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Rita Manchanda

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I

Structured Misperceptions and Split Publics

In the wake of the December 13, 2001 terrorist attack on the Indian Parliament, *Hindustan Times* editor Vir Sanghvi denounced the media and the intellectual class who heap scorn on the war hysteria of ‘the middle class and perhaps the masses’. In an opinion piece titled, ‘Among the Appeasers’, he writes, “To look down on the anger and frustration of ordinary people while simultaneously searching for reasons to let Pakistan off the hook is not to stand for peace. It is to stand for appeasement” (HT Dec 30, 2001).

Sanghvi in his usage of the term ‘appeasement’ self consciously positions his argument within the logic of the Hindu right’s discourse on the politics of appeasement and its thematic corollary, the pseudo secularist values ascribed to the Nehruvian state and internalised by the de-racinated English media and the intellectual class. The term “appeasement” registers in the Hindutva lexicon next to ‘pseudo secularism’. Its currency, especially from the 1980s, indexed the significant shift in the terms of public discourse and the constitution of what analysts of cultural studies describe the emergence of a Hindu public sphere. However as analysts like Purnima Mankekar (*Screening Culture, Viewing Politics* 1999) have observed, hegemonic discourses are inherently unstable. In this essay, I explore how the media continues to participate in shoring up a Hindu public sphere in the framing of militarized¹ Hindu nationalism.

¹ I have used militarism and militarization in this paper as synonymous terms, however the former relates to ideological aspects and the latter to the material. For an examination of militarization and militarism see Anuradha Chenuy *Militarism & Women in South Asia*, Kali for Women, New Delhi, 2001. Of the process of militarization, she describes, it as a process whereby military values, ideology and patterns of behaviour result in the militarization of the structural ideological and behavioural patterns of state with powerful impact on civil society. (p5) Militarism is defined as the strategic use of the military in politics. The larger phenomenon of “indicates an emphasis on the military over civil, and of militarial considerations, ideals and values over civil ones in the state. It encompasses the wider ideological and/or institutional structures that promote militarist strategies. (p4)

Sanghvi’s article is a useful entry point. He conjoins ‘appeasement’ in the context of the Muslim minority at the expense of the Hindu majority to what he ascribes as the appeasement politics of the media and the intellectual class in dodging the need for a strong militarist retaliation against Pakistan and instead heaping scorn on the justified public demand for military action. That is appeasement in both these contexts is indicted as the failure of a ‘soft state’ - the leitmotif of the militant Hindu nationalist discourse.

More significantly, Sanghvi’s reading of the public reaction is constructed around two polarities. One, represents the anger and frustration of a homogenous middle class made synonymous with the masses who are said to be baying for strong retaliatory action against Pakistan sponsored terrorist attacks. The other, embodies the condescension of a weak kneed intelligentsia and its ally, the English media, which looks for reasons to avoid the use of military force.

I have focused at length on Sanghvi’s polarised structuring of the public reaction (See also his HT Dec 23, 2001 and Jan 13, 2002) because it succinctly encapsulates the construction of what arguably is a familiar Hindutva discourse frame. It posits two differentiated and stereotypical publics and politically exploits the antagonism between the two. The deliberate twining of temple and terror in the dominant media frame of the December 13 attack, seeks to give it a powerful emotional charge. Moreover, it is reinforced through the projection of a structured misperception (producing antagonism) between split publics as articulated through a linguistically and culturally differentiated split media, i.e. the deracinated ‘national’ media and the rooted language media.

My analysis is indebted to Arvind Rajagopal’s brilliant study of how the Hindu nationalists used the contradictions between India’s ‘split publics’, inhabited by different languages and culture of politics to reshape a Hindutva public in the mid 80s. In “Politics After Television: Hindu Nationalism and the Reshaping of the Public in India” (Cambridge 2001), Rajagopal argues that the broadcast of the *Ramayana* serial on National Television provided for the first time a single field of social connectivity across the nation and brought into salience the differences in India’s “split publics”. However, it was the linguistically divided print media that provided the context in which the contradiction was worked out. That is the ‘terms of translation’ between the two split publics- inhabited by the English language state centric, pseudo secular and alienated press and the vernacular, local and rooted Hindi language press - created a structured set of misunderstandings which the Hindu nationalists exploited. “The criticism and fear from the former indirectly reinforcing sympathy offered by the latter” and provided the necessary opposition that gave the Ram Janambhoomi movement the appearance of an unstoppable juggernaut, Rajagopal states.

Arguably, Rajagopal's study tends to be deterministic, particularly in the assertion of a causal link between the broadcast of the epic serial *Ramayana* on nation wide Television and its catalytic impact in changing the terms of cultural and political discourse which provided for the electoral success of the BJP. He claims that it was the mass media which shaped the context in which the politics of the Hindu right 'was conceived, enacted and understood'. Here, I do not want to enter into a debate on the causal linkage between the phenomenal growth of the Indian mass media and the BJP's electoral fortunes, and as Robin Jeffrey perceptively cautions, the links though plausible are circumstantial and difficult to prove. ('Media Revolution & "Hindu Politics" in North India, 1982-99', *Himal Magazine* July 2001).

My interest lies in exploring the continuing relevance of Rajagopal's analysis of how the media structurally participated in constituting from the mid 80s a public sphere imbued with an emergent militarized Hindu nationalist discourse. Does his analysis provide a way of understanding the continuing role of the mass media as the context in which the structured tensions between split publics are played out in the consolidating up an unstable Hindu public.

As noted above, the media's framing of the December 13 terrorist attack, as represented in Vir Sanghvi's article 'Among the Appeasers' demonstrates a similar pattern of playing off two stereotyped and antagonistic media mediated publics in the context not of temple but militarism? In this case, it is the satellite television news channels (English and Hindi) that vociferously privileging a war drummers agenda (a comprehensive analysis will require a study of the role of the vernacular press). The reaction of influential sections of the English language press as reflected in editorial comment and opinion is to denounce the jingoistic rhetoric and appeal for restraint. Arguably, the political consequences of exploiting this projected tension between an 'upper class' intellectual apology for a 'soft state' and appeasement (of Muslims/Pakistan) and the middle class/masses militarized nationalist impulse, should have been to drive the BJP vote in the UP elections. That it did not shows the limits of the impact of the mass media's temple-terror frame on viewers and readers who are capable of contesting and constructing their own meanings of a socio political reality intersected by caste and bad governance.

Nonetheless, the mass media – print and audiovisual- has been a crucial actor in effecting the discursive slippages between national culture and Hindu culture in the making of a hegemonic Hindu discourse. It has resulted in the exclusion of experiences, memories and modes of living not authorised by upper caste and upper class Hindu elites. The secular left has ceded centrespace in the public sphere to the Hindu right and is marked by

defensiveness and even a tendency to internalize the pejorative label of pseudo secularism. However, as analysts like Purnima Mankekar emphasize hegemonic discourses are inherently unstable and constantly challenged.

However, what can be said is the persistence of an oppositional and antagonistic frame of split publics as part of the hegemonic discourse anchored in the notion of 'soft state' whether the context is militarized Hindu nationalism or communalism. It can be picked up in the mass media's representation of the violence in Gujarat. The most evocative example again is Vir Sanghvi article 'One – way Ticket' (*HT* March 1, 2002). (My focus on Sanghvi's writings is not to make crudely imply that a member of the liberal intelligentsia has been co-opted by the Sangh Parivar. Indeed on the text book controversy he has opposed the Hindu right.) Sanghvi maps a divided public and in doing so shapes it as much as reflects a polarized vocabulary of discourse. On the one side are the hurt sentiments of the Hindu majority, on the other, an uncomprehending secular establishment and media that is unable to break out of the ideological gridlock of 'Hindus provoke and Muslims suffer'. The burden of his argument rests on the secular establishment's (read Opposition plus Television and English print media) failure to forthrightly condemn the attack on the *kar sevaks* in Godhra and their locating it in the context of the Ayodhya temple campaign. "The subtext of all secular commentary is the same the *kar sevaks* had it coming to them. Basically, they condemn the crime (Godhra train carnage) and blame the victims". This argument is the mainstay of the BJP's attack on the media as articulated in their report "Godhra and After: The Role of the Media". The Editor's Guild report "Rights and Wrongs" has challenged this misrepresentation.

Sanghvi in "One –way Ticket" asserts that this 'rigidly secularist construct' of only criticising violence against minorities has become counterproductive and risks provoking once again a Hindu backlash as in the mid 80s. "Any media –indeed any secular establishment which fails to take account of the genuine concerns of the people risks losing its own credibility. Something like this happened in the mid eighties when the aggressive hard secularism on the part of the press and the government led even moderate Hindus to believe they had become second class citizens in their own country.' Sanghvi's article is representative of a genre of media writing which posits a divided public of inchoate hurt Hindus being pushed by an insensitive secular establishment/ media into the arms of fundamentalists and thus violently retaliating in Gujarat. (Jaya Jaitley 'Secular make-believe' *Indian Express* March 7, 2002) Further, the Editor's Guild report quotes the Editor in Chief of *Sandesh*, Falgun Patel claiming that the leading Gujrati language papers *Sandesh* and *Gujarat Samachar* were taking a 'pro Hindu' stand while the English media

sides out and out with minority community. That the horrendous terrorist attack of some crazies on 'kar sevaks' is being equated with a state abetted pogrom against the minority community, is a frame that finds no space in this construct of split publics –one minority appeases the others 'hurt' majority. To use Rajagopal's argument, does the 'terms of translation' between the two serve to consolidate a Hindutva imbued public sphere?

In the case of the December 13 terrorist attack on the Indian Parliament, does this frame serve to reinforce war hysteria and the anti democratic politics of hate and intolerance within? In the wake of the attack, there were self styled spokespersons like the Bhvaratiya Janata Party (BJP) V K Malhotra who on BBC Radio '*The World Today*' declaimed that 'public opinion' demands action. That is military action. How was that public opinion formed – by the mass media?

The public sphere² is mediated through the means of communication and it is in this public sphere that what approximates to public opinion is formed. What then is the role of the mass media? Does the media reflect public opinion or shape it? In media and cultural studies, the media today is recognised as a critical participant in the constitution and regulation of social and political movements. How does the media participate in the construction of the discourse of a 'weak-soft state' thus legitimizing the repressive anti democratic politics of a national security state, which the Hindu right is best positioned to exploit? Is there a link between the phenomenal growth of print and electronic media and the BJP's capture of the centre stage of politics in India? Is the media implicated in communal violence? Does media mediated war hysteria drive Indian foreign and defence policy?

Methodologies that pursue direct impact analysis or theorizing on causal linkages tread a minefield, given peoples complex negotiations with socio-political realities. However, the conjunction between the explosion in the print and audio visual media and the phenomenal rise of the BJP, has encouraged a series of studies on the relationship between the mass media and the constitution of a Hindutva public and communal violence. As earlier mentioned, perhaps the most ambitious is Arvind Rajagopal study "*Politics After Television*" Its critical counterpart can be said to be Robin Jeffrey's work on the Indian media, in which he examines the power and the limits of theorizing causal linkages (*India's Newspaper Revolution 2000 & Himal July 2001*)

² The public sphere can best be described as a network for communicating information and points of view (i.e. opinions expressing affirmative or negative attitudes); the streams of communication are in the process, filtered and synthesized in a such a way that they coalesce into bundles of totally specified public opinions. See Jürgen Habermas *Between Facts and Norms* p 360, 376-379 MIT Press Cambridge 1998..

Below, I want to examine the role of the mass media, militarism and the shoring up of a Hindu public. Arguably, militarism has been central to the constitution of a Hindutva public and its core, the ideology of cultural unity under a strong Hindu nationalist state. That public is demonstrably an unstable one. The apocalyptic vision of an unstoppable Hindu juggernaut of the early 1990s, fortunately, has proved alarmist. The Hindutva public remains a contested space as evident in the challenge to the aggressive redefining of cultural space as evidenced in the textbook controversy. (The requirement of being able to compete in a globalized environment provided a competing pull to the Hindutva cultural agenda) However, in the context of militarism there is little resistance to the construction of a hegemonic discourse that privileges authoritarianism, and a homogenous militarized Hinduism and the exclusion from mainstream nationalist discourse of 'other' communities. Militarism was and has become even more central to the consolidation of a Hindu nationalist public. How relevant is Rajagopal's thesis in understanding how in the mass media, militarism is promoted through the interplay of oppositional fields or polarities - India in a state of siege and India as a great power.

In the mid 1980s, the mass media (including a public sphere inhabited by *jagrans* and *yagnas*) provided the context in which was staged a polarized struggle between authentic and inauthentic visions of 'Indianess', leading to a fundamental transformation of the terms of political and cultural discourse and the effective de-legitimization in the public sphere of certain voices and perspectives. The result is that whole communities (Muslims, Christians – Macaulayites and Marxists) are excluded or made to appear defensive in construction of a hegemonic nationalist discourse. The current textbook controversy over the saffronization of history, indexes both the thickness of the social and cultural spread of the ideology of an exclusivist militarized Hindu nationalism and its continuing contestation.

My concern here is to understand the relationship of the mass media in the construction of Indian militarism and its articulation in the form of a Hindu national security state as a core constituent of a militarized Hindu nationalism and the ideology of the *Sangh Parivar*. In the early 1990s several media and cultural studies focused on the linkages between the rise of the mass media, *Ram Janam bhoomi* movement, the constitution of a *Hindutva* Public, the increase in communal violence and the rise of the BJP. This essay seeks to revisit the expanded mass media environment marked by a further explosion in print and audio-visual media and understand how it participates in the shaping of a jingoistic consensus on India as a national security state, the inculcation of the values of militarism and its implications for the BJP's hold

on power. The BJP believes (and the opposition accedes) that it is political party best positioned to exploit militarism for vote bank politics.

Also, the democratic impulse produced by a phenomenal expansion in the reach of the mass media in India has been crimped by the authoritarian impulse legitimized by in the values of militarism. The media is implicated in the delegitimizing of socio-economic struggles and their treatment as law and order problems or worse as terrorism. It is implicated in a hollowing out of politics from violent struggles for socio-political justice. In addition, liberalisation and globalisation of the economy and the commodification of mass media as industry, has generated a media mediated Hindu right public which excludes as citizen and reader/viewer, the non consumer – the poor.

This essay does not claim to be comprehensive in understanding the mass media as actor in fostering the Hindu right agenda of militarism and in the process the consolidation of a Hindu public. The mass media is analysed as the field in which a militarized Hindu right identity and its concomitant the national security state was negotiated and legitimized. The historical commitment of the official and the independent media to nation state building was transformed into a commitment to a jingoistic national security state with the commercial audio visual media taking the lead. Evidently, there were honourable and several exceptions.

The methodology for cultural analysis of the mass media involves a systematic study of one, institutional changes in the media, media technologies, political economy of the media and the BJP's media cronyism; two, editorial processes and content analysis. Constraints of space and time inhibit any full methodological study. Also much work has recently been done on the institutional growth of the mass media, i.e. Robin Jeffrey's *'India's Newspaper Revolution'* and William Crowley and David Page's *'Satellites over South Asia'*. I therefore propose to postpone revisiting the institutional developments in the mass media. The focus will be more on the editorial process and particularly, how the media participated in dealing with the ideological construct of a 'weak-soft state' ideology and the fostering of a militarized Hindu public. For this purpose I will analyse the role of the mass media in fostering militarized Hindu nationalism in its discourse of selective events/processes. i) *Militarism and the Ram Janambhoomi movement* ii), *BJP, the Bomb and the Media: Inevitability of India Going Nuclear*, iii) *Pakistan the neighbour as 'enemy'*, iv) *Kashmir – proxy war: Media turns its back on the people of J&K*, and, v) *The enemy within- State of Siege*.

II

Militarism and the Ram Janambhoomi Movement

In mapping the multi layered socio-political milieu in which the Ramjanambhoomi movement emerged as a juggernaut, there is need to consider the political vacuum produced by the collapse of the Nehruvian vision, the frustration over the failure of the modernity project, the Mandal challenge, Globalization, global Islamic resurgence, etc. However for the purpose of this essay, the focus will be on the theme of Hindu society under siege and how it was communicated to the public to foster the making of militant Hinduism and the Ramjanambhoomi movement. A detailed study is required of the way the media participated in producing the discursive slippages between 'Indian power elite under siege, India under siege and Hindu society under siege'. Here, at best some broad brush strokes will be essayed.

In the 1980s, the underlying theme of public discourse was India under siege which got morphed into Hindu society under siege as the threats to national unity were communicated to the public as coming, real or perceived, from minority communities and requiring majority community mobilization. The Meenakshipuram conversions fueled the Hindu psychosis about declining demographic strength and fed into the danger from secessionist movements in Punjab and Assam that threatened to tear the nation apart. As Christophe Jafrelott succinctly analyses, "the distinguishing feature of the 1980s undoubtedly lay in the way this feeling of vulnerability was discussed and communicated to other Hindus through the appearance of other 'threats' such as Sikh extremism, the influx of Bangladeshi immigrants into Assam, the visit of Pope John Paul II and the Government's pro Muslim bias in the Shah Bano controversy and the Rushdie affair" (*The Hindu Nationalist Movement in India*, 1993). The mass media played a critical role in effecting the discursive slippage between India under siege and Hindu society under siege. The mass media largely followed the Indira Gandhi government in co-joining the safeguarding of national integrity with the mobilization of the majority community.

Spiraling separatist violence in Punjab pushed families to flee Punjab and spread insecurity beyond Punjab. A series of bomb explosions in Delhi, Harayana, Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan spread terror and was magnified by

the national press to produce panic of a national state of siege. In Assam, Hindu anxiety was stoked by reports of calculated infiltration of Bangladeshi Muslims into Assam. Media played along with foreign hand – sarcastic foreign hand brown...Poor Bangladeshis fleeing abject poverty to a less poor land dubbed infiltrators. Above all the Hindu nationalists feared the risks of regional separatism which they argued reducing the number of Hindus in Assam could not fail to create.

These threats were communicated by the mass media in the security paradigm of a 'weak-strong state'. That is, the state was threatened by anti-national forces that were abetted by the ubiquitous 'foreign hand'. Alongside were the Indian state's achievements in developing the scientific and technical accoutrements of a regional power. Indira Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi projected the Congress party as the bulwark against the anti national forces. However as Sandy Gordon argued (p. 256) such interpretation of Indian nationalism, "was ripe for exploitation and competition from another new nationalism- that of the Hindu right. Indeed the idea of a weak strong state is a classic one propagated by many parties towards the extreme end of the spectrum, especially the right". The BJP sought to identify threats with resurgent Islam and the source of India strength- Hindu character and genius. It was a remaking of Hinduism more readily identified with traditional notions of power.

Several studies (Charu & Mukul Print Media and Communalism Delhi, Mukul 1990 ; Victoria Farmer 'Mass Media Images Mobilisation and Communalism in David Ludden edited *Making India Hindu* 1996; Tapan Basu et al *Khaki Shorts and Saffron Flags* and Arvind Rajagopal *Politics After Television* 2001) have examined how the mass media substantively shifted the nature of political and cultural discourse; how it enabled the VHP to project itself as co-extensive with Hinduism and facilitated the BJP becoming the spokesperson of a hegemonic militant Hindu discourse. I want to trace the centrality of militarism in this hegemonic discourse.

At the core of the RSS's ideology and praxis is the belief summed up by Vir Savarkar in *Hindutva: Who is a Hindu?* "Unite Indians and Militarize Hinduism". That is recover the culturally essentialist character of Indian society in the unity of Hindus and an essentialist Hinduism and build a strong state by militarizing Hinduism and the Hindu community. The RSS discourse denounces as aberration what it describes as the Gandhi – Nehru version of Hinduism as humble and submissive – which glorified a strategy of passive resistance – where a Hindu bends to receive lathi blows. It fostered defeatism, pseudo secularism and internal divisions as innate Hindu tolerance was interpreted as weakness. The RSS' version of Hinduism is very different and its orientation can be summed up in Golwalkar's comment – Every Hindu God is armed. The

remaking of the figure of Ram as warrior god is integral to the creation of the hegemonic discourse of the Hindu as militant. Integral to the RSS philosophy is the military training and exercise that are part of the daily ritual for RSS cadre

Several perceptive studies have analysed the continuing primacy given to the figure Ram in the RSS's articulation of Hindu (Indian) cultural revivalism from Hegdewar to the Vishwa Hindu Parishad's spearheading of the Ram Janambhoomi movement. It is a Ram who above all else symbolizes military prowess, in sharp contrast to his portrayal in *Ramcharitramanas* where he lacks masculine assertiveness. As Anuradha Kapur (Diety to Crusader: The Changing Iconography of Ram in Gyanendra Pandey edited *Hindus and Others* 1993) in her study of the shifts in Ram iconography observes, traditionally Ram is rarely portrayed using a bow. Hanuman provided him the strength he needs. However by 1989 the Ram of the hoardings is represented as a symbol of strength and power, defiant and determined to wrest back what has been lost. It is a muscular Ram drawing his bow. The attributes of Hanuman are transferred to Ram. He symbolizes the angry Hindu taking forceful action. It challenges the image of the submissive Hindu which the Sangh Parivar seeks to remake into a Hindu retaliating with forceful action.

The martial theme is central to Ramanand Sagar's televised epic series *Ramayan* in which he creates a territorially manifest Ram Rajya. Writing on the teleserial, Purnima Mankekar comments, 'In addition to being exclusionary vis a vis the non Aryans, the television Ramayan construction of ideal masculinity was also intrinsically patriarchal in that it was based on militarism and the masculine protection of women (Brahmins, Adivasis and other vulnerable groups) on Kshatriya protection".

Sagar's *Ramayan* speaks of Brahmanical knowledge of scientific discoveries in the service of war. In the Marich Subahu episode where the Brahmans appeal to Ram to prevent the demons from disrupting their Vedic rituals through which they acquire scientific knowledge, the episode is framed as a clash between two knowledge systems, i.e. scientific knowledge and magic. Moreover, science is clearly associated with the power of combat. Rajagopal argues that Sagar's *Ramayan* serial extends into the past a national security state undertaking scientific research to battle its enemies.

The impact of the epic serial *Ramayan* shown on state controlled nation wide television over 78 weekly episodes in 1987-88 (and the Mahabharat 91 episodes) in the creating of a Hindu public has been extensively studied. (Parallel was the controversy over the tele-serial *Tippu Sultan* and the making of a national mainstream in which histories/experiences that challenged the remaking of a linear Hindu hegemonic discourse were excluded). The political

ascendancy of Hindu militancy was also facilitated by its seizure of public space as marked by a surge in mass rituals- yagnas, jagrans and yatras. It served to make people more receptive to the VHP's propaganda that the movement was spontaneous and the constitution of a militant Hindu public sphere natural. Sadhus and Sants mediated the discourse in the media as the new Newsmakers. The media played a crucial role in transforming the attitudes of the public and shifting the character of elite nationalism.

In the cultural recovery of the militant Hindu, the audio cassettes of Sadhvi Ritambhara require special mention. In a vocabulary of crude machismo appeals, Ritambhara seeks to mobilize the kar sevaks for a once for all battle. The voice is obsessively focused on the theme of violent confrontation as she brings together public anger against corruption and bad governance with the evocation of street violence against the enemy at hand- the Muslims (*Khaki Shorts Saffron Flags 1993*).

The role of the print media (and video-cassettes) in fanning militarized Hinduism and communal violence in Ayodhya has been ably documented by Asghar Ali Engineer (*EPW* May 17, 1991) and Radhika Ramaseshan (*EPW* Dec 15, 1990). The implications of institutional changes in the media, the upsurge in the growth of the Hindi print and audio-visual media and the changing ownership pattern has been perceptively documented by Robin Jeffrey. Charu & Mukul are among the first in examining the linkages between institutional changes in the print media, especially ownership pattern and the growth of communalism. To this needs to be added the impact on editorial processes of the displacement of the professional editor and the domination of the editor-owner and the growing practice of hiring senior editorial staff on short term contract basis. Moreover, there is the emergence of a common social sphere of editors and politicians who routinely socialize together. And finally BJP and media cronyism. At one level it manifests itself in the systematic manner in which the Sangh Parivar has placed allied journalists in the print and audio visual media. Then there is the induction of its journalist allies to the Rajya Sabha, key advisory posts and its spin doctors evident during the Godhra and After Godhra carnage in Gujarat.

Arguably, media management is not unique to the BJP in power and it was Rajiv Gandhi who began the policy of inducting professional media managers.. However what is noteworthy is the systematic manner in which the BJP has over the years cultivated the mass media. For example, from the 1980s the BJP facilitated journalists covering its National Conventions and Executive Council meetings, providing transport and lavish hospitality and ensuring saturation coverage. Its media management policies had a crucial role to play in enabling the BJP then in the political wilderness, to insinuate itself into centre space in the media discourse as the political party with a difference.

III

BJP, the Bomb and the Media

Perhaps, a parallel can be drawn between the dominant English (as differentiated from the language media's) 'structured' mis-reading of the hydra headed Sangh Parivar (including the BJP's) 's determination to demolish the Babri masjid and build there a Ram temple and the Sangh Parivar's determination to make India a nuclear weapons power.

The BJP and its political precursors, the Bharatiya Jana Sangh in their election manifestos and national council resolutions, have unequivocally called for the induction of nuclear weapons. That is except for the brief Janata interregnum when Atal Bihari Vajpayee as Foreign Minister said "I've dropped the bomb". In 1964 when China went nuclear, the BJS lambasted the ruling Congress for its pseudo pacifist inhibitions. From 1984 to the 1996 and 1998 elections, the manifestos have with some minor variations promised induction of nuclear weapons. (Partha Ghosh *BJP and the evolution of Hindu nationalism 1999*)

However, strategic analysts like Raja Mohan of *The Hindu* misread the situation in 1996 and were caught unawares in 1998. Raja Mohan was writing in the context of the nation wide debate on India signing the CTBT and the apparent failure of the BJP as the Opposition party to pursue its nuclear agenda. He writes, "The BJP prefers to duck the question. One would have expected the BJP as the leading opposition party to accuse the Indian government of retreating under international pressure on the question of nuclear testing and for wasting a golden opportunity last year for boldly changing India's status. Smitten by the prospect of emerging as a ruling party, the BJP prefers to be diplomatic in its declared nuclear posture." (*The Hindu* 8 Jan 1996). We now know from the RSS chief K Sudershan that in 1996 when the BJP first took power they had planned to go nuclear, if the government had not collapsed in 13 days.

Again in 1998, the party manifesto and resolutions committed it to 're evaluate the country's nuclear policy' and exercise the nuclear option. Raja Mohan with unconscious irony misreads the BJP's agenda. "Does induction simply

mean completing the architecture of a functional deterrent- without formally declaring it? ... All that India needs to do now according to some analysts is to plug the gap in the hardware and integrate capabilities through the software of a nuclear doctrine. If the BJP takes this road, it might not be deviating too radically from the mainstream national approach on nuclear weapons but only building on it.” (The *Hindu* Feb 6, 1998)

Are we seeing the same structured misperception that characterises the continuing misreading by the English media’s of the Temple agenda? Is the misreading located in the self conscious effort to position the BJP as a party driven by the imperatives of governance to domesticate its agenda and become not very different than the Congress. I argue that on the core issues of the hindutva agenda - temple, militarism/ nuclearism, saffronizing education and the fostering of the cultural unity of a Hindu India, there is no retreat. Arguably, is that why the English media gets it wrong?

Within 40 days of taking over, the BJP led coalition on May 11, 1998 tested three nuclear bombs and announced to the world that India had gone nuclear. The NDA agenda had promised a security review and the setting up of a National Security Council, but before any of this, the BJP independent of its allies although the RSS was in the know, went nuclear. It was not material changes which drove the BJP to nuclear thus breaking with the Indian policy of nuclear ambiguity, but as Achin Vanik has explicated, the RSS-BJP’s nuclear obsession is ideologically driven.

In the public discourse, on the streets and in seminar halls, Pokhran II was celebrated as natural and inevitable and indeed the expression of a national consensus, merely requiring the courage to move the country from weak kneed nuclear ‘ambiguity’ and ‘hypocrisy’ to determined nuclear power greatness and world status. Critical voices were silenced though some limited space emerged after Pakistan went nuclear. Opposition politicians from former Prime Ministers I K Gujral to P V Narasimha Rao and the strategic community media personalities, who till the other day had defended nuclear ambiguity, now competed with each other to own the not Hindu but Indian bomb. They were responding to a jingoistic consensus which the BJP had crafted. The absence of Newsmakers, that is dissenting elite, meant that the dominant media reflected a consensus of enthusiastic support. (Aijaz Ahmad ‘The Hidutva Weapon’ in Kothari and Mian edited *Out of the Nuclear Shadow* 2001) Critical voices were clubbed as out of date ‘Leftists’ and anti nationals. Peace rallies and meetings were given little or no coverage. Talking heads on Doordarshan and the satellite channels privileged the hawks. However, there was a counter discourse articulated in *Frontline* and *Outlook* Magazines.

Also, some token space was given to recognised critics but they were categorically positioned as the marginal ‘Other’. As J Sri Raman in “The Climbers Case’ argues in the media the vote was clearly the ‘ayes’ had it. (*Out of the Nuclear Shadow* 2001)

Leaving aside the ‘split publics’ frame in developing the militarism discourse, here I want to focus on how influential sections of the elite media spoke to an expanding constituency of an emerging elite nationalism. How did the media communicate the idea of the inevitability of an Indian bomb, necessary to recover the country’s pride and international status as befitting its natural civilizational greatness. How did the media make acceptable the equation of science with nuclear militarism? In juggling the costs of going nuclear, how did the mass media participate in the elite intellectually ceding concern for the poor majority in India in the changing terms of its nationalist discourse? What role did the media played in domesticating the horrific power of weapons of mass destruction so much so that the use of nuclear weapons – or calling Pakistan’s nuclear bluff is loosely banded about in the public sphere by government Ministers, respected strategic analysts in *The Hindu* and by spokespersons for the RSS establishment in *Panchajanya*?

In understanding the making of the dominant media frame of an underlying national consensus for Pokhran II, several analysts have focused on the preceding media managed debate on the discriminatory nature of the CTBT and Indian defiance in resisting pressure to sign away its national interest and keep open the nuclear option. It positioned Pokhran II as inevitable and desirable defiance. In addition, I want to draw attention to the role of the tele serial Ramayan in fostering connectivities between ancient Vedic militarized science and contemporary scientific militarism/nuclearism. The television experience enables a seamless connectivity between contemporaneity and the past to foster a nuclear discourse of naturalness and inevitability, anchoring it in the recovery of essential greatness of militarized Hindu nationalism.

Above we had examined how Ramanad Sagar depicted ancient Hindu society as politically and socially equal to the challenge of modernity, indeed to have supplanted and surpassed it. He modernizes ancient education (echoing the latter day discourse on Vedic mathematics) and qualifies Vedic rituals as spiritual science. In the episode where the Sage Vishwamitra gives Ram special weapons, they are specifically said to be energised by ‘the power of atoms’. The parallel with nuclear weapons is explicit (Rajagopal 2000) It is not incidental that Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi sought to co-opt the changing nature of elite nationalism and the discourse of militarized Hindu national security – by calling India’s state of the art indigenously developed missiles

for carrying nuclear and conventional warheads, *Agni*, *Prithvi* and *Trishul*

Indeed, the English media was used to shift the image of the BJP's Pokhran II from a Hindu bomb to an Indian bomb and to construct a 'non threat specific' responsible national nuclear deterrence. At the street level, the VHP projected the bomb as a symbol of militarized Hindu revivalism and celebrated the blasts with the cry of *Jai Shri Ram*. VHP's Ashok Singhal wanted to institute a *Shakti Peeth* in Pokhran and proposed carrying radioactive sand to the corners of India. In the shadow of the bomb, loose statements were made of the need for a war, one that would not last long. *Panchajanya* made out a case for attacking Pakistan. The vocabulary of the street nuclear discourse was couched in crude masculine terms. Those who had abjured nuclear weapons were dubbed a 'bunch of eunuchs' Shiv Sena supremo Bal Thackeraya, stated that the tests were a testimony to the manhood of the state. "We have to prove that we are not eunuchs" he said. (*Militarism and Women in South Asia* Chenoy 2001)

J Sri Raman in a perceptive analysis of a section of the media's role is in 'The Climber's Case' argues that just as Pokhran was a package what was communicated to a special public was a pro bomb package, held together by the claim of legitimacy for the tests and the illegitimacy of any opposition to them. "This section of the media sought to sell Pokhran as a package of special appeal to its specific audience. It did so by claiming the tests to be based on national consensus as well as a break with the past, it did so in the name of Indians science and nationalism of a new ruthless real-politik. It did so by presenting Pokhran as a passport to an elevated world status for India. It did so by ignoring the economic implications of nuclear weaponisation almost entirely. It sought to damn the anti Pokhran camp by identifying it with Leftism and Third World reality"(*Out of the Nuclear Shadow* 2001).

His broad review is based on the *Indian Express*, *The Pioneer* and the magazine, *India Today*. In particular he plots the editorials and Opinion pieces of the editor, Shekhar Gupta, as especially influential. For example, the May 12 front page signed editorial, opens with an accolade for Vajpayee and Advani in creating a mood of Indian resurgence – implying that Pokhran was the short cut to a higher world status for the country. The edit adumbrates many of strands in the Pokhran media package. There is the theme of a tacit consensus as also of bold departure; not only the bravery of the new leadership but the other qualities it was believed to possess were presented as an incontestable line of argument. Asserted was the no frill character of pro Pokhran nationalism that was no admirer of ambiguity and no respecter of restraint.

The editorial also leads into the next step of post Pokhran diplomacy – to effect an about turn and sign the discriminatory CTBT. "India is prepared with a diplomatic wet blanket to contain the fallout by offering to be a willing and active player in the international nuclear arms control regime. The difference is that India seeks to play the game as a nuclear weapons power. This is the end of ambiguity and hypocrisy." A following editorial pushes it further home 'Seize the day Forget national ego, move on to CTBT'

Another strand in the Pokhran package is the nuclear explosions as the triumph of Indian science. It is taken up in the May 18th editorial, 'Scientific breakthrough in complete nuclear weaponisation' which unquestioningly accepts official claims and equates nuclear science with nuclear militarism. An editorial (IE May 12) flags off another mantra of the media, the theme of the tests as setting India apart from the Third World identified in turn with some of its unlovely members –belligerent Libya and Iraq. Sri Raman observes that in an opinion piece the next day the editor turns the fallout of India's isolation in the international community into an opportunity to do some Third World bashing. In his weekly column he returns to the theme of the bomb as a 'short cut out of the Third World'. Mocking at the inferiority complex which pulls Indians to the idea of a Third World bomb he writes, "Here we want to use ours to confirm our status as the leader of the world's wretched", that is, not our passport out of the Third World. Hiroshima anniversary serves as an occasion for dumping on 'third worldists and rusted anti imperialists' wailing over the American aerial atrocities against humanity.

It is in the pretzel twists to the argument that the blasts had bettered prospects for global disarmament and that India should therefore sign the CTBT – that the BJP's hand at media management is most visible. Editor Prabhu Chawla in his weekly column in *India Today*, describes how the media was co-opted on the BJP's nuclear agenda. In "Vajpayee's blitzkrieg Spin Doctors work overtime to give the Prime Minister a face lift", Chawla comments on the avalanche of press briefings and selective leaks last week by the Mandarins of the PMO which have jaded even the ever hungry journalistic palate. Rarely have journalists been so wined and dined by the movers and shakers of the BJP led coalition. The objective was to change the image of the PM from indecisive to decisive chief executive. The result – that " within a week most Indian newspapers and fringe arm chair intellectuals were bending over backwards in join the jingoistic chorus"

IV

Pakistan, the Neighbour as Enemy

E.P. Thomson had once said, “We can kill thousands because we have learnt to call them enemies. Wars commence in the culture first of all, and we kill each other in euphemisms and abstractions, long before the first missile has been launched”.

In the Hindu nationalist orthodoxy, the necessity and inevitability of an Indian security state is constructed around Pakistan, the enemy without and its extension within- the Indian Muslim community, suspect for its alleged allegiance to a beyond Bharat *ummah* identity and thus incapable of authentic belonging on the criteria of *punyabhumi* and *pitrabhumi*. The Partition legacy adds to this anxiety. Militarized nationalism, anti democratic impulses and hate politics are integral aspects of the media packaging of the Indian national security state justified by the hostility of the neighbour -Pakistan. The dominant media frame projects an essentialist antagonism between Hindu India and Muslim India as the *raison d’etre* for militarized nationalism.

As an example of how the media participates in the construction of Pakistan as the essential enemy, take the *Star TV* promo ‘Tonight at 8’ flashed on television screens in 2000. The voice over says “everything you wanted to know in your neighbourhood and across the border” accompanied by a visual of the Bofors gun firing. What impact would such repetitive messaging have on the mind’s eye of the viewer? It emphasizes the reductive frame of a violent conflict ridden relationship which may be appropriate if Kargil is the definitive frame but clearly distorts and focalizes the multi faceted relational model of conflict and coexistence characteristic of India Pakistan relational model. (my chapter ‘Warring Neighbours Coexist and Cooperate’ in *Space, Territory and the State* edited by Ranabir Samaddar 2002). Indeed the threat to revoke the Indus water treaty, post Dec 13, drew attention to the existence of levels of cooperation which have survived two wars.

The mass media frame for Pakistan is one of essential hostility and of a competing masculine militarized nationalism. For example, the year 2001 was

marked by the Agra summit and Dec 13 attack on the Indian Parliament. *Star TV* in a news update on the year end India-Pakistan crisis edits a 30 second recap of the year’s moments in Indo- Pakistan relations thus. It cuts to General Pervez Musharraf asserting ‘lay off’. Then cuts to the macho verbal duel about who is more manly around the metaphor of wearing bangles (denial of masculinity) with the Pakistan President rejecting an imputation of a lack of masculinity and the Indian Prime Minister asserting India’s masculinity by highlighting the wearing of a *kaada*, the conclusive symbol of *mardangi*. (TOI edit Nov 2, 2001) Of course there is no mention of the bus diplomacy of the women of India and Pakistan for peace, or their initiative to transform the pejorative femininity of ‘bangles’ - into a symbol of shared strength to build peace.

In an effort to analyse how the Pakistan threat is worked out in the media, I want to focus on the coverage of the Dec 13 terrorist attack on the Indian Parliament and the whipping up of a war hysteria. The very obviousness of the BJP’s manipulation of public opinion around ‘terror and temple’ politics to revive its flagging electoral prospects in UP, reflects the media’s willingness to be a participant in purveying a war jingoism that reinforces militarized Hindu nationalism.

Dec 13 reinforced a mood sought to be cultivated in India since Sept 11, that is, if the US and Israel could do it, why can not India. Writing in *The Hindu* “Breeding Little Hawks”(Dec 17) Javed Jabbar, former Pakistan information Minister, describes the TV programme *Star Talk* which on Dec 9 featured children of the ages of 10-14 to mark UNICEF’s Children’s Day. 80% of the questions, he claims were primed to get the children to support hot pursuit and attack training camps like the US did. After Dec 13, the media refrain became ‘public opinion’ demands retaliatory action against Pakistan.

Television set the tone for this public anger, with the 24 hour news channels driving print media reportage and steering public opinion. There was the constant repetition of the event, caught live, of the attack on Indian democracy. Prime Minister Vajpayee’s immediate response sounded a defining note of belligerence, i.e. take the battle against terrorism to a decisive conclusion. It may have been intended to move the international community to act but his ‘aar paar ki ladai’ reverberated in the media becoming shriller by the day.

Television anchorpersons unabashedly beat the war drum. Commenting on the electronic media’s role in spuriously creating a public mood of war jingoism’, Harish Khare in *The Hindu*, Dec 18, picks out the various strands which contribute to building up a war hysteria. “The Ministers are harangued for being mealy mouthed. If the US could do it to Afghanistan, why can’t we do

it to Pakistan? Follow Israel. Tell us here and now, what is the government going to do? Spell it out? ... There is a distinct sense of disapproval that the Opposition is not going for war right away.” The dominant media mood is to suspend all criticism dubbed anti national. Poonam Saxena’s in a review of the news channels berates the Opposition for harping on security lapses. Quite understandably, she argues, there were no takers for such comments. TV anchorpersons openly rebuked them and rued the absence in India of the patriotic consensus that Sept 11 spontaneously produced in the US. And the Opposition (except the Left) was quick to abandon this anti patriotic track and suspend all criticism of macho nationalism. lest as in the case of Kargil they lose out in a patriotic backlash.

In the midst of much of the mass media baying for revenge and retaliation, *Indian Express* editor Shekhar Gupta’s appeal to defuse tension in his Opinion piece and edit of Dec 15, struck an oddly discordant and evidently unacceptable note. He challenges the media mediated hype about the Lakshman Rekha having been crossed in the December 13 attack. In appealing for balance he reminds readers of the even greater threat posed to the nation state in the 1980s during the Punjab terrorist crisis, when transistor bombs exploded in the capital’s markets and trains and buses. There were few takers in the mass media for this kind of comparative storyline.

An editorial in the *Times of India* sums up the media as actor in whipping up war hysteria. “There is a lot of ill informed talk about war in our media, both print and electronic media persons ask provocative questions of political leaders most of whom have little to do in any decision making on war. Whether the politicians have a role to play or not their answers to such questions are invariably couched in macho terms”. (Dec 27) Others who could drive decisions (though formal accountability rests with the Foreign and Defence Ministries) like L K Advani on Dec 16 made himself available to at least 3 TV channels. While he refused to be goaded into saying more than ‘action’ would be taken, the war prone mood of the newscasters translated that military action was imminent.

Also, a pale reflection of the ‘split publics’ theme can be picked up in the projection by the media of the myth of the two faces of the BJP –the moderate and the extremist – embodied in Vajpayee and Advani. The Sangh Parivar, through a ‘gullible’ media worked its strategy of orchestrating moderate vs extremist views, that produced an emotional confusion and policy paralysis in the context of the ram temple and the war against the enemy within and without. There is unconscious irony in the media’s surprise at the relative restraint in Advani’s statement in Parliament on Dec 18 and the aggressive

military posturing of Vajpayee. Advani, however, could not stop himself from gratuitously adding , “...Pakistan, itself a product of the two nation theory, itself a theocratic state with an extremely tenuous tradition of democracy, is unable to reconcile itself to the reality of a secular, democratic confident India whose standing in the international community is growing.” Critical editorial comment about unnecessarily flogging the two nation theory, was limited in the media. (*The Hindu* Dec 19, 2001).

Public space was full of on the spot polls. There were television audience spot polls, print media’s internet poll of readers and independent surveys - all stoked the jingoistic mood. Hindustan Times on Dec 18 reported the findings of an internet poll - 85% wanted the camps attacked and 60% favoured military action and not aggressive diplomacy . The day before *The Hindu* quoted a survey of ‘Delhites’ by Shyam Vyas Marc Pvt Ltd which revealed that in the aftermath of Dec 13, 86% of those polled wanted stricter laws (POTA), 82% favoured attacking training camps in Pakistan and 33% were for hot pursuit. Headlines trivialized war – “Delhites prefer taking terrorism head on”. The trend of some national dailies since the Kargil war of showcasing celebrity opinion on war and peace was continued. However, given that one political editor described an India - Pakistan war as a “punch up” (*TOI* Dec 19), is there much to choose between experts and the page 3 glitterati?

Experts picked by the television networks seemed preponderantly in favour of strong action, meaning military action. Opposition leaders who might have been expected to resist succumbing to the angry rhetoric of a militarist response like former Prime Minister V P Singh went on TV and called for ‘hot pursuit’, though he ambiguously added that it would mean all out war with Pakistan. His apologists explained that he meant to warn against the deliberate confusion in the objectives of a military response – for example is it to take out the training camps, teach Pakistan a lesson or cripple it for once and for all. Admittedly, the lack of dissenting voices in the opposition (except Left politicians) left the media with few newsmakers to quote to develop an alternate non militarist discourse. The compulsions of electoral politics saw Samajwady Party leader Mulayam Singh challenge not the BJP’s militarist impulse but accuse it of being long on the rhetoric of war and short on action.

A look at three national dailies, *The Hindustan Times*, *The Times of India* and *The Hindu* from Dec 14-31st shows a marked preponderance for aggressive military action in the farming of news reports and choice of opinion pieces, cartoons and letters. Strategic policy analyst Brahma Chellaney was showcased by both print and audio-visual media as spokesperson of a new strategic consensus anchored in the vocabulary of hard headed realism. There

was no reason for India to behave like a vulnerable and powerless state. Bus rides and summits will get you nowhere. Chellaney's advice to reduce and cut off diplomatic rail, road and air links was to prove prophetic. (*HT* Dec 18) In 'An Act of War' he argues that India's cost of inaction against cross border terrorism outweighs potential cost of action." Journalist Raja Mohan a former member of the National Security Advisory Council, backs the logic of using military force even further in 'Act then, India Must' (*The Hindu* Dec 20) and argues its time to call Pakistan's nuclear bluff and face the consequences of hitting out. Raja Mohan in a subsequent article (*The Hindu* Dec 28) claims that the US "responding to the Indian threat to look down the nuclear abyss, has shed ambiguity about Pakistan and terrorism".

Nuclear saber rattling may have been aimed at pressuring the US to act. However the army chief General Sunderajan Padmanabhan's loose talk on the use of nuclear weapons at a widely reported press conference ratcheted up the jingoistic mood. Defence Minister George Fernandes' clarification seemed at odds with itself given that just a couple of days before in a press interview he had spoken about India's second strike capability. The role of the media in gaining acceptance for India as a nuclear power has been commented on in an earlier section. The Dec 13 aftermath showed the ease with which the nuclear discourse in the media crossed the lines between weapons of mass destruction never to be used to legitimate weapons of retaliation. Vir Sanghvi in the article 'Among the Appeasers' demonstrated how he discursive slippages occur. "Nuclear war should be avoided, the world would intervene – so do we sit back and do nothing?" asks Sanghvi in *Hindustan Times*.

In the wake of Dec 13, the media provided the context for fostering a jingoistic public opinion that backed the BJP government deploying 800,000 troops in a tense eyeball to eyeball military stand off along the border. The characteristic tit for tat cycle of retaliatory fire (covered by the media as episodes rather than as a continuum) was ratcheted up daily with reports, e.g. of 'IAF to study US precision strikes', 'Pakistan moving missiles in place' and television stories of panic fleeing of people from the border villages as the country readies for war. The rhetoric of "we don't war but war is being thrust upon us" was addressed to the US as enforcer of peace in the region. And while sections of media lauded India's success (Advani's US visit) in getting the US to act, what was played down was the volatility of the brinkmanship. Why was a Lt General in the Rajasthan sector sacked? What did the US satellite images show of Indian troops on the border? Evidently that story line was not pursued. Instead, there were news reports of "Youths raring to join the army amid talk of war" (*HT* Dec 30) and slipped into bottom end of the story the admission that the driving force as much unemployment as patriotism.

"Peaceniks' as the mainstream media disparagingly described them, found little exposure except as the token dissenting voice. *Hindustan Times* and *The Hindu* did cover a Citizens anti war vigil (Dec 26). But there were few takers for the story line of six Delhi University students arrested for distributing anti-war leaflets. The media was complicit in conflating legitimate dissent with anti national and terrorist activities. As for the line up of terrorist suspects, the national media unquestioningly participated in the Delhi Police Chief's media show starring the confessions of Mohammad Afzal, his cousin Shaukat and his nephew Gellani. Within 72 hours of the attack, on the basis of the confessions of Mohammad Afzal, the five dead terrorists were established as Pakistani nationals linked with the militant outfits Jaish e Mohammad and Laskar e Toiba. He named one of the terrorists, the killer of Rupin Katyal of the Kandahar hijacking. The three accused were brought before a media, habituated to camouflaging as established fact information or disinformation by privileged sources. I.e. intelligence agencies and police. Reporters at the staged press conference did not ask any questions or raise the question of Afzal being or having been a surrendered militant who was or had been working with the J&K security forces.

The Hindustan Times report accented 'Pak uses fanatics to spread terror in India' while a more critical Times of India report says of co-conspirator 'Afzal, he helped Jaish for money' (*HT & TOI* Dec 21, 2001). Subsequently a Times reporter Mahua Chatterjee met the Delhi University lecturer Geelani in jail and reported he had been tortured by the police, attempts made to force him to sign a confession (admissible under POTA). The suspicious circumstances of his having bought a house for 22 lakhs was explained as a blatant lie. Subsequently, a story in *Outlook* magazine Jan 14, 2002, revealed that the CBI had trashed the Delhi police's case about Afzal's identification of one of the dead terrorists as *Burger* the killer of Rupin Katyal. Most media sources quietly dropped the story.

Did we see a media with too much patriotism on its sleeve, as Vinod Mehta argued in *Outlook* Jan 14, or too little, as Newstrack video journalist Madhu Trehan claims. "Sadly today's Indian (upper class) is ambivalent about patriotism as he is about how he is going to spend the evening. In a national emergency their first thought would be which is best country I can move to", she writes in *Outlook* Magazine, Dec 31. "Today, patriotism is considered not so cool and is a bhenji concept. Journalists and intellectuals dismiss it as pure jingoism, politicians of course misuse it for vote gains and for the general public, it is a shrug of complete disinterest." Here we see again the projection of a polarized media/publics, which lends the argument its extra charge.

V

Proxy War: Media Turns its Back on the People of J & K

For the Sangh Parivar and its political offshoots, the BJS and the BJP, its policy on the Muslim majority state of Jammu and Kashmir focuses on abrogation of article 370 of the Constitution which guarantees the special status of the state. Related is the Hindu right's protest against the proscription of Indians -non state subjects - from buying land in the state, a law introduced by the Hindu Dogra rulers, and not unique to J & K but also in force in Himachal Pradesh. The not so covert communal agenda is to change the cultural ethos and the population ratio in the state as was effected by the Hindu right in Jammu division.

The BJP led National Democratic Alliance's compromise agenda makes no mention of article 370. However, the BJP in power has so managed the Jammu and Kashmir issue that the issue of article 370 has de-facto become a non issue as evinced in the Central government removing from the political agenda -the autonomy issue. The BJP led government summarily dismissed the autonomy proposal of its ally J & K Chief Minister Farooq Abdullah. The struggle of the people of Jammu and Kashmir has got focalized as Pakistan's 'proxy war' through Islamic *jehadis*. Its indigenous cause - the denial of democratic rights and alienation, has been politically hollowed out and reduced to a territorial conflict. The issue of the aspirations of the people of Kashmir has been made irrelevant in the media mediated frame of national security and proxy war. As *India Today* succinctly put it, "The country can no longer afford to behave like a tenant on a notice to vacate somebody else's property". The ideology of territoriality produces a militarization of the polity sanctioned by Indian civil society and indeed internalized by it.

The mass media is an accomplice in the reductive framing of the Kashmir conflict as a national security issue and terrorism, thus reinforcing the alienation of the people of the state. Journalists in the choice of analytical frames to explain violence are implicated in driving cycles of violence as instinctive, essentialist or 'proxy' violence. A national security frame predicates a militarized response and forecloses the options of politically

transforming the conflict. It explains why the spin doctors frame the Kargil conflict as a military victory and embarrassedly downplay the US diplomatic demarche to effect a politically negotiated resolution.

Till 1990, in the national press, Kashmir was interpreted by journalists who were largely Kashmiri Pandits. The image projected in the news dispatches was of the Kashmiri as traitors and secessionists. As journalist Tavleen Singh observed, it was this image of the Kashmiri which made it possible for a civil society in the rest of India to deny democratic political rights to the people of Kashmir and to accept that a legally elected Chief Minister be kept in jail for 18 years. ('Tragedy of Errors' 1996; and Manchanda & Bose 'National security, human rights and the mass media' 1997) Subsequently, when the Kashmir conflict broke out, the national media literally turned its back on Kashmir with journalists relocating to Jammu and filing officially sponsored stories datelined Srinagar.

In the mass media's coverage of the conflict in Jammu and Kashmir certain editorial practices can be picked out. One is reporting at a distance and therefore the preponderance of officially sourced reports or unverifiable intelligence agency based stories. Also headlines given by the News Desk, in Delhi, Mumbai or Chennai tend to misrepresent the text of a field report by privileging the loss of life/ injury to security forces and minimizing civilian lives lost. Expectedly, as the dominant frame is national security, the loss of lives of security personnel is highlighted while the loss of civilian lives and property and human rights violations by the security forces is barely given a passing reference lest the morale of the fighting forces get lowered. Reports of human rights violations by the state are denounced as propaganda by anti nationals and subversion by pro-Pakistan forces. Violations by the militants are given full play. Reportage is filtered through the filters of 'ungrateful' and 'pampered' Kashmiris and the security forces fighting 'with one hand tied behind their back'.

The media mediated terrorist frame has not only hollowed out politics and delegitimized the story line of the 'people of Kashmir', it has dealt a devastating blow to the media's sensitivity to the value of universal human rights. Post Dec 13, Union law Minister Arun Jaitley at a public occasion after Dec 13, slammed human rights groups as overground fronts of terrorists. It is an index of media's internalization of the national security perspective that it evoked no comment.

Teresa Joseph and Fayaz Bukhari in two perceptive studies of the Indian print media reporting Kashmir, have highlighted its state centric approach.

Bukhari's analyses shows the preponderance of a law and order frame in which the perspective privileged is that of the security forces while the human rights of the people of Kashmir are sacrificed. In a quantitative reading of space given and content analysis of some major incidents of human rights violations covered by national newspapers - *Times of India*, *Indian Express* and the *Hindustan Times* - Bukhari claims that the Times of India devoted the least space to the human rights angle in reporting. The storyline was determined by the official version. This is reinforced by Joseph's study of three Indian newspapers - *Indian Express*, *Times of India* and *The Hindu* over a three month period from Dec 1, 1991- Feb 29, 1992. Out of a total of 423 reports relating to various aspects of Kashmir, 230 were based on official statements and /press releases of which 78% of the sources were Indian government officials and leaders of mainstream political parties. Only 7 % were based on Kashmiri sources including officials from other countries.

Stock reports on Kashmir refers to death and capture of militants, civilian casualties are airbrushed out of the headline. For example *The Hindu* Dec 29, 1991 carries the headline '5 Killed in Kashmir' while the report reads 'Five militants and two civilians were killed and 11 persons injured'. Similarly, in *Times of India* Jan 1, the headline is "2 BSF Men killed in J & K attack" and the report reads, '2 BSF jawans were reportedly killed in a grenade attack here today while a civilian was allegedly tortured to death during interrogation'.

The terrorist news frame does not accommodate ambiguity or critical scrutiny. Whether it is the Chatti Singhpora massacre of 36 Sikhs (coinciding with President Bill Clinton's visit to India) or the Amarnath killings, print media and television, took its story line from the official version. In the Chattisinghpora killings, fact finding reports of a Punjab based human rights group and Amnesty International cast serious doubts on the government's version. However, they found little coverage in the press. The dominant media frame in the intense print and television coverage of the Chattisinghpora killings was communal, says veteran Kashmiri journalist Zafar Meraj. (Compare it with the national media coverage of the killing of 33 Kashmiris in the firing by security forces on a procession in Bijbehara in 1993). The message was that the Sikhs are not safe in a Muslim majority state - the same Sikhs who till then had lived secure in the state. A few days later five people were reportedly taken into custody and burnt alive. The Home Minister promptly denounced them as the foreign mercenaries behind the terrorist attack. Public outcry at the killing of five allegedly innocent villagers, forced the government to undertake an inquiry. The national media played down these killings, claims Meraj. Subsequently, a news report in the *Indian Express* revealed that the DNA samples taken were tampered with. It was a rare follow up.

The media has been crucial in reinforcing the image of the Kashmiri as Muslim terrorist and Pakistani agent. A fixed item in daily newspapers is J & K militant nabbed by the Delhi police. It took a couple of enterprising *Indian Express* reporters to rip aside the fiction of these dreaded militants being nabbed by the police. The news item, 'Delhi Police find no proof on most J - K militants', exposes the over zealousness of the police in picking up Kashmiri who come to work or study in Delhi. Of the 30 Kashmiri militants picked up by the Delhi Police terrorist cell, arms were recovered from only three. (*I E* Mar 18, '96). Today, this kind of story line, finds even less space, as evinced in the media's uncritical reporting of the three accused in the Dec 13 terrorist attack. The construction of the sequence of events, the suggestion and motivation is taken directly from the police sources. And the backlash on Kashmiri Muslims who are being evicted from their rooms in Delhi's walled city by panic stricken landlords, finds little coverage.

Kargil: Media as a Force Multiplier

The extent to which the mass media participates in shaping and even driving the changing terms of the discourse of Indian nationalism - that is militarized Hindu nationalism, was particularly evident during the Kargil conflict. It was the country's first war in a media society. 24 hour satellite news channels brought the images and sounds of war in real time to our drawing rooms. It was our first experience of war as spectacle and war as infotainment. In the Kargil war, the media not only reported the Kargil war, but endowed militarism with a nobility of purpose and defined nationalism as patriotic flag waving, dangerously intolerant and demonising of the "other"- in this case, all Pakistanis. Pakistan and the people of Pakistan became the enemy, fused in the media shaped popular imagination with rogue states and Talibanised terrorists.

It was a discourse that closed off any discussion on the political "why and wherefore" of the Kargil conflict as event, glamourised war and martyrdom and spurred a jingoistic hysteria of militarised patriotism. Calls for cease-fire and peace were derided and worse denounced as anti-national. Security became exclusively military security, at whose territorial altar was sacrificed the notion of human security. (my chapter "Kargil Conflict : War in a Media Society" in Kargil and After edited by Amitabh Mattoo and Kanti Bajpai, 2001)

Two media images dominated the Kargil war. One, the graphic representation of the jawan, unyielding, etched against the silhouette of dangerous mountains, the markers of the boundaries of the motherland, the nation. It was a statement of aggressive territorial nationalism. Two, the endless

televised spectacle of ceremonially draped coffins, ritualistic public mourning of heroic martyrs while dry eyed families waited for the privacy to weep and maybe question why their sons were dying? Around the media hyped *shradhanjali* kitch, was constructed a martyrdom that defined a patriotic nationalist discourse of self sacrificing macho heroes who died valiantly asserting as did Capt Batra, fresh from one victory and raring to go on to another-, “*yeh dil mangta hai more*”, he was quoted as saying on *Star news*.

Post Kargil there has been much mutual backslapping between the media community and the military forces as reflected in the commendation of the “media as a force multiplier”. Did the media win that vote of confidence by holding back on uncomfortable questions and disclosures? Take the sensational news reports on the “mutilation” of six Indian soldiers. Its timing not only vitiated the atmosphere for Pakistan Foreign Minister Sartaz Aziz’s talks in Delhi but more crucially, it raised to a jingoistic pitch anti Pakistan rhetoric and ultra nationalist fervour to cross the LOC and teach Pakistan a lesson. If before people were more interested in what was happening in the world cup cricket. (Daily Excelsior June 20, 1999) afterwards they were “dying to go to Kargil” and kill half a dozen Pakistanis.

The Pioneer echoed that flag waving shrillness in its news report, “Barbarians : Pak army gouged Indian soldiers eyes, chopped off ears, genitals” (June 11, 1999). It was based on a *UNI* news agency flash from the site, quoting an army colonel spokesperson. The Foreign Minister Jaswant Singh formally released the details of the postmortem report at an emotionally charged press conference. “I am outraged, I feel personally violated,” he said. The details he recited were horrific- an eye stabbed with a blunt instrument, cigarette burns, etc. However, nothing was said about mutilation of ears, nose and genitals. The emotionalism of the event, discouraged niggardly questions like - Was only Lt Kalia tortured? Of course, even one, was too many. But the facts needed to be known. (Reports of mutilation by the Indian security forces were deliberately suppressed.)

Given the sensitivity of the disclosure and Pakistan’s denial, what about independent corroboration by the ICRC? Here in what was either sloppy reporting or worse deliberate, verification by an official of the Indian Red Cross was confused with verification by the ICRC. The ICRC denial, if carried, was tucked away somewhere inside. Several editorial writers wrote as if the ICRC had confirmed “torture”.

A group of foreign military attaches was called in to see the bodies. One from a western country, was openly skeptical. He informally admitted that while

the eye region of the face had been bashed in, it could have been the result of a fall against a sharp stone, not necessarily the result of a blunt instrument gouging out the eye. As for the cigarette burns, it was hard to say whether they were caused by bullets or by cigarette burns. At issue, here, is not whether the bodies were mutilated. It is the suspension of skepticism by a media. The *Times of India* provided space in their Letters to the Editor column to a skeptical respondent, Fayaz Ahmed’s letter, “Torture mystery” (July 20, 1999). It provoked a deluge of letters, most criticized him on the basis of his religious identity.

Kargil was fought as a territorial war with the media compliantly de-linking Kargil from the politics of the Kashmir dispute and ignoring the situation of the people of Kashmir, the fellow citizens of India? The mass media as an integral part of the ideological superstructure of the Indian nation state, fought that battle as a third front. Once the momentum of war took over, professional standards of fairness and accuracy were sorely tested as the mass media (with some exceptions) got swept up in whipping a war hysteria, and picked up the theme of teaching Pakistan a lesson. In the process, it was forgotten that the Kargil conflict was not a war, that diplomatic talks are and should be pursued throughout conflict, and that ultimately the “victory” was a diplomatically negotiated one of ceasefire and “safe passage”.

In place of an analysis of the Kargil conflict contextualised in the problematique of Pakistan politics or as a product of nuclear deterrence in the subcontinent, there was stereotyping about Pakistan as a rogue state. Young reporters and the liberal intelligentsia, routinely referred to Pakistan as “enemy” and “rogue state”. Influential newspapers like the *Times of India*, fulminated in editorials, “A Talibansied and militarised Pakistan which acts as a rogue state because of the autonomy it feels it enjoys because of nuclear capability ...”. Denouncements like “Pak dominated by mullahs and generals steeped in drug trafficking money laundering and international terrorism...”, (*TOI* edit 18 June 1999) preclude the possibility of posing such questions as -Was it the Pokhran and Chagai tests which emboldened Pakistan to undertake a military adventure, confident in the nuclear deterrence logic of limited escalation?

The Kargil conflict not only set back India Pakistan relations, by demonising Pakistan, it threatens to foreclose the possibility of dialogue by locking the two countries in an irretrievably antagonistic course. An edit in the *Times of India*, “India Betrayed” (June 15, 1999) mocked at a group of eminent Indians and Pakistanis counseling restraint and calling for a ceasefire. “It is like advocating restraint equally to Rapist and Rape victim”. The demonic imaging

is further propped up by the projection on India and Pakistan of a deep ideological and religious antagonism. By politically de-linking Kargil from Kashmir, the antagonism between India and Pakistan is made into an essentialist one, incapable of resolution.

The “war drummers” agenda demanded that Pakistan be reduced to a country of Islamic zealots and murdering mujahedeen. The media became an accomplice in the project of defining a super patriotic discourse which was militaristic, dangerously intolerant and dismissive of dissent. It was not censorship, but a self induced jettisoning of the professional obligation to be skeptical of the official word and claim, observed Harish Khare of the *The Hindu*. (28 July) Khare wrote, ‘... except for some obvious exceptions, this jingoistic aberration has been self induced and has revealed a hitherto unsuspected itch for nationalistic conformism ... the very joyfulness which informed the martyrdom reporting ... Since the war drummers did not ask any questions, they frown on all those who ask questions, any questioning of the Kargil war, its beginning, its conduct and its conclusion is deemed anti nationalist’.

Covering the Kargil conflict was as much about reporting on some and not reporting on others. There was a self induced ban on reporting on the situation in Kashmir. The foreign media bottled up in the valley and blocked access to Kargil found again the forgotten story of the alienation of the people of Kashmir and the excesses by the security forces. The Independent reported on the torching of villages in Bandipur, Khargam and Nathpora by the Indian forces. The Indian media chose to ignore it. A well known Indian TV producer explained “ I wouldn’t touch the story at this time, because the viewers wouldn’t like to see the army portrayed in a negative light. A post-mortem would be alright”. (*Outlook Magazine* July 12 1999) Presumably that also applies to reports of forced portage by the army. There was no media blessed martyrdom for the porters killed in the Kargil heights.

In Kashmir the war is over winning the hearts and minds of our citizens. But the national mass media again turned its back on Kashmir to confirm that Indians view Kashmir exclusively as a territorial dispute. The Kargil crisis had to do with territorial security, but it also had to do with the deeper issue of the people of Kashmir. There is a security question but there is also a citizenship question. The Vajpayee government has de-linked Kargil from Kashmir, for obvious political reasons. But should the media have uncritically endorsed that decision. Moreover, The de-linking of Kargil from Kashmir politically conveys that between India and Pakistan there is an essentialist antagonism. On Kashmir, the possibility of settlement of the dispute exists, in principle, but there can be no resolution of essentialist hostility. It plays into the hands

of fundamentalist forces in India and Pakistan, making them stronger in both countries.

During the Kargil war the mass media was up front baying to teach Pakistan a lesson. A shrill editorial in *The Pioneer* asserts,. “There can be no ceasefire agreement till the last intruder has vacated the Indian territory alive or dead, preferably the latter. The intruders must be taught a lesson so severe that succeeding generations never contemplate such a misadventure. Only then can the government consider resuming dialogue. In any case not a dialogue, but a monologue ...that India wants... The Pakistan establishment must declare in a chastened and remorseful tone that hereafter it will never again plot to wrest Jammu and Kashmir from India. This must be the sum and substance of the dialogue”. A *Hindustan Times* edit (June 14, 1999) is equally bellicose – “ Kargil has left India no choice but to do what it has failed to do in the past.” It could be argued that the same logic drove General Musharraf to launch his Kargil misadventure to do a Pakistani Siachin and teach India a lesson. Once you accept the logic of military force to settle scores, you legitimise Siachins and Kargils.

The dominant media frame of the ending of the Kargil conflict remains even today, a military victory, glossing over the US mediated diplomatic compromise. Across the border, its mirror image remains equally militarist- with the spin being ‘defeat snatched from the jaws of victory’. In situations of conflict, we know journalists lie- sometimes because they are lied to but also because they are impelled by a patriotic imperative. As columnist A G Noorani in “Kargil Diplomacy” (*Frontline* Aug 13 1999) exposes, there were six points where the government ‘lied to the people, brazenly systematically- safe passage to the intruders, secret deals with Pakistan negotiations with Pakistan prior to the withdrawal of the intruders, US mediation, ceasefire and accord on ceasefire with Pakistan’. The media (with honourable exceptions) was implicated in promoting these lies. Suspending all skepticism, the media accepted Defence Minister George Fernandes hawkish line as definitive- ‘Either surrender without further waste of time to India or get killed’. However, as we now know there were back door diplomacy channels, direct telephone communication and the diplomatic intercession of President Clinton. The diplomatic demarche did not fit well into the frame of a military victory. Also, it would undermine the nationalist orthodoxy of ‘no third party’ involvement in the Kashmir dispute.

VI

The State of Siege & The Enemy Within

I argue that the mass media collaborates in constructing an ever-widening circle of suspect communities within the country - Muslims, Kashmiri Muslims, Bangladeshi Muslims, Nepali migrants, Christians, North East Christians, Sri Lankan Tamil refugees, etc. As we noted above the sense of vulnerability in the early 80s was communicated to the majority (Hindus) as coming from threats posed by the minorities. Following the Hindutva wave, there has been a decisive shift in the discourse of Indian nationalism in which these communities have been conjured as 'the Other', and located outside the nationalist mainstream and projected as latently treacherous.

In the shrinking space for democratic discourse in India, distorted terminologies and phrases have been made natural in the 'mainline' media. For example, the media has played a vital role in the construction of a public discourse between the period 1986-92 in which the 400 year old Babri Masjid got converted into 'a disputed structure', quietly fulfilling the task of the BJP of convincing the vast majority of Indians that what was being demolished was not a mosque in the constitutional sense but a disputed structure in the ultra-constitutional sense! *Communalism Combat* co-editor Teesta Setalvad, argues that sectarian and hate speech has been consciously created and surreptitiously promoted in the media by the Sangh Parivar, encompassing political parties like the BJP and the Shiv Sena, and the ideological fountainhead- the RSS and its offshoots, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad, the Hindu Jagran Manch, the Bajrang Dal. (Reporting Conflicts, SAFHR Paper May 2001)

Of late, hate speech commonly found in the pages of the Shiv Sena organ, *Samana* and the RSS organ *Panchjanya*, is being re-printed by the mainline media. The justification may be to report and expose what such communal organs are writing. But the newspapers in doing so are giving the hate speech of these organs, great publicity, especially when it is not contextualised. What messages are being communicated when newspapers reproduce the statements of the Thackerays of the world (admittedly Newsmakers) without

critical comment. For example, The *Times of India* front pages as news, the statement of the Bajrang Dal chief - 'Christians Are Worse Than Muslims, Kick Them Out'. In the case of the the suspect communities as for example Kashmiri Muslims, prejudiced statements of politicians and officials are picked as headlines and without quotation marks. (Teresa Joseph 'Kashmir, human rights and the media', 2000)

Illegal and legal Bangladeshis have become 'infiltrators' and worse, described as 'convicted' Bangladeshis, a vocabulary the criminalizes them. (*The Hindu* Nov 20, 2001). They are 'convicted' of what – of fleeing a desperately poor land and being pushed back across the border or shot crossing the border. The insinuation is that they are not refugees but people who migrate for a specific purpose and design related to alien and hostile interests. In the construction of these suspect communities is the subtext of the ubiquitous working of the Pakistani intelligence agency, Inter Services Intelligence (ISI).

The latest is Nepal, projected as a hot bed of insurgency in the Indian media, with ISI agents at will plotting anti Indian subversive activities. A Nepalese Pashmina shawl trader who was traveling in the hijacked IA plane was judged terrorist hijacker in the media. A leading Indian weekly published a Game Plan for subversion in India and implicated a veritable Who's Who of Nepal. The reports cite as source intelligence agencies. The media has played a crucial role in the building up of the ISI as the ubiquitous source of anti Indian subversion in India, Nepal and Bangladesh. In the reportage of the 'ISI bogey' there is a frightening lack of responsibility by the media in general and the Hindi language media in particular. Allegations are often front paged with startling headlines but there is rarely any follow-up. In India's border districts especially in Assam, Bihar, UP and other parts of the North-East and Bengal, the ISI bogey is often a cover to shield brutal rights' violations.

Teesta Setalvad co-editor *Communalism Combat* argues that the ISI bogey serves two purposes argues, it keeps certain sections of the population, Indian Muslims on the defensive and serves as a smokescreen for declining professional standards of the police force. The cover story 'The ISI- The Demon that we feed' exposed how the media uncritically reproduces the prejudiced statements of the para-military forces in analyzing the influence on young Muslim minds of *madrassas* and puts out alarmist half baked figures on changing demographic profiles of districts.

The unsubstantiated statements of political leaders reported by the media damn the Muslims as ISI agents and the *madrassas* as hot beds of terrorist subversion. For example, fFormer Rajasthan Chief Minister, Bhairon Singh

Shekhawat's claimed at a press conference that 12,000 ISI agents were operating in the border districts of Rajasthan. *The Hindu* (Jan 13, 2001) reported his statement that 'traitors' (Muslims) who had helped the Pakistani army in 1965 and 1971 were active again. He "alleged" that 240 madrassas operating in the border areas were the hot beds of fanaticism and Pakistani agents were teaching there. There is no substantiation of his claim. The report does carry an editorial qualification - that this is the first instance of Muslims in Rajasthan being accused of cooperating with the ISI and assisting Pakistan in the wars.

In this final section, I want to essentially focus on how the 'India, a state of siege' syndrome is worked through the media becoming an accomplice of the intelligence agencies. Sections of the mass media are implicated in representing the privileged perspectives of the intelligence agencies as established facts using phrases which have come to be a classic of journalese - 'said to be'. Whether it is the reportage of north east conflicts, the recent Indo Bangladesh border crisis (See *Himal Magazine* May 2001)or the activities of the ubiquitous ISI-RAW networks, privileged perspectives – read derived from intelligence agency sources –are camouflaged as fact.

Take a recent *TOI* Guwahati datelined story 'N-E Rebels die in blast at Banga tryst' which reports a bloodbath in a Bangladesh hotel claiming several lives of representatives of extremist outfits of the northeast, resulting from a fall out between rebel groups. On the basis of unnamed 'reliable sources' we are informed of a meeting in the Shah hotel somewhere on 'Bangladeshi soil'. Reliable sources" are quoted that 15 'extremists' were injured and several succumbed, though the exact number or names not known. The new Bangladesh government is trying to hush it up, it is said. Reports in the Bangladesh press –*Dainik Inqulab* –obligingly described it as a gas pipe explosion. Furthermore the correspondent adds "*It may be mentioned* that several militant groups operating from safe houses and camps in Bangladesh for several years now under the official patronage of the ISI. *It is well known* that several top ULFA leaders have invested in real estate...."(emphasis added)

The information may or may not be false, but the process of reporting clearly is flawed. It is reporting at a distance- based on non verifiable intelligence agencies inputs. The framing is imbued with the correspondent's prejudices vis a vis the representation of the 'extremists', the Bangla press and India – Bangladesh relations under BNP government. The construction of sequence of events and the suggestion and motivation is taken directly from intelligence sources.

The implications of the public discourse of suspect communities, especially of the Muslim community, in the changing terms of a militarized Hindu nationalist discourse is fatally visible in the polarised public sphere of Gujarat and the carnage there. However, the national media reportage of the Gujarat carnage, its exposure of state complicity in the violence and the genocidal nature of the attacks on Muslims in Gujarat- testifies to the possibility and capacity of a non communal national print and electronic media to contest the making of an exclusivist Hindu nationalist public sphere. The challenge is for the national media to withstand the anti democratic militarist impulse justified in the context of national security and the paradigm of a weak –strong state.

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