

Is Peace Journalism Possible in Indian Journalism? Perceptions of a Select Few Indian Journalists

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Abstract

The present study is the first ever attempt to discern if peace journalism, by far the most well-known in media studies for being largely devoted to media portrayals of external conflicts between nations, could be applied to the Indian media in the context of expanding Indian journalism since globalization. The study is also the first ever approach to shed light on India's past ethos, drawn from its spiritual texts and discourses, and to delineate the long history of Indian journalism (Murthy, 2010; 2017) which constantly violated the practice of peace advocated in the ancient Indian spiritual texts. Adopting a multi-perspectival approach combining both hermeneutics and discourse methods as applicable to interviews, the study elicited answers to an unstructured questionnaire from some prominent Southern journalists. The findings suggest that the Indian journalists' view of 'peace journalism', contrary to how it was understood to sound in the West, is not relevant to Indian journalism by scope, definition, and extent.

Keywords

Peace Journalism, Conflict Promotion, Sensationalism and Hype, Market-driven Journalism, Indian Journalism, Mindful Journalism, Media Culture, Newsroom Cultures.

Resum

Aquest estudi és un primer intent de destriar si el periodisme de pau, el més conegut de lluny en els estudis dels mitjans de comunicació, ja que està dedicat sobretot a les representacions mediàtiques dels conflictes externs entre nacions, es podria aplicar als mitjans de comunicació indis en el context de l'expansió del periodisme indi des de la globalització. També és una primera aproximació per abocar llum sobre l'ethos de l'Índia en el passat, extret dels seus textos i discursos espirituals, i dibuixar la llarga història del periodisme indi, que transgredeix constantment la pràctica de la pau preconitzada en els antics textos espirituals indis. L'estudi adopta un enfocament multiperspectiva que combina tant l'hermenèutica com els mètodes del discurs aplicables a les entrevistes, per tal d'obtenir respostes a partir d'un qüestionari no estructurat a alguns periodistes destacats del sud de l'Índia. Els resultats suggereixen que la visió dels periodistes indis sobre el periodisme de pau, al contrari del que es creia a Occident, no és rellevant per al periodisme indi, tant pel seu abast com per la seva definició.

Paraules clau

Periodisme de pau, promoció de conflictes, sensacionalisme, periodisme orientat al mercat, periodisme indi, periodisme conscient, cultura dels mitjans, cultures de les sales de premsa.

Introduction

Peace journalism is all about contributing news to a sustainable, coexistent, and mutually inclusive society. Contribution to peace happens in several ways depending on the orientation of a country's topography and culture both within and without. For instance, under its ancient spirituality and its philosophical traditions, India is a peace-loving country that has given birth to peace apostles such as Goutam Buddha (563/480 BCE) and Mahatma Gandhi (2 October 1869–30 January 1948). Both these leaders have inspired several other leaders in subsequent generations to emulate the path of peace and non-violence. Yet, much violence reverberated across India both before and after the Partition for several reasons.

India, as a nation-state, is a much-disputed fact by postcolonial scholars (Linz & Stepan, 1996, for a nation-state debate thesis). These scholars argue that several marauders have invaded the country over several centuries, weaning away each time a part of what is notionally described as *Akhand Bharat* (Grand India) by the traditional and conservative think tanks of India. While violence from across borders was/is an undeniable fact, it is also true that India, the so-called *Akhand Bharat*, was/is never peaceful within its notional *Akhand Bharat* territories (Tharoor, 2016).

During pre-colonial times also, India, which was a compendium of hundreds of tiny nations, was a witness to continuous wars and conflicts between smaller and larger kingdoms. Despite numerous Indian philosophical and epic texts emphasising

the value of nonviolence and discouraging violence against humankind, Indian history bears rich testimony to incessant violence rather than the practice of nonviolence. Texts like Kautilya's (4th c. BCE) *Arthashastra* (Science of Economics) and Vishnu Sarma's (3rd c. BCE) *Panchatantra* (Five Strategies to Win) offered some peace models that contribute to a "sustainable peace", which in other words today can be construed as the earliest discourse of peace in the literature as well as in later forms of media communication.

In the present article, the author first offers a brief description of the Indian *ethos*, strongly advocating the need for peace in every sphere of Indian life. Secondly, the author moves on to the paradoxical role that the media have been continuously performing, both as perpetrators of conflicts as well as mediators of their resolutions since colonial times. It is this unique media strategy, very singular to India, which problematizes the whole relevance of peace journalism to Indian media. The author lays out that, in the process, the media could not eschew their market-driven journalistic ambitions, as argued by Sunanda Datta Ray (2000), Ajit Bhattacharjea (2000), and Sevanti Ninan (1995), which have become phenomenal in post-privatisation and globalisation (Murthy, 2010; Murthy et al., 2010; Murthy, 2017; 2018a). Thirdly, the author offers the views of highly regarded panellists for regional and national television channels on the possibility of Indian media taking recourse to peace journalism, contrary to their present practice of portraying every issue, major or minor, local or regional or national, as *a'la* war that could be viewed as a 'construct' or a '*tamasha*' (a funny spectacle or a melodrama) on the small screen. Lastly, the article has a critical discussion of why peace journalism is not yet a reality in India, which was once a symbol of peace.

Peace Discourse in India

Ahimsa (non-violence) means 'no injury' to self or others. It includes actions, verbal abuse, and thoughts filled with vengeance or revenge. Classical Hindu texts like the *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana* debate the principles of *Ahimsa* when one is faced with war and situations requiring self-defence. Historical Indian literature has in this way contributed to modern theories of just war and self-defence (Chapple, 1990). The discussions between Lord Krishna and the Kauravas, Vidura and Dhritarashtra, and Vidura and Pandavas in the *Mahabharata* dwell at length on the "sustainability of peace" as a matter of state policy. Similar discussions between Sugriva and Rama, Angad and Ravana, and Hanuman and Ravana in the great epic *Ramayana* offered ample material for developing a "theory of peace journalism" relevant to Indian as well as universal contexts. The essence of the *Upanishads*, the end of the *Vedas* known as *Vedanta*, is centred on *Ahimsa*. Walli's (1974) comprehensive study gives an overview of the whole idea of *Ahimsa*.

Even in the *Gita* (which is a compendium of 108 *Upanishads*),

Lord Krishna offers Arjuna a vivid description of the gains of non-violence and truth as essential principles of human life for sustainable peace, besides material and spiritual development. That does not mean to say that conflict could be forever absent, but it (the *Gita*) rather advises us on how to handle conflict management in terms of fighting for the 'truth' (Chapple, 1990; Tharu, 2020). It is here Buddhism differs slightly from the perception of Hinduism. Buddhism recommends absolute tolerance. Eminent scholars in India contend that Buddhism is an offshoot of Hinduism, though some may differ with this view.

Unfortunately, the importance of 'peace' as an ideal way of life always contrasts with the concurrent existence of perpetual 'violence' in India. Thus, the recurrent violence because of wars and conflicts between and among Indian kingdoms before the invasion by foreigners has rendered 'peace' an immensely scarce commodity (Tharoor, 2016). However, this is not a feature just at the State level. Individuals, social groups of various kinds, and then 'the State' itself—all have added to the conflicts on one or another of the issues that were taken advantage of both by the mighty Indian kings as well as foreigners. From the 17th to the 19th centuries, Indian kings such as Harshavardhana (590-647 CE), Allauddin Khilji (1296-1316 CE), and Akbar united India under a single empire.

In his latest work—*An Era of Darkness: The British Empire*—, Tharoor (2016) offers a lucid description of how this phenomenon led to the establishment of the British Empire in India. In the name of peace and stability, a series of wars have torn the countries of the subcontinent apart and turned the people who lived there into slaves for invaders from North Asia, West Asia, and the West. All of these annexations and kingdom restructurings resulted in heavy bloodshed and a massive loss of human life at a time when Buddhism, a religion strongly committed to nonviolence, was reigning at its peak in both India and Asia (Gombrich, 2006). This is the irony of India, which has laid the foundations for peace since times immemorial.

During colonial times, it was very hard to find even traces of terms such as 'peace' and 'non-violence' that lasted for over 200 years (Tharoor, 2016: 5-6; Durant, 1930: 7). Durant wrote in his famous work *The Case of India* that "when, in 1803, the invading British besieged the Fort at Agra, and their cannon struck near the beautiful Khass Mahal, or Hall of Private Audience, the Hindus surrendered at once, lest one of the most perfect creations of the human hand should be ruined like Rheims. Who were then more civilized?" (p. 6-7). The British built an empire driven by promoting conflicts between tiny nations, with military aid and support from the East India Company (Tharoor, 2016: 6). Tharoor writes: "In the hundred years after [*the War of*] Plassey, the East India Company, with an army of 260,000 men at the start of the nineteenth century and the backing of the British government and Parliament (many of whose members were shareholders in the enterprise), extended its control over most of India" (2016: 5-6).

Contrary to what most people think, Indian media, which first appeared in the 18th century in India in the form we know them

today, grew stronger and more important during the freedom struggle against British imperialism, and this trend continued into the post-colonial era. Tharoor (2016) writes: “Apologists for Britain, and many critics, tend to give the Empire credit for introducing the concept of the free press to India, starting the first newspapers and promoting a consciousness of the rights a free citizen was entitled to enjoy” (Tharoor, 2016: 95).

During colonial rule and afterwards, the Indian media did somersaults on issues like caste, region, religion, and politics, repeatedly bringing the country to the edge of a crisis while pretending to have salvaged it. They never lost sight of their market priorities, however (Murthy, 2010). For example, Ninan and Chattarji (2013) provide an invaluable detailed version of caste to regional conflicts promoted by the media. In many instances, the media act as perpetrators of conflicts as well as agents of ‘conflict resolution’ between various partners of conflict (such as the Centre and State, ruling and opposition parties, gender struggles, communal violence, family conflicts, etc.). This questionable role of the media has never been the subject of discussion or study in the classroom.

The author argues that the liberalisation of the media economy led to new ways for owners to align and grow. “This resulted in the formation of new monopolies, leading to monopoly capitalism in which journalists must rework the ethics and values of their profession” (Murthy, 2018a: 91). It automatically converted newsrooms into ‘war rooms’, as outlined above, in the last decade.

The narrative of the ‘peace discourse in India’ in the foreground is essential, as Western audiences do not know that the ‘peace journalism’ that Professor Johan Galtung has churned out is a ‘synthesis’ of Eastern philosophy that combined Buddhism, Confucianism, Daoism, and Hinduism (Gunaratne et al., 2015). Nor do Indian journalists know it. Had they known it, the findings of their responses would have been different. While Vijay Darda (2020), a special correspondent for *The Indian Express* welcomed the introduction of ‘peace journalism’ into Indian media, Sasi Nair, the editor of *VIDURA* (a monthly journal of the reputed Hindu group of newspapers Chennai) would have not have raised doubts about its suitability for Indian media.

There is another reason for the mention of ‘Indian peace discourse’. At the beginning of this new millennium, three scholars of Sri Lankan origin, who began their early careers as journalists, did pathbreaking work in relating Buddhist ideas to journalism and mass communication. They are Dissanayake (1983), Gunaratne (2007), and Seneviratne (2012). Mark Pearson from Australia described their work as Mindful Journalism. It dealt with the relationship of the principles of the Four Noble Truths of Buddhism to journalism and mass communication. Though both Galtung (1985) and Gunaratne et al. (2015) veered around Buddhism to produce a different but balanced version of conflict resolution journalism, they could not avoid coining two different schools of journalism that disapproved of the present pursuit of aggressive and violent journalism. Peace journalism is also known by various names

but precludes ‘mindful journalism’. Surprisingly, Gandhi has been a key reference point in many works by Galtung (1955; 1985).

Literature survey

As mentioned in the foregoing, Johan Galtung (1985), an academic from Norway (which does not have any history of peace traditions like India had) originally conceived the concept of ‘peace journalism’ from the four Eastern philosophies as an ideal mode of reporting for the mainstream press in areas of conflict. According to him, Buddhism is such that no one can use it to justify direct and structural violence, war, and exploitation. He has simply applied the principles of these philosophies and religions to the journalism and mass communication fields, beginning with his widely known study on ‘the structure of foreign news’ in the mid-1960s (Galtung & Ruge, 1965). His peace research eventually culminated in the advocacy of a new approach to journalism called ‘peace journalism’ (PJ), in sharp contrast to ‘war journalism’ (WJ) or the current forms of West-centric journalism.

Galtung (1985) argued that Buddhism has tremendous potential as a source for pursuing ‘peace’ politics to a large extent untapped. At the same time, he pointed out that Buddhism has an inherent weakness in tolerating highly violent systems. Though Galtung recognised the focus of Buddhism on the improvement of ‘self’, he overlooked supplementing his peace journalism with the mental cultivation that Buddhism very much advocated (Gunaratne et al., 2015: 8). The reason is that Galtung developed his ‘peace journalism’ from the religion of Buddhism, while Gunaratne et al.’s ‘mindful journalism’ emanated from the core philosophy of Buddhism comprising 15 principles (Gunaratne, 2007, 2009).

According to Lynch and McGoldrick (2005), ‘peace journalism’ is when editors and reporters make choices—of what stories to report and how to report them—that create opportunities for society at large to consider and value non-violent responses to conflict (p. 5). Lynch (2014) argued that the “agency” available to journalists—the freedom to choose what to write—is constrained by the structures in which they work. However, journalism itself is a structure, and one to be reckoned with (p. 3). Lynch draws heavily on Dov Shinar’s work, the Galtung-inspired five-point model with emphasis on exploring the background to a story, giving voice to all parties, coming to creative conflict resolution, exposing lies on all sides, and drawing attention to peace stories and post-war developments (Ottensen, 2014: 382-385).

Galtung argued in 2006 that journalists should look into the causes of conflicts instead of just reporting on what happens during them (Falk, 2008). Scholars in this area identify four important characteristics of peace journalism: it is (i) conflict-oriented; (ii) truth-oriented; (iii) people-oriented; and (iv) solution-oriented. The advocates of peace journalism argue that

journalists who report to the mainstream press themselves act as 'gatekeepers' and should report only facts without inflating or bloating them. Hackett (2007: 75-78) argued that by virtue of its "structured subordination to (or imbrication with) the interests of political and economic elites, journalism can still chasten power and enable it to be controlled."

Thus, Lynch says that good journalism can work against journalism itself or at least against journalism as usual (2014: 7). He cites his empirical studies on Indonesia and presents the case of Ghana which tended to suppress free journalism once Kwame Nkrumah came to power in the aftermath of liberation from the British (Lynch & McGoldrick, 2005: xv).

Though Lynch has been a student of Johan Galtung and worked with him closely, how he missed the sight of Galtung's Buddhist approach to peace journalism is a big enigma. In his famous work, the *Global Standard for Reporting Conflict* (2014), one would not find a single mention of the Buddhist approach of Galtung anywhere. Mark Pearson, who named Gunaratne et al.'s work "Mindful Journalism", also hailed from Australia like Lynch. Lynch says that "in the context of reporting conflict, journalists, media activists, educators and scholarly researchers have, since the mid-1990s, been debating, teaching, advocating for and attempting to implement peace journalism, a deliberative creative strategy, conceived as a specific response to the policy implications of Galtung's (1965) study."

However, the assumed rejection of journalists' 'neutrality' and 'objectivity' has come under sharp criticism. Hanitzsch (2004) contested Galtung's model of 'peace journalism' and described it as a pack of "myths and fallacies". One influential critique of peace journalism scholarship has been that it regards audiences as a "passive mass that needs to be enlightened by virtue of right and proper reporting," asserted Hanitzsch (2008: 75). Loyn, a BBC correspondent (2007), strongly opposed the kind of 'peace journalism' advocated by Lynch and McGoldrick (2005). Loyn argued that peace journalism's opposite is "good" journalism, which traditionally relies on objectivity to uncover a version of the truth that is less relativistic than that produced by the "journalism of attachment" (Loyn, 2007: 2). However, it must be remembered here that Lynch and McGoldrick have offered a fair modicum of prescriptions to journalists to avoid escalation of 'conflict' and 'violence' due to reporting. Even so, Majid Tehranian (2002) has provided ten valuable commandments to diffuse the escalation of 'conflict' and 'violence' through the reporting of both internal and external conflicts.

Ottosen (2007), despite admiring and supporting Galtung's theory of 'peace journalism', opposed his (Galtung's) text-based model for underestimating the visual aspects of war and peace reporting. He, along with his colleague Stig A. Nohrstedt suggested critical analysis of visual aspects of reporting conflict to supplement Galtung's 'peace journalism' model. However, Samuel Peleg's defence of peace journalism dismisses the contention of Hanitzsch (2004) that 'objectivity' is the most important issue to worry about. According to Peleg, regarding 'the objectivity position', reporting what you see is not the most

important issue when the main point of a story often is what you don't see. Thus, he preferred to differ from Loyn's position. More or less, he has taken the line of Lynch and McGoldrick's (2005) prescriptions for war reporting journalism.

Media researcher Wilhelm Kempf (2007), who used the peace journalism model in his research in Yugoslavia, basically supports its framework, even though he criticizes the book written by Lynch and McGoldrick (2005) wherein they in turn criticise Loyn's position on 'objectivity' (2007: 4). Turning away from the call for 'objectivity', as suggested by Lynch and McGoldrick (2005) and Hackett (2006), not only jeopardises the peace journalism project's acceptance in the journalistic community but also twists peace journalism into a form of "advocacy journalism" which leads directly to public relations and propaganda and can erode the trust its recipients have in peace journalism (Shinar & Kempf, 2007: 7).

Tehrani (2002), a renowned communication scholar in Islamic communication, argued while analysing the reporting of 9/11 that "ethically responsible" journalism is a *sine qua non* of peace journalism. He advocates a shift of focus from journalist-centric ethics to institutional ethical frameworks, which need to have international agreements among themselves to ensure that war reporting becomes institutionally responsible and accountable. He further calls for pluralism in media structures at the regional, national, and global levels to achieve pluralism in content.

Hussain (2016) studied the media coverage of the Taliban in Pakistan. He observed that in a conflict situation where national interests are involved, the media become nationalistic and patriotic, leaving behind the considerations of quality and good journalism. Abdul-Nabi (2017) says that the peace journalism model is a "rebellious form" and an "international reform movement" that aims to change the professional standards of traditional journalism.

It is surprising that despite Galtung's proposed model of peace journalism gaining wider acceptability at the height of the dichotomy between war journalism (WJ) and peace journalism (PJ), it continued to raise several theoretical and epistemological questions across practitioners of journalism in the West. It is also equally astonishing to note that a model of peace journalism has stemmed from a scholar from Norway, which has no known philosophical or spiritual *ethos* like India advocating for peace and nonviolence. Nor does Norway have any history of bloody wars in the past. Alternatively, Gunaratne, Pearson, and Senarath (2015) have proposed a model of 'mindful journalism' that offers new dynamics of news ethics for positive reporting in the digital era. Inspired by fundamental Buddhist ethical principles, mindful journalism suggests that the profession of journalism can adopt Buddhist strategies to add clarity, fairness, and equity to news decision-making and provide a moral compass for journalists facing ethical dilemmas in their work. Their practice is the most effective way to remove conflicts and the associated flow of agony from news coverage and media reporting (Murthy Book Review, 2016).

Even today, Norway continues to be the safest place on earth for journalists, while India occupies a position that poses a terrible threat to their safety and security (Murthy, 2018b). At the same time, the unfair way media outlets and journalists stir up social conflicts both inside and outside borders goes against what most people want. This paradox in Indian media centrally engages the present study.

From the foregoing literature survey, it becomes amply clear that the present state of journalism in India is stuck somewhere in the continuum between two emerging schools of thought on journalism: peace journalism and mindful journalism. Both of these new schools of thought want a more holistic approach to journalism and do not like how news is becoming more commercialized, sensationalized, and commoditized through stories that create or exacerbate conflicts and crises.

This question arises here as the mass Indian media have been performing a dubious role by relaying images of every debate as a conflict/war similar to conflicts across borders as portrayed in the Western media. Such a recurrent relay of images of political leaders “wearing royal attire and crossing swords” or “sporting glances of anger, outrage, and burst” against their opponents in a “face-to-face framing” has been a matter of concern for academics seeking to see the Indian media adopt a peace model that minimises growing violence and conflict in society.

Based on the situation in the Indian media that was described above, the following research questions come to mind:

Research Questions

RQ.1: Is it possible to relate the Western model of peace journalism to the Indian media that does not follow the Indian media *ethos* either?

RQ.2: Is competitive journalism, as implicated in Indian media behaviour, justified in portraying every public issue or political issue as an “*a la*” war?

The rest of the article examines these questions from different perspectives on the subject.

Description of the terms of discourse

“*a la*” war: It conceives a situation that is similar to or in the manner of war, but does not actually amount to war using weapons to kill people during internal or external crises.

Negativity and grief: Negativity is one of the basic news values, as “bad news is sometimes more newsworthy”. But the tendency to portray even what needs to be a neutral or objective report in a negative manner has assumed the form of an unbearable crisis. Similarly, sharing or circulating or conveying the news of the grief of an individual or society to a larger body of the masses or audience is another pathetic trend along with negativity these days in media reporting. As a result, the audience is constantly bombarded with news that agitates their minds and hearts.

Market-driven news and journalism: Market-driven news and market-driven journalism are, for the most part, interchangeable. This term refers to journalism that is written for a specific group of people. It can also mean that the news being reported is meant to impress those groups (McManus, 1994).

Competitive journalism: Conceived as the journalism that enables a particular media house to run first and fast with the latest soft news, defeating all other competitive media houses in the race.

Unstructured questionnaire: It collects qualitative data from the interviewees. This type of questionnaire in this case has a basic structure and some branching questions but nothing that limits the answers of a respondent. The questions are more open-ended. It is very helpful in qualitative communication research.

Methodology

This study is descriptive and grounded in qualitative analysis, adopting both hermeneutics and discourse methods as relevant to the interviews through an unstructured questionnaire. Using an unstructured questionnaire, the author opens up a horizon for the responses of the interviewees and for cross-questioning. The study analysed the interview-based statements of five prominent journalists (their original names have been deleted) who were also panel speakers for regional as well as national electronic media channels in India.

Eric Freedman (2017) has adopted this method for his research ‘Journalism after Jail: coping with the trauma of imprisonment’, published in *Media Asia*. Similarly, Somani and O’Boyle (2018) have adopted the same method in their latest work on ‘TV News in India: Journalists in Transition’, published in *Critical Perspectives on Journalistic Beliefs and Actions: Global Experiences* (see Freedman et al., 2018). Both science and social science agree that research methods used by well-known scholars and their predecessors should be used.

Sarah J. Tracy (2020), a renowned qualitative research theoretician, has stated that “interviews are valuable for providing information and background on issues that cannot be observed or efficiently accessed [...]. Interviews may also access information on past events, rare occasions, dastardly deeds, clandestine trysts, disasters, or buried emotions” (p. 79). She has not stipulated any particular number of people that one has to conduct interviews with to validate the findings. Indeed, the numbers do not count, but the content that flowed from a select few would go far to establish the findings.

Questions raised in the interviews

The questions posed to the above-mentioned journalists through their mobile phones were open-ended to maintain a continuum of questioning. They were all almost similar to the

questions raised by Western scholars in the West. However, this is the first ever attempt in India to see whether the doubts or scepticism raised by Western scholars on the success of peace journalism as a model for mainstream journalism is relevant to India.

The questions raised included a wide range, beginning with the relevance of the peace model of journalism to Indians. Why were newsrooms transformed into war rooms at the turn of this millennium in a country that has had a strong *ethos* of peace and non-violence since Vedic times? The study tried to get journalists to talk about the most important question: What are media companies getting out of turning newsrooms into war rooms? Will it not just stir up the emotions of the general public (audiences) and give a bad impression of the country with a lot of bad news?

Panellists chosen for interviews

The journalists interviewed were: Journalist A, a former editor of *Prajasakti*, a daily newspaper published in Hyderabad; Journalist B, a psychologist and political analyst; Journalist C, a former news bureau chief at the *Deccan Chronicle*, and later resident editor of *Indian Express*, Hyderabad; Journalist D, a former correspondent of All India Radio, Hyderabad, and a political analyst, and Journalist E, a former political leader of the Loksatta party and a panel speaker. All these were also panellists for national channels though they are all based in Deccan, South India.

Journalists/panellists' discourse

As mentioned at the start, the Indian media needs to account for its failure to mitigate the spread of negativity and sorrow. It also has to explain its false pretensions of negotiating peace between conflicting groups. In recent times, Vijay Darda (2020), a special correspondent, has also raised some critical questions on the role of Indian media in fomenting crises rather than alleviating them (2020); "Should it report only the incidents?" Perplexed, Darda queried how the media could get down to the root of the problem and report the truth without further aggravating the conflict. The fact is that "the media is proving incapable of adjudicating its role properly," he added. He did not stop there. He explained further the scenario of the Indian media in relation to the majority of global media: "If a mob lynching is reported anywhere in India, different media groups take opposing stands. In trying to bring out the magnitude of the crime, they start promoting disharmony between the two communities. There are no attempts to indicate that they are trying to broker peace with their journalism. This is the case with not just India alone; the media all over the world lacks a peace agenda."

Asked about this kind of situation widely prevailing in India, Journalist C responded by saying that: "The Indian media is never as mentally mature as one finds with the Western media." But it was pointed out to him that even in the West or in the Middle East, the media failed to adopt 'peace journalism' and preferred to embrace 'war journalism'. The senior Journalist C

said that "In my view, peace journalism is a non-starter in India and I am even sceptical of the Indian media ever toeing the line of producing non-violent news." As a response to the persistent questions of the Indian media not adopting its past *ethos* of peace as embodied in Indian philosophy, which also contributed to the development of 'peace journalism' by Galtung, he said that "the current '*tamasha*' effect of portraying any issue in its worst 'violent' form on the small screen vis-à-vis the strong *ethos* of preaching and practising non-violence and peace in ancient India, was a consequence of the evolution of 'realism' divorced from the religious life of ancient prescriptions over time." Today, 'religion' and 'reality' are parallel lines, he argued, and do not impact each other. He also pointed out the growing religiosity in India on the one hand, and political and journalistic ethics drifting from non-violence, peace, and objectivity to violence, subjectivity, and bias on the other. This was in agreement with what Vijay Darda (2020) precisely pointed out in his write-up in *The Indian Express*.

When the same issues of concern were placed before Journalist A, a renowned Marxist analyst, he responded by saying that 'peace journalism' is not possible in developing countries like India. He expressed views on peace journalism from the Marxist perspective. He went further, putting the crux of the issue in the laps of the western countries. He said that war and conflict between different strata of society, such as class enemies (capitalists vs. labour and/or feudalists vs. labour), is a never-ending process in a developing and mixed economy like India. He also added that even assuming that 'peace journalism' is a luxury of developed countries like Norway or Sweden, these countries could not foster a similar ideology of media among other advanced nations like the USA and the UK. Much of the conflict in the world is largely due to the conflict-prone policies of the USA, the UK, and the former USSR, besides international funding agencies. Surprisingly, this issue is not discussed threadbare in the works of either Galtung (1965) or Lynch and McGoldrick (2005).

However, Lynch pointed out similar gaps in the peace journalism discourse, citing the contentions of Liz Fawcett (2002) and David Loyn (2007). Lynch argued that "structuration is always already underway in journalism, which therefore requires the adoption of a deliberate remedial strategy to counter its effects. In this case, familiar patterns of 'news flow' would tend, unless compensated for, to produce representations of global governance issues skewed towards the perspectives and interests of the rich world at the expense of the poor" (2008). This agrees exactly with the views of Journalist A. He did not have a positive view of the media of these nations. According to him, the media of the USA and the UK contributed to the larger share of conflict promotion and violent images of the ongoing Gulf wars and Afghan-Taliban conflicts. He adds that just as entertainment has become news, negativity and sadness have also become news, akin to marketable commodities for the media.

When asked about the visual presentation of 'conflict' images

on television screens for every issue or any issue, Journalist D expressed the view that it was due to the media's intentions to reach larger sections of the audience, besides the "market-driven journalism trends of the US" which turned out to be an emulative ideal for the sustainability of visual media. He further added that the "imagery of conflicts and 'violence' shown in the frames of Indian television, especially in Telugu television, is part of 'sensationalism' and 'hype'. It is just a canvas; the real stuff comes from the different parts of society."

When a particular query was raised from the author's end about whether he meant the influence of Gerbner's cultivation theory (1969) in all such projections, he agreed this was so and said that Gerbner's theory was a corollary to marketing strategies of the US and UK markets that were emulated by the Third World media including India. Do you mean to say that the cultivation theory effect has altered the attitudes of the public? He responded by stating that "over decades of drifting time, the attitudes and aptitudes of Indian people have drastically changed, and people seem to enjoy such violent imagery and abusive verbal exchange among panellists as they are used to more and more such debates in the newsrooms of Indian media houses." Asked further about the indispensability of such images of violence and abusive debates in the media, he said that "whatever they are in a marketing sense, the issues can be handled devoid of aggressive postures of the elements involved in the reporting."

Asked as to why 'peace journalism', which emerged from the peace *ethos* of India at one time, could not be a guiding spirit to Indian journalism, Journalist B, a psychologist and political analyst, responded by stating that "most regional media in India have no occasion to report on border conflicts." This view is in agreement with the view of Journalist C. He explained that "internal conflicts of castes, communities could not be treated on a par with cross border conflicts." He supported the view of Journalist C that peace journalism, as one could gather from the existing literature, stemmed from the reporting methods of the ongoing conflicts between nations in the Caribbean, Latin America, and the Middle East. He said that 'peace journalism' would not apply straight away to India despite India having a strong peace *ethos*.

To a question about whether the portrayal of violent images in Indian media is not akin to Western imagery, he replied in the negative. In Journalist C's view, the magnitude of damage to properties and human losses found in the Gulf War or the Afghanistan-Taliban conflict is in no way comparable with what one perceives as a conflict both in politics and in newsroom discussions in India. However, he concurred with Journalist D's view that "war-like images" or "aggressive postures" akin to war/conflict are unwarranted on Indian television screens. Regarding the question of Galtung's suggested objectivity and five-point model as a condition precedent for good journalism, he clarified that there is "sensationalism" and "hype" and an absence of neutrality and objectivity with regard to incidents of conflict in India, and that the structuration of media (see Lynch

2014) is indispensable in developing countries like India. Like Loyn and Hanitzsch, he argued that there is no such thing as absolute neutrality or objectivity. Situational judgments vary from journalist to journalist. "What one journalist perceives as a neutral report may not be 'neutral' to another journalist," he added. In a country like India, where pluralism exists at every turn of life (see Majid Tehranian's ten-point model), it is impossible to stipulate harsh or rigid guidelines to journalists on "neutrality" and "objectivity" he asserted.

Journalist E, a political activist and commentator, straightaway blamed the West for the present trends in the transmission of negativity and sorrow, besides the violent imagery on background screens and abusive discussions, constituting a '*tamasha*' in television newsrooms. To the pertinent question of whether he deemed 'peace journalism' relevant to India, he answered that "it is also a Western product that did not somehow gain popularity in the West itself, let alone India." When the relevance of the strong *ethos* of peace embodied in the Indian scriptures was pointed out to him, he countered that the "modernity" that crept into the education and training of journalists and media management created a disjuncture with the past. He, however, agreed that transmitting violent images and conflicts, riots and clashes, murders and rapes with or without dramatization can certainly be part of 'conflict journalism' or 'war journalism' but does not necessitate the invocation of 'peace journalism' of Galtung's original thesis in *The Structure of Foreign News* (1965).

At the end of the journalists' and panellists' discourse, it appeared that there were sharp differences over accepting 'peace journalism' (PJ), which arose in the West, as an eventual panacea for the Indian media in reducing the transmission of negativity, sorrows, and flare-ups that are impacting on the psyches of Indian multitudes. The overall analysis offers a lot of diversity in the views of the panellists reported here.

Conclusions

The present study, though the first ever on the relevance and application of 'peace journalism' to India, offers clear evidence of the following facts. Firstly, India as a nation-state has an indelible religious and spiritual *ethos* that suggests peace and non-violence as an unalienable human function, with its spiritual texts offering numerous models of peace discourse. Secondly, despite such strong philosophical traditions, the internal conflicts and wars that marred Indian history have disturbed the much-advocated 'peace' and 'non-violence' idealisations. Thirdly, despite all this inflicting a deep injury on the psyche of Indians, the Indian media—a product of the West in education, training, and management—have continued to indulge in promoting conflicts and mediating them later, as Vijay Darda rightly pointed out, taking advantage of differences and dissensions existing within the caste, religion, region, and politics of the State as a nation.

The present study not only offers an overview of the above but also establishes through the interviews with the expert panellists interviewed that 'peace journalism' is impracticable. An inference that could be drawn from the foregoing views of all the panellists is that "there is no direct positive relationship between the expanding media ecology and culture, and the probability of implementing peace journalism" in India. Firstly, many scholars are of the view that peace journalism is relevant to nations that are marred by both external and internal conflicts, such as Syria, Iran, Iraq, Yemen, Israel, Palestine, Egypt, Turkey, etc., leading to terrible damage to property and engendering huge human losses. Thus, the panellists see the relevance of 'peace journalism' (PJ) as a substitute for 'war journalism' (WJ) only about the external conflicts of Western countries (cited above).

Many do not see 'peace journalism' as a model with wider applications for a country like India, despite the latter having a number of internal conflicts. The imagery of *a'la* war in the backdrop of television newsrooms, vulgarity, slang, abuse, and aggressive posturing go to constitute a '*tamasha*' of Indian newsrooms but do not reflect the magnitude and seriousness of the 'actual war imagery' reporting during the external conflicts in the West or the Middle East.

Though many of the scholars mentioned above agree that the negativity and anguish caused by the current trends of media transmission in India are problematic, the relevance of peace journalism to the Indian media scenario is dubious. Further, growing changes in the attitudes and aptitudes of people as a consequence of the influence of cultivation theory towards watching warlike imagery on the television screen inside newsrooms accompanied by violence, vulgarity, obscenity, and aggressiveness may also be one reason as to why and how "conflict and violent" newsroom discussions and debates have become marketable commodities. However, all of the panellists agreed that these could be avoided, but they were sceptical about whether it would happen given media management's current attitudes.

Thus, peace journalism is looked upon as an 'ideal' rather than a phenomenon compatible with the current trends in the Indian media economy, its peace *ethos* notwithstanding. Hence, the inverse relationship between the propositions of peace journalism and the media economy becomes more apparent and a reality. Even though media culture, the economy, and the environment are all expanding, it is unlikely that peace journalism will enter the Indian media scene at this point.

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