

Hierarchies of Victimhood

Some Reflections on Newsroom Decision-Making on the Conflict in Jammu and Kashmir

Praveen Swami.

Associate Editor and New Delhi Chief of Bureau, Frontline Magazine

Penang, July 2006

praveenswami@gmail.com

As a rule there are mirrors, so on the right you see Dracula raising the lid of a tomb, and on the left your own face reflected next to Dracula's, while at time there is the glimmering image of the Ripper or of Jesus, duplicated by an astute play of corners, curves and perspective, until it is hard to realise which side is reality and which illusion.¹

On July 4, 2006, members of an armed group tried a former member, Tanzim Ahmad, for treason. No accounts of the proceedings, which took place in the forests above the frontier town of Mendhar, are available. Medical examiners, however, later recorded the punishment. Ahmad's ears were cut off, his eyes gouged out and his testicles severed before someone did him the kindness of slitting his throat.²

I apologise, at the outset, for beginning my presentation with this somewhat gruesome event. However, I believed an explicit account of Ahmad's death would help make clear that what we call 'conflicts' are in fact houses of unimaginable horror. In this paper, I shall use Ahmad's death as a medium to interrogate the hierarchies of victimhood implicit in Indian newsroom decision-making on reporting the conflict in Jammu and Kashmir. I will also be examine the conditions and circumstances in which the image of human deaths – which are, after all, the most elemental quality of a conflict – has been subject to an extraordinary textual obliteration.

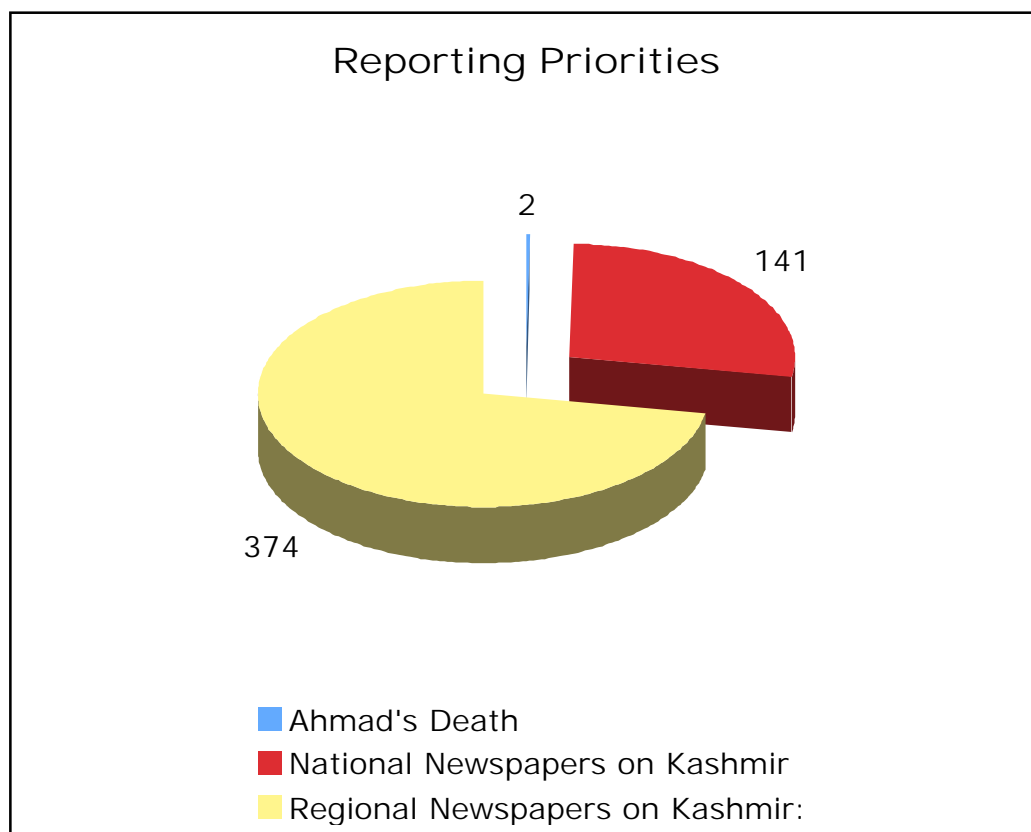
Killings like that of Ahmad constitute everyday experiences in Jammu and Kashmir. Between a quarter and a third of the fatalities recorded in the conflict have, ever since 1990, been of civilians – overwhelmingly the very Muslims, it perhaps needs to be added, in whose name the jihad in the state is being fought. It could be argued, of course, that since the vast majority of violent incidents in Jammu and Kashmir claim the lives of either members of terrorist groups or Indian forces, these narratives ought to occupy centre-stage – but it bears mention, if only in passing, that there is little serious reportage of these deaths either. Here, however, I shall focus on the ways in which the media in India handles the stories of the civilian victims of the conflict – and the serious journalistic malaise that the structures of this reportage demonstrate.

¹ Umberto Eco, *Travels in Hyper Reality*. Pan Books (London), 1987. Pages 13-14

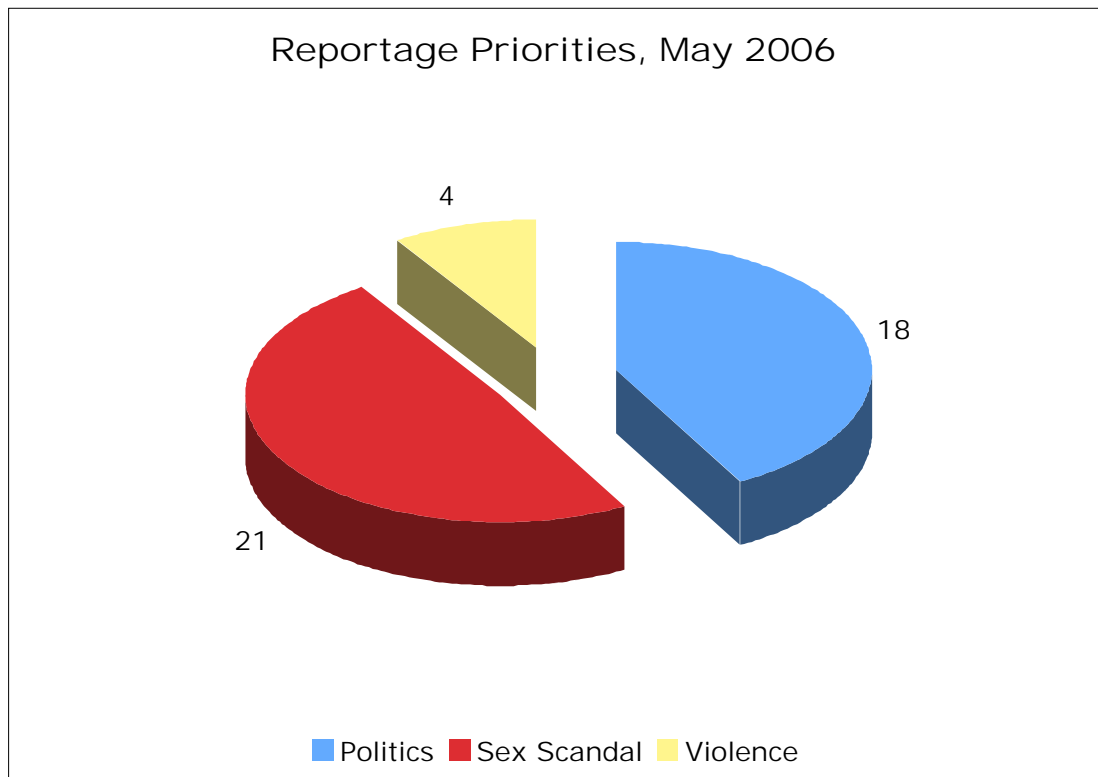
² 'SPO tortured, killed,' *The Daily Excelsior* (Jammu), July 6, 2006.

Sex versus violence

Ahmad's death, like that of other civilian victims, attracted almost no attention, although the killing was reported by the main Indian wire service, the Press Trust of India. Two column-centimetres were devoted to the tragedy in one single newspaper operating out of the state of Jammu and Kashmir. This was on a day when three major Jammu and Kashmir-based English-language newspapers, The Daily Excelsior, the Kashmir Times and Greater Kashmir collectively assigned 374 column-centimetres to stories related to the conflict. Three Indian national newspapers, The Hindustan Times, The Indian Express and The Tribune, had also assigned not-inconsiderable space to the conflict that day, a total of 141 column centimetres which, among other things, recorded a large spectrum of incidents of terrorism.



Ahmad's story was for the most part pushed off newspaper pages with accounts of the unfolding of an prostitution scandal in Srinagar, the summer-season capital of Jammu and Kashmir. During the month of May, the number of opinion articles The Indian Express, The Tribune, and The Hindustan Times quite clearly illustrates just how central this issue was to coverage; although I have no statistics for television coverage, the allocation of time may well have been even more skewed towards this single issue:



Since April, 2006, media audiences across India have been transfixed by this quite unprecedented spectacle, which has led to two former ministers, a senior bureaucrats and decorated police officials, amongst others, being arrested on charges that range from rape to peddling official favours for sex. Just what about the Srinagar prostitution led it to occupy centre stage in media narratives? Tempting as it might be to attribute this to the media's endless fascination with sleaze, we must turn for answers to complex political processes in Jammu and Kashmir – notably the appropriation of scandal by the religious right wing.

From as early as 2002, the Jammu and Kashmir Police had begun investigating Srinagar-based madam Sabina Bulla, concerned at the prospect that her high-profile clients might become vulnerable to blackmail. Later, in 2004, Chief Minister Mufti Mohammad Saeed received warnings that a television channel had been approached to conduct a sting targeting Ministers who were among Bulla's patrons. Bulla was arrested along with several of her associates, but the prosecution went nowhere. With the aid of her influential clients – and the lack of real evidence – Bulla was soon back in business. However, this March, a pornographic video-clip involving Ms. Y., a minor who worked at Bulla's brothel, began to circulate from cellphone to cellphone in Srinagar. Outraged city residents complained to the police. Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister Ghulam Nabi Azad sensed an opportunity to demonstrate the credentials of the new government – and, his detractors charge, to rid himself of potential rivals. The case was referred to India's federal police body, the Central Bureau of Investigations. Meanwhile, in response to a petition alleging a cover-up was underway, the Jammu and Kashmir High Court began direct supervision of the case.

Islamist groups in old-city Srinagar – a long-standing stronghold of the religious right – sensed that the scandal could be leveraged at the level of the street. Under the patronage of Islamist patriarch Syed Ali Shah Geelani, the Dukhtaran-e-Millat leader Asiya Andrabi unleashed protests across Srinagar. KBA president Abdul Qayoom, who is affiliated to Geelani's hardline Tehreek-i-Hurriyat, led a parallel battle in the courts. Political Islamists

and terrorist groups were able to reclaim centre-stage by representing themselves as the sole guardians of its religious-cultural order. Politicians like Andrabi and Geelani contend that the prostitution scandal is intimately enmeshed with the secular state's larger agenda in Jammu and Kashmir – the obliteration, they contend, of Islam. According to a June 25 press release issued by a Geelani-affiliated organisation, "the sexual exploitation of Kashmiri girls is a conspiracy hatched by India and its collaborators in Kashmir to harm our moral values and ethos."³

For the most part, newsrooms simply reproduced this narrative, representing it as popular perception – a claim for which no validation exists or has even been sought. What little commentary there was mirrored the Islamist position. Writing in the Srinagar-based *Greater Kashmir*, the commentator ZG Muhammad sought to place the scandal in a historical context, arguing that "the Kashmir women have [long] been a victim of lust and lasciviousness of the evil eyes of marauders" – an astounding semantic construction suggesting both that gender violence is region specific, and in some way the outcome of the characteristics of women themselves.⁴ "History is replete with instances from the days of Mongol desperado Zulju," wrote Muhammad approvingly, "about [sic.] women drowning themselves in Jhelum to save their chastity and honour."

In another fairly typical article, columnist Nisar Patigaroo argued that prostitution was facilitated by the "leniency that the parents have given to their children, particularly females."⁵ This had, he claimed, led to "waywardness amongst boys and girls who throng the public parks, [use] the modern gadgets viz. mobile telephones, Internet and [watch] obscene scenes." Terrorist groups have long shared the same sentiments. Since 1990, there have been dozens of violent attacks on cable television operators, bars, movie theatres, beauty parlours, women who have rejected the veil or chose to wear trousers and even internet facilities. Now, Islamist political groups have succeeded in vesting their long-standing rejection of modernity with moral legitimacy, without a single shot having to be fired.

With two honourable exceptions, newsrooms did not find space for critiques of the Islamist reading of events. Opportunities for such exercises were not wanting. Andrabi's concern for women's honour did not, for example, extend to condemning a July 8 grenade attack on south Kashmir legislator Sakeena Itoo, in which she was injured and five National Conference cadre killed.⁶ Nor was Geelani exercised by the murder of 26-year-old Tasleen Akhtar, a villager from the Poonch area in February, after she refused to marry a Hizb ul-Mujahideen commander.⁷ Indeed, even the Islamist silence on mass killings that have taken place this summer was not questioned by the media. On June 16, an armed group targeted the village of Nehoch-Dunga, in the district of Udhampur, to punish villagers they believed were hostile. Year-old Abdul Ahad was beheaded; the noses and ears of Roshan Din and

³ 'HCBA terms Azad's statement contempt of court,' *Greater Kashmir* (Srinagar), June 25, 2006

⁴ ZG Muhammad, 'Nasira to Asiya,' *Greater Kashmir* (Srinagar), June 31, 2006.

⁵ Nisar Patigaroo, 'The scandal and its aftermath,' *Greater Kashmir* (Srinagar), June 29, 2006.

⁶ '8 killed 42 injured in attack on former Minister,' *The Daily Excelsior*, July 9, 2006

⁷ 'Woman killed in Udhampur,' *The Daily Excelsior* (Jammu), March 5, 2006

Ghulam Rasool were cut off. Six others, including Mr. Ahad's elderly wife, received a brutal beating.⁸

No great imagination is needed to see what the consequences this silence were. Ethnic-Kashmiri audiences within Jammu and Kashmir had their prejudices and paranoia about the threat from a supposedly-predatory Hindu-dominated nation affirmed. Outside of the state, mainly Hindu audiences had their prejudices and paranoia about the supposedly-inherent fanaticism and unreason of Kashmir Muslims affirmed. All possibilities of a meaningful dialogue questioning of stereotypes was lost.

Ms. Y. herself, the woman in whose name the campaign was fought, was perhaps the media's worst victim. She was repeatedly named in both broadcast and print reports, her family identified and her personal past subjected to scrutiny. Prominent print platforms argued that she be committed to police custody to prevent her testimony from being influenced – and judges listened. As a consequence Ms. Y. has had no access to either professional psychological support or legal counsel – an appalling violation of her rights for which the media must be held to account. Through the medium of print and television, her life, just like that of Ahmad, was reduced to a means to serve other people's ideological ends.

Testing Truths: The Case of Chittisinghpura

JOURNALISTS' willingness to participate in propagandistic enterprises built around the appropriation of tragedy for parochial ends is only rivalled by their thin grasp of what facts are available. How this works in practice is illustrated by the media's handling of the massacre of 36 Sikh villagers at Chittisinghpura, a small village in southern Kashmir. Carried out on the eve of the 2001 Indian tour of the United States of America's President, Bill Clinton, the massacre offers interesting insight into the kinds of killings of non-combatants which do attract attention – but also on just how thin on fact media narratives of major events actually are.

Chittisinghpura is particularly interesting because of the diametrically opposed ideological narratives it generated – a narrative heavily based on conjecture and assumption, but devoid of actual evidence. One particularly influential media commentary came from the novelist Pankaj Mishra, whose assertion that the massacre was the outcome of an Indian covert operation gained wide currency in this country and abroad. Writing in *The Hindu*, Mishra – not known for any experience of reporting either on Jammu and Kashmir or conflict situations in India – asserted that “the number of atrocities in Kashmir is so high and the situation in general so murky that it is hard to get to the truth.”⁹ Mishra did not see fit to provide evidence of his assertion that levels of atrocities in Kashmir were high, or what they were high in comparison to. Nor did he explain just why the existence of atrocities was, per se, an obstacle to arriving to the truth. Instead, the bald assertion was used, through a series of leaps of logic, to assert that the general situation “lends weight to the suspicion... that the massacre in Chittisinghpura [sic.] was organised by Indian intelligence agencies in order to influence Clinton.”

⁸ Arti Tikoo Singh, 'LeT mutilates 2 villagers,' *The Times of India* (New Delhi), June 28, 2006

⁹ Pankaj Mishra, 'Paradise Lost,' *The Hindu* (Chennai), August 27, 2000.

It is worth noting, in the first place, that Mishra's article nowhere suggests that he actually made an effort to gather any evidence in support of this claim: of what official and non-official sources were consulted to arrive at the conclusion, or what effort was made to assess and weigh the evidence, we remain uninformed. Mishra's position in fact accurately reflected widespread rumours in Jammu and Kashmir at the time. None the less, none of the proponents of the Indians-did-it theory actually claimed to be witness to the massacre, or to have any hard facts to support the allegation. Allegations based purely on supposed eyewitness testimony has been a leitmotif of reportage on Jammu and Kashmir. In general, careful investigation of several such incidents has given at least some reason to be sceptical of such claims, including uncontested eyewitness claims.¹⁰ Journalists rarely seem conscious of the multiple pressures that could be operating on informants in conflict zones, and of the several ways in which such pressures may shape their testimony. The 'ordinary villagers' who litter the pages of newspapers could be just that – but also be people who see events through ideological filters, are themselves dependent on rumour, or be simply disinclined to tell the truth because of coercive pressures.

Journalists who, unlike Mishra, were willing to accept the Government position did so with a disregard for rigour that rivals his own. One thoughtful analysis of reportage of the affair has noted that three newspapers reported the arrest of a suspect, Mohammad Yakub Wagay, in wholly distinct ways. Wagay, the scholar Kanchan L. has noted, was described in *The Hindustan Times* as "a local conduit" for terrorists who carried out the massacre, in *The Pioneer* as a Lashkar-e-Taiba operative, and in *The Asian Age* as "the butcher of Anantnag."¹¹ All these descriptions, incredibly, were made as the outcome of a single press conference held by a senior bureaucrat simply announcing the arrest. When Wagay was subsequently released, the media claimed the Government case had collapsed – but made no effort to find out on what evidence the arrest had initially been based, or to even explore the possibility that Government had, in fact, failed to seriously investigate allegations made by victims' relatives.

For the media, each new disclosure was an irritating aside, not an organic part of the narrative itself. As such, affair illustrates a larger media problem with complex stories:

The appearance of reports in a piecemeal fashion tends to create a bland and unquestioning acceptance of the narrative on the evolving scenario. The continuing nature of the incident – as also of the news cycle – necessitates an objective recapturing or reassessment of the incident in its entirety, but this rarely happens and the media continues sourcing for 'side-narratives' even as the original incident is pushed into the background by the succession of events....

¹⁰ Crisis and Credibility: Report of the Press Council of India, January and July 1991. Lancer Paper IV, Lancer International (New Delhi), 1991. The Press Council found several contradictions of fact in eyewitness testimony offered by women who claimed to have been raped by soldiers at the village of Kunan Poshpora. My objective here is not to pass any judgment on the event itself, but to note the limited and well-proved fact that participant testimony is not always credible.

¹¹ Kanchan L, 'Analysing Reportage From Theatres of Conflict,' Faultlines Volume VIII, Institute for Conflict Management (New Delhi), April 2001. Page 43

... the Press never stops to sum up and reassess, but is forever pushing forward, grasping at the latest twists and turns in the episodic succession.¹²

What is critical here is that the death of civilians in Chattisinghpura did not, in newsrooms, have inherent value. Nor was determining the truth about the perpetrators justify, to the minds of editors, sustained and serious investigative pursuit. Like Ms. Y., the victims were only significance as instruments through which the legitimacy of the State or its Islamist opponents could be interrogated. I have been able to locate just two post-2004 reports in the six newspapers I examined which sought to illuminate readers on the perpetrators of the massacre. There was not a single article on the fate of the victims themselves.

Truth, as Eco warns us, is elusive, but here we have the media abandoning the very search for it altogether. In some senses, this is just a reiteration of the old truism that truth is a casualty of war. In this case, however, the death of truth is a consequence of media failure as much as of state or non-state propaganda.

Censored at Gunpoint: The Case of Punjab.

WHY has the India media proved so unwilling assign centre-stage to either the victims of violence, or interrogate its authors?

Part of the answer lies in the media's profound reluctance to identify - and thus antagonise - perpetrators: reporting conflicts, after all, is not a cost-free enterprise. To understand this long-standing problem, it is useful to examine the impact of the Khalistan movement in Punjab on the media, and the lessons it holds out for the Indian press. The experience shows just how easy it is for non-state actors to skew discourse on violence – and, sadly, how unwilling the Indian mainstream media has been to do battle in defence of its own freedoms.

Although now almost airbrushed from our collective memory by an epic act of amnesia, the conflict in Punjab claimed 21,443 lives between 1981 and 1993. As contestation between Khalistan groups and the Indian State approached its climax in the late 1990s, the media became a theatre for battle itself. One key episode were demands by Khalistan groups that newspapers publish a letter written to India's President, R Venkataraman, by Harjinder Singh 'Jinda' and Sukhjinder Singh 'Sukha.' Harjinder Singh and Sukhjinder Singh had been convicted for the 1986 assassination of General Arun Vaidya, a commander who had played a key role in the Indian state's initial offensive against Khalistan groups. Their 21-page letter explaining the reasons for their actions was despatched to major Punjab-based newspapers, most of which carried abridged versions on July 27, 1990. One newspaper whose correspondent had received a direct threat to his life, the Punjabi Tribune, chose however to carry the entire text.

A subsequent investigation of the media in Punjab by the Press Council of India noted the impact the Punjabi Tribune decision had on other publications within The Tribune group,

¹² Kanchan L, 'Analysing Reportage From Theatres of Conflict.' Page 46

the state's largest media chain.¹³ The investigation, conducted by Jamna Das Akhtar, K Bikram Rao and BG Verghese on the instructions of the Press Council, concluded that:

The differential treatment of the letter within The Tribune group brought an immediate threat to The Tribune [English] and the Dainik Tribune [Hindi] to comply. The Tribune accordingly carried the full text on July 28, [but] not the Dainik Tribune. The Editor of the latter is thereupon said to have received a dire warning, and the papers carried the full Sukha-Jinda letters on July 29 with an abject apology.¹⁴

Much of the media had to pay the price for The Tribune's Editorial surrender. Soon, a welter of terrorist groups were issuing material for verbatim reproduction to media outlets, often accompanied by threats. Terrorist repression of the media escalated peak in November 1990, when terrorist groups fighting for the creation of a separate Sikh state imposed a code of conduct. The guidelines were issued by a Panthic Committee led by Sohan Singh, a one-time government employee who set up the organisation in 1989 as an apex ideological council for terrorist groups operating in Punjab. The Panthic Code mandated, among other things, that:

- The media cease to use words like 'terrorist,' 'extremist' or 'subversive.'
- The prefix "self-styled" be omitted from references to ranks of terrorist leaders.
- No reference be made to the fact that the Panthic Committee was Pakistan-based.
- The term Sant, or Saint, be prefixed before all references to the Sikh fundamentalist leader Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale.
- Journalists were to take the advice and direction of the local leadership of terrorist groups.
- "Memorable punishment" would be meted out to those who defied the code.
- Journalists were to "accept the creation of Khalistan."

Several elements of this code are of course significant – not the least the now-mainstream use of the word 'militant', a term historically used to describe left-wing political radicals, instead of 'terrorists.' Journalists who had qualms about receiving orders on what words they could and could not use were further tamed by the assassination of RK Talib, of a Director of state-run All India Radio, on December 6, 1990. Only papers with a strong ideological persuasion defied the Panthic Code. On the left of Punjab politics, the resistance came from the Communist Party of India's Nawan Zamana, the Communist Party of India (Marxist)-affiliated Lok Lehar, and six small newspapers supportive of various Maoist factions. On the ideological right, the Panthic Code was defied by the Punjab Kesari, run by the Hind Samachar Group. Editorial staff and proprietors of Punjab Kesari faced repeated terrorist attack, and the newspaper eventually had to be distributed under police protection.¹⁵ New Delhi-based newspaper organisations with enormous financial muscle and political influence, notably, displayed no such gumption.

After the collapse of independent print reportage on Khalistani violence, terrorist anger focussed itself on the broadcast media, at the time exclusively state-owned. In May 1992,

¹³ Crisis and Credibility.

¹⁴ Crisis and Credibility, Page 22.

¹⁵ KPS Gill, 'Endgame in Punjab: 1988-1993.' Faultlines Volume I, Institute for Conflict Management (New Delhi), May 1999. Page 72.

one terrorist group, the Babbar Khalsa International, killed All India Radio broadcaster RL Manchanda. After Manchanda's execution, the organisation issued a fresh ten-point code of conduct for the media, which demanded that women anchors cover their heads, prohibited the use of the term *atankvadi*, or terrorist, and sought a phased end to all non-Punjabi language broadcasting within the state.¹⁶ Coercion, commentators have pointed out, was not the sole mode of terrorist relationships with the media. Although evidence of collusion with terrorism is hard to come by, one study of the period has pointed to the role of some journalists in collaborating with the drafting of the Panthic Codes.¹⁷

In Punjab, the State responded to terrorist pressure on the media by bringing its own legal and institutional coercive apparatus to bear. Copies of *The Tribune* carrying a Panthic Committee edit listing officials who would be punished for failing to use Punjabi in all official communication were seized by the Chandigarh administration on February 2, 1991. Similar action was taken in subsequent weeks against *The Indian Express*, *Ajit* and *Aaj Di Awaz*. *The Tribune* responded by dropping the article in subsequent editions – and the Panthic Committee with a letter to Punjab newspaper editors threatening them with execution if they did “nothing to resist” this censorship.¹⁸ Some newspapers, notably *The Times of India*, also faced action under the controversial Terrorist and Disruptive Activities (Prevention) Act for carrying press releases issued by the Panthic Committee. In general, however, such legal action seems to have led to little; no journalist was actually convicted for criminal offences under counter-terror laws. As the Editor of *Nawan Zamana* noted in his deposition to the Press Council of India, the state's decision not to respond to terrorist coercion of the media with counter-terror of its own set up the terms of media discourse in Punjab during its troubled decade of terror:

The Press in the Punjab has been subjected to constraints both by the Government and the terrorists. Any objective assessment would show that the threat from the latter has been a continuous process of very serious dimensions. Those worthies who, instead of standing up to the terrorists' threats have cowed before them, are much more vociferous against the government.¹⁹

None of this is, of course, surprising: bringing about such compliance is the purpose of censorship-by-Kalashnikov. As Kanchan L. has pointed out:

... acts of terrorism constitute a political statement and have a substantial political intent. Increased and intrusive media coverage is, at once, part of such an intent, and itself becomes an element of the dynamics of its realisation, as it inevitably leads to a global focus on the theatre of conflict....²⁰

From this point onwards, Indian coverage has for the most part consisted of a recounting of the testimonies of actors; the faithfulness of narration, it would appear, directly linked to power. Journalists are for the most part content with the iteration of conflicting claims, little

¹⁶ Gill, Page 66.

¹⁷ Ajai Sahni, 'Free Speech in an Age of Violence: The Challenge of Non-Governmental Suppression.' *Faultlines*, Volume II, Institute for Conflict Management (New Delhi), August 1999. Page 157.

¹⁸ *Crisis and Credibility*, Page 88.

¹⁹ *Crisis and Credibility*, Page 94-5

²⁰ Kanchan L, 'Analysing Reportage From Theatres of Conflict.' Page 54

concerned with examination of just how plausible their content might be. The faithful rendition of 'he said' and 'she said' is seen as constituting balanced reporting – however imbalanced 'he' or 'she' might be.

Some conclusions

I USED Eco's *Travels in Hyper Reality* at the outset of this paper to illustrate the multiple challenges and perils of reporting conflict in India: the media's role, after all, ought to have been to separate out the images of Jesus and Jack the Ripper, providing meaning and context to the exceptionally bloody sub-conventional conflicts which have raged through considerable parts of the country over the past several decades. These wars – fought in Punjab, Jammu and Kashmir, India's North-East, or zones hit by Maoist violence – have after all claimed far more lives than all of India's wars with its neighbours put together.

Instead, Indian media appears to be in the grip of curious pathology, which leads it on the one hand to uncritically reproduce State narratives, masquerading as "objective" reportage – and of the other, equally uncritical reportage on the State's adversaries, which is valorised as fearless criticism. Although a wealth of tools and information is available which could lead to meaningful critical discourse on security issues in India, the media has failed in its audience.

We are told one week that infiltration in Jammu and Kashmir has increased, and that terror training camps continue to operate across the border; the other that peace with Pakistan is around the corner. One set of reports informs us that the Army has crushed terrorism in Jammu and Kashmir; another that it is in fact principally engaged in acts of terrorism directed at the civilian population. Most disturbing of all, theatres of violence are increasingly become little other than stages from which The Heroic Reporter may declaim – a representation which rests on ignoring the reality of the millions of people who live who live in these supposed battlefields, or of children who go to school there. In other words, India's conflict zones are being reduced to a spectacle.

The Indian media, more often than not, no longer feels the need to address itself task of making distinctions, of informing, and of subjecting claims to the test of reason. It is easy to identify newsroom problems which sustain this unhappy state of affairs, notably poor salary structures which mean few quality journalists are drawn to reporting from India's more remote regions; market pressures which have cramped the space available for news not of immediate interest to affluent urban audiences; and even the lack of facilities available for journalists to educate themselves on the issues they write on. However tempting it might be to call for training programmes or awareness classes to address these problems, the sad fact is that there is no *deus ex machina* that can mitigate what is for the most part self-imposed harm. Real introspection is needed within the media community on these issues, but introspection must first be founded on the realisation that there is in fact a problem.

Perhaps a useful starting point for introspection might be to consider the possibility that the media ought not to be covering 'conflicts' - and focus its energies, instead, on people. Jammu and Kashmir, after all, is a place where people live – not a 'problem.'
