

VIOLENCE AS *NON*-COMMUNICATION:
THE NEWS DIFFERENTIAL OF KASHMIR AND NORTHEAST
CONFLICTS IN THE INDIAN NATIONAL PRESS

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ABSTRACT

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‘Violence as *Non-Communication*:

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Conflicts in the Indian National Press’

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This thesis seeks to explain the contradiction of ethno-national conflicts in northeast India involving much terrorism and violence *not* resonating in the New Delhi-based national press. Evidence suggests that the media cover only a third of ongoing global terrorist conflicts even though terrorism and violence have long been privileged in communications research as being irresistibly newsworthy. The case study is located in India, but selectivity is a global phenomenon with only few conflicts receiving sustained media attention: Northern Ireland, Basque separatism, Quebec, Kashmir, Catalonia, or the Middle East; the rest are symbolically annihilated.

I propose that the sustained coverage of a conflict in the national or international contexts depends on the key variable of the socio-cultural environment in which journalists operate. A conflict is likely to figure regularly in media content only if journalists see it as affecting or involving what they socially and culturally perceive to be the ‘we’; a similar conflict involving the socio-cultural ‘they’ may be routinely ignored or extended *ad hoc* coverage, even if it involves much violence and terrorism. The ‘we’-‘they’ binary, used here as a socio-cultural concept, also connects with political debates about multiculturalism, recognition, citizenship and Orientalism.

Located in the discourse of production of news, this study establishes that terrorism and violence as part of a conflict may not guarantee news coverage. Kashmir and northeast conflicts demonstrate several commonalities, but only the Kashmir conflict is routinely selected for sustained and prominent coverage. By mainly interviewing journalists, it is established that the northeast is routinely seen to involve and affect the socio-cultural ‘they’; hence its systemised low status in the news discourse compared with Kashmir, which is perceived to be located at the core of the ‘we’. This news differential also suggests the existence of ‘sub-Orients’ within the Orient, even Orientalism within the Orient.

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In October 1999, when I began this research, I had put in over 15 years in the cut and thrust of daily journalism, and there was some restlessness over the superficiality of it all. Perhaps because I became a professional journalist early, I also began losing interest early. There was much satisfaction of having thoroughly enjoyed the magic of words and the vicissitudes of life in journalism, but I did not want to partake of it any longer. I was keen to move on in more satisfying directions but in areas not vastly unrelated to my journalistic background.

Against this backdrop, it was an intellectual delight to be supervised by Annabelle Sreberny, who not only understood the vagaries of a mind-set long conditioned to journalism, but slowly and surely guided me into thinking outside the journalistic box. She had more confidence in my ability to survive the academic rigour than I ever had in myself, for which I shall remain grateful; my shortcomings were met with much patience and understanding. I have learnt and benefited more than I could have imagined from my interactions with her and her writings.

My tryst with academia began after a brief conversation with Roger Dickinson in February 1995 on the sidelines of a day visit to the University of Leicester as part of a five-member team of Press Fellows of Wolfson College, Cambridge. Not only did he encourage and facilitate the diversion from journalism (first on MA in Mass Communications and subsequently for PhD), he also tolerated my intrusions into his time to act as an invaluable sounding board for academic publishing and plans.

Bill Kirkman has literally been a friend, philosopher and guide since my fellowship at Cambridge. John Naughton, his successor as Director of the Press Fellowship Programme at Wolfson, has been a source of much inspiration, having for long successfully juggled a senior academic position with prolific journalism. Bill and John symbolise a delightful co-existence of academia and journalism; I hope they will be happy to see this new 'edition' of my career.

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'The ideal scientist thinks like a poet, works like a bookkeeper, and writes like a journalist. At least that's what I try to do. The important thing is to get it right'.

---Edward O Wilson, author of *Consilience: The Unity of Knowledge*.

1. Prolegomenon & the Cultural Poetics of Conflict

‘Hegemony is an historical process in which one picture of the world is systematically preferred over others, usually through practical routines and at times through extraordinary measures...Normally the dominant frames are taken for granted by media practitioners, and reproduced and defended by them for reasons, and via practices, which the practitioners do not conceive to be hegemonic. Hegemony operates effectively---it does deliver the news---yet outside consciousness; it is exercised by self-conceived professionals working with a great deal of autonomy within institutions that proclaim the neutral goal of informing the public’.

---Gitlin (1980: 257).

This thesis challenges the widely held assumption in media research that violence, terrorism and conflict are irresistibly newsworthy. It investigates an ‘absence’ in media content rather than a ‘presence’: the absence of news about several ethno-national conflicts raging across the world even though they involve terrorism and violence. Unlike most media research that investigates content---in the form of representation, effects, stereotyping, etc.---it seeks to explore the reasons behind theoretically newsworthy events *not* evoking media coverage. Studies about the ‘areas of invisibility’ have so far been confined to the coverage of women, gays, the ethnic minorities in specific (mostly western) national media systems, or the low coverage of Third World nations in the western media. The trope of the margins has rarely examined the potentially rich poetics of peripheral space or the cultural underpinnings of conflict coverage. As Weimann & Winn concluded after analysing Rand Corporation’s global conflict data involving hundreds of groups and over 5000 events between 1968 and 1986, ‘less than one-third of all terrorist events are actually reported’ (1993: 71).

This study deals with the ‘symbolic annihilation’ (Tuchman, 1978) of events and issues involving terrorism, violence and conflict. It is located in India but the thesis proposed to explain the contradiction of conflicts *not* resulting in media coverage may well be applied to different settings. By mainly interviewing journalists of the New Delhi-based English-language national press, I explain why the host of insurgencies in

India's northeast, involving much terror and violence, do not evoke the nature and range of coverage that the Kashmir conflict routinely does.

This study is rooted in praxis, since the research question is one I encountered as a journalist while covering and writing on the two conflict zones over more than a decade. Amidst journalistic routines, it was evident to me that each of the two conflicts evoked different responses from journalists, but the why and how of the differential was not very clear to me then. This study provided an opportunity and largely confirmed my prognostications. I approach the question as a researcher with a background in journalism; thus, the 'I/me' surfaces throughout the thesis. The focus of inquiry is the community of journalists and their socio-cultural proclivities that influence their approach to events in Kashmir and the northeast states; the idea is to identify continuities in the mindset of journalists. By doing so, I want to put flesh-and-bones journalists, with all their strengths and weaknesses, back into journalism studies; in the process, I also question Gans' contention that journalists, during their professional work, 'leave their conscious personal values at home' (Gans, 1980: 182).

The proposed thesis is rooted in what McNair (1998: 19) calls the 'dominance' paradigm of journalism (*journalism as it is*), and not the 'normative' paradigm (*journalism as it is supposed to be*). I argue that at the practical level, the various definitions of news can all be conflated to a basic formulation: 'News is essentially what interests me/us'. This implies the existence of a subtle but discernible socio-cultural binary of 'us' and 'them' or 'we' and 'they'. Such perceptions may be considered politically incorrect in modern democratic and multicultural societies, but the existence and influence of such dichotomies can scarcely be denied. The binary is a discursive phenomenon, and shifts according to focus, locale and perspective (Sreberny, 2002; Elias, 1994; Elliott, 1986; Shils, 1975). Since journalists hail from middle class, educated segments of society, the journalistic community cannot be untouched by the divisive functions of the socio-cultural binary, notwithstanding the demands and claims of being professional and objective in their work routines. As former *Guardian* editor Alistair Hetherington puts it, the instinctual news value of most journalists simply is: 'Does it interest me?' (1985: 8).

Based on 'we'- 'they' dichotomy, the thesis proposed in this study is:

A conflict involving terrorism and violence is likely to be accorded sustained media coverage only if it is seen by journalists as affecting or involving what they socially and culturally perceive to be the 'we'; a similar conflict

involving the 'they', or one that is not framed within the 'we' parameters, may be routinely ignored, or extended ad hoc coverage.

The 'we'-'they' binary connects specifically with Schudson's 'cultural' approach to production of news (2000). This study is thus located at the heart of the triumvirate of discourses of 'terrorism and media', 'violence and media' and 'conflict and media' in the sense that the very foundation on which they are based is challenged: the presumed inevitability---an implied unilinear causation---that events involving terrorism, violence and conflict lead to or attract news coverage. An influential formulation in the discourse has been by Schimd & de Graaf, who observe that violence itself is a form of communication (1982). This predictive determinism underpinning the discourses appears so rooted that a contra view of conflict, about terrorism and violence *not* resulting in media content, is rarely considered, let alone addressed. It is not so much a matter of framing of news about unreported conflict zones, but the very presence of news itself is in doubt. The determinism implicit in the discourse is almost suggestive of a mechanical process: that events involving violence or terrorism naturally, automatically, find their way into the media, a simple input-output, 'cause' (violent event) and 'effect' (media coverage) equation, as it were. In such a perspective, journalists are seen as cogs in the wheel of news production, robot-like, mechanically converting information about violence and terrorism into news content.

Located within the discourse of production of news, this study makes a case for a closer examination of this grey area at the point of encoding, one stage before raw information about violence becomes news, which later goes on to have 'effects' on readers/viewers. Questions such as these are rarely asked: Which violence qualifies to become news? Why do journalists fail to go beyond sporadic event-oriented reportage of certain conflicts? Even if journalists may be aware of the seriousness of the issues involved in a particular conflict and recognise the need to raise its awareness, how do journalists' cultural/ethnic background and socialisation in newsrooms prevent this? Is it something to do with *who* is affected by terrorist or violent events in the 'invisible' theatres of conflict? What lies behind the high intensity coverage of conflicts in Northern Ireland, Kashmir or the Middle East?

Using the example of two theatres of prolonged ethno-national conflict in India---Kashmir and the northeast region, both bearing several commonalities---I suggest that there is a method in the routine selectivity in the coverage of issues and events

involving peripheries and minorities; and that the mere fulfilment of the criteria of terrorism and violence may not guarantee media attention. As Chapter 2 explains, Kashmir is culturally and politically central to modern India and is seen by journalists based in New Delhi (and elsewhere in India too) as part of the national 'us' while the people and space of the northeast, with their tenuous historical and cultural links with the mainland, are routinely seen as the 'they'. This difference in perception, ingrained in the political, social and cultural ethos through education, historical accounts and media routines, is responsible for the high status accorded to the Kashmir conflict and the low status of the northeast conflicts, even though the latter has been the scene of sustained violence and terrorism for secessionist objectives. The fact that news replicates existing socio-cultural patterns of hegemony and dominance has been well established in media research (Hartley, 1982; Gitlin, 1980; Roshco, 1975; etc.). My research shows that this also extends to the coverage of political conflict and political violence, which is supposed to be the 'most salient, operational news value' (Hall, 1981: 237) of political news.

A different set of questions raised by this study is related to the notion of a 'national' press. How 'national' is, or should, a capital-based press be in the range of issues, events and regions it covers? How well does it cover the constitutive elements of the nation: the regions and states? Do peripheral regions, where issues of ostensible national interest such as secession, insurgency, alienation, low development etc. may be raised, find space in the 'national' press, or should they find space? For example, how much does the London-based British 'national' press inform its readers about Wales, Scotland or the ethnic minorities? How much does the New Delhi-based English-language press cover the life situations of India's margins defined in geographical or social terms? I, however, do not attempt to address such questions in detail; they may well be taken up as a separate line of inquiry.

For the purposes of this study, the distinction between violence, conflict and terrorism is largely irrelevant. I use 'conflict' as an umbrella term to describe the ethno-national developments in Kashmir and northeast India; my idea of 'conflict' is not confined to acts of terrorism, killing, destruction of public/private property, but encompasses the gamut of related activities such as political manoeuvrings, placing and tactically revising secessionist demands, shifts in strategy, announcements of ceasefire, grant of amnesty to those who surrender to state authorities, local alienation, the causal socio-economic conditions, etc. The focus is on how a conflict

as a whole---including its causes and manifestations---*resonates* in the media, and not just its violence or terrorism aspects. The point is that individual acts of terrorism may well be reported with varying degrees of importance in terms of space and placement in a newspaper, but the question addressed is: why do the host of northeast conflicts not resonate in the Indian national press, individually or severally, the way Kashmir does?

By *resonance*, I mean that journalists treat and cover a conflict as an ongoing issue of importance and not merely as an event-centric or sporadic source of news. For example, the Northern Ireland and Kashmir conflicts are the focus of not only Page 1 news but also stories and analyses in the inside pages, op-ed pages, editorials, interviews, columns, news-features, letters to the editor, etc; the content is contributed from a range of perspectives (parliament, Defence ministry, Home Ministry, political parties, human interest, local impact, etc) by reporters, special correspondents, senior editors, columnists, edit writers, etc. It should thus be possible through a simple count of content to determine which conflict---Kashmir or the northeast---figures more prominently across the pages in India's national press.

Sporadic and event-centric reportage of under-reported conflicts means that a conflict and its underlying causes---of which terrorism is a symptom---is accorded low status in the news discourse, since the reader is not invited to understand why things are the way they are. Over the years, such perfunctory coverage converts the conflict into a blind spot from which only occasional news about violence or terrorism may be deemed worthy of being reported, if at all, without accompanying explanatory content. There is an apparent inability or unwillingness to provide a historical or political context to such conflicts in news discourse. This has implications for the media's agenda-setting function since such coverage does not bring the conflict to the notice of decision makers and readers; thus, no pressure is mounted on the government to 'do something' about it.

All acts of violence constitute the canvas for the purpose of this thesis, but the focus is mainly on ethno-national conflicts that involve political violence. This precludes violence that marks political contests such as elections, social movements, or domestic violence. I adopt the definition of conflict as formulated by the Heidelberg Institute for International Conflict Research (HIK) in its annual *Conflict Barometer*:

Conflicts are defined...as the clashing of interests (positional differences) on national values and issues (territory, independence, self-determination, autonomy,

ideology, power, resources) of some duration and magnitude between at least two parties (states, groups of states, organisations, or organised groups) that are determined to pursue their interests and win their case. At least one party is the organised state (HIIK, 2002: 2).

Ethno-national conflicts are considered 'among the most important security problems in the world today' (Brown, 2001: xi). According to Chenoy, 'Ethnic and religious conflicts threaten to tear apart more societies today than any other issue. These conflicts rise out of identity movements that construct an enemy "other" and characterise themselves as nationalists even though they are based on exclusionist agendas' (2002). The reference is to the many 'nations without states' and the conflicts that seem endemic in pursuit of political goals to win statehood, autonomy, etc; here, nations without states are referred to as 'cultural communities sharing a common past, attached to a clearly demarcated territory, and wishing to decide upon their political future, which lack a state of their own' (Guibernau, 1999: 1; see also McCrone, 1998; Nairn, 1997); Appadurai terms them 'Trojan nationalisms' (1996: 165). They find themselves in one or more states that they regard as alien and assert the right to self-determination, autonomy or secession. From the State's viewpoint, these are branded as 'insurgency', 'separatism' or 'secessionism'; a terminology also reflected in the dictum that 'one man's terrorist is another's freedom fighter'. My research shows that even violent and terrorist events as part of ethno-national conflicts that may be serious enough to threaten the status quo of existing nation-states, may not always qualify to become news.

At the international level, the careers of only a few such ongoing conflicts figure in the media on a consistent basis, though not all resonate to the same degree. The 'usual suspects' are Northern Ireland, the Basque separatism in Spain, Catalonia, Kashmir, Tamils of Sri Lanka, conflicts in the Middle East or the Quebecois issue in Canada. However, they represent but a fraction of the number of ongoing conflicts, given that an overwhelming majority of the 189 members of the United Nations are non-homogenous and internally diverse nation-states, and that many of them face conflict situations in various forms. The power geometry of international relations ensures that conflicts involving major actors such as the United States, western European states or NATO are extensively covered by the influential western media: conflicts such as in Kosovo, the Gulf war or the 'war against terrorism' in Afghanistan receive extensive coverage through western news superpowers such as the CNN, BBC, Reuters, etc.

The situation, however, is different in relation to the large number of ongoing conflicts in the developing world, many of them involving challengers with an international reach. The world media largely ignored the tinderbox situation in Afghanistan since 1996 when the Taliban took over, but provided blanket coverage only after 11 September 2001 happened. Such neglect by the media of potentially explosive conditions globally may have serious implications for conflict resolution, which is premised on the primary condition of awareness: you have to be aware of something before you can do anything about it. Research on agenda-setting suggests that the chances of issues entering the public sphere and ultimately on the agenda of policy-makers are more if they figure in the media, and virtually nil if they do not (Dearing & Rogers, 1996; McCombs & Shaw, 1972, etc.); in other words, the media puts pressure on policy-makers to 'do something' only on those issues and events that figure in them.

According to Scherrer, 'warfare and mass violence is not going on between East and West, nor between North and South, but occurring at this very moment inside some 60 states in four continents' (1999: 53). Since 1945, more than 250 major wars took place, mostly in the developing world, and very few of them were inter-state conflicts. Scherrer's study reveals a rich menu for entrepreneurs of ethnicity and nationalism to tap into: underneath the structure of most nation-states there is an 'extraordinary multitude of between 6,500 and 10,000 nations, nationalities and peoples as ethnic entities of diverse size' (1999: 54). His 'Register of Violent Conflicts, 1985-94' lists 102 examples, while Gurr (1993) has been tracking the careers of as many as 300 politically active ethnic and religious groups engaged in conflict, over half a century. According to HIIK's *Conflict Barometer 2002*, 173 political conflicts were carried out during the year: 'Ongoing political conflicts of 2002 are most frequently carried out on the conflict issues of national power, territory and autonomy' (HIIK, 2002: 5).

How many of the ongoing political conflicts figure in the media? Is there a minimum awareness of real and potential conflict situations among policy-makers and the public? The media coverage of a few ethno-national conflicts, while symbolically annihilating the vast majority of them, may have serious consequences for the prospects of peace within and across nations in an age of globalisation when the movement of humans, material and money to finance terrorism is easy, as the events of 11 September and others demonstrated. Perhaps the only media focus on such invisible conflicts in the British media is the Channel Four series, *Unreported World*,

though it does not deal only with conflicts. The focus of this study is the developing world, particularly countries that are democratic, since the media can hardly be expected to play its key role in the public sphere in countries that are not democratic. India, a postcolonial country that became independent in 1947, has a large media industry and a record of commitment to the freedom of the press. It is also beset with serious ethno-political challenges due to its internal diversity that is reflected, among others, in the ongoing conflicts in Kashmir and the northeast states.

1.1 Approaches and Methods

I assume that a socio-cultural sense of 'we' and 'they', or 'us' and 'them', is a reality and a fact of life in multicultural societies, howsoever altruistic and well-meaning the motives of modern political structures or the discourse of politics of recognition (Taylor, 1994) may be. This sense is produced or constructed, it is not a given, and is causally linked to the process of nation-formation and the role of the dominant 'ethnie' in such a process (Smith, 1995). As Wimmer observes, 'ethnic conflicts and xenophobia/racism are integral parts of the modern order of nation-states' (2002: 5). In this study located in the Indian context, the 'we'-'they' binary as a conceptual tool is applied at the national level, and as envisaged, understood and perpetuated by journalists of the influential New Delhi-based English-language press. Despite impressive legal and executive instruments drawn up by multicultural societies such as Britain, the United States or India, who wields the socio-cultural power geometry in each of these countries, and which sections of society are institutionally at the receiving end, is hardly a secret. As Hartman & Husband observe, 'there are elements in the British cultural tradition that are derogatory to non-whites' (1981: 274). Modern India's political commitment to secularism is institutionalised in its Constitution, but as Chapter 2 explains, its polity of over 1 billion people is also marked by numerous categories and sub-categories of socio-cultural 'others' based on a complex matrix of religion, caste, ethnicity and language.

The socio-cultural binary is broadly analogous---but is not an exact fit---with categories such as majority-minority, centre-periphery and a society's central value system (Shils, 1975), the established and outsiders (Elias, 1994), ingroup-outgroup (Elliott, 1986), and inside-outside (Sreberny, 2002). The 'we' may have connotations of Gramscian hegemony, and can be thought of as being broadly reflected in what is popularly called the 'national mainstream'. The 'we' seems to naturally elide with

certain (dominant) sections of society. Public appeals by policy-makers to rebels in Kashmir and northeast 'to give up arms and join the national mainstream' immediately brands the restive groups involved in the conflict as the 'they', as being out of the national mainstream. The mainstream may be defined as a relative commonality of outlooks and values that the media believes exists in its target audience, which it also circularly cultivates among its readers/viewers.

Shils suggests that 'Society has a center...(It) is a phenomenon of the realm of values and beliefs. It is the center of the order of symbols, of values and beliefs, which govern the society. It is the center because it is the ultimate and irreducible...In this sense, every society has an "official" religion, even when that society or its exponents and interpreters, conceive of it, more or less correctly, as a secular, pluralistic, and tolerant society' (1975: 3). If the 'centre' of British society may be identified as being white, English, Anglo-Saxon and Christian, the constituents of its Indian variant may be Hindu, Muslim, Hindi-speaking and Aryan, which relegates the tribes (in the northeast) and lower castes as being outside the 'national mainstream'. As Pandey rightly suggests, nations and nationalism are built around what Shils calls the 'centre' whose 'central value system' comes to be seen as *the* value system of all:

(Nations) are established by constructing a core or mainstream---the essential, natural, soul of the nation, as it is claimed. (Minorities) are constituted along with the nation---for they are the means of constituting national majorities or mainstreams. Nations, and nationalisms, are established by defining boundaries. However, these are not always---or perhaps, ever---sharply or easily defined. Nationalisms have therefore commonly moved along the path of identifying the core or mainstream of the nation. Alongside this emerge notions of minorities, marginal communities, or elements, the fuzzy edges and grey areas around which the question of boundaries---geographical, social, cultural---will be negotiated or fought over (1999: 608).

Journalists are invariably drawn from the 'national mainstream' and circularly cater to this section of society and its value system. Thus, events and issues that do not fall within the paradigm of interest to this section are unlikely to be considered by journalists as newsworthy, even if they involve terrorism and violence. This study shows that the media accords consistent attention to only those conflicts that are framed within or against the Shilsian 'centre', 'we' or 'us'. Even if conflicts involving the 'other' meet all the criteria of newsworthiness---including the 'most salient, operational news value' of violence (Hall, 1981: 237)---they will not resonate in the media. Here, the 'other' can also mean peripheral regions as viewed from and by a

society's 'centre', and minority groups, separately or together; for example, minorities inhabiting peripheral regions such as northeast India.

This preferential treatment of conflicts seems to be true at the international level (as the recent Afghanistan example suggests) as well as within multicultural nation-states. For example, a hypothetical clash between the Shia and Sunni Muslims of Bradford is unlikely to be accorded Page 1 banner treatment in the London-based national press, since 'they' do not affect the British 'us', but a clash between Bradford Muslims and the majority white community may well be considered worthy of such attention (note the extensive coverage of unrest between white and Muslim youths in Oldham and Burnley in 2001). If 'they' clash among themselves, it is hardly likely to interest 'us', unless 'we' are involved or affected.

India's two peripherally located conflict zones---Muslim-majority Kashmir and the substantially tribal (Mongoloid) northeast---share several commonalities such as the scale of violence, longevity of conflict, demand of independence, challenge to the State, foreign involvement, local alienation, etc. They demonstrate 'comparable message potential' (Entman, 1991: 9), but it is only Kashmir that resonates in India's national press while the conflicts in the northeast are accorded perfunctory, indifferent or *ad hoc* coverage, if at all covered. Several NGOs and human rights groups have chronicled instances of violations during counter-insurgency operations in the northeast, but most of them go unreported and unnoticed in the national press (an example is included as Appendix 3). The empirical evidence presented here is mainly from the press since television news is a recent phenomenon in India, and it anyway replicates the news hierarchy of the press since most television journalists in influential positions are still drawn from the press (Sonwalkar, 2001a: 516).

The imbalance in the coverage of the two conflict zones is explained by showing that unlike the northeast conflicts, politically and culturally Kashmir is located at the heart of the mainstream Hindu-Muslim-secularism problematic that underpinned the very creation of India and Pakistan in 1947, and continues to dominate modern India's public sphere. The Kashmir conflict is routinely, and naturally, seen by journalists as affecting the national 'we', the irreducible 'central value system' of Indian society and the political structure. At the same time, journalists routinely relegate the northeast to the category of 'others' as its conflicts are not seen to impinge on the Hindu-Muslim-secularism problematic, the region being inhabited mainly by (Christian or animist) Mongoloid tribes who are traditionally considered outside the

fold of Hindu society. There have been instances when the region's conflicts were covered prominently by the national press, but only when the Hindu-Muslim-secularism problematic was involved; for example, during the six-year 'Assam agitation' against (Muslim) immigrants from neighbouring Bangladesh, or when the many outlawed armed groups target specific individuals or communities in the region that have roots and close links in the politically and culturally influential parts of mainland India such as the 'Hindi belt'.

Extensive interviews of journalists reveal the disjunctures and differences in their socio-cultural perceptions of the two conflict zones. None of the journalists stated that they were prejudiced towards the northeast region, since as members of the press they felt committed to the unity and integrity of India and the equality of citizens as enshrined in the Constitution. But even while stating that the region deserves more attention, they admit to the over-riding feeling in their newsrooms that 'somehow the region, its people and issues do not matter to us' (DYV)¹. The degree of agreement among the interviewees on this overriding feeling in newsrooms was remarkable; they nonetheless admitted that the region deserved more importance than it got.

Based on a discussion of the Indian context and the evidence collected, I explain the selectivity in the coverage of the two conflict zones by applying the hypothesis that Kashmir continues to receive better coverage in the Indian 'national' press because it is seen by journalists as interesting, involving or affecting the Indian 'we'. On the other hand, the many conflicts in the northeast involve the 'other', which is seen to be of less interest to the Indian 'centre', 'central value system' or 'we' as perceived and represented by New Delhi-based journalists. The northeast appears on the press radar only if 'they' or 'their' activities affect 'us'; for example, when Hindi-speaking people are killed, federal government officers posted in the region are victimised, or key economic interests in tea and oil are hit. Armed rebels in the region validate this when they admitted to me several times during journalistic interactions that they often deliberately choose targets that would cause concern in New Delhi, 'otherwise we will not be taken seriously by New Delhi' (see also responses of northeast-based interviewees; Chapter 5, Page 158-164).

From the state's perspective, it might be considered politically incorrect or even divisive to define the contours of the 'we' and 'they' as perceived from New Delhi,

¹ DYV is a New Delhi-based journalist interviewed during this study.

since the State is constitutionally committed to furthering the equality of citizens, non-discrimination and secularism. But the fact remains that such a dichotomous world-view does exist among journalists at the functional level. I suggest this on the basis of anecdotal evidence as well as journalists' interview responses. My 'practitioner experience' account in Chapter 5 forms a substantial part of the evidence presented, and is based on Wolfsfeld's observation that the main approach in qualitative methodology 'is to develop an empathy with each antagonist while avoiding over-identifying with any of them' (1997: 8).

1.2 Organisation of the Argument

The study is spread over six chapters. I begin the argument in Chapter 2 with an overview of nationalism, ethnicity and state-formation in South Asia. The variables of religion, language and ethnicity have been central to this process (Phadnis, 1989), particularly the centrality of religion and ethnicity in the formation of the national self and the emergence of modern India and Pakistan in 1947. Before Independence, a section of the Muslim leadership formulated the two-nation theory, by which Muslims of the sub-continent were viewed as constituting a nation separate from Hindu-majority India. This theory ultimately led to the partition of India and the creation of Pakistan, but millions of Muslims chose to remain in India rather than migrate to Pakistan. The Hindu-Muslim problematic is the principal---but not the only---problematic in modern India. Due to historic tensions between the two communities and the fact that Muslims are a large minority, the Muslim community's events and issues are almost viewed as part of the 'national mainstream'. Thus, other minorities in Indian society, such as tribes, lower castes, women, Christians and Parsis, etc. are relegated to the bottom of the social hierarchy. Kashmir is the only Muslim-majority state in Hindu-majority India while tribes and tribal issues dominate the seven northeast states. The second section of this chapter documents the fundamental characteristics of each of the two conflict zones; I identify their common elements and suggest that given India's complex ethnic, religious and cultural realities and the very 'invented' nature of its emergence as a modern nation-state in 1947, the northeast conflicts may pose a greater challenge to modern India than Kashmir.

The first section of Chapter 3 locates the study in the discourse of production of news and discusses the various sociological approaches to the study of news. It reviews the literature on violence/terrorism and the media, and quotes influential

formulations that are based on the predictive determinism that violence or terror naturally leads to media coverage. A review of the literature on news values foregrounds the reasons for adopting the cultural approach (Schudson, 2000) as the umbrella approach in this study to explain journalists' attitudes towards the northeast conflicts. The second section theorises the conceptual binary based on the work of Shils, Elias, Elliott and Sreberny. As Blair says in a discussion of *Star Trek*: 'Every civilisation needs its aliens. The problem of the alien is essential to every civilisation, which inescapably defines itself in terms of what it is not' (1982: 183). However, as this study demonstrates, 'the alien' may be present within the nation, not outside it. This is in line with Said's work on the 'other' as exemplified in the thesis of Orientalism. The socio-cultural binary is not seen as rigid, but discursive, changing their respective constituents according to focus, locale and perspective. For example, Hindus may consider themselves as the 'we' and simultaneously categorise the Muslims as the 'they', but this may change in Kashmir where the majority Muslims may view the Hindus as the 'they'. The constituents may include elements not only of religion, but also language, ethnicity and locale, jointly or severally.

Chapter 4 discusses the research methodology adopted, and the merits and demerits of qualitative and quantitative methods. It explains why interviewing was adopted as the main tool of inquiry, and also the reasons for conducting a superficial, simple version of content analysis: to *a priori* establish the imbalance in media coverage of the two conflicts. Given the nature of inquiry, numbers are less important in this study than journalists' responses in order to establish the contours of the 'map of meaning' that influences and provides direction to their professional activities. Even though 'practitioner experience' is not a mainstream research method, I add a section on my experience to provide a first hand view of covering the northeast for a major national newspaper, *The Times of India*. In the second section of the chapter, I trace the history of the Indian press, its role in the freedom struggle and its career in independent India. I explore why the New Delhi based English-language press is considered the 'national' press, and the most influential in the Indian public sphere. The recent phenomenon of Murdochisation---what may be called the 'shift from the by-line to the bottom-line'---in the English-language press is discussed, besides setting out the reasons for the English language enjoying a privileged position in Indian society.

Data gathered during fieldwork in India between January and April 2001 is presented in Chapter 5, comprising mainly interview responses from senior journalists

in New Delhi and the northeast. The chapter begins with results of the content analysis showing the number of news items relating to the two conflicts in four national English-language newspapers over a six-month period coinciding with the fieldwork. Since the very presence of news about the conflicts is being investigated, the placement of the news items, column centimetres or its treatment matter less to the basic purposes of this study. Journalists interviewed talk about stereotype images in newsroom about the two regions, and state how Kashmir is naturally considered important, without any formal newsroom guidelines to that effect, and how the northeast region is equally naturally seen to be on the periphery of national and journalistic consciousness. It becomes clear that Murdochisation, or the 'dumbing down' of editorial content, and the increasing corporate culture in the press has not unduly affected the coverage of the Kashmir conflict, but has further annihilated the northeast region from the news columns.

In the concluding Chapter 6, based on the theoretical discussion and evidence presented, I suggest that 'areas of invisibility' exist not only in relation to social margins such as minorities, women, etc., but also exist in relation to theoretically newsworthy events involving terrorism and violence. Selectivity and bias exist in domestic news, within single nation-states, which may also suggest the existence of 'sub-Orients' and Orientalism *within the Orient*. By persistently focussing on the Kashmir conflict, news workers uphold its high status in Indian public discourse, and by neglecting the northeast conflicts, perpetuate the low status of the region. I suggest that the cause-and-effect equation implicit in the discourse of news and violence-terrorism needs to be revised by inserting the key variable of 'socio-cultural environment'. The 'cause' (terrorist event) would translate into the 'effect' (media coverage) only if the 'we' is affected or involved. There is no 'effect' (media coverage), or feeble effect, if the event involves the 'other' of a given nation/society. Based on Billig's notion of 'banal nationalism' (1995), I suggest that the journalism practised by the 'national' or mainstream press/media, which makes a certain range of events and issues seem as natural, can be termed as 'banal journalism'. The routine coverage of Kashmir and the equally routine *non*-coverage of northeast conflicts is presented in a banal and routine manner; it is reproduced daily unquestioningly and renders one view of society as *the* view of the entire society. Banal journalism flags the 'we' daily in news columns and television content.

2. The Idea of India; Unrest in Kashmir & Northeast

In the fifth decade of India's freedom, the nation-state has been confronted with unprecedented situations...In the dynamics of the political system... some sections and states have carried the day in an elitist trend. The weak, the ignorant and peripheral have suffered marginalisation. Tensions have taken the form of open conflict and confrontation. Separation and secession lurk around...On the periphery of the Indian state, in the north-east, turbulence and turmoil have been in evidence...It seems to us that while the constitutional assemblages resound eloquently of democratic trends and values, in translation to the ground they seem to be prone to suffer distortions. (There) is a widespread feeling...that the tribals have been at the receiving end of psychological discrimination, that they have experienced being second-class citizens.

---From *Report of the Expert Committee on Plains Tribes of Assam*,
Union Ministry of Home Affairs, 1992; Vol. 1, 155-6, 168-9.

The primary objective of this chapter is to establish the constant tension in Indian public discourse between the principles of modernity on which the nation-state is premised since its creation in 1947, and the saliency of age-old socio-cultural traditions based on religion, region, language and ethnicity. The differential approach of journalists towards the two conflict zones of Kashmir and the northeast is one of the overt manifestations of this tension. I highlight the centrality of the Hindu-Muslim-secularism dynamic in Indian public life, and note the privileged position enjoyed by Hindi, the 'national official' language, even though more than half of India's population does not speak it. By doing so, I explore and tease out the shifting yet unambiguous constituents of the common-sensical understanding of 'we' and 'they' as perceived by journalists based in New Delhi. Following Bachelard's notion of the poetics of space (1992), I suggest that Kashmir evokes, reflects and symbolises a rich poetics and politics of modern India's 'national space', whose narrative is reproduced daily by journalists through professional routines.

The defining characteristic of the contemporary Indian reality is its kaleidoscopic diversity in terms of religion, language and ethnicity. Parekh suggests that 'No country in the world matches India in its diversity' (1996: 145). Modern India can be viewed as a grand but complex and brittle coalition of languages, religions and ethnic

groups. Unlike most new nation-states created following decolonisation in the 20th century, India has remained a democracy. The Indian press is located at the centre of this vortex of tensions framed against India's sub-continental size. As Wolpert observes, 'India's republic is more nearly a continent than a country, much less a nation as Europeans understand it' (1999: 577).

Modern India is the seventh largest member of the United Nations and the tenth biggest industrial country. Within Asia, it is marked off by mountains and the seas; bounded by the Himalayas in the north, it stretches southwards and at the Tropic of Cancer, tapers off into the Indian Ocean between the Bay of Bengal on the east and the Arabian Sea on the west (See Map 1). India's internal political map has undergone several changes since 1947, but the international borders it inherited from the British have remained intact. In 1947, India was dotted with more than 500 princely states; today, its federal democratic structure has coalesced into 28 states (some larger than Germany or France), and six federally ruled Union Territories.



(Map 1: Map of India showing states, their capitals and Union Territories)

It is flanked by Pakistan, China, Myanmar, Nepal, Bangladesh, Bhutan and Sri Lanka.

A three-tier federal structure governs India: the central government (also called the 'Union government' or the 'Centre'), state governments in each of the states and Union Territories, and local self-government (village councils). The central government and the two houses of parliament are based in the capital, New Delhi, while each state has a separate government, legislature and judiciary, usually based in the state capital. Powers are divided with the federal government responsible for 'national' subjects such as Defence, Currency, External Affairs, Citizenship, etc. (the Union List), while subjects of local concern such as Public Order, Public Health, Local Taxes fall in the domain of the state governments (the State List); subjects such as Education, Environment, Social Security, Electricity, etc. are administered by both federal and state governments (the Concurrent List).

Modern ideas of 'nationalism' and 'self-determination' that catalysed India's freedom struggle continued to hold sway after independence, particularly among the people and regions that found themselves in the putative Indian state, but did not perceive a stake or a sense of belongingness in it. Conflicts along different fault-lines broke out soon after Independence amidst seemingly ungovernable diversity. At the beginning of the 21st century, the ethno-national conflicts in Kashmir and the northeast figure prominently in the official list of 'Problem Areas'²:

- *Fundamentalist-Separatist Extremism*: Punjab, Jammu & **Kashmir**;
- *Regional-Separatist Extremism*: the **North-East**;
- *Movements for Autonomy*: the **North-East**, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh;
- *Ethnic/Tribal Conflicts*: the **North-East**;
- *International Terrorism*: Jammu & **Kashmir**, the **North-East**, Punjab, Tamil Nadu, Delhi;
- *Refugees, Illegal Migration*: Jammu & **Kashmir**, Tamil Nadu, West Bengal, Bihar, the **North-East**;
- *Caste Conflicts*: Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Madhya Pradesh;
- *Illegal Arms/Drug Trafficking*: Jammu & **Kashmir**, the **North-East**, Maharashtra, Gujarat, Rajasthan, Punjab, Tamil Nadu, West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh/Bihar;
- *Left Wing Extremism*: Bihar, Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh & Orissa;

² Source: Union Ministry of Home Affairs website: <http://mha.nic.in/scen.htm>; accessed on 28 May 2002; emphasis on Kashmir and northeast added. It may be noted that 'Kashmir' is part of the state whose official name is 'Jammu & Kashmir' comprising the three regions of Jammu (largely Hindu), Kashmir (largely Muslim) and Leh-Ladakh (largely Buddhist). The combined state has a Muslim majority.

- *Communal Conflicts*: Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Andhra Pradesh, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Orissa.

The faultlines of difference in India have a long past; they have been the cause of much celebration and conflict over the millennia. Before the arrival of the British in the seventeenth century, India experienced Islamic colonialism for nearly three centuries. As Wolpert observes:

(The) roots of India's multiculturalism extend back over three thousand years to the first great invasions of South Asia by Indo-Aryan tribes whose priestly Brahman bards chanted mantras to their gods. Indian civilisation...presents us the examples of both a rich and pacifist multi-cultural heritage, and a tragic and violent present that cannot simply be blamed on British imperialism...(The) sub-continent, instead of being a model of peaceful coexistence, continues to suffer from intractable ethnic conflicts that have the potential to undermine the stability not only of South Asia, but the entire post-Cold War world (1999: 575, 579).

2.1 India: The State vs. the Nation?

There are two complementary modes of defining modern India: one based on a Constitution carefully crafted by an elite that adopted the premises of modernity (secularism, equality, pluralism, etc.), usually identified with Jawaharlal Nehru and his vision of a 'composite culture' existing in India over centuries; and the other, based on traditional modes, which privileges culture, customs, religion, etc. One of the many examples of the tension between these two modes is the contrast presented by India's status as a modern nuclear and technological power and the continued low status of women (Bathla, 1998) and other sections of society such as the lower castes, tribes, religious minorities, etc. A recent manifestation of the 'traditional' theme is the idea of 'cultural nationalism' promoted by the votaries of *Hindutva* (Hindu-ness): the right wing Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and its progenitor, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (national volunteer association). This theme privileges the majority Hindu community and its culture to the disadvantage of minorities, mainly the large minority of Muslims. Much politics since the late 1980s has revolved around this theme as symbolised by the destruction of the Babri mosque in Ayodhya in December 1992, the Hindu-Muslim riots in Gujarat in 2002, and the BJP coming to power in New Delhi and several states.

In Indological literature, Hinduism is seen as the key pillar in the western construct of India, which, according to Inden (2000), not only served the interests of the colonists but also had the effect of 'depriving Indians of their capacity to rule their

world, which has consequently been appropriated by those in the West who wish to dominate it'. India has long been a melting pot of religions, ethnicities, languages and a hub of economic activity, attracting invaders through the millennia, mainly Muslims from central Asia and Afghanistan; the British, French, Portuguese and the Dutch followed.

Hegel's was a typical 19th century description of India as an object of desire:

From the most ancient times downwards, all nations have directed their wishes and longings to gaining access to the treasures of this land of marvels, the most costly which the Earth presents; treasures of Nature---pearls, diamonds, perfumes, rose-essences, elephants, lions, etc.---has also treasures of wisdom. The way by which these treasures have passed to the West, has at all times been a matter of World-historical importance, bound up with the fate of nation (in Bose & Jalal, 1997: 1).

Since the focus of this study is contemporary, I shall refer mainly to developments since India became independent in 1947, but also refer to some earlier events that relate to the two conflicts of Kashmir and the northeast. In modern India, deep-rooted religious and cultural traditions co-exist with modern 'political technologies' such as the nation-state, Constitution, secularism, etc. During the freedom struggle, religious rituals and cultural traditions were used as part of the popular resistance against colonial rule. The largely Hindu but secular leadership of the Indian National Congress led the struggle, during which the Hindu-Muslim divide was largely subsumed by a unity of purpose. This sense of unity, however, weakened as independence became imminent in the early 1940s. Indeed, the divide was central to the emergence of India and Pakistan as two independent nation-states in 1947, and much of national debate in the two countries since then continues to revolve around it; one example of this is the issue of Muslim-majority Kashmir that remains geographically and politically divided between India and Pakistan, with the former holding on to a major part of its territory.

By the end of World War II, the Labour government in Britain was 'more concerned with building the welfare state at home and disengaging from some of the imperial baggage abroad' (Chapman, 2000: 157). Pressure of the freedom struggle in India added to London's assessment that it could no longer hold on to its colony. It was during this period before independence, the early 1940s, that a section of the Congress' Muslim leadership, led by Mohammad Ali Jinnah, put forth the 'two-nation theory', according to which Muslims constituted a nation separate from Hindu-

majority India. The demand for a separate state for Muslims of British India, 'Pakistan', was raised on the ground that they would be unsafe in an India dominated by Hindus.

Congress leaders such as Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi and Nehru, who had committed the party and the freedom movement to their modernist vision of a secular India, rejected the 'two-nation theory', and offered several guarantees and positions of power to the Muslim leadership in the new government that was to be formed after independence. According to Nehru, 'What (secular India) means is that it is a State which honours all faiths equally and gives them equal opportunities; India has a long history of religious tolerance...In a country like India, which has many faiths and religions, no real nationalism can be built up except on the basis of secularity' (in Iyer, 2001). However, Jinnah and his followers refused to give up and during the protracted discussions in London and Delhi demanded that the Muslim-majority provinces of British India be carved out to constitute the new state of Pakistan. The outgoing colonists conceded this, having earlier established the context through census exercises and separate electorates. In seven weeks in 1947, Sir Cyril Radcliffe hastily drew borders of the two new states cutting across villages, towns and lives, an exercise that led to much turmoil, mass migration and massacres between Hindus and Muslims. W H Auden's lines convey some of the haste, danger and nature of Radcliffe's task (in Khilnani, 1997: 200):

Shut up in a lonely mansion, with police night and day
Patrolling the garden to keep assassins away,
He got down to work, to the task of settling the fate
Of millions. The maps at his disposal were out of date
And the Census Returns almost certainly incorrect
But there was no time to check them, no time to inspect
Contested areas. The weather was frightfully hot,
And a bout of dysentery kept him constantly on the trot,
But in seven weeks it was done, the frontiers decided,
A continent for better or worse divided.

The next day he sailed for England, where he quickly forgot
The case, as a good lawyer must. Return he would not,
Afraid, as he told his Club, that he might get shot.

The Partition of British India into India and Pakistan, and the consequent transfer of population involved one of the largest migrations in human history. Millions of Hindus from what was to become Pakistan migrated to India while Muslims from what was to become India travelled to Pakistan. It triggered waves of religious riots

and massacres (Butalia, 2001), and constituted a failure for every side involved in the pre-independence discussions: Jinnah's 'two-nation theory' failed as millions of Muslims spread across India preferred not to migrate to Pakistan; Gandhi and Nehru, who had put forth their vision of a secular India, could not prevent the division of British India; and due to the massacre of nearly a million, the departing British failed to ensure a smooth transfer of power. After the lines and borders were redrawn across land, cultures and homes, Pakistan chose to become an Islamic Republic whereas India made secularism an inherent part of its plurality (Sen, 1993).

After 1947, as both India and Pakistan set about recovering from the trauma of Partition, the ideological-religious foundations of Pakistan came under strain in 1971 when its eastern territory, East Pakistan, seceded with Indian help to emerge as the new state of Bangladesh. Between 1947 and 1971, the state of Pakistan was geographically dispersed between its western territory and the eastern territory separated by the vast expanse of north India (see Map 1). India supported Bengali nationalism in East Pakistan where resentment against domination by the Punjabi elites in West Pakistan had blown into a full insurgency. Indian leaders often highlight the emergence of Muslim-majority Bangladesh and the presence of over 110 million Muslims in India (1991 census)---more than the population of Pakistan---as proof of the two-nation theory's fallacy.

The creation of Pakistan and the drawing of India's new political boundaries meant that some areas and people that were closely involved with the freedom struggle were left out (Muslims, Sindhis, Pathans, etc. in Pakistan) in the new dispensation, while some that had a tenuous relationship with the mainland, the freedom struggle or even with the colonial administration, were included within the new borders (tribal regions of the northeast). Among the first challenges of free India was the incorporation of over 500 princely states in the new political framework. They had enjoyed a degree of autonomy under colonial rule and were wary of the new political realities. However, most of the princely states that lay within India's new territorial boundaries accepted the situation after a mix of persuasion and incentives, but some remained reluctant. Among these was the princely state of Muslim-majority Kashmir, which was ruled by a Hindu king who did not want to join India or Pakistan but intended to remain independent.

As the nascent Indian State grappled with myriad problems, Nehru---India's first prime minister and the most influential of its pre-independence leaders (Khilnani,

1997)---strengthened institutions of democracy and ensured that challenges were faced in an atmosphere of debate and consensus. As Talbot observes, ‘Despite its critiques...the modernist paradigm dominates and is a potent influence on the “nation-building” activities of many third world states...(Nehru) sought to forge a new national unity resting on a modernised relationship between a politicised and socially mobilised citizenry and an intrusive state’ (2000: 4). Since 1947, India---famously called ‘a functioning anarchy’ by economist John Kenneth Galbraith---has remained a democracy amidst more than a half-century of domestic and regional bushfires. As Sen (1997) observes, India’s ‘biggest achievement is in the maintenance of democracy’, which has enabled it to accommodate cultural diversity, manage ethnic conflict and face challenges of development. India’s diversity, which was once considered a problem, is now seen as the main reason behind the success of its democracy, ‘for at the national level...no single ethnic group can dominate’ (Hargrave Jr., 1994: 72). Nehru was aware that ‘unfortunately, there are inherent in India separatist and disruptive tendencies’, and stressed on ‘our need to fight communalism, provincialism, separatism, stateism and casteism’ (in Phadnis, 1989: 86). The perpetuation of democracy has ensured that competing demands and interests are largely resolved through debate and democratic instruments such as elections, media, parliament, judiciary and governments answerable to the people. As Khilnani observes:

Few states created after the end of European empire have been able to maintain democratic routines; and India’s own past, as well as the contingencies of its unity, prepared it poorly for democracy. Huge, impoverished, crowded with cultural and religious distinctions, with a hierarchical social order almost deliberately designed to resist the idea of political equality, India had little prospective reason to expect it could operate as a democracy. Yet fifty years later India continues to have parliaments and courts of law, political parties and a free press, and elections for which hundreds of millions of voters turn out, as a result of which governments fall and are formed (1997:16).

Even while committing the new state to principles of modernity, political leaders were clear that socially India did not exist as a nation, but politically it had become one. In speeches and writings, they promoted a new formation shaped by republican ideals and cast in the mould of a modern Constitution. Ambedkar, who is credited with drafting India’s Constitution, stated: ‘In believing that we are a nation, we are chasing a great delusion. We can only attempt to become a nation-in-the-making’

(1946). In contemporary India, there has been a constant tension between efforts of the State to forge a macro-nationalism and the many micro-nationalisms of ethnic groups and communities, often ranged against each other (Baruah, 1994). Hobsbawm describes India as one of the prime examples of polities that grew out of anti-colonial movements, which were inspired by the nationalism of the West in theoretical terms, but in practice were efforts to construct states that were by and large the opposite of the 'ethnically and linguistically homogeneous entities' that are seen as the standard form of the Western nation-state (1990: 164).

In the pre-independence period, the colonial view was that India was not and could never become a nation. As Strachey put it in 1903: 'This is the first and most essential thing to learn about India---that there is not, and never was an India, or even any country of India, possessing, according to European ideas, any sort of unity, physical, political, social or religious; no Indian nation, no "people of India" of which we hear so much' (5). Things changed under British colonialism. Chapman suggests that 'the British were not the first rulers to bring administrative unity to large areas of the subcontinent. However, the technological advances they introduced enabled distant regions to be more closely knit than ever before. English not only served as a unifying lingua franca for the Indian elite, but crucially introduced it to the notion of modern nationalism and the desire for self-determination' (2000: 30).

2.1.1 The Multicultural Indian

Before setting out the comparable characteristics of the two conflict zones of Kashmir and the northeast, I discuss India's key variables of religion, language and population in order to set the context to identify the constituents of the socio-cultural binary from the perspective of news-workers in New Delhi.

Due to the intricate matrix of religion, caste, language, ethnicity, etc., India's socio-cultural environment is in a perpetual state of movement. '(The) immense intermingling, interaction, interdependence in every field...makes the identification of "pure categories" almost impossible' (Das, 1992: 143). Every Indian can be said to belong simultaneously to majority as well as minority communities. In contrast to the relatively simpler realities of the west, an Indian may identify with several groups simultaneously, and not always as an Indian: 'Everything in India is group oriented, be it an extended family, or in the wider caste or community' (Chapman, 2000: 33). This not only problematises the conception of majority and minority but also opens

up a range of possibilities for inter-group and inter-cultural 'swishing', as would be evident from my own example:

I belong to the faith adhered to by 82 per cent of the population (Hinduism), but a majority of Indians do not speak my mother tongue, Marathi. Even within my faith, I am categorised among the numerically small caste of Brahmins; and even among Brahmins, my sub-caste is not the majority. I am also a Maharashtrian since my cultural roots lie in the western state of Maharashtra (capital: Mumbai/Bombay). But since my first 18 years were spent in Roman Catholic Goa, with little exposure to other parts of India except through Bollywood films, a part of me remains Christian-Goan and responds to church music. After India 'liberated' Goa from Portuguese rule in 1961, my father was one of the first Indian employees in the local station of All India Radio. Since the Hindu-Muslim divide was not a major factor in Goa, I find myself less passionate about inter-religious clashes than fellow citizens in north/central India, where memories of Partition and communal riots are part of daily life. My ancestral roots lie in the centrally located Hindi-speaking state of Madhya Pradesh, but until the age of 20, I was not conversant in Hindi, the 'national official' language. There are many communities that have nothing in common with mine though they may belong to the same state, faith or sub-caste (for example, Gujaratis, Bengalis, Punjabis, etc). The Persian-Urdu *ghazal*, which has origins in Islamic culture, and rendered by Indian and Pakistani artistes, remains my favourite form of music. My career in journalism later exposed me to various other cultures in northwest, north and east India, and since 1990 I have settled in New Delhi in the north, without posing a problem culturally or socially (see also Page 168).

In the course of a day, an Indian usually dips into various spaces of identity and swishes back and forth between the matrix of cultures, which makes social categorisation into majority and minority almost a meaningless task. As Parekh observes, 'With India made up of so many criss-crossing communities, every Indian is the bearer of several identities. An average Indian has multiple affections and loyalties' (1996: 146). The point is that the concepts of majority and minority are at best fluid and shift according to focus and locale; the people and cultures that may constitute the 'we' and 'they' in north India may be entirely different when the focus is shifted to western, southern or eastern India. As Das rightly observes:

(No) two Indians are equal...The stratification of society is so deep that it virtually negates any concept of social egalitarianism...Differentiation of individuals is so intense that although individuals do coalesce in social groups, the groupings themselves are so extremely fragmented, segmented and stratified that the very concepts of "majority" and "minority" appear illusory...Any majority-minority classification therefore on the basis of a single factor is simplistic and even one on the basis of more than one factor can be quite misleading. In such a situation, definition and identification of "majority groups" and their counterpart "minorities" are necessarily, at best, only approximate (1992: 25).

According to Bhabha, 'I do think that the Indian scene is a site of remarkable cultural tolerance on the one hand and cultural difference on the other without always posing an assimilative norm. Whereas people in Europe get steamed up about having Africans among them, we have tolerated wave after wave of migrants with a much lower economic base. We have tolerated a range of ideas coming from the West, from the East, from the Pacific Rim' (in Jain & Poddar, 1995). Parekh suggests that individuals have neither the conceptual resources nor the need to identify themselves as belonging to majority or minority communities; and that the idea of *national* majorities and minorities does not arise unless two conditions are met. 'First, the country as a whole must become the primary point of orientation; second, there must be an identity with a national reach. In India languages and ethnicities are mostly regional and lack national reach. Only religion provides the latter...' (1996: 146).

Since the focus of this study is the Indian national press based in New Delhi and the two conflict zones of Kashmir and northeast, an approximate list of constituents of the 'we' and 'they' can be drawn up. New Delhi is located in the north-central region, which is popularly called the 'Hindi heartland' or the 'Hindi belt', comprising some of India's largest states: Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. The following questions may help identify some constituents of the 'we' and 'they' from New Delhi's perspective: Who is fighting whom in Kashmir and the northeast, and to what end? How does each conflict affect the 'we' of New Delhi? Do those involved in the conflict, or their activities, matter to 'us' in New Delhi, north India? Which social groups dominate the community of news-workers in New Delhi?

The identity of the producer, subject and the consumer is vital to analyse and understand the complexity of news production. As Singh observed after investigating the coverage of the Chechen hostage crisis in Moscow in 2002 and the US-led talk of war on Iraq in international newspapers and television channels, 'the tone of foreign news coverage varies sharply depending on who is producing the news' (2002).

Before attempting to answer the questions outlined above in the Indian context, a closer look at the key variables of ethnicity, religion and language is in order.

2.1.2 The People of India: Religion and Language

Census was a key instrument British administrators deployed to classify and control the colonised population. Appadurai suggests that classifying the population was an obsession with the British (1996: 116). Cohn shows that the Indian census, 'rather

than being a passive instrument of data gathering, created a new sense of category identity in India which in turn led to new strategies for mobility, politics and electoral struggle' (1987). According to Das, before census was introduced, there was a 'blissful state of social ignorance...If a group did not know how far it extended and what was its strength in numbers, it was not likely to have an acute and aggressive self-awareness' (1992: 2). Middleton, superintendent of the 1921 Census, observed: 'We pigeonholed everyone by caste and community. We deplore its effect on social and economic problems but we are largely responsible for the system we deplore. Government's passion for labels and pigeonholes has led to crystallisation and fragmentation' (in Das, 1992: 3). Towards the close of the 19th century, census had made religion the politically significant basis of self-identification. The Hindus were told that they constituted a majority while Muslims were told of the regions where they were in a majority. By 1947, the spaces occupied by the majority and minority communities were clear enough to drive Jinnah's demand for the separate state of Pakistan. Parekh summarises the developments:

Thanks to the enthusiastic Hindu response to westernisation, the rise of a westernised Hindu middle class, the decline of Muslim aristocracy, and the consolidation of colonial rule, Muslims began to feel left out and to ask for special protection. This suited the British rulers, who granted them, and then other minorities, separate electorates, thereby making religion an integral part of the colonial state. As the struggle for independence, predominantly led by the Hindus, gained momentum from the 1920s onwards, Muslim leaders began to fear Hindu domination and speak of the need for their own Muslim-majority state...The partition had a traumatic effect on Indian self-understanding. It made the ideas of majority and minority the dominant currency of political discourse...The ideas of majority and minority soon travelled to many other areas of life, giving rise to ideas of collective or group rights (1996: 146).

India today has the second largest population in the world after China. The 2001 census recorded a population of 1,027,015,247 with a literacy of 65 per cent. Census data relating to the numbers of lower castes and tribes is particularly relevant to the present study. These sections of society are counted separately and form part of the official acknowledgement of the lower status these sections have historically suffered from, and to whom positive discrimination is extended. In official parlance, they are described as 'scheduled castes' and 'scheduled tribes'; the 'schedule' in the terminology referring to the schedule of the Constitution in which they are listed by their caste or tribe names. The scheduled castes relate to the lower castes who are

variously called 'untouchables', *harijans* (children of God) or as they prefer to call themselves, *dalits* (the oppressed); they constitute a social segment of Hindu society that is set apart from others on the ground that its members happened to be born into certain families. Sorabjee suggests that 'there is no country in the world which has such extensive and positive affirmative action provisions as India', but admits that traditional 'discriminatory practices...do persist. An absence of effective enforcement of the legal provisions is one of the causes' (2001: 16). However, the focus of this study is less with this section of society than with the 'scheduled tribes', since tribes inhabit large areas of the northeast and constitute the majority in some states in the region. Singh, who directed the Anthropological Survey of India's *People of India* project, observes: 'The North Eastern tribal region is easily the most dynamic of tribal regions, and the process of its opening up and integration with the rest of the country is still underway' (1993).

In the Indian context, the term 'tribe' is a colonial construction; it was introduced in the 19th century when colonial expansion faced formidable opposition from what were then called 'forest-dwellers', 'primitive groups', etc.; they were differentiated from the 'mainstream' population that had been subjugated with less difficulty. They were termed 'tribes' and attributed racial characteristics borrowed from the experience of colonial expansion in America, Australia and Africa. They were distinguished from Hindus and Muslims on the assumption that they were animists. In economic terms they were considered 'backward', culturally 'primitive' and on juridical grounds, since they were difficult to subjugate, 'criminal'. In the 1931 Census, the first serious attempt was made by the colonial administration to list them, and it was discovered that while the 'forest tribes' of 1891 had numbered 16 million, in 1931 the 'primitive tribes' numbered 22 million. In the Government of India Act of 1935, they were re-designated as 'backward tribes'. After independence, special provisions were made for their administration and social uplift, and were listed in separate schedules of the Constitution, thus becoming known as 'scheduled tribes'. Due to the policy of positive discrimination, there is a constant clamour for inclusion of more tribes or sub-tribes in the list; the number of tribes listed in the schedule increased from 212 in 1950 to 427 in 1971.

The term 'scheduled tribe' has not been defined in the Constitution, but in India, Singh suggests that 'tribe is determined primarily by the political and administrative consideration of uplifting a section of the Indian people which has been relatively

remotely situated in the hills and forests and which is backward in terms of the indices of development. The Scheduled Tribes have been identified in terms of the two parameters of relative isolation and backwardness. Sometimes the notion of territoriality has also been applied to incorporate all communities of the remote and backward regions' (1993). The definition of 'tribe' remains problematic but denotes certain perceptions and images such as 'the absence of exploiting classes and organised state structures; multi-functionality of kinship bonds; all-pervasiveness of religion; segmented character of the socio-economic unit; frequent co-operation for common goals; shallow history; distinct taboos, customs and moral codes; the youth dormitory; a low level of technology; common names, territories, descent, language, culture, etc' (Pathy, 1992: 50). But the ground situation remains complex.

The sets of attributes in terms of which tribes are differentiated from castes are not possessed by a large number of groups that have been identified as tribes, and even groups that demonstrate these attributes have dissimilarities. At one end there are groups that have all these features and at the other are those that hardly show these attributes. The large majority of the tribes, however, fall somewhere in between. The only thing the tribes 'seem to have in common is that they all stand more or less outside Hindu civilisation' (Beteille, 1960). In the Hindu social hierarchy, tribes are often clubbed with the lowest of the four castes, the Sudras. As Chapman notes, '(Tribes) have themselves not accepted the Hindu framework of life nor the pantheon of Hindu Gods. They are often incorporated into modern economic life at the lowest levels' (2000: 34). There are several instances of tribes converting to Christianity, particularly in the northeast, and to Hinduism (Xaxa, 1999). As per the 1991 census, the scheduled castes constituted 16.48 per cent of India's population while the scheduled tribes amounted to 8.08 per cent, or 67.7 million, of which 8.14 million are spread across the northeast. Religion presents a similar picture of complexity:

Table 1: MAJOR RELIGIONS (PERCENTAGE OF POPULATION), 1991

<u>RELIGION</u>	<u>PERCENTAGE</u>	<u>RELIGION</u>	<u>PERCENTAGE</u>
Hindu	82	Jain	0.40
Muslim	12.12	Other Religions and Persuasions	0.39
Christian	2.34	Religion Not Stated	0.05
Sikh	1.94		
Buddhist	0.76		

There are two ways of looking at the conundrum of religion: one rooted in the western worldview---which may be called a perspective 'from above'---that suggests that Hindus constitute an overwhelming majority of the Indian population: 82 per cent; and the indigenous perspective---a view 'from below'---that holds that the census figures lead to a misleading perception of majority and minority which ignores the long tradition of intermingling of religions in India over the ages; an interaction that has been intense enough for the peaceful co-existence of religious communities even before the idea of secularism was introduced. As Das observes, '(There) is little historical evidence of sustained communal hatred operating at the popular level prior to colonial rule...(At) the popular level, the religious response to prevailing state of affairs, expressed through the Bhakti movement, Sufism, etc., was in terms of amalgamation of faiths rather than fuelling of mutual hatred' (1992: 94). The census figures may lead to perceptions and images that may ignore the influence of Islam in music, architecture, literature etc., and the corresponding impact of Hinduism on Indian Islam. The Indian version of Islam is different from its counterparts elsewhere, and even within the country it varies from one region to another; for example, a Kashmiri Muslim may have very little in common with a Muslim in Kerala in south India, except the name of their religious persuasions. 'Hindu castes and caste-like divisions are common among Muslims, Sikhs and Christians...For their part, the Hindus have absorbed Muslim and Christian practices, and some of them see nothing wrong in worshipping at the shrines of all religions' (Parekh, 1996: 145). Indian security experts point out that in the post-September 11 'war against terrorism', not a single Indian Muslim was apprehended for being a member of Al Qaeda. As Raman observes: 'The overwhelming majority of our Muslims have remained nationalists and (have) kept away from the pan-Islamic terrorists...When they feel aggrieved by the perceived failure of the Government to protect them, they go and cry on the shoulders of the media, non-governmental organisations, the National Human Rights Commission, the opposition parties or at the most, foreign human rights organisations, and not on the shoulders of bin Laden' (2002).

The simplistic census-based perspective has been useful to political entrepreneurs: Jinnah in his quest for Muslim-majority Pakistan and lately, the *Hindutva* proponents with their Hindu-centric idea of 'cultural nationalism'. The clashes between Hindus and Muslims in Gujarat in 2002 were the most recent manifestation of this political entrepreneurship. However, evidence suggests that the non-census based perspective,

‘from below’, is more rooted in India’s social fabric but it is also vulnerable to periodic ruptures. Experts note that given the religious antagonisms and the vast numbers involved (820 million Hindus and 140 million Muslims), there have been relatively few instances of religious clashes in modern India. This is because to a large majority of impoverished Hindus and Muslims alike, survival itself is at stake: ‘(At) the level of the ordinary people, peasants and artisans, as they were exploited almost to the point of being reduced to mere subsistence survival by practically all regimes, religious rivalries hardly mattered’ (Das, 1992: 94-5). According to Wolpert, ‘(Coexistence) was more often the norm during the centuries of Hindu-Muslim cohabitation in South Asia. Most villages were in fact atoms of multicultural harmony during the era of Muslim rule and continue to be so in many states of modern India (1999: 576)’.

Religious riots during Partition in 1947 claimed almost a million lives. However, Varshney---author of a study of clashes since independence in *Ethnic Conflict and Civic Life: Hindus and Muslims in India* (Yale, 2001)---observes: ‘Since 1950, only 8,000 have died in Hindu-Muslim riots in India. If you compare India’s record to other diverse post-colonial societies it is fairly impressive. If you compare to what people feared after the 1947 riots, it is even more remarkable’ (in Luce, 2002). As Ghosh (2000: 210) notes, ‘In India, more violence is Hindu caste-oriented than communal’ (in Indian popular discourse, ‘communal’ refers to the brittle relationship between Hindus and Muslim ‘communities’). The strongest criticism of Hindu extremism invariably comes from within the influential modernist sections of the Hindu community, as the coverage of the Gujarat clashes in the media demonstrated.

Indologists have long accorded Hinduism the central place in the understanding of India and its culture. Smith observed that ‘If all reference to Islam, Christianity and other foreign religions be put aside for a moment, it may be said that India, excepting *uncultured tribes (!)*, is essentially Hindu, the land of the Brahmans. The unity underlying the obvious diversity of India may be summed up in the word Hinduism’ (1919: 26; emphasis, exclamation mark added). Hinduism has been essentialised in western constructs of India, but many Hindus themselves would find it problematic to accord the ‘religion’ such status. Without delving deep into the rich debate about Hinduism, suffice here to say that most Hindus consider it a way of life than a religion since it is not church-based and is not founded on a strict dogma. Hinduism is considered a ‘collection of a broad group of south Asian religions’ (Babbili, 1997:

133). It has observable characteristics---ornate temples, gods, ancient texts, castes, rituals, etc.---but these do not reveal the full story. This is not to ignore its holy and unholy features, particularly the repressive caste system, but to highlight its open-ended and flexible nature. Inden (2000) explains how generations of western writers depicted Hinduism as a pillar of India, and how it was central to the west's instrumentalist construction of India. It is the only world religion (apart from Judaism) that is named after a place rather than a founder or doctrine. As Chapman observes:

The Western mind is peculiarly partitioned. It likes to put things in boxes, to call this sacred, that profane; to label some things religious, and some secular or temporal. Hinduism is therefore labelled by Westerners a religion, as though that were a separate box in the scheme of life. But to a Hindu, the word religion would have no particular meaning. 'Hinduism' simply means the ways of Hindu society, a society or societies of people found living by and beyond the Indus river, whence the name originates...(These) people have many languages, and are descended from many invading groups (2000: 27).

Census figures on religion (see Table 1; Page 28) conceal the endless diversity within Hinduism. The number of gods in the Hindu pantheon runs into millions while Hindus are extremely divided among themselves as worshippers of respective gods and goddesses; even those who worship the same god(s) may do so according to different modes and belong to different sects. Moreover, they may belong to various orders headed by different *gurus* and may be even more sub-divided. To complicate matters further, Jainism and Buddhism have been incorporated in the broad framework of Hinduism and a large number of Hindus (and many Sikhs) believe that Sikhism is not a different religion but only a sect within Hinduism. The state of Indian Islam in census figures is no less problematic.

Apart from the two major sects---Shias and Sunnis---which are both present in India in significant numbers, there are also sub-sects such as Ahmediyas, Bohras, Ismailis and followers of various *pirs* (holy men) and Sufi *fakirs* (religious mendicants who established systems of devotion different from Islamic orthodoxy, and marked the cultural confluence of Hinduism and Islam; they are popular among both Hindus and Muslims). As Das observes, due to the 'variety of complexities obtaining in India, it is nothing but gross simplification to talk of percentages and numbers. And yet, for lack of any other system of broad classification...(census figures show that)...all religious groups, other than Hindus, are numerical minorities' (1992: 94).

The linguistic matrix demonstrates yet another complexity. According to the Linguistic Survey of India, there are 179 languages and 544 dialects, and philologists classify them into four distinct family groups: India-Aryan, Davidian, Austro-Asiatic and Tibeto-Chinese. The number of languages and dialects enlisted for census purposes runs into hundreds, but the major 'official' languages are 18:

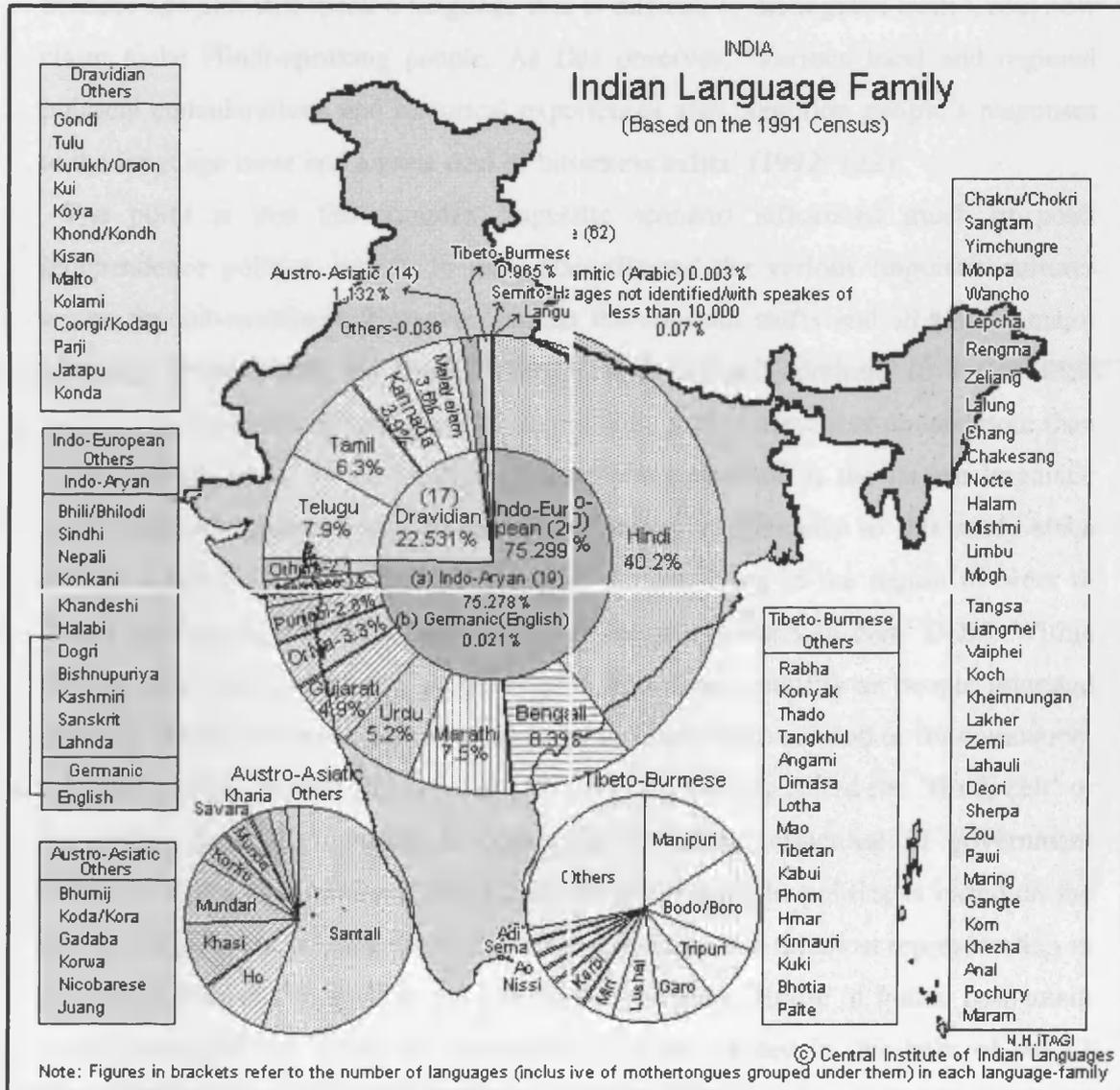
Table 2: SPEAKERS OF MAJOR LANGUAGES (PERCENTAGE), 1991

<u>LANGUAGE</u>	<u>PERCENTAGE</u>	<u>LANGUAGE</u>	<u>PERCENTAGE</u>
Hindi	40.22	Bengali	8.30
Telugu	7.87	Marathi	7.45
Tamil	6.32	Urdu	5.18
Gujarati	4.85	Kannada	3.91
Malayalam	3.62	Oriya	3.35
Punjabi	2.79	Assamese	1.56
Sindhi	0.25	Nepali	0.25
Konkani	0.21	Manipuri	0.15
Kashmiri	0.01	Sanskrit	0.01

The Constitution recognises 18 'official' languages with Hindi as the 'national official language'. As Table 2 above and Map 2 (Page 33) indicate, minority languages dominate the linguistic scenario. Hindi is the largest linguistic group but is not a majority, as it is spoken by only 40.22 per cent of the population. After independence, since every province was multilingual, attempts were made to reorganise them in such a manner as to bring about a degree of linguistic and cultural homogeneity of the people in a given province. On the basis of the States Reorganisation Commission's report in 1955, many boundaries were redrawn on linguistic basis and a number of uni-lingual states were carved out; for example, Marathi language in Maharashtra state, Oriya in Orissa, Tamil in Tamil Nadu, Kannada in Karnataka, etc.

The exercise was by no means compact. The declaration of Hindi as the 'national official' language generated much controversy and violence. In Tamil Nadu and West Bengal there were language agitations, destruction of public property and deaths. In Chennai (Madras), violence was endemic until the assurance was given that Hindi would not be imposed on the state and that English would continue to be used as the 'link' language for an unspecified time in the future. Language is central to the cultural divides of North, South, West and East India:

Regional cultures and linguistic groups have...asserted their right to dominance in post-independent India. The divisions between the North and the South, between the Hindi-speaking northerners and the southerners who speak Tamil, Kannada, Malayalam, and Telugu have become pronounced. The South with its longer traditions in art, music, dance, drama, and literature perceives the North as politically dominant and culturally bullish. Similar situations exist between Northeast and West. Regional conflicts and politics based on language are common and pose a constant threat to India's unity and harmony (Babbili, 1997: 150-1).



(Map 2: India's language family)

A key feature of the linguistic situation is that a language does not generally correspond to an identifiable and distinct religious community. For example, Bengali is the language of the Hindus, Muslims and Christians alike in Bengal. These communities have 'identical linguistic interests in definite areas despite their religious

differences (Wadhwa, 1975: 10). But this is not universally true, particularly in post-independence India, since much politics and culture influence each other. For example, Punjabi is now increasingly identified with Sikhs, because large sections of Punjabi Hindus have renounced the language they have spoken for centuries in favour of Hindi, particularly after the anti-Sikh riots of 1984 that followed the assassination of Indira Gandhi by Sikh bodyguards. Urdu is identified with Muslims---it is the national language of Pakistan---but a large number of Hindus who were using it some decades ago and still speak a language that is difficult to distinguish from Urdu, now claim to be Hindi-speaking people. As Das observes, 'Various local and regional political considerations and historical experiences also condition people's responses to the language issue and a great deal of bitterness exists' (1992: 122).

The point is that the complex linguistic scenario influenced much of post-independence politics, which, in turn, also affected the various linguistic cultures across the sub-continent. However, amidst the constant shifts and slippages, major language groups such as Hindi, Marathi and Bengali continue to retain their predominant position in their respective domains; some differences matter more than others. Hindi, which is the 'national official' language and is the largest linguistic group, enjoys a special place. It also holds particular relevance to this study since northeast rebels often target Hindi-speaking people living in the region in order to attract the attention of the (Hindi-speaking) decision-makers in New Delhi. Within the northeast, Hindi-speaking people form a significant minority as people migrated from the north and central India to the region in search of livelihood or for commerce.

India's capital, New Delhi, is located in what is popularly called the 'Hindi belt' or the 'Hindi heartland', which is politically the most influential in government formation at the federal level. The Hindi belt's influence in politics is based on the fact that it is the most populous in the country and thus has the most representation in parliament. Out of 543 seats in the Lok Sabha (the lower House of Indian parliament corresponding to the House of Commons), 226 are located in this belt; of the 13 Prime Ministers in independent India, 10 hailed from this region.

The 'belt' comprises the following contiguous Hindi-speaking states of north and central India:

Table 3: THE HINDI BELT (HINDI SPEAKERS, 1991; LOK SABHA SEATS)³

<u>STATE</u>	<u>%AGE: LS SEATS</u>	<u>STATE</u>	<u>%AGE: LS SEATS</u>
Uttar Pradesh	90.1 (85)	Bihar	80.9 (54)
Madhya Pradesh	85.6 (40)	Haryana	90.1 (10)
Hiamchal Pradesh	88.9 (4)	Rajasthan	89.6 (25)
Delhi	81.6 (7)	Chandigarh	61.1 (1)

Apart from the fact that Hindi is the language of national politics and debate, it enjoys a privileged position because of its adoption by a major section of the culture-entertainment industry comprising television, audio-visual media and the Hindi film world (better known as Bollywood). Hindi and English are most commonly used by the urban elites across India: 'Where Hindi and related languages encompassed a plurality of the population in India, but left out a large majority, especially in the South (and the East), English became the language of all-India communication. By the same dialectic of unification and liberation, the colonial language also was adopted as the link language among the anti-colonial opposition (de Swaan in Das, 1992: 132-3). Much of national politics, administration, law, commerce, industry, communications and transport is carried out through the medium of Hindi or English. At the government level, English is used for inter-state communication among non-Hindi states, between Hindi and non-Hindi states and between the central government and the states.

The multicultural reality of Indian nation-state is thus framed within an analytic complexity of cultural diversity. Three aspects of contemporary Indian society are relevant to this study:

- The centrality of the Hindu-Muslim-secularism dynamic, which is rooted in the way the sub-continent was partitioned,
- The socially disadvantaged position of tribes; and,
- The privileged position of Hindi language in the politically influential 'Hindi belt', in which New Delhi and the 'national' press is located.

The two conflict zones of Kashmir and the northeast are located amidst the vortex of tensions thrown up by the intricate socio-cultural matrix based on religion,

³ State-wise number of Lok Sabha seats in brackets. Since the 1991 Census, three new states---Uttaranchal, Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand---have been carved out of Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Bihar, respectively. The figure in the table covers the population of these states. Chandigarh is a federally administered Union Territory.

language and ethnicity. From the Statist point of view, the two conflicts are also seen as a threat to the unity and integrity of India; the situation is often compared to that prevailing in the former Soviet Union:

The disintegration of the Soviet Union offers a sobering warning to Indians. After all, that empire was cobbled by centuries of absolutist czardom and was held together for seventy years by the ideals of socialism as well as the power of an overarching state. By contrast, India exists on the basis of a soft State, a weak ideal and fragile institutions. Hence, the dangers to its unity are far greater (Das, 1992: 1).

2.2 Conundrum of Conflict: Kashmir and the Northeast

The Kashmir conflict has been a 'legacy of partition' (Tan & Kudaisya, 2000: 221) while the host of insurgencies and struggles for local autonomy in the northeast trace their origins to the fact that India, along with other former colonies, came to 'inherit artificial boundaries cutting across ethno-cultural lines' (Ganguly, 1998: 9). It is thus common to find ethnic groups divided along international borders of two or more nation-states, a situation often reflected in the geo-politics of insurgency when demands are made for 'Greater' homelands by groups seeking secession or reunification with kin across the international borders; for example, the demand for 'Greater Nagaland', 'Greater Mizoram', or 'Greater Kashmir', that seeks to reunify land and the people belonging to the same ethnic stock in adjoining Myanmar or Pakistan. Since India's independence, secessionist demands have been raised in three areas: Punjab, Kashmir and the northeast states. The demand for 'Khalistan' for the majority Sikhs of Punjab hogged national and international headlines during the 1980s. By the early 1990s the Indian state had militarily and politically neutralised the insurgency that had secured support from neighbouring Pakistan; one of the victims of the 'Khalistan' insurgency was Prime Minister Indira Gandhi who was shot by her Sikh bodyguards in 1984 for sending the Indian army into the Golden Temple at Amritsar---the Mecca of the Sikh community---where Sikh militants had made a base.

Insurgencies in India broadly divide themselves into four overlapping categories:

- The first category has roots in a colonial legacy of disputes, best exemplified by the Kashmir insurgency;
- The ideology-inspired insurgencies such as the armed Marxist-Leninist Naxalite movement in West Bengal;

- The third type is founded on classic factors such as economic backwardness and underdevelopment: for example, the insurgency in Assam by the outlawed armed group, United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA);
- The Naga insurgency fits into the fourth category of insurgency stemming from volatile ethnicity. The Bodo agitation in Assam for a separate 'homeland' for plain tribes also fits into this category.

Theorising nationalist exclusion and ethnic conflict in new nation-states such as India, Wimmer observes:

The elite of the most powerful ethnic group takes over the new state apparatus after the end of the empire, while the subordinated groups continue to remain on the margin of political life and public culture. However, as soon as an educated middle class appears that is able to develop a discourse of injustice invoking the principles of representational justice and equal access to citizenship, the ethnocratic rule is challenged...When a majority population with a tradition of political centralisation takes over the apparatus, ethnicisation of the state and bureaucracy occurs automatically' (2002: 10, 92).

Some northeast conflicts appear to validate such observations.

Kashmir and the northeast are the two areas where secessionist demands continue to be raised, and where the might of the Indian State continues to be challenged. The two conflicts are a creation of exogenous and endogenous factors, both reinforcing each other in a seemingly intractable combination. Alienation of the local population has resulted in local leaders accusing the federal government of being unresponsive and perpetuating the pre-independence 'colonial attitude'. Development indices of the two regions have been among the lowest in the country, which circularly reinforces local feelings of alienation and the appeal for secession. Discussing the fate of 'nations without states', Guibernau rightly suggests that their nationalism 'often clashes with ignorance, neglect or lack of will on the part of the state which tends to resist pressure to grant the right to self-determination to national minorities living within its borders' (1999: 25).

Since India's independence, three wars have been fought in which Kashmir has been a direct or indirect factor, two between India and Pakistan in 1947-9 and 1965, and one between India and China in 1962. The constant state of tension between India and Pakistan along their international borders almost led to more wars in 1999 and 2002. However, unlike the case of Kashmir, the northeast has not been the cause of inter-state wars but was the theatre where much of the India-China war of 1962 was

fought; the Red Army had then overran the Indian state of Arunachal Pradesh and entered Assam. It subsequently withdrew, but China continues to lay claim to the territory of Arunachal Pradesh. The involvement of Pakistan, China, Bhutan, Myanmar and Bangladesh in northeast insurgencies has been documented by Indian security agencies over the years; their governments often adopt an ambivalent approach towards northeast rebels, depending on each country's overall relationship with an India that is seen as a 'big brother', 'overbearing' and one with 'hegemonic designs' in South Asia.

Table 4 brings together some of the major characteristics and commonalities of the two conflicts based on annual reports of the Union Ministry of Home Affairs, data maintained by the Institute of Conflict Management, New Delhi, and my experience of covering the two zones for *The Times of India*:

Table 4: MACRO ANALYSIS OF CONFLICT CHARACTERISTICS

KEY ELEMENTS	KASHMIR	NORTHEAST
Foreign Involvement	Yes (Pakistan, China)	Yes (Pakistan, China, Bhutan, Bangladesh)
Alienation from Centre, Mainland	Severe	Severe
Population Structure	Mainly Muslim, Kashmiri Hindus (Pandits)	Tribes, Hindus, Immigrant Muslims
Outlawed Armed Groups	Several	Several
Main Demand	Independence, Joining Pakistan, More Autonomy	Independence, More Autonomy
Indian Security Forces	Large Presence	Large Presence
Economic Development	Low	Low
Intensity of Violence	High	High
Crisis of Local Governance	Serious	Serious
Kin Across Borders	Yes (in Pakistan Occupied Kashmir)	Yes (in Myanmar, China, Bangladesh)
Constitutional Status	Special	Special

As the government's list of 'Problem Areas' (Page 17) indicates, Kashmir and the northeast figure in seven of the 10 official categories: Fundamentalist-Separatist Extremism; Regional-Separatist Extremist; Movements for Autonomy; International Terrorism; Ethnic/Tribal Conflicts; Refugees, Illegal Migration; Illegal Arms/Drug Trafficking.

The two zones are located at opposite ends of the Himalayan range. Geographically, Kashmir is closer to New Delhi (Srinagar: 891 km) than the northeast (Guwahati: 2034 km), but in this study, geographical proximity is less a factor since Kashmir receives high coverage not only in the national press based in New Delhi but also in other sectors of India's mammoth press industry. There are several common elements between the two in terms of the degree of violence, local alienation, demand for secession from India, foreign involvement, extensive use of sophisticated arms and ammunition, etc. In other words, Kashmir and the northeast demonstrate 'comparable message potential' (Entman, 1991: 9) for news coverage.

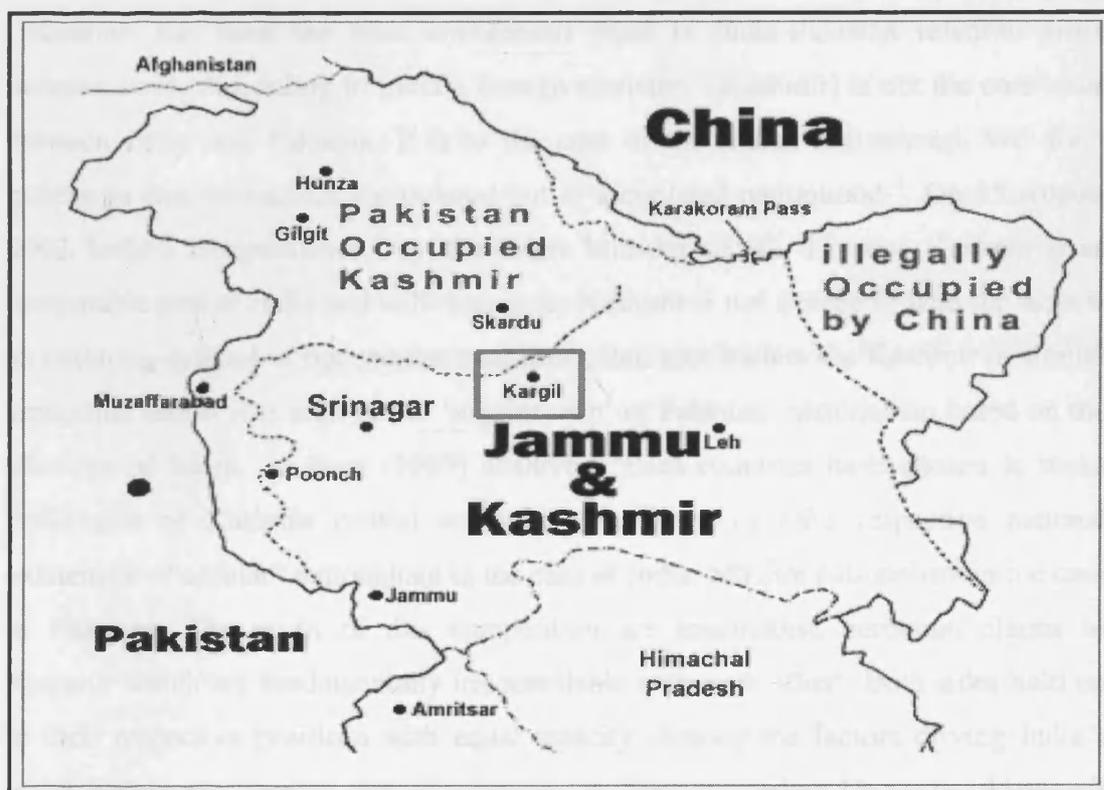
I now present a closer examination of each conflict zone and connect them to the social realities discussed earlier: the centrality of the Hindu-Muslim-secularism dynamic in the Indian public sphere, the socially disadvantaged position of tribes, and the privileged position of Hindi in the politically influential 'Hindi belt'.

2.2.1 The Kashmir Imbrolio

Kashmir is often termed as the 'unfinished business' of Partition since it is the only Muslim-majority area of British India that is not part of Pakistan. The Islamic state of Pakistan's claim to Kashmir rests solely in the logic of the two-nation theory that led to British India's Partition. Secular-democratic India, on the other hand, sees Kashmir as the most evocative symbol of its commitment of multiculturalism, diversity and pluralism. According to Bose (1999), 'there are several significant similarities in the configuration of the problems in Northern Ireland and Kashmir, particularly in the complex intersections of a variety of "domestic" and "international" conflict-producing factors in both cases'. Following nuclear tests by both India and Pakistan in 1998, an influential view in the west is that Kashmir is 'the most dangerous place in the world' (Rushdie, 2002), a view that was first credited to former US President Bill Clinton.

The extensive coverage of the Kashmir conflict in the Indian and international media has led to it being often bracketed with global conflict spots such as East

Timor, Kosovo and Northern Ireland. It is one of the many places whose peoples and territories are seen as 'nations without states' (Guibernau, 1999). Wedged between Pakistan, India, China, Afghanistan and the central Asian states, 'Greater Kashmir' (including both the Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir and Pakistan-controlled 'Azad' or free Kashmir) sits squarely in the middle of a web of disputed borders. The Kashmir valley is the passageway through the Himalayas to the entire subcontinent. From Kashmir flow a host of rivers that hustle down into India and Pakistan (the Indus, Chenab, and Jhelum rivers, flowing into Pakistan; and Ganges and Yamuna into India). As India's northernmost territory (see Map 1; Page 17), the state of Jammu and Kashmir provides a strategic window on other regional powers such as China, Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Tajikistan. Kashmir 'was one of the great centres of early Hinduism' (Akbar, 1985: 217), and due its geo-strategic location, it has been at the crossroads of the sub-continent's history of invasions and conquests. In geo-political terms, it is considered a bulwark for whoever manages to control it. The first emperor to do so was Asoka, who spread Buddhism in the region and built its capital, Srinagar.



(Map 3: Map of the Jammu & Kashmir region, from the Indian perspective, showing areas 'occupied' by Pakistan and China)

The total area of the former princely state of Kashmir was 86,023 square miles, approximately the size of the Korean Peninsula, Kansas or Britain. India administers 53,665 square miles and Pakistan 32,358 square miles. A 'Line of Control established in 1972 following the 1971 India-Pakistan war divides the territory; the 'Line of Control' replaced the former cease-fire line following the first India-Pakistan war in 1947-49.

Of the many strands of the ethno-political knot in which Kashmir finds itself, three are particularly relevant to this study:

- The conditions in which the former princely state of Kashmir opted to join India after independence;
- Kashmir's importance as the symbol of Indian secularism, as the only Muslim-majority (65 per cent) state in Hindu-majority India. Its political inclusion within the Indian nation-state is seen as challenging the two-nation theory, which Indian leaders had never accepted before independence;
- Kashmir's cultural recall and imagery as a 'Paradise on Earth', on which much prose and poetry has been lavished, in Bollywood and elsewhere, and its central position in the myths and mists of early Hinduism.

Kashmir has been the most contentious issue in India-Pakistan relations since Independence. According to India's foreign minister, '(Kashmir) is not the core issue between India and Pakistan. It is at the core of the Indian nationhood. We don't believe in denominational nationhood but in a civilised nationhood'⁴. On 15 August 2002, India's Independence Day, the Prime Minister stated: 'I repeat, Kashmir is an inseparable part of India and will remain so. Kashmir is not a piece of land for us; it is an enduring symbol of our secular traditions'. Pakistan leaders see Kashmir in similar emotional terms: it is seen as the 'jugular vein' of Pakistani nationalism based on the ideology of Islam. As Bose (1999) observes: 'Both countries have chosen to make possession of Kashmir central to the *raison d'être* of their respective national existences---"secular" nationalism in the case of India, Muslim nationalism in the case of Pakistan. The result of this competition are maximalist, zero-sum claims to Kashmir which are fundamentally irreconcilable with each other'. Both sides hold on to their respective positions with equal tenacity. Among the factors driving India's stand is the apprehension that 'Kashmir's exit from the Indian Union would set off

⁴ Jaswant Singh, quoted in news agency copy, *Press Trust of India*, 12 July 2001.

powerful centrifugal forces in other parts of the country. (The) stakes for both states involve far more than territorial claims: the question of control of Kashmir goes to the very basis of the state-building enterprise in South Asia' (Ganguly, 1996).

The roots of the Kashmir problem lie in the events surrounding the Partition of British India. Kashmir was one of the largest princely states that had to soon decide its future as the British colonists announced their departure. The princely states were remnants of earlier kingdoms the British had conquered, and were governed under a system of indirect rule in which the princes enjoyed political autonomy in their respective states while surrendering foreign policy and defence to the colonists. In deciding whether to accede to Pakistan or India, the British advised them to proceed on the principle of geographical contiguity, which, however, was not useful in many cases due to the haphazard geographical spreads of their kingdoms. The situation was further complicated by the fact that in several instances, Hindu rulers presided over Muslim-majority populations and vice versa. The neatest solution, according to the British, was for the princely states to join either of the two new countries with which their territories were contiguous. This proved a dilemma for Kashmir, which was contiguous with both India and Pakistan, and on this basis, could accede to either.

As the date of independence, 15 August 1947, arrived, most princely states, except Kashmir, Hyderabad and Junagarh had acceded to India. Hyderabad and Junagarh had Muslim rulers and Hindu-majority populations, and were reluctant to join India. They were, however, subsequently 'integrated' within India through 'police action'. In the case of Muslim-majority Kashmir, its Hindu ruler, Maharaja Hari Singh, was reluctant to accede to either, and wanted his kingdom to remain independent, even as Jinnah, Pakistan's founder, tried to influence him to decide in favour of Pakistan. As Tan & Kudaisya note, 'Following the "logic" of partition, Kashmir, with a Muslim population outnumbering the Hindus three to one, should have gone to Pakistan' (2000: 224), but it did not. Akbar conveys some of the flavour of the turbulent days:

Jinnah tried whatever he could. First he tried wooing, both the Hindu Maharaja and the Muslim mass leaders. That failed. Then he sent in raiders to seize Kashmir by force within eight weeks of freedom, and after them regular Pakistani troops. They almost captured Srinagar at one point, but then were pushed back till they were left with a thin slice of the valley in the west and a large tract of mountainous wasteland in the north, on the borders of Afghanistan and China. Kashmir remains divided today at about the line where the troops stood when ceasefire in the first Indo-Pakistani war took effect on the last day of 1948. The overwhelming bulk of Kashmiris live in India; Srinagar is their capital (1985: 214).

During the Pakistan-sponsored raid, the Maharajah panicked and turned to India for help. On 26 October 1947, in return for India's assurance for military aid, he signed the 'Instrument of Accession', and Kashmir joined the Indian Union. Prime Minister Nehru airlifted Indian troops and drove the invaders back to what is now the 'Line of Control', the de facto border between the two countries. Under the terms of 1948 and 1949 UN resolutions, Pakistan was to withdraw its forces from the entire area of the old princely state, whereupon India was to reduce its troops to a bare minimum. An internationally monitored plebiscite was to then determine which nation Kashmir would join. None of this happened, Pakistan did not pull its troops back and India did not reduce its military presence. About a third of the former princely state was absorbed into Pakistan as 'Azad' (Free) Kashmir. The fabled Kashmir valley---the heartland commonly used as shorthand for the whole region---remained in Indian hands. Given considerable autonomy by India, including a separate Constitution, all of Maharajah Hari Singh's domains under Indian control were incorporated as the state of Jammu and Kashmir. Although Jammu is predominantly Hindu, and Ladakh (culturally and ethnically linked to Tibet) is largely Buddhist, the overwhelming numbers of Muslims in the valley make the combined territory the only Muslim-majority state in India.

For nearly four decades after independence, this compromise---considerable local autonomy but not independence, and limited political freedom---was largely acceptable in Kashmir. India has continued to hold on to Kashmir on legal grounds, citing the 'Instrument of Accession' as an irrevocable and final settlement of the issue. However, Pakistan and the pro-Pakistan elements of Kashmiri leadership challenge the validity of the claim. Several rounds of Indian elections have been conducted over the years with Kashmiri voters choosing representatives for Indian parliament located in New Delhi, and the state assembly based in Srinagar. Pakistan's position has been that when the princely states of Hyderabad and Junagarh, both Hindu-majority states with Muslim rulers, had gone to India, it was only logical that Kashmir, a Muslim-majority state with a Hindu ruler, should have joined Pakistan.

Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah, who emerged as a mass leader of the Kashmiris after India's independence, is credited with steering the Kashmiri people towards India. As Akbar observes:

Two men kept Kashmir within India: both Kashmiris descended from Brahmin families. One was Jawaharlal Nehru; the other was Sheikh Mohammad

Abdullah, whose family was converted to Islam from Brahminism late in the eighteenth century...In an achievement which the world still finds difficult to comprehend, given the fixed mirrors through which India is constantly viewed, Sheikh Abdullah and the Kashmiris stayed with India rather than go with Pakistan in 1947. As Sheikh Abdullah said over and over again, he had a religion in common with Jinnah, but a dream in common with Nehru (1985: 214-5).

Both Nehru and Abdullah believed that if Muslim-majority Kashmir could remain and prosper in secular-democratic India, then there could be no finer argument against the two-nation theory that had divided the sub-continent. As Pandey observes, “Kashmir” was one of the great populist symbols of this new national enterprise---a Muslim-majority state aligning with secular India at the behest of the popular Muslim leader of the state’s people’s movement, and confirming its commitment to the new India through its participation in periodic election’ (2002). There were two wars and several clashes between India and Pakistan over Kashmir, but a grassroots insurgency did not arise until 1989, seven years after Sheikh Abdullah’s death. The following table sets out the number of casualties in Jammu & Kashmir since the latest phase of turmoil began in 1989:

Table 5: CASUALTIES OF TERRORISM, JAMMU & KASHMIR, 1988-2001⁵

<u>YEAR</u>	<u>INCIDENTS</u>	<u>TERRORISTS</u>	<u>CIVILIANS</u>	<u>SECURITY FORCES</u>	<u>TOTAL</u>
1988	390	1	29	1	31
1989	2154	0	79	13	92
1990	3905	183	862	132	1177
1991	3122	614	594	185	1393
1992	4971	873	859	177	1909
1993	4457	1328	1023	216	2567
1994	4484	1651	1012	236	2899
1995	4479	1338	1161	297	2796
1996	4224	1194	1333	376	2903
1997	3004	1177	840	355	2372
1998	2993	1045	877	339	2261
1999	2938	1184	799	555	2538
2000	2835	1808	842	638	3288
2001	3278	2850	1067	590	4507
Total	47234	15246	11377	4102	30725

⁵ Source: www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/india/states/jandk/data_sheets/annual_casualties.htm; Institute of Conflict Management, New Delhi; accessed 3 July 2002.

The region has since witnessed widespread disturbances, counter-insurgency operations, a large presence of Indian security forces, and harassment of the local population. India accuses Pakistan of sponsoring the insurgency and infiltrating non-Kashmiri 'jehadi' militants into Kashmir.

A prominent feature of the post-1989 insurgency was that the minority Kashmiri Pandits (Hindus) were targeted by militants and systematically driven out of the valley, resulting in 250,00,000 of them living as refugees in camps in various places across Hindu-majority India. Several foreign and domestic tourists have been among those killed, and the insurgency resulted in a collapse of the local tourism-based economy.

The insurgency left a trail of death and destruction in a region that is historically known for its natural beauty, tranquillity and inter-religious harmony. The Muslims of Kashmir adhere to a pacifist Sufi version of Islam that had long taken root in the region due to close inter-mingling among its Buddhist, Hindu and Muslim communities. During the turmoil of Partition, there was not a single case of killing in Kashmir when thousands were being killed in Hindu-Muslim clashes in nearby Punjab and the North-West Frontier Province. This rare record of communal harmony is credited to the evolution of 'Kashmiriyat' (Kashmiri-ness) over the ages:

(There) is a strong bond of Kashmiriyat that binds all communities in a cultural and religious fraternity...The veneration of saints and shrines of all religions is very much part of the Kashmiri psyche and springs from the composite culture that Kashmiriyat represents...A remarkable manifestation of this ethos is the annual Amarnath *yatra*⁶ when Hindu pilgrims visit the cave discovered by a Muslim family and is, even today, cared for by the descendants of that family (KRC, 1999: 38-9).

In the rest of India, apart from important political and religious factors, Kashmir's popular appeal lies in its cultural image of being a 'Paradise on Earth'. Several rulers, historical figures and writers have sung odes to its natural beauty, and much prose and poetry has focussed on the splendour and salubriousness of the Kashmir valley. Media content on Kashmir invariably represents it as a 'paradise'; Mark Tully's BBC documentary in June 2002 was titled *Paradise Lost*, while Salman Rushdie's commentary in *New York Times* on 3 June 1999 was titled *Kashmir: The Imperilled Paradise*. Tourist guides and Internet content also refer to Kashmir in similar terms:

⁶ *Yatra* is Hindi for pilgrimage.

Kashmir: Paradise Exposed to Hell, or Kashmir: Paradise on Fire, or Kashmir: Tourists Paradise, etc.

Until 1989, Kashmir formed the sylvan backdrop of several Bollywood films, songs and storylines, the most popular being the 1964 blockbuster *Kashmir ki Kali* (The Rosebud of Kashmir). It was the tourist's favourite destination, and was known as the greenest and most temperate spot in the Himalayas. It was the summer refuge of the British Raj as well as wealthy Indians escaping the blistering heat of the southern plains. With the advent of the tourist trade, the region gained in popularity as lavish brochures described its breathtaking scenery and centuries-old shrines. As recently as 1989, more than half a million Indian and foreign vacationers travelled to Kashmir to drift carefree on houseboats, to ski, hike, or fish the trout streams. Guides escorted visitors to famous landmarks, including the Moghul gardens of Nishat Bagh, the Mattan temples, Hari Parbath castle, and Pahalgam, the hiker's Mecca. Moghul emperor Jehangir's attachment to Kashmir is legendary; he sighed on his death bed that his last wish was to visit Kashmir.

Some better-known descriptions of Kashmir are:

- 'Like some supremely beautiful women, whose beauty is almost impersonal and above human desire, such was Kashmir in all its feminine beauty of river and valley and lake and graceful trees. And then another aspect of its magic beauty would come into view, a masculine one, of hard mountains and precipices, and snow-capped peaks and glaciers, and cruel and fierce torrents rushing down to the valleys below. It had a hundred faces and innumerable aspects, ever-changing, sometimes smiling, sometimes sad and full of sorrow...It was like the face of the beloved that one sees in a dream and that fades away on awakening...'---Nehru, in *Autobiography*;
- '(Kashmir) is more beautiful than the heaven and is the benefactor of supreme bliss and happiness'---Kalidas, the doyen of Indian poets;
- 'The (Kashmir) valley is an emerald set in pearls; a land of lakes, clear streams, green turf, magnificent trees and mighty mountains where the air is cool, and the water sweet, where men are strong and women vie with the soil in fruitfulness'---Sir Walter Lawrence, 19th century British historian.
- 'The best place in the Himalayas, a country where the sun shines mildly'---Kashmir historian Kalhan;
- 'A diamond whose glitter and sparkle attracts adventurers, scoundrels, fortune-seekers, and romantics'---Marie D'Souza, writer;
- 'The dust of Kashmir is like an eye lotion and its grass and herbs are powerful medicines for beauty'---Maulana Faize, court poet of Emperor Akbar, reflecting the latter's feelings;
- '*Gar Bar-ru-e-Zamin Ast; Hamin Ast, Hamin Ast, Hamin Asto*' (If there is paradise in the world, it is then this Kashmir, it is here; it is here)---Urfi, Persian court poet of Moghul emperor Shahjehan, who was emotional about Kashmir;

- ‘A kingdom of unsurpassing beauty’---Francois Bernier, French writer and the first European to enter Kashmir in 1665;
- ‘When the clouds roll by, the haze lifts and a real Kashmir spring or autumn discloses itself, the heart of even the hardest visitor melts’---Francis Younghusband, one of the early European travellers to Kashmir.

Kashmir thus enjoys a privileged status politically due to its centrality to modern India’s commitment to secularism, but it is also deeply embedded in the people’s psyche as a ‘Paradise on Earth’, and as a place of high religious importance for Hindus. Kashmir can be viewed as India’s *Heimat*, an aspirational homeland; ‘it is a place that everyone aspires to visit before dying’ (see DRBR’s interview response; Chapter 5, Page 148-149). *Kashmir ki Kali*, the 1964 Bollywood film, can be categorised as an Indian *Heimat* film, similar in its settings and contents to the genre of German *Heimat* films. The changes that have occurred in Kashmir---from an idyllic place for tourism before 1989 to the hub of insurgency subsequently---have since been reflected in Bollywood films. If *Kashmir ki Kali*, the romantic musical, reflected the earlier idyllic phase, *Roja* (1992), *Mission Kashmir* (2000) and *Pukar* (2000) were based on contemporary events with Indian nationalism, patriotism and the politics of insurgency as the major themes. Kashmir also finds a prominent place in nationalist symbols and evocations; particularly the popular post-independence Hindi slogan: ‘*Kashmir se Kanyakumari Tak, Bharat ek Hai*’ (From Kashmir to Kanyakumari, India is one⁷).

In New Delhi’s intensely political environment, Kashmir features prominently in parliamentary proceedings, during visits of foreign dignitaries, security debates or protests by thousands of Kashmiri Hindus living in the capital; it also features prominently in cultural events such as festivals of Kashmiri cuisine, poetry and music. After 11 September, Kashmir’s conflict figured more prominently as Indian security officials announced that Al Qaeda activists fleeing ‘Operation Enduring Freedom’ in Afghanistan had crossed into Kashmir.

The next section takes a closer look at the northeast region comprising seven states: Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Mizoram, Manipur, Tripura, Meghalaya and Nagaland.

⁷ As Map 1 (Page 16) shows, Kashmir is India’s northernmost point and Kanyakumari near Thiruvananthapuram, jutting into the confluence of Arabian Sea, Indian Ocean and the Bay of Bengal, its southernmost point. Bharat is India’s official name derived from Hindi.

2.2.2 Northeast: The Beehive of Insurgency

Since the focus of this study is not so much why the Kashmir conflict gets consistent press coverage but why similar conflicts in the northeast do not, the situation in the seven states is set out in some detail to bring out the matrix of differentials in the two situations. Apart from detailing the region's setting and its career in independent India, I also briefly explain its pre-independence history and the colonial approach to governing the region, particularly vis-à-vis its tribes. In the process, I also highlight some reasons that contribute to the region being accorded---almost systemically---a low status not only in relation to its many conflicts but also in general terms.

The conflict in Kashmir involves one state of the Indian Union: Jammu & Kashmir. The northeast, on the other hand, involves seven states, each of which has been in the grip of more than one form of conflict: insurgency, separatism within India, agitations for local autonomy, inter and intra-tribal clashes, locals versus 'outsiders', locals versus immigrant Muslims from Bangladesh, language tussles,



(Map 4: The Northeast Setting)

boundary clashes among the seven states, etc. The conflicts are played out within the overall context of the region's historically tenuous links with mainland India, its people bearing a deep sense of alienation from the rest of the country, and the local belief that 'India', 'New Delhi', and the 'Centre' are solely interested in the region because of its natural resources such as oil and tea. Until 1972, it was India's External Affairs Ministry, rather than the Union Home Ministry, that administered two of the region's seven states, Nagaland and Arunachal Pradesh.

As suggested by the chapter's opening quote (Page 15), not only its many conflicts but the geographically peripheral region as a whole lies on the margins of national consciousness. There is official recognition that the region is 'special' and needs statutory protection. A clutch of laws and regulations has been enacted for the purpose and new states were created to meet local tribal aspirations. But the Planning

Commission, a federal government body, puts it: 'The Northeast tends to be seen as a distant outpost, some kind of land's end' (1997: 2).

As Map 4 indicates, less than one per cent of the northeast's boundary is contiguous with mainland India, while the remaining 99 per cent (more than 4500 km) form India's international borders with China, Bangladesh, Myanmar and Bhutan. Assam is over 2000 km away from New Delhi and 3000 km away from India's financial capital of Mumbai/Bombay. The region is closer to Yangon (Myanmar), Bangkok (Thailand) or Chinese cities such as Kunming (1079 km); it is linked to mainland India through a narrow 21-km corridor in north Bengal, popularly called the 'Chicken's Neck'. It covers a land area of 255,037 sq. km. (approximately the combined size of the United Kingdom and Ireland), and accounts for 7.8 per cent of India's total land space. The region is mostly hilly (70 per cent), with plains on either side of the river Brahmaputra, and has some of the finest rain forests in the world. The topography of the hills is generally rugged and vast areas remain inaccessible even though projects to extend the railway and road network since independence have connected some remote areas and promoted integration. Of the seven states--- popularly called the 'Seven Sisters'---mountains and hills cover most of Arunachal Pradesh, Mizoram, Nagaland, Meghalaya, nine-tenths of Manipur, about half of Tripura and one-fifth of Assam. The construction of the region as India's 'northeast' is a post-independence phenomenon; prior to 1947, most of the region was part of the Assam province of British India.

The people inhabiting the land-locked region have been variously described as a 'museum of nationalities' (Fuller, 1909) or as 'a perennial source of interest and delight to sociologists, anthropologists and social or religious workers' (Singh, 1987: 9). Culturally and ethnically, the northeast has less in common with the rest of South Asia (India, Pakistan) than with the southeast Asian cultural zone comprising Myanmar, Thailand and China. As the editor of a major two-volume work on southeast Asia observes:

The population of eastern India, "north-east India in our vocabulary", includes a large population of tribal and minority people who speak languages closely related to languages of south-east Asia rather than to the languages of India proper, and their cultures in many ways resemble the cultures of neighbouring south-east Asian peoples. Just as the southern boundary of China does not mark a cultural or linguistic division, the eastern border of India does not mark a cultural or linguistic area (Kunstadter, 1967: 205).

The region's geographical and cultural proximity to southeast Asia is reflected in its ethnic composition, which can be divided broadly into three groups: the tribes inhabiting the hills, the tribes in the plains, and the large non-tribal population in the plains. Out of India's 67.76-million tribal population, 8.14 million live in the northeast. The hill areas alone have more than 100 tribes of Mongoloid origin. Each tribe is divided into several sub-tribes; for example, the broad category of Naga tribe has eight distinct tribes and a number of sub-tribes. In anthropological terms, peoples of five groups entered the region at different periods of history: the Austrics, Negroids, Kiratas, Dravidians and the Aryans. They have their origins in the Indo-Burmese, Indo-Tibetan, Kuki-Lushai, Meitei, Chin-Kuki, Shan-Tai and India-Aryan stock (Singh, 1987: 9, 30). Over 200 'scheduled tribes' are based in the region. Singh, a scholar-officer of the federal Indian Administrative Service who served in the region during most of his career, observes: 'To an outsider a person living in Assam is an Assamese, in Nagaland a Naga, in Mizoram a Mizo, in Manipur a Manipuri, and so on. But the real situation is baffling, and purely from the angle of ethnic variety the people of north-east India have a greater variety to offer than perhaps any other part of the globe' (1987: 28). Table 6 presents the statistical overview of the northeast relating to its high literacy figures (compared to other parts of the country), the tribal majority states; and population density. The high literacy in the region is a legacy of Christian missionaries:

Table 6: VITAL STATISTICS OF NORTHEAST STATES⁸

<u>STATE</u>	<u>AREA</u>	<u>POPULATION</u>	<u>DENSITY</u>	<u>TRIBES %</u>	<u>LITERACY</u>
Arunachal	83,743	1,091,117	13	63.7	54.74
Assam	78,438	26,638,407	340	12.8	64.28
Manipur	22,327	2,388,634	107	34.41	68.87
Meghalaya	22,429	2,306,069	103	85.53	63.31
Mizoram	21,081	891,058	42	64.75	88.49
Nagaland	16,579	1,988,636	120	87.7	67.11
Tripura	10,486	3,191,168	304	31	73.66

⁸ NOTES:

- 'Area' is in sq. km. and 'Density' (population) is per sq km.
- Population figures are 'provisional', from the 2001 Census;
- Literacy figures are from the 2001 Census;

Source: *NE Newsletter*, produced by the Ministry of Home Affairs, Vol.2, No.3, March 2001 (for population figures); *NE Newsletter*; Vol. 1 No. 11-12 November, December 2000 & Vol. 2 No.1, January 2001 (for percentage of tribal population in respective states); and www.censusofindia.net (for 2001 literacy figures).

Assam is home to 20 major tribes, 11 in the hills and nine in the plains, the prominent ones being Bodo, Mishing, Dimasa and Kachari. In Nagaland, there are 39 tribes, including the Konyak, Ao, Sema, Angami, Lotha, Rengma and Kuki. In Manipur, besides the Meitei, there are two groups of tribes: Naga and Kuki, each divided into a number of sub-tribes. Tripura is home to nine scheduled tribes, including the Kuki (with 26 sub-tribes), Tripuri, Reang, Jamatia, Chakma, Halam, Noatia and Mogh. Meghalaya is the homeland of three ancient hill communities: the Khasis, Jaintias and Garos with their numerous divisions into clans. Arunachal Pradesh has 110 scheduled tribes, prominent among them being Monpa, Apatani, Adi, Kampti, Singpho, Wancho and Nishi. In Mizoram, the major tribes are Lushai, Hmar, Fanai, Tlanglan and Lakher.

Non-tribal Assamese and Bengalis constitute two major linguistic communities in Assam. The non-tribal Assamese are further divided into Ahom, Koch, Kalita and others ethnic communities. There are Muslims with linguistic affinities to Assamese as well as Bengali. The Bengali-speaking community dominates the demographic profile of Tripura, and is also present in significant numbers in Meghalaya and Manipur. From mainland India, the politically influential Hindi-speaking community of traders from Rajasthan and the labour workforce from Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh and West Bengal are found all over the northeast.

The region's diversity is reflected in the 'amazing multiplicity of languages and dialects used: they number 420 out of a total of 1652 in the whole country' (Singh, 1990: 12). The Government of India (1992) report provides the break-up of languages and dialects: 168 in Arunachal Pradesh, 95 in Nagaland, 87 in Manipur, 112 in Tripura and altogether 192 in Assam, Meghalaya and Mizoram:

In Nagaland, in the district of Phek comprising a population of hardly a lakh (100,000), seven distinctly different languages are spoken. There are also extreme examples of a group of villages or even one village speaking one language; the language of Akhegwo village in the Phek district of merely a thousand is not comprehended by those who do not inhabit it.

Two languages spoken in the northeast---Assamese and Manipuri---figure in the list of 18 major official languages mentioned in India's Constitution (See Table 2).

Apart from ethnicity and language, religion has been a defining symbol of identity in the northeast. Aided by the colonial regime, Christian missionaries were 'very effective in the hills of the north-east in the 19th and early 20th century' (Baruah, 1989: 2087). India's image of a Hindu-majority country, based on census figures, conceals

the northeast reality that Christianity is the religion of the majority in the states of Mizoram, Nagaland and Meghalaya, as the following Table 7 shows:

Table 7: MAJOR RELIGIONS IN NORTHEAST INDIA, 1991

<u>STATE</u>	<u>RELIGION</u>	<u>POPLN. %</u>	<u>STATE</u>	<u>RELIGION</u>	<u>POPLN. %</u>
Assam	Hindu	67.1	Meghalaya	Christian	64.6
	Muslim	28.4		Hindu	14.7
	Christian	3.3		Khasi	6.3
Manipur	Hindu	57.7	Nagaland	Christian	87.5
	Christian	34.1		Hindu	10.1
	Muslim	7.3		Muslim	1.7
Mizoram	Christian	85.7	Arunachal Pradesh	Hindu	37.0
	Buddhist	7.8		Donyipolo/ Sidonyipolo	31.9
	Hindu	5.0		Buddhist	12.9
Tripura	Hindu	86.5			
	Muslim	7.1			
	Buddhist	4.7			

The missionaries were keen to convert the animist tribes. The most successful were the Welsh Presbyterian Mission, the American Baptist Mission (Pugh, 1967: 240), and the Salvatorians or the German fathers (Singh, 1987: 16).

On the issue of religion too the region is closer to southeast Asia rather than South Asia: 'Except for recent converts to Christianity, the hill men (like most of their cousins to the east) fall under the vague rubric of 'animism' and are thus set off from their Hindu neighbours in the valley' (Burling, 1967: 215). There are references to northeast locations in the two ancient Hindu religious texts of Ramayana and Mahabharata, but as the history of the growth of Hinduism here shows, the religion failed to spread to the hills among tribes even though it was long established in Assam's Brahmaputra valley and also spread to the Manipur valley. Singh suggests some reasons for this:

(There) were certain inherent weaknesses in Hinduism which made it less attractive to the hill people. It is true that conversion is not accepted in Hinduism in as much as birth determines whether a person is Hindu or not. It is also true that the rigid caste structure, with its various divisions and subdivisions, was too complex for a straightforward tribal mind. Yet the main cause was a lack of effort on the part of the Hindus. Thus Hinduism did not prosper in the hills of Jowai, Shillong, Kohima, Aizawl and elsewhere in the north-east. Hindu kings of the region did not extend their sway to these areas.

The Brahmins were also ignorant of tribal dialects and made little efforts to learn them or give them a script, a job that was successfully done by the Christian missionaries (1987: 44).

The British policy of encouraging Christian missionaries in the northeast had a significant impact. The missionaries demanded and received financial support for their philanthropic and educational work, and official protection. British tea planters in Assam also facilitated the touring missionary's work through the large network of tea gardens and tea growing communities. Becker, a German missionary, recorded that 'without their (tea planters') help it would have been unthinkable to undertake long and extensive tours, to cross the Assam Valley in all directions and to visit the Christian communities dispersed over such a vast area' (1980: 67). Christianity raised literacy and improved health care, and in several places the tribal practice of head hunting was stopped. However, some observers feel the work of Christian missionaries was not universally beneficial: 'These developments led to a loosening of intra-tribal bonds of unity and a decline in the authority of the chiefs. The tribals also discarded their traditional dress and forms of music in favour of Western dress and music' (Singh, 1987: 17).

In the 1970s and 1980s, there were attempts in official security circles to establish a link between the breakout of insurgency movements and Christian missionaries. As per this view, two powerful insurgency movements had occurred in states that had a Christian majority: Nagaland and Mizoram. This 'logic' led the former Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi, to actively support and promote Hindu missionary organisations such as the Ramkrishna Mission to spread Hinduism in Arunachal Pradesh where tribes followed the animist Donyipolo faith (see Table 7). Official patronage was also extended to Hindu organisations after the India-China war in 1962, when the Red Army had overran the state of Arunachal Pradesh and reached Assam. As Ramaseshan (1989) observes:

Those in power are very suspicious of Christianity, pointing out that the two north-eastern states with secessionist movements raising their heads only too often are Mizoram and Nagaland---both Christian majority states. So every effort is made to keep that religion out (of Arunachal Pradesh)...The anti-Christian bias of the government began from the late Sixties, and was, apparently, initiated by the then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi...What prompted the change in attitude was the Chinese aggression in 1962 and the armed rebellion in Mizoram. To prevent the Christianisation of the state and to aid the development of 'patriotism', it was felt that Hinduism should be introduced into the state.

The perceived link between insurgency and Christianity was subsequently belied when another powerful insurgency movement began in Hindu-majority Assam in the 1980s; moreover, the demand for secession has never been raised in Christian-majority Meghalaya where rebel groups are also active in local autonomy based conflicts. Christian-majority Mizoram has been largely peaceful ever since the 20-year insurgency led by the Mizo National Front ended following the signing of a peace accord with the federal government in 1986; it has been hailed as one of the few examples of successful conflict resolution in the world by Gurr: 'Less has been written about the conflict containing agreement that established a federal state for India's Mizo people in 1986' (2000: 57).

Historically, the northeast's links with mainland India have been tenuous. Its geo-political contours first emerged in the early nineteenth century, as part of the eastward sweep of the British empire. In the pre-colonial period, Ahom kings ruled a large part of Assam⁹. A key historical fact is that British rule spread to the region much later than the rest of the colony; 'nearly over a century after it had subjugated the rest of India' (Chandola, 1967: 153). This had implications for its participation in the freedom struggle, and subsequent integration in modern India. Assam became part of British India when the Ahom aristocracy sought British help against Burmese invasions, which led to the signing of the Treaty of Yandabo in 1826. Other parts of the present northeast came under British rule under different times: the Assam plains in 1826, Cachar (southern Assam) in 1830, the Khasi hills (part of Meghalaya) in 1833, the Naga hills (Nagaland) in 1835, the Garo hills (part of Meghalaya) in 1872-73 and the Lushai hills (Mizoram) in 1890. When the Ahom kingdom passed into British hands in 1826, 'it was the first time in history that the Assamese heartland became politically incorporated into a pan-Indian imperial formation. For the Ahoms had successfully resisted the Mughals' (Baruah, 1999: 21). Assam became a chief commissionership province in 1874; prior to that, it was ruled as an 'appendage of the unwieldy province of Bengal' (Gait, 1905: 336). Since 1826, the boundaries of Assam and the northeast have undergone changes, which led to the inclusion of areas that were not part of the pre-colonial Assam, and the exclusion of some of its earlier

⁹ The Ahom or Tai-Ahom rulers of Assam, in ethnic terms, are considered an offshoot of the Tai people (Shan, i.e., Sham, cf. Siam) of south-east Asia; they are called Shan in Burma, Thai in Thailand, Lao in Laos, Dai and Zhuang in China, and Tay-Thai in Vietnam. The Assamese branch, the Tai-Ahoms, came to Assam in the early thirteenth century, most likely from Mong Mao in China's Yunnan province, and established a state that survived for 600 years (Phukan, 1992: 49-50)

parts. 'Colonial Assam...not only was larger than precolonial Assam, it excluded some areas that were culturally part of precolonial Assam' (Baruah, 1999: 26).

The British largely continued the conciliatory and isolationist policy of the Ahom kings towards the tribes. 'Their (Ahoms') concern was that the hill people should confine themselves to their habitat in the mountains and forests and that no provocation should be offered that might cause them to raid the villages in the plains' (Rustomji, 1983: 23). There were two dimensions of the colonial policy towards the region:

(First), the administration of the north-east was essential for the maintenance of the Empire of India, as it could be threatened from the north by Czarist Russia in collusion with Burma, China and Tibet; and secondly, the economic exploitation of Assam oil, tea and forest resources would augment the financial resources of the Empire ...A policy of segregation emerged out of the British perception of the tribal situation (Singh, 1987: 18).

Apart from these strategic concerns and interest in natural resources, the region was a low priority for the colonial administrators. In 1905, a new province was created, clubbing Assam with eastern Bengal (present Bangladesh), the reason being that a larger Assam would make it attractive for senior British civil servants to come and work in Assam¹⁰. During this integration, the administrators came close to removing the word 'Assam' from the name of the new province when Bengali politicians protested that Bengalis did not want to be called 'Assamese'. Initially, it was decided to name it as the 'North Eastern Province', but this was finally dropped in favour of 'Eastern Bengal and Assam'. The reason for retaining 'Assam' in the nomenclature, however, was not the sentiments of the Assamese who feared obliteration of everything that was associated with the word 'Assam' culturally, but pressure from captains of the British tea industry based in London. They argued that 'Assam' by which the region's tea was known in international markets must be retained in the new name (Bhattacharjee, 1993: 256). The career of the new province, however, was short-lived, and Assam was reverted to its former status as a chief commissionership.

The British policy of segregation meant that tribes were kept in reservation-like territories called 'backward' or 'excluded'. 'The experience of colonial rule in these areas, to say the least, was profoundly different from that of the regularly administered parts of India' (Baruah, 1999: 28). Of the many laws enacted for the administration of these areas, the Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation of 1873 allowed

¹⁰ Chief commissioner Fuller to Lord Curzon, (in Guha, 1977: 70)

the government 'to prescribe, and from time to time alter by notification... a line to be called the Inner Line and to prohibit any subject living outside the area from living or moving therein'. Beyond this line, the 'tribes are left to manage their own affairs with only such interference on the part of the frontier officers in their political capacity as may be considered advisable with the view to establishing a personal influence for good among the chiefs and the tribes' (Mackenzie, 1884: 89-90). Over time, some administrative controls were extended beyond the Inner Line, but the movement of people from the plains to the hills was restricted. No British subject or foreign citizen could cross the line without a licence, and trade or possession of land beyond the line was severely restricted. Restrictions of the Inner Line were applied to areas under the present-day states of Nagaland, Mizoram and Arunachal Pradesh.

The colonial policy of segregating the tribes from the plains people was partly based on a 'distrust of educated Indians', as the debate in the House of Commons in 1935 indicates. Colonel Wedgewood argued that the 'backward tracts' should remain under British control, and prevented from being controlled by the elected government of the province. Educated Indians, he said, 'want to get them as cheap labour and if these people are to be saved from the hell of civilisation, the only chance they have is British protection and British control and to be free from the insidious advances of the rich people in the provinces to exploit them' (Rao, 1976: 84). The policy of drawing a rigidly enforced boundary between the plains and the hills marked a setback to the interaction between the people of the two areas: 'The people of the hills and of the plains or valleys are radically different but have always been interconnected' (Jacobs et al, 1990: 9).

The policy of segregation prevented the spread of the freedom movement that was raging in other parts of the country. Assam was the only state that was drawn into the movement, but not as intensely as other areas of British India. Nehru regretted the policy's impact on the spread of the freedom movement:

For half a century, we have had a struggle for freedom in this country culminating in the achievement of independence. That struggle itself, apart from the result, had a liberating tendency. It raised us and improved us and hid for the moment some of our weaknesses and other qualities. We must remember that this experience of hundreds of millions of Indian people did not extend to the tribal area...we were not allowed to go by the old British authorities, so that our freedom movement did not reach these people. Rumours of it reached them. Sometimes they reacted rightly and sometimes wrongly, but whether they functioned rightly or wrongly is not the point. The essence of the struggle for freedom, which meant raising some kind of a

liberating force in India, did not reach these areas, chiefly the frontier areas which are the most important tribal areas. The result is that we have been psychologically prepared for the last thirty, forty or fifty years for various changes in India, while those frontier areas were not so psychologically prepared. In fact, they were prepared the other way by British officers or sometimes the missionaries who were there. The missionaries did very good work there and I am full of praise for them, but politically speaking they did not particularly like changes in India. In fact, just when changes were coming in India, there was a movement in north-eastern India, supported by many foreigners there, to encourage those people of the north-east to form separate and independent States¹¹.

The Partition of British India into India and Pakistan isolated the northeast further. East Bengal, with which the fate of the region was tagged for much of the history of British India, became part of Pakistan, and was called East Pakistan. 'The partition aggravated its geo-political isolation as the region is (now) linked with the rest of the country by a narrow land corridor and is surrounded on all sides by international borders. Earlier various tribal regions had closer ties with the adjoining areas of Bengal and Burma than with each other, but the partition all but physically separated the Northeast from the Indian heartland' (Datta, 2000). The region's traditional trade routes through railways, road and waterways dried up. The contiguous districts in Bengal were the main markets for the agricultural produce of Assam's border districts, and when Pakistan authorities prevented trans-border trade, the villagers faced economic strangulation (Rustomji, 1983: 10). Similarly, traditional trade routes with Myanmar and China were also disrupted as India began consolidating itself as a sovereign nation-state (The Indian and Myanmar government have since agreed to allow limited day interaction of tribes in Nagaland, Manipur and Mizoram along their international border). Partition also meant that trade and movement of people from mainland India to the northeast took place through a circuitous route. The new, tenuous land and rail routes linking the region to rest of India become the first targets of rebels groups operating in the region. Disrupting the routes means cutting off the entire region from the rest of India for prolonged periods, raising prices of essential goods and creating scarcity conditions.

The colonial regime's economic policies also had a profound socio-political impact in the region, particularly in Assam. The modernisation of traditional agriculture demanded raising crops on all cultivable but fallow land, reclamation of marshy or

¹¹ Excerpt from Nehru's speech at the opening session of the Scheduled Tribes and Scheduled Areas Conference, New Delhi, 7 June 1952.

swamp lands and the introduction of new crops of vegetables, mustard and jute. All this required investment in irrigation, flood control measures etc. The British, however, did not want to bear the costs of the modernisation, and preferred to search for cheap and dependable labour that was not available locally. This led to the large-scale induction of Bengali Muslim cultivators from East Bengal (today's Bangladesh), who were more than willing to move out of their homelands due to severe economic and land pressures. Large numbers of Bengali Muslims migrated from East Bengal's Mymensingh district adjoining Assam, occupied fertile land along the Brahmaputra river and settled there. Organised cultivation as part of the tea industry's expansion led to a further induction of labour, mainly from among tribes in the eastern states of Bihar and Orissa. The increased production of grain and tea attracted the Hindi-speaking trading community of Marwaris from Rajasthan, while Hindi-speaking labourers from Bihar came in large numbers to work on construction of railway tracks and roads. A large number of Nepalis in the British army settled as cattle farmers or domestic servants. As Singh observes: 'The question naturally arises as to what the British response was to this unprecedented stress on the social and cultural fabric...Notwithstanding the notes recorded by some perceptive British administrators and demographers, the British attitude was largely one of benign neglect' (1987: 18).

This migration towards the end of the 19th century set the stage for further induction and became the source of much conflict after the region became part of independent India. Contrary to the suggestion that migration would be an 'instrument of cultural diffusion and social integration' (Bogue, 1969: 487), clashes between migrants and indigenous population have been a prominent feature of post-colonial politics: for example, the conflict between Fijians of Indian origin and the locals; attacks on Ibo settlers in north Nigeria eventually led to a civil war; in Malaysia, where Chinese have lived as long as Malays, Malay antagonisms towards Chinese have been defined in terms of a conflict between the indigenous (the 'Bhumiputra' Malays) and the Chinese; expulsion of migrants has been a common feature in African countries.

No issue has caused as much turmoil and instability in Assam and the northeast as the issue of migration from the neighbouring area whose political name has progressively changed from East Bengal in British India to East Pakistan after Partition, to Bangladesh after 1971. Baruah compares the Assam situation with Fiji and Malaysia where mass migration during colonial rule led to similar 'stubborn

pattern of immigrant-indigenous conflicts' (1999: 66). The colonial regime initially encouraged economic migration from East Bengal, but the process continued after Partition due to an impoverished local economy that made Assam and the northeast an attractive proposition to the teeming population of East Pakistan/Bangladesh. Living conditions in Assam, Meghalaya or other parts of India may not be ideal, but are considered better than those in Bangladesh¹².

Experts have often questioned the economic viability of Bangladesh because of its 'over-population, poor natural resource base, vulnerability to natural disasters and undiversified economy dependent on the production of two crops, rice and jute' (Hossein, 1990: 1). According to Hazarika (1993): 'In numerous respects, Bangladesh represents the Malthusian nightmare: too many mouths to feed and too little food, or too many people on too little land. The population of 115 million continues to grow at an estimated pace of between 2.2 and 3 per cent per year. It has doubled in the past thirty years. The country's population density of 785 per square kilometre is the world's highest'.

In 1978, Weiner noted that in terms of population growth, Assam 'has been the fastest growing area in the sub-continent for the last seventy years' (79), and summed up its implications thus:

The presence of these migrants has shaken the foundations of Assamese social structure and created solidarity among the Assamese even while generating cleavages between the indigenous Assamese and the indigenous tribals. It has influenced the educational, social and economic aspirations of countless Assamese, determined their central political concerns, and become a decisive factor in the periodic restructuring of the state's boundaries. Migration to Assam has also given rise to powerful assimilationist and nativist sentiments and backlash separatist agitations, to massive conflicts over language, education and employment policy, and to political cleavages that have...led to the intervention of India's central government and the use of the Indian army. In short, migration has been a force for social, cultural, economic and political change in Assam (81).

In Assam's public discourse, migration from East Bengal/Bangladesh is referred to as 'illegal migration', 'infiltration' or the 'foreigners issue', and mainly refers to Bengali Muslims. In a regional socio-political environment in which every non-local is viewed with suspicion, if not contempt, Bengali Hindus who crossed over into India from East Bengal after Partition are also not welcome, while those migrating to

¹² The migration from Bangladesh is mostly to the northeast, but not confined to it. Large pockets of 'Bangladeshi Muslims' have been reported in other parts of India. In 1992, government agencies estimated their numbers in New Delhi to be between 100,000 and 300,000 (Hazarika, 1993).

the northeast from other parts of India are considered *bahiragata* (outsiders). In the early years of British rule, English-speaking Bengali Hindus were encouraged to take up employment in the colonial administration since there was a shortage locally. However, of all groups that migrated to the northeast over the years, the most controversial has been that of Bengali Muslim farmers, whose impact on the local socio-cultural environment was clear to the colonial officers.

The Census Report of 1911 described the migrant farmers as 'hardy and prolific cultivators working their way northwards. These people are accustomed to the risk arising from diluvian and devastating floods which other cultivators are unwilling to face'. The 1931 Census reported: 'At first the local people did not accept them joyfully. But as they came to see their knowledge of agriculture, their contribution to the general prosperity of the district--the prejudices and dislikes are beginning to disappear'. The contribution of Bengali Muslim farmers to Assam's agricultural development is acknowledged (Bandopadhyay & Chakraborty, 1998: 94-116), but it is the fear of being culturally and politically swamped by the migration that has engaged public discourse since the late 1970s. The issue remains a politically sensitive one, in which one of the most quoted references is a passage from the 1921 Census of India report by C S Mullan, Census Commissioner of Assam:

Wheresoever the carcass, there the vultures will be gathered together. Where there is land, thither flock Mymensinghians¹³. In fact the way in which they have seized upon vacant areas in the Assam valley seems almost uncanny. Without fuss, without tumult, without undue trouble to the district revenue staffs, a population which must amount to over half a million has transplanted itself from Bengal to the Assam Valley during the last 25 years. It looks like a marvel of administrative organisation on the part of the government, but it is nothing of the sort: the only thing I can compare it to is the mass movement of a large body of ants...(This) is likely to alter permanently the whole future of Assam and to destroy more surely than did the Burmese invaders of 1820 the whole structure of Assam's culture and civilisation.

According to Hazarika (1993), the migration from East Bengal/East Pakistan/Bangladesh 'has resulted in the creation of a sub-nation the size of an Australia within India. This population of between 12 and 17 million has moved illegally, without proper visas, passports or documents, and it has settled in northeast India'. A section of the Bangladesh elite views the northeast as a *lebensraum* (natural living space) for the country's impoverished multitudes (Sonwalkar, 1995: 5).

¹³ The reference is to the people from the Mymensingh district of East Bengal.

The migration has generated an identity crisis amidst fears among the indigenous Assamese that they would soon be reduced to a minority. The state of Tripura presents an extreme case. Due to the migration of Bengali Hindus from East Bengal, first during Partition and subsequently after the 1971 India-Pakistan war, the tribal population in Tripura dropped from 64 per cent in 1874 to 28.5 per cent in 1981¹⁴. '(Tripura) has been swamped by Hindu refugees who have been coming since the 1950s. The state is a small area that was dominated by nineteen tribes...yet the state's population has been converted to a Bengali majority in a few decades. By 1981...they (the tribes) had lost political power' (Hazarika, 1993). For six years between 1978 and 1984, a powerful students organisation in Assam launched an agitation demanding the expulsion of 'foreign nationals', paralysing normal life in the entire region¹⁵. A major theme of public discourse in the region is the federal government's perceived neglect in terms of development and indifference towards the long-term impact of continuing migration from Bangladesh. The hill states have been less affected by the migration than Assam because of the segregationist provisions of the Inner Line, which continues in operation. In census exercises in independent India, Bengali Muslim migrants identified themselves as Assamese speakers in order to merge with the local population and avoid detection. But as their number has grown over the years, an enduring apprehension in Assam is that if and when the Bengali migrants declare themselves as Bengali speakers, the Assamese speakers would become the minority.

Apart from the controversy surrounding the migrant Bengali Muslim community, there are tensions between the Assamese speakers who see themselves as 'locals' and other migratory communities:

- *Tea labour community*: Considered to be the 'oldest of Assam's large modern-day 'immigrant' groups' (Baruah, 1999: 53), members of this community were recruited to work in tea gardens from tribes such as the Santhals, Mundas, Oraons, Gonds and Kisangs, mostly from the eastern states of Bihar and Orissa. The 1921 census estimated them to be over 1.3 million while a recent account places them at least at three times that figure.

¹⁴ Census of India: Tripura (Agartala: Director of Census Operations, 1981).

¹⁵ According to India's Home Minister, L K Advani, 'Assam is among those states which are seriously affected by infiltration...(Advani) clarified that infiltration from across the border was continuing' ('Repeal of Act: Centre Remains Non-Committal', *The Assam Tribune*, 17 May, 2000).

- *Bengali Hindus*: Bengali Hindus first migrated to Assam when Ahom kings brought in personnel to man the administration, but their numbers increased during colonial rule, when English-speaking people were required. Bengal was one of the first places where the British established themselves--- Calcutta/Kolkata was the capital of British India until 1912---and Bengalis were among the first to be educated in English and western thought. They staffed the colonial administration in the northeast, and soon Bengali became the court language and the language of instruction in schools from 1837 to 1873. For decades, the Assamese language was projected as a vulgar dialect of Bengali;
- *Hindi-speaking Marwaris from Rajasthan*: The famed trading community from northwest India ‘played a major role in Assam’s transition from a largely non-monetized economy to a market economy’ (Baruah, 1999: 61). The first Marwaris travelled to the region with the British, and in the absence of competition from local traders, soon dominated trade and commerce. Though numerically small, their domination of trade makes them politically influential in New Delhi and locally, but also makes them highly visible and vulnerable. They were targeted during the ‘anti-Marwari’ riots in Guwahati in 1967. ‘The Marwaris have their own charitable organisations, hospitals, Hindi-language newspapers and Hindi-medium schools; they are thus not only economically better off than most Assamese, but their institutions and bazaars make them notably conspicuous and therefore vulnerable’ (Weiner, 1978: 103-104);
- *The Nepalis*: The migration of Nepalis arose out of their enrolment in the British Indian Army as ‘Gurkha’ soldiers; some chose to settle in Assam. Treaties between India and Nepal allow unrestricted travel of citizens between the two countries and commensurate rights of occupation, settlement and land. The 1991 census recorded 433,000 Nepali-speakers in Assam or 1.9 per cent of the population (this, however, is not an accurate estimate of the Nepali community since many people of Nepali origin speak Assamese).

Of the seven northeast states, Assam has been the closest to the pan-Indian ethos in terms of religion, languages, ethnicity and its involvement in the freedom struggle. After independence, tribes in the region were apprehensive of finding themselves in the new dispensation that had a Hindu-majority; they were unsure if the new rulers in

New Delhi would show the same accommodating approach to their ways of life as the British had. Leaders from Assam, who historically saw themselves and their state as 'leaders' of the entire region, demanded that the segregationist regulations be scrapped. Socially, the Assamese treated the tribes with condescension, as being a simple folk with quaint and curious customs, which they would outgrow on being civilised. As Rustomji observes: 'Much of the discord on the borders is a reaction to this attitude...Nothing gives rise to so much anger, hostility, even hatred, as the apprehension of cultural aggression. And it is this apprehension that has been at the root of the unrest on the north-eastern frontiers since the British withdrawal' (1983: 2).

Despite the unpopularity of the segregationist provisions of the Inner Line, it is 'to the credit of the post-colonial Indian state' that they have been maintained (Baruah, 1989: 2088). Entry into Mizoram, Nagaland and Arunachal Pradesh continues to be restricted to Indians from other parts of the country while the entry and movement of foreign nationals in the northeast is strictly regulated, if not prohibited in most areas. Special provisions for autonomy in tribal areas were incorporated when modern India's Constitution was adopted on January 26, 1950. Nehru laid down the basic approach and policy towards the tribes, as Luthra¹⁶ recalls:

The essence of his policy which was later translated into action was that whereas every effort should be made to extend social services such as hospitals, schools and the like to these people, under no circumstances should the worker go to these people with an air of superiority or the ardour of reformers. He wanted us to look upon them as another mode of living just as there existed so many other modes in other parts of our country. It was carefully laid down that there should not be even a suggestion of imposing anything on these people. The pace of work of the social services should be in tune with the capacity of the people to absorb or accept it. And above all, the then Prime Minister emphasized that we should not enter these areas with any doctrinaire approach (1967, 111-2).

However, despite best intentions, the fact that the region became one among many in independent India meant that the special attention it needed was not always accorded. The sheer distance from New Delhi 'prevents the national capital from effectively supervising the critical tasks of economic development and the promotion of equity' (Singh, 1987: 59; see also chapter opening quote). Besides, age-old tribal values prevented the growth of loyalty to the political notion of a nation-state,

¹⁶ P N Luthra, former Advisor to the Governor of Assam, 1966.

particularly in the hill areas that were least involved in the freedom movement. Primordial considerations continue to receive far greater loyalty.

The special constitutional measures intended to provide autonomy and safeguards to the region and its people have failed at the stage of implementation, while intense counter-insurgency operations have further alienated an already alienated people. In Assam, the belief runs deep that the central government continues to treat the region as the British did: exploiting its resources for tea and oil, but not spending enough on its development¹⁷. The post-independence attempt at reorganising the region into seven states is viewed in Assam as a continuation of the colonial 'divide and rule' policy, and not many Assamese brook the suggestion that that their own enthusiasm was largely responsible for the tribes demanding separation after the British withdrawal:

The Assamese felt it incumbent upon themselves to atone for the supposed injury done to the tribal...The Assamese had looked forward to the departure of the British as the opportunity for the creation and consolidation of the 'Greater Assam' which they envisaged as the union of the plainsmen of the province with the entire hill population...It was grievous shock to the Assamese to find the hillmen rejecting the hand of brotherhood so generously proffered. The Assamese took just pride in their culture and their language, and it seemed inconceivable to them that the hillmen should not wish to be admitted within their fold...The hill people on the other hand, and the Nagas in particular, were nervous at the prospect of the Assamese embrace (Rustomji, 1983: 34).

The tribal demand for separation from Assam gathered 'such an intensity that unless it is conceded, it tends to develop a desperateness to get out of India itself' (Gupta, 1967: 1).

Two levels of tension are thus evident: at the macro level, between the people of the region and the central government in New Delhi, and at the micro level among the people and states *within* the northeast as manifested in bloody inter-state boundary clashes, inter and intra-tribal clashes, tribal/non-tribal clashes etc. Within the region, anger and suspicion against the federal government based in New Delhi is all too apparent. According to Dixit¹⁸ (1998), New Delhi's neglect of the northeast has almost become 'national policy':

¹⁷ As Gupta (1984: 66) puts it: 'In today's resurgent Assam, everyone is a homespun economist. Figures of power production, length of road and rail per capital; industrial output and investments from central pool, are freely bandied about to prove the thesis that the rest of the country has singled out the north-east for colonial plunder---they are all believed'.

¹⁸ J N Dixit, India's former Foreign Secretary.

Punjab and Jammu & Kashmir have overwhelmed our national security consciousness through the Eighties and Nineties so that we have tended to neglect an equally vital region: the seven northeastern states. Their geostrategic location demands focused national attention...If one may offer an...encapsulation of the historical reasons for these troubles, there are three. First, during colonial rule, the government wanted to sustain divisive tendencies. Two, the governments of independent India were late to realise that decentralisation, respecting ethno-linguistic diversities and paying attention to development were imperative to make this region part of the national mainstream. Third, taking advantage of our flawed policies, antagonistic foreign countries fomented separatism which strengthened in direct proportion to economic and political neglect. All the agitations resulting from this alienation...can be traced to neglect, compounded by the acquisitive, self-centred and insular regional politics and parties.

In the ensuing climate of despondency, helplessness and frustration, 'the cynical message the people of the region get is that for any advancement or even securing normal benefits such as a bridge over the Brahmaputra or recognition of their language, they have to take to the streets, destroy strategic bridges, and kill innocent people before they are taken seriously by New Delhi, and invited for "talks" to resolve the issues' (Sonwalkar, 1992a: 9). There is some justification for the 'lack of development' argument often put forth in the region. The northeast was incorporated into the central development planning process much later than other states. Mizoram joined the process only in the Planning Commission's Seventh Five-Year Plan¹⁹, while prolonged insurgency in Nagaland thwarted implementation of developmental programmes. Mizoram and Arunachal Pradesh did not have a police system until the mid-1960s (Singh, 1987: 6). As the Planning Commission (1997: 2) admits:

The Northeast is a latecomer to development. The trauma of partition, political evolution and reorganisation of Assam along the present state boundaries, and continuing internal adjustment to achieve decentralised sub-state structures such as autonomous councils, punctuated with protest movements and insurgencies, have interrupted progress. The building of new political institutions, with former district councils graduating to statehood, has necessarily been a slow process. Traditional institutions were in some cases too soon or somewhat carelessly bypassed for newer structures that are perhaps not always well-suited to the region. Likewise, all-India norms and patterns of administration and planning have been extended to or have sometimes been sought by these units only to prove an embarrassment.

Due to the climate of anger and suspicion---bordering a siege mentality---altogether different meanings are read into routine pronouncements made in New Delhi or by

¹⁹ The Planning Commission formulates India's centralised developmental thrust. Each plan covers five years. The First Plan covered 1951-1956; currently, the Ninth Plan (1997-2002) is in operation.

individuals who are locally seen as ‘outsiders’. During the 1962 India-China war, as the Red Army overran Arunachal Pradesh and entered Assam, Nehru, in a broadcast over All India Radio, said: ‘...I can well understand what our friends in Assam must be feeling because all this is happening on their doorstep... We shall not be content till the invader goes out of India or is pushed out. We shall not accept any terms that he may offer, because he may think that we are a little frightened by some setbacks. I want to make that clear to all of you and more specifically to our countrymen in Assam to whom our heart goes out at this moment...’ (PIB, 1962). Nehru’s mention of ‘heart goes out’ continues to be interpreted in Assam as ‘bidding goodbye to Assam and the northeast; a farewell speech’; it is seen as a ‘prime’ example of New Delhi’s indifference and reluctance to protect Assam and its people²⁰. As Gupta observes: ‘The argument often heard...is: We are a burden; indispensable in terms of our resources but territorially expendable’ (1984: 65; see also NUB’s interview response; Chapter 5, Page 159).

Crucial to the impasse between the northeast and mainland India is the ‘absence of cultural and psychological integration with the mainstream’ (Datta, 2000). In mainland India, inhabitants from the northeast with Mongoloid features are viewed as strangers or foreigners. As Horam (1988: 64) observes: ‘As soon as a Naga crosses North-East India and ventures westwards, he is mistaken for a Thai, Cambodian, Chinese or Japanese and treated as a foreigner. This they (the secessionists) triumphantly declare clearly shows that the Nagas do not fall into Indian society, for even the Indians fail to recognise them as Indians’. Dixit (1998) recalls a Member of Parliament from Meghalaya being asked during a parliamentary committee meeting whether head hunting was still being practised in the region. As R K Jaichandra Singh, a senior politician of Manipur, observed:²¹:

We are just not taken seriously by anybody in Delhi. I encountered this attitude on several occasions when I was chief minister. Unless there is insurgency, Delhi does not take the northeast seriously. I have not heard anyone in Delhi saying that he is interested in solving the economic or political problems of Manipur. We would like to be as much Indians as

²⁰ An example of such perceptions is a publication of the influential Assamese literary body, Assam Sahitya Sabha. Titled ‘Assam and the Assamese Mind’, senior journalist Jadu Kakati wrote: ‘...(Came) the sad Chinese aggression days. Parts of the then North-East Frontier Agency (today’s Arunachal Pradesh) had already fallen to the advancing Chinese forces when the then Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru sent his memorable message of sympathy to the people of Assam, bidding goodbye to them and virtually handing them over to the Chinese’ (quoted in Gupta, 1984: 65).

²¹ The late Jaichandra Singh was a Union minister in the Rajiv Gandhi government, 1984-88; and chief minister of Manipur, 1988-90 (unpublished interview, quoted in Sonwalkar, 1995).

anyone but because of the prevailing conditions we are not allowed to feel like Indians. If people like me feel this way, you can imagine the sentiments of the younger lot. Not many know that people with Mongoloid features are also Indians. Quite often we are called Chinese. In fact one of the Manipur government lawyers while studying in Bombay was stoned in 1962 (during the India-China war) by batch-mates who took him to be a Chinese. When I was studying in Lucknow, Delhi or when I was called for an interview for admission to the Indian Military Academy, none around me considered me as one among them. No good officer of the Indian Administrative Service likes to come and work in the northeast; only the lesser ones are sent here²². More than anything else, what is needed is for New Delhi to give us a sense of belonging, a feeling of being part of the Indian experiment. No amount of central funds can replace this emotional-psychological input.

The northeast's marginalisation in the national consciousness affects its presence in media content. Doordarshan, the state-owned official network, has never had a presenter with Mongoloid features on its national channel; similar is the situation in private channels such as Zee, Star News or Aj Tak. No journalist with roots in the northeast has ever held a senior position in the national press. Symbols, individuals or themes from the region also do not figure prominently in television or film entertainment. Unlike *Kashmir ki Kali* and its *Heimat*-like connotations, there has been no similar representation of northeast in Bollywood. There have been feeble symbolic references to Assam in Hindi films such as *Ek Pal*, *Daman*, *Dil Se* but these did not fare well at the box office. Noted Assamese musician Bhupen Hazarika is known in the Hindi film industry but his exertions in Hindi or Hindi films has rarely been as popular as those of others. There have never been references to the people or cultures of Nagaland, Mizoram, Meghalaya, Tripura, Arunachal Pradesh, in Bollywood films, as characters, dialogues, location or themes. In the early 1980s, New Delhi-based journalist Shekhar Gupta faced an unusual question when he was transferred to the northeast: "In which currency do we send your salary?" Asked a sympathetic cashier at the *Indian Express*...as I prepared to leave for Shillong on what the editor called the most sensitive news assignment in the country' (Gupta, 1984: x).

²² In the years following independence, Rustomji observed: 'The Indian officer...was inclined to regard a posting in the hills as a penal infliction' (1983: 39). The situation has not changed much since: 'Almost every Chief Minister of the seven states has complained to the Centre about the tendency of Indian Administrative Service/Indian Police Service officers to take a transfer out of the region at the first opportunity...Today, every northeast cadre of IAS/IPS has several reluctant, disgruntled officers, who happened to be allotted the cadre not out of choice but on a roster basis...' (Sonwalkar, 1992b)

There is official recognition and admission that the federal government based in New Delhi has not dealt with the region as it should have. Prime Minister Vajpayee observed in 1998: 'When people in New Delhi think of the northeast, they usually think of the geographical distance, which translates itself into mental distance. When people in the northeast think of New Delhi, they usually think of the developmental distance, which translates itself into emotional distance'²³. However, such official recognition has not resulted in remedial action.

Due to prolonged unrest, the northeast is often referred to as 'India's Ulster' or as a potential 'East Timor' (Dutt, 1999). At least 50,000 people have been killed in insurgent violence since 1947, of whom 25,000 alone were killed in violence linked to the 50-year-old Naga insurgency²⁴. Since World War II---when Kohima (Nagaland) and Imphal (Manipur) were prominent theatres of battle between the Allied powers and the Japanese---'the political scene in north-east India...has never been placid' (Singh, 1987: 22). Insurgency commenced in Nagaland a day before India became independent, when the Naga leadership headed by Angami Zapu Phizo declared Nagaland to be 'independent'. It soon spread to other areas in the region.

In the perception of the Union Ministry of Home Affairs, the main reasons for northeast groups demanding secession from India are²⁵:

- 'Never a part of India before annexation by the British;
- Discrimination within the country;
- Lack of cultural integration with the rest of the country;
- Under-development and economic backwardness;
- Influx of 'foreigners'.

Conflicts in the northeast can be divided into three categories: tribal groups ranged against the State; inter-tribe conflicts; and tribes verses non-tribes.

The goal of ULFA, an outlawed rebel group, is 'To liberate our motherland Asom from the unjust clutch of Indian administrative machinery; to hand over the administration to the people who have (been) alienated, exploited and betrayed; and (to dismantle) all the obstacles (in the form of) the Indian state machinery'²⁶. External

²³ From the Prime Minister's address to a meeting of Chief Ministers of northeast states; *NE Newsletter*, Vol.1, No.1, November 1998; published by the Union Ministry of Home Affairs.

²⁴ Source: 'Indian Separatist Leader leads Guilty to Thai Forgery Charge', *AFP*, May 25, 2000.

²⁵ Cited in 'The North-East: Militancy, Terrorism and Senseless Violence', Ministry of Home Affairs web-site: <http://www.mha.nic.in>

²⁶ Extract from ULFA's 'Constitution'; the original Assamese name for Assam is 'Asom'.

and internal support has been vital to the survival of insurgency; it is also sustained by the local climate of suspicion, anger and distrust with 'India', 'New Delhi' and the 'Centre'. The climate is reflected and reinforced daily by the local media in which 'India' and 'New Delhi' are routinely represented in adversarial or conspiratorial terms (see also northeast-based interview responses; Chapter 5, 158-164). The host of insurgencies, though, are just one of the many forms of conflict in the region, though it has been the most serious and endemic from the security point of view. The official strategy to deal with the unrest is outlined thus²⁷:

While India inherited militancy in Nagaland at the time of its independence, the tentacles of militancy extended to other States in the North-East at different times in the post-Independence period. The militancy in North-East, however, subsequently acquired an ominous form as a result of networking amongst various militant groups and availability of trans-border sanctuaries, coupled with the feelings of alienation and exploitation. Lack of employment opportunities other than in the Government sector and non-performance of some of the State Governments have also contributed to participation of neo-literate youth in militant activities. Militant activities in North East, thus, is a complex issue that can not be tackled by any single prescription. Therefore, the Government has adopted a multi-pronged strategy to deal with militancy in the North-East which includes willingness to meet and discuss legitimate grievances, resolve to counter senseless violence with firm hand, understanding with neighbouring countries and, more importantly, infrastructural development, employment opportunities, good governance and decentralization.

Since independence, five secessionist insurgencies and at least two major struggles for autonomy have resulted in the following casualties:

Table 8: NORTHEAST INSURGENCY CASUALTIES, 1992-2001²⁸

	<u>CIVILIANS</u>	<u>SECURITY FORCES</u>	<u>MILITANTS</u>
Assam	2459	611	1373
Arunachal	31	9	31
Mizoram	6	13	1
Nagaland	603	235	882
Tripura	2082	296	255
Meghalaya	63	50	27
Manipur	1371	649	830
TOTAL	6615	1863	3399

²⁷ Source: Ministry of Home Affairs website: <http://www.mha.nic.in>; accessed on 18 March 2001.

²⁸ Source: 'Survey of Conflicts & Resolution in India's Northeast', Ajay Sahni, *Faultlines*, Vol. 12; published by Institute of Conflict Management, New Delhi: www.satp.org.

A key feature of each insurgency has been that 'tribal' groups use modern ideas such as self-determination, nationalism, nation-state and modern arms in pursuit of their goals even as they base their secessionist/separatist demands on primordialism. 'Each revolt or unrest is well-organized, with a political machinery to carry out its goal and a military wing attached to the political organization to implement its dictates---all have the trappings of a tribal political order but are presented in modern language and supported by modern weapons' (Singh, 1987: 94). In most states, the divide between underground activity and mainstream politics is blurred, particularly in Nagaland and Manipur.

Naga insurgency is considered the 'mother of all insurgencies' in the region as it is the oldest and the most resourceful in terms of cadre strength, arms and ammunition, and ideological commitment. Naga armed groups extend material and financial sustenance and coordinate activities with other groups in the region. Security officials believe that northeast insurgent groups have links with similar outfits across South Asia. Apart from reasons rooted in ethnicity and history, Nagas and other tribes revolted when India became independent because they were suspicious of the new 'Hindu rulers'; they had heard that Hindus worship the cow, and feared that they might be deprived of their main source of sustenance, beef (Rustomji, 1983: 25). As Horam (1988: 35) observes:

Nagas without exception are xenophobes. They have always been suspicious of all outsiders. The coming of the white men was stoutly opposed. When the whites came first to Naga Hills they were called 'half-cooked' men because of their pale colour. The ingrained superstitious strain in the Naga caused the white men to be accused of bringing ill-luck and pestilence to the Naga people. Much later when the 'half-cooked' men left Naga Hills, Nagas were scared of being ruled by the 'Black-race' who would forbid them to eat 'beef' and 'pork'...It is interesting to note that even after they became Christians and had wide and friendly contacts with both white missionaries and white administrators the Nagas were never 'crazy' about white people the way certain other tribes...are. (The) Nagas strained at the British yoke refusing the offer to remain a British Colony after Independence--just as they chafed at the thought of Indian dominance.

The insurgencies in Nagaland and Mizoram were partly animated by fears of India's vast Hindu majority 'swallowing up' the small tribes, and imperilling their Christian faith. ULFA leaders too have criticised Hindu dominance. The Naga crisis is rooted in ethnicity; it is a consequence not so much of the need to preserve the ethnic character of the Nagas than from a fear of its extinction. On the basis of their

Mongoloid stock, the Nagas considered themselves different from the Aryans, and were reluctant to be linked to mainland India, fearing persecution and extinction. Ethnic paranoia, whipped up into a full-blown political agenda, is the essence of insurgency in Nagaland.

The following table sets out the status of conflicts in each of the seven states in the region:

Table 9: TABLE OF TURMOIL IN THE NORTHEAST²⁹

<u>STATE</u>	<u>NATURE</u>	<u>STATUS</u>	<u>KEY GROUPS</u>	<u>START YEAR(S)</u>
Assam	Insurgent	Ongoing	ULFA, Bodo	Late 1980s
Nagaland	Insurgent	Ongoing	NSCN	1947
Manipur	Insurgent	Ongoing	NSCN, PLA	1960s
Meghalaya	Social	Ongoing	Locals-Outsiders	1970s
Tripura	Insurgent	Ongoing	NLFT, ATTF	1980
Arunachal	Social	Ongoing	Locals-Chakmas	Late 1980s
Mizoram	Insurgent	Resolved	MNF	1992

Modern India's determination to preserve its territorial boundaries inherited at the time of independence prompted the government to often deploy the army, air force and other security forces in the northeast. A number of laws were enacted, some dubbed as 'draconian' by human rights groups, such as the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act, 1972, the Assam Disturbed Areas Act, 1955, Nagaland Security Regulation, 1962, Assam Maintenance of Public Order Act, 1953.

Violations of human rights during counter-insurgency operation worsened the ground situation over the years. An army officer observes: 'Unfortunately, most people in the northeast have been exposed to only the bad side of India: the wily Hindi-speaking Marwari trader who exploits them, or the army man hailing from outside the region who is not sensitive to local sentiments and commits mistakes during counter-insurgency operations' (in Sonwalkar, 1995). The security-oriented 'fire-fighting' approach of the 1950s and 1960s later gave way to a 'carrot and stick'

²⁹ Notes: Intra and inter-tribe conflict is a feature of all seven states; also conflict between 'locals' and 'outsiders'. Besides the major armed groups mentioned in the table, several other groups also operate within specific states or across the northeast. Most of them have been outlawed. In all there are at least 50 such armed groups. ULFA: United Liberation Front of Asom; NSCN: National Socialist Council of Nagaland; PLA: People's Liberation Army; NLFT: National Liberation Front of Tripura; ATTF: All Tripura Tiger Force; MNF: Mizo National Front. Source: Ministry of Home Affairs, Institute of Conflict Management.

policy that involved the granting of statehood within India's federal structure to meet tribal aspirations, local autonomy, and amnesty to former insurgents. A mix of force and political-financial incentives were used to persuade rebels to give up arms and the idea of secession. The creation of the states of Nagaland and Mizoram of Assam was the result of such a policy, even though economically the states were unviable units, and needed to be heavily subsidised by the central government³⁰. The policy, which involved drawing former rebels into the political process, resulted in the signing of 'memorandums of understanding' or 'accords' between the federal government and rebel groups, but these have not meant a permanent end to conflict. Some prominent 'accords' are:

- Shillong Accord, 1975, with 'Underground Nagas';
- Assam Accord, 1985; with the All Assam Students Union to end the six-year agitation against 'foreign nationals' in Assam;
- Mizoram Accord, 1986; with the secessionist Mizo National Front;
- Tripura Accord, 1988; with the secessionist Tripura National Volunteers;
- Bodoland Accord, 1993; with the separatist All Bodo Students Union, to create an autonomous council for the Bodo tribes in Assam.

The state of Assam has shrunk in size since independence, and there are demands to divide it further to meet the aspirations of newly restive groups/tribes. The official perception that creating new states as a response to real or potential insurgency, based on the colonial principle that reorganisation of the area 'is the answer to its myriad problems' (Singh, 1987: 18), and that it would somehow make insurgencies go away, encouraged the many tribes and sub-tribes in the region to demand 'separateness' (Baruah, 1999: 106). Prabhakara suggests that the situation also suits the central government: '(The) weakening and the fragmentation of the northeastern region has been the consistent policy of the Government of India, for such weakening has resulted in individual units, depending heavily on New Delhi subsidies, and these units can be always expected to be loyal' (1974: 2102).

³⁰ 'The States of the Northeast are ascribed a "special category" status by the Government of India...(The) National Development Council (NDC), the apex body for the approval of Plan funding, earmarks 30 per cent of total Plan allocations for special category States as central assistance for State Plans. Significantly, these States receive 90 per cent of Plan assistance as a grant, and just 10 per cent as a loan, as against the norm of 30 per cent grant and 70 per cent loan for other States. Favoured treatment is also given by the Finance Commission with respect to the sharing of Central tax revenues' (Sahni & George, 2000: 45-46)

Since the mid-1980s, insurgency has come to be viewed as a 'cottage industry and a bargaining counter' against New Delhi for more funds (Sonwalkar, 1990). This 'industry' includes making extortionist demands on profit-making tea companies, government employees and the politically influential Hindi-speaking Marwari traders. In a region with high rates of unemployment, providing financial and other incentives to rebels who surrender acquires new and unintended meanings for the youth. As New Delhi increases developmental funds in response to voices of discontent, a comprador-like class has emerged, comprising the trader, politician, bureaucrat and the insurgent. The corrupt local governments are seen as 'representatives of the central power to keep the people in a state of underdevelopment' (Saigal, 1992: 215-216). The nexus between power wielding individuals and groups---mainstream and underground---is reflected when 'militants often raise issues that are intertextual in the sense that they allude to and are contiguous with the mainstream social discourse of a region' (Baruah, 1999: xii).

In security circles, the northeast is seen as a 'strategic concern'. As the Indian Defence Minister observes, 'The northeast is by far the most sensitive part of the country...Punjab, and Jammu and Kashmir have been in the public eye the world over...The world has had either no time or no inclination---for obvious reasons---to take a look at Pakistan-sponsored terrorism in India's northeastern states' (in Hussain, 2001). This study spells out the 'obvious reason' for the marginalisation of northeast discourse in the Indian public sphere.

2.3 Summary

This chapter has highlighted the kaleidoscopic diversity of Indian reality against which the Kashmir and northeast conflicts are framed. Both demonstrate 'comparable message potential' at the level of conflict characteristics, but a closer look reveals deep differences and disjunctures. These are part of, and reinforce, the wider Indian reality based on the saliency of religion, language and ethnicity. The genesis of the Kashmir conflict lies in the creation of modern India and Pakistan in 1947, and involves two of the largest religious communities in South Asia, Hindu and Muslim, who have a mixed history of mutual suspicion and close interaction over the ages. Kashmir is closely linked with modern India's ideas and ideals of secularism, multiculturalism and pluralism. India's commitment to these principles has ensured

that Muslims, Sikhs and Christians occupy some of the highest offices: the President, cabinet ministers, top officials in the armed forces, civil and foreign service, etc.

Three aspects of the Kashmir conflict are central to this study:

- Kashmir involves the Hindus and Muslims; the former constitute the majority at the national level while the latter is India's largest minority community; both have a history of communal tensions;
- Kashmir has a strong cultural recall among the people across India as a 'Paradise on Earth';
- Kashmir's history and future is seen to be closely linked to the foundations and the future of a modern, democratic and secular India.

The northeast conflicts, on the other hand, are played out against the fact that the region has been historically and culturally tenuously linked with mainland India; it became part of British India over 100 years after the colonial administration consolidated itself in the rest of the country. During the freedom struggle too, except for some involvement of Assam, the participation of the region and its people was negligible. In official circles, it is seen more as a security issue, prompting massive deployment of security forces. Almost all army personnel hail from outside the region, which has implications for the need to be sensitive to local traditions and cultures during counter-insurgency operations; thus, the Indian army is often seen as an 'occupation army' in the northeast.

In mainland India, northeast tribes continue to be seen in largely uncivil terms in a public sphere dominated by the Hindu-Muslim-secularism problematic. The region's geographically peripheral location and its virtual absence in popular forms of entertainment and media, drive its perception outside the region as India's 'other'. Such perceptions reify a form of *internal* Orientalism (Said, 1995) within the Orient, and invokes themes such as civilised-barbaric, developed-undeveloped, cultured-uncultured, etc. The situation is no different from racism, as a report in *The Assam Tribune* (2000) on problems faced by students hailing from the region at the hands of the Delhi police or other government personnel indicates:

Woes of NE students in Delhi
From Our Staff Correspondent

NEW DELHI, March 27 — Perceived racial discrimination against students from the North-east residing in the capital, have led to a massive outcry among the students community, who accuse the authorities of turning a blind eye to their woes.

If the students who prefer to call themselves Mongoloid People Association, are to be believed, their dreams and aspirations of earning a decent living and leading a respectable life lie shattered in the face of harassment and racial abuse meted out to them. Though their grouse is against the government, it is the Delhi Police which has made life miserable for them.

“The Delhi Police often ridicule and make fun of our genuine problems whenever approached for justice or protection...It is unfortunate that, despite the commendable service and contributions made for the country for the last 50 years we are yet to be treated as equal citizens. However derogative and unpleasant it may be we tolerate and bear it within the limit of our conscience.”

Students said their harassments do not end with the police. It is very common for students from the region to find their mail missing or delayed. The reason is that most postmen, particularly in the Delhi University area, on seeing the name of the addressee, ‘hijack’ the mail, demand ‘ransom’ for delivering the letters, including bank drafts and money orders. Our complaints to the higher authorities do not yield any effect, they complained.

A memorandum addressed to the Union Home Minister said that they come all the way to the capital in search of better living conditions and also to associate with the mainland people but are ignored and often humiliated. ‘Whenever we approach the police we are ridiculed and humiliated till we agree to compromise or threatened to put us behind bars. From constable to the police chief, we don’t know whom to blame for all the unfortunate racial bias,’ they said.

The report reiterates the otherness of the northeast and its people. In New Delhi, as in most places in mainland India, people from the region are viewed as different, the ‘other’. The students’ experience in New Delhi reflects attitudes and perceptions that have not changed through years of ‘nation-building’ appeals and activities since independence. The pejorative attitude towards the tribes/ Mongoloid people is ingrained in the mainstream psyche dominated by the Hindu-Muslim-secularism problematic. This is in line with Hartman and Husband’s observation in the British context that there are elements in the British cultural tradition that are derogatory to non-whites (1981: 274). As the report indicates, discrimination evokes the response of asserting one’s identity: northeast students formed a group called the ‘Mongoloid People Association’.

Thus, the conflicts in the northeast are predicated on three factors:

- Most conflicts involve tribes, which are disadvantaged in social and cultural terms vis-à-vis the numerically large and politically influential Hindu-Muslim communities;
- The region is geographically distant from mainland India; historically it has tenuous links with the rest of the country;

- The region's natural beauty is less known and none of its places are major tourist spots. The northeast does not evoke the powerful cultural recall, and thus finds virtual no place in popular forms of entertainment in a way that Kashmir does.

Due to the conditions in which India and Pakistan emerged on the world map in 1947, much of the public debate in India is concerned with the Hindu-Muslim-secularism problematic. The focus on this tends to relegate other issues such as removing social inequalities as inherent in the caste system, the treatment of women, the life situations of other minorities, to the margins of public discourse. The modernist discourse of secularism may have overshadowed and suppressed other modernist concerns from appearing on the public agenda. Thus, India presents the picture of being pulled along opposite directions: the modernistic impulse as reflected in its commitment to secularism, democracy and equality of citizens, and the saliency of deep-rooted traditions and values that perpetuate the disadvantaged position of minority groups.

In this context, the concepts of 'majority' and 'minority' are at best amorphous categories, shifting according to focus, perspective and locale. But socio-cultural binary is a useful conceptual tool to unpack the constituents of socio-cultural power relations in specific contexts. The binary applied in this study is one based in, and analysed from the perspective of news-workers based in New Delhi.

New Delhi is located in the 'Hindi belt'; almost all journalists (of English or language press) use Hindi in daily interactions with sources and colleagues. Hindi speakers thus come to be privileged over other languages, particularly when victims of insurgent violence in the northeast hail from the Hindi-speaking regions. On such occasions, news reports in the New Delhi-based press invariably point out and mention that the victims were 'Hindi-speaking people' (examples of such news items presented in Chapter 5; Pages 177-180). Due to this systemised preferential treatment, northeast insurgents are known to deliberately target Hindi-speakers in order to attract the attention of the federal government and the elites based in New Delhi. The victimisation of Hindi-speaking people in the northeast is seen in New Delhi and other parts of the 'Hindi belt' as an attack by 'them' on 'us'.

The next chapter locates this discussion in media theory and carries forward the research question by adopting a culturalist approach to the production of news, and developing the conceptual tool of the socio-cultural binary or 'we' and 'they'.

3.

Media Coverage of Conflict: A Contra View

Not all symbols are equally potent. Some metaphors soar, others fall flat; some visual images linger in the mind, others are quickly forgotten. Some frames have a natural advantage because their ideas and language resonate with a broader political culture. Resonances increase the appeal of a frame by making it appear natural and familiar. Those who respond to the larger cultural theme will find it easier to respond to a frame with the same sonorities. The resonance concept focuses on the relationship between the discourse on a particular issue and the broader political culture of which it is a part. Both media discourse and popular wisdom have such resonances.

---Gamson (1992: 135)

This chapter provides the conceptual framework of the study, and develops the thesis to explain the contradiction of conflicts in northeast India *not* evoking the degree of coverage that is routinely accorded to the Kashmir conflict in the Indian national press. The thesis is based on the primary assumption that news is essentially about us, where the understanding of ‘us’ or ‘we’ shifts according to focus, locale and perspective. Building on this, I postulate the thesis as follows:

A conflict involving terrorism and violence is likely to be accorded sustained media coverage only if it is seen by journalists as affecting or involving what they socially and culturally perceive to be the ‘we’; a similar conflict involving the ‘they’, or one that is not framed within the ‘we’ parameters, may be routinely ignored, or extended ad hoc coverage.

The thesis is located within what McNair (1998: 19) calls the ‘dominance’ paradigm of journalism (journalism *as it is*), and not the ‘normative’ paradigm (journalism *as it is supposed to be*). It is located at the heart of the triumvirate of discourses of ‘terrorism and media’, ‘violence and media’ and ‘conflict and media’ in the sense that it addresses the very foundation on which they are based: the presumed inevitability of events involving terrorism, violence and conflict resulting in news coverage. This predictive determinism underpinning the discourses appears so rooted that a contra view of conflict, about terrorism and violence *not* resulting in media content, is rarely considered, let alone addressed. The thesis cuts across inside-outside issues such as violence and terrorism in national or international contexts, and questions the assumption that violence and terrorism are irresistibly newsworthy.

I use 'conflict' as an umbrella term to describe a range of developments related to ethno-national conflicts in Kashmir and northeast India. Based on the HIIK's definition of conflict (see Chapter 1; Page 5, 6), my idea of 'conflict' is not confined to acts of terrorism or violence, but encompasses the gamut of related activities such as political manoeuvrings, placing and tactically revising secessionist demands, shifts in strategy, announcements of 'ceasefire', grant of amnesty to those who surrender to state authorities, local alienation, the causal socio-economic conditions, etc. Violence is usually a common feature of serious ethno-national conflicts, such as in Kashmir and northeast India. The focus is on how an ethno-national conflict as a whole *resonates* in the media, and not just its violence or terrorism aspects. The point is that individual acts of terrorism may well be occasionally reported with varying degrees of importance in terms of newspaper space and placement, but the focus of inquiry is why the host of northeast conflicts do not *resonate* in the Indian national press, individually or severally, the way Kashmir does?

A clarification is necessary here. Building on Gamson (Chapter 3 opening quote), my idea of *resonance* is that journalists treat and cover a conflict as an ongoing issue of importance and not merely as an event-centric or sporadic source of news. For example, Northern Ireland or Kashmir conflicts are usually the focus of not only Page 1 news in the British and India national press, respectively, but also of related stories and analyses in inside pages, op-ed writings, editorials, interviews, columns, letters to the editor, news-features, etc. The content on these conflicts is spread across sections of a newspaper, and is contributed from a range of perspectives (parliament, Defence ministry, Home Ministry, political parties, human interest, local impact, backgrounder, etc.) by reporters, special correspondents, senior editors, columnists, edit writers, feature writers, etc. It should thus be possible through a simple count of content to determine which conflict---Kashmir or the northeast---figures or resonates more prominently across newspaper pages in the Indian national press.

Sporadic event-centric coverage of unreported or underreported conflicts means that a conflict---of which violence and terrorism is a symptom---is accorded low status in the news discourse, since the reader is not invited to understand why things are the way they are. When such treatment is accorded as a matter of routine, it converts the conflict into a blind spot from which only stray news about violence or terrorism are deemed worthy of being reported, if at all, without accompanying explanatory content. This has implications for the media's agenda setting function since such

coverage does not bring the conflict to the notice of decision makers and readers; thus, no pressure is mounted on the government to 'do something' about it.

Questioning the presumed inevitability that conflict results in media coverage locates this study in the discourse of production of news; the study is rooted in praxis and is concerned with what actually happens in newsrooms, irrespective of what the 'normative paradigm' of journalism holds. The focus here is the journalist and his/her attitude towards events as they occur in Kashmir and northeast India, and the subjective world-view that is brought to bear on exertions that journalists may well describe as 'professional'. As Shoemaker and Reese rightly observe, it is the 'individual' aspect of news production that lies at the core of the many levels of influences on media content (1996: 64). This 'individual' aspect, as do others, are framed within the broad social structure and is subject the prevailing socio-cultural power geometry. Hence, '...none of these actors---the individual, the organisation or the social institution---can escape the fact that it is tied to and draws sustenance from the social system' (Shoemaker, 1991: 75)

The conceptual framework is presented in two sections, and broadly follows two trajectories of inquiry:

- What does the discourse of 'conflict/terrorism/violence and media' say about the coverage of events related to conflict situations, and what does the theory of news production say about such coverage?
- What would explain the low coverage of northeast conflicts even though they involve terrorism, a high degree of violence and several other characteristics of better-known conflicts?

First, a brief overview of the literature on 'violence/terrorism and media' establishes the presumed inevitability of the violence-coverage linkage, and places this study in context. Based on the theory of news values and the sociology of news, I then note that as in the case of Kashmir, conflicts in northeast India should theoretically lead to sustained coverage in the Indian national press. I discuss the three sociological approaches to study news, and state the reasons for adopting the 'cultural' approach (Schudson, 2000: 189-194) as the umbrella approach in this case to explain journalists' attitudes towards the northeast conflicts.

In the second section, I build the proposed thesis by developing the concept of socio-cultural binary in a given society/nation. I argue that at the encoding stage itself,

an event first has to cross this socio-cultural binary-filter before it is considered newsworthy. Professional values such as objectivity, accuracy, ethics, impartiality, etc. may run secondary to this primary 'gate'. As Hetherington rightly observes, the instinctual news value of most journalists simply is: 'Does it interest me?' (1985: 8). However, the terminology of the socio-cultural binary---'we' and 'they' or 'us' and 'them'---is not to be seen as being pejorative, conspiratorial or insular, but to take Hall's idea of a 'deep structure' functioning as a selective device in news production (1982: 234) a step further, and to identify one set of its possible attributes. The binary can be a useful way to interrogate the entrenched ways in which certain socio-cultural limits are naturalised by media-workers.

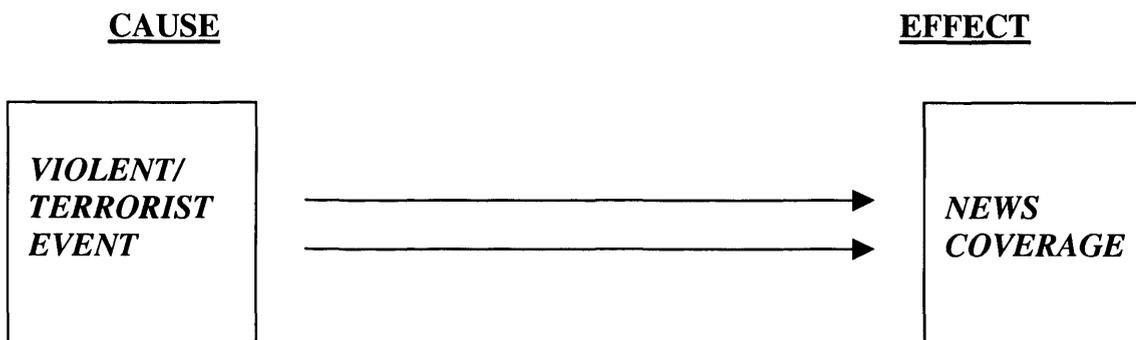
3.1 Determinism in Conflict Literature

Terrorism, violence and war have interested generations of communication researchers. At the macro level, the attempt has invariably been on investigating a 'presence' in the media, as representation, content, reporting practices, stereotyping, historical development, military-media relationship, etc. The focus has rarely been on the nether world of 'absence' between the lines. As far as I could investigate, no study has so far interrogated why the media does *not* cover certain conflicts or forms of violence or why such conflicts are routinely extended ad hoc or perfunctory coverage even though they may involve much violence and terrorism. The possibility of conflict *not* attracting sustained media attention has rarely been brooked or considered worthy of investigation. The nearest line of inquiry to this has been the discourse on minorities and the media, which focuses on how various minorities---gender, ethnic minorities etc.---are 'symbolically annihilated', kept on the margins or routinely accorded low status in media content (Cottle, 2000; Poole, 1999; Hartman & Husband, 1981; Tuchman et al, 1978, etc.). But the coverage of conflict and violence that involves the minorities, in which the majority community may not be a party---overtly, covertly or is simply indifferent to the conflict---has rarely been investigated.

Studies in the area of 'violence and media' focus on 'effects' (particularly on children), and how violence is depicted on television (Barker & Petley, 2001; Carlsson & von Feilitzen, 1998; Douglas, 1995; Greenfield, 1984, etc.). The line of inquiry is invariably based on *a priori* assumption of a functional relationship between an act of violence---the realm of deviance (Ericson *et al*, 1987)---and its

media coverage due to negativity, unexpectedness, and drama; the link between the two is taken for granted.

Figuratively, the relationship implied in the discourse between events involving violence and media coverage may be presented as:



However, the studies do not go further to investigate why journalists prefer to cover only some conflicts or some forms of violence in society on a regular basis, or why they routinely ignore others. A similar relationship is implied in the discourse of ‘terrorism and media’, and there is a similar lack of progression in the line of inquiry to cover acts of terrorism that do *not* attract significant media coverage. The primary stage of encoding itself needs to be made problematic in order to comprehend the complexity of news production (Hall, 1980). For long, violence, in its myriad forms, has been privileged in studies of news production without questioning the seemingly natural selectivity involved in its coverage.

Nossek touches on some of these grey areas in a discussion about the coverage of *foreign* political violence:

(When) political violence is reported and covered, there is already a prior definition by the journalist of the event as some kind of political violence---say, war, terrorism, or a violent demonstration---that predates the reporter’s own professional definition. Thus, professional norms become secondary to the national identity of the correspondent covering the story for the newspaper. The definition requires the journalist to decide instantly whether or not it is *our* war or *theirs*, *our* terrorism or *theirs*, etc. The definition, and the immediate stance adopted as a result, will influence whether the event is selected as news and the way it is covered (2001: 2; emphasis added).

In the discourse of ‘terrorism and media’, the definition of terrorism itself has been a slippery eel with versions being as divergent as numerous. As Paletz and Boiney observe, apart from some notable exceptions, ‘the bulk of literature on the relationship between the media and terrorism is dismaying. Some of it is blatantly propagandistic,

consisting of shrill jeremiads, exhortations, tendentious examples, and undocumented assertions. Unexamined assumptions abound, terms go undefined, and arguments are untested' (1992: 23). The focus of this study is one such 'unexamined assumption': the presumed inevitability of violence and terrorism translating into news content, which underpins other themes of the discourse.

Unlike Clausewitz' classic definition of war being a continuation of politics by other means, terrorism is often seen as the 'illegitimate recourse to particularly reprehensible forms of violence, directed to ends which may have as much to do with gaining publicity as rectifying political grievances' (Carruthers, 2000: 163). According to Walzer (1992), conventional warfare is conducted based on certain principles that make it a 'just war', but terrorism is often considered the abnegation of conventions. The very act of labelling who is a terrorist and who is not, and which activity is terrorism, is itself no less controversial, symbolised by the adage that one man's terrorist is another's freedom fighter.

Most studies focus on the propagandistic nature of terrorism, its ultimate targets being not the immediate victims but those watching. Schmid and de Graaf suggest that 'Terrorism cannot be understood only in terms of violence. It has to be understood primarily in terms of propaganda. Violence and propaganda have much in common. Violence aims at behaviour modification by coercion. Propaganda aims at the same through persuasion. Terrorism is a combination of the two' (1982: 14). The US Army's definition states that terrorism involves 'a criminal act that is often symbolic in nature and intended to influence an audience beyond the immediate victims' (Carruthers, 2000: 167). Media strategies are part of the overall activities of terrorist or insurgent groups; the IRA's expertise at coordinating acts of violence with the media's requirements has long been acknowledged.

Two major themes dominate the 'terrorism and media' discourse: orthodox and revisionist. The orthodox view holds that media provide 'oxygen of publicity' to terrorists, in Margaret Thatcher's famous words. As per this view, without media coverage, terrorism would simply disappear (Szumski, 1986: 70). Schmid and de Graaf suggest that terrorism and mass communication are so closely linked to each other that 'without communication there can be no terrorism' ((1982: 9). According to Lord Annan:

Terrorism feeds off publicity; publicity is its main hope of intimidating government and the public: publicity gives it a further chance of recruitment.

The acts terrorists commit are each minor incidents in their general campaign to attract attention to their cause. No democracy can tolerate terrorism because it is a denial of the democratic assumption that injustice can, in time, be put right through discussion, peaceful persuasion and compromise. By killing and destroying, the terrorists are bound to extort publicity---and one of their ends--because such news will be reported (1977: 270).

This view, that seeking publicity is the terrorists' primary aim and that without it terrorism would simply disappear, prompted government interventions in reporting terrorism and imposition of several curbs on journalists in Europe and elsewhere.

However, revisionists challenge this by suggesting that 'political violence is not reducible to communicative behaviour alone' (Schlesinger, Murdoch & Elliott, 1983: 158). According to Seagaller, terrorism generally arises in 'blocked societies' as a result of 'unpalatable political problems whose solution, in effect, is too low a priority' to the concerned state (1987: 5). In such intractable situations, restive groups unhappy with the conditions they find themselves in and which defy legal remedy, resort to violence to break free. For such groups, seeking publicity may be an interim goal but not the final objective of redressing deep-rooted political grievances. Schlesinger questions the orthodox viewpoint, and the related suggestion that reporting terrorism is 'contagious' and encourages others (1991: 18-28) As Carruthers observes, 'Bans on media reportage are most unlikely to suffocate terrorism altogether, for this prescription tackles only the symptoms, not the underlying malady, and treats terrorism as essentially a problem for journalists, not for politicians' (2000: 190).

Lacquer calls 'innovative' terrorists 'super entertainers of our times' (1977: 233), as they fulfil the media's insatiable demand for diversity and news angles. According to Bell: 'There is simply no way that the Western media can ignore an event that has been fashioned specifically for their needs. Television terrorists can no more do without the media than the media can resist the terror event. The two are in a symbiotic relationship' (Wardlaw, 1989: 76). Terrorists too are said to be aware of the media attracting potential of their activities.

As noted earlier, the discourse is premised on the predictive inevitability of acts of terror or violence attracting media attention. Schmid and de Graaf's influential theme, that violence and terrorism is basically an act of communication and propaganda, virtually discounts the possibility that terrorists' courting of the media may not always

lead to coverage. The implied determinism is deep-rooted; it is taken as a given. The following statements are suggestive of the universal applicability claimed:

- '(Violence)...is 'the most salient, operational "news value" in the domain of political news' (Hall, 1981: 237);
- '(Deviance) is *the* defining characteristic of what journalists regard as newsworthy and, as such, becomes inextricably linked with journalists' methods' (Ericson, *et al*, 1987: 4; emphasis in original);
- 'The actual or anticipated use of violence are normally sufficient to assure (media) access' (Weimann & Winn, 1993: 118);
- 'The bread and butter of news is conflict, violence, rivalry and disagreement (Hartley, 1982: 83);
- 'Terrorists are rather resourceful about creating new theatrical productions; every year or two they come up with a new variant that captures the media's imagination' (Krauthammer, 1984: 47);
- 'The nature of terroristic violence is such that the "free" or "autonomous" media cannot ignore terrorist violence. The sheer scale and dramatic nature of violence offers media "unputdownable" news as well as providing the perpetrators a good measure of publicity' (Mudgal, 1995: 51).

The cornerstone of such formulations---and also those of the orthodox view with its 'symbiosis' thesis and the revisionists' challenge to it---is the link between acts of terrorism and the presumed inevitability of media coverage. As Weimann & Winn observe, 'It has been axiomatic in the news industry that negative events are much more likely to be reported and to receive extensive coverage than events that embody pro-social, humanitarian or constructive values' (1994: 125). As my research shows, this may be valid in general and theoretical terms but may not hold water in several, if not most, national and international conflict situations.

There exists a deterministic understanding of the news production process, in which the 'input' of acts of violence or terrorism is seen to mechanically convert into the 'output' of media coverage; there is no room envisaged in the literature for the possibility of acts of terrorism *not* attracting substantial media attention, or for a qualitative assessment about whose terrorism is being spoken of: *ours* or *theirs*? In such a view---almost reminiscent of the discredited 'hypodermic needle' theory, but this time in relation to journalists instead of readers---journalists are seen as robot-like, without a mind of their own, as passive recipients of external event-stimuli. They are expected to, or are seen to, mechanically convert information about acts of violence or terrorism into news copy. The socio-cultural environment in which they operate, and which influences them as do other aspects of news production, seems to have been ignored by 'terrorism/violence and media' researchers.

Weimann & Winn come closest to addressing this presumed inevitability:

The professional factors that affect coverage of terrorism are particularly complex. Such professional considerations include the editorial norms for what is newsworthy, the administrative routines governing how news is gathered, the self-image and role conceptions of the newsperson, the procedures of news selection within newsrooms, and the competitive ethos in the news industry. Journalists are influenced not only by peer pressure and occupational norms, but also by what the public thinks is newsworthy. Journalists are in turn affected by how they perceive their peers' perceptions of public expectations...*The national culture of a particular society within which journalists live and work may also exercise an influence* (1994, 111-112; emphasis added).

As this observation indicates, much space remains to be explored in the area of violence/terrorism and media; for example, the self-image and role conceptions of the newsperson, the procedures of news selection within newsrooms, peer pressure and their perception of what the public thinks is newsworthy. The self-image of a journalist, based on his culture and ethnicity, can be a crucial determinant in the process of selecting terrorist and violent events for coverage. Only those events that accord with his own socio-cultural background, his/peer perceptions and what they think the public perceive as newsworthy, are likely to be routinely picked up for coverage on a sustained basis; those conflict situations that do not accord with the personal-social themes are unlikely to be considered worthy of coverage. Here, the journalist's resonating subjectivity, framed against the wider socio-cultural environment, may become the first 'gate' an event has to cross before professional norms such as objectivity, fairness etc come into play.

Thus, of the many themes in the discourse of 'violence/terrorism/conflict and media', of particular relevance to this study is the subtle, fundamental assumption of predictive inevitability of events resulting in coverage. It is widely taken as a given, and also finds reflection in the discourse of production of news, which is itself a popular field of investigation among researchers. The next section examines the theory of production of news and what it holds about events involving violence, terrorism and conflict.

3.2 The Production of News

Since Max Weber's conception of a journalist's social standing as a political person (1921) to the proliferation of 'gate-keeping' studies from the 1950s onwards, researchers have sought to deconstruct news from various angles. From 1965

onwards, it has been customary to pay obeisance, as it were, to the lodestar paper ‘The Structure of Foreign News’ by Johann Galtung and Mari Ruge in the *Journal of International Peace Research*. It is considered a landmark study (Watson, 1998: 117), and their list of ‘news values’ continues to be cited as ‘prerequisites’ at the beginning of the 21st century (Herbert, 2000: 72-73).

My experience in journalism suggests that journalists are quick to identify news or the news potential of events---in other words, they know exactly what is news and what is not news---but few venture to define it. As Ericson *et al* rightly observe, ‘They can recognize it when they are engaged in the work, but they become inarticulate when they attempt to describe it apart from doing it, except by saying that they have a “nose for news” ’ (1987: 20). A journalist may find academic attempts to deconstruct news quite disorienting. Several newsroom studies investigated the notion of news (Hartley, 1982; Gans, 1980; Golding & Elliott, 1979; Hall, et al, 1978, Schlesinger, 1978, Halloran, et al, 1970; etc). According to Hall, ‘journalists speak of “the news” as if events select themselves...they speak as if which is the “most significant” news story, and which “news angles” are most salient are divinely inspired’ (1982: 234). Tuchman sees news judgement as ‘the sacred knowledge, the secret ability of the newsman which differentiates him from other people’ (1972: 672). Schudson notes that on this issue, there is some tension between journalists and social scientists, as the former are uncomfortable with phrases such as ‘constructing the news’, ‘making news’, ‘social construction of reality’, etc.; ‘such language propels journalists into a fierce defence of their work, on the familiar ground that they just report the world as they see it’ (Schudson, 2000: 176).

Hall’s definition of news has been influential in the discourse of news production:

(News) is a *product*, a human construction: a staple of that system of ‘cultural production (to use Theodore Adorno’s phrase) we call the mass media. Journalists and editors select, from the mass of potential news items, the events which constitute ‘news’ for any day. In part, this is done by implicit reference to some unstated and unstatable criteria of *the significant*. News selection thus rests on inferred knowledge about the audience, inferred assumptions about society, and a professional code or ideology (1982: 148).

Galtung and Ruge’s list of news values has been revised and expanded several times over the years. However, none of the lists can be said to be comprehensive; neither can there be a guarantee that if an event fulfils one of more values in the lists, it would take the form of a news item. For example, how do the news values help explain the

non-coverage of the many ongoing conflicts around the globe? Also, is it not possible that the ‘areas of invisibility’ identified in international reporting (DFID, 2000; Sreberny-Mohammadi *et al*, 1985) are replicated *within* nations even though events in such regions may theoretically fulfil several conditions of newsworthiness? Is it possible that some news values ‘veto’ or neutralise others? As Cottle rightly observes:

The complexity of news variously understood as institutional process, journalistic product, social symbolism, cultural practice, discursive and narrative form, or even social and civic ritual as well as informational resource and source of entertainment and pleasure, all combine to ‘limit’ the explanatory claims of any one study or retrospective account (1990).

The next section takes a closer look at the fundamentals of news and news values.

3.2.1 News Values

Several studies have used the notion of ‘news value’ to explain the selection of news items, the prospects of events being considered newsworthy or the actual formulation of news. It is suggested that news values ‘provide a cognitive basis for decisions about selection, attention, understanding, representation, recall, and the uses of news information in general’ (van Dijk, 1988: 119). The many lists of ‘news values’---starting from Galtung & Ruge (1965) to Harcup & O’Neill (2001)---have been drawn up in western settings. Foreign news, or external threat, has been a common focus of inquiry in such studies; rarely have such studies been conducted in non-western settings, particularly in vast and deeply multicultural settings such as India, where the news ‘values’ may shift according to focus, perspective and locale, and may themselves reflect the complex matrix of the socio-cultural environment. Moreover, studies of news values have rarely focussed on ‘internal’ differences within a given national society.

Before narrowing the focus on factors that may inhibit the coverage of conflicts, I present a brief overview of news values that are supposed to render events newsworthy. Application of the same values to situations *within* a national society or intra-nation situations rather than international situations, may enrich the debate and reveal new insights into the relationship between media and a national society. For example, which regions or datelines figure more often in the news discourse; how do perceptions of news differ between national, regional and local media organisations?

There is an extensive literature on ‘news values’ (for example, Epstein, 1973; Roshco, 1975; Tuchman, 1978a; Gans, 1979; Fishman, 1980; Hartley, 1982; Ericson

et al, 1987, Bell, 1991; Zelizer, 1992, etc.); the studies built upon the framework suggested by Galtung & Ruge, and attempted to further specify and expand the informal (largely unspoken by journalists) codes of newsworthiness.

As suggested in Chapter 2, ethno-national conflicts in Kashmir and the northeast demonstrate high levels of terrorism, violence and local angst. Thus, theoretically, they attract several values for being newsworthy. In their analysis of the RAND Corporation's data on terrorist behaviour between 1968 and 1986, involving hundreds of groups and over 5,000 events, Weimann & Winn note that 'bombing is in fact a less effective means of gaining coverage than kidnapping and other forms of violence' (1993: 118). Based on Galtung & Ruge's study, they explore how well terrorist events satisfy requirements of news values, and once again echo the presumed inevitability of terrorist events resulting in media content.

I present a brief overview of news values based on Galtung & Ruge's list:

1. **FREQUENCY:** Events that are compatible to the frequency of news production are more likely to be considered newsworthy. Terrorists are known to factor in the media's production schedule while planning events. As Schmid and de Graaf observe: 'How sophisticated the media strategy of the Red Brigades is can be inferred from the fact that they choose Wednesdays and Saturdays as their preferred communication days, knowing that on Thursdays and Sundays papers are thicker and have higher circulation figures' (1982: 51). The 11 September attacks took place around 9 am in New York, and seemed to have been timed to catch prime time slots on US television;
2. **THRESHOLD:** Events must pass a threshold of emotionally significant meanings to be covered by the media; below a certain threshold the media will not report an event. Thus ten deaths in Burkina Faso may not make news in the Leicester press, but if the toll goes up in hundreds, it may be considered newsworthy. Weimann & Winn suggest that terrorist events and the numbers of victims in conflict situations normally encounter little difficulty in achieving the required level of significance of coverage' (1994: 119);
3. **UNAMBIGUITY:** Journalists prefer events that are uncomplicated. As Livingstone observes, 'Unlike wars and most revolutions...acts of terrorist violence normally have a beginning and an end, can be encompassed in a few minutes of air time, (and) possess high degree of drama' (1982: 62). According to Hartley, 'Events don't have to be simple, necessarily (though

that helps), but the range of possible meanings must be limited' (1982: 77). This makes crime news highly newsworthy since such events are clear and their range of meanings are limited;

4. **MEANINGFULNESS:** An event has to be culturally meaningful within the cultural framework of the audience, since the media is known to pay attention to events that are familiar and culturally proximate. Hartley divides this value into two: cultural proximity and relevance (1982: 77), while for Golding & Elliott, proximity has two senses, cultural and geographical (1979: 119). A British national killed in Saudi Arabia makes an event more meaningful and newsworthy in the British press even though the foreign country may not be culturally proximate.
5. **UNEXPECTEDNESS:** This value holds that an event should be unexpected for it to be considered newsworthy, a factor that is easily met by acts of conflict-related violence and terrorism. Weimann & Winn observe that 'By its very nature...terrorism embodies surprise' (1994: 121). In conflict situations, violence and terrorism is an ongoing phenomenon and not unexpected. A daily toll of about 10 to 15 killings in Kashmir is considered routine, is almost 'expected' by journalists and decision-makers, but an act of terrorism resulting in death of hundreds makes it more newsworthy;
6. **CONSONANCE:** This relates to the predictability of an event. As Hartley observes, 'If the media expect something to happen, then it will' (1982: 77). The 1970 study by Halloran *et al* is considered a classic study in which it was found that the news coverage of the anti-Vietnam war demonstration in Grosvenor Square in London in 1968 concentrated exclusively on what the media expected: violence.
7. **CONTINUITY:** If an event is defined and presented as news, events of the same type in other locales are likely to be considered newsworthy 'even if their dramatic intensity or *amplitude* is much lower' (Weimann & Win, 1994: 122; emphasis in original). Moreover, an event that has been covered will continue to be covered for some time as a 'running story'.
8. **COMPOSITION:** This refers to mixture of different kinds of events. 'If a newspaper or TV bulletin is packed with major foreign stories, a relatively insignificant domestic story will be included to balance the mixture.

Alternatively, if a major story is running, other similar events may be selected for inclusion in a “round-up” of stories on that subject’ (Hartley, 1982: 78);

9. REFERENCE TO ELITE INDIVIDUALS: If well known public figures become victims as kidnap hostages or casualties, journalists are more likely to be considered such events newsworthy. As Marighela observed in the Brazilian situation, ‘to kidnap figures known for their artistic, sporting or other activities who have not expressed any political views may possibly provide a form of propaganda favourable to the revolutionaries’ (nd: 103);
10. REFERENCE TO ELITE NATIONS: This underpins the media imperialism thesis that privileges the North Atlantic region on the ground that the important mass media are essentially American and West European (Tunstall, 1977). Conflicts involving Western powers (Kosovo, Gulf war, ‘war against terrorism’, etc) are more likely to be extended sustained coverage by western news powers (CNN, BBC, Reuters, AP etc.). As Weimann & Winn suggest, ‘The marked elite-centeredness of the media helps to account for the focus of modern terrorism on Western societies. Media-oriented terrorists appreciate that they are more apt to attract attention if they design their acts with Western locales and/or Western victims in mind’ (1994: 124);
11. PERSONALISATION: This holds that an event that is reported from the perspective of individuals involved is preferred as individuals are easier to identify, easier to report than social processes and easier to pit ‘good’ actors against ‘bad’ ones. Personalisation helps readers relate to reports on a personal and individual basis;
12. NEGATIVITY: Van Dijk suggests that ‘negativity’ is the ‘best known’ of the news values (1988: 123). As per this value, ‘bad news’ is favoured over ‘good news’, ‘because the former usually conforms to a higher number of...factors’ (Allan, 1999: 63). Hartley suggests that negative events adhere to five values: ‘It is generally *unexpected*, *unambiguous*, it *happens quickly*, it is *consonant* with general expectations about the state of the world, and hence its *threshold* is lower than that for positive news’ (1982: 78; emphasis in original).

It is suggested that for a story to make it to the news columns, it has to score well on the above checklist. Hartley observes that ‘the more of these conditions a given story fulfils, the bigger it will be’ (1982: 79), and cites the instance of how the murder of John Lennon met virtually all the pre-conditions. The values have been identified as a

set of shared assumptions among news professionals, but they cannot be said to be ideologically neutral as they may ‘actually disguise the more important ideological determinants of a story’ (Hartley, 1982: 80). According to Allan, news values are subject to constant change, but ‘it is still possible to point to these and related news values as being relatively consistent criteria informing these assignments of significance’ (1999:63).

The terminology of ‘news values’ varied, but most researchers develop their exertions around the list drawn up by Galtung & Ruge, and labour under the positivism that that each news value adds to the newsworthiness of a story. However, the possibility of one or more value negating others has rarely been considered. Is it not possible that even though a story may be in consonance with some values but is ‘vetoed’ by others? For example, stories about violence, conflict and terrorism may score high on the scale of news values, but may not make it to the news columns if they are ranged against, for example, the value of ‘cultural proximity’? The possibility that violence and terrorism too need to be culturally proximate, and that they may not guarantee news coverage, has rarely been investigated.

It is worth noting that the ‘we’-‘they’ socio-cultural binary that underpins the theory proposed in this study is reflected in the discourse of news production. For example, in Hartley’s explanation of the new value of ‘Meaningfulness’:

Meaningfulness (a) Cultural proximity: events that accord with the cultural background of the news-gatherers will be seen as more meaningful than others, and so more liable to be selected. This works in two ways. First, Islamic, third-world and oriental events may not be seen as self-evidently meaningful to Western reporters unlike European, American or even Russian events. Second, within “our” culture, events connected with underprivileged or ethnic groups, with regions remote from centralized bases of news organisations, or with specifically working-class culture, will be seen as less intrinsically meaningful than those associated with central, official, literate culture. (b) Relevance: events in far-off cultures, classes or regions will nevertheless become newsworthy if they impinge on the news-gatherer’s “home culture”---usually in the form of a threat; as with OPEC and the (mostly Arab) countries with oil---their lifestyles, customs and beliefs are suddenly fascinating for Western journalists (Hartley, 1982: 77; emphasis added).

A more recent formulation is clearer:

‘*Cultural specificity*: events which conform to the ‘maps of meaning’ shared by newsworker and news audience have a greater likelihood of being selected, a form of ethnocentrism which gives priority to news about ‘people like us’ at

the expense of those who “*don’t share our way of life*” (Allan, 1999: 63; emphasis added).

Van Dijk’s observation that ‘negativity’ is the ‘best known’ news value, also seems to be based on the ‘we’-‘they’ binary:

(Negative) information is a test of general norms and values. Especially when deviance of various types is involved, it provides *ingroup* members with information about *outgroups or outcasts* and the application of a consensus of social norms and values that helps define and confirm the *own group* (1988: 123; emphasis added).

The socio-cultural binary model set out later in this chapter is essentially a cultural formulation. It reifies what has been hinted at in the ‘news values’ discourse: that even potentially high newsworthy events such as terrorism and violence may be hostage to the value of meaningfulness (cultural and geographical proximity). The proposed thesis is based on my argument that the socio-cultural environment has a pre-eminent role to play *even* in relation to the coverage of terrorism, conflict and violence. The model, thus, is located within the ‘cultural’ approach to production of news. First, I discuss the three approaches to a sociological analysis of news, best exemplified by Schudson (2000).

3.2.2 Sociology of News Production

Three main approaches are outlined in Schudson’s seminal analysis of news: political economy, social organisation and cultural. Each approach may help study different research questions, while some may require a combination of two or more approaches. However, as Schudson notes, all three have strengths and weakness, and even taken together have ‘fallen short of providing adequate comparative and historical perspectives on news production’ (177). I present a brief overview of the first two approaches before discussing the cultural approach adopted in this study.

Political Economy

The political economy of news is a macro perspective that suggests a direct relationship between economic ownership and the dissemination of messages that maintain the legitimacy and values of a class society (McQuail, 1994, Curran et al, 1982, Murdock, 1980, Herman & Chomsky, 1988). Here, economy is considered the primary driver of media content; it argues that ‘the class which has the means of material production at its disposal does have control at the same time of the means of

mental production; and it does seek to use them for the weakening of opposition to the established order' (Murdock, 1980: 37).

The political economy approach is popular and widely used in media research, but it was not used here as the main approach for the following reasons:

- Industrially, both Kashmir and the northeast are officially categorised as 'backward' states. They are also categorised as 'special' for funding purposes (due to poor local revenue generation they are largely funded out of the finances of the federal government). The main industry in Kashmir has been tourism, which has been badly affected by the insurgency. Northeast is rich in forest resources, tea and oil, and has a relatively better manufacturing-industrial base. Advertising revenue and circulation of national newspapers from both states is low; thus, theoretically, the coverage of *both* conflict zones should be low. But Kashmir continues to be accorded intensive coverage because of its deeper political and cultural resonance in modern India. This deeper resonance seems to overrule political-economic factors involved;
- Politically, Kashmir has a smaller presence (6 seats) in the Lok Sabha, the lower house of Indian parliament, compared to the northeast (24 seats). Theoretically, the northeast should figure more prominently in the political-parliamentary discourse than Kashmir, but that is not the case.

Thus, a political economy approach would be unlikely to unravel the low status of northeast and the high status of Kashmir in the national press. I do not deny that at the broader level economic and political processes play an important role in the determination of news content, but in this case, I argue that examining the deeper resonances of a socio-cultural system---usually ignored by materialists---may be more relevant to the overall objectives of this study.

As Chapter 2 set out, Kashmir and the northeast have different 'pulls' among the elites and the people; hence even though Kashmir has a lesser political representation in parliament (six seats) than the northeast (24 seats), it evokes stronger resonance among journalists and the elites. Kashmir's political importance in modern India is based on socio-cultural factors that connect with India's main religions and traditions of Hinduism and Islam. A political economy approach would be unlikely to address these deeper factors, but is useful to explain some of the interview responses: that extensive coverage of the northeast might alienate the readership of the national press.

Social Organisation

This approach was introduced by sociologists, and emphasises that occupational and organisational constraints in the working of journalists determine patterns of news coverage (Molotch & Lester, 1974; Tuchman, 1978a; Gans, 1979; Fishman, 1980; Gitlin, 1980). This approach points out that the organisational requirements of the media shape news, and professionalism largely serves organisational interests. It holds that since journalists deal with a bureaucratised world they cannot bring their biases into news. Organisations that seek media coverage need to function in an organised and bureaucratised manner to meet the demands of the media. However, this approach does not help explain situations when even though actors function in tandem with the media's routines, they may not make it to the news columns; for example, rebel groups in the northeast are known to use the media to send political messages, but are not always successful.

Moreover, Kashmir constitutionally is part of the state of Jammu & Kashmir, which is one of the 28 states in India. The northeast region, on the other hand, comprises seven states, each with a separate legislature and an executive establishment within the national federal framework. This means seven separate local government infrastructures, bureaucracies, etc., constituting seven distinct sources of news about local politics, economy, etc. Thus, from the social organisation perspective, the northeast region should figure more prominently compared to the single state government infrastructure of Jammu & Kashmir.

Socialisation of new recruits in newsrooms ensures that dominant ideologies are soon imbibed and perpetuated in professional activities (Breed, 1997: 109). New members are socialised into the profession, which means that they taken on a 'range of beliefs, values, basic assumptions and understandings as well as sets of occupational routines in order to be accepted as qualified and successful. Much of this adoption and adaption goes on at unconscious or sub-conscious levels' (Halloran, 1998: 20). This may manifest itself in several ways. For example, even though Britain is officially committed to multiculturalism and equality of citizens, the London-based national press would be unlikely to accord Page 1 'banner' treatment to a hypothetical clash between Shia and Sunni Muslims of Bradford, but a clash between the white majority and Bradford Muslims may well be considered worthy of such coverage. In this context, it is significant that clashes between Muslim and white youths at Oldham, Burnley in north England in 2001 were widely covered in the British media.

The extensive coverage of clashes involving the majority white community may well be explained within the normative paradigm of journalism: to raise awareness about the dangers of the rise of the fascist British National Party. But the fact remains that it is the involvement of the British 'we'---and the journalists' understanding of this---that elevates such a clash in the national press, while a conflict between Asians of Pakistani or Bangladeshi origin may not resonate to the same degree, since it would not interest the 'we' overly. A similar example in the Indian context would be a clash between warring tribes or between lower castes being reported in brief or not reported at all, but if the clash were to involve high caste Hindus or Muslims as one of the parties, it would stand a good chance of being covered as a major event. Such selectivity, reflected in the British media, has hegemonic overtones, but reproduced on a daily basis as a matter of course; it is naturalised and taken for granted. The range of issues and events that the mainstream British press routinely ignores may well be seen from contents of the Asian or Afro-Caribbean press.

Cultural Approach

The cultural approach looks at the media as an institution that operates within a given culture or a symbolic system which shapes the news and in relation to which reporters perform their duties. Curran et al (1982: 27) note that 'culturalist studies seek to place media and other practices within a society conceived of as a complex expressive totality'. Based on the Gramscian concept of hegemony, this approach argues that a ruling ideology is not imposed but appears to exist by virtue of an arrived-at consensus. In other words, hegemony works by way of discourse and not necessarily through political and economic power (Hall, 1982). This approach can also be called a humanist approach since it views journalists and news-workers as subjective individuals infused with their own cultures, strengths and weaknesses, and not as cold, mechanical and objective individuals who are supposed to drop their identities the moment they step into their professional roles. It also holds that various background assumptions that play an important role in the selection, exclusion and framing of news largely go unnoticed in the cut and thrust of daily news production, but they determine and influence the range of issues that may be debated; what can be said and what should not be said.

Of these three macro approaches, I use the cultural approach as the main perspective to conceptualise the socio-cultural binary in the next section. The news value of

cultural proximity (meaningfulness) is embedded in this approach, which makes it a more appropriate tool for this study. The reality is that in the age of globalisation and digital age, beyond the technology-driven razzmatazz of newspapers, magazines or television bulletins, news remains a 'human construction' (Hall, 1982: 148); it is subject to the deeds of omission and commission that characterise every human endeavour.

This perspective has come in for some criticism (Curran, 2000, Stevenson, 1995). Curran (1990) argues that the cultural perspective overlooks an important determinant: the ownership and control of the media and concentrates too much on the ideological aspect. He argues that economy of the media is the most important factor in deciding what goes into the newspaper and what is left out whereas the cultural perspective assumes that control of the media lies outside, and it is based on the assumption that journalists enjoy a high degree of autonomy and that their reporting is structured by cultural and ideological influences. Similarly, Stevenson (1995: 46) argues that the concepts of hegemony and ideology are 'essential for an understanding of the information age'. However, such debates 'should be reconnected with concerns related to political economy...' Although these scholars do not deny cultural perspective, they advocate a combination of materialist (political economy) and cultural approaches for media studies.

In the cultural perspective, the media works within the sphere of consensus in a society (Hallin, 1989); a consensus comprising what Parekh calls 'operative public values' (1994: 216). According to Hall (1977, 1982), the media simply bring unusual events to the 'map of meaning' so that the audiences may make sense of them; this presupposes the existence of a cultural map of social world that forms the basis of the audiences' knowledge. Newspaper sections reflect this cultural map: politics, national, foreign, sports, economy/business, etc. Within this arrangement some spheres, institutions and events are privileged. Hall et al (1981) argue that the classification, ranking and ordering of events in themselves indicate clear preferences and interpretations. In the course of production of news, certain contexts are rendered 'meaningful' while 'normal' and 'abnormal' behaviour is also constructed, which strengthens a common culture, what Shils calls the 'central value system'. In other words, 'a modern morality play takes place before us in which the "devil" is both symbolically and physically cast out from the society by its guardians' (Hall et al, 1981: 352). Thus, a particular image of a society gets constructed as representing the

interests of all. The groups and voices outside this consensus are seen as deviant or dissident or mad. As van Dijk perceptively observes, 'the macrodimensions of social structure, history, or culture are enacted or translated at the microlevel of news discourse and its processing' (1988).

Journalists cannot proceed or function without taking into account the prevailing social-cultural ethos. I argue that apart from professional and organisational influences, the socio-cultural binary of 'we' and 'they' also affects journalists' attitude and approach to events/issues involving different sections of society, particularly in multicultural situations such as India and Britain.

3.2.3 Summary

This section has identified the premise in the discourse of 'violence/terrorism and media' that is under scrutiny: that events involving violence and terrorism naturally result in news coverage. This fundamental assumption has rarely been questioned even though there is much evidence in national and international contexts that the media do not cover *all* acts of terrorism or violence. As Weimann & Winn observe, 'less than one-third of all terrorist events are actually reported' (1994: 71). In the discourse of news values too, violence and terrorism are privileged as the prime causative factors of news content. I suggest that the news value of meaningfulness (geographical and cultural proximity) may have the potential to veto or neutralise other values such as negativity, unambiguity and unexpectedness, *even* in relation to events of violence and terrorism.

The cultural approach to news production is mainly used in this study; the other two approaches---political economy and social production---are complementary. The three approaches cannot be seen as exclusive but complementary, each adding grist to different aspects of the study.

As Schudson rightly points out:

Most research on the culture of news production takes it for granted that, at least within a given national tradition, there is one common news standard among journalists. This is one of the convenient simplifications of the sociology of journalism that merits critical attention, and might indeed be a point at which a lot of current assumptions about how journalism works begin to unravel (2000: 193).

Located in the cultural approach to production of news, the next section builds the conceptual socio-cultural binary that underpins the thesis.

3.3 Conceptualising 'We' and 'They' Binary

In this study, journalists are seen as subjective individuals, not as value-free or impassive robot-like professionals who purportedly 'leave their conscious personal values at home' (Gans, 1980: 182). Although most journalists make every effort to be objective, impartial and fair in their professional endeavours, their exertions are invariably conducted within a socio-cultural framework, which determines the nature and limits of their activities. A sense of *we-ness* pervades their output from the primary stage of selection, encoding and transmission; this 'we'-ness is largely unstated and unarticulated, but lurks around in the background as journalists go about performing their professional activities. A clearer picture of news production (or non-production) may emerge when the unstated is brought to the fore.

The location (local, regional, national) and category (general, financial, specialist) of a publication largely defines what journalists may consider to be of interest and newsworthy to the 'we', the target audience. Journalists of a 'national' newspaper based in the capital may privilege events within the nation as part of their sense of 'we', and perceive events and issues of other countries as 'their' events. Only if this sense of 'we' is involved or affected in other countries would the events be deemed newsworthy (for example, the coverage in the London-based national press of British nationals arrested in Gulf countries; or the coverage in the Indian press about achievements of expatriates in the IT industry, etc).

The first point I wish to make is that the socio-cultural binary of 'we' and 'they' is not a rigid formulation, but shifts according to locale, focus and perspective. For example, the Scots in Edinburgh may consider themselves as the 'we' and the English as the 'they', but the situation reverses when viewed from London; similarly, Hindus and Muslims in India may alternately view each other as 'we' and 'they'. This discursive nature of the binary, however, does not question its existence; it is assumed in most social settings even if it is not spelled out in clear terms: 'a sense of *we-ness* and *they-ness*... appears to run through all human societies' (Elliott, 1986: 1; emphasis in original). A clear identification of the constituents of 'we' and 'they' may well be considered politically incorrect in most modern societies given ongoing political debates about multiculturalism, recognition and citizenship. However, as Blair observed in a discussion on *Star Trek*: 'Every civilization needs its aliens. The problem of the alien is essential to every civilization, which inescapably defines itself in terms of what it is not' (1982: 183).

The terms 'we' and 'they' are apparently simple notions. They are invoked in routine conversation, but reify a deep-rooted understanding of the socio-cultural environment. Announcing the 'war on terrorism' after 11 September, President Bush declared 'You are either for us or against us'. The binary is so banal that it usually goes unnoticed in the same manner that a flag fluttering diurnally goes unnoticed on public buildings as a symbol of 'our' nationalism (Billig, 1995). Its surreptitious usage and taken-for-granted understanding is not dissimilar from Gramsci's concept of common sense, defined as 'the uncritical and largely unconscious way in which a person perceives the world' (1971), or Bourdieu's concept of 'doxa':

A quasi-perfect correspondence between the objective order and the subjective principles of organization (as in ancient societies), the natural and social worlds appear as self-evident...The instruments of knowledge of the social world are in this case (objectively) political instruments which contribute to the reproduction of the social world by producing immediate adherence to the world, see as self-evident and undisputed, of which they are the product and of which they reproduce the structures in a transformed form (1977: 164).

As Elliott points out, words such as 'us' and 'them' or 'we' and 'they' should not be 'disparaged because they are commonplace. On the contrary they well describe the collective feelings or attitudes of individuals who regard themselves as belonging to nations, subnations, social classes, religious sects or any other identity types with a sense of distinctiveness of their own' (1986: 6).

The socio-cultural binary---among other binaries such as upper class-lower class, gender and caste-based, etc.---enters media discourse as part of the inherent selectivity in the process of news production, but overt examples are not uncommon. Announcing a series of articles on British Islam after 11 September, a full-page announcement in *The Guardian* asked: 'How much do *we* know about *them*?' (emphasis added). The newspaper did not identify the social groups it considered the 'we' or 'them', but it was evidently addressing its majority white, middle class, Christian readership, and categorising Muslims as the socio-cultural 'they' of British society. The question seemed to deny the very possibility of British Muslims being considered part of the readership of *The Guardian* or the British mainstream. After 11 September, there was a rash of articles in the western press that openly invoked the binary of 'we' and 'they' (Sreberny, 2002, 220-234; Said, 2001). Journalists, being part of the same socio-cultural environment to which they cater, cannot be expected to

be untouched by what Parekh calls 'operative public values' (1994: 216) or the Shilsian 'central value system'.

3.3.1 Identity and Group Consciousness

The problematic of 'identity' has long haunted mankind. Who am I? Where do I belong? Who are my people with whom I can interact? Such questions have been debated for centuries as part of efforts to identify individuals and others. As Smelser observes, 'The primary good that we distribute to one another is membership in some human community' (1981: 281). A desire to belong, or membership of society, is one of the fundamental characteristics of humankind. Sreberny suggests that the first impulses of group consciousness begins with the family, the relationship between the '(m)other and child', which later runs through various levels ranging from national social structures to the most macro of global system processes (2002: 224). Identity is the conscious awareness by members of belonging to a group and implies some degree of reflection, articulation, emotional connection, sharing commonalities and difference from others. According to Elliott, '(Group) consciousness or a sense of *we-ness* simply springs from the individual's identification with familiars as opposed to strangers...(The) essence of *societas* is the sense of *we-ness* which, however, need not be a totality in itself, but may be expressed at different levels and at different strengths' (1986: 11-12).

The sense of 'we'-ness' and 'they-ness' is developed by the usage of words such as 'my' or 'own' people; 'homeland', 'motherland' or 'fatherland', and 'mother-tongue'. Elliott suggests that 'One's own people are regarded as kith and kin or own kind in the language of the family or tribe. Great leaders too are often called Fathers or Mothers of their People. A respected Royal Family too can assist the sense of being a national family' (1986: 7). Some conceptual models relevant to understanding the socio-cultural binary of 'we' and 'they' are: 'inside-outside' (Sreberny, 2002), inner and outer psychological worlds (Klein, 1975), Elias' individual-group, We-I balances and established-outsiders (Mennell, 1992) and the state system-centric notion of acts and attachments in international relations (Walker, 1993). These models, however, are not rigid or fixed in time and space, and should 'not be seen as differing spatial "levels" of analysis, but rather as structuring imaginaries that simultaneously compete for our identification' (Sreberny, 2002: 224).

As Elliott observes:

People only display attitudes of *us* due to an acquired sense of *we-ness* determined largely by a sense of *they-ness* in relation to others...(Group) consciousness involves social attachments going beyond personal ones and immediate relatives and friends to embrace unknown individuals conceived to be own kind whom one may not know personally at all---except that they are conceived to be own people to whom one belongs, by virtue of shared language, accent, religion or nation. To such people, or the country where they live, one feels a sense of attachment of even greater intensity than for single individuals on whose behalf one would rarely be prepared to die. Group attachment, therefore, imports loyalty and allegiance to *us* in the face of outsiders. (One) notes the correlation of *us* and *them* and the prevalence of both ingroup and outgroup behaviour at the same time (1986: 8-9).

Elias' work at Winston Parva in Leicester is central to developing an understanding of the 'we'-'they' dichotomy in society. The suburb of about 5,000 inhabitants saw itself, and was also seen by others, as being divided among the 'established' sections of society and the 'outsiders'. The section that was seen as 'outsiders', were regarded by the more prosperous sections as inferior; a perception that came to be internalised by the 'outsiders' as well. An unfavourable collective 'we-image' was created for the consumption of the 'outsiders', who incorporated it into their individual self-image. The section targeted as 'outsiders' could not retaliate because, as Elias observed, 'their own conscience was on the side of detractors. They themselves agreed with the "village" people that it was bad not to be able to control one's children or get drunk and noisy and violent...They could be shamed by allusions to this bad behaviour of their neighbours because by living in the same neighbourhood the blame, the bad name attached to it, according to rules of affective thinking, was automatically applied to them too' (1965: 101-2). This study also provides more proof of the ability of a dominant social group to ensure that its value system is accepted as *the* value system of the society; of how an unfavourable collective 'we'-image is generated among the people of the northeast (see northeast journalists' responses; Chapter 5, pages 157-164).

The sense of 'we' and 'they' is developed through socialisation with familiars and strangers as well as through educational texts and the media that may reflect the prevailing socio-cultural power relations in society. Elias's work suggests that it is impossible to conceive of an individual separate from the socio-cultural environment, but he also recognised that the constituents or the definition of 'we' and 'they' may change over time:

One's sense of personal identity is closely connected with the 'we' and 'they' relationship of one's group, and with one's position within those units which one speaks as 'we' and 'they'. Yet the pronouns do not always refer to the same people. The figurations to which they currently refer can change in the course of a lifetime, just as any person does himself. This is true not only of all people considered separately, but of all groups and even of all societies. Their members universally say 'we' of themselves and 'they' of other people; but they may say 'we' and 'they' of different people as time goes by (1970: 128).

Thus, below the normative discourses of democracy, multiculturalism and nationalism lies a discursive web of relations symbolised by the socio-cultural binary of 'we' and 'they'; it is based on material as well as psychological factors. When the 'we' is used in relation to a dominant social group, it may demonstrate the characteristics of Gramscian hegemony, as the 'central value system' (Shils, 1975: 4) is sought to be applied to all sections, including the minorities and the periphery. The 'we-ness' of the dominant social group is echoed in what Shils calls a society's 'centre', defined as the 'centre of the order of symbols, of values and beliefs, which govern the society. It is the centre because it is the ultimate and irreducible; and it is felt to be such by many who cannot give explicit articulation to its irreducibility' (1975: 3). For example, the 'centre' of British society may be associated with the 'ultimate and irreducible' values of the majority white, Christian, Anglo-Saxon, English-speaking people, rather than the minority Asians or Afro-Caribbean people, which was reflected in recent debates about Britishness/Englishness (for example, the controversial report of the Commission on the Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain headed by Bhikhu Parekh). The majority white section of British society may see itself as the British 'we' and the minorities as the 'they', a pairing that may be so banal that its existence and implications may routinely go unquestioned. A society's 'centres', as Shils notes, 'impose themselves by means other than coercion and manipulation, which are more than places where decisions are made and coordinating functions are performed' (1975: xxxii).

As stated earlier, the idea is not invest the 'we'-'they' binary with pejorative, conspiratorial or insular connotations, but to take cognisance of the unequal power relations in society as a way to explore the news differential in the Indian national press. Referring to the Winston Parva study, Mennell points out that it may be tempting to interpret the findings in terms of 'prejudice' or 'discrimination' practiced by individuals who happened not to like each other, but adds that Elias understood the established-outsiders dichotomy as a dynamic social process rather than simply as the

outcome of the motives, intentions and actions of isolated individuals (1992: 121). Branding one group as inferior and making it stick, Elias argued, is a function of a specific figuration formed by two groups with one another: 'The centrepiece of such a figuration is an uneven, tensile balance of power...They are uneven because one group has succeeded in monopolising some power resource' (Mennell, 1992: 121). Mennell echoes Bourdieu's concept of 'doxa' in the observation that where the balance of power between established and outsiders is extremely unequal, it is common for people to believe that the differentials of power are inherent in the very 'nature' of mankind; the natural and social worlds appear as self-evident (for example, the low 'we-image' among the lower castes in India).

The low image of tribes held and propagated in the mainstream Indian public discourse is a manifestation of extreme uneven power relations in Indian society. As Mennell observes:

Where the balance of power is very uneven, the oppressed and exploited cannot escape from their position. This is one of the conditions which makes it most likely that they will take into their own we-image what the established say about them. This process of stigmatisation is a very common element in domination within such highly unequal power balances...The outsiders are always dirty, morally unreliable and lazy, among other things (1992: 122).

The socio-cultural binary, thus, can be a key tool to explore and identify group perceptions and consciousness. The next section discusses the binary in the context of nationalism and the formation of modern nation-states.

3.3.2 The National 'We' and 'They'

The discourse of nations and nationalism is premised on the socio-cultural binary of 'we' and 'they', as reflected in its terminology: 'ethnie', 'core', 'mainstream', 'national self', 'homeland', 'Father of the nation', majorities and minorities, etc. The formation of nations or national identity is based on constructing a 'core'. A nation, among other essentials, should have a territorial conception, which is seen as 'historic homeland'. As Smith notes, 'The homeland becomes a repository of historic memories and associations, the places where "our" sages, saints and heroes lived, worked, prayed and fought. All this makes the homeland unique' (1991: 9). Normatively, a nation presupposes a measure of common values and tradition among the population, 'or at any rate (among) its "core" community' (Smith, 1991: 11). A

national identity provides a powerful means of defining and locating individual selves (British, Indian, German, etc.).

The nationalist project is based on several assumptions about common myths and historical memories; a common, mass public culture, a historic territory; common legal rights and duties of members, etc. National consciousness involves collective feelings of own kind shared by a majority of the inhabitants, if not all. Elliott suggests that this consciousness is merely one among several types of group identification, 'the causes of which are basically psychological...it is the identification of individuals which matters and their psychological sense of *us* and *them*' (1986: 113,114; emphasis in original). At the macro level, all members of a nation may consider themselves as the 'we' and members of other nations as 'they'. But due to the global reality of 'people belonging to groups within groups within groups' (Mennell, 1994: 177), the 'we'-'they' dichotomy problematises the socio-cultural power relations within a specific nation. For example, an Indian ('we') can be distinguished as someone who is *not* a Pakistani, British, American, etc. (the 'they'); but when the dichotomy is applied *within* a specific context, say Indian, one enters a socio-cultural minefield. Who constitute the Indian nation or the Indian 'we' and 'they'? The Bhikhu Parekh report similarly highlighted the socio-cultural minefield in Britain.

Nag suggests that the 'us'-'them' dynamic is essential to the construction of nationhood. He observes:

Nations have always been concerned about 'us' as against 'them'. Nations are obsessed with 'self' and discriminate 'the other'. The construction of the national self has always been only vis-à-vis 'the other'. The basis of such construction is differentiation. The 'self' consisted of people who share common cultural characteristics and such commonalities could be measured only by contrasting against those who do not. Thus construction of nationhood is a narcissist practice while nation-building was all about building walls around the 'self' and distancing from 'the other' (2001).

Pandey takes the 'we'-'they' dichotomy in the national context further in a formulation that is similar to Smith's idea of a 'dominant ethnies' (1986) determining the contours of a nation:

(Nations) are established by constructing a core or mainstream---the essential, natural, soul of the nation, as it is claimed. (Minorities) are constituted along with the nation---for they are the means of constituting national majorities or mainstreams. Nations, and nationalisms, are established by defining boundaries. However, these are not always---or perhaps, ever---sharply or easily defined. Nationalisms have therefore commonly moved along the path of identifying the core or mainstream of the nation. Alongside this emerge

notions of minorities, marginal communities, or elements, the fuzzy edges and grey areas around which the question of boundaries---geographical, social, cultural---will be negotiated or fought over (1999: 608).

The construction of a 'core' and minorities implies uneven power relations between the groups that constitute, or happen to be part of, a nation. Those who monopolise power and manage to impose their 'central value system' over the rest of society or nation, may routinely view themselves as the national 'we', and the minorities as the 'they'. Parekh notes that 'almost every modern state is characterised by cultural diversity, that is, by the presence of different and sometimes incompatible ways of life that seek in their own different ways to preserve themselves' (1994: 199). Thus, the uneven power relations within a nation makes the reification and persistence of the socio-cultural binary a sine qua non of most nation-states, even though it may not be routinely articulated amidst the (politically correct) debates about multiculturalism, citizenship and recognition. Multiculturalism itself is premised on the belief that minority cultures do not get their due, in societies that are dominated by particular socio-cultural groups.

The majority 'we' groups that monopolise power relations within a nation may be prone to impose their hegemony over the 'they'; the very understanding of the two categories is imbued with hegemonic connotations. In societies where the balance of power is extremely unequal, trajectories of hegemony may be passive in nature, since hegemony is rarely contested in such contexts. On the other hand, in contexts where the balance of power is not one-sided or almost equal, attempts to impose hegemony may be settled through confrontation. The first type of 'soft' hegemony may be viewed as passive, while the latter 'hard' variety as active.

In the passive 'doxic' setting, 'they' groups or the dominated groups may come to accept unquestioningly the state of affairs as the natural state of affairs; its members may not be even aware of the iniquitous fault-lines. Mennell observes that in such contexts 'it is very common for people to believe that the differentials of power are inherent in the very "nature" of mankind' (1992: 122). Here, hegemony works in a seemingly consensual and benign manner; its impact may be profound and more difficult to delineate since it is largely hidden from public awareness and may be more difficult to uncover. This study is an enquiry into this 'soft' form of hegemony, by which one view of society is made to appear as the 'natural' order of things, beyond rational questioning, which may completely de-legitimise or even obliterate other

possible versions of the world. As Billig observes, 'National identities are rooted within a powerful social structure, which reproduces hegemonic relations of inequity' (1995: 175).

The search for a perceived socio-cultural homogeneity not only underpins the primary task of forging a nation, but it continues in the form of 'nation-building' once the nation gets a state. According to Pandey (1999), this nationalist search for clarity, uniformity and 'purity' amidst manifest fluidity, uncertainty and inequality is unrealisable. Nation building, Nag observes, 'is also a coeval process of majority building so as to ensure that the hegemony of a community is unchallenged. Hence, the creation of nations also required constant shedding of people who do not fit the constructed identity or question the framework. This automatically involves minority persecution, ethnic cleansing, denial of political rights to smaller groups and such forms of atrocities due to which exodus of the persecuted takes place' (2001).

Hobsbawm remarks that nation watching is not as simple as bird watching; an observer can be taught to distinguish a mouse from a lizard but not a nation from other entities a priori, because there are as many definitions as there are perhaps nations (1990: 5-7). However, it can be safely said that nations are all about 'us', where 'us' may be perceived differently by those inside and outside a nation. A common theme of the morass of definitions of nations and nationalism is that this 'us' is all about homogeneity of culture and tradition that is sometimes given or sometimes constructed (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1983). All definitions in the literature of nations and nationalism refer to cultural commonalities as the primary prerequisite for the formation of a nation or nationality.

However, the search for cultural commonalities often involves exclusivity and insularity in which every outside group is viewed as the 'other'. In this sense, constructing a nation involves an unending process of 'othering'; first by shedding all others from its purview, and once formed, by looking at the characteristics of the other in its own self and then shedding the new 'others'. In the name of developing 'us', weak and marginal sections of the nation may be displaced, evicted or expelled not just in socio-cultural terms but also from the nation's territory (see Chapter 2 opening quote; Page 15). The socio-cultural binary is thus very much a reality in the 'national' context. As Nag suggests, 'nation-building or nation-creating process is actually an unending one of forming an exclusive elite group in the name of

homogeneity. It is like the peeling of an onion---continuous and ceaseless...(Finished) with the 'others', the nations begin creating 'others' from within itself" (2001).

The next section locates the binary in the Indian context and attempts to trace some of its main elements from a New Delhi perspective.

3.3.3. Binary in the Indian Context

Chapter 2 hinted at the possible elements of the Indian 'we' and 'they' from the perspective of population, religion, and language. I attempt a further narrowing down of these elements in this section. As Pinto observes, 'In the social system that is operative in India, a feeling of superiority and inferiority is ingrained in it' (2000: 194). The socio-cultural binary is essentially related to group consciousness, and of particular relevance here is the fact that in India, 'the group matters more. Everything in India is group oriented, be it an extended family, or in the wider caste or community...(In) India individualism has a lesser value than in the ego-centric West' (Chapman, 2000: 33).

Chapter 2's opening quote indicated the low status of tribes and other marginal groups in post-independence India; how some sections monopolised the state and resources. In this context, some determinants of the Indian 'we' from a national perspective are obvious, while others are not so clear. For example, Hinduism, being the religion of the majority, comes to be naturally privileged in the public discourse, though very much within the political-constitutional principles on which modern India is founded. In Britain, just as it would appear strange to describe a citizen as 'British Christian', the phrase 'Indian Hindu' would appear similarly incongruent. Analysing Hindi newspaper texts prior to independence in 1947, Pandey notes that 'Hindu' or 'Indian' was 'an irrelevant distinction; the terms were practically interchangeable' (1999: 611). In recent years, pro-Hindu political parties such as the Bharatiya Janata Party, with their vision of a 'Hindu *Rashtra* (nation)' and the slogan of 'one nation, one culture, one identity', have captured much political space.

The first and obvious characteristic of the binary is the Hindu-Muslim-secularism problematic that has underpinned not only the creation of India and Pakistan but also continues to engage the public sphere in modern India. The problematic enjoys a privileged position due to the sheer size of population of the two communities: 82 per cent Hindus and 12 per cent Muslims (1991 census) in a population of over 1 billion.

It is also accorded importance due to India's constitutional commitment to pluralism, secularism, to treat all religions equally and not to favour any religious group.

The second obvious level of the binary is at the level of caste within Hindu society. In his work on established and outsiders, Elias referred to the origins of the pariah castes in India. As Mennell observes, 'There, just as in the tiny local instance of Winston Parva, an explanation has to be sought in how groups came to impinge on each other in the past, although in India it was the newcomers who came as conquerors to fill the place of the established, and the old residents who formed the outsider group...The Indian caste system is a byword for durability and resistance to change' (1992: 122). The terminology of the chapter in which Chatterjee discusses the location of caste in colonial and postcolonial contexts itself is significant: 'The Nation and its Outcasts' (1993: 173-199).

In the hierarchical caste system, Brahmins form the highest and most privileged group while the more numerous lower castes form the excluded sections or social outcastes. The caste system comprises thousands of castes and sub-castes but the main divisions are four-fold: Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaisya and Sudras. The last section, Sudras or 'dalits' have been historically mistreated due to the domination of the Brahmins and the upper castes and their lot has not changed much in modern India despite impressive legislation and positive discrimination. Nag observes that 'even after independence dalits remained excluded from the power structure; in fact dalit resurgence was met with a vengeance from the Brahmin-bania³¹ dominant system' (2001). Analysing the state of lower castes from the perspective of ethnicity and ethnic groups in modern India, Pinto observes:

The competition for power among different social and ethnic groups was legitimised on the premise that all social and ethnic groups will have equal space and opportunities. However, with the majoritarian groups or the dominant social groups gradually aspiring for power, the attempt was to create a national culture. In the process the ethnic groups have felt marginalised and rejected...Besides providing only a private space for ethnic groups and their culture, the ethnic cultures are regarded as inferior primitive and therefore to be discarded. In opposition, the majoritarian state culture is perceived as progressive, modern, democratic, secular and enlightened...Thus, ethnic identities are merely tolerated and viewed as transitory, to be gradually assimilated into the homogenising national culture' (2000: 189-190).

³¹ Bania is a powerful upper caste mainly involved in trade and commerce.

There are thus two obvious levels at which the socio-cultural binary is self-evident: Hindu-Muslim and upper caste-lower castes. Other minorities include Christians, Parsis, Sikhs, tribes, etc. Of particular relevance to this study is the status of tribes who have a large presence in the northeast, and who have historically been seen as being outside the fold of Hindu society or at the lowest rung of the caste system. As Chapman observes, 'Another group who are sometimes put in this fifth class are the tribal peoples particularly from the near hill regions, who have themselves not accepted the Hindu framework of life nor the pantheon of Hindu Gods. They are often incorporated into modern economic life at the lowest levels' (2000: 34). Attempts by tribes to articulate grievances are seen as dissent that is then dealt with by force, as the history of the northeast in post-independence India indicates. Interview responses in Chapter 5 reiterate that decision makers have a condescending or patronising approach to the tribes, which results in cultural misunderstandings and alienation, particularly in the case of the northeast. Pinto observes that the otherness of tribes within Indian society evokes the modern-primitive theme:

In the social hierarchy, though ethnic groups are "outsiders", they are viewed as inferior, primitive and in need of being developed. Their cultural life is judged in the perspective of a majoritarian. The process of dealing with the legitimate aspirations of ethnic groups has led to an alienation of these groups from the state...The groups becomes acceptable only when it agrees to be integrated into the national culture...The emancipatory role the state was expected to play in relation to ethnic and marginalised social groups has never been a reality though individuals have been co-opted (2000: 190-196).

In such a backdrop, I argue that even though Hindus and Muslims may routinely view each as the 'other', when the unit of analysis is the tribes, the Hindu-Muslim-secularism dynamic can be viewed as part of the mainstream public sphere. This privileged position may relegate the life situations of other minorities to the bottom of the public agenda. The Indian elites consider the threat potential of Hindu-Muslim tensions to be greater and of more importance than other social tasks such as initiating reforms within Hinduism, improving the lot of dalits, etc. Since a large section of Indian Muslims were converted from Hinduism over centuries, the Hindu-Muslim dynamic also assumes an Aryan racial colour when compared with tribes of Mongoloid or Tibeto-Burman origin. Hindi comes to be privileged since it is the largest linguistic group (over 40 per cent). The hegemonic power wielded by the Hindi-speaking groups was evident even during debates in the Constituent Assembly formed to draft modern India's Constitution. As Nehru stated during the debate, '(In

some of the speeches I have listened (to) here and elsewhere, there is very much a tone of authoritarianism, very much a tone of the Hindi-speaking area being the centre of things in India, the centre of gravity, and others being just the fringes of India' (CAD, 1949: 1414). If Hindi is associated with Hinduism and Urdu with Islam, as Windmiller (1954: 313) suggests, English has come to be associated with modernity and the Western way of life. It reflects a world-view whose moorings may not be firm in local traditions/customs, and may also denigrate the local. As the northeast-based interview responses in Chapter 5 indicate, tribes and peripheral ethnic groups perceive the national elite as hostile to their culture and lifestyle.

Based on the above discussion, I attempt to identify approximate elements of 'we' and 'they' as perceived from New Delhi. The list is also based on interview responses and my experience of covering the Kashmir and northeast conflicts. I may add that the following table of elements should be seen in the context of the coverage or non-coverage of the two conflicts in the English-language national press; the elements may vary in different situations, locales or perspectives:

Table 10: ELEMENTS OF 'WE' AND 'THEY': NEW DELHI

<u>WE</u>	<u>THEY</u>
New Delhi	Regions outside the 'Hindi belt'
Hindus, Muslims	Christians, Sikhs, Parsis, etc.
Brahmins, upper castes	Lower castes, Dalits
Aryans	Tribes (Mongoloid)
Hindi language	Other languages
North/Central India	Rest of India
English press	Non-English press
Kashmir, Punjab	Assam, Northeast states
Hindi films	Non-Hindi films
Inhabitants of plains	Inhabitants of hills

3.3.4 Summary

In this study, journalists are seen as subjective individuals who cannot proceed without being part of the socio-cultural binary. This is particularly so in India where social stratification is a complex diurnal reality. The domination of upper castes, including in the media, is a fact of life. Prasad, a rare columnist belonging to the lower castes (dalit), questions, 'why is it that in a population of over 205 million Dalits, roughly equivalent to the combined population of France, UK and Germany, there is not a single Dalit with a press card in the mainstream media?' (2001).

The Indian public sphere is dominated by Hindus and Muslims, who consequently marginalise or symbolically annihilate the life situations of other minorities such as Christians, tribes, women, etc. Hindu and Muslim cultures are routinely considered part of the Indian national 'we', while those of other sections of society are equally routinely viewed as the 'they'. The modern Indian state, even though officially committed to principles of equality, pluralism and secularism, is seen to be uneven in its attitude towards different sections of society. This anomaly is also acknowledged officially, as Chapter 2's opening quote suggests.

In such socio-cultural contexts, Kashmir is widely perceived as part of the mainstream environment while the northeast, inhabited by Christian or animist tribes, is routinely perceived as the socio-cultural 'they'. Following Hartman and Husband (1981: 274), it would not be an exaggeration to state that the Indian cultural tradition contains elements that are derogatory to minorities, particularly tribes and the lower castes.

The socio-cultural binary connects with ongoing debates about recognition, citizenship and multiculturalism (Honneth, 2001; Kymlicka, 1995; Taylor, 1994). As mentioned in the practitioner experience account (Chapter 5; Pages 167-175), the mention of lesser-known place name in a report dateline, or the mention of a tribe name in a report in a New Delhi-based newspaper is sometimes viewed locally as a form of 'recognition'. As northeast-based interviews responses indicate, it is a matter of some frustration that not only is the region not treated as 'normal' in news discourse, its violence and terrorism aspects also do not resonate in the national press. Halloran suggests that minorities may have no choice but to indulge in violent activities in order to come to the notice of the media and authorities: '(The) structure of news reporting or "news values" may mean that certain minority or non-elite groups within any given country may have to engage in "negative" behaviour before they are noticed by the media' (1974: 19). But as the case of northeast conflicts shows, this too may not be valid universally.

The next chapter discusses the methods adopted in this study to explore the socio-cultural binary in the English-language national press in relation to terrorism and violence in Kashmir and the northeast. The methodology used, mainly qualitative, is followed by a discussion on the historical and contemporary career of the Indian press amidst the saliency of English language in Indian society.

4. Methods, Texts & the English-Language National Press

(By) its very nature, no content analysis---whether used to identify Galtung and Ruge's factors or any other formulations---can show us which possible news items were rejected or not even noticed by the news selectors.

---Harcup & O'Neill (2001: 269)

The objective of this chapter is two-fold: to present the reasons behind the selection of particular research methods adopted in this study, and to discuss the trope of the Indian press---not only the English-language national press---to highlight its importance in Indian democracy and the place the coverage and non-coverage of the two conflict zones in context. If earlier chapters focussed on contexts and concepts, this chapter foregrounds the fieldwork data presented in Chapter 5 that seeks to explain the contradiction of northeast conflicts involving much violence and terrorism *not* amounting to the kind of coverage that the Kashmir conflict is routinely accorded.

The discussion on the Indian press is necessary to stress the importance of coverage or non-coverage of issues in a modern democracy. In the 50 years since India's independence, the Indian media---which until recently meant only the press---is seen to have 'managed to stay with the lofty principles enunciated by the founding fathers. There is a splendid moral high ground that has hardly ever been abandoned by at least the mainline press. The fundamental stones of a democratic edifice – freedoms of expression and livelihood, secularism, pluralism, human rights, the defence of the under-dog and the minorities, the rule of law – have been protected whenever under attack' (Tejpal, 2002).

4.1 Methods and Methodology

In social scientific activity, methods are a means to an end; they are not an end in themselves (Halloran, 1998: 10-11). Of the two macro methodological approaches in social sciences, quantitative and qualitative, I use the latter since it is more suitable to the overall goals of this thesis: to explore journalists' cultural attitude and approach towards the two conflict zones of Kashmir and the northeast. A qualitative approach is more likely to unravel the reasons behind the high status of Kashmir and the low

status of northeast conflicts in the news discourse of the Indian national press. This connects with the cultural approach of news production in which journalists are seen as ‘agents’ of social events. Thus, interviewing was the main research tool used. Some of the questions posed to journalist-interviewees were: Why do they routinely accord high status to Kashmir-related events and low status to similar events in the northeast? Which factors influence their attitude towards the two comparable conflict zones? What do the journalists themselves feel about the coverage or non-coverage of the two zones? Why does the northeast figure prominently when ‘Hindi-speaking’ people are involved as actors in events? As stated earlier, the issue is not so much framing or stereotyping of news from the northeast, but the very presence of news from the region.

Eliciting responses directly from journalists in interviews was considered the best way to explore and explain the differential cultural status of the two conflict zones. Since the objective is more to investigate ‘absence’ of news, content analysis was not used as the main research tool since content analysis cannot help identify or explain why certain news items were rejected or were *not* considered newsworthy (Harcup & O’Neill, 2001: 269). The adoption of interviewing as the main research tool was also influenced by the possibility that the terminology of the socio-cultural binary that underpins this thesis, ‘we’ and ‘they’ or ‘us’ and ‘them’, was more likely to surface in face-to-face semi-structured interviews.

In this study, the research question that is sought to be answered is the ‘why’ of the low coverage of northeast conflicts vis-à-vis Kashmir; the northeast’s low coverage in the national press is assumed as a given. Thus, a simple version of content analysis was undertaken solely to establish *a priori* the extent of coverage of the two conflict zones. A basic comparison of the number of news items between two subjects under study is an indicator of the importance given to each. For example, if the relative importance of Scotland and Wales in the London-based British national press is the focus of inquiry, a simple count of media content would indicate which region is accorded more space and attention. For this limited purpose, deeper analysis of content may now be required.

Here, the main purpose of this study is to investigate the socio-cultural differential in journalists’ perceptions about the two conflict zones. Apart from interviewing and basic content analysis, I include a section on ‘practitioner experience account’ to provide a flavour of my experience of covering the northeast for an influential New

Delhi-based national newspaper, *The Times of India*. I supplement the data with examples of relevant texts that appeared in the national press during the fieldwork period between January and April 2001. The examples, privileging ‘Hindi-speaking’ victims of northeast conflicts substantiate and corroborate themes arising out of interviews, and are indicative of the ways in which New Delhi-based journalists construct texts about events in the northeast.

Texts presented include a local and contra view of the coverage of northeast conflicts from within the journalistic community: an award-winning series of reports and analysis written by a senior Assam-based journalist in *Deccan Herald*, a Bangalore-based English newspaper. The series, presented in full as Appendix C, provides an alternative view of the coverage of northeast events that are usually ignored by the New Delhi-based press.

4.1.1 Interview

Semi-structured interviews, with open-ended questions focusing on various dimensions of the two conflict zones, were used to elicit themes that influence the ‘map of meaning’ of journalists and opinion makers. According to Cohen and Manion (1994), the advantages of open-ended questions are:

- They allow flexibility to the interviewer;
- Provide a chance to probe deeper into the issue to exhaust the respondent’s knowledge;
- Establish rapport;
- Give an opportunity to assess the beliefs of respondents;
- They may provide unexpected or unanticipated information that may prove useful.

Semi-structured interviewing is based on the use of an interview guide that includes some clear instructions on the list of questions and topics to be covered in order to elicit reliable data. Bernard (1994) suggests that semi-structured interviewing works best when dealing with managers, bureaucrats and elite members of a community; in other words, people who are accustomed to using time efficiently. The interviewer is fully aware of what s/he wants from an interview but at the same leaves room for both to follow new leads, and is also cautious not to exercise excessive control over the informant.

Access to interviewees was facilitated by the fact that I knew most of them as colleagues or contemporaries; there were no major hurdles and no scheduled interview was cancelled due to difficulty of access. The questions included general and specific questions; the respondents expressed themselves freely and at length. Some of the preliminary questions were: Why does Kashmir tend to get greater coverage in the Delhi-based English language press than the many insurgencies in northeast India? Do you think the northeast is more, less or well covered by the national press? Do you agree with the notion that this press is the 'national press'? If yes, please explain; if not, why not. What is the general attitude in newsrooms towards developments in northeast India? Who or what constitutes the 'national mainstream', according to you? According to you, are there any cultural reasons that influence the attitudes towards events in Kashmir and northeast? Are you encouraged to work on reports/articles/analyses relating to northeast India? What are the main sources of news on northeast issues in Delhi?

The responses were not tape-recorded but taken down in a notebook as they were being expressed. This was for two reasons: the presence of a tape recorder invariably makes an interviewee cautious, and given my background in journalism, I am used to taking down notes rapidly. Soon after the interviews, the relevant parts of responses were fed into computer files. The duration of interviews varied from 30 to 90 minutes. Some interviews were scheduled after contacting the respondents on phone, and were conducted in offices and residences, and some on the sidelines of a media conference.

The interviews were conducted during the fieldwork visit to India between January and April 2001. Since the focus was the national press, most of the data was collected in New Delhi. In all, 40 interviews were conducted, 27 in New Delhi and 13 in Guwahati (Assam). After conducting the interviews in the capital, I obtained the views of northeast journalists on the national press' treatment of the region. This provided not only a contra view from within the larger journalistic fraternity but also one rooted in the specific socio-cultural milieu of the northeast. Journalists, apart from being professionals, are also citizens and have their own views about society. As I travelled to Assam, I encountered a problem often faced by journalists covering the region: it was not possible for me to travel to all seven states due to constraints of time and logistics of travel.

However, an opportunity to interview journalists from the region presented itself during a conference held in New Delhi during the fieldwork period. Several

journalists and human rights activists from the region attended the conference on the subject of 'Media Under Pressure in the Northeast: Is the Rest of the Media Bothered?' on 28 January 2001. I used the occasion to interview the non-Assam journalists and widen the interviewee base (see Appendix A for 'Statement of Support to the NE media' adopted at the conference). The conference debated how journalists based in the northeast often face difficulties or fall victims in an atmosphere marked by insurgency and counter-insurgency operations. As Appendix A and interview northeast-based interview responses indicate, much of the Indian press remains largely unconcerned about the problems faced by journalists in the region.

Journalists interviewed were of the rank of Special Correspondent and above, and included Editors, Chiefs of Bureaus, and senior columnists. Two of them were senior television journalists who had lately moved from print, while the rest were print journalists with experience of more than 10 years. I focussed on the print medium due to its long and established roots in Indian society, and the fact that television is a recent phenomenon in India. Television news in India is known to replicate the news hierarchy of the print medium since senior television journalists are still drawn from the press. The interviewees were selected in view of their holding key positions in the editorial hierarchy, and their status in the profession (Sample list of journalists interviewed in Appendix C).

Even though some New Delhi-based interviewees did not directly cover Kashmir or the northeast, they were interviewed to elicit the overall attitude and approach towards the two conflict zones. Decisions in editorial meetings are influenced by their views on events and issues of the day. Northeast-based interviewees included two professors of Gauhati University who contribute political columns in the local press, two senior government officials associated with the media, one senior political activist with experience of dealing with the media, and a former journalist who had joined the board of the Manipur State Human Rights Commission.

The ethnic composition of journalists is important since theoretically a journalist of a particular background may be expected to be sensitive to events/issues concerning his/her community. For example, a journalist from an Asian background in the British national press may be expected to have better insights or access to events/issues concerning the community. Several studies have explained coverage patterns of groups or places by examining the proximity between the group members or the residents of a place and the journalists reporting on them (Gamson and Wolfsfeld,

1993; Jakubowicz et al, 1994; van Dijk, 1996). The proximity between the journalist and the subject-group may be based on ethnic, racial or religious identity. For example, Wolfsfeld et al (2000) found that the fact that Israeli-Arab cities were covered by the Jewish journalists and editors hailing from majority socio-cultural groups affected their coverage patterns. According to Shoemaker and Reese, '(A) more diverse workforce will improve the media's ability to better reflect a multicultural society' (1996: 172)

This ethnicity-based linkage between the journalists and the community in focus, however, may not always be considered professional. Indian editors who decide on the transfers, postings and appointments of correspondents believe that a journalist hailing from the same group or region that is the focus of coverage may be subject to the pulls and pressures of the community, which is best avoided for professional reasons. A journalist of Assamese background is unlikely to be posted to cover Assam and the northeast since his or her cultural origins may influence professional output. Thus, a journalist with a different socio-cultural background is usually posted to specific regions since he or she is expected to be more neutral/professional. My posting in the northeast was an example of this idea, since culturally and ethnically my roots lie in western India, which has nothing in common with the northeast.

Such cross-cultural recruitment-posting may be expected to be more professional, but in the multicultural Indian reality, it also opens the possibility of recruiting-posting individuals with socio-cultural backgrounds that may be historically hostile or condescending towards the society that is sought to be covered. For example, efforts are made to avoid posting a journalist of ethnic Bengali origin in Assam due to the hostility between the Assamese and Bengali communities. The ethnicity of all journalists interviewed in New Delhi, except one, was rooted in north India; some who had roots in other parts of the country, not the northeast, had settled or grown up in the capital long enough to have been socialised in the prevailing socio-cultural ethos of north India. The interviewees included two former Northeast Correspondents of *The Times of India*.

None of the interviewees sought anonymity, but due to the potentially controversial nature of the subject, I have identified them only by initials in Chapter 5. The first letter pertains to their location: 'D' for interviewees based in Delhi and 'N' for those based in the northeast. The initials of the interviewees follow these letters; for example, DVVPS, DPB, NDC, NRC etc.

4.1.2 Content Analysis

I used content analysis in its most basic form and for a limited purpose: solely to establish the imbalance in the coverage of the two conflict zones in the national press, which is taken as a given in the research question. Content analysis is a tested technique in social sciences including communication research, and is considered a multipurpose research method developed specifically for investigating any problem in which the content of communication serves as the basis of reference. It has been used for various purposes such as identifying the intention of communicators; to study the psychological state of people, to figure out the existence of propaganda; to determine the focus of the people or institutional or societal attention or to discern the trends in communication content (Berelson, 1952; Weber, 1985; Krippendorf, 1980). Berelson provides the oldest and most popular definition: 'Content analysis is a research technique for the objective, systematic and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication' (1952: 18). According to Krippendorf, 'content analysis is a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from data to their context', whose 'purpose is to provide knowledge, new insights, a representation of facts, and a practical guide to action' (1980: 21).

However, Harcup & O'Neill observe that 'by its very nature, no content analysis---whether used to identify Galtung and Ruge's factors or any other formulations---can show us which possible news items were rejected or not even noticed by the news selectors' (2001: 269). For the purposes of this study, content analysis involved a simple count of reports, articles, analyses, editorials etc. that appeared during the six-month period from October 2000 to March 2001, which coincided with the fieldwork period (January to April 2001). Four national newspapers were selected for the study: *The Times of India*, *Indian Express*, *The Hindu* and *Hindustan Times* (the next section on the Indian press, 4.2, places them in context). They are considered representative of India's influential English-language national press, and co-exist within a large and complex press industry that has witnessed major changes in its structure, role and profile over two centuries. The criterion of count was the dateline of news reports, headlines of articles or mention in the text of editorials, features etc., of places in Kashmir and the northeast states.

After arriving at the count of reports relating to the two conflict zones, I sub-divided the figure for the northeast against the seven states in the region to for a micro-analysis of the coverage of states with a tribal majority and those with a non-tribal

majority. This was in line with the conceptual underpinnings of the thesis: the understanding of the socio-cultural binary by which tribes and lower castes are routinely accorded low status. Since the very presence of news is the subject of inquiry, the placement and treatment of the items was not noted specifically, though the general trend was that Kashmir-related items were displayed prominently on Page 1 and elsewhere, while northeast-related items rarely made it to Page 1. Each of the four newspapers covered specific events in Kashmir, while not all covered specific events occurring in the northeast. Reportage on Kashmir was marked by similarity of themes presented across the four newspapers.

4.1.3 Practitioner Experience

In communications research, 'practitioner experience' is not a mainstream method. But my recent experience in academe indicates that there is much that can be achieved by incorporating the experiential; it may enrich and substantiate data collected by other methods such as content analysis, interviews, discourse analysis, etc. Personal narratives by journalists can be a useful input to important research questions; for example, Harold Evans' personal account of his experience at *The Times* in *Good Times, Bad Times* (Weidenfeld, 1983) can provide valuable insights into the changes that occurred in the newspaper after its takeover by Rupert Murdoch, or Robert Fisk's potential narrative on covering global theatres of conflict or Andrew Marr's personal account of reporting the shifting quicksands of Westminster politics. If other parts of this study demanded a researcher's objectivity, this section abandons it in favour of personal resonating subjectivity. The narrative is necessary because the research question first surfaced during my career in journalism while covering the two conflict zones. As Sreberny observes:

Standpoint theory is a useful and welcome development, the importance of clarifying from where one stands to see, but most of the time, it is insufficiently personal. I want to press for a radical subjectivity that not only tries to account for why I, the articulating academic, find a certain issue of value to explore but more importantly, how my subjectivity resonates with and through the subject matter as I analyse it (2001: 294-295).

This section presents relevant aspects of my career in journalism, and includes the periods before, during and after my posting in Guwahati (Assam) as the Northeast Correspondent of *The Times of India* between July 1988 and August 1990. The

narrative includes details of unique problems that a journalist with ethnic roots in mainland India may encounter when posted in the region.

4.1.4 Selected Texts

Apart from data gathered from interviews and content analysis, I present a selection of news texts that appeared in the national press during the fieldwork period. The texts were selected on the basis of their description of a series of violent and terrorist events in Assam and the central theme that the victims/events involved members of a particular linguistic group, Hindi. This theme ran through an overwhelming majority of news items related to Assam, and was remarkable in the way it generated concern among federal decision makers based in New Delhi. The texts symbolise and reiterate the privileged status enjoyed by 'Hindi people in the Indian public sphere, and indicate that northeast-based events had more chances of figuring in columns of the national press if victims or actors belonged to this particular linguistic group.

The preference accorded to events involving Hindi-speaking people connects with the discourse of news frames. The concept of media frames is best understood within the context of the social construction of reality approach to news production. As the existing literature (Gans, 1980; Gitlin, 1980; Gamson et al, 1992; etc.) suggests, journalists construct frames of events that are professionally useful and cultural familiar. This compels them to create a story that resonates within a particular culture; thus, elements that may not resonate within the culture are unlikely to be considered newsworthy. News frames are a sub-set of the wider cultural frames that exist in society. As Gitlin (1980: 7) observes, 'Media frames are persistent patterns of cognition, interpretation, and presentation, of selection, emphasis, and exclusion, by which symbol-handlers routinely organise discourse, whether verbal or visual'. Wolfsfeld (1997: 49) suggests that three questions can help provide leads on how journalists construct media frames about conflicts:

- How did we cover this conflict in the past?
- What is the most newsworthy part of the conflict?
- Who are the good guys?

Analysing the coverage about developments in the northeast in such a framework may further reinforce the 'we'- 'they' dichotomy as seen from the perspective of journalists in New Delhi. The selected news texts presented reinforce existing socio-cultural

frames in which 'Hindi-speaking' people are considered 'meaningful'; thus, victims or actors of northeast-based events, who speak Hindi, may be routinely considered by New Delhi-based journalists as the 'good guys'.

Texts presented include a selection of news reports by an Assam-based journalist who covered insurgency-related events that were completely ignored by the national press. These texts provide a local view of the conflicts.

4.4 Agenda Setting

One of the concerns that drives this study is that unreported conflicts are less likely to figure in the public sphere, which may have implications for peace and conflict resolution within and across nations. In keeping with the agenda-setting tradition of media research, routine high coverage of Kashmir ensures its presence in public agenda while low coverage of northeast conflicts prevents them from coming into the public domain. As Wolfsfeld observes: 'The very fact that policy makers and citizens are encouraged to think about some challenges rather than others is, by itself, likely to affect the allocation of public resources and how people relate to the political world' (1997: 13).

Gross observes that representation in the media 'reality' is in itself power:

(Non)-representation maintains the powerless status of groups that do not possess significant material or political power bases. That is, while the holders of real power---the ruling classes---do not require (or seek) mediated visibility, those who are at the bottom of the various power hierarchies will be kept in their places in part through their relative invisibility...Not all interests or points of view are equal; judgments are made constantly about exclusion and inclusion and these judgments broaden or narrow (mostly narrow) the spectrum of views presented (2001:406).

The media is the foremost forum in a democracy where issues of public interest are articulated, debated and highlighted for attention of policy-makers. Dahlgren (1991) suggests that the media itself is the public sphere. Given the wide range of ongoing events and current issues, access to such a key site of public focus is always a struggle. Bagdikian points out that 'what the main media ignore, political leaders know they can safely ignore' (2002).

Agenda-setting research in political communication has been a dominant interest of scholars (see Protesse & McCombs, 1991; Rogers & Dearing, 1994). Commenting on the role of agenda-setting function of mass media, Cohen (1963: 13) observes that 'the press may not be successful much of the time in telling people what to think, but

it is stunningly successful much of the time in telling its readers what to think about'. It has been asserted that the issues and information on the media agenda become over time the issues and information on the public agenda, which consequently also affects the policy agenda (Nelson, 1994).

Thus, the low coverage of northeast conflicts has implications for the media's agenda-setting functions. This prevents public awareness of the problems in the region, and also blocks a sense of urgency among decision makers that is witnessed in relation to the more visible Kashmir conflict. Conflicts and events that could be prevented if initial signs are recognised and addressed continue to complicate the tense northeast scenario.

4.5 Summary

The research question is investigated through one primary (interviewing) and three secondary methods. Since the focus of this study is to investigate the symbolic annihilation of northeast conflicts, I use interviewing as the main research method to probe the socio-cultural 'map of meaning' of New Delhi-based journalists of the national press, particularly their attitude and approach to events and issues in the northeast. A basic version of content analysis was used due to the method's limitations in uncovering events and issues that are *not* considered newsworthy or are 'killed' in newsrooms. The basic count of content was carried out to a priori establish the imbalance in the coverage of Kashmir and the northeast before going on to present the main data based on interviews.

I present a section on practitioner experience to narrate my experience of covering the northeast for *The Times of India* in order to complement data obtained from other methods. I also present a series of selected news texts that were published during the fieldwork period to reinforce the saliency of Hindi speakers in Indian society. The texts include a selection of award-winning news reports that provide a local contra view of events and issues in the northeast. Written by a senior Assam-based journalist, the reports relate to events and issues that found virtually no mention in the national press, and were awarded the 'Journalism for Human Rights' award.

The next section sets out the trope of the Indian press and its career in modern India, particularly the influential English-language press that is widely considered as the national press.

4.2 Indian Press & the English-Language 'National' Press

This section discusses the trope and career of the Indian press, particularly the influential English-language press that is considered 'national' by journalists, readers and policy-makers alike; it also addresses the social status of English language that circularly drives its growth and privileged position in Indian democracy. Since the focus is India's 'national' press based in New Delhi, I first discuss the notion of a 'national' press and then present the history and structure of the Indian press.

The notion of a 'national' press has is based more on convention than a well-defined structure. Newspapers published from a country's capital are usually accorded the status of a 'national' press, whose contents are expected to have a perspective that encompasses the entire nation. The location of a newspaper is important in determining its canvas and agenda: local, regional, or national. The local is expected to focus primarily on local issues, the regional on a particular region, and so on. Newspapers located in a nation's capital are considered 'national' even though they also simultaneously cater to its local events and issues. However, not all newspapers published from a capital can be termed 'national' in scope and content, since they primarily cater to local issues and events of the capital.

The national press is expected to bring issues concerning various parts of the nation to the attention of policy-makers based in the capital, and also convey to a nation-wide audience the day-to-day decisions of the federal government. The privileged position of a national capital---by virtue of history or its being the seat of federal government, parliament, political parties, etc.---rubs off on the newspapers located in the capital. In the existing literature, the notion of a 'national' press remains largely unexplored; there has been virtually no in-depth study into its characteristics, structure, mandate or its record of being 'national' in its contents.

In the context of Britain, the characteristics of a national press is considered to be 'a mixture of national representation, geographical reach and breadth of content...A London base and nationwide circulation were generally essential, but there were exceptions...The nationals did not cover the country evenly either, and their contents had distinct biases' (Seymour-Ure, 1996: 18-20). According to McNair, in Britain there are 12 'national daily newspapers (including the *Sport* and the *Morning Star*) with a combined circulation of over 14 million (1999: 12); all of them published from London. The Royal Commission on the Press observed that national newspapers 'tended to reflect the life and interests of three or four regions rather than of the whole

country' (1947: 8). In such a backdrop, an interesting line of inquiry could be: to what extent does the London-based British 'national' press cover Scotland, Wales or the economically deprived north of England? Due to the location of federal/central state structures in the capital, the national press tends to focus more on the affairs and activities of the state; politics tends to dominate its contents. In other parts of the country, national newspapers and their journalists based in the capital may be viewed as part of the Establishment, as being in close touch with national public opinion, latest political thinking and the government's decision-making process. Journalists writing for the national press are usually well known throughout the country.

In the Indian context, similar privileged status is accorded to newspapers published from New Delhi, particularly the English-language newspapers. English is privileged historically since it was the language of the colonial rulers, and continues to be the language of communication of the State and the most influential sections of Indian society.

The next sub-section places India's national press in historical context.

4.2.1 Colonial Origins of the Indian Press

The first printing presses were brought to India towards the close of the fifteenth century by the colonial triumvirate of trader, soldier and missionary, who initially discouraged the publication of newspapers. However, the first newspaper on Indian soil was published as late as 29 January 1780, under the title *Bengal Gazette or the Original Calcutta General Advertiser*, by James Augustus Hicky, a disgruntled employee of the East India Company, who described the journal as 'a weekly political and commercial paper open to all parties, but influenced by none' (Rau, 1974: 10). However, due to the nature of the *Bengal Gazette's* contents and the context of publication, Hicky is not considered the founder of Indian journalism. This credit is given to Raja Rammohun Roy (1772-1833), a Bengali intellectual, who launched reformist journals in Bengal in the east, and used them to assert national self-respect, and counter attacks on Indian religions by Christian missionary journals. The three journals he launched in or around 1821 were *Sambad Kaumidi* (Bengali), *Mirat-ul-Akhbar* (Persian) and *The Brahmunical Magazine* (English). On the western end of British India, Fardoonji Murzban published the *Bombay Samachar* in 1822, which is still in existence as a Gujarati daily. These publications were the precursors of the newspapers and tabloids that were to play a stellar role during the freedom struggle.

The British-owned and nationalist press were closely associated with the freedom struggle, presenting and countering contending versions of politics of the day. The rapidly growing newspapers introduced and consolidated ideas of modernity, and contributed to the evolution of a national identity, despite low literacy and strict press laws introduced by the colonial administration. Roy's contemporary, Lord William Bentinck, who was perceived as a liberal Governor-General, supported Indian efforts at reforms, and by 1830, there were 33 English-language and 16 Indian-language publications in circulation. By 1870, the influence of Indian-language newspapers had grown to such an extent that they were perceived as a threat by the colonial government, leading to the enactment of the repressive Vernacular Press Act of 1878. But despite constraints, the press continued to grow, and within a century of the publication of Hicky's *Bengal Gazette*, more than 140 newspapers in Indian languages were being published, representing and providing a forum for a new sense of nationalism (Desai, 1976).

As nationalism evolved, so did the idea that the freedom of the press was a basic right to be cherished and fought for. Indian industrialists started their own newspapers with an overt anti-colonial stance. Most nationalist leaders were involved in activist, campaigning journalism, including M.K. Gandhi, who used Gujarati, his mother-tongue, and English to spread the message of freedom. By 1941, about 4,000 newspapers and magazines were in print in 17 languages, all anticipating and seeking to hasten the end of colonial rule. In the 1940s, before full independence in 1947, the press was broadly divided into three categories: the English-language Establishment papers such as *The Statesman* and *The Times of India*; the English-language nationalist press such as the *Hindustan Times*, *Indian Express* and *The Hindu*; and, Indian language publications such as *Anand Bazaar Patrika* (Bengali), *Kesari* (Marathi), *Sandesh* and *Bombay Samachar* (Gujarati), *Matrubhumi* (Malayalam) and *Aaj* (Hindi). As Chakravartty, veteran editor, observes:

From the point of view of resources, the nationalist press as a whole, particularly the regional press, was precariously placed. Their printing set-up, their access to advertisements, their paucity of staff, were mostly primitive and totally inadequate. But the nationalist press in those days was not a business venture but a noble mission, a commitment of sacrifice and dedication, which it sought to transmit to its eager readership. Since it emerged as an auxiliary of the freedom struggle, the character of the paper used to be determined by this fact. The newspaper was read for the message conveyed by the editor in his editorial. The focus was on the editorial message, and very often, the paper

was known by the name of its distinguished editor. What they lacked in resources, they made up in their commitment and determination (1994: 8).

A pattern of rival English-language newspapers (colonial and nationalist) emerged across the country: the nationalist *Amrit Bazar Patrika* ranged against the British-owned *The Statesman* in Calcutta; *Leader* and *The Pioneer* in Allahabad; *The Tribune* and *Civil & Military Gazette* of Lahore; *Sind Observer* and *Daily Gazette* in Karachi; *Bombay Chronicle* and *The Times of India* in Mumbai; and *The Hindu* and *The Mail* in Chennai. Newspapers in Indian languages were in the forefront of the freedom struggle, but English publications acquired a pre-eminent position, as it was the language of the colonial rulers.

Within decades of the first Indian newspapers rolling off the presses, they had become prime vehicles of protest and, in some cases, the rallying point for the masses. A notable feature of the Indian press' pre-independence career was the speed at which ideas, instruments and processes of modernity were introduced, absorbed and spread across the sub-continent, and then deployed against the very source that first introduced them: the British colonial system. The press had matured in the acid bath of the freedom struggle, and when India became free in 1947, 'she had already acquired a sophisticated press, experienced in agitation, but also knowledgeable in the arts of the government' (Smith, 1980: 159).

4.2.2 Structure of the Post-Independence Press

In the colonial backdrop, the primary objective of journalists until 1947 was to assist in the goal of attaining freedom. They not only served as vigorous spokespersons of Nehru and other leaders, but also openly allied with them. However, after independence there was a lack of purpose and direction, which often translated into unthinking support for the Nehru's Congress government (1947-1964): '(Instead) of critically examining the failures and shortcomings of the government in economic and social progress, it praised government leaders despite meagre and slow advances in these areas. Instead of directing the government's attention to domestic instability, it encouraged the government to play an increasingly dominant role in the international scene' (Karkhanis, 1981: 193).

The fact that modern ideas about a free press and freedom of expression had taken root in Indian society was never in doubt. Karkhanis' observation is a reflection of this, and points to the expectation among the people that soon after independence, the

press should have quickly re-adapted itself and switched to the role of an impartial monitor and watchdog of the new government. The press soon developed a close relationship with India's nascent democratic institutions, and most newspapers and political parties---including those aligned with extreme political ideologies---believed that the multi-party system of government had taken firm root. A free press was crucial to the success of India's tryst with democracy. Unlike India, several countries that emerged after decolonisation in mid-20th century did not accord similar importance to the press. As Nehru stated in 1950: 'I would rather have a completely free press with all the dangers involved in the wrong use of that freedom than a suppressed or a regulated press' (in Sharma, 1993: 7). The government of free India tolerated criticism in editorial pages, and there were no attempts to muzzle the press or the expression of dissent, which aided the creation of a professional culture in which Indian journalists aspired to reach the standards of British journalism.

The press had its impact in other areas. As Nobel laureate Amartya Sen has famously argued, the principal reason why two to three million people perished in famines in China in the 1950s and 1960s while only thousands died in India, in spite of there being no major differences in agricultural growth rates and food-grain supply, is the existence of a relatively free unofficial media in India and its absence in China (Sen and Dreze, 1989). The press played the role of an effective advance warning system. It became a major agency of communication, information dissemination and public debate; newspapers contributed significantly to raising public and even governmental awareness on a range of issues, from changing social values, to poverty and starvation, to policy and programme failures. This was largely aided by Nehru's consensual and conciliatory approach towards the press.

The situation, however, changed when his daughter, Indira Gandhi, succeeded him as prime minister. Her approach towards the press was less consensual; the press found her manipulative and insensitive during her prime ministership (1967-77 and 1980-84). By the time she came to power, a different generation of journalists had taken over; it did not see the press as being beholden to the government. Her relationship with the press further strained when she imposed Emergency for 19 months during 1975-77 at a time of much political turmoil across India. During the Emergency, censorship was imposed, 253 journalists were detained, seven foreign correspondents were expelled and the watchdog Press Council of India was dissolved (Nayar, 1978). This Emergency period also witnessed a spirited struggle by sections

of the press (notably the *Indian Express*), who opposed censorship and other restrictive measures.

Since the press is largely privately owned, it has been largely free of government control. Except for the period of Emergency, its record has been unique in the developing world: 'The Indian press is seen to have largely functioned according to Edmund Burke's idea of the Fourth Estate. Freedom of the press is actively and successfully defended, as was evident when the Rajiv Gandhi government proposed legislation on defamation in 1988' (Sonwalkar, 2001b: 750). Despite misusing the state-owned electronic media for propaganda purposes, Indira Gandhi lost the 1977 general election to the Janata (People's) Party, which formed the first non-Congress government since independence. The emergence, after the 1977 election, of regional leaders in national politics galvanised the regional language press, particularly in the 'Hindi belt' of north and central India. In 1979, for the first time, Hindi newspapers surpassed English ones in circulation, 32 years after Independence.

At the beginning of the 21st century, India's print media structure 'offers a product line that is dizzying in its diverse array of languages, ownership structures, and topics' (Viswanath & Karan, 2000: 92); it reflects India's complexity and diversity. As Jeffrey observes, 'No other country---indeed no other continent---in the world has a newspaper industry as complex and highly developed as India's' (1993: 2004). It is 'competitive and pluralist and is not dominated by any single group or ideology...India is also the biggest market for English language publications outside Britain and the US' (Sarkar, 1994: 79). The growth of the press is largely driven by rising literacy; in 2001, the census found 65 per cent of the population (667 million) literate, a 13 per cent rise since the 1991 census; roughly equalling India's total population of 1981³².

Some basic indicators underscore the complexity and diversity. In 2000, the total number of newspapers and periodicals published was 49,145 compared to 41,705 in 1997. There were 5364 dailies, 339 tri/bi-weeklies, 17,749 weeklies, 13,616 monthlies, 6,553 fortnightlies, 3,425 quarterlies, 431 annuals and 1,668 publications with periodicities such as bi-monthlies, half-yearlies, etc. Newspapers were published in over 100 languages and dialects: English and the 18 official languages listed in India's Constitution, 81 other languages/dialects and some foreign languages. This

³² Source: Census of India, 2001; available on <http://www.censusindia.net/results/index.html>.

size and diversity acts as a bulwark against nation-wide press monopoly. The highest number of newspapers was published in Hindi:

Table 11: NUMBER OF NEWSPAPERS PUBLISHED IN INDIA, 2000³³

<u>LANGUAGE</u>	<u>DAILIES</u>	<u>TOTAL</u>	<u>LANGUAGE</u>	<u>DAILIES</u>	<u>TOTAL</u>
English	390	7175	Nepali	3	65
Hindi	2393	19685	Oriya	76	714
Assamese	16	220	Punjabi	107	879
Bengali	99	2643	Sanskrit	3	53
Gujarati	141	1966	Sindhi	11	106
Kannada	332	1668	Tamil	356	1965
Kashmiri	0	1	Telugu	164	1200
Konkani	1	7	Urdu	525	2848
Malayalam	216	1431	Bilingual	74	2844
Manipuri	14	45	Multilingual	17	542
Marathi	371	2717	Others	55	371
<u>TOTAL</u>	5364	49145			

In 2001, *The Hindu's* Chennai edition emerged as the largest circulated single-edition newspapers with 937,222 copies, followed by *The Hindustan Times*, New Delhi, (909,278), the Bengali daily from Kolkata (Calcutta), *Ananda Bazar Patrika* (876,727) and *The Times of India* (843,874). According to *Press in India-2002*, an annual publication of the Registrar of Newspapers for India, the figures for 2002 showed a continuation of the trend as the total number of daily newspapers rose from 5364 in 2000 to 5638 in 2002³⁴.

Table 11 indicates the pre-eminent position enjoyed by the English-language newspapers. After Hindi, the national language, the largest number of newspapers published is in English. Of all the languages in which newspapers are published, Jeffrey's 1987 study revealed that English had the highest daily-to-people ratio: one copy for every four English speakers; the ratio for Hindi was 1: 74. In view of rising literacy, a burgeoning middle class and rising circulation since 1987, the situation in 2002 can be expected to have improved further for the English-language press.

³³ For each language, 'Total' includes tri/bi-weeklies, fortnightlies, monthlies, quarterlies, bi-monthlies, half-yearlies and annuals. Source: 'India-2002: A reference Annual', published by the Government of India.

³⁴ See 'Numbers of News Dailies Increasing in India', *India Weekly*, 18-24 October 2002.

Since the early 1980s, India's media universe was further complicated by the proliferation of television, which opened opportunities of information, entertainment and connectivity for individuals, institutions and regions. But as in other locales across the globe, television did not seriously disturb the press' position as a mature and sober voice in public life; it continues to be seen in terms of its historical role as a forum of responsible debate³⁵. Press circulation continues to grow parallel to rising literacy, and a lion's share of advertising is still devoted to the press³⁶. Most publishing groups---not only English-language ones---have adopted latest printing and information technology that facilitates instant transmission by satellite of entire pages to various publication centres across the country, touching new frontiers in design, reach and economy of scale.

The structure and size of the press points to its key location in Indian democracy even though it is not the most important means of communication in literacy deficit India. But since the power structure remains dominated by the educated, the written word carries weight that is out of proportion to its reach. The press has always circulated among the formal and informal networks of landowners, industrialists, bureaucrats, industrial executives and politician-intellectuals who constitute the large Indian middle class³⁷ and the elite.

The political leanings of mainstream Indian publications have never been a secret, but anecdotal evidence suggests that efforts are made to confine views to the editorial pages and to keep news columns free from bias. According to Ryan, overall two elements of tension are discernible in the press: a tradition over a century and a half of formal opposition to government, and its new role since Independence as an exponent of government policy in uniting the country to work for democratic and social progress: The two elements 'are bred of history and are to some extent

³⁵ This was one of the major findings of the National Readership Survey 2001: 'Overall, the survey found that in the last decade, the reader base in urban India has grown from 63 million to 96 million, a growth of 52 per cent. There is significant scope for growth as 59 million urban adults are literate but do not read any publication'. (*The Times of India*, 'Print Holds Ground, Radio Slips, TV Soars', 7 July 2001). Jeffrey's 1993 study suggested a similar trend: 'In most of the industrialised world, the past decade has seen a reduction in the number and circulation of daily newspapers. But not so in India, where the overall circulation appears to have increased by roughly 140 per cent in the same period' (2004).

³⁶ In 1993, advertising spend on the press was (US) \$ 664 million out of \$ 990 million, and \$ 842 million out of \$ 1319 million in 1994 (*Far Eastern Review*, 5 October 1995). The press' share saw a reduction in subsequent years due to the growth of television, but the press still corners more than a half of the advertising expenditure.

³⁷ The size of the Indian middle class has been compared to that in the US (*Financial Times*, 17 November 1995; V). The National Council for Applied Economic Research, a New Delhi-based organisation, estimates it to be nearly 300 million, and projects it at 445 million by 2006-7.

mutually exclusive, representing different interests within the press' broad ownership patterns. They serve as a focal point of tension within the Indian press, and between the press and government today' (1990: 54).

Since the late 1980s, however, the introduction of corporate culture in media managements has resulted in 'Murdochisation', a phenomenon identified with market forces and Murdoch's privileging numbers and profits over journalism's normative role and functions.

4.2.3 English-Language Press & its 'Murdochisation'

The English-language press based in New Delhi is considered India's national press. It is popularly identified as part of the Establishment because it '(identifies) itself with the fears and anxieties of the Indian state' (Mudgal, 1995: 78). There is a dearth of scholarly writing on the post-independence career of the Indian press, more so on its English variety, even though its importance and leverage in Indian democracy was recognised early. Windmiller observed in 1954 that 'India's English language press is the only national press and it is paramount in the world of Indian journalism' (315). Its power and influence press is driven by its class composition as it is run by the same dominant group to which it primarily caters, which becomes an important factor in deciding the nature of news (Joseph & Sharma, 1994).

English-language newspapers are published from several metropolitan centres but some 'stand out as India's quality press' (Viswanath & Karan, 2000) as they 'influence the thinking of the ruling elite' (Kaushal, 1997: 71), and are the 'prime moulders of policy' (Singh, 1992: x). Representatives of this 'quality press' with circulation reach across India are³⁸:

- *The Times of India* (established 1838)
- *The Statesman* (1875)
- *The Hindu* (1878)
- *Hindustan Times* (1924)
- *Indian Express* (1932)

³⁸ Each of these is a multi-edition newspaper published across India, but the main editorial centre is usually located in New Delhi. Other major English-language newspapers and their main centres of publication are: *The Pioneer* (New Delhi, Lucknow), *The Telegraph* (Calcutta, Guwahati), *Deccan Herald* (Bangalore), *The Tribune* (Chandigarh, New Delhi), *The Assam Tribune* (Guwahati), *Free Press Journal* (Mumbai, Indore), *Deccan Chronicle* (Hyderabad), and *The Hitavada* (Nagpur). Almost all major English and regional language newspapers maintain offices in New Delhi, staffed by special correspondents and business executives.

Of these, British businessmen launched two during colonial rule, *The Times of India* and *The Statesman*, while nationalists started *The Hindu*, *Indian Express* and *Hindustan Times*. Industry estimates believe that these five newspapers account for over 60 per cent of the circulation of English language newspapers. Reports published in these newspapers often figure in parliamentary debates and influence official policy on current issues. The English-language press 'has generally played a stabilising role in national politics, promoting national integration and secular values, avoiding extremes and sticking to the middle path' (Joshi, 2002). English-language newspapers co-exist with a vibrant English-language financial press, and mass circulation English-language magazines such as *India Today*, *Outlook*, *Filmfare*, etc. devoted to news and current affairs, entertainment and lifestyle. As columnist Vanaik observes:

The English language dailies can never seriously influence voting patterns but enjoy a very significant and disproportionate influence at two levels. First, the Central government recognizes its impact on the Indian elite and therefore takes it very seriously when it comes to seeking legitimization and endorsement of policies. Second, the non-English language press sees this "national" media as the source of the most serious and sophisticated discussion on issues of national and international import, which then shapes its own editorial perspectives and discursive output (2001).

From the late 1980s onwards, owners of the English-language newspapers, in tune with global media management practices, adopted a corporate approach to publishing. Dubbed 'Murdochisation', the changeover came in for much criticism when attempts were introduced to make newspapers 'light' with a 'dumbing down' approach. During the 1990s, along with moves to liberalise national economy, several changes were initiated in the press industry. The introduction of a corporate culture, that privileges 'marketing' over 'editorial' is seen to have distanced the press from its social roles and obligations. The changes included re-defining the concept of news; events and issues that were earlier considered worthy of coverage (education, health, rural India, social issues, etc.) were no longer pursued. Several beats such as Agriculture, Labour, Education, etc. were abolished in News Bureaus. Columnist Bidwai calls the new culture 'Murdochisation without Murdoch':

'Murdochisation' involves the very destruction of the media as a responsible institution that disseminates information and promotes debate. It means obliterating the distinction between the editorial and business functions in a publication...The point is not so much that Murdoch is about to take over the bulk of the Indian media, but simply that Indian publishers are now doing roughly what he has already accomplished. He is their principal role model. Many are consciously adopting the same business strategies as NewsCorp

does. Three of the largest newspaper chains in India have put into practice, editorial policies and methods which characterize Murdoch's operation...There are instructions to editors to make their paper 'light' and friendly to the elite...This silent 'Murdochisation' has transformed notions of what is acceptable as news and the range of views that are permitted expression. Serious analytical writing is at a discount' (1996: 6-7).

In boardrooms of media companies, news was perceived as a de-romanticised commodity, no different from soap or toothpaste. The journalistic standards of *The Times*, London, have been a model for generations of Indian journalists, and the guidebooks on editing, reporting, etc. by its former editor, Harold Evans, influenced newsroom practices and style-sheets. In the 1990s, after *The Times* was taken over by Murdoch, its marketing practices too became a model for Indian newspaper managements. As Sainath puts it:

The 1990s have witnessed the decline of the press as a public forum. This can be attributed largely to the relentless corporate takeover of the Indian press and the concentration of ownership in a few hands. Around seven major companies account for the bulk of circulation in the powerful English language press. In the giant city of Bombay, with over 14 million people, *The Times of India* has a stranglehold on the English readership. It also dominates the Hindi and Marathi language press. *The Times* is clear and unequivocal in its priorities. Beauty contests make the front page. Farmers' suicides don't. Sometimes reality forces changes, but this is the exception, not the rule. Most other large Indian newspapers are eagerly following *The Times'* philosophy, inspired by the press baron, Rupert Murdoch: a newspaper is a business like any other, not a public forum. Monopoly ownership has imposed a set of values entirely at odds with the traditional role of the Indian press (2001).

The Times of India Group was the first to usher in 'Murdochisation'. Shah (1997) details the shift in the group towards marketing over the years, of how a former cigarette company executive was designated the managing editor of *The Times of India*, and when the editor went on leave, his place was filled by an executive, and how the post was scrapped altogether. Such was the emphasis on marketing in the newspaper that Coleridge, in his book on newspaper barons, *The Paper Tigers* (1993), observed: 'Of all the newspaper owners in the world, I met no one so single-mindedly wedded to marketing as Samir Jain'³⁹. Other newspaper managements were initially wary of the 'marketing-to-the-exclusion-of-editorial' and 'dumbing down' lines, but as profits of *The Times of India* Group soared, they adopted similar approaches, which

³⁹ Coleridge credits Samir Jain, managing director of *The Times of India* Group, with 'Americanising' *The Times of India* and practising Harvard Business School techniques he learnt during a brief internship at the *New York Times*.

resulted in several changes in business practices (competitive pricing), employment terms for journalists (short-term contracts) and editorial content (focus on infotainment). On the changes in *The Times of India*, Dalal, the newspaper's former Business Editor, observes:

What happened in this paper is a reflection of what is going on in the entire press today. This is the most profitable business group in the country. It is the group with the largest circulation...Hence it also sets the business agenda for other newspapers; about how far they are going to go, what are they going to carry and whether they want to test any limits. In fact, it has been setting the agenda on a lot of issues. It pioneered the page three concept. They are very proud of what they call 'dumbing down' of newspapers...You then have the role that the marketplace plays in either 'dumbing down' and destroying institutions or making sure that nothing is ever highlighted (2001: 10).

The adoption of a corporate culture---what might be called the shift from the by-line to the bottom-line---re-worked the rules of the industry. The phenomenon of 'Murdochisation' was first visible in English language newspapers---which are usually the flagship publications of leading publishing groups---but soon percolated to other major language publishing houses. As interview responses in Chapter 5 indicate, there is now less space for events and issues that were earlier considered newsworthy.

4.2.4 Social Status of English

The success of Murdochisation is circularly driven by the social values associated with the English language in India, and its utility for communication across the many language barriers in the country. It was the language of the colonial rulers and along with the game of cricket, constituted the most visible cultural symbol of colonialism. After independence, in the backdrop of intense linguistic passions across the multilingual sub-continent (see Chapter 2), English emerged as the sole link language, even though it was galling to nationalists who loathed the idea of taking recourse to a foreign language to communicate with fellow citizens. The language 'extends its hegemony and control over other languages' (Babbili, 1997: 151) but continues to be the *lingua franca* in the post-independence era. Fasold (1984:139) suggests that English lacks the symbolic power that is required to be chosen as India's official language, although it does have a high communicativity necessary for the successful functioning of a nationalist language. Since English has the advantage of being spoken in pockets throughout the country; 'only English language publications can claim a "national" status' (Joseph & Sharma, 1994: 135).

According to Arora & Lasswell,

The apex elite of India...rely on the English language as the principal means of communicating with one another. In explaining the influence of English-language newspapers account must be taken of the fact that English has been, and remains, an official language; and that in practice it is the preferred language of the administrator and the intellectual. The journalists and editors who are all-India figures are those who are active in the English-language press (1969: 3-6).

English is used in both public and personal domains, and is granted a near-native status unlike a language that is foreign to a country's soil. Estimates of the number of people using English varies between 5 and 10 per cent of the 1 billion plus population. The number is small (between 50 and 90 million) compared to the total population, but this small segment controls domains that have professional prestige (Kachru, 1986: 8). The highest readership of English-language newspapers is in the metropolitan centres of New Delhi, Mumbai, Chennai and Calcutta. Among the urban educated, English is the language of thought of many, and co-exists with other language environments.

In the Constituent Assembly formed to draft modern India's Constitution, English was the only language that was understandable to all delegates, and when members concluded their debates in English, they adopted an English-language text that remains the most authoritative. After prolonged debate, they declared Hindi, the language spoken by the largest number of people as the national language, but extended English the official status of an associate. Despite pro-Hindi efforts of Nehru and others, English soon emerged as the most important language for national, political and commercial communication, which further complicated the uneasy relationship between India's westernised elites and the masses. As Smith suggests, 'India is a country with an intellectual elite which is perhaps further alienated from its own masses than that of any other developing country' (1980: 160).

Socially, knowledge of spoken and written English is seen as a passport to a good career (within India and abroad) and upward mobility. Irrespective of the language Indians grow up speaking as mother-tongue, there is a premium on receiving education in English, which is also the language of instruction in India's best educational institutions. The symbolic and material power that comes with education in English and the low status of those who do not speak the language is evident from

the following account of a Hindi teacher who educated her three children in English language schools:

I still remember the pain I felt when I went to my (eight-year old) daughter's school and she didn't let me come inside her class because she was afraid that her classmates would laugh at her because I did not know English. If I had been educated in English, I wouldn't get insulted like that...With English-medium education, I would have got a promotion and a much higher salary in my school. I have a Master's degree in Hindi and a teacher's training diploma and I have been teaching for 20 years...Yet, 18 or 20-year old women who have been educated in the English medium, join straight from college and start from a salary that's at least twice as high as mine. And on top of that when parents come to see me in school I am always worried about my English. Since the last five years, the management has made it compulsory for school children to speak in English at all times except during the Hindi class. And if the teacher can't show off her English, the parents think she is worthless (quoted in Faust & Nagar, 2001).

English is an aspirational and utilitarian language in Indian society. The act of purchasing, reading and placing English newspapers and magazines in one's drawing room makes, or is intended to make, a statement of lifestyle preferences and attitudes.

Journalists and editors working in the English-language press are the most known across the country. Many journalists from the non-English-language press aspire to switch over to the English-language press since it is considered professional and more rewarding in terms of salary, perks and impact on career. The aspiration is also geographical, as in Britain where journalists working on local newspapers too aspire to progress to a national newspaper (Franklin & Murphy, 1991: 8). English-language journalists working on local or metropolitan newspapers aspire to work on national newspapers published from New Delhi, the hotbed of political journalism, and where 'the media is more pervasive than anywhere else in the country' (Jha, 1992: 145). Anecdotal evidence suggests that regional political leaders of national parties, who value their respective local language press in order to reach their constituents, often question central leaders based in New Delhi with some ennui why the latter are so sensitive about contents of English-language national newspapers, to which the answer is invariably a knowing smile!

English-language journalists in India possess a natural multilingual expertise that is useful in news-gathering, particularly while interacting with the vast numbers of non-English speakers in the country who constitute their sources, interviewees or subjects. In newsrooms and among peers, interaction routinely switches back and forth between English and the relevant local language, without being noticed or posing a problem

for the speaker, listener or the professional act of reporting/writing in English. The mother tongue of English-language journalists is often unintelligible to each other, but they are linked together by English, the language of their profession. They usually interact within circles that are comfortable with English, Hindi or their own languages, and rarely, if ever, cross the class-language barrier.

4.2.5 Summary

The career and trope of the Indian press has witnessed several changes over more than two centuries. The implantation of the press in India has been so successful that it has become self-perpetuating; it feeds and is fed by, a growing elite and middle class, but is not fully in consonance with the literacy-deficient Indian society. As Joseph summarises, the Indian press' role has moved from 'revolutionary zeal during the nationalist movement to uncritical complacency in the years after Independence, from renewed commitment to democracy and social justice in the wake of the Emergency to largely unadulterated excitement over economic "liberalisation" and "globalisation"---and the delectable fruits thereof---in recent time' (1997: 12).

The English-language press reflects the opinion of influential readership and plays an agenda-setting role. It 'delineates the priorities of the country and conditions the expectations of the most powerful segments of the Indian population: the political, intellectual and business elite' (Haque & Narag, 1983: 35). Its importance and key location in Indian democracy is circularly driven by the social status of the English language. However, trends in English-language newspapers such as Murdochisation may adversely affect the life situations of the non-English-speaking majority. Concerns over its impact may be justified, but it is also a fact that technically the Indian press is today brighter than it was before 1991. Faced with similar challenges in other locales, evidence against corporatisation of the media is not always foreboding (Demers, 1996). *The Times of India* and the *Hindustan Times* are supposed to lead the 'dumbing down' pack from New Delhi, but these are also the only publishing groups to have opened bright editions across the country in the last decade, which has further democratised news coverage, readership and advertising, besides rejuvenating local cultural, political and economic networks. The impact of 'Murdochisation' has been discursively positive and negative (Joseph, 1997).

As interview responses and other data presented in next Chapter 5 indicate, 'Murdochisation' does not affect or dilute the high status of Kashmir in the news

discourse, but contributes to further lowering the status of northeast conflicts, if not obliterating them altogether. This suggests that the socio-cultural binary based on 'operative public values' and the 'central value system' may be more influential than the political economy of India's national press.

How does this binary come across in routine newsroom interactions? How do the New Delhi-based journalists perceive and prioritise the two conflict zones? Which socio-cultural factors influence their approach and attitude towards the two events? How do journalists and citizens based in the northeast view the record of the New Delhi-based national press in covering conflicts in the region? The next chapter presents interview responses and other fieldwork data.

5. Fieldwork Data & the Prism of Socio-Cultural Binary

*Majhdhar mein naiyya dole, to manjhi paar lagaye;
Maanji jo naav duboye, use kaun bachaye.*

(When the boat rocks mid-stream, the boatman steadies it and rows it ashore;
But if the boatman himself tries to sink the boat, who can save it?).

---Lyrics from a popular Bollywood song, cited
by NRK in Assam, equating the national press to
the boatman, and the nation to the boat.

This chapter presents data gathered during fieldwork in India between January and April 2001; the data is framed within the thesis proposed in this study to explain the contradiction of much violence and terrorism in northeast India *not* attracting attention of the English-language national press. The thesis proposed is:

A conflict involving terrorism and violence is likely to be accorded sustained media coverage only if it is seen by journalists as affecting or involving what they socially and culturally perceive to be the 'we'; a similar conflict involving the 'they', or one that is not framed within the 'we' parameters, may be routinely ignored, or extended ad hoc coverage.

In this chapter, questions raised in previous chapters are addressed: How 'national' is India's national press? What considerations influence journalists while covering the two conflicts? What is their general cultural approach to Kashmir and the northeast, independent of the prevalence of conflict? How does Murdochisation affect the coverage of the two conflict zones? Which conflicts are deemed sufficiently important to be covered on a consistent basis? In this study, the better-covered Kashmir conflict mainly figures as a counter-point; the focus is on the low status of the northeast and its conflicts in the news discourse of the national press.

In order to provide a flavour of the thought processes of journalists, verbatim text of interview responses forms bulk of the chapter. The first set of data establishes the imbalance of conflict coverage overwhelmingly in favour of Kashmir through a basic form of content analysis. The subsequent main section, on interview responses, is divided thematically as well as regionally; interviews conducted in New Delhi (journalists working on the national press) and those conducted in the northeast.

I then present a section detailing my experience of covering the northeast region between 1988 and 1990; this includes relevant details of my career in journalism. This section is followed by a presentation of selected texts that appeared in the national press during the fieldwork. These are examples of how ‘Hindi-speaking people’ are privileged in the news discourse. The texts include a series of reports about events that were typically ignored by the national press. The events occurred in Nagaland, where the demand for independence and secession from India is as old as the Kashmir conflict. The events, as part of the army’s counter-insurgency measures in end-1994 and early 1995, had implications for the human rights of local civilians. The events were reported by a Special Correspondent of *Deccan Herald*---a regional English-language daily published from the southern Indian city of Bangalore---but were ignored by the national press. However, the New Delhi-based National Human Rights Commission, an organisation established and funded by the federal government, took cognisance of the reports and awarded compensation to victims.

By presenting the body of material through four different sources, I establish the socio-cultural differential that underlies the journalists’ attitude towards the two conflict zones, which influences their coverage, or non-coverage, even though they both involve much violence and terrorism.

5.1 Content Analysis

As set out in Chapter 4 (Page 113), a simple count of content about the two conflict zones was undertaken (see Appendix C for variables). Walmsley suggests that ‘in the case of spatial information, the media brings places that are beyond the realm of direct experience to the attention of media users and then indicate how much importance to attribute to such places by giving differing prominence to each’ (1980: 343). This may be also valid for conflicts that are similar in character but spatially located at a distance from each other.

News items, editorials, special features and letters to the editor that appeared over a six-month period, between October 2000 and March 2001, were selected. Four newspapers were selected for this purpose due to their mass circulation and national reach, and the ability to influence public agenda (set out in greater detail in Section 4.2; Pages 123-148):

- *The Times of India*;

- *Indian Express*;
- *The Hindu*;
- *Hindustan Times*.

During the fieldwork period, several important political developments took place: the announcement of ceasefire between security forces and Kashmiri militants; further extension of ceasefire between security forces and Naga insurgents; holding of 'peace talks' between the federal government and an outlawed Naga outfit; collapse of local government in Manipur when it lost majority in local assembly; clashes between security forces and rebels; rebels killing civilians in both conflict zones, etc.

Table 12 sets out the statistics of coverage of the two conflicts during the fieldwork period:

Table 12: STATISTICS OF DATA ON KASHMIR AND THE NORTHEAST

Total number of days (1 October 2000 to 31 March 2001)	182
Total number of newspaper issues examineded	728
Total number of items on Kashmir and the northeast	659
Number of items on KASHMIR	520 (79 %)
Number of items on the NORTHEAST	139 (21 %)

Since the very presence of news was the subject of inquiry, the placement and display of items was not noted specifically, but the general trend was that Kashmir-related items were displayed prominently while northeast-related ones rarely, if ever, made it to Page 1. Specific incidents of violence or killings in Kashmir were reported extensively by each of the four newspapers; all four did not cover similar incidents in the northeast, if at all they were covered by one or two of them.

The Times of India had the maximum news content on Kashmir while *The Hindustan Times* had the most northeast-related reportage. The newspaper-wise distribution of items was: —

Table 13: COVERAGE OF KASHMIR & NORTHEAST BY NEWSPAPER

<u>NEWSPAPER</u>	<u>KASHMIR</u>	<u>NORTHEAST</u>
Indian Express	134	40
The Times of India	182	31
The Hindu	88	16
Hindustan Times	116	52
TOTAL	520	139

Within the northeast, its profound demographic and socio-cultural divisions (see Chapter 2; Section 2.2.2) clearly emerged when data was further divided against the seven states. The state-wise share of news items was:

Table 14: NORTHEAST STATES' SHARE IN COVERAGE⁴⁰

<u>STATE</u>	<u>ITEMS (PERCENTAGE)</u>
Assam	75 (53 %)
Manipur	41 (29 %)
Tripura	4 (2 %)
Meghalaya (T-M)	3 (2 %)
Mizoram (T-M)	0 (0 %)
Nagaland (T-M)	0 (0 %)
Arunachal Pradesh (T-M)	0 (0 %)

The states with a non-tribal majority (Assam, Manipur, Tripura) accounted for 84 per cent of the coverage while tribal-majority states (Meghalaya, Nagaland, Arunachal Pradesh and Mizoram) were virtually blanked out of the coverage, accounting for 2 per cent of the news items. This appears to validate the proposed thesis as well as the socio-cultural binary on which it is based. As Chapter 1 (Section 2.1) indicated, tribes are routinely seen as the socio-cultural 'other' in Indian society; they are seen as existing outside the fold of Hindu society, which in turn, is also rejected by animist tribes themselves, many of whom have converted to Christianity.

Several themes emerge out of a closer analysis of the data for Kashmir and northeast conflicts, presented in the following two sub-sections.

⁴⁰ 'T-M' stands for 'tribal-majority' state. The total figure for the northeast (139) included 16 items that dealt with the region as a whole.

5.1.1. News Items: Kashmir

- Kashmir-related news items dominated the data compared to the conflicts in the northeast, by a ratio of nearly 4:1. In keeping with media's agenda-setting function, the message conveyed by the national press is that the Kashmir conflict is more important and worthy of the attention of readers and policy-makers than those in the northeast;
- News reports on Kashmir were invariably displayed prominently, mostly on Page 1. For example, a report of killings in the Kashmir Valley would be followed up with a federal government reaction story sourced in New Delhi (also on Page 1); reaction by local government, political parties, security experts, discussion in parliament, backgrounder, etc;
- The data on Kashmir mainly included reports of events but also included editorials, opinion pieces, features, letters to the editor, etc., indicating that its coverage was both event and issue-based. Sunday magazine sections of the four newspapers also included news-features on the week's events in Kashmir;
- Reports datelined Srinagar or other places in Kashmir were filed by the respective newspaper correspondents, and these were followed up in New Delhi by Chiefs of Bureau or Special Correspondents covering parliament, political parties, ministries of Home or Defence, which indicated the high status of events and issues relating to Kashmir.

5.1.2. News Items: Northeast

- Within the northeast universe, the tribal-majority states were almost blanked out. One of the reasons Assam accounted for a majority of the northeast-related data is that it is geographically nearest and most accessible from mainland India. It is considered the 'gateway of northeast India', and news agencies and representatives of most national newspapers are based in Guwahati (Assam). The state also has large Hindu and Muslim population, including those who migrated there from the politically and economically influential 'Hindi belt'. Apart from Assam, no full-time correspondent of any of the national newspapers is posted in other northeast states;
- The states with non-tribal majority (Assam, Manipur, Tripura) dominated the coverage even though several conflict-related events occurred in tribal-

majority states (Meghalaya, Nagaland, Arunachal Pradesh and Mizoram) during the fieldwork period; these were covered in the local northeast press;

- Only one northeast-related report conflicts appeared on Page 1 in one newspaper (*The Times of India*) during the fieldwork period. It reported the federal government's decision to send additional troops to Assam in view of attacks on 'Hindi-speaking people' (reproduced as the first text in the 'Selected Texts' section). Other northeast-related items were used in the inside pages, usually in lower half, or in 'Brief' columns. None of them were followed up on subsequent days with reactions from political parties, decision makers or experts based in New Delhi;
- The low number of northeast-related items conveyed the message that events and issues pertaining to the region did not deserve the attention of decision-makers and readers of the four newspapers;
- The northeast data overwhelmingly comprised news items; it included feeble resonance in the opinion columns. This indicated that northeast-related coverage was largely event-oriented, and that the region and its developments had not become an issue in the national press.
- Most northeast-related items published were disseminated by two news agencies (*Press Trust of India* and *United News of India*). This indicated that either the four newspaper' correspondents there had not considered newsworthy or that they were resigned to the fact that their output would be accorded low priority in their New Delhi-based newsrooms. None of the Chief of Bureaus or Special Correspondents based in New Delhi contributed to reportage on the northeast.

5.2 Interviews

This section provides interview responses of journalists based in New Delhi and the northeast. The responses provide clear evidence of the 'map of meaning' that perpetuates the low status of northeast conflicts in the national press; the responses also convey the sense of anger and ennui among northeast-based journalists on the way the 'national' press treats and covers (or not covers) the region. Several responses are presented verbatim to avoid generalisations and to provide a flavour of how

northeast is perceived in daily newsroom discourse. The responses have been gathered around specific themes that arose from the interview data collected.

Two main characteristics of the interview responses were apparent at the outset.

First, *all* New Delhi-based interviewees acknowledged the seriousness of northeast conflicts. However, when asked why the conflicts were ignored or poorly covered, they blamed the 'prevailing north India-centric ethos' or 'lack of interest', or the feeling in newsrooms that 'they (the northeast people) don't seem to matter to us'. Some of them regretted that individually they could not remedy the situation since there existed a general 'mental block' towards events and issues related to the region, even if they involved much violence and terrorism. This connects with the discourse of socialisation within newsrooms (Breed, 1997), which may prevent individual journalists from deviating from the norm, and also indicates the saliency of deep-rooted socio-cultural values within which news discourse is framed.

Secondly, northeast-based interviewees accorded much importance to the role of the New Delhi-based English-language national press in the Indian public sphere. Some of them angrily objected to it being called a 'national' press due to minimal, ad hoc or perfunctory coverage of the northeast, but none questioned its agenda-setting role at the national level. Their criticism of the national press stemmed from high normative expectations about the role of the press in modern democracy, as reflected in this chapter's opening quote. For NRK, the press is as crucial to a nation-state as a 'boatman' is to a 'boat': 'Who will save the nation (boat) when the press (the boatman) itself tries to sink it?' Other interviewees such as NUB and NAB stated that the national press' attitude towards the region was a sub-set of the 'arrogance of Delhi and its step-motherly attitude towards us', while NHG and NDC cynically expressed themselves against even hoping that the national press would ever recognise the region's problems as national problems. They had long resigned themselves to the region's 'symbolic annihilation' in the national press, and did not expect any better. NHG and NDC expressed surprise at the very suggestion that the northeast may be considered as worthy of coverage as Kashmir. In such a situation, whenever some reports on the region appear in the national press, they tend to stand out.

DD, a leading human rights activist based in New Delhi, has been actively organising conventions on the Naga issue and arranging visits by prominent individuals from mainland India to Nagaland to assess the ground situation. He stated that the national press routinely ignores his group's activities: 'In 1996, we wanted to

release a document, “Where Peacekeepers Have Declared War” detailing the events in Nagaland and Manipur as part of the army’s counter-insurgency operations. We organised a press conference at the Press Club of India in New Delhi; more than 40 people turned up, including senior journalists of the rank of assistant editors and associate editors, but the next day not a line appeared in the papers. The press is not interested in the Naga issue’.

The interview responses are divided according to specific themes that emerged from the responses (the dates of interviews follow quotes); the themes were categorised on the basis of frequency of occurrence in responses and the importance that respondents accorded them to explain the high status of Kashmir and low status of northeast conflicts in the news discourse.

5.2.1. Theme 1: Cultural Distance & Modern vs. Primitive

Most New Delhi-based interviewees stated that their instinctual feeling about the northeast was that ‘whatever happens there, somehow does not affect *us* and *our* readers’ (DYV). This statement was a clear reflection of the deep socio-cultural divisions in Indian society and the ways in which certain minority sections are routinely seen as the ‘other’. DYV’s response includes the terminology of the socio-cultural binary (‘us’ and ‘them’). Kashmir, on the other hand, is commonly seen as ‘something that affects *us*’ (DVVP). Journalists are aware of Muslim-majority Kashmir being an evocative symbol of India’s commitment to secularism, and also of the cultural pull it evokes through Bollywood films and religious myths. The region, particularly its tribes are not only culturally seen as the ‘other’, but also as ‘primitive’ with the implication that non-tribal sections of Indian society are ‘modern’. Due to the virtual absence of news or mention about the northeast in daily news discourse, DAT, a Special Correspondent of *The Times of India*, was unaware if the newspaper had a correspondent posted in the region at all (it subsequently emerged that it did have a full-time correspondent in Assam). In general, the interviewees agreed that violence is of much interest, but admitted that violence and terrorism in the northeast did not resonate in the same way as Kashmir does. The northeast was routinely perceived in newsrooms as being of little interest to newspaper readers.

Four responses reflected the deep divisions in Indian society, and indicated how the socio-cultural binary influences professional activity:

Very few among the mainstream politicians, journalists have any knowledge of the northeast, except those who specialise in it. The feeling is that it does not directly concern our life. Kashmir on the contrary has the Pakistan angle, the Hindu-Muslim angle. Among political journalists, we have a vague idea about tribes and conditions in the northeast. Even if there is a massacre there, it is only a one-day thing for us. Frankly, nobody would admit it, but we do feel that the northeast is not a part of India. It is treated as an occupied territory; the psychology is that it is not part of us. Not surprising that the people there treat the Indian army as an occupation force. The bulk of Indians are not concerned about what happens there; somehow there is a feeling that what goes on there does not affect our fate. Right from an early age, we are not made aware of our country's ethnic diversity. We only know of Bengalis in eastern India, nothing beyond. Most of us will not be able to tell a Naga from a Mizo. The region has been a troubled area for a long time. The neglect is worse in the Hindi-language press. The English-language press is more concerned about the US and the UK than the northeast. The attitude towards the tribes is that they are a necessary evil, so all we have to do is to hold on to them and their territory by force. Officials have this feeling, the press also (DYV, Senior Editor; 2.3.01).

The northeast is not part of the collective psyche of the national mainstream. For us, they are 'chinks', the way northerners have branded them. There is a tremendous amount of political and cultural arrogance among people north west of the Doab region. The feeling is that we are superior; the concept of Aryan supremacy. The northeast is not politically significant. Assam has very few MPs, 14 out of 545, and 24 seats for the entire region. Culturally, northeast suffers from stereotyping. The image is that people there drink, eat all kinds of meat, they are amoral Christians who believe in polygamy and who fight bitterly. In sum, it is a society we don't need to know much about. The Indian army is there; give them two slaps and they will be quiet (DNM, Senior journalist; 23.3.01).

Journalists don't want to take the trouble to learn more about the region; there is no sustained interest; Prejudices are very deep even among highly paid officers. The attitude in Delhi to northeast tribals is: 'They have just come down from trees, they want toilets?' This is what a joint secretary of the Union Home Ministry once said. The attitude is that they are jungle people, and the same is the attitude among media men. There is discrimination by rulers, ministers, bureaucrats, and intelligence agencies. Such is the gap that many villagers there may not know who is our Prime Minister (DHC, veteran columnist; 11.4.01).

The northeast is not a part of the national mainstream. It is a very sad fact after 53 years of Independence. The Delhi press should cover northeast as intensely as Kashmir. It has to understand that the region is a unique part of India. Indian culture is largely considered Aryan culture while the Mongoloids are still considered alien. Once I had to explain that 'Kuki' is not a biscuit but a major tribe of Manipur (DPS1, Special Correspondent; 11.4.01).

The responses were remarkably frank; they indicated that the northeast people and tribes are not only seen as different from the mainstream (as viewed from New Delhi), but also primitive. DPB (columnist) highlighted the importance of prevailing socio-cultural environment, popular myths, beliefs and understandings:

Prejudices are very strong. There is a new kind of arrogance, particularly among the mainstream middle classes in India; it is very hegemonic. It privileges mainstream cultures and marginalizes the rest (10.4.01).

Two responses went further to explain why Kashmir held much appeal and how the low status of northeast is ingrained in a person in north India right from childhood:

There is a very rigid, formatted block against the northeast. Where, what is the northeast, Delhi journalists will ask. For them, 'my world is Punjabi food, and Kashmir is the only tourist place'. In this sense Kashmir is closer to me, a local issue. I don't go to the northeast for honeymoon. My colleague wanted to go to the northeast for his honeymoon; he became a major target of ridicule in our newsroom. The northeast people are tribals, and how do we treat tribals in our backyards? Kashmir is the birthplace of our biggest leader, Jawaharlal Nehru. Kashmir is immortalised in the film *Kashmir Ki Kali*. I too don't want to go to the northeast. I would rather visit Kashmir or Maharashtra or other mainstream state. The northeast holds no appeal; also, it is too distant. It is remote to me culturally, I do not relate to their languages, culture, or race. They are all chinks. For me, a *gora* (white person) from Kashmir holds 1000 times more attraction than someone from the northeast (DVVPS, Chief of Bureau; 7.4.01).

The low status of the northeast is fed into the sub-conscious right from childhood in north India. In folktales, at least in eastern Uttar Pradesh where I come from, it is portrayed as a region of women from where one never comes back, or as a region that is not worth going to. On the other hand, Kashmir has the opposite place. We always say *Kashmir se Kanyakumari tak, Bharat ek hai* (see Page 47); we don't say *Guwahati se Kanyakumari...* Kashmir has always been viewed as heaven on earth in folktales, mythologies. It is a place that everyone aspires to visit before dying. So when something happens or goes wrong there, the people are disturbed. The poetry of great (Hindi) poets such as Dinkar or Pant resonates with Kashmir imagery. Kashmir is considered the crown, the most important part of the body. The northeast too has the same importance, but there is no awareness of this' (DRBR, Chief of Bureau; 24.3.01).

Such impressions about Kashmir and the northeast based on deep socio-cultural values are likely to affect newsroom perceptions about all events in the two regions, not just those relating to violence and terrorism. The news value of cultural proximity or cultural distance clearly exerts a strong influences on the newsworthiness of events, including those involving much violence and terrorism. As DPM (Chief of Bureau) stated:

There is silence in Delhi on northeast insurgencies because they have not registered on our minds. Most of us do not have any relatives, business connections or property there; thus there is no interest. Our daily life is in no way affected if something happens there. Sanjay Ghosh's abduction and death in Assam made news because he had connections in the government and the media. So many incidents take place but there is no coverage; only when one of us is killed we collectively sit up and take notice (24.4.01).

Sanjay Ghosh, a Bengali by origin, was educated in England and represented an NGO based in Assam. He was abducted and killed by the ULFA in 1997, an event that was closely covered by the national media. The northeast is likely to figure in the national press only when culturally proximate events or actors take place. This is valid not only at the international level but also *within* multicultural nations such as India. According to DVS (Chief of Bureau), 'the region figures as a tiny blip on the national radar, that too because the people at the receiving end are from north India---Hindi-speaking migrants, Marwaris, Bengalis---and not because of problems of the region or its people'. (As stated in Chapter 2, the powerful Marwari community dominates business and trade in the region, and hails from the northwest Hindi-speaking state of Rajasthan).

Respondents recalled three incidents that reiterated the low status of the northeast. The instances also suggest that the northeast's routine marginalisation usually goes unquestioned or unobserved in the newsrooms.

I remember one particular day when I was covering parliament. Two items were listed for discussion: a bomb blast at the RSS office in Madras (Chennai), and the Kuki-Naga clashes in Nagaland and Manipur. In the blast, 10 people were killed while in the Kuki-Naga clashes hundreds had been killed. There were 35 MPs listed to speak on the blast. Only three MPs were present in the House when the second item was taken up. It is a clear signal that these (tribal clashes in the northeast) are not important issues' (DPS2; 5.4.01).

'Twice I was involved with Doordarshan's election coverage, in November 1998 and February 2000. In November 1998, elections were held in Mizoram, Rajasthan, New Delhi and Madhya Pradesh. It was a live show. No more than a total of 40 minutes out of 26 hours were devoted to Mizoram. We had an OB van at Aizawl, but we took the link only once or maybe twice during the entire telecast. Such is the approach even in official Doordarshan. In February 2000 when elections were held in Bihar, Orissa, Haryana and Manipur, we kept producing material for Manipur but the hosts said: 'Leave out Manipur'. The perception is that the market is not interested in news from the northeast' (DNM; 23.3.01).

‘The other day there was no major political leader in Delhi but a statement was issued on Kashmir, and how the media lapped it up! The same day the chief minister of Manipur was here to discuss a ceasefire proposal with Naga insurgents, but not a line was reported’ (DVVPS, Chief of Bureau; 7.4.01).

DSH was the only interviewee based in New Delhi who was ethnically from the northeast (Assam). He is a journalist, columnist and author of books on the northeast, and one of the rare examples of a journalist of northeast origin writing about mainstream issues. As former correspondent of *The New York Times* based in New Delhi, his reporting of the Bhopal gas disaster of 1984 was nominated for the Pulitzer Prize. He contributes opinion pieces in the national press and is also part of NGO activity to raise awareness levels in mainland India about the northeast, and forge closer social and journalistic links between the two regions. During my fieldwork period, DSH had organised a media conference in New Delhi (which went virtually unnoticed in the national press even though some of its journalists attended it); the subject was ‘Media Under Pressure in the Northeast: Is the Rest of the Media Bothered?’ (See Appendix A)⁴¹. A rare ‘northeast voice’ in influential circles in New Delhi, DSH often points out inaccuracies in northeast-related reports appearing the national press by writing to editors (see Appendix B). His responses had a resonance and flavour distinct from others:

In June 2000, there were major floods in Siang in Arunachal Pradesh. Not one national newspaper mentioned it. When the Agriculture ministry took note, the minister offered Rs 500,000 as relief (millions are given in other states). So many important developments are taking place in the northeast: the ceasefire in Nagaland has been extended, there is a growth in civil society; ordinary people want things to work, people are speaking out against insurgents publicly. But there is no focus by the press in Delhi about an event that is very significant. After 40 years of struggle there is peace in Nagaland. The northeast is much more complicated than Kashmir. Change is coming about in Nagaland, there is a need to make systems work. There is a sense of tiredness about how long this spate of violence has been going on. But the press can only reflect society. There will be a market for northeast news only when it is seen to affect India substantially. Six months of the year people live with floods. No correspondent goes to flood-affected areas. There is a lack of imagination on the part of correspondents, editors. It is a huge task to raise the level of awareness about the region. People are now accepting that there are gaps. Delhi is very government-oriented, bureaucratic. Many find it easier to dismiss the northeast because it is very complex to understand. They ask, what is happening, who is killing whom, what is this thing called autonomous

⁴¹ As stated in Chapter 4, I used the occasion to interview northeast-based journalists who attended the conference.

council? They take the easy way out; don't make an effort to explain. If you scan the opinion pages of national newspapers, it would seem that only Sanjoy Hazarika writes on the northeast. It shows that either I am fighting a losing battle or people have chosen not to treat it as a problem. Even reporters based in Guwahati, they depend on stringers or others. Nobody goes to the interiors. The problem is that there is no one controlling northeast coverage from Delhi. If there are no Marwaris or Hindi-speaking people killed, it is easier for the editor in Delhi to say there is no story. It is basically a cultural thing; the neglect of the region is not born out of prejudice, *per se*. In daily meetings, editors will say: Is there anything new happening there? How much political interest is there? Editors do not encourage correspondents to cover the region. Perhaps if northeast militants explode a bomb in Delhi they will wake up (28.3.01).

Summary

This sub-section highlights the importance of cultural proximity or cultural distance *within* nations. The media do not work in a socio-cultural vacuum; media images of a particular section of society or region cannot be very different from the general (dominant) attitudes and values prevalent in society. The responses suggest that unlike Kashmir, New Delhi-based journalists perceive the northeast region and its people as 'different' or the 'other', something that does not 'affect *us*'. Kashmir, on the other hand, enjoys an evocative and positive cultural recall. Kashmir is accorded a pre-eminent position in India's social, political and cultural environment, while the northeast is concomitantly accorded low status not only vis-à-vis Kashmir or its conflicts, but even in general terms. The national capital is usually the focus of elite activity in almost every field. As Chapter 2 indicated, there are gaps in understanding at official levels about issues and problems of the northeast. In modern India, the official approach has usually been that of a fire fighter, seeking ad hoc solutions to problems that are rooted in deep socio-cultural divisions.

As the next sub-section will show, the general attitude of indifference towards the region affects and influences professional decisions. In the socio-cultural environment in which New Delhi-based journalists operate, a particular ethnicity (Aryan), language (Hindi) and region (north and central India) comes to be routinely privileged. The responses reiterate and reflect the traditional low status of tribes, who are viewed as being outside the fold of Hindu society. According to DVS, the people in the northeast 'are like distant neighbours than Indians' while DD believes such perceptions among journalists amounted to news apartheid: 'This is not talked about. They won't even accept that there is underlying racism in all this. If a person from the

northeast comes to Delhi, he is looked upon differently. Unconsciously or consciously this attitude stems from that'. The displacement of primitiveness on to 'others' enables middle class elites---from which journalists are drawn---to maintain an image of themselves as pure, modern and unsullied by tribal ways of life.

5.2.3 Theme 2: Influence of Socio-Cultural Environment on Professionalism

Most respondents stated that in newsrooms, there was little or no knowledge about the complex realities of the northeast. 'Due to its complexity, the attitude of newspapers is that this is a beehive, why should we put our hands in it, why should we bother?' (DRBR). According to DPS1, 'It is extremely difficult to make the Desk respond and understand the importance of developments there'. The general principle, as DAT put it, was: 'We don't know, we don't cover'. A socio-cultural environment in which a particular region is routinely viewed through a fixed prism, influences organisational matters such as posting of correspondents, appointment of stringers, allocation of beats, making judgments about abilities of correspondents with ethnic roots in particular regions, etc.

DHC, a veteran journalist with extensive experience of covering the northeast soon after independence in 1947, stated that the media was guilty of historically neglecting the region. All senior political correspondents, he stated, were based in Delhi or Calcutta, who would not take the trouble to go to the region: 'You did not bother about tribal areas except to contain them...colleagues are uncomfortable about the humid weather there, and then there is also the language problem. Why go to a village at all, you will require an interpreter. Even today we do not have the complete picture of ULFA'.

Three responses on newsroom perceptions revealed how the overall socio-cultural environment affected journalists and their work in relation to the northeast:

It is difficult to interest colleagues in northeast news. It is a battle. The overriding view undoubtedly is Delhi-centric; it is the perspective of north and central India. The northeast suffers in this environment, even if there is violence there. For 20 years we had no one (correspondent) in the northeast. Sometimes the correspondent from Calcutta or Patna used to cover it. The mind-set is: Is the northeast that important? Sometimes we get letters from readers wishing we had more news from the north-east, but the reality in the newsroom makes this impossible (DSC, Associate Editor; 28.1.01).

As the responses indicate, there is acknowledgement that the northeast deserves more coverage than it got but the responses also reveal a sense of helplessness on the

part of individual journalists to change perceptions in newsrooms. DSC's experience in his newsroom seemed symbolic of all newsrooms in the capital, particularly those of the four national newspapers. The region was often covered on an ad hoc basis, by temporarily despatching correspondents from neighbouring states. The situation seemed no different in television newsrooms that are mostly manned at the senior level by journalists with a print background, who transfer their 'map of meaning' to the new medium. DSJ, senior television journalist, stated:

There is lot of ignorance. There is a tendency to club the entire region as a conflict zone. We are guilty of this. We do get stories from the northeast, but what happens to them? There is no awareness of the context, how they should be placed. They may be hugely significant but lack of knowledge affects its use. There is also the cycle of 24-hour news; northeast news is not carried in prime time. We do try to accommodate news from there, try and push it up, but more often there is an internal struggle to use news from other parts of the country. I feel the main reason is the way northeast is perceived, a kind of stereotype: whether or not people would want to watch news from there. We are also unable to ascribe faces to the northeast. Its issues are viewed in isolation. The assumption is that it would have no bearing in the rest of the country (28.1.01).

DSJ admitted that newsrooms in New Delhi do receive northeast-related reports filed by news agencies as well as in-house journalists, but the output rarely crosses the 'gates' to reach the stage of publication in the next day's newspaper or in television bulletins. In editorial meetings, there is usually an 'internal struggle' by various departmental heads to ensure their output is published. Since the news network is well established in mainland India, particularly north and central India (the 'Hindi belt'), the output is invariably more from these regions. Such output also accords with the socio-cultural background of Desk personnel who make key decisions about news selection, display and placement. In such a competitive newsroom environment, northeast-related news is routinely marginalised by default. As DRZA (Senior Editor) observed:

It is true enough that insurgencies in the northeast suffer considerable neglect in terms of media coverage and consequently, the attention of the authorities. This is not just on account of perceived geographical remoteness, but an indefinable sense of distance psychologically from north India. The general attitude in newsrooms towards developments in the northeast I think is a sort of dazed incomprehension. It is rare for there to be an informed eye to take a look at stories coming through from there. Unfortunately, they do rather get relegated to the inside pages, if at all used (25.6.01).

In such environment, on the few occasions that news of the region is published, it is often marked by several errors: incorrect names of state capital in text or headlines, incorrect spelling of names of important tribal politicians/actors, incorrect mention of special constitutional provisions, etc. According to DAJP, 'among journalists, there is no stake in the northeast. They often go wrong on facts; worse, nobody notices it'. NRK's perspective from the northeast is: 'we are always happy to see news in the national press about our region, but the happiness ends there. Often, the news item is faulty, scanty, full of untruth, not given the due importance or has a political angle. When we read such reports we feel as if we still don't form part of the mainstream. The press would treat similar events in Delhi or elsewhere differently'.

The experience of two former Northeast Correspondents of *The Times of India* posted in the region in the early 1990s reiterated newsroom realities:

The general attitude in newsrooms towards northeast developments is one of apathy. Since many people in newsrooms are from states other than the northeast, they don't relate to developments there, and tend to ignore the region. However, when it comes to what's called juicy, sexy or exotic stories, they are displayed prominently. For example, when I did a story on the matriarchal Khasi society in Meghalaya coming under pressure, it was not only used as a front-page story, it was also reproduced in the *New York Times* and the *International Herald Tribune*. I haven't been discouraged from working on northeast stories, but in my experience, one has to sell his northeast stories harder in the newsroom than stories from other regions. Consequently, reporters based in the northeast tend to magnify the issues a bit just in order to get noticed by their bosses. (DZA; 28.6.01).

This is suggestive of an Orientalist position in newsrooms based in New Delhi. The attitude that considers 'juicy, sexy or exotic stories' from the northeast more likely to be published is no different from Said's work on how the west views the Middle East as its exotic 'other'. Reports filed on developments in India for the western press too have to be framed within the Orientalist parameters to be considered agreeable or to accord with the 'map of meaning' of journalists manning the newsrooms in London or New York. However, as the responses indicate, this sense of the 'other' is discernible not only within the parameters in which Orientalism was originally conceptualised, but it can also influence socio-cultural perceptions and media content *within* the Orient. In this sense, the northeast is routinely perceived in New Delhi as a 'sub-Orient' within the Orient (India).

DDM, another former Northeast Correspondent of *The Times of India* reiterates the theme of internal Orientalism:

For people in Delhi, the northeast is much too distant; in fact, most people in and around Delhi are unaware of the huge political, cultural, and linguistic differences among the seven states. The general attitude ranges from being patronising to indifference. Coverage is largely limited to stories about large-scale violence, arson, or political chaos. Other stories about life in the region are not given much prominence. Occasionally, Delhi newspapers send journalists from the capital to do stories with an 'exotic' flavour. When I moved to Delhi, the northeast was one of my many 'beats'. While nobody 'discouraged' me from working on reports/analyses on the northeast, I don't think I was actively encouraged to do so either. My reports would invariably be held over or used in some remote corner of an inside page (30.7.01).

Several respondents (DBB, DPB, DNM, DPS2, DVS) stated that a major reason for northeast news finding less and less space in the national press is the spectre of 'Murdochisation', which had changed the very definition of what was considered newsworthy (see Chapter 4; Section 4.2.3). Recalling the corporate approach towards news and newspaper production, they stated that there was 'no market for news from the northeast, readers are given only that which they want'. However, this was disputed by DPS1, DAJP and DBB, who insisted that readers were not impervious to news from the northeast and were in fact keen to know about developments there, if only the national press covered the region like any other region in the country. According to DPB, the concept of news had changed after leading publishing houses adopted Murdoch's business and editorial practices:

There has been a silent Murdochisation of the press. The problem has been aggravated in the last decade. The whole notion of what is relevant has changed in newsrooms. Subjects like commercial activity, corporate success and glamour of non-resident Indians are given extra importance. Some beats have disappeared, like Labour, Education, and Health. We should be really alarmed that such issues have become less and less important. No one writes about real issues facing India. The media does not ask questions, only celebrates each time somebody announces intention to invest. If Nagaland were an investment destination, it would have got some coverage (10.4.01).

DRBR provided a cogent overview of how the perception of the region in the newsrooms has changed. He said when he was posted in the region, his reports were published prominently, but added they were unlikely to be given similar importance in today's environment:

Around 1990, the northeast had become part of the mainstream as far as media coverage was concerned, but later it slipped back to its earlier position of neglect. Until 1991, it was covered the same way as any other part of India. As far as I know, from 1980 to 1991, those who considered their newspaper to be a national newspaper felt that the region should be covered the same way as

Delhi is covered. Due to such attitude, there was a regional desk, and using news from the northeast was a matter of interest and concern in the newsrooms. In the Samir Jain type of journalism⁴², the newspaper became a product with a consumerist attitude, no different from soap or toothpaste. The earlier concept of news changed after 1991 (24.3.01).

DRBR was posted in Arunachal Pradesh in the early 1980s; he has witnessed first hand how economic changes over the years influenced perceptions within newspaper managements and newsrooms. As he correctly pointed out, until 1991---from when 'Murdochisation' of the Indian press is believed to have begun---the northeast was considered as worthy of news coverage as any other region in the country. There was a sense among senior editors that extra effort needed to be devoted to gather news from the region. The extensive coverage of the six-year 'Assam movement' against illegal immigrants from East Pakistan/Bangladesh was an example of the pre-Murdochisation approach in newsrooms. DRBR continued:

The awareness of being a national daily, responsibility and duty towards the nation, has diminished. Earlier, only the very good reporters used to be sent to the northeast; now the region is considered a punishment posting within the fraternity. Recently, two journalists went to the northeast for six months to travel around. Before going, they met editors in Delhi and told them they would file reports and would they cover some expenses. No, the editors said. Our editor asked them to send reports, and said they would be carried in the normal course, as and when it becomes possible to do so. They have been sending reports, but they are used rarely, more as an obligation than any desire to report about the region. This is the change that has come about after 1991 (24.3.01).

The point that 'earlier only the very good reporters used to be sent to the region' is a reflection on the reporting and reputation gained by correspondents posted in the region such as V I K Sareen, Harisha Chandola, Shekhar Gupta, Hemendra Narain, Seema Guha and Vipin Pubby for the national press. In the 1990s, despite serious efforts by subsequent correspondents, their output did not stand out the way that of earlier correspondents did. Their output not only ran into the 'gate' of the socio-cultural binary but also that of 'Murdochisation'. DRBR continued:

Before 1991, whenever I suggested that something needs to be covered in the region, my editors would be promptly agree. The reports used to have an impact. The notion that no one is interested in the northeast is wrong; many are interested. The credibility of English newspapers has suffered; its ability to create public opinion has reduced. It is less a spokesman of the common man and more of the Establishment. Insurgency is less a problem of the

⁴² See Page 133 for observation about Samir Jain in Coleridge (1993); also Footnote 39.

Establishment than that of the common man. Journalists alone cannot be blamed for this. The place where he or she works influences him. Now it is difficult to raise questions; no debates take place, the newsroom is as silent as a mortuary. The selfishness of those who own and lead the newspapers has ensured that public institutions come under less or no scrutiny now (24.3.01).

None of the respondents said they had been encouraged to cover the northeast, unlike Kashmir. Over the years, what was once a coveted posting---as it virtually assured correspondents Page 1 exposure due to the wide range of events and issues---came to be seen as a punishment posting (DAJP). As DNM stated: 'I was never told to cover the region. Once I wanted to go there while I was in *The Economic Times*, but was told off'. DAJP and DBB pointed out that no full-time correspondents of national newspapers are posted beyond Assam; moreover, managements are reluctant to provide facilities and funds for travel within the region---difficult at the best of times. In his nearly three-decades long career, DAJP said he recalled only one instance of any editorial initiative on the northeast: 'H K Dua, former editor of *Hindustan Times*, once told an assistant editor, Ash Narain Roy, to just travel around the region for two months and come back. He was not expected to report from there. That visit sensitised Roy to the region, and he now writes often on developments there. This would not have been possible if the editor had not sent him, but such initiatives are extremely rare'.

DBB, a former editor of *Hindustan Times*, was never posted in the northeast, but reported on some Nagaland-related developments after visiting it or interviewing underground Naga leaders based outside India. He stated that newsrooms in multicultural settings need to be 'representative' of social groups:

Most of us feel it can be covered out of briefings given by the joint secretary in charge of the northeast in the Union Home Ministry. Basically this amounts to only regurgitation of official viewpoints and data. When I did the stories on Nagaland, I got fantastic response in north India. I did not get such response for other stories. Anybody who says that northeast is not a lucrative enough market for the media is talking nonsense. The northeast is part of the Indian market; there are high disposable incomes in the region with western lifestyles. There is definitely a market there. Newspapers have to make the effort; they gain a lot by having a representative newsroom. Mizoram chief minister Zoramthanga opened up when a journalist hailing from Manipur interviewed him in Delhi recently. I am not advocating a quota system, but it increases the sensitivity of the newsroom to various regions. The absence of northeast-related news definitely subverts the media's agenda-setting function (4.4.01).

Newsrooms of the English-language press are predominantly staffed by journalists who ethnically hail from the 'Hindi belt' or other parts of mainland India. This has implications for the way news from the northeast is viewed. As DBB noted, a chief minister from northeast responded differently to a journalist who hailed from the region.

5.2.4 Summary

The socio-cultural understanding of Kashmir and the northeast influences organisational routines and professional practices. Unlike the Kashmir conflict, which is considered 'sexy' (DAT), the northeast conflicts are numerous and complex to understand. It is not possible to report or write about them without gaining basic knowledge of the kaleidoscope of tribes, religions, languages, and the plethora of special constitutional and legal provisions. News reporting demands that events are conveyed in a simple and easy to understand manner, which may preclude lengthy explanations; thus, journalists may tend to take the easy route by ignoring complex events and issues. In such a situation, it is likely that the output of journalists who are aware of northeast complexities and prevailing conditions is given less consideration in newsroom meetings, where the voices and output of relating to events and issues of the socio-cultural 'we' may be routinely accorded more importance.

After liberalisation of the Indian economy, the press has undergone several changes, affecting organisational matters and definitions of news. From a position when serious attempts were made to cover the northeast states as any other region before 1991, it has virtually disappeared from news columns of the national press. Senior journalists steeped in traditional, pre-liberalisation values disputed the widely held assumption that there is no market for news from the region. It was felt that northeast news coverage may improve if newsroom recruitment were made more representative of India's diversity. As DNM pointed out, except for few instances of journalists ethnically hailing from the northeast, an overwhelming majority of journalists in New Delhi were upper caste Hindu, with token representation from the lower castes, Muslims or Christians.

5.2.5 Theme 3: National Press not Performing Duty---View From the Northeast

Views expressed by northeast respondents reiterated themes around 'distance' in the form of geography, religion, ethnicity, politics and culture. Differences in perceptions

and attitudes between New Delhi and the northeast was remarkably summed up by the Prime Minister: 'When people in New Delhi think of the northeast, they usually think of the geographical distance, which translates itself into mental distance. When people in the northeast think of New Delhi, they usually think of the developmental distance, which translates itself into emotional distance' (see Footnote 23; page 68).

In the northeast, as in other regions, local journalists and readers perceive the four English-language newspapers with some awe, as 'national' newspapers; they are seen as a forum where the thinking and decisions of the federal government are articulated. Such perceptions about the national press were reflected in interviews conducted in the northeast.

A notable feature of the northeast responses was the cynical acceptance of the belief that 'we don't matter to Delhi' (NUB, NKTS, NWH, NAB, NDC, NRK, NHG). As noted in Chapter 2, in the northeast there is a sense of alienation from the national mainstream, which manifests into a distinct 'anti-Delhi, anti-Centre' belief; local journalists also share it. National newspapers are keenly read to discover signs of recognition of the existence of the region, its people and problems. The general opinion of the interviewees was that by consistently ignoring the region, the national press was not performing its national duty. Amidst the general mood of despondency and cynical acceptance of the region's low status, the national press is looked up to as the ultimate forum of redress and hope. As NDNB stated: 'At a time when other pillars of democracy crumble, people look up to the fourth estate: the judiciary, legislature and executive are crumbling. For this reason alone the (national) journalist ought to be far more dedicated, but is not'. NAB echoed this: 'Delhi is too far. The press has a role to bridge the distance. At least allow people to express grievances'.

The resentment over the national press' marginalisation of the region was apparent from the following responses:

When Delhi journalists come here they do not bother to go to villages. They just meet intellectuals in Guwahati, and the chief minister; prepare a story and file. They are told that I am pro-ULFA, so they come and talk to me. Once I refused to talk to them. Without reading my writings, you want ready quotes to do your story? This is no way to do journalism. Secret killings are adding to the problems. There is a complete alienation from the system. It is a chaotic situation. The young are attracted to the ULFA because they have seen the judiciary, national press, parliament; they have all failed and chosen to remain silent on our issues. All remain silent when so many get killed. They do not play the role they should; they are responsible for this chaotic situation here. The rulers and the intellectuals based in New Delhi have no time for us;

nobody bothers. The Delhi press also supports the policy to kill; it has also decided to crush the indigenous people. At least write some facts. At least reflect 50 per cent of the situation here. Now not even five per cent is reflected in the Delhi press. There is no democratic reaction in other parts of the country to events happening here. But when things happen elsewhere, we react here. Other parts of the country are not aware of our situation due to less coverage, so they don't react. Assam is seen as distant, as a forest area, as if people here are not civilised or cultured. (NAB; editor; 21.2.01).

Intense anger against the federal government based in New Delhi is commonly expressed in the region. In such an atmosphere, journalists working for national newspapers are seen as an extension of the Establishment; for example, as DAB stated: 'The Delhi press also supports the (federal government's) policy to kill'. An important point made by DAB was that due to low status in the news discourse, events and issues of the northeast do not evoke concern or 'democratic reaction' from other parts of India, though 'when things happen elsewhere, we react here'. This suggests a one-way flow of information *within* a nation. NUB was similarly passionate in his response:

Who gives a damn for us? Unlike Kashmir, we are of Mongolian stock. The northeast and its people are not important enough. Delhi is too self-centred; its horizon does not extend beyond the municipal borders of Delhi. Since September 2000 Manipur insurgents have blacked out Hindi television channels, who has reported it? Also, cinema halls there do not show Hindi films. There has been a police mutiny; a Catholic priest has been killed; who has reported it? This region is hard to understand. The Delhi press has a condescending attitude towards the northeast. We have only 24 MPs in the Lok Sabha out of 545. The fact is that we do not impinge on the national consciousness. People are frustrated, about 10 per cent people have taken to arms, but that is no way to vent their anger. But then where are we reflected in the national press? They write about restaurants in New Delhi, how is it relevant to us? No one is bothered. If 1000 people are killed then perhaps there will be some consternation but only for some days. Ten years ago, newspapers were more serious, around the time you were posted here. Now a newspaper is considered no more than a commodity, like soap or chocolate (14.2.01).

Such a reading of national newspapers in the periphery, the northeast, may challenge Anderson's argument that reading newspapers is a way of reinforcing the idea of belonging to a nation (1991). The people in the periphery may read national newspapers not so much to reinforce their Indian identity but to know about activities of the federal government and central elites on issues of the day, or about the presence or absence of news about events and issues concerning them, or even as a means to diurnally reinforce their belief that 'we don't matter to Delhi'.

The national press is accorded considerable importance, but at the same time, several respondents refused to call it 'national'. As DHG, a professor known for his political views, stated: 'The Delhi press is not a national press; it is a hegemonic press, so not suitable for democracy. People on the periphery are suppressed. Delhi journalists think they can form opinion on their own. The image that the Delhi press puts out is dangerous'. NWH and NDNB preferred to call it the metropolitan press, instead of 'national'. Editor NDNB explained:

I disagree with the term national media. It almost makes it seem as if we were anti-national or something. For me, there are two types of dailies--- metropolitan dailies and regional dailies. And there is a lot of difference between them. If one person were to read a metropolitan daily for six months and another person a regional daily, after six months their perceptions will be so different that they will begin to imagine that they are living in two different countries. The point I am trying to make is that the so-called national media is least bothered about what is happening in the peripheral states. Their credibility in these parts is so low that they hardly have any circulation. Reader interest develops only if news gets covered and if papers do good features on the problems of this area. As of now the metropolitan dailies are content with ignoring the northeast. It's typical ostrich like behaviour' (20.2.01).

Referring to the mood of despondency, alienation and visceral resentment towards New Delhi and the federal government in the region, NWH believed that the media could help change focus from violence to peace. He, however, regretted that 'like mainland India, the metro media too treats the northeast as the periphery'. Noting that the enormous funds infused into the region by the federal government were little more than fire-fighting measures, which would never help bring peace, he stated: 'The media perhaps can change the focus. But unfortunately, the metropolitan print media too seems to regard the region as India's backwaters. NRK observed:

The Delhi press is made out to be the national press. We are forced to consume what is put out by the Delhi press. If Delhi treats the northeast as a problem, then it must have the best people working here in all spheres. They should go deeper into the genesis of the problems; the region should be focussed more often. The media shoves down our throat the majority viewpoint on every issue, as if other regions of the country have no different views. The Delhi-based English language press has a wider reach of national coverage. It is more important for opinion building in Delhi (20.2.01).

Some respondents (NDC, NRK, NHG, NYL) were critical of correspondents of national newspapers posted in Assam, most of whom ethnically and culturally hailed from outside the region. A common criticism was that since they wanted to further

their career goals, they usually filed only those reports that would attract the attention of their senior colleagues based in newsrooms in New Delhi. Another criticism was that correspondents approached the region with biases, and made little effort to understand complex realities. The respondents recalled several correspondents who had worked in the region, made a mark during their tenure and subsequently went on to hold senior positions in the Delhi press.

Three responses on the functioning of correspondents of national newspapers in the northeast revealed how correspondents of national newspapers are perceived by their colleagues of the local media:

Most correspondents of Delhi-based papers do not want to stay here. There is the theory that if you want to be a true journalist go and work in the northeast for some time. They have a big brother attitude towards us; the feeling that they always know more than us. But there are some exceptions to this. But most do not want to stay here, particularly those with families. They only stay for a few months, take a 'certificate' of having worked in the northeast and get a promotion. It is like an experiment. They write reports without meeting the right people. There was a time when FA (correspondent of *India Today*), sitting in Patna, used to talk to me for one hour on the phone and do expert writing on the region from there (NDC; 20.2.01).

Most people who represented Delhi papers here have been knowledgeable, but when they write, they are guided more by what their editors ask them to write. They have to write on certain issues only if they want to make it to page one; otherwise their reports get dumped in the inside pages or are just left out. If they are given a free hand, they could do better. Broadly, the attitude of Delhi journalists is of unconcern' (NRK; 20.2.01).

'Neo-colonial attitudes are being perpetuated. Delhi has a vested interest in keeping the region disturbed. There is a similar caste system in the Indian media. Our journalist friends from Delhi come to the region with preconceived ideas and biases. They perpetuate stereotypes as evident from programmes on Zee TV and others. This perpetuates the climate in which insurgency flourishes, and makes it an attractive proposition for our youth. The Centre neglects the region; the media is no different. Metropolitan journalists come for a junket, go back but don't file anything. It is difficult to find even one sentence in a national daily on the northeast' (NYL; 28.1.01).

Avraham suggests that in their routines, correspondents usually tend not to 'rock the boat'; they file stories that fit the accepted pattern of reporting: 'Thus, even though their placement within the marginal cities afford them a more accurate picture of life in the periphery, they tend to continue to perpetuate the stereotyped generalisations accepted by news organisations' (2002: 79). Reports that reinforce the widely accepted image of the northeast being a disturbed area have more chances of being

used in the national newspapers than, say, about tribes adopting modern techniques of farming in the hills or groups of citizens resisting insurgents' efforts to extort 'tax'. NWH stated that he often came across serious readers who lament about the poor or no coverage of the region:

I am often asked why no national newspaper writes about Assam's 'Satriya' dance form being accorded the status of an Indian classical dance form by the Sangeet Natak Akademi (official cultural body). Why no one bothers to highlight the massive artificial floods that ravaged parts of Arunachal Pradesh last year when the Chinese let waters flow out from a dam. Or why no one writes about the plight of nearly 200,000 Bodo and Santhal refugees in western Assam, who have been victims of ethnic clashes four years ago and who continue to live in sub-human conditions in makeshift camps' (28.1.01).

NWH and NHG said most correspondents were insensitive to ground realities and blindly use the official terminology ('terrorist') and sources (army) preferred by their editors. According to NWH, editors and key journalists based in New Delhi need to be sensitised to the complexity of the region so that the right message was sent down the editorial line. NHG regretted that correspondents tended to blindly accept whatever information the army gave them: 'the press automatically accepts the views of the army. Editors prefer these kinds of views. Instead of representing or reflecting reality, the media creates a reality. Ultimately, conflicts are settled by force, and the media's non-coverage suits the government. It is as if the problems of the northeast are not the nation's problems'.

On the issue of branding individuals as 'terrorist' or 'insurgent', NWH stated:

Newspaper editors often regard themselves as being different, as being above everything, as being someone terribly different. This perhaps applies more to those editors based in the metros. To my mind, there is an urgent need to sensitise these editors on the delicate, complex and often highly emotive scenario in conflict zones as the northeast. Then perhaps these editors would send the message down the line that the terms 'terrorist' and 'militant' do not necessarily mean the same and so on. In the northeast, a rebel cadre would not like to be referred to as a terrorist but may not mind being called an insurgent (28.2.01).

NKTS, deputy director-general of the state-owned Doordarshan and All India Radio, heads the infrastructure in the northeast. A Mizo tribal from Mizoram, he was one of the rare examples of a journalist hailing from the northeast holding a key media position. His response was noteworthy for the severe criticism of the attitude of his employer---the federal government---towards the region:

Kashmir and Punjab are very near to Delhi, thus they are 'India Number One'. We are 'India Number Two'. Important events in the northeast are given low priority in Delhi newsrooms, including Doordarshan. Out of 110 news-feeds sent by Doordarshan's centre in Arunachal Pradesh to the central newsroom in New Delhi in one year, only 10 are used. Is the value of one life lost in the northeast less than the value of a life lost in Kashmir insurgency? We doubt if the northeast is considered true part of India. When the first All India Radio station was inaugurated here in Guwahati, there was protest since the national anthem did not include Assam or other parts of the northeast, but it dutifully listed other states of the country. The national anthem was not allowed to be sung. Delhi journalists do not cover northeast objectively; often they misrepresent and commit factual mistakes. Sometimes they put Shillong in Mizoram or Imphal in Meghalaya. So many ceasefires, extortions and other developments here do not find a mention in the Delhi press. We in the northeast know more about other parts of the country than people elsewhere know about us. We are often asked to join the national mainstream, but what is Indian culture? The mainstream should come to smaller streams rather than the other way round. The northeast is taken as a museum piece by Delhi. The Delhi press does not have time for us; only when the VIPs come, they come. The inside story of the region and its problems are never investigated; how many people have been killed, how many women raped in Nagaland and Mizoram, no one knows. Phizo (a legendary Naga leader) once said it is not a question of how many women were raped, how many were not raped. The neglect by the media suits Delhi since they can do what they like, they don't want people in other parts of the country to know. The new Doordarshan channel for Kashmir has been given so many funds, but very less funds for us in Doordarshan northeast (14.2.01).

NDC, editor of a respected Assamese literary weekly, recalled that he briefly worked on the New Delhi edition of *Indian Express*: 'Colleagues in the *Express* newsroom asked me strange questions. One girl on the Desk asked me if Assam is in China or Burma. Someone said he had been to my place, Dimapur. They do not know that there are seven states, only a region'. DRK and DHG regretted that whenever they point out glaring errors in reports or article by writing to the editor of the concerned publication, neither are they acknowledged or used; the errors remained uncorrected even in subsequent reports or features.

The northeast's general low status seemed to affect local journalists, who work under difficult conditions as they were caught between insurgents and security forces. Leaders of journalist unions in New Delhi, who often highlight harassment or other causes of journalists in various parts of the country, rarely take up issues concerning northeast journalists. NAB, editor of a mass circulation Assamese tabloid, is known for his radical views that have brought him in conflict with officials and security forces. Some years ago he was jailed for his alleged links with the secessionist ULFA,

but later released for want of evidence. He stated: 'They put me in jail. Had I been in Haryana or Uttar Pradesh or the 'Hindi belt', things would have been different; I may have got the Magsaysay award. No Delhi journalist supported me; no one raised questions why an editor of my stature has been arrested. I am the editor of the highest circulated daily. There is just no question of even compensation'.

5.2.6 Summary

This sub-section has highlighted gaps in the perception of news-workers based in Delhi and the northeast, and the high esteem in which the national press is regarded in the periphery. Expectations from the national media were high, in keeping with the normative paradigm of journalism, though they contrasted drastically with the reality--the dominance paradigm, or, journalism *as it is* (McNair, 1998: 19). The respondents angrily stated that the national press did not accord the importance the region deserved. The deep sense of neglect in the region has bred a climate in which every decision or action taken by national leaders is seen as a zero-sum game or as a conspiracy. For example, DHC recalled Nehru's speech during the 1962 India-China war, when Chinese forces crossed Arunachal Pradesh and entered Assam (see Chapter 2, Page 65-66). According to DHC, Nehru's mention, 'My heart goes out to the people of Assam...' amounted to 'bidding goodbye' to the region and its people; it was and continues to be perceived locally as a letdown by New Delhi. The national press is viewed as a sub-set of such alleged conspiratorial attitudes. NHG recalled that during the 1962 war he was part of a group that met Nehru: 'Nehru was more bothered about Kashmir. We met him as students in 1962, during the Chinese invasion up to Assam. He scolded us and asked if we were cowards. We said: 'You are not at the receiving end'. He then piped down'.

However, respondents' anger over the national press concealed the high regard with which they held its agenda-setting function. Even while being disparaging about the way the national press covered the region, they hoped it would change attitudes and play its normative role in the Indian public sphere. There was lack of unanimity over terming the New Delhi-based press as the 'national' press, but it was universally acknowledged that it had a major impact on political and decision-making circles at the highest level. Respondents felt that barring exceptions, correspondents of national newspapers based in the region could not escape the blame for perpetuating 'step-motherly attitudes' (NDC). They also highlighted the need to sensitise editors and

senior journalists to the region's complexities so that proper attention could be devoted and basic errors avoided.

5.2.7 Theme 4: International Dimension and Proximity of Kashmir to New Delhi

During interviews, I mentioned Kashmir as a reference point, and maintained focus on northeast conflicts. This sub-section sets out respondents' perceptions towards Kashmir. 'Murdochisation' was stated to be a major reason to adversely affect northeast coverage in the 1990s, but it did not seem to affect coverage of the Kashmir conflict.

Respondents stated three main reasons for the high status of Kashmir in the news discourse: its key location in modern India and its presence in religious, cultural and national myths; the involvement of Muslims, Pakistan and the conflict's internationalisation; and its geographical proximity to New Delhi. DAT and DPS2 stated that Kashmir was considered 'sexier in newsrooms' while DAJP believed that Kashmir is simpler and easier to understand than northeast conflicts. DBB, DVS and NDNB believed that Kashmir may be on top of the federal government's agenda, but it was the northeast that may represent a greater challenge in the long run.

Responses reflected the high importance that journalists routinely attached to the Kashmir conflict:

Kashmir is covered consciously because it is on the international agenda. There is a lot of hue and cry at the international level. It is also the only case where there is state-sponsored institutionalised terrorism. The bloodier and violent it is, the better it will be covered. There are a lot of extremist elements there; there is religious fundamentalism and the Afghanistan angle as well. The Islamic angle also makes it newsworthy. The US is also involved in Kashmir (DAR; 29.3.01).

To the national press, Kashmir is a combustible combination of the irreducible past and an irresistible future. It is undoubtedly a huge story for us: the Kashmir valley's strategic importance in geo-political terms, its complex cocktail of religious-political problems and the question it poses for India as it was meant to be, not what Pakistan wants it to be (DRZA; 25.6.01).

Kashmir and Punjab are nearer culturally and geographically; they create immediate fear in the minds of the people in New Delhi, the ruling elites and the media. Proximity is a very big factor. If there is the smallest of incident in Punjab or Kashmir, there is a fear that they will come and kill us in Delhi. The northeast people have not come to kill in New Delhi so far (DPM; 24.3.01).

Kashmir is an international involvement. It also has Hindu shrines such as Vaishno Devi, Dal Lake, Amarnath yatra. Kashmir's relevance has been perpetuated over the years by national leaders like Nehru (DHC; 11.4.01).

DVVPS and DAJP stated that Kashmir had the more familiar Hindu-Muslim angle, unlike the less-emotive Christian or tribal factor in the northeast. DYV reiterated this and added that 'Kashmir has a visible hate symbol in the form of neighbouring Pakistan and the presence of Muslims, who are in a majority there'. DVVPS believed that the age-old Hindu-Muslim problematic translates in the modern era as the India-Pakistan problematic. He added that over 90 per cent of journalists in New Delhi hailed from the nearby states of Punjab, Kashmir or Haryana, and felt more concerned about Kashmir than the northeast. According to DAJP, 'It is a human tendency to play up one's own culture'. Comparing the two conflicts, DYV said 'the feeling is that Kashmir is our territory under foreign occupation but the north-east is occupied by us; that is the general attitude'.

Northeast respondents disputed that the involvement of Pakistan or the international dimension was mainly responsible for the higher status of Kashmir. They pointed out that all neighbouring countries around the northeast---China, Myanmar (Burma), Bangladesh and Bhutan---sometime or the other were involved in stoking insurgent fires in the region. India also accuses Pakistan of fomenting unrest in the northeast. As NDNB stated:

Terrorism in Jammu and Kashmir is stoked by Pakistan, but here too the ISI (Pakistan intelligence agency) is very strong. There is one set of standards for Kashmir and another for the northeast. There can be a ceasefire in Jammu and Kashmir, but nothing like that in Assam? Delhi journalists do not realise that they need to learn lessons from Kashmir. The loss to India will be greater if this area goes away. Look at the resources here: water, timber, tea, oil. During the Presidential address (to parliament), there was reference to Jammu and Kashmir, but no word about insurgency in the northeast? The sad part is that the Centre has learnt no lesson from the experience of Jammu and Kashmir (20.2.01).

According to DHG, Kashmir is a matter of relative strength between India and Pakistan, and a prestige issue for both. 'This is a typical view of the Delhi elite that has a blinkered view of things', he stated and added that unlike ULFA---the northeast based secessionist group---Kashmiri insurgents 'are not apologetic' about support from Pakistan.

5.2.8 Summary

The high status of Kashmir is based on its centrality to the respective polities of India and Pakistan. Its popular cultural imagery as well as proximity to New Delhi lends it greater leverage compared to the northeast. Kashmir has been the confluence of Hindu and Muslim religions, which have higher resonance in the Indian public sphere than Christianity or animism practised by northeast tribes. Some respondents believed that the northeast may prove a greater problem for the State than Kashmir, but in the prevailing environment, there was little realisation of that in newsrooms, government-political circles or the elites. Northeast respondents stated that the region had comparable international dimensions and intensity of conflict, but Kashmir obviously had something 'extra' (NDC) that the northeast did not have.

Most New Delhi interviewees stated that they had covered Kashmir-related events during their careers, and noted that reporting Kashmir invariably won them professional esteem from colleagues and prominence in newspapers. Due to Kashmir's high status, it figures in several beats: parliament, political parties, the ministries of External Affairs, Home Affairs and Defence, etc. Respondents said they reported on Kashmir developments either during their news gathering rounds in New Delhi or by visiting Kashmir to meet insurgents or government representatives. Such visits were either arranged by themselves through their own sources in insurgent groups or by government departments keen to publicise their activities among the alienated local population. Respondents in New Delhi said that except one or two colleagues, none had sources among insurgent groups in the northeast; no efforts were made to develop them. Government sponsored visits to the northeast were invariably treated as 'junkets', by officials as well as journalists, as a weekend getaway from New Delhi, from which not much coverage was expected, and less produced.

5.3 Practitioner Experience Account

In this sub-section, I step back from the role of a researcher and set out my experience of covering the northeast and Kashmir. I begin by briefly presenting my relevant socio-cultural and professional background before narrating aspects of the two-year tenure in the northeast as the Special Correspondent of *The Times of India*, between June 1988 and August 1990. However, I must emphasise that though journalists have covered the region before and after my tenure, my experience has been largely unique for reasons specific to my situation. Thus, the experience may not

be entirely representative but provides an account of what it means for a ‘mainstream’ individual to cover a region that is widely considered, by the same mainstream, as the ‘other’. It is also important to emphasise that during my tenure, the Indian media largely meant the press. It was the pre-Internet era and proliferation of news on Indian television was at least five years away. The newspaper was considered the most important source of information, and working for a national newspaper such as *The Times of India* lent further valence. The following table places my northeast posting in Guwahati (Assam) in the context of my career:

Table 15: CAREER IN JOURNALISM

<u>ESTABLISHMENT</u>	<u>POST</u>	<u>YEAR</u>	<u>LOCATION</u>
1. Zee News (TV)	Editor, Exec Producer	1999	New Delhi
2. Business Standard	Chief of Bureau	1996-1999	New Delhi
3. Asia-Pacific Communication Associates (multimedia)	Associate Editor, Bureau Chief	1994-1995	New Delhi
4. The Times of India	Special Correspondent	1990-1994	New Delhi
5. The Times of India	Special Correspondent	1988-1990	Guwahati
6. The Times of India	Chief Sub-Editor	1987-1988	Patna
7. The Times of India	Senior Sub-Editor	1986-1987	Patna
8. Rajasthan Patrika (English)	Sports Editor	1984-1986	Jaipur
9. Free Press Journal	Sub-Editor	1983-1984	Indore
10. Nagpur Times	Trainee Sub-Editor	1982-1983	Nagpur

5.3.1 Cultural Location and Pre-Northeast Career

In a deeply multicultural society such as India, a person’s cultural background becomes a matter of primary concern in professional and personal interactions. The surname reveals much about one’s roots, similar to the way the Scots recognise the Frasers, MacDonalds and the Crawfords as separate clans by their names. Mine immediately locates me as an upper caste Hindu from the western Indian state of Maharashtra (capital: Mumbai/Bombay). The ‘kar’, at the end of the surname, is a characteristic of Maharashtrians, and literally means the person is ‘of the village of’, in my case, of the village of ‘Sonwal’. In Assam, where ‘outsiders’, particularly Bengalis, are viewed with some condescension if not contempt, I was to feel grateful for the ‘kar’ in the surname, since it confirmed my non-Bengali origins, particularly because my Sanskritic first name is more common among Bengalis than Maharashtrians, which raised doubts among some. Culturally my roots lie in Maharashtra but I was born in the central Indian, Hindi-speaking state of Madhya

Pradesh, parts of which were once ruled by Maharashtrians (Maratha kings). Until the age of 18, I grew up in the eclectic Hindu-Christian, European environs of Goa, where my father, a Music Producer (Classical), was one of the first Indian employees of the local station of All India Radio after Goa was 'liberated' from Portuguese rule in 1961. I became comfortable with Hindi, the national language, only after we moved from Goa to Maharashtra in the late 1970s.

I began my journalistic career in December 1982 as a Sub-Editor (Trainee) on *Nagpur Times* (Nagpur, Maharashtra), and soon delighted in the world of journalism and the magic of words. Keen to travel and know different cultures, I subsequently moved on to join the launching teams of three new editions of leading newspapers: *Free Press Journal* (Indore, Madhya Pradesh; 1983-84), *Rajasthan Patrika* (Jaipur, Rajasthan; 1984-86) and *The Times of India* (Patna, Bihar; 1986-88). Two aspects of this progression are relevant to this study: India's multicultural tapestry opened up to me in a blaze of colours and languages as I moved through cultures that were vastly different from mine; secondly, I remained a Desk-Production journalist, moving up the hierarchy from a Trainee Sub-Editor to Sub-Editor, Senior Sub-Editor, Chief Sub-Editor and Acting News Editor; my responsibilities included editing copy, making pages, working late nights and producing the day's edition. During this period, I also reported on several sports and cultural events. By 1988, having exhausted most challenges on the Desk-Production side (and also tired of doing late night shifts), I explored the possibility of moving to the Field as a reporter/correspondent.

I was keen to enter the real world and experience the thrill of reporting on areas that are traditionally given higher status in journalism: politics, government, conflict, etc. Instead of bringing other reporters to limelight by improving their copy, giving by-lines and locating them suitably in the newspaper, I wanted to partake of this seemingly more exciting world, even if for a brief while. It was a new world of professional activity as I had never been a reporter, but the professional risk was worth taking since I knew that if things did not work out, I could always return to the Desk side of journalism.

It was this mix of cultural adventurism and journalistic ambitions that prompted me to seek a transfer from the Desk position (Chief Sub-Editor) at *The Times of India*, Patna, to Guwahati to cover the northeast. The region was left uncovered for some time when the previous correspondent was posted to Sri Lanka to cover the Tamil insurgency. In 1988, reporting from a location considered difficult was deemed

prestigious within the profession. The northeast was considered one of the difficult areas to cover; unlike Kashmir and Punjab, it was also a relatively unknown and uncharted territory. There were two contenders in the New Delhi office and one in the Mumbai/Bombay office for the vacancy there, and initially my lack of Field experience went against me. However, my Resident Editor in Patna was able to ensure my selection due to his standing within the profession and organisation. For me, the new post initially meant a drop in the editorial hierarchy since my new designation of Staff Correspondent was correspondingly two notches below that of my last designation of Chief Sub-Editor. I decided to go ahead, and was happy to be upgraded two notches as Special Correspondent within months of joining the new post.

Like most journalists and others in mainland India, I had very little idea about the region that I was to cover for as influential a newspaper as *The Times of India*. Days before I left Patna for Guwahati, I could not easily list the seven states or their capitals, and asked the Northeast Correspondent of *Indian Express*, who hailed from Patna and had come home on a holiday, to name them all for my benefit. I later checked the map to re-confirm. To familiarise myself with the area before formally taking over, I was asked to visit a remote tribal region in Assam where violent conflicts were raging for local autonomy. Tension was in the air as Assam police personnel had allegedly raped Bodo tribal women.

Travelling from Patna, it was immediately apparent on landing in Guwahati that this was a world that was different from any I had encountered during my earlier peregrinations within India. Proud of their way of life, Bodos resent the condescending manner in which the dominant Hindu Assamese treat them; for the Assamese, they were the 'other' within Assam. Bodos demanded the creation of a separate state to preserve their culture and way of life (until then within India, but later some armed Bodo groups sought secession). On reaching the tribal region (Kokrajhar), the colourful and simple Bodos were pleasantly surprised that a correspondent of *The Times of India*, no less, had come all the way to investigate the alleged rape. My reports on the incident were received well in New Delhi, Assam as well as within the profession, which emboldened me to pack up from Patna and move to Guwahati to take up my first Field posting.

5.3.2 Northeast Correspondent of a 'Delhi Newspaper'

Within days of my arrival in Guwahati in June 1988, at the height of the monsoon season, I faced another 'first'. As a Desk journalist, I had for years coldly handled copy about swirling flood waters submerging various parts of the country, including Assam; about large regions being cut off, the army being deployed to rescue the marooned, etc. I was soon to know what the reports actually meant. Returning home one late evening, I was stopped about two miles from my house. The entire residential locality was under water that had risen almost to rooftops. The fury of the mammoth Brahmaputra river, around which Guwahati is situated, was frightening that cold dark night. The army took over the next day, but it was not until two weeks before I could take a ride on an army boat to my house to see virtually all my belongings put to waste.

I rented another house, this time on a hill, but was soon greeted with snakes slithering across rooms. The house was burgled while I was away in Mizoram to cover local elections. A news agency (*Press Trust of India*) report, carried by several newspapers, headlined 'Times scribe's house burgled', did little more than bring top Assam police officials to my house to investigate the crime, an embarrassment that was often recalled by local journalists, who quipped they had never seen such police mobilisation for a simple case of burglary!

Before leaving Patna, my Resident Editor, ethnically a Bengali from Kolkata (Calcutta) and who was instrumental in ensuring my posting in the northeast, had imperiously briefed me: 'Treat the Assamese with the contempt they deserve', a remark that to me symbolised the cultural minefield of eastern India that I was to step into. I heard him out, and as on earlier occasions when I had moved into different culture zones, preferred to see and experience things for myself before forming opinions. In Assam, I soon removed local suspicions caused by my Bengali-sounding first name by pointing to well-known fellow Maharashtrians in Bollywood films and cricket, and the common 'kar' in our surname (Lata Mangeshkar, Urmila Matondkar, Namrata Shirodkar, Sunil Gavaskar, Sachin Tendulkar, etc.). Meanwhile, my reports--usually three per day in the New Delhi edition that arrived in the northeast in the evening---removed apprehensions that I may have come to the region with prejudices or biases. I was soon accepted locally, and extended rare cooperation and hospitality. I travelled extensively, through poorly connected but highly literate and westernised

states, and soon enjoyed reporting from the region, and picked up enough Assamese to strike conversations.

On the way home one late night, a policeman on patrol turned racially abusive when I spoke to him in Hindi, as its use immediately branded me an 'outsider'. However, I subsequently learnt enough spoken Assamese to be called '*Asomiya jana Marathi*' (A Marathi who knows Assamese), by Bhupen Hazarika, the doyen of Assamese music. I built a personal database of each of the seven states and read extensively on various aspects of the region's history, people and their cultures, which helped link contemporary events to history. The range and frequency of issues and events to be covered kept me constantly busy; it almost seemed that events took place for my benefit, so that I could report them and establish myself as a Field journalist!

My output was driven by a sense of enjoyment and freedom from Desk routines, but had a different effect among senior editorial colleagues and readers in New Delhi and elsewhere. Many felt happy to read about a region they knew little about while colleagues conferred on me the epithet of a 'northeast expert'; this 'honour', however, had more to do with the fact that I was considered a journalist with mainstream origins, and the perception among colleagues and readers in mainland India that 'one of us' is battling in 'difficult' northeast. A journalist of Mizo or Naga origin, working in, say, Mumbai/Bombay, would be unlikely to be called a 'Mumbai expert'. In Maharashtra, where the Mumbai edition carried my reports, I was viewed with some indulgence and wonder, of how *aamcha manoos* (our own man) was reporting from distant northeast.

Much of my success in reporting and getting published the next day was because unlike most correspondents, I had close knowledge of the ways of the Desk and its routines: my copy needed little editing, it carried a ready headline and passed through channels ('gates') in the New Delhi newsroom quickly. I knew page production timings, which helped time stories for Page 1 or other pages.

Moreover, I benefited from the Desk's working culture in which sub-editors build an image of a correspondent or reporter based on the routine experience of handling his or her copy. The arrival of copy from correspondents viewed as competent may be happily handled since less effort would be required to see it through the editorial processes; similarly, there is some reluctance to handle copy filed by correspondents seen to be less competent, since it would require re-writing, cross-checking, referencing etc. Thus, at the Desk level, correspondents come to acquire a stereotype

image, which gets reinforced daily on the basis of their output. Such stereotyping, however, cannot be healthy since the output of correspondents with better newsroom images tends to be routinely used just because the ‘messenger becomes the medium’; the same reports filed by others may not be considered worthy of publication. Conversely, even if the correspondent who is perceived at the Desk as less competent, strives hard and produces quality output, it may not receive due attention.

As Desk perceptions of my exertions in the northeast turned favourable, I benefited on occasions while reporting events or issues that may otherwise not be considered worth publishing; such reports were used prominently apparently due to the goodwill that my output had generated. Moreover, though I personally did not know the Desk colleagues who handled my copy in New Delhi, having never worked in the capital, I knew that they were aware of my Desk background; some of them saw me as one of their own, as one who had successfully ‘escaped’ from the monotonous routines of the Desk, which many Desk journalists aspire to do.

In the northeast, apart from differences in language, ethnicity and culture, what strikes a ‘mainstream’ person---journalist or otherwise---is the strong ‘anti-Delhi’ sentiments and the deep sense of alienation, in which everything about New Delhi, the federal government or Hindi-speaking people is deemed villainous or a conspiracy against the northeast and its people (see also Page 66, footnote 20). New Delhi is seen as the repository of cunning and worse, the hate symbol responsible for everything that is wrong in the region. Impressive figures are trotted to prove how New Delhi or India is exploiting the region for its tea and oil reserves. It is difficult to escape such local arguments presented with much passion and data.

Reporting in such a scenario can be tricky, particularly when one is a journalist for a New Delhi-based newspaper, and also needs to be careful of local sentiments. However, I managed to publish extensively about local sentiments, using freely cited official figures and charts. Apart from providing me great copy to file, such reports helped raise some awareness in New Delhi about problems in the region, besides pleasing local sentiments. I came to be viewed as a ‘balanced journalist of a Delhi newspaper’; journalists and others I interviewed during the fieldwork, more than a decade after I had left the region, recalled my tenure. I was the first journalist to interview the top leadership of ULFA which, however, did not prevent it from once issuing an ‘Obey or Die’ directive against me and the Northeast Correspondent of *Indian Express*. The group demanded that we submit our reports first to its

representatives for clearance before transmitting it to our newsrooms in New Delhi. Fortunately, both of us had contacts and goodwill in the group to ensure that the directive was not strictly implemented.

The one single idea that drove my reporting was that Assam and the region deserved to be covered in *The Times of India* like any other Indian state. For long, it had been covered perfunctorily, on an ad hoc basis, by correspondents who used to ‘parachute’ from nearby Kolkata (Calcutta) or New Delhi on short visits, write ‘expert’ reports and also inject their own prejudices in their copy. A stereotype of the region had been created, as one being unsafe and in perpetual conflict, unworthy of reporting or worse. Besides the ‘newsy goldmine’ of insurgencies, ethnic conflicts and politics, I decided to widen the canvas to cover issues and events relating to little known, non-political aspects of the region. Here again my Desk background helped. I targeted specific sections of the newspaper to write about the tribal ways of life, the Assamese film industry, local literatures, languages, wild life, tourism, culture, the extension of the Indian railway network to new hilly areas, etc. In June 1990, over a full-page in the ‘Leisure’ section of the newspaper, I wrote a feature on rare Assamese proverbs and their English translations that had been put together painstakingly by a British administrator in the 19th century. A copy of his collection was found in a warehouse of the manager of a tea estate once owned by a British merchant. The feature gladdened the hearts of many who could not believe that a newspaper so identified with the villainous ‘New Delhi’ had devoted so much space to such a topic. The feature, titled ‘The Boneless Tongue of Assamese Proverbs’, has lately surfaced on an Assam website: www.assam.org/assam/language/proverbs/prasun-proverbs.html.

During my peregrinations in the region, I endeavoured to file reports with datelines that had rarely or never appeared in the national press, which prompted some readers to respond through letters and oral feedback that after over 40 years of Independence, their existence had at least been recognised by a national newspaper, if not the national government. Here, the dateline was important, not so much the contents of the report. I could not escape a sense of nationalist pride in India’s rich diversity while travelling to remote areas and the tribal states that had so little in common with me. The official nationalist slogan of ‘Unity in Diversity’ appeared to stir something in me. I was once delighted to see the Hindi signboard of a federal government office near the India-Burma border in Mizoram but also understood why it had been blackened by angry locals who believed they got a raw deal from New Delhi. During

an election rally attended by tribal villagers in a hamlet in Manipur, a candidate who was a former journalist insisted on my coming on to the stage, and announced my arrival as though I had come all the way from New Delhi to support his candidature (he was elected). It made me realise how recognition (Honneth, 2001) or some link with the national mainstream, is craved for, even while deeply resenting its attitudes towards the region. (As NRK remarked: 'There are three major aspects of human relationships: love me, hate me and ignore me. The third is the most painful. At least, recognise my existence'). There was clearly much more to the northeast than was being presented to the rest of the country by the official and unofficial media. During this two-year posting---my first tryst with Field reporting---I had contributed nearly 1500 items sourced on the northeast, over half of them with a by-line.

5.3.3 Move to New Delhi Bureau

I began researching the region's history, myths and tribal ways of life, and looked forward to reporting from the region for at least five years, if not more. I began work on a book on northeast insurgencies on the invitation of a publisher (Harper Collins). However, the retirement of two Special Correspondents in *The Times of India's* elite New Delhi Bureau led to an internal search for suitable replacements. The Chief of News Service recommended me even though given the newspaper's rigid traditions of hierarchy and promotions, I was considered too young for a place in the Bureau that was responsible for the coverage of the federal government, parliament, politics, economy, foreign policy, etc. from a national perspective. It covered beats that are professionally considered the most important.

I moved to New Delhi in August 1990. Even though I subsequently covered several defining moments in Indian politics---the demolition of the Ayodhya mosque, the Hindu revivalist movement, Hindu-Muslim conflicts, events in Kashmir, the downfall and formation of federal governments, parliament, general elections, etc.---the epithet of 'north-east expert' stuck. I did not lose any opportunity to write on the northeast from a New Delhi perspective, either as part of the government's northeast initiatives, or the lack of them, or about flaws in policies and practices in the region.

It was during this time, the early 1990s that I witnessed first hand the changes in Indian journalism that occurred following the liberalisation of the national economy, particularly 'Murdochisation'. *The Times of India* was the first to adopt a corporate culture to editorial practices; the earlier focus of news coverage shifted as several

beats and regions became extinct from newsrooms and news columns. The northeast was among the first casualties; in any case it was never a priority. But it was also apparent that 'Murdochisation' did not affect the coverage of Kashmir, which continued to dominate news columns. Within New Delhi's journalistic fraternity and political circles, it was apparent that conflicts in Punjab and Kashmir were privileged, but they had no time or inclination for the northeast.

5.3.4 Summary

The northeast figured in *The Times of India* prominently during 1988-1990 largely for reasons specific to my professional and socio-cultural situation. It was a combination of luck, knowledge of Desk practices and cultural adventurism that brought the northeast and me in the limelight for a brief period. It was a time when Murdochisation had not taken root; there was space in news columns even if news about the northeast was something of a novelty to those who believed that the reports were being filed by 'one of us'. I did not have the socio-cultural 'baggage' of the Hindi belt, having never lived in New Delhi or thereabouts long enough to be socialised in it. Moreover, my upbringing in Roman Catholic Goa had apparently prepared me well to interact with Christian tribal population in the northeast, even though my vegetarian preferences often created piquant situations in a region where everything that has four legs---and is not a chair---is considered a delicacy, including dogs.

Thus, my practitioner experience account may not be considered representative of the way the northeast is generally viewed by journalists of the New Delhi-based newspapers. My professional progression towards New Delhi was 'bottom up', having earlier worked in states and regions, unlike most New Delhi-based journalists who began their career in the Capital and are normally loathe to shift to the northeast or elsewhere. I managed to retain my connections with the region even after I quit *The Times of India* in 1994 and joined *Business Standard*, a leading financial daily, and subsequently moved to television journalism. Throughout the decade working and reporting on the quicksands of political journalism at the highest level in New Delhi, the feeling that I got during my early travels within the northeast remained: that the national press may have a greater role and influence than the national government in building a cultural bridge between the centre and the periphery; between 'us' and

'them'. But given the deep-rooted socio-cultural values operating in New Delhi and north India, this bridge may well remain too far.

5.4 Selected Texts

This section presents two sets of texts: one, extracts of news items that appeared during the fieldwork period, and a series of reports about insurgency-related events in the northeast by an Assam-based correspondent (the series fetched the correspondent the 'Journalism for Human Rights Award'). The series provides a typical example of newsworthy events in the northeast being ignored by national newspapers. Events that may cause public uproar, retribution and even a change of local government in other parts of the country, pass off unreported in the northeast without causing any ripples. As two respondents (NHG, NKTS) stated, indifferent and ad hoc coverage of the region 'suits the government'. Thus, incidents of violation of human rights or other important events in the northeast seldom become an issue at the national level. As DD, a human rights activist, and DVS, Chief of Bureau, observed, by its indifference, the national press mounts little pressure of public opinion on the government on issues of the northeast, the way it does on Kashmir or Punjab; in other words, no pressure is mounted on the government to 'do something'.

5.4.1 Privileging Hindi-Speaking People

A substantial proportion of data relating to Assam referred to ULFA's terrorist activity, which included the targeted killing of over 100 Hindi-speaking people in different incidents in November-December, 2000. As set out in Chapter 2, this particular linguistic group is viewed in Assam and the region as 'outsiders', and their being made a target was one of ULFA's ploys to attract the national media's attention and generate concern in the politically important north and central India.

The following extracts of news reports that appeared during the fieldwork period indicated the privileged position in which Hindi-speaking people are held, and the concern that is generated in official circles whenever they are targeted in the northeast. The extracts are examples of how such events are 'framed' by the national press:

- NEW DELHI: Twenty-seven additional companies of paramilitary forces are being rushed to Assam and the Army will assist the state police in launching a special operation against insurgents who have been killing Hindi-speaking non-Assamese residents. The decision was taken at a high powered meeting

presided by home minister L K Advani Friday evening. Among others, the meeting was attended by defence minister George Fernandes, Assam chief minister P K Mohanta, Assam governor S K Sinha, Army chief General S Padmanabhan...More than 1,800 pockets where non-Assamese live, including the Hindi-speaking Biharis and Marwaris, have been identified to provide special attention... ('Paramilitary forces being rushed to Assam', *The Times of India*, 9 December 2000).

- Just when it was thought that the ULFA was fading away, it has returned with a vengeance by carrying out a series of attacks on Hindi-speaking people in Assam. So far, nearly 70 people have been killed as a result of isolated attacks which began in Tinsukia and Dibrugarh districts and have now spread to virtually all over the state. What is noteworthy about these latest depredations of the ULFA in Assam is that the Marwaris and Biharis have been specifically targeted, leading to a minor exodus of these communities, especially of those from Bihar. It has been suggested that the Marwaris are being terrorised to enable the ULFA to extort more money from this traditional trading community. But why the generally poor Bihari labourers and daily wage earners are being singled out remains a mystery. (Editorial, 'Fires of Parochialism', *The Hindustan Times*, 8 December 2000).
- A string of well-planned attacks by separatists on Hindi-speaking people in Assam during the past one month marks the beginning of a new round of terror in the volatile insurgency situation in the region, police said. More than 50 Hindi-speaking persons have been brutally killed in systematic attacks spread across the state beginning October 22 with the latest of the serial killings taking place Sunday midnight when four Bihari quilt-makers were shot dead in western Assam. ('Terror Stalks Hindi-Speaking People in Assam', *The Economic Times*, 29 November 2000; *The Economic Times* is part of *The Times of India* Group).
- Assam is back in the news, but for all the wrong reasons. The state was recently rocked by a series of killings committed by armed underground groups, with ultras selectively training their guns on non-Assamese settlers, mostly the Hindi-speaking ones... ('Bullets Find A New Target', *Indian Express*, 14 November 2000).
- News about killings by extremists always draws immediate attention. The recent killing of Hindi-speaking labourers in Assam, reportedly by the ULFA, has drawn just such attention this time round. Often in the past, news about similar killings had gone unreported. But the newly identified target group has got the mainstream to sit up and take notice...ULFA has in the past, killed mostly to demonstrate its power to those in positions of political or economic authority. Government officials, politicians and businessmen have been the primary targets, with tea planters being the most visible. The motive behind the Kashmir-type killing may be to place the insurgency in Assam on the same footing as Kashmir; a struggle of the indigenous people against "mainstream India" ('The killing fields of power', *The Pioneer*, New Delhi, 10 December 2000).

A prominent feature of these texts is that even though India is a multicultural and multilingual society, Hindi-speaking people are accorded high importance in a seemingly natural, routine and common-sensical manner. Their victimisation was

considered the most newsworthy part in newsrooms of the English-language press. As outlined in Chapter 2, Hindi is India's 'official national' language and spoken by over 40 per cent of its population, mostly in north and central India, where New Delhi is located. The message that the national press conveys to readers across the country is that when Hindi-speaking people---one section of Indian society---are targeted, it deserved their attention; also that victimising this particular group deserves to generate concern among policy-makers. The extracts stand out because the linguistic identification of victims is normally not an accepted practice in the Indian press. Victims would belong to some language group or another. There have been numerous instances of specific language groups being targeted in different parts of the country, but rarely have linguistic origins of insurgent violence been identified so openly.

By consistently covering the series of events affecting Hindi-speaking people, the press turned them into an issue (Rogers and Dearing, 1994). During the fieldwork period, several clashes took place within the northeast among warring tribes, between tribes and non-tribes or those that did not involve the Hindi-speaking people. These were reported in the local press, but did not find a mention in the national press, reinforcing the proposed thesis that media attention is unlikely to be forthcoming when violence or terrorism involves the 'they'. Wolfsfeld suggests that treatment of particular events or issues depends on how they were covered in the past (1979: 49). This was not the only occasion when the targeting of Hindi-speaking people made national news; it was a continuation of the way in which such events were covered in 1989 and 1991, when the same linguistic group was targeted and subsequently privileged in the news columns.

Another text published during the fieldwork period substantiates the thesis. A cynical article headline in the *Indian Express* wondered: 'Isn't Shillong in a foreign country?' (Shillong is the capital of Meghalaya). The headline reflected a sense of despondency over the way the national press covers the northeast, and noted how journalists of national newspapers often got their facts wrong during the few instances that the region was reported. Neikula Mera, writer of the article, criticised the lack of knowledge among journalists about basic facts of the region such as the names of states and their capitals. Extract from the article:

In December, Manipur was involved in a political wrangle that almost warranted President's Rule. On December 19, a Delhi-based newspaper carried an editorial, entitled 'Kohima Calling'. It had mixed up the capitals of Nagaland and Manipur! January saw tensions in Shillong, which led to the

murder of some businessmen. The editorial in another newspaper on January 18 talked about “five Indian businessman” being killed in Shillong. Apparently, the editorial team did not think that the other inhabitants of Shillong are Indians too!

During the unfortunate killings of migrant workers in Assam, late last year, most national dailies along with leading news channels carried the story, and there was unanimity in terming them as the killings of “Hindi-speaking people” in Assam. Did they mean to say that they were killed by virtue of their speaking in Hindi? There's an implication here that people in the Northeast do not speak Hindi at all, which is definitely not the case. All these examples underline a viewpoint that seems to categorise the people of the Northeast as being somehow different from “conventional Indians”.

There is, besides, the general apathy that newspapers seem to exhibit for issues related to the Northeast. This, in turn, is one reason why the ordinary person on the street has relatively no idea about the region. Talk about Nagaland, Meghalaya, or any other state, and they assume it to be a foreign region. Many don't know the difference between Meghalaya and Mizoram'. (5 March 2001).

The extracts are intended to provide a flavour of the ways in which news about events in the northeast are routinely covered. Such focus on specific influential social groups is neither questioned nor considered worthy of correction.

5.4.2 Fit for Awards, Unfit for National Press

The second set of texts presented relate to the award-winning series by Utpal Bordoloi, senior journalist of Assam origin, who is reputed for his candid reporting of conflicts in the region (see Appendix D). The reports got him a journalism award but the events he reported on were completely ignored by the national press. Based in Guwahati, Bordoloi is a Special Correspondent of *Deccan Herald*, a leading English daily published from Bangalore and other cities in south India. Since the newspaper is not circulated in New Delhi, its contents usually do not become a topic of debate in parliament or political circles in the Capital.

The selection of Bordoloi's eight reports relate to the insurgency situation in Nagaland and Manipur. The citation of the ‘Journalism for Human Rights Award’ observed: ‘Be it the inter-tribal feuds, the clash between the militants and the security forces, or the indiscriminate shooting and killing by any party, Utpal Bordoloi has not let any bias creep into his reporting’. Headlines of his eight reports are indicative of its contents:

- ‘Army Destroys Heart of Nagaland CM's Constituency’ (CM stands for Chief Minister, the elected executive head of the state government);

- ‘Renewed Panic in Nagaland’;
- ‘Troops Tend to be Trigger-Happy’;
- ‘Naga Insurgency: Trouble Ahead’;
- ‘Fence Attacks Crop, Again’;
- ‘Trigger-happy Security Forces Spark-off a Row’;
- ‘Tribals at War’;
- ‘A Conflict that Few Know of’.

The reports relate to events in late 1994 and 1995. As Bordoloi stated during my interview with him, many such events had occurred in the past, were still taking place, but never evoked much attention or concern among New Delhi elites, including the media. The constant tension between insurgents and security forces means that several journalists are unable to carry out their duties or simply become victims (see ‘Statement of Support to the NE Media’, Appendix A). Several northeast-based journalists have been killed. As Bordoloi suggests in ‘A Conflict That Few Know Of’, many prefer to flee to safety, especially those based in Nagaland. Extracts from two of his reports are indicative of the constant tension (presented in full in Appendix D):

Such is the hold of the Indian state machinery in Nagaland that the news of the killing of Kohima’s Deputy Commissioner Dr L V Reddy, last Tuesday morning, had to be officially released not from the State capital but from New Delhi. The reason? Almost the entire administration was in a state of panic, from Chief Minister S C Jamir downwards. Also, the representatives of both UNI and PTI⁴³ had fled Kohima earlier in March. A temporary replacement sent by PTI from Guwahati also left after just two-and-a-half days. The reporters’ flight and the killing both stem from the March 5 massacre in which paramilitary troops under army command mowed down seven civilians, including children, and injured 22 others in the heart of the capital, in the same area where Dr Reddy was killed...PTI’s Borbora and UNI’s Goswami told their respective managements that they had received death threats (‘Renewed Panic in Nagaland’, 2 April 1995)

Much of the action (in the northeast) goes unreported outside Nagaland because the representatives of both national news agencies were compelled to flee Nagaland in March, a side effect of the conflict. The metropolitan press has no representative in the state, thus there is a virtual news blackout from Nagaland (‘A Conflict that Few Know of’, 4 October 1995).

The Indian press usually opts for discretion when faced with allegations of human rights violations by the army or security forces in Kashmir, northeast or elsewhere. Such violations are reported only in the face of intense public pressure through

⁴³ News agencies: UNI (*United News of India*) and PTI (*Press Trust of India*).

demonstrations or legal challenges. As DD noted, 'the Naga issue is not covered by the press because it is uncomfortable to talk about the holy cow, the army, your own army. The army thing is extremely touchy; people (in the media) have left it untouched. There is a problem focussing on the Naga issue; their numbers are small but they are still fighting for the last 50 years'.

Bordoloi's series begins with a report about an incident involving the army in Mokokchung in Nagaland:

December 27, 1994 will be remembered as a black day in Mokokchung town, legislative assembly constituency of Chief Minister S Chubatoshi Jamir. On that fateful day, troops of 16 Maratha Light Infantry (MLI), infuriated by the killing of their officiating Commanding Officer (CO), Lt. Col. K.B. Poonacha, went berserk and razed Imlong place, the heart of the town, to the ground.

According to the district administration, 24 commercial buildings containing 89 shops, 48 residential buildings, 17 vehicles and seven two-wheelers were totally burnt in the troops' rampage. A mosque was totally destroyed and a church damaged. According to provisional estimates, the monetary value of the damage is in the region of Rs 10 crore⁴⁴.

Three charred, unidentifiable bodies have so far been recovered from the ashes: it is feared that more could be lying in the debris and wreckage of the ruined town centre. The Ao Senden, the Apex tribal council of the Aos, has reported ten persons killed and seven still missing at the time of reporting though the official casualty figure is given as eight, including two army personnel (Army Destroys Heart of Nagaland CM's Constituency', February 1995).

The event went unreported in the national press, but the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), a quasi-judicial body, took cognizance of Bordoloi's report and sent a team to investigate. Based on the team's findings and Bordoloi's reports, the NHRC directed the federal government to pay Rupees 10 million as compensation to the affected citizens of Mokokchung. It amounted to a rare indictment of a government organisation (army) by another government organisation (NHRC). Bordoloi stated that the NHRC or any government body in New Delhi taking note of such events was a rare, one-off incident. Several such incidents pass off unreported and unnoticed. None of the national newspapers reported the incident even after the NHRC awarded compensation. Respondents in New Delhi said they were unaware of any such incident and did not remember it being carried in their newspapers. Some admitted that the incident must have occurred but even if the facts were made available to them, or if their own Northeast Correspondent had sent a report, it was

⁴⁴ 10 crore is a unit equivalent to 100 million.

unlikely to have been used given the sensitivities involved in reporting about the army, which is perceived in New Delhi newsrooms as performing a difficult job in the northeast.

As Bordoloi stated:

How does getting some space in southern papers matter when they do not make an impact in New Delhi, the seat of central government and the national elites? To that extent, the southern press is more national than the New Delhi press. The only fallout of my reports and the NHRC directive is that people in Mokokchung give me a hero's welcome whenever I go there. So many similar situations have happened in the past, are still taking place, but since no one from the national press reports them, nobody takes notice. Just imagine what would be the public or government reaction if such events take place in your state, Maharashtra, or any other mainstream state...In fact, you are the first person who is asking us how we feel about the national press' coverage of our region.

Bordoloi's other reports relate to inter-tribal wars in Nagaland and Manipur, and how the security forces carry out their operations away from the glare of the media. During counter-insurgency operations, apart from the common man, even officials of the federal Indian Administrative Service posted in the northeast become victims. It was apparent that such reports would cause different reactions in civil society in other parts of the country, which would normally force the government to 'do something'.

5.4.3 Summary

This section presented extracts from selected texts that reinforce the thesis presented in this study: that the socio-cultural binary is the primary gate an event has to pass before journalists consider it newsworthy, even if the event involves much violence and terrorism. Extracts presented reflect the privileged position of Hindi-speaking people in the news discourse of the English-language national press. The news items generated much concern among readers and policy-makers, and prompted several measures to reinforce security in Assam where rebels had targeted members of the specific linguistic group.

The second set of examples related to events in Nagaland and Manipur that were ignored by the national press, but were considered important enough by an official human rights body to offer compensation to victims. It amounted to an indictment of a state arm by another state arm. Interview respondents were unaware of the specific incidents reported, but admitted they were not surprised they were not covered in the

national press given the prevailing uncritical approach in newsrooms towards the army.

The two sets of extracts virtually validate the thesis in the sense that when 'we', the Hindi-speaking people, are affected or involved, the media accords much coverage and generates much concern. But if events involve 'they', tribes in northeast, as in the case of Nagaland and Manipur, journalists do not consider them worthy of coverage. Thus, no concern is generated among readers and policy-makers to 'do something' about tribe-related events and issues in the northeast.

Thus, from the perspective of journalists based in New Delhi, the northeast is further away not only geographically but also symbolically, imaginatively and aesthetically.

6. Conclusion: Northeast Violence as *Non-Communication*

Although deviant acts like terrorism can be regarded as enormously newsworthy, there may be differences in newsworthiness, depending on the attributes of the single terrorist act. A given medium is more likely to report on terrorist activities involving targets of its own nationality. In the same vein, certain terrorist activities, certain terrorists, or the number of victims might differ in their perceived degree of “relative” deviance, thus influencing media coverage differently.

---Weimann & Brosius (1991: 335)

The impetus for this study was my experience of covering the two conflict zones of Kashmir and northeast over more than a decade, and witnessing first hand the news differential that each conflict evoked in the influential English-language national press based in New Delhi. The idea was to unpack the ways in which certain sections of society or regions are routinely, almost innocuously, kept off news columns. If acts of violence and terrorism were supposed to be so irresistibly newsworthy, as the intersecting discourses of violence-terrorism-conflict and the media suggest, the host of insurgencies in the northeast should have at least resonated as much as the single insurgency based in Kashmir, if not more, in the national press. Violence and terrorism has long been privileged in the discourse of production of news while the trope of the margins has mostly confined itself to representation. Media research has rarely examined the *non-coverage* of events and issues involving much violence and terrorism relating to the minorities or the margins.

Such has been the supposed certainty that terrorism and violence attract media attention that it led influential researchers such as Halloran to suggest that ‘(The) structure of news reporting or “news values” may mean that certain minority or non-elite groups within any given country may have to engage in “negative” behaviour before they are noticed by the media’ (1974: 19). But the routine ways in which news about violence and terrorism involving minorities gets marginalised or neglected has rarely been questioned. This gap assumes more salience due to the fact that the movement of humans, material and money to finance violence and terror knows no national borders in an age of globalisation, as the events of 11 September 2001 showed. 11 September added a sharper edge to this study---which began in September

1999---particularly as the coverage of the WTC attacks highlighted the deep-rooted sense of ‘we’ and ‘they’ that routinely underpins western news coverage (Sreberny, 2002: 220-234). From a non-western context, Aiyar came to similar conclusions, ‘As Israeli aircraft do to Palestinian symbols of authority what Mohammed Atta and his men did to the WTC, the double standards of the “global war” on “global terrorism” stand nakedly—and unashamedly—exposed. Whatever the mealy-mouthed rhetoric post-September 11, the world still remains divided between “our terrorists” and “their terrorists” ’ (2001).

This study is located in the discourse of production of news: news values and the cultural approach to unravel the socio-cultural underpinnings of conflict coverage. The cultural approach looks at the media as an institution that operates within a given culture in relation to which journalists perform their duties. The approach argues that the ideology of the dominant sections of society is not imposed but appears to exist by virtue of a consensus.

The study thus uses a multi-theoretical approach to develop the model of ‘we’ and ‘they’ that, I argue, influences news coverage at all levels. This includes the theories of nations and nationalism and group consciousness (established-outsider, inside-outside, etc), which also connect with political debates about multiculturalism, citizenship and recognition. A sense of ‘us’ and ‘them’ lies at the core of processes to create or build nations; from the morass of competing definitions it can be said that this ‘us’ is all about homogeneity, a homogeneity that is sometimes given or sometimes invented. The existence of minorities within a nation is not only a contemporary reality across the globe but also a foundational principle; for, the minorities are seen to be the means of constructing the majority or the mainstream. If news discourse may be seen as one by the elite, for the elite and of the elite, the exclusion of minorities is likely to be routinised and institutionalised in newsrooms, even if their life situations involve much terrorism and violence. In this context, the Gramscian concept of hegemony may be extended to cover events and issues involving minorities and margins.

The non-coverage of events of violence and terrorism involving minorities has implications for the media’s agenda-setting function. If such events and issues do not find a place in media content, they are unlikely to figure in the public agenda; no pressure is put on the authorities to ‘do something’. The idea of the public sphere evolved in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, but media technology widened

the idea further in a democracy. Democracy and media may well be considered two sides of the same coin, as the media shapes public consciousness, initiates debates, and facilitates dialogue. By one definition, media itself is the public sphere. (Dahlgren, 1991). It may not be an exaggeration to say that ‘recognition’ of sections of society or regions in the media may be as important, if not more, as that by the state. By covering the life situations of *all* sections of society, the media may help foster a sense of belonging to what Anderson called the ‘imagined community’ of the nation, or at least bring alternative perspectives to the fore. The need to increase the range of ethno-national conflicts covered in the media assumes further importance when the role of news media in peace processes is considered. As Wolfsfeld observes, the news media may impact peace processes in four ways: they can play a major role in *defining the political atmosphere* in which the process takes place; the media can have an influence on political actors’ *strategy and behaviour*; they can have an important influence on the *nature of the debate* about a peace process; and the media can *raise and lower the public legitimacy of the political actors* involved in the process (2001: 4-5).

There is much debate in the democratic world about multiculturalism, citizenship and recognition, all based on the reasonable assumption that minorities in all locales and nations have got a bad deal. In a multi-ethnic scenario, it is also suggested that every groups should have the ‘right to communicate’ (Husband, 2000: 199-214). However, as interview responses in Chapter 5 indicate, even when groups resort to violence and terror to ‘communicate’ with national elites, the media may block their voices.

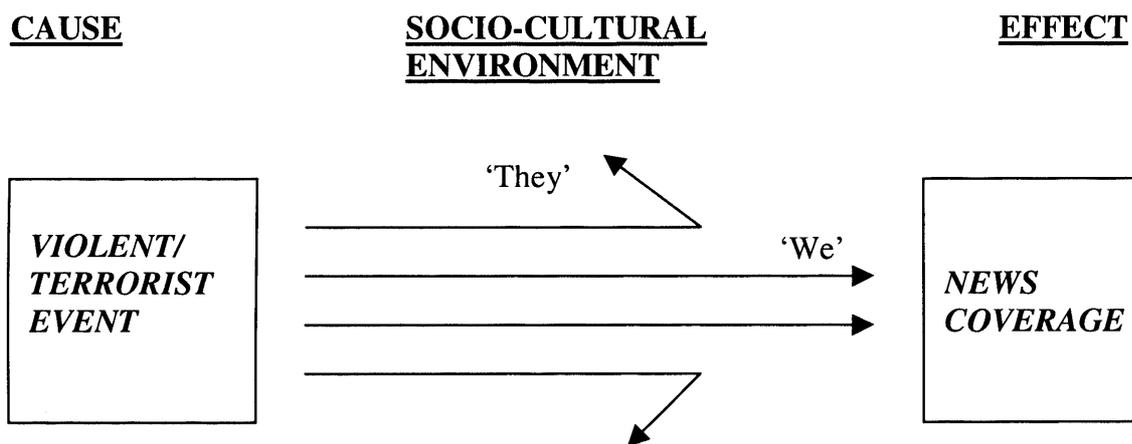
6.1 Major Findings & ‘Banal Journalism’

There are at least three major findings of this study:

First, it demonstrates that contrary to the determinism implied in the literature, violence and terrorism may not always guarantee news coverage. There are numerous ongoing conflicts that are routinely kept off the news discourse *within* nations as well as internationally. The ‘news values’ of negativity, unambiguity etc. are useful to explain media content, but may not be valid in *all* conflict situations, particularly since research indicates that only a third of terrorist conflicts are actually covered in the media. There are conflict zones in which even though insurgent groups may seek media attention, their activities may not resonate in the media. As this study has

demonstrated, not only are most events involving violence and terrorism in the northeast not covered, when they are covered at all, the news reports invariably lack historical and political contexts.

Secondly, the study establishes that the production of news relating to violence and terrorism is a complex process. It is not a simple cause (event)-effect (news coverage) relationship; its encoding and transmission depends on the key intermediary variable of the socio-cultural environment in which journalists operate. Reifying this in the form of the socio-cultural binary of ‘we’ and ‘they’, the thesis that only those conflict situations that involve or affect the ‘we’ are likely to be accorded sustained news coverage is validated; those involving or affecting the ‘they’ are unlikely to figure much even if events occur *within* a nation-state. Figuratively, the earlier equation of news production implied in the discourse (see Chapter 3; Page 81) may now be revised as follows:



A conflict involving terrorism and prolonged unrest has to be consonant with the socio-cultural background of journalists for it to be covered on a sustained basis. An event of terrorism/violence is first subject to the question: Who is involved? The identity of the victim or actors needs to be first identified before the event is considered newsworthy. Thus, contrary to Gans’ contention that during their professional work journalists ‘leave their conscious personal values at home’, this study suggests a constant tension between journalists’ ethnic/cultural background and professional norms such as objectivity, impartiality and fairness. As some respondents stated, the northeast tribes are not ‘people like us’ or that they ‘do not share our way of life’.

Thirdly, in the Indian context, this study shows that journalists based in New Delhi perceive the host of insurgencies in the northeast as involving the 'they' (tribes), about which it is assumed by default that there is not much interest among readers and policy-makers. Not only are 'normal' events in the northeast rarely covered, even those involving violence and terrorism do not resonate much. The indifferent at best, and pejorative at worst, attitude towards tribes is found in the majority non-tribal sections of Indian society, which also gets reflected in the media. The routine exclusion of the northeast region and life situations of tribes may well be viewed as a form of unwritten censorship. On the other hand, the Kashmir conflict is seen as part of the 'we', as more of a 'deviance' in Indian society than the northeast, and is accorded sustained coverage. Application of the 'we'-'they' model also indicates that the 'cultural' aspect of news production over-rides the 'political economy' since, as this study shows, the changes in India's newspaper culture---'Murdochisation'---do not affect the coverage of Kashmir, but it has made news coverage of the northeast more unlikely or impossible.

Based on the findings and following Billig's notion of 'banal nationalism' (1995), I suggest that the dominance paradigm of journalism (journalism *as it is*) can be termed as 'banal journalism': the routine ways in which the affairs of 'we' get highlighted and those of 'they' get marginalised or neglected in news discourse. This brand of journalism is banal because it is commonplace, it is reproduced daily unquestioningly and renders one view of society as *the* view of the entire society. The national press in most settings, including Britain and India, can thus be said to practice banal journalism. Due to its daily routines of production and the limited range of events and issues it covers, banal journalism may seem to possess a harmless neutrality or normality, but as Arendt (1963) stresses, banality is not synonymous with harmlessness. Banal journalism feeds and perpetuates banal nationalism; it diurnally flags 'operative public values' or the 'central value system' of a society. It springs no surprises and its ideological moorings often slip from attention as it flags the 'we' daily in news columns and television bulletins. The journalistic net is cast only as wide as the 'we' deem it fit; and journalists being invariably drawn from the 'we' have a clear conception of what interests 'us'. The thesis of banal journalism is premised on the socio-cultural binary that underpins this thesis.

Banal journalism is essentially about 'us' and not 'them'; it is about maintaining boundaries. It is predictive, does not go beyond the society's sphere of consensus,

does not take up issues that may surprise the reader, it de-sensitises readers to news about violence, it is habit-forming, and addictive.

Some key characteristics of banal journalism are:

- It is wedded to the status quo and uses the syntax of hegemony. The media is evidently an integral part of the power structure; it reflects the priorities and preoccupations of the dominant power groupings, and thereby supports and perpetuates the basic norms and values of the dominant order;
- It reinforces prevailing power relations in a given society/culture;
- It has several spaces of symbolic annihilation;
- It allocates value to conflicts by preferring some to others;
- It usually limits the range of issues and events to be covered by not presenting alternative perspectives;
- It makes the interests of the 'we' seem routine, and simultaneously makes the marginalisation or exclusion of the 'theys' appear natural;
- Only when events and issues conform to the themes and practices of banal journalism are they accorded media coverage, including violence and terrorism;
- It is based on the actual 'imagined community' of the nation: what the journalists understand and *imagine* to constitute the 'we' and 'they';
- Its success lies in the very denial of its existence by news workers, as the interviews responses in Chapter 5 indicate;
- It professes adherence to ideals of modernity, but rarely practices them.

It may be noted that none of the New Delhi-based journalists believed they were prejudiced towards the northeast, but admitted to being helpless in the face of the over-riding feeling within newsrooms that news about the northeast was of no consequence: 'who is bothered about the northeast?' is a common question raised. Socialisation in newsroom cultures ensures that journalists who may be interested in covering or writing about the northeast do not feel encouraged to do so. The exclusion of the northeast from the news discourse is so banal that it is rarely noted or questioned, which means that if and when events from the region are reported, they invariably contain errors that also go unnoticed. Resonance of the Kashmir conflict across newspaper pages, including editorial and opinion pages, means that it is routinely seen as an issue, while stray event-centric coverage of the northeast

indicates that it has not become an issue. At the individual level, most New Delhi-based journalists prefer to cover the Kashmir conflict rather than the northeast, since the former is considered socio-culturally proximate and 'sexy'. The northeast is routinely seen as lying outside the sphere of consensus of Indian society.

The Kashmir conflict is framed within the mainstream Hindu-Muslim-secularism dynamic, which dominates Indian public sphere. This suggests that Indian elites accord more importance to upholding the values of secularism than focussing on reforms within Hindu society (such as eradicating untouchability, 'sati', etc.) or working towards basic socio-economic goals such as poverty alleviation, rural regeneration, health, education, etc. The hegemony of the secular discourse may have had the effect of suppressing concerns of marginal sections of society such as tribes and lower castes. Shils' 1962 observation, made during a study of the then emerging postcolonial nation-states in Asia and Africa, appears valid at the beginning of the 21st century: 'Citizenship is not among the virtues which they (traditional societies) prize...A concern for the well-being, in peaceful pursuits, of the whole population, over a large territory, indifferently to their particular ethnic and kinship bonds, is not so widely diffused' (31).

This study also indicates an imbalance of news is as much a reality at the international level as it is *within* large multicultural nations. Research suggests that there is a qualitative and quantitative imbalance in the news flow at the international level (Sreberny-Mohammadi et al, 1985):

- Not only is there a quantitative imbalance in news flow, with the Third World receiving far more material about the First World than vice versa but the continual coverage of the global centres of the industrial world contrasts with the intermittent images of the south in crisis;
- It is not so much that the developing world is singled out for such "negative" attention, but that the developing countries tend to be reported only in this manner.

This study indicates that such patterns of one-way news flow also exist *within* nations. North and central India dominate content of the New Delhi-based national press, while regions such as the northeast are covered perfunctorily, if at all. It is not that such regions---spaces of exclusion---are singled out for such treatment, but they 'tend

to be reported only in this manner'. This suggests the existence of 'sub-Orients' within the Orient, even Orientalism within the Orient.

Said's thesis of Orientalism (1995) concentrated on the Middle East; Inden (2000) argues that there are more 'Orients' than the one with which Said was mostly concerned. Said's idea focusses on Islam and the Middle East, while Inden takes it further to show how an India was constructed/imagined by British historians and administrators. Inden shows that the West's major depictions of India as the civilisation of caste, villages, spiritualism and divine kings had the effect of depriving Indians of their capacity to rule their world, which was consequently appropriated by those in the West who wished to dominate it (2000: 5). The present study suggests that the notion of Orientalism may be extended further *within* deeply stratified societies of the Orient such as India.

6.2 Difficulties and Limitations

My background in journalism facilitated the study's fieldwork, which meant that access to interviewees in New Delhi and the northeast did not pose a problem. I could also access the computer database of daily events relating to the two conflict zones during the six-month period between October 2000 and March 2001, which is daily updated and maintained by the Research Division of the Zee News television network, where I was Head of News before beginning the PhD research in September 1999. If the practical aspects of this study were conducted smoothly, I did encounter problems in accessing literature on its theoretical aspects.

It was significant to note that the 'we'-'they' dichotomy in Indian society in relation to tribes appeared to be reflected in academic literature. Studies of Indian society are invariably dominated by the essentialism of caste in Hinduism. The tribes seem to figure only in a 'sub-Orientalist' sense when mainstream writers present ethnographic accounts; rarely do they form an integral component of studies of Indian society. The socio-cultural location of tribes within Indian or Hindu society has rarely been explored, except to mention in passing that they are seen to lie outside the fold of Hinduism or that they have not accepted the pantheon of Hindu gods. A contemporary perspective on tribes is missing, which posed some problems in developing the socio-cultural binary that underpins this study.

Secondly, even though there are some recent studies on the Indian press, there is no post-independence study on the influential English-language press, India's 'national'

press. The ushering in of 'Murdochisation', beginning from the English-language press, has been noted but it has not been placed in the context of the career of the Indian press: from its colonial origins to its role during the freedom struggle, to facilitating new democratic foundations, to its adoption of corporate cultures in tune with global practices. I hope to have filled this gap through the section on the Indian press in Chapter 4 (also published as 'Murdochisation of the Indian Press: From By-Line to Bottom-Line', *Media, Culture & Society*, 24 [6], 821-834). If there was no earlier study on the Indian 'national' press, I did not find much on the concept of a 'national' press either, except for stray allusions in texts on the history of the British press or the Royal Commission on the Press (1947).

When I began this research, the first difficulty I faced had to do with the way years of journalistic writing had conditioned my writing and thought processes. Writing on a subject beyond 500-800 words was uncharted territory as I was used to saying everything about a given subject within that word limit. Unlearning much of the journalistic conditioning to suit academic writing was made more difficult as I continued some writing for the press well into the research period. That journalistic and academic writing are vastly different would be stating the obvious. However, it did seem to me that much of academic writing could do with some journalistic simplicity and flair in order to make it accessible to a wider readership; also, journalistic writing could do with some of the attention to detail and crosschecking that marks academic writing. If journalism is about knowing an awful little about an awful lot and academic writing is about knowing an awful lot about an awful little, my task was to find a 'golden mean' for the purpose of this thesis. This was perhaps the most difficult part of this research exercise. Aided by valuable advice from the supervisor, I would like to believe that this 'golden mean' has been achieved.

6.3 Contributions of the Study

This research is perhaps the first to investigate the theoretical contradiction of much violence and terrorism *not* resulting in news coverage. The explanatory theory may be used to explain the unreported conflicts within nations as well as at the international level. As such, it enriches our understanding of the processes of production of news and contributes to the debates about violence-terrorism-conflict and the media, and also to political debates about conflict resolution, multiculturalism, citizenship and

recognition. It provides a different insight into the relationship between violence-terrorist-conflict and media.

In the Indian context, this study is the first to make a comparison and establish the many commonalities between the Kashmir and northeast conflicts (see Table 4; Page 38), and then to make a comparative analysis of their coverage in the New Delhi-based national press. To the best of my knowledge, no study has so far examined the coverage of northeast insurgencies in the Indian national press, even independent of a comparison with Kashmir. A prominent feature of this study is that it is written by a journalist with experience of covering the two conflict zones, and incorporates a substantial section on 'Practitioner Experience' as part of the fieldwork. The idea was to enrich the 'objective' part of a research project with resonating 'subjectivity'; once again I hope to have reached a 'golden mean' between the two.

The study is perhaps the first to adopt a multi-theoretical socio-cultural approach to explain the coverage and non-coverage of conflict situations. In the process, it has established a relationship between events of violence and terrorism that were supposed to be irresistibly newsworthy, and the wider social-cultural environment in which journalists operate. The socio-cultural binary uses terminology that is part of routine interaction among journalists and sources ('us' and 'them; 'we' and 'they'). As this study shows, beneath these innocuous---almost banal---words lies a complex but clear understanding of the prevailing socio-cultural power relations, which routinely influences news production.

At another level, this study reiterates the established saliency of the cultural approach over political economy in relation to the coverage of minorities and margins. Coverage of Kashmir not only survives 'Murdochisation' but as a symbol of patriotism, it also seems to have been appropriated by a corporate culture that sees nationalism and patriotism as a news-product. In contrast, the northeast tugs feebly at the nationalism-patriotism strings among large sections of Indian society. This study can also be read as an exploration of gaps in India's public sphere at two levels: between the official and unofficial discourses, and between the dominant Hindu-Muslim-secularism problematic and the life situations of the disadvantaged.

6.4 Suggestions for Further Research

Several leads may be pursued following this study. Most ethno-national conflicts are viewed from the state's perspective as a 'national interest' or 'national security'

problem rather than from the people's perspective. As interview responses indicate, this tendency is strikingly conspicuous in the stray reporting on the northeast when military sources are privileged and their perspectives find more space than those of the people. In such a view, the removal of the actual or perceived threats to a nation-state from such conflicts is seen to be more crucial than threats to the very survival of people. A critical examination of such reportage, bringing out the degree of dependence on the state for sources of news, would reveal insights into the reporting practices of journalists of national newspapers based in the northeast.

Questions such as these may be fruitfully pursued in future research: Is the pattern seen in the national press---high status of Kashmir and low status of northeast---repeated in other English language newspapers across the country? Are there any changes in the language press? How is the northeast reported or explained in, say, the Malayalam press in South India? Do northeast insurgent groups change media strategies due to indifference of the national press? How many reports on the northeast insurgencies are based on official sources (security forces) and unofficial sources (rebels/victims)?

The ethnography of journalists of national newspapers posted in the northeast and their individual experiences (journalistic and non-journalistic) would be a useful aid to future journalists keen to work in conflict situations. In particular, the ropewalk experiences of dealing with security officials on the one hand and rebels on the other in a non-familiar socio-cultural environment may provide insights into India's multiculturalism and cross-cultural strategies of journalists. I have set out my experience in this regard in the section on 'Practitioner Experience' in Chapter 5.

Given the tense socio-cultural relations between Bengalis and the Assamese, a discourse and content analysis of the geographically proximate Kolkata (Calcutta) press and its coverage of the northeast would be revealing of the tensions. Two major English newspapers are published from Kolkata, *The Statesman* and *The Telegraph*; both are circulated in the northeast. The general impression in Assam is that the Kolkata press perpetuates the wider pejorative attitude of Bengalis towards Assamese, but this has not yet been proved through systematic investigation. A second line of inquiry may cover the mass circulation Bengali-language press (*Ananda Bazaar Patrika*, *Aj Kal*, etc.) and its approach towards the northeast.

Apart from the under-researched phenomenon of 'Murdochisation' of the Indian press, a content analysis of reportage of 'social' issues before 1990 and later may add

further grist to the 'dumbing down' mill. As Chapter 4 explained, adoption of a corporate culture in managements of the Indian press began in the early 1990s coinciding with the opening up of the Indian economy.

Finally, I hope this study will contribute to the understanding of the complexities of the production of news, and in the Indian context, raise awareness of the northeast conflicts and the underlying causes that, from a statist perspective, may pose a greater challenge than Kashmir for conflict management and nation-building.

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APPENDIX A

STATEMENT OF SUPPORT TO THE NEW MEDIA

Participants in the conference, "Media Under Pressure in the Northeast -- is the Rest of the Media Bothered?" held at New Delhi on January 28, 2001, expressed concern about such pressures, and called upon all governments and organisations in the Northeast of India to respect the essential right of journalists and media persons in the NER to report accurately on issues affecting the region without fear or favour.

The conference, having heard from the personal experiences of senior editors and journalists of the region, extended support to those media professionals there who continued to conduct their work under difficult and often stressful conditions, facing intimidation and violence as well as threats to life and their professions.

It noted that in the past years, editors and journalists in the region have come under physical and verbal attack from groups for a variety of reasons. In some cases, editors have been killed, others have been beaten and some have been arrested. In addition, newspaper offices have been attacked and bombed.

It noted that media have been at the receiving end of such threats and even assaults from government officials, security forces, militants and anti-social organisations. The conference urged all groups at all levels to stop such harassment and intimidation. It called upon governments at the Central, state and district levels to strictly implement the law and act firmly, without prejudice, against any individual or group who seek to intimidate the press. The State human right commissions and the National Human Rights Commission should take cognisance of such incidents on their own. Governments should also not use advertisements as a tool to control the media.

The Northeast is a complex weave of issues, peoples and problems. It is not an easy area to report and explain to a wider world. Such a task is not made easier by the pressures described above and even leads to distortions, deliberate or otherwise.

The conference emphasised the need for better briefings by Government and other sides. In addition, journalist groups should rally behind those who face threats. This is where the email and the Internet become tools to inform and muster support. This will ensure that the media are driven by the desire to be first and accurate.

The conference suggested that the metropolitan media develop special research units to document and analyse conditions in the NER so that reports are adequately backgrounded and do a good job of informing viewers and readers. It also urges the metro media to develop specialisation in the issues facing the NER.

Journalists from the region should travel to other parts of India to improve their professional capabilities as well as to better understand the perspectives of others. Similarly, the metro media -- both vernacular and English language -- should make a determined effort to send correspondents regularly to the NER to better understand conditions there at first hand. It is encouraging that this process has begun.

Such documentation would in the long term also help build up the capabilities and professionalism of regional news organisations.

The Northeast is not just a bundle of contradictions or a land of exotic peoples. It is a treasure house of information and remarkable stories, of remarkable people and communities, confronting difficult challenges -- how to span a thousand years in a lifetime and retain their basic moorings without remaining in an economic backwater.

The journalists of the region reflect the diversity and challenges of the region. This conference affirms its support to the right of the media to report and speak its mind fearlessly, accurately and transparently and calls upon all groups and governments to enable this to happen.

Let the press do its work without interference.

The Conference was organised by the India International Centre and the Centre for North East Studies and Policy Research.

Senka Ao, Ao Milen
Supriya Bezbaruah, India Today
Jayanta Bhattacharyya, PTI (Agartala)
Urvashi Butalia, Kali for Women
Sudeep Chakravarty, India Today
Manas Chaudhuri, The Shillong Times
Deepak Dewan, The North East Sun
Subir Ghosh, Northeast Vigil
Preeti Gill, Kali for Women
Seema Guha, The Times of India
Sanjoy Hazarika, columnist and author
Wasbir Husain, The North East Daily
Sreenivasan Jain, NDTV
Pradeep Kumar, Amar Ujala (Kanpur)
Yambem Laba, Manipur State Human Rights Commission
Chaman Lal, National Human Rights Commission
Joseph Lepcha, Naba Dhara
Amita Malik, columnist
Habung Payeng, Arunachal News
Pradeep Phanjoubom, The Imphal Free Press
A.J. Philip, The Indian Express
Kishore Senam, The North East Sun
Anil K. Singh, Zee News
Prasun Sonwalkar
Milon Subba, Sikkim Herald
T.Tara, Assam Tribune (Itanagar)
G.D. Wangsu, The Dawn-lit Post
Sebastian Zumvii, The Northeast Herald

APPENDIX B

Sanjoy Hazarika

B/14, Press Enclave, Saket, New Delhi 110017 Tel 6864120
email: sanhaza@yahoo.com

18 March 2001

Mr. Vir Sanghvi
Editor
The Hindustan Times
New Delhi

Dear Vir:

Kum Kum Chaddha had called me the other day after I had called in to your office to mention my concern about the March 1 news item about the alleged attempt on Paresh Baruah, the “army chief” of ULFA, credited to your Shillong correspondent.

I explained to her that as a reporter and someone who follows North East events and issues closely, I had personally checked out the story which is based on an unidentified source, clearly a security official of some sort. I spoke to an editor in Dhaka who lives near where the incident is supposed to have taken place and to several top Government officials here who have detailed knowledge on these issues. All of them dismissed the report as not just inaccurate but totally false.

If the incident had taken place, then, surely, someone on the HT news desk should have asked the following basic questions: apart from the credibility of the source, how did six armed “unidentified men” pump bullets at Baruah from close range as he walked out of a restaurant and miss him completely? Either they were bad marksmen or they weren’t aiming for him at all! They ended up killing a business “associate” and injuring his driver! Incidentally, the name of the restaurant is also spelled wrong: It’s Basil Leaf not Basin Leaf. The Thais use a lot of basil in their food; haven’t heard of any basin though.

The Indian High Commissioner in Bangladesh lives in Gulshan. Surely, he too would have filed an extensive report on such an incident.

But he didn't nor did any other newspaper out of Dhaka or the North East carry this report. Because it did not happen.

I am writing at some length about this after considerable thought. It is important that those of us who feel concerned about the region speak out on the issue of media coverage especially when it is clearly based on biased information.

Reporting the North East is not an easy job at any time; but professional reporters do not make their job any easier by simply carrying everything that some "sources" share with them. They need to check the veracity of these accounts by doing some cross checking and research of their own.

There is even a reference in the HT story of March 1 to an earlier attempt on Baruah's life. Again, from everything that one has checked and with everyone here and there, this too did not take place even though it seemed to be such a "scoop."

I apologize for taking up your time with this incident. But I felt it needed to be brought formally to your attention.

With regards and every good wish,

Sanjoy Hazarika

APPENDIX C

Sample of interviewees:

New Delhi:

1. Chief of Bureau, *Hindustan Times*.
2. Author and Columnist, *Indian Express*.
3. Former Chief of Bureau and Columnist, *Indian Express*.
4. Special Correspondent, *The Times of India*.
5. Senior Editor, *The Times of India*.
6. Associate Editor, *The Hindu*.
7. Former Executive Editor, *Hindustan Times*.
8. Author and Columnist, *The Pioneer*.
9. Chief of Bureau, *Jansatta*.
10. Chief of Bureau, *Dainik Jagran*.
11. Columnist, Author and former Assistant Editor, *The Times of India*.
12. Special Correspondent, *The Telegraph*.
13. Deputy Chief of Bureau, *The Times of India*.
14. Senior Broadcast Journalist, BBC, and ex-Special Correspondent, *The Times of India*.
15. Senior Editor, *Indian Express*.
16. Special Correspondent, *Hindustan Times*.
17. Associate Editor, *India Today*.
18. Media Critic, *Indian Express*.
19. Senior Editor, *Dainik Jagran*.
20. Columnist, *Indian Express* and former India Correspondent of *New York Times*.

Northeast:

1. Editor, *The Sentinel*.
2. Consulting Editor, *The Sentinel*.
3. Editor, *Aji*.
4. Editor, *Asom Bani*.
5. Editor, *Imphal Free Press*.
6. Editor, *North-East Times*.
7. Special Correspondent, *Deccan Herald*.
8. Deputy Director General, *Doordarshan* and *All India Radio*.
9. Columnist and Writer, *Imphal Free Press*.
10. Senior official of North-East Frontier Railway (in-charge of interacting with journalists)

Semi-structured interviews were conducted around the following questions:

1. Why does Kashmir tend to get greater coverage in the New Delhi-based English-language press than the many insurgencies in northeast India?
2. Do you think the northeast is more, less or well covered by the national press? Do you agree with the notion that this press is the 'national' press? If yes, please explain; if not, why not.

3. What is the general attitude in newsrooms towards developments in the northeast?
4. Who or what constitutes the 'national mainstream', according to you?
5. According to you, are there any cultural reasons that influence the attitudes towards events in Kashmir and northeast?
6. Are you encouraged to work on reports/articles/analyses relating to the northeast?
7. What are the main sources of news on northeast issues in New Delhi?

Variables for Content Analysis:

1. News items with Kashmir and any of the seven northeast states in headline or text.
2. Dateline originating in Kashmir and the northeast.
3. Editorials on issues relating to conflicts in Kashmir and the northeast.
4. Letters to editor on events/issues in Kashmir and the northeast
5. Features on Kashmir and the northeast.

Citation

**The Fifteenth PUCL
'Journalism for Human Rights'
Award, 1996**

Utpal Bordoloi

Selected reports:

- ✧ **Army Destroys Heart of Nagaland CM's Constituency**
- ✧ **Renewed Panic in Nagaland**
- ✧ **Troops Tend to be Trigger-Happy**
- ✧ **Naga Insurgency: Trouble Ahead**
- ✧ **Fence Attacks Crop, Again**
- ✧ **Trigger-Happy Security Forces Spark-off a Row**
- ✧ **Tribals at War**
- ✧ **A Conflict that Few Know of**

March 23, 1996

Bhopal

PUCL 'JOURNALISM FOR HUMAN RIGHTS' AWARD
of Rs.20,000/-, Citation, and a Plaque

The Award was instituted in 1981
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Reports on human rights situation in the country, published in the calendar year 1995 in any language, in any newspaper, magazine, or journal, etc., in India are eligible. Essays, books, Letters to the Editor, etc., are not considered.

REPORTS PUBLISHED IN A LANGUAGE OTHER THAN ENGLISH MUST BE ACCOMPANIED BY AN ENGLISH TRANSLATION STATING THE DATE AND NAME OF THE PAPER, JOURNAL, ETC.

GUIDELINES:

- (1) The award is for Journalism for Human Rights, hence:
 - (a) the topic may be wider than mere civil liberties; (b) reports should be about the human rights situation and not about the human conditions in general; (c) while violations of human rights by the State are the ones that are most often investigated, violations by private groups of the rights of their members or others are also relevant.
- (2) The problem the investigation focuses on should be of general significance.
- (3) Weight is also given to follow-up.
- (4) Although the eventual impact of the story is often outside the control of the author, it is kept in mind.
- (5) The risk that the writer has borne by doing that kind of story and the field-work that has to be done are also taken into account.
- (6) The record of the writer over a longer period is also important.
- (7) Entries should be accompanied by a short professional data of the author.

THE JURY MAY NOT LIMIT ITSELF MERELY TO THE ENTRIES RECEIVED, MEMBERS MAY MAKE THEIR SUGGESTIONS.

MEMBERS OF THE JURY:

Amrik Singh
B.B. Sarkar
Narendra Sharma
S. Sahay

CITATION

The seven States of India to the East of Bangladesh, generally known as the seven sisters, are not only geographically distant from the rest of the country but are also a totally different world emotionally and culturally. Barring Assam, the other six States, namely, Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram, Meghalaya, and Tripura are mainly connected with the rest of the country only by Air or hilly and badly kept roads. The combined effect of these factors is a sense of frustration and a feeling of neglect in the minds of the people. There are very few newspapers from other parts of India which have their reporters in any of the States beyond Assam. What happens in these States, therefore, is generally not known to the people in other parts. All these States are witnessing militancy and underground movement, of one kind or other. There is widespread deployment of army and paramilitary forces whose actions are even beyond the scope of the National Human Rights Commission.

*Any Journalist who covers the happenings in these states exposes herself or himself to danger from both sides. This year's Jury of the Journalism for Human Rights Award selected **Utpal Bordoloi** of Guwahati for his objective and fearless reporting of the events in some of these States for The Deccan Herald, published from Bangalore. He sharply focuses on the happenings and the political background which combine to infringe on the human rights of the common people. Be it the inter-tribal feuds, the clash between the militants and the security forces, or the indiscriminate shooting and killing by any party, Utpal Bordoloi has not let any bias creep into his reporting. His reporting of the incident at Mokokchung, Nagaland, prompted the National Human Rights Commission to visit the town. After investigating the incident it asked the Government of India to Award one crore rupees to the affected citizens as compensation.*

Taking his undergraduate degree from Delhi University, Bordoloi started his journalistic career as an editorial apprentice with the UNI at Delhi in 1981. He was promoted and transferred to Guwahati in 1982. He worked with the Sentinel upto 1983. Thereafter he freelanced as the Assam stringer for Reuters, Onlooker, Sunday Observer, and The Daily. He joined The Deccan Herald in 1988 and has been working as its Chief North East Correspondent since 1991. He was awarded the Statesman Award for rural reporting in 1983 and 1984.

Bhopal
March 23, 1996

K.G. Kannabiran
President

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Peoples' Union for Civil Liberties

ARMY DESTROYS HEART OF NAGALAND CM'S CONSTITUENCY

December 27, 1994, will be remembered as a black day in Mokokchung town, legislative assembly constituency of Chief Minister S. Chubatoshi Jamir. On that fateful day, troops of 16 Maratha Light Infantry (MLI), infuriated by the killing of their officiating Commanding officer (CO), Lt. Col. K.B. Poonacha, went berserk and razed Imlong place, the heart of the town, to the ground. It was an incident comparable to Sopore in Kashmir.

According to the district administration, 24 commercial buildings containing 89 shops, 48 residential buildings 17 vehicles and seven two-wheelers were totally burnt in the troops' rampage. A mosque was totally destroyed and a church damaged. According to provisional estimates, the monetary value of the damage is in the region of Rs.10 crore.

Three charred, unidentifiable bodies have so far been recovered from the ashes: it is feared that more could be lying in the debris and wreckage of the ruined town centre. The Ao Senden, the Apex tribal council of the Aos, has reported ten persons killed and seven still missing at the time of reporting though the official casualty figure is given as eight, including two army personnel.

Imlong place, the town centre, has been the traditional site for New Year's celebrations in Mokokchung, and many residents were busy shopping for the occasion when a section of the 16 MLI set out on a routine patrol through the bazar from their company post nearby.

About 10.20 a.m., as the patrol was passing the town's main traffic crossing, shots were fired at it from the window of a house overlooking the bazar area. According to the army's version, this "dastardly, well-planned attack" was carried out by guerrillas of the Khaplang faction of the NSCN. The soldiers strung out along the patrol route at five-metre intervals immediately took cover and started firing back at the house from where they had come under fire. A heavy firefight ensued as panicky civilians ran into shops for shelter and shopkeepers most of them of trading community hastily pulled down their shutters.

Hearing the gunfire Col. Poonacha who was in the company post, came down to control the action. About 45 minutes after the first shots were fired he was hit by a bullet and seriously injured. However, he continued to direct the action, in which four "anti-national elements" were killed, till he succumbed to his wound. Sepoy P.R.D. Knot was the other army casualty.

The Maratha soldiers' fury thereafter may be explained by the fact that Lt. Col. Poonacha was the second CO of the battalion to fall to NSCN bullets in Mokokchung district in the space of just twelve months. In December 1993 Colonel Nair, the then CO, was killed in an ambush near Changki village. Explained army sources: "It's extremely difficult to control troops when their commanding officer is hit. For them the CO is like a father." In any case, the soldiers went berserk, in the original Viking sense of the term.

According to the official version issued by the Press Information Bureau (Defence Wing), two civilians were also killed and two others injured in the crossfire. During the firing, high tension electric cables snapped and some gas cylinders exploded setting fire to "a few smaller buildings and vehicles which was extinguished expeditiously".

"The army exercised extreme restraint in reacting as they were deeply conscious of the vulnerability of large number of innocent civilians in the area, " the PIB release said.

THE POLITICAL FALLOUT

The security forces have always been hated by Nagas in general for excesses and atrocities committed during the last 40 years of counter-insurgency operations. The 16 MLI, the latest target of the peoples' wrath, has been condemned for its action by almost all sections of society and non-governmental organisations. Demands have been made for punishment of the guilty men and officers and for the transfer of the battalion out of Nagaland. So much is routine.

But, perhaps for the first time ever, political leaders of Nagaland and the underground guerrillas have also come in for strong public condemnation for contributing to the circumstances which led to the Maratha soldiers destroying the historic town centre of Mokokchung. This has considerable significance for the state's politics.

Never before in his long political career has Chief Minister S.C. Jamir had to face so much opprobrium among his own Ao tribe assembly constituency which he represents. Mr. Jamir has maintained a discreet silence over the incident, and his silence is regarded as the sign of guilty conscience. Mokokchung is a stronghold of the NSCN (K), Mr. Jamir has been accused of patronising this faction by no less than the former Governor, Lt. Gen. V.K. Nayar (ret'd). This is also an open secret in Nagaland, and particularly Mokokchung, so Mr. Jamir got a cold reception when he visited the town two days after it was put to torch. "There is no work for you here. Go back to Kohima, " local public leaders reportedly told him.

Public ire in his constituency has also been fuelled by the fact that, till date, the state government has not announced any relief and rehabilitation measures, whether ex-gratia payments to those made homeless or destitute by the arson or compensation to the next of-kin of the dead. Relief measures have been undertaken only by non-governmental organisations.

Not surprisingly, Mr. Jamir did not have the courage to attend an emergency general session of the Ao Senden, the apex tribal council of the Ao tribe, held at the Mokokchung town hall on January six to discuss the rebuilding of the town and the lives of the victims. The meeting was attended by representatives of about 100 Ao villages and towns, Nagaland's Lok Sabha M.P., Mr. Imchalemba Ao, six out of the ten MLAs from Mokokchung district, and about 5,000 other tribesmen.

According to this version, 24 buildings in the main shopping complex and 15 vehicles were gutted by fire, and sounds of exploding ammunition could be heard till the next morning. Subsequent search of the area resulted in the recovery of 15 weapons including a charred AK-47, three 9 m.m. carbines, an album of photographs of guerrillas with their arms, olive green uniforms, live ammunition, empty cases and "remote control devices".

"The Connivance of, and shelter provided to the underground elements by the local shopkeepers cannot be discounted," the army version concluded. "If such support is not provided by some of our people to the misguided elements in our society peace would prevail and innocent lives saved," the PIB release said. This version is flatly contradicted by the

hundreds of eyewitnesses present in Imlong place that morning, including the non-Naga traders and shopkeepers who were among the worst sufferers of the arson.

Though this was not included in the resolution finally adopted by the Ao Senden, the major demand of the people at the meeting was for the immediate resignation of all the ten MLAs from Mokokchung, including Mr. Jamir, owing moral responsibility for the incident. Various speakers accused the legislators of beginning incidents of shooting in the town by utilising the services of the underground guerrillas during the 1993 assembly elections.

The resignation demand was, significantly, backed by the Nagaland Times daily, considered the party organ of the ruling Congress (I): its new executive editor, Mrs. Monalisa Changkija Longkumer, is an Ao.

Only Mr. Imchalemba and one MLA, Mr. Sentinchuba, spoke at the Ao Senden meeting. The silence of the other elected representatives "spoke volumes", Nagaland Times said in a editorial. "These five were not prevented from speaking, but they chose to remain silent, not even condemning the army's atrocities not expressing a word of condolence, consolation or solidarity before their voters". The paper called this "a disgraceful admission of their gross neglect and dereliction of their duties".

"...most conspicuous is Chief minister S.C. Jamir's absence in what will go down as a historic meeting of his own district. Jamir as a seasoned politician is no doubt fully aware how much this meeting will affect him politically and how much politics in the state will be affected," Nagaland Times said.

The Naga Council put a major share of the blame for the incident on the state government. Its president, Mr. Tsukti Longkumer, has gone on record accusing the government of virtually handing over Mokokchung town and district to the underground outfits. Mr. Longkumer had warned the Ao Senden last year that this would invite "untold sufferings" on the common people. But like, the Biblical Prophets, his was a voice crying in the wilderness.

It was because of this that the Ao Senden unleashed all pent up fury on the politicians, particularly the elected representatives, holding them squarely responsible for the people's sufferings: first by patronising the underground groups and later by failing to protect them from the rampage of the security forces.

The guerrillas also came in for severe criticism. Mr. Nokdang Ao, President of the Dimapur Ao Hoho, questioned as to "how and why any faction of the underground could provoke the army in such a public place where the civilians were vulnerable and inevitable exposed to the dangers of crossfire".

The Ao Senden meeting by a resolution strongly condemned "the genocide and massacre and arson of human lives and properties inflicted by the 16th Maratha Light Infantry to the people of Mokokchung town on 27th December '94. They have converted the Mokokchung town into a bloody battlefield without any reason which is unparallel in history".

Two other resolutions are highly significant: No.5:- "The Ao Senden moved all the Naga underground organisations and Security forces not to establish camps in towns and villages not to stay in private houses so as to provide security and peaceful existence to the general public as a whole".

No.6: "The Ao Senden condemns the looting of banks, extortion of money from the public in the name of Naga Freedom fighters which has already caused untold miseries to the people of Nagaland."

These are significant resolutions because they are the first ones in the long history of the Naga struggle against the Indian state taken by any representative tribal organisation to speak against the underground guerrillas. The government of India and its security agencies would do well to take note of this development.

By other resolutions the Ao Senden decided to send a report to the National Human Rights Commission of India seeking punishment for the guilty and compensation for human lives and properties lost, and also to demand a judicial inquiry by not less than a retired High Court judge: if these resolutions do not have the desired effect, the Ao Senden would move a writ petition "in any appropriate court of law".

By yet another resolution, the Ao Senden moved the government of Nagaland to provide interest free loans "so as to reconstruct Mokokchung town to its old glory".

Mr. S.C. Jamir can ignore these resolutions taken by the highest traditional council of his tribe only at his own peril. So far, however, the only step taken by his government is to constitute a three-member official inquiry team headed by the state Home Commissioner, Mr. P. Talitemjen Ao, to inquire into "the circumstances leading to the firing incident and the cause leading to the burning of houses". The inquiry team, which also includes the inspector General of Police (Intelligence), Mr. S. Hesso Mao and the Deputy Inspector General, Assam Rifles (South), Brigadier Ramesh Nagpal, is to submit its report by January 31. But this step has satisfied no one and the inquiry commission's appointment is widely described as a "Whitewash and an attempt at a cover-up".

According to reliable accounts, after Col. Poonacha succumbed, the soldiers opened up with everything they had in their arsenal including two inch mortars and 84 m.m. Carl Gustav rocket launchers. Led by Major Deepak Sharma, the Company Commander, they broke open some shops which had closed their shutters, dragged out the people sheltering inside, and beat them up indiscriminately. The entire market place was cordoned off and hundreds of people including women and children were forced to crawl on hands and knees to the main traffic point where they were forced to remain lying on the ground. Some were urged on at bayonet point, sustaining cut injuries on their persons. However, these were the lucky ones. During a lull in the firing the soldiers allegedly looted bundles of textiles, wool and fabrics from shops, doused them with petrol taken from parked vehicles, and used them to set fire to buildings and vehicles. An unknown number of persons perished in the blaze, trapped behind locked shutters: according to local sources, as many as twenty Marwari shopkeepers may have died in this way. Till the third week of January, the debris and wreckage had still not been cleared, so the exact toll of citizens could not be ascertained till the time of filing this report.

Several loud explosions were heard during this phase of the action. One of these collapsed a reinforced concrete building owned by former Chief Minister (now cabinet minister, Social Security and Welfare), Mr. K.L. Chishi. The dimension of the building was such that it could not have been brought down by an L.P.G. cylinder blast, and this gives rise to the suspicion that explosives (probably P.K.-1 or guncotton slabs) were used to demolish some buildings.

The official explanation of snapped high tension wires and exploding L.P.G. cylinders causing the damage is untenable for several reasons. According to Nagaland Electricity Board officials, the only cable that snapped was a neutral line and not a charged wire. According to Electrical Engineers, an 11 K.V. line would start sparking if a few strands were to be severed by a bullet, but would cause a fire only if it touched the ground or the roof of a thatched hut: all the buildings destroyed or damaged by fire were R.C.C. structures.

Secondly, most of the shops and establishments burnt down dealt in textiles and fabrics, stationery and consumer goods, where the question of storage of L.P.G. cylinders just does not arise. Third, some of the shops and houses burnt were hundreds of meters away from the centre of the action.

It is also on record that the soldiers twice prevented the fire brigade from approaching the site to douse the blaze, even threatening the officiating district Police Superintendent, Mr. S. Bendang, at gunpoint as he was escorting the fire tenders. This is confirmed by fire service officials who say that though they set out immediately on getting first information of the fire at 11.15 a.m., they could reach the site only at 11.45 a.m. because of obstruction by the troops: the fire service station is less than half a kilometer away.

A sub-divisional officer and uniformed policemen were also severely beaten by the soldiers during the action. It is also alleged in different quarters that on subsequent days when the entire town was under the control of the army, several girls and women were molested or raped by the soldiers, especially in the park and in a church. Looting and extortion from shopkeepers and citizens has also been alleged.

Curfew was clamped on Mokokchung town immediately after this incident and night curfew continues at the time of reporting. The security forces have launched intensive combining operations in the entire district but, according to reliable sources, the NSCN (K) guerrillas have shifted to neighbouring Zunheboto district to evade the troops.

Another consequence of the December 27 incident is that several thousand non-Nagas, Marwari businessmen and Bihari, Bangladeshi and Nepali daily wage earners, fled Mokokchung after day curfew was lifted in the first week of January and took shelter in the border town of Mariani in Assam. They have reportedly been threatened to leave Nagaland by the army and Assam Rifles in order to have a free hand to deal with the remaining Naga population.

Several theories have been floated as to why the NSCN (K) guerrillas chose to provoke an encounter with the army in a busy, crowded urban centre. One is that an NSCN sentry panicked at the sight of the approaching patrol and opened fire. Another, less credible, is that the MLI troops may have blundered into a showdown in the making between the NSCN (K) and its rival faction the NSCN (I-M). A third theory is revenge for another atrocity by the troops just a week earlier.

At 11.30 p.m. on the night of December 20 Nlongtsu Lotha and Zaneo Angami, drivers of Nagaland State Transport (NST) bus No. NLX 523, were dragged out of their vehicle as they were returning from dropping some passengers, and shot down in cold blood. The same night the troops opened fire on a truck injuring a number of civilians. The killings of the two drivers provoked a strike by NST employees, causing immense hardship to the travelling public.

There are also indications that the burning of Imlong place was deliberate and premeditated. It is an open secret that the entire Army/Security Forces establishment in Nagaland are angry with Chief Minister S.C. Jamir for his support and backing to the NSCN (K). "We were just waiting for a chance to roger the bastard - now we have taught him a lesson he won't forget in a hurry. We have also put the fear of God in these people (Nagas)" said one young officer. In the upper Assam areas bordering Nagaland, news of the army action was received with glee, primarily because of the depredations caused both by underground groups as well as civil and police officials passing through Assam territory: much resentment was caused in Jorhat town on January ten, for instance, when the escort party of a Nagaland VIP indiscriminately beat up cyclists, rickshaw pullers and pedestrians with rifle butts and boots. Hence the approval of the army action in Mokokchung. "Serves them right. They have been doing too much dadagiri of late," said one retired Nagaland government servant now settled in Mariani.

-- Eastern Panorama, February, 1995

RENEWED PANIC IN NAGALAND

Such is the hold of the Indian state machinery in Nagaland that news of the killing of Kohima's Deputy Commissioner Dr. L.V. Reddy, last Tuesday morning, had to be officially released not from the State capital but from New Delhi.

The reason? Almost the entire administration was in a state of panic, from Chief Minister S.C. Jamir downwards. Also, the representatives of both UNI and PTI had fled Kohima earlier in March. A temporary replacement sent by PTI from Guwahati also left after just two-and-a-half days.

The reporters' flight and the killing both stem from the March 5 massacre in which paramilitary troops under army command mowed down seven civilians, including children, and injured 22 others in the heart of the capital, in the same area where Dr. Reddy was killed.

Second Murder

Dr. Reddy, 38, (IAS 1985) native of Vijaywada, was driving to his office when his car came under automatic weapons fire. Dr. Reddy and driver K.P. Rongmei were killed on the spot, bodyguard K. Angami received multiple bullet injuries.

Tragically, Dr. Reddy was killed just three days before he was to proceed on deputation to Andhra Pradesh as Deputy Chief Executive (Administration) at the Nuclear Fuel Complex, Hyderabad. He leaves behind his wife and two sons.

This killing, the second of a non-Naga officer since that of Mokokchung district Police Superintendent Ved Prakash in August 1994, has shaken Mr. Jamir's Government in his current fourth term which began in 1993. The Cabinet, meeting in a emergency session to discuss its repercussions, announced a Rs. 5 lakh reward for information about the killers -- an unprecedented amount. Night curfew was clamped on the capital and army patrolling intensified.

The effect of this on Mr. Jamir's political future is a matter of conjecture at present. But the following facts should be kept in mind:

- (a) He has been warned by the Centre more than once on the law and order front, without effect.
- (b) He has been accused by a governor of patronising a faction of the National Socialist Council of Nagaland.
- (c) His own tribe, Ao, is up in arms after the destruction of his own constituency, Mokokchung, in an army action against insurgents in December 1994.
- (d) Other tribes like the Sema are angered by his pro-Ao policies, especially in important appointments like the Vice-chancellor of Nagaland University.
- (e) A strong dissident faction in the Congress(I), will use this opportunity to convince the central leadership to replace Mr. Jamir.

Admn in Disarray

The administrative repercussions of the Reddy killing would be disastrous. Moral among government employees has already hit rock bottom, specially among non-Naga officials and employees and those of banks and public sector organisations. The ONGC last year closed down its operations in Nagaland; the State Bank of India wants to close all but a few of its 43 branches in the State.

Why was a low-profile, non-controversial bureaucrat like Dr. Reddy targetted by the underground. That too, when it was well known that he was handing over charge on March 31?

Part of the answer lies in the NSCN's strategic and tactical line on the way to its goal of an independent Nagaland: striking at institutions and individuals representing the Indian state machinery, terrorising and rendering impotent the administration and projecting itself before the people as the real power in the State, say intelligence officials.

The more immediate cause, however, may be Reddy's initial statement, in response to queries from media representatives, on the March 5 massacre of civilians by troops of the 16 Rashtriya Rifles. This incident, in the heart Kohima, caused much anger among the Nagas.

According to the official version a column of the 16 Rashtriya Rifles was returning from election duty in Manipur when the convoy was fired upon from three different places in the CRPF complex area at Leire at about 1 p.m. near the ITDC Hotel Ashok Japfu. The troops returned fire. After a minute, the convoy was again fired upon. Two Assam Rifles and four Rashtriya Rifles jawans were injured.

State police officials including the Director General of Police Chaman Lal and eye witnesses flatly contradict this version. What probably happened was that the Rashtriya Rifles troops panicked when a tyre of a vehicle in their convoy punctured, confusing the sound for a gunshot or bomb explosion. They then started firing blindly. among other weapons they used two inch mortars in the thickly populated civilian area.

The dead included the Nagaland policemen, two minor girls aged three and a half and eight, and two Nepalese apart from 22 others injured. The Kohima Raj Bhawan, the three-star

Hotel Ashok Japfu, a minister's residence, the fire brigade building and even the office of the Kohima Police Superintendent were hit by the mortar bombs.

Initially Dr. Reddy told the media, including PTI and UNI that the Rashtriya Rifles fired indiscriminately after its convoy was fired upon by suspected (NSCN) militants. This version was circulated by the news agencies and broadcast by All India Radio and Doordarshan in their news bulletins caused much anger in Nagaland.

Pressure from various quarters later forced Dr. Reddy to withdraw his initial statement a day later, and blame the Rashtriya Rifles. The truth of the matter may, or may not, be resolved by parallel inquiries being conducted by the army (3 Crops HQ) and the state administration. The fact, however, remains that both the PTI's Borbora -- reassigned to Agartala, and UNI's Goswami, posting undecided -- told their respective managements that they had received death threats for reporting the Deputy Commissioner's first version -- and fled Kohima.

-- Deccan Herald, April 2, 1995

TROOPS TEND TO BE TRIGGER-HAPPY

TRIGGER-HAPPY is not an adjective associated with well-trained, disciplined troops, yet fire discipline appears to be getting worse day by day among the army and paramilitary troops posted in the Nagaland-Manipur sector.

Whether involving regular army units, paramilitary formations under Army command like the Assam Rifles, the newly-created Rashtriya Rifles (RR) or the CRPF, there has been an increasing trend of indiscriminate firing in heavily built-up and densely-populated urban areas of Nagaland in the last few months, causing heavy loss of civilian life and damage to property.

Consider the following cases:

(1) December 27, 1994. Mokokchung District headquarters. Berserk troops of the 16 Maratha Light Infantry, enraged by the killing of their officiating commanding officer, razed the town centre, destroying 79 shops, 48 residential houses and 24 vehicles. Ten civilians were killed.

(2) January 23, 1995. Akuluto town, Zunheboto District. Troops of the 15 Assam Rifles went on a rampage killing a woman and injuring several other people, including two minor children, in indiscriminate firing. They also burned down nine houses and destroyed six others in retaliation for a snipping attack on their post.

(3) February 23, 1995. Wokha District headquarters. This time the 12 Assam Rifles fired indiscriminately while trying to apprehend a suspected underground (the local term for Naga militant). An 8-year-old girl and an adult male received serious bullet injuries.

(4) March 5, 1995. Kohima. Mr. Vandanshan Lotha and his family were standing on the verandah of their house in the AOC area of the State capital when a two inch mortar bomb fired by the Rashtriya Rifles landed in the courtyard. Two of his daughters, aged three and a

half and eight died on the spot. Two others aged six suffered shrapnel injuries and are still in hospital.

Seven people were killed and 22 injured in the heart of Kohima in the latest outrage. The dead included two Nagaland police personnel and two Nepalese while the injured included four women and seven children.

Fire discipline is a concept familiar to any senior division NCC cadet of the army wing. In essence, it simply means that troops are not to open fire until the unit commander has located the target and given the order to fire. But, as the four incidents cited above prove, this principle seems to be observed more in the breach, at least in Nagaland.

Clearly, something is wrong in the way the security forces are handling the insurgency in the Nagaland-Manipur sector. Indiscriminate firing leading to civilian casualties is a violation of the army's own code of conduct in a counter-insurgency situation, the so-called "Ten Commandments" which are printed in English and Hindi and supposed to be kept in the pocket of every soldier.

According to senior officers at the Army's 3 Corps headquarters at Rangapahar in Dimapur, the changed nature of insurgency in Nagaland lies at the root of all the four incidents. With the insurgents moving into the urban areas from the jungles and the villages in recent years, the likelihood of clashes with the security forces in the towns has increased.

In each case cited above, the army commanders blame the underground -- the NSCN guerrillas -- for initiating the action in urban areas which ultimately led to civilian casualties.

There appears to be approval of the sledgehammer tactics used by the troops on the ground at the highest levels of the army. "I do not expect my troops not to take the appropriate military action when fired upon", Gen. Shankar Roy Choudhary said when asked about the Mokochung incident. Asked whether the principle of using minimum force was observed in this case, given the extensive devastation of the town centre, Gen. Roy Choudhary said: "This has to be interpreted in context of the situation".

But there is clearly more to it than army commanders are willing to admit. A major factor is that standards of discipline and training are slipping, perhaps because the army is over-stretched in its counter-insurgency role not only in the North-East but also in Kashmir.

The Indian Army's counter-insurgency and jungle warfare school (CIJWS) at Vaiangte, Mizoram, needs to update its training regime, some army officers feel. The school has always trained the soldiers to operate against guerrillas in a jungle/rural environment, and troops are not adequately trained to cope with attacks in densely-populated towns. Their reaction is disproportionate.

In the Kohima case the Rashtriya Rifles men are widely accused of panicking on hearing the sound of a burst tyre. They fired at a convoy carrying Brig. Ramesh Nagpal of the Assam Rifles, the senior-most military officer in the Kohima area, injuring two riflemen.

They abused Director-General of Police Chaman Lal and held him off at gunpoint. They used two-inch mortars -- not supposed to be used in civilian areas -- without knowing what their target was.

The incidents of the last few months have badly traumatised the Nagas. Two major protest rallies, drawing more than 10,000 people each time, have been organised in Kohima by the

Naga People's Movement for Human Rights (NPMHR). The demand: "Withdraw armed forces from the civil areas".

Indiscriminate firing and the killing of innocents only makes the cause of Naga nationalism stronger as it will then get more support and recruits from people who have lost their loved ones, says a leading academic.

-- Deccan Herald, April 4, 1995

NAGA INSURGENCY -- TROUBLE AHEAD

Twenty years after the Shillong accord (1975) was supposed to have ended the Naga insurgency, the situation is back to square one. The S.C. Jamir-led Congress (I) government's decision on March 31 to bring the whole state under the Disturbed Area Act and the Armed Forces Act is the most telling proof of this.

Mr. Jamir, now in the third year of his fourth term as chief minister, took the decision with great reluctance. But he had no choice in the matter: the Central Government under pressure from the home and the defence ministries, having laid down an ultimatum to either promulgate the two draconian acts or quit.

The acts give the army and the para-military forces extensive and independent powers of action. A lowly havildar is empowered to order troops to shoot to kill, carry out raids, destroy structures and materials used by outlawed organisations, cordon, search and arrest. In effect, the state where these laws are in operation are virtually handed over to the security forces.

Last Straw

As reported in these columns over the past two years, the situation in Nagaland has been steadily deteriorating since February 1993 when Mr. Jamir was sworn in last.

The last straw for the Union Home ministry, which has pulled up the chief minister more than once, was the March 28 assassination of the Kohima Deputy Commissioner, Dr. L.V. Reddy. The broad daylight murder of the official right in the heart of the state capital was "an open challenge which cannot be taken lightly," Mr. Jamir said, justifying the highly unpopular decision.

A strong reaction is developing against it. Mr. Vamuzo, former Nagaland Peoples' Council (NPC) chief and leader of the Opposition in the state assembly, has called upon individuals, church leaders and voluntary organisations to protest the decision, and upon the Centre to think of changing the state leadership instead. Mr. Vamuzo thinks the Disturbed Areas and Armed Forces Special Powers Acts would make the situation "uncontrollable" and force more youths to join the "revolutionary forces".

Black Laws

The public in general fear what the security forces will do, armed with legal sanction for any action they may carry out. Even without the two "black acts", army and para-military troops have killed more than 20 civilians, including children, in random, indiscriminate

shootings in four towns including Kohima since the end of December. They also destroyed the center of Mokokchung town, Mr. Jamir's own constituency.

The black laws, as they are known in the North-East, were passed in 1958 to deal with the armed uprising of the Naga tribes led by late Mr. A. Z. Phizo, which broke out in 1955-56. The 1975 Shillong accord was signed by the Government of India and a section of the Nagas -- the so-called 'accordists' -- but it was rejected by a hard core, China trained faction. This faction formed the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN) in 1980.

The N.S.C.N. was first led by the triumvirate of S.S. Khaplang (president), a Myanmar Naga of the Hemi tribe, Issac Chishi Swu (vice-president) from the Sema tribe, and Thuingaleng Muivah (general secretary), a Tangkhul Naga from Manipur's Ukhrul district.

Till 1987, this group mostly operated out of the Naga areas in Myanmar, carrying out hit-and-run raids on the Indian side of the border.

In 1988, the guerrillas split on tribal lines, with Khaplang's men massacring scores of Swu-Muivah supporters. The survivors, pushed out of the territory of the Myanmar Nagas, shifted to new areas in Nagaland, Manipur, Assam and Bangladesh, the Barail range of hills in Assam's North Cachar district flanking Nagaland and Manipur was made into a major transit route to Bangladesh and South-East Asia.

The NSCN split and increased military operations by Myanmar may have lulled India's security planners that the Insurgent threat on the country's eastern flank had been slit and therefore diminished. In 1990 the army's famed 8th Mountain Division, raised in Nagaland in 1965 to combat the Naga guerrillas, was moved to Jammu and Kashmir. This left a security vacuum and the NSCN was quick to exploit it.

Logistic Support

Besides expanding into new areas and infiltrating the towns, the NSCN began sponsoring and actively helping other insurgent groups of the North-East with arms, training and logistic support. These included the United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA), the Bodo Security Force (Bd.S.F.), the Hmar Peoples' Convention (HPC) and other smaller groups.

The ULFA-NSCN connection led to both the organisations being banned by the Centre in December 1990 -- the NSCN over the Nagaland government's protests -- together with President's rule in Assam and the army crackdown on ULFA, Operation Bajrang. It was at this time that a 20-km strip of Nagaland along the Assam border together with Mon district -- a transit area for ULFA and NSCN (Khaplang faction) cadres going to or coming from Myanmar -- was brought under the Disturbed Areas Act. The Jamir's government's decision will extend the operation of the act to the remaining districts of Mokok Chung, Zunheboto, Wokha, Phek, Tuensang and Paren and Kohima sub-divisions.

Despite being outlawed, by 1992 it was clear that not only had the Swu-Muivah faction of the NSCN recovered from its 1988 setback, but had also increased its influence, reach and striking power. To what extent Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) directorate played a role in this is not established, but India's security organs have established definite linkages.

Two developments of 1993 gave a further boost to the NSCN. First, it got a measure of international recognition when it was accepted as a member of the Hague-based Unrepresented Nations and Peoples' Organisations (UNPO) and set up "embassies" in Bangkok, New York and other places where supporters could be found.

Political Patronage

Second, the Nagaland Assembly elections of 1993 saw candidates of all parties, but mainly the Congress (I), utilising the services of both factions of the underground in a big way. Mokokchung residents recall the sound of gunfire all day long on polling day.

The NSCN, and particularly the Khaplang faction, thereby entrenched itself more deeply with political patronage. Not for nothing did a former Governor, Lt. Gen. V.K. Nayar (retired) accuse Mr. Jamir of supporting the Khaplang faction. Mr. Jamir, however, strongly protested this report.

Since the end of 1993, the army and paramilitary forces in Nagaland and Manipur have invariably come off worse in their encounters with the NSCN: not less than four Lt. Colonels and Colonels have been killed -- and one crippled for life -- in ambushes, and more than a hundred other soldiers. Partly out of frustration, the soldiers have often vented their wrath on innocent civilians. Once they are let off the leash with the promulgation of the two black laws, innocents and civilians are increasingly going to be the worst sufferers.

-- Deccan Herald, April 9, 1995

FENCE ATTACKS CROP, AGAIN

Three incidents of mass rape in Assam and Tripura in the last month not only shook the north-eastern states but also raised the question whether the first three initials of the CRPF should read Compulsive Rapist Police instead of Central Reserve Police.

In Tripura, two successive incidents of rape of tribal women by both the central force and the state armed police has severely embarrassed the Left Front government. The Opposition parties are trying to make the incidents an issue before the Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council elections later this year.

In Assam, the Opposition had no chance to rake up the issue even in the Assembly as the administration at the district level quickly defused the situation by arresting seven CRPF constables on April 7.

The incident occurred on the afternoon of April 5 at Jutlibari village in Dibrugarh district, about 20 kilometers from the oil town of Duliajan. The jawans were part of a larger group of about 20, belonging to the 21st CRPF battalion stationed at Bahadur Chariali (cross roads), who went to fell trees illegally for firewood at the Mahakali-Borjan reserve forest.

Sneak into Village

About seven or eight CRPF men sneaked away from the main party and first began drinking country liquor at a Nepali village. Drunk, they strayed into Jutlibari at about 2:30 p.m. in the afternoon when the women of the village were busy at their looms weaving for the ensuing Bihu, or Assamese new year festival.

The CRPF men sent away the menfolk in the village, those not out working, on the pretext that their commander, waiting some distance away, wanted to meet them. In less than half-an-hour they raped a 10-year-old class six girl and a teen ager in class eight, besides

SPECIAL NOTE

THE FOLLOWING
IMAGE IS OF POOR
QUALITY DUE TO THE
ORIGINAL DOCUMENT.

THE BEST AVAILABLE

IMAGE HAS BEEN

ACHIEVED.

severely molesting two other teenage schoolgirls and a young mother with a 10-month old infant.

Alarm raised by women who managed to escape brought the men back to the village. The CRPF were chased out of the village. They went away threatening they would shoot the villagers if they reported the incident. The villagers, mostly farmers and stock, discussed matters before deciding to report the incident the same evening to the police station.

The local police administration as also the CRPF battalion commander expressed praise for cooperating to settle the matter quickly and effectively. A parade was held of the CRPF troops and seven perpetrators of the crime were shown to the victims and arrested under five charges of the Indian Penal Code. In Dibrugarh, the arrested jawans have reportedly been beaten up severely and are in the district jail after they were remanded in judicial custody.

Judicial Probe

In Tripura, where too an eleven-year-old girl was among the survivors of a rape in two separate incidents, Mr. Samar Chowdhury, the Left Minister, initially tried to brush aside the first reports, saying that though the crime had been committed, the allegations of rape were yet to be confirmed.

He, however, did order judicial inquiries into both incidents. CRPF conducted the first incident at Mitrajoypara under Kanchanpur subdivision of North Tripura district on March 14 while six Tripura State Rifles (TSR) jawans were involved in the second case at Thalibari under Amarpur sub-division of South Tripura district. The eleven-year-old girl, were raped in each case.

In both the cases the CRPF and TSR men took advantage of the absence of people in the villages because of the on going Jhum cultivation season.

The Opposition Congress (I) and its ally the Tripura Upajati Jukta Front along with other organisations like the Tribal Students' Federation (TSF) and the Women's Samiti are among those calling for immediate and strong action against the men involved. Till date the only action taken has been the suspension of the men.

State-Wide Stir

The Opposition political parties are not satisfied with the government's response. They have announced they will launch a state-wide agitation on the issue. The former president and former Chief Minister, Mr. Sudhir Ranjan Mazumdar, has called on people to organise protest meetings and processions against police atrocities in the state.

These incidents have once again highlighted the fact that something is seriously and radically wrong with the training and motivation of security personnel. The repeated cases of indiscriminate firing by police, army and paramilitary forces resulting in innocent civilian casualties.

TRIGGER-HAPPY SECURITY FORCES SPARK OFF A ROW

Angered by yet another incident of unprovoked and indiscriminate firing, the entire bureaucracy in Manipur is locked in a major confrontation with the security forces posted in the strife-torn State, posing a problem for both the State and Union Governments.

Indiscriminate firing by the security forces causing civilian casualties has emerged as a serious problem in Nagaland and Manipur in recent months, raising questions about the training and discipline of the troops. In the latest incident, which occurred on the night of May 3, however, the target was not hapless civilians but the official vehicle of a senior IAS officer, Barun Mitra, the Deputy Commissioner of Senapati district. While Mr. Mitra escaped unhurt, his driver was seriously injured.

'Disgraceful'

The perpetrators of this incident -- like the one in Kohima on March 5 -- were troops of the Rashtriya Rifles. This much-touted, so-called, 'specialised counter-insurgency force' has been raised by the army from regular soldiers after completion of their terms of enlistment, is led by regular army officers on deputation, and operates under army command. Its performance in the North-East so far has been a disgrace, many observers feel.

In his official complaint to the Chief Secretary on the "murderous attack on me and my driver", Mr. Mitra stated that on the evening in question, he had been to headquarters of the 79 CRPF battalion at Kangpokpi in his district. Returning to his headquarters, Senapati, at about 11 p.m. the Deputy Commissioner chose to drive his official Gypsy with his driver M. Buddha Singh, 32, sitting behind him on his left.

"It was a clear night with no fog and visibility was good. Since the road is on the hill having sharp bends and it was night time, I was driving slowly. While crossing Tumiyan Khullen village, the vehicle further slowed down due to a curve/bend along the road in this village. Suddenly there were bursts of gun fire from different directions on my vehicle."

"I was completely taken aback at the shoot-out since there was no signal/warning/challenge for me to stop the vehicle. There was nobody to be seen on the road. I immediately applied the brakes and stopped the vehicle. After pausing for a moment I got out of my vehicle and stood facing the southern direction (towards Kangpokpi). There was no reaction from the people who opened fire," Mr. Mitra reported.

"Then, I shouted 'Kaun Hai?' asking for the identity of the persons who opened fire. In reply I was asked to raise my hands. When I revealed my identity and questioned them as to why they had opened fire without giving any warning, a torch was flashed at me from my head to toe and four to five arms-wielding personnel in uniform came forward from the southern direction."

"I saw my driver bleeding profusely and writhing in pain..."

Judging the driver's condition to be critical, the deputy Commissioner "dropped further conversation with the RR personnel and moved towards Senapati". But he almost immediately changed his mind and turned around for Imphal, about 50 km away, for better medical help. Buddha Singh was administered first aid and put on glucose drip at the CRPF camp at

Kangpokpi before he and the Deputy Commissioner were driven to the Regional Medical College, Imphal, by the Commanding officer of the 79 Battalion CRPF and his escort.

Checking his vehicle as the driver was being treated, Mr. Mitra found that his vehicle had been fired upon from behind, and bullet holes indicated that he himself had had a very narrow escape: several had hit the top portion of the driver's-side window.

"It is therefore submitted that the accused persons... had fired at my vehicle with the intention to kill the occupants of the vehicle."

The bureaucracy reacted strongly, noting that such incidents were not rare. The State associations of the IAS, IPS, Manipur Civil Service, Manipur Police Service, and Manipur's Secretariat Service met on May 5 and strongly condemned the Rashtriya Rifles, "irresponsible, reckless and dastardly act".

"Though fully aware of their *raison d'etre*, that they are in aid of civil administration, such incidents are not rare. Earlier the car of the Deputy Commissioner, Chandel, was fired at by the army. This raises doubts as to whether they are in aid of civil administration or otherwise..." said the proceedings of the meeting.

'Deliberate'

Apart from direct assault on the persons and vehicles of the civil authorities, the meeting noted, "The army/Rashtriya Rifles personnel are indulging in deliberate acts aimed at humiliating the office and authority of the civil administration." It cited a recent example when the Senapati Police Superintendent and his men and vehicles were frisked and searched in the district headquarters itself by Rashtriya Rifles men while the policemen were on duty and their identities were known."

Resolutions

The five officers' associations took the following resolutions: (a) that the guilty Rashtriya Rifles personnel be handed over to the police, irrespective of the Army Act, for a fair investigation of 'attempt to murder the DC and his driver'; (b) the Rashtriya Rifles unit (8th battalion) be removed from Manipur; (c) Union and State Governments to issue clear instructions on the role of security personnel, army in particular, vis-s-vis civil authority. Such instructions to be codified and punishment for their violation to be made mandatory to stop alienation of officials and public at large; (d) copy of the proceedings to be sent to the Governor, Union Home Ministry, Chief Minister, Union Cabinet Secretary and central associations at New Delhi for their information.

The bureaucrats have also formed an action committee to take follow-up action.

-- Deccan Herald, May 21, 1995

TRIBALS AT WAR

A virtual state of civil war has all Nagaland in its grip.

The Chakesang tribe is pitted against the Tangkhuls. The Angamis are on the warpath against the Kukis. The Semas and the Aos have, of course, long been feuding. The NSCN (I-M) versus the NSCN (K). The NSCN/GPRN against the ~~NK~~C/NFG. ^{LN}

Inexorably, the Nagas appear to be sliding back to the days of inter-tribal warfare, when each village was a sovereign entity perpetually at war with its neighbours. This situation, created by the politicians and warlords of the underground, has plunged the ordinary Naga into deep despair.

Extending the Disturbed Areas Act to cover the whole state in April, following the murder of Kohima DC Dr. L.V. Reddy, has made hardly any difference. Even as Chief Minister S.C. Jamir claims an improvement in the law and order situation, killings, kidnappings and extortions continue unabated.

The state police continue to 'lose' arms to insurgents at an alarming rate. On July 23, NSCN (I-M) guerrillas drove off with the complete armoury of a company of the Nagaland Armed Police (NAP) -- 92 weapons and a wireless set -- from just outside the Rangapahar military cantonment in Dimapur, headquarters of the army's IIIrd corps -- the raid was made possible by the connivance of the NAP sentry on duty.

It is doubtful whether Jamir's writ applies/runs even in the state capital. Militants walk into the secretariat at Kohima with impunity to make extortion threats. The Ao Church of Kohima recently became the victim of an extortion demand for Rs. 50 lakh by the NSCN and the Bible on the pulpit was reportedly desecrated. The NSCN's motto, incidentally, is 'Nagaland for Christ.'

Three assassination attempt -- two successful -- have rocked the state since Dr. Reddy's murder, in addition to almost daily killings of ordinary citizens. These were the killing of Mr. Iyanger Ao, IPS Commandant, 1st NAP Battalion (May 11), together with his bodyguard, the attempt on Works and Housing Minister Neiphu Rio in which his driver was killed and three bodyguards injured, and the June 20 killing of 'Lt. Gen.' Povezo Soho 'Deputy Commander-in-Chief' of the Naga Federal Government.

'General' Soho's killing by the Issac-Muivah faction of the NSCN triggered the Chakesang-Tangkhul showdown which promises a fresh wave of inter-tribal bloodletting. A 40-year-veteran of the Naga National Council/Naga Federal Government founded by late Zapu Angami Phizo, 'General' Soho belonged to the Chakesang, or Eastern Angami tribe, native to Phek district. The Tangkhuls, who dominate the NSCN (U-M), are native to Ukhrul district, across the border in Manipur.

The motive behind this killing seems to be a 'unity understanding' signed by the NNC/NFG and the Khaplang faction of the NSCN, whereby the two groups agreed to carry out joint armed operations. The NSCN (K) has been locked in a bloody factional war with the I-M group since the organisation split along tribal lines in 1988.

Incensed at the killing, the Phek Town Chakesang People's Committee (CPC) called a widely-attended public meeting on June 24 and unanimously decided to serve a 'quit' notice on Tangkhul residents, accusing them of 'harbouring mercenaries.'

The I-M faction retaliated by passing a blanket Asha (death sentence) on all members of the Phek town CPC and the apex tribal body, the Chakesang Public Organisation. This further infuriated the Chakesangs and a full-fledged tribal war is in the offing.

The other 'Quit' notice making waves in both Nagaland and Manipur has been served on the Kukis of Nagaland, in particular of Kohima, by the Angami Youth Organisation (AYO), which has led to a large scale exodus of Kukis to Manipur by the time the deadline expired on July 25.

The Angamis' wrath against the Kikis was provoked by the disappearance of two Angamis of Khuzama village -- Pudil and Vimechol Hibo.

The Angami youth Organisation (AYO) first reacted by imposing a 12 day blockade of National Highway 39, the lifeline to Manipur which runs through the Angami area. The crippling blockage, was lifted only after the Manipur government headed by Rishang Keishing, himself a Tangkhul Naga, gave an assurance on finding the missing men. The assurance failed. The Angami youths, meanwhile, were incensed at the silence of Nagaland's Kuki population. The quit order followed. In this context it must be understood that under Angami law, a killing can only be expiated with the death of the killer or his banishment for 7 years.

Angami observers themselves have described the quit orders on the Kukis as an 'unfortunate decision' needing review. But these are rare voices in the wilderness. By the time the deadline expired on July 25, more than 700 Kukis from Kohima -- mostly government servants and their dependants -- had fled to Imphal and Kangpokpi in Manipur, while others sought shelter in areas dominated by their own tribe in Peren and Zalukie sub-divisions.

In the context of the low-intensity conflict in the Nagaland/Manipur theatre, the implications of these developments should not have been lost on India's security planners, whether at New Delhi or at Rangapahar. They have certainly not been lost on Naga observers. The Assassination of Gen. Soho, said the Nagaland journal, "has struck another grievous blow to the (Naga national) movement (by) widening the chasm that already exists within it.'

-- Deccan Herald, July 30, 1995

A CONFLICT THAT FEW KNOW OF

Though small in scale by Kashmir standards, an equally intense, no-holds barred war is being fought between the outlawed National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN) and the security forces, spilling over into Assam and Manipur.

Much of the action goes unreported outside Nagaland because the representatives of both national news agencies were compelled to flee Nagaland in March, a side effect of the conflict. The metropolitan press has no representative in the State, thus there is a virtual news blackout from Nagaland.

According to Nagaland police statistics, the overall crime rate in the State showed a slight decrease in the first six months of 1995 compared to the corresponding period last year. However, incidents involving the Naga underground guerrillas increased by nearly 60 per cent

during the period, despite the entire State being declared disturbed and brought under the Armed Forces Special Powers Act.

Cases of human rights violations by the security forces increases by almost 70 per cent. Cases of murder and rape also increased. Extortion was reportedly less, but this cannot be taken to be reliable as most extortion bids are not reported to the authorities.

"Hot contact" between the security forces and the underground (UGs in army jargon) guerrillas also appears to be on the increase as indicated by a number of incidents during the last two months.

Heavy-handed responses by the security forces each time they took casualties have led to fresh charges of human rights violations. After an incident at Dimapur, Assam Rifles troops beat to death Mr. Inashe Ayemi, 36, the project director of the DRDA in Zunheboto, in front of his mother and sister, despite his producing his identity card.

A domestic servant, Kadir Ali, was killed and a driver, Ram Bahadur, seriously injured in indiscriminate firing by the troops. More than 40 civilians were arrested, while every person found moving in the vicinity of the incident was forced to lie on the road under a scorching sun. At Unger village a civilian, Mr. Moatoshi, was shot dead by soldiers of the 20 Jat regiment. Other villagers were herded into the village church and held for interrogation there.

Under pressure from the security forces, guerrillas of both the Khaplang (K) and the Issac-Muivah (I-M) faction are ranging far and wide, sheltering and striking in the Assam hill districts of Karbi Anglong and North Cachar as also all along the Assam-Nagaland border in the plains.

The NSCN (I-M) struck in North Cachar, killing an Assam Police Special Branch Sub-inspector and a shopkeeper and burning down six shops in the bazar at Haflong, the district headquarters, and killing a Nepali teacher at Umrangshu: the UGs had killed six Punjab police commandos and injured three more in an ambush the previous month.

The UGs also killed the cashier of a plywood firm at Mariani in Jorhat District in a foiled attempt to kidnap its manager. The NSCN had earlier this year served extortion notices on 14 tea gardens in Sibsagar District and seven in Jorhat District.

According to senior Central Intelligence officers in Upper Assam, there is an understanding between the NSCN (K) and the ULFA to allow the Naga guerrillas to collect funds through extortion even on the Assam side of the border. The two groups have also decided that all actions in the border areas of Assam and Nagaland would be joint operations.

The I-M faction this month also warned the Government and the Election Commission of India of "serious consequences" for "regularising foreign nationals living in Nagaland" by issuing photo-identity cards without verifying their nationality.

The warning issued in Kohima said the Government of India was trying to confer citizenship on foreigners in Nagaland and that the situation would grow worse if this continued. While it did not clarify if by foreigners it meant Bangladeshis and other aliens or non-Naga Indians also living in Nagaland, the process of issuing photo-identity cards was severely affected, with work stopping in two districts. To date, only about a third of 8.32 lakhs voters have been photographed.

In North Cachar, the Deputy Commissioner, Police Superintendent and Assam Rifles Commandant were told by the NSCN, under a threat, to withdraw armed plainclothesmen

from the district. The officials were also warned not to propagate the Government's view that the District Council elections, which are three years overdue, had been put off because of the law and order situation created by the NSCN.

On the international front, NSCN (I-M) chairman Issac Chisi Swu addressed the 47th session of the United Nations sub-commission on the prevention of discrimination and the protection of minorities on August 1 and called on the world body to send a fact-finding mission to Nagaland to investigate 'India's use of force against the Nagas.' Mr. Swu participated in the session as a delegate from the "Society for Threatened People, Germany."

Perhaps because of the lack of outside publicity, the situation inside is being taken seriously only by the security forces. "The situation in both Nagaland and Manipur is a national security problem, that in Assam is a law-and-order problem," a senior general stressed recently. However, "we will bring so much pressure on the insurgent groups that they would have no other option but to come to the table for talks", he said in an informal talk.

-- Deccan Herald, October 4, 1995

Previous Winners

Swami Trivedi	for 1981 in 1982
Chaitanya Kalbagh	1982
Neeraja Chawdhry (Ms)	1983
Shahnaz Auklesaria (Ms)	1984
Sheela Barse (Ms)	1985
Manimala (Ms)	1986
K. Balagopal	1987
Bharat Dogra	1988
Mukul	1989
Raju Mathew	1990
Sajan Abraham	1991
Jeemon Jacob	1992
Teesta Setalvad	1993
P. Sainath	1994 in 1995
