Media and securitisation: A review

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Securitisation is the public perception of an issue or phenomenon as an existential threat to society. Except in the extreme case of war, an issue becomes a security issue whenever the public begins to perceives it as such.

Such a security perception gives political actors the legitimacy to address an issue as a security issue and use instruments of governance at their disposal to deal with it. These instruments are then presented as the most efficient method of ameliorating the security threat without having to change the structure of the polity.

The media plays a role in moulding public perception of securitisation through the language and frames it uses to describe a particular issue as an existential threat to the public and the polity.[1] The issue could range from political and economic security to threats to cultural homogeneity and social stability.

This paper focuses on the media's role in the securitisation of the polity, masculinisation of security, media as a platform for the issues of human security (food, environment, health, etc.), and the security of the media itself.

Media and securitisation of polity

An issue does not lend itself to securitisation in a modern democracy unless there is a public perception of it as a security threat. The media achieves this not only through the process of describing and analysing the issue but by quoting expert opinion that presents a development or problem as a security issue.[2] Headlines and the careful use of photographs in the media orient the public towards specific ways of thinking.

By orienting the public to a security character of an issue, it begins to be perceived as a risk that needs immediate mitigation.[3] Such a perception need not only be about the prospect of military confrontation that would threaten the sovereignty of the nation.[4]

It could be about migrants threatening economic security by taking away local jobs. In Europe the rise of right-wing political movements and parties is linked to the perceptions that Muslim migrants threaten the cultural homogeneity of predominantly Christian Europe. In India a perception has been created that the Hindu majority of the country is threatened by its Muslim minority. In Assam, the growth of ethnic nationalist politics and right-wing Hindu politics is linked to creating a perception that Assamese

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[1] Alberto Tagliapietra, Media and Securitisation: The Influence on Perception, Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI), Rome, Italy, 2021. https://www.iai.it/sites/default/files/iaip2134.pdf

[2] Barry Buzan, Ole Wæver and Jaap de Wilde, Security. A New Framework for Analysis, Boulder/ London, Lynne Rienner, 1998, p. 24, 26, quoted by Tagliapietra, op. cit.

[3] Thierry Balzacq, Sarah Léonard, and Jan Ruzicka, 'Securitization' revisited: theory and cases, International Relations, Volume 30, Issue 4. https://doi.org/10.1177/0047117815596590

[4] Clara Eroukhmanoff, Securitisation Theory: An Introduction. January 14, 2018. https://www.e-ir.info/2018/01/14/securitisation-theory-an-introduction/

culture is threatened by Bangladeshi Muslim immigrants in India. In Sri Lanka and Myanmar, the account is about a threat to Buddhist culture.

The media generated securitisation perception reduces a complex issue to a simple one of an existential threat that is easy to understand. Once the issue has reduced a complex structural reality into a security issue, it facilitates political actors to step in and present themselves as the only ones with the instruments and policy tools capable of resolving it.[5]

The media can either be used by political actors to create this perception or it can itself become a securitisation actor.[6]

In the case of Bangladeshi immigrants allegedly taking away the due share of local Indian citizens[7], the media has by and large been used by political actors to polarise the polity for electoral purposes. The Indian Home Minister calling them "termites"[8], for example. This is also true of right-wing Hindu politicians in describing the Rohingya migrants in India as potential terrorists because they are Muslims.[9]

However the media often becomes a securitisation actor by its own volition. When the media is under pressure to be jingoistic or nationalistic, it often tends to adopt the role of a voluntary securitisation actor. War need not be only against an enemy country but could be a war against an identifiable enemy such as in the "War on Terrorism", a global counter-terrorism campaign launched by the US in the wake of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks.

The media as a securitisation actor has long been evident in the reportage about Jammu and Kashmir[10], especially when it comes to holding India's bête noire, Pakistan, responsible for the woes of the Indian State in the region.

The most recent example of the Indian media becoming a securitisation actor was seen in the north-eastern state of Manipur. Since May 2023, the Imphal Valley based (ethnically largely Meitei) media and the Hill districts based (ethnically largely Kuki/Zomi) media have competed with each other in building and popularising a

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[5] Ibid.

[6] Alberto Tagliapietra, op.cit.

[7] Illegal Migration from Bangladesh: Deportation, Border Fences and Work Permits, IDSA Monograph Series No. 56 December 2016. https://idsa.in/system/files/monograph/monograph56.pdf

[8] The Hindu, Bangladeshi migrants are like termites: Amit Shah, September 22, 2018. https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/bangladeshi-migrants-are-like-termites-amit-shah/article25017064.ece. And, The Wire, In Bengal, Amit Shah Once Again Brings up 'Infiltration From Bangladesh', 24 October https://thewire.in/communalism/eyes-on-2026-west-bengal-elections-amit-shah-once-again-talks-of-infiltration-from-bangladesh

[9] The Hindu, Rohingya a threat to security, says BJP, August 18, 2022. https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/mha-in-the-right-on-rohingya-resettlement-plan-says-bjp-after-kerfuffle/article65779640.ece

[10] Syed Nazakat, Indian Media Coverage of Kashmir: When Stories Clash with National Interest, Asia Pacific Media Educator, Vol. 22, Issue 1. https://doi.org/10.1177/1326365X1202200107

securitisation story along ethnic lines, each projecting the other as an existential threat.[11]

Either way, by securitising an issue these political actors and their facilitator media end up converting a political and structural issue into an issue of policy and security governance. And security issues are best addressed by security specialists and security actors – the police, armed forces and allied actors.

Thus, illegal Bangladeshi immigrants are to be dealt with by enumerators of the National Register of Citizens[12] and penal machinery, including setting up detention camps. Rohingya immigrants are confined to closely monitored camps and even deported by the police. The Meitei-Kuki conflict is left in the hands of the Assam Rifles one day and the Central Reserve Police Force and Manipur Police Commandos the other.[13] The securitization of the ethnic strife in Manipur has led to civil society mobilising for security on such a large scale that non-state security actors are now armed in a bid to provide security to their respective ethnic communities.[14]

The media's role in framing and building a particular issue as one of security, thus suggest that there is only one set of solutions and one set of "experts" who can address it. If it were framed as a complex, structural and humanitarian issue, the issue would open itself to a different set of solutions, different approaches and different actors which could have a role in resolving it.[15]

Framing as a security issue facilitates technocrats and security experts as being best suited to deal with the problem. It creates a demand for security often by fomenting social hysteria and weaponising the issue. The alternative framing can present the same issue as a human, social and complex political issue – without creating an atmosphere of fear and apprehension -- requiring complex, structural, socio-economic and humanitarian solutions relying on political processes.

Media and masculinisation of security

The terrorism originating from Pakistan and Narendra Modi's rise in Indian politics is a good way of looking at masculinisation of security.

The political discourse around the rise of Modi was about the need for a 'masculine' leader whose style of governance would embody efficiency, dynamism and total devotion to the defence of India that was eagerly promoted by the media. He described

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[11] Editors' Guild of India: Report of the fact-finding mission on media's reportage of the ethnic violence in Manipur, September2, 2023. https://editorsguild.in/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/EGI-report-on-Manipur.pdf

[12] National Register of Citizens, Government of Assam, https://www.nrcassam.nic.in/wha_nrc.html

[13] The New Indian Express, CRPF battalions to replace units of Assam Rifles in violence-hit Manipur, September 10, 2024. https://shorturl.at/CrGou

[14] The Hindu, Assam Rifles files sedition case against Imphal civil society group, July 22, 2023. https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/assam-rifles-registers-case-against-influential-civil-society-group-in-imphal/article67106762.ece

[15] Clara Eroukhmanoff, op. cit.

himself as the worshipper of Mother India (*Ma Bharati*), claiming that every atom in his body was dedicated to *Ma Bharati*.[16]

In his election campaign in 2014, the manliness of his leadership was emphasised by his "56-inch chest" and claims that he was able and willing to bear the harshest burden[17] in the service of "Mother India". The attempt was to contrast Modi's leadership style from that of his predecessor Manmohan Singh who was indirectly portrayed as an "effeminate" leader unable to take on external threats like Pakistan and China, as well internal threats ('Muslims terrorists').[18] Media played a crucial and uncritical role in the masculine leadership image of Modi gaining currency.[19]

The aggressive masculinisation of security has continued during Modi's tenure in government leading to the projection of "surgical strikes" across the Line of Control in Jammu and Kashmir[20] and in Modi proclaiming that he had ushered in a regime which killed terrorists by pulling them out of their homes: "Today, India doesn't send dossiers. *Aaj Bharat ghar mein ghus ke marta hai* [Today India kills terrorists on their own turf]."[21]

Modi's masculinisation of security has been achieved both by constructing an image (56-inch chest, etc.) as well through performativity (e.g. 'surgical strikes' and 'killing terrorists on their own turf').

Scholars of masculinisation of security[22] have also pointed out that this is also achieved through expanding the trope of the gendered family onto the nation (e.g. referring to India as *Ma Bharati* or Mother India). They point out that Modi like all populist leaders, conceptualises "the nation in need of security as a family that needs to be protected by a masculine protector." In using the emotive aspects of the family: "The rhetoric of protection brings together love, faith, pride, and the typical qualities of discipline, force, and power associated with a masculine strongman." Also, "Modi's construction of a masculine state as a protector against cross-border terrorism resonates with global counterterrorism discourses post-9/11 that legitimate pre-emptive security measures and suspension of civil liberties by a masculine state to rein in terrorism."[23]

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[16] PM Modi calls himself pujari of Maa Bharati, moneycontrol.com, https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=1105095720684999

[17] Sagnik Dutta and Tahir Abbas, Protecting the people: populism and masculine security in India and Hungary, Journal of political ideologies, https://doi.org/10.1080/13569317.2024.2337181

[18] Sanjay Srivastava, Modi-Masculinity: Media, Manhood, and "Traditions" in a Time of Consumerism, Television & New Media, https://doi.org/10.1177/1527476415575498

[19] Ibid.

[20] India's 'surgical strikes' in Kashmir: Truth or illusion? bbc.com, 23 October 2016. https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-37702790

[21] We don't send dossiers on terror; we kill terrorists by entering their homes, The Hindu, April30, 2024, https://www.thehindu.com/elections/lok-sabha/we-dont-send-dossiers-on-terror-we-kill-terrorists-by-entering-their-homes-pm-modi/article68124858.ece

[22] Sagnik Dutta and Tahir Abbas, op.cit.

[23] Ibid.

Modi as the dutiful son of Mother India (rather than the daughter) not only protects his mother but also guards the nation as its *Chowkidar*.

The image of the *chowkidar*, usually a man with a weapon which he alone can use to guard the family house and property, also projects the masculinity of Modi the protector[24]. With his party supporters claiming that they too were *Chowkidars,* the masculinisation of security was sought to be universalised.

The gendered family and the love, faith, pride, and responsibility towards it merge with and rationalise the strong leader who is needed to exercise discipline, power, violence and force to protect the family. Citizens are urged and expected to go along with it as a part of their 'duty' towards the nation.

Even before he became prime minister Modi talked of "duty to Mother India"[25] by declaring, "Not only Modi, every child and citizen owes a debt to Mother India…it is his duty to repay the debt whenever an opportunity arises. A doctor repays his debt to Mother India when he saves lives…A teacher does so by teaching. Everybody has to repay this debt…I hope Mother India gives her blessings and nobody goes away without paying this debt."

Once Modi became the prime minister, this was to transform into a debate of fundamental rights vs. fundamental duties of a citizen towards the nation.

Modi has repeatedly talked of emphasising duties over rights[26] claiming that once citizens performed their duties, rights will automatically be protected: "Everybody's rights are embedded in our duties. If I carry out my duty as a teacher, then doesn't it safeguard the rights of the students? …Then there will be no quarrel between rights and duties. Mahatma Gandhi used to say *moolbhoot adhikar nahi hote hai, moolboot toh kartavya hote hai* (rights are not fundamental, it is duty that is fundamental), and if we fulfil our duties honestly, no one will have to ask anything for their rights because their rights are protected in them."[27]

Lest there be any doubt that the tilt towards duties first and rights later argument is one of securitisation, it must be noted that the Constitutional amendment introducing fundamental duties into the Indian Constitution was made under another Indian leader who was a masterful securitisation actor, Indira Gandhi during the Emergency when fundamental rights were suspended.

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[24] Ibid.

[25] After PM poser, Modi talks of 'Mother India', Indian Express, April 5, 2013. https://indianexpress.com/article/cities/ahmedabad/after-pm-poser-modi-talks-of-mother-india/

[26] Five times PM Modi emphasised on duties, Apoorva Mandhani. The Print, 09 September, 2022. https://theprint.in/india/five-times-pm-modi-emphasised-on-duties/1122965/

[27] Pariksha Pe Charcha: Everybody's rights embedded in duties, PM Modi to students, Sukrita Barua, The Indian Express, January 21, 2020. https://indianexpress.com/article/education/pariksha-pe-charcha-everybodys-rights-embedded-in-duties-pm-modi-to-students-6226926/

Fundamental Duties were introduced by the 42nd Constitutional Amendment Act, 1976, by inserting Article 51-A into the Constitution of India. Initially, there were 10 fundamental duties: Respect the Constitution, the national flag, and the national anthem; cherish the noble ideals of the freedom struggle; uphold and protect the sovereignty, unity and integrity of India; defend the country and render national service when called; promote harmony and common brotherhood amongst all the people of India; preserve the rich heritage of the nation's composite culture; protect the natural environment and have compassion for living creatures; develop scientific temper, humanism and spirit of inquiry and reform; safeguard public property and abjure violence; strive for excellence in all individual and collective activity.

One more duty was added through the 86th Constitutional Amendment Act, 2002, calling upon parents and guardians to "provide opportunities for education of his child, or as the case may be, ward between the age of six and fourteen years".[28] Apparently, most of the fundamental duties were "borrowed" from the citizen's duties listed in the constitution of the erstwhile Union of Soviet Socialist Republic (USSR).

The then law minister H R Gokhale claimed that the chapter on fundamental duties was introduced to tackle that section of the population which showed no respect to the established legal order (i.e. did not accept Indira Gandhi's suspension of fundamental rights) and was meant to have "a sobering effect on these restless spirits who have had a host of anti--national, subversive and unconstitutional agitations".[29]

Indira Gandhi is a fine example of a woman actively masculinising politics and she is praised even today by proponents of a strong state for her leadership qualities, especially for tackling terrorism in Jammu and Kashmir[30] and carving Bangladesh out of Pakistan.[31]

The idea then as now was to subdue critical voices and make citizens the recipients and supporters of a security discourse of a masculine and authoritarian state.

By uncritical propagation of Modi's masculinist discourse of securitisation, the media helped in promoting a patriarchal notion of security with a masculine protector protecting the citizens like women and children, legitimising paternalism of the authoritarian state by subordinating citizens to the will of the masculine leader, and thereby helped to mask the abuse of state power in the name of securitisation[32], e.g. in Jammu and Kashmir and Manipur. As a result, all debate about autonomy within the

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[28] Fundamental Duties that PM Modi invokes were introduced by Indira Gandhi during Emergency, Apoorva Mandhani, The Print, 27 December, 2019. https://theprint.in/india/fundamental-duties-that-pm-modi-invokes-were-introduced-by-indira-gandhi-during-emergency/341221/

[29] Ibid.

[30] RSS praises Indira Gandhi for tough stand against terror, NDTV, Apr 07, 2012. https://www.ndtv.com/india-news/rss-praises-indira-gandhi-for-tough-stand-against-terror-475530

[31] Sudarshan slams Nehru, praises Indira, Business Standard, Feb 06 2013. https://www.business-standard.com/article/economy-policy/sudarshan-slams-nehru-praises-indira-105062001055_1.html

[32] Sagnik Dutta and Tahir Abbas, op.cit.

Union of India in Jammu and Kashmir or peoples' wishes and desires in India's northeast find no space in the securitisation perspective that dominates the media. Such accounts are willingly projected by the media as threatening the unity and integrity of India.

Media as a platform for security issues

Securitisation is, however, no longer a narrowly focused issue relating to threats to the security of the state which have to be tackled in terms of military solutions or for the sake of political stability.

The wider notion of securitisation present today includes human security (food, climate change, health, etc.), regional security, cultural security and the security of identity. Media has played and continues to play a role in expanding the concept of securitisation to include all the perceived threats as security threats.[33]

So in India, where Hinduism is the majority religion, the media is not averse to promoting the propaganda of the Hindu majoritarian political party by providing it a platform to argue that 'Hindus are in danger'[34], 'by 2050 (or some such date) India would become a Muslim-dominated state'[35], 'Muslims have launched 'love-jihad' against Hindus by marrying Hindu girls'[36] and that 'such people(who are a threat to the nation) can be recognised by their clothes'.[37]

By providing disproportional news space and TV time, barely mediated by alternative and contrary views, media has helped in making Muslim citizens of India the subjects of social suspicion.[38] It has facilitated their stigmatisation as the dangerous "other" and threat to national security and 'Indian' (meaning Hindu) society'.

It could be argued that the media plays its role in securitisation unknowingly – unaware of the consequences of its facilitating act.

The media contributes to creating an "exceptional realm" by drawing attention to an issue or a problem – framing it as a threat – exaggerating its dimensions and the urgency of dealing with it. In effect it creates an audience of citizens which is then encouraged to conclude that the 'security issue' is a sufficient threat to warrant

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[33] Clara Eroukhmanoff, op. cit.

[34] See, for example, Pooja George and Vedika Inamdar, Mainstream News Media and Majoritarian Violence in India, The Polis Project, December 9 and 2021, and, The Washington Post, Inside the vast digital campaign by Hindu nationalists to inflame India, September 26, 2023.
https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2023/09/26/hindu-nationalist-social-media-hate-campaign/

[35] NewsClick, "No, India will not become 'Muslim Rashtra'", October 30, 2021. https://www.newsclick.in/No-India-Will-not-Become-Muslim-Rashtra

[36] Andrea Malji and Syed Tahseen Raza, The Securitization of Love Jihad, Religions 2021, 12(12), 1074. https://doi.org/10.3390/rel12121074

[37] The Economic Times. Those indulging in arson 'can be identified by their clothes': Narendra Modi on anti-CAA protest, December 15, 2019. https://shorturl.at/xbruL

[38] M. Mohibul Haque and Abdullah Khan, Mapping Islamophobia: The Indian Media Environment, Islamophobia Studies Journal 2023. Vol. 8(1):83-99. https://www.scienceopen.com/hosted-document?doi=10.13169/islastudj.8.1.0083

extraordinary policies and action. It thus helps to create public consent for the intervention of security specialists – ranging from politicians, the military and police establishments to immigration services and border guards – who can offer the 'right' solution. By manipulating citizens in this way, the media widens the acceptance of the security landscape in a way that "specialists" no longer need to suspend the democratic rights of citizens in order to intervene.[39]

Visualisation of an issue as a security issue, especially on TV news in India, reflects a complex interplay between media, public perception and securitisation. The rise of satellite TV and internet-based social media has led to new ways of presenting and consuming news, especially during a security crisis or when the State wants to securitise an issue.

Consider how the relentless live reporting of the 26/11 Mumbai terror attacks led the Supreme Court of India to criticise Indian television media for its "reckless" live telecasting of security operations, arguing that such coverage endangered public safety.[40] It also ended up building momentum for a perception that India failed to retaliate adequately against Pakistan, which remains an integral part of the criticism that the then Congress government "mishandled national security".[41] Such arguments provided a rationale for the aggressiveness of the Narendra Modi government on issues of national security, legitimising the 'surgical strikes' against Pakistan after terrorist attack on an army camp in Uri[42] and the bombing of Balakot in Pakistan after the Pulwama terror attack on Indian security personnel.[43]

Take another instance where visualisation helped the State securitise an issue –the reverse migration of labour from the cities to villages during the Covid-19 pandemic. Television played an important role in securitising the reverse labour migration by framing it as a problem that could lead to potential social unrest and pose public health risks. Such a framing with live visuals of migrants walking back to their villages in an unorganised fashion provided a rationale for the strict lockdown imposed by the government to restore control over a undisciplined population. The visuals acerbated

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[39] Clara Eroukhmanoff, *op.cit.*

[40] Reckless TV coverage of 26/11 operation put national security in jeopardy: Supreme Court, The Times of India, August 30, 2012. https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/Reckless-TV-coverage-of-26/11-operation-put-national-security-in-jeopardy-Supreme-Court/articleshow/15969434.cms

[41] Biryani was served to Kasab after 26/11 Mumbai attacks: JP Nadda slams Congress, India Today, Nov 16, 2024. https://www.indiatoday.in/elections/assembly/story/jp-nadda-slams-congress-ajmal-kasab-biryani-mumbai-attacks-maharashtra-elections-2634172-2024-11-15 , and UPA government did not take steps that had to be taken after 26/11 terror strike: Nirmala Sitharaman, The New Indian Express, March 14, 2019. https://www.newindianexpress.com/nation/2019/Mar/14/upa-government-did-not-take-steps-that-had-to-be-taken-after-2611-terror-strike-nirmala-sitharaman-1951047.html

[42] Uri, Surgical Strikes and International Reactions, Manohar Parrikar Institute of Defence Studies and Analyses. https://idsa.demosl-03.rvsolutions.in/publisher/uri-surgical-strikes-and-international-reactions/

[43] Balakot: Indian air strikes target militants in Pakistan, bbc.om, February 26, 2019. https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-47366718

the sense of a crisis needing urgent state intervention, displaying a complex interplay between concerns of public health and national security.[44]

Prioritising dramatic descriptions and portrayals over responsible reporting, and a distorted interpretation of live visuals, shapes the public understanding of an issue as a threat and hence a security issue. Visuals with partisan commentary by news anchors and participants in televised debates exacerbated tensions around autonomy issues in Jammu and Kashmir and the ethnic violence in Manipur. The disproportionate representation of a perspective, usually the State's, can perpetuate misinformation and violence, raising ethical questions about the media's role.

Traditional media – print, TV and digital news platforms – are not the only facilitators of the widening security landscape in which government machinery and experts manning it can run riot. Media platforms draw in other actors as well. They range from members of academia, think tanks, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and even social groups.[45]

In particular, the Indian media has tended to provide a platform for the securitisation of cultural and religious identity in the last decade and half. India has also witnessed how groups on WhatsApp, Facebook and other social media[46] have helped disseminate and amplify the security narrative about Muslims, terrorism, Rohingya refugees, etc.

Not that securitisation has been limited to religious, cultural or ethnic identities. Issues such as food and environment have also been brought into the securitisation approach. How the media frames such issues is of crucial significance because it shapes how the public and the policy makers understand the issue and address it.

If the media frames the lack of food as only the problem of the poor or a specific section of society (e.g. migrants on the move during the Covid-19 pandemic), then free food distribution by the state, free community kitchens run by NGOs, public spirited charities or groups of citizens or by Hindu temples and Sikh gurudwaras, seem like an obvious solution. This was witnessed during the Covid-19 pandemic in India and resulted in free food distribution to about 80 crore Indians (nearly 66% of the population) which has now been extended and will continue till 2029.

In tackling the issue of food poverty through a securitisation process, the problem becomes depoliticised and the hungry are reduced to objects of charity. If, however, food deprivation is framed as a rights issue linked to the right to health, right to food and even encompassing the right to livelihood, the hungry would immediately be

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[44] S. Irudaya Rajan, P. Sivakumar, Aditya Srinivasan, The COVID-19 Pandemic and Internal Labour Migration in India: A 'Crisis of Mobility', The Indian Journal of Labour Economics (2020) 63:1021–1039. https://doi.org/10.1007/s41027-020-00293-8

[45] Clara Eroukhmanoff, op.cit.

[46] Fuelled by Social Media, Calls for Violence Against Muslims Reach Fever Pitch in India, People vs. Big tech, February 22, 2022. https://peoplevsbig.tech/fueled-by-social-media-calls-for-violence-against-muslims-reach-fever-pitch-in-india/

viewed as people with rights which need to be respected, protected and politically fulfilled. The right to food is set out more or less in this perspective in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights which India ratified in 1979.[47]

If the media presented hunger not as a securitised issue but a multi-dimensional one, then perhaps societies would perhaps begin addressing the root causes of poverty and food deprivation.[48] Solutions would not be found in moral acts of charity of the state or individual but in changes which are structural, political.[49] The limitation of a policy of free food distribution becomes evident if one were to ask whether hunger would end when the Indians state ends free food distribution to 80 crore people in 2029?[50]

India witnessed the securitisation of health and well-being when the Covid-19 pandemic spread, with "specialists" in the government being allowed to impose punitive policies with little consideration for democratic norms and rights.[51] Converting the pandemic into an internal security issue made it possible for the government to implement policies which resulted in severe and sudden restrictions on the lives of citizens. The most vulnerable, especially the precariously employed and migrant workers lost their livelihoods overnight and started walking back from the cities where they worked to their villages in millions.

The securitisation of the pandemic also allowed the government to invade the privacy of citizens by requiring compulsory registration on apps and monitoring through intrusive digital technology.[52] People who were considered 'security threats' were even detained and isolated as in the case of conference participants of Tablighi Jamaat in Delhi[53], among whom were foreign visitors. The securitisation of health and monitoring of health led to closure of state borders, or the strict monitoring of inter-state movement

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[47] International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, adopted December 16 1966 BY General Assembly resolution 2200A (XXI). https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/international-covenant-economic-social-and-cultural-rights. And, Ratification of International Human Rights Treaties – India. http://hrlibrary.umn.edu/research/ratification-india.html
[48] Claire Kerins, Sinéad Furey, Páraic Kerrigan, Aodheen McCartan, Colette Kelly, Elena Vaughan, News media framing of food poverty and insecurity in high-income countries: a rapid review, Health Promotion International, Volume 38, Issue 6, December 2023, daad188, https://doi.org/10.1093/heapro/daad188
[49] *Ibid.*
[50] Free Foodgrains for 81.35 crore beneficiaries for five years: Cabinet Decision, Press Information Bureau, Government of India, November 29, 2023. https://pib.gov.in/PressReleaseIframePage.aspx?PRID=1980689
[51] Rahul Mukherji, Covid vs. Democracy: India's Illiberal Remedy, Journal of Democracy, Volume 31, Number 4, October 2020, pp. 91-105. https://www.uni-heidelberg.de/md/sai/pol/jod__rm_covid.pdf
[52] Kritika Bhardwaj, Digital Surveillance Systems to Combat COVID-19 May Do More Harm Than Good, EPW Engage, Vol. 55, Issue No. 23, 06 Jun, 2020. https://www.epw.in/engage/article/digital-surveillance-systems-combat-covid-19-harm. And, N D Vivek, Securitisation of COVID-19 pandemic: policy measures in India and implications for health governance, Health Sociology Review, Jul 12, 2024. https://doi.org/10.1080/14461242.2024.2372026
[53] Tablighi Jamaat: The group blamed for new Covid-19 outbreak in India, bbc.com, April 2, 2020. https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-52131338

causing migrant workers to be ostracized in their own villages where they sought safety after having to leave their workplaces in the cities.[54]

The media by and large helped in this process of securitisation by accepting and even justifying the government's classification of the pandemic as a state of exception which required the authorities to violate democratic norms and processes. Punitive measures were taken against sections of the media who questioned the process or criticised the implementation of government policies of dealing with the pandemic.

According to a study by the Rights and Risks Analysis Group, about 55 journalists faced punitive action for their reporting of the pandemic or for being critical of health policies during the national lockdown in India from March 23 to May 2020.[55] These were mostly independent journalists working in the states. They were arrested or had FIRs registered against them, were served summons or show cause notices, faced physical assault and destruction of properties and threats.

Reporters were accused of spreading false information, disobeying the order of public servants and acting negligently to spread infection of a dangerous disease. A leading group of Hindi newspapers, the Dainik Bhaskar Group, which led the media's critical reporting on the government's Covid-19 policies – reported on deaths from oxygen shortages, lack of hospital beds and the large scale disposal of the bodies of thousands of victims found floating on the Ganges. The media group alleged that more than 100 tax inspectors descended to conduct raids at about 30 of its establishments in Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Gujarat, Maharashtra and Delhi, for its critical reportage.[56] These harsh measures sent a chilling message to others to comply unquestioningly with the securitisation logic of the state.

Climate change is yet another problem that is being framed in a securitisation perspective using the media.[57]

There is no clear evidence of whether climate change leads to major conflicts between nations. However, climate change can act as a threat multiplier as it links water, food and energy and can result in local disasters, forced displacement and migration, and even violent conflicts between communities.[58]

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[54] Ranabir Samaddar (ed), Borders of An Epidemic: Covid-19 And Migrant Workers, Calcutta Research Group, Kolkata, 2020. https://www.policefoundationindia.org/images/resources/pdf/COVID-19_migrant_workers.pdf
[55] India: Media's Crackdown During COVID-19 Lockdown, Rights & Risks Analysis Group, June 15, 2020. http://www.rightsrisks.org/banner/india-medias-crackdown-during-covid-19-lockdown-2/

[56] Tax raids target Indian paper that criticised government over Covid, The Guardian, July 22, 2021. https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/jul/22/tax-raids-target-indian-paper-criticised-government-covid-dainik-bhaskar
[57] Mike S Schäfer, Jürgen Scheffran and Logan Penniket, Securitization of media reporting on climate change? A cross-national analysis in nine countries, Security Dialogue, Vol. 47, No. 1 (February 2016), pp. 76-96. https://www.jstor.org/stable/26293586
[58] Ibid.

If the media does not analytically separate the political agenda of the state actors, corporates and the elite from that of the affected communities, civil society experts and other stakeholders, it would end up promoting only the discourse of the security actors. Such a public discourse can only elicit security threat-based responses from the state and other allied actors.

The media's refusal to understand or question policies supposed to counter threats from climate change, has let the Indian state pursue patently contradictory policies. It has both expanded the use of renewables[59] as well as coal-based energy generation by importing coal, rationalised in terms of energy security[60], with the same crony capitalists involved in both renewables and coal imports.[61] Similarly, state actors have banned use of diesel cars in metropolitan cities after 10-years of use[62] but allowed them to ply in non-metro or rural areas although the impact of climate change cannot be compartmentalised in this way.

It must, however, be clarified that this is a broad-brush picture of how the media facilitates the process of securitisation. A detailed and disaggregated study of the media might show differences between, say, the behaviour of the national and regional media, English and Indian language media or between journalists employed by mainstream media and independent media.

Thus, for example, most of the journalists who wrote critically of the Indian government's Covid-19 pandemic policies were independent journalists and the newspaper groups which did a series of exposes about Covid deaths and disposal of the dead along the banks of the Ganges was a regional Hindi media group.

There will also always be readers who read against the grain, aware that media consumption is also an ideological exercise. But that does not detract from the overall role of media in securitisation.

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[59] "Clean energy need of hour": PM Modi applauds India's powering progress, ANI, October 21, 2024. https://www.aninews.in/news/national/general-news/clean-energy-need-of-hour-pm-modi-applauds-indias-powering-progress20241021183509/

[60] Business Standard, India extends operation of imported coal-based power plants: Circular, October 16, 2024. https://www.business-standard.com/industry/news/india-extends-operation-of-imported-coal-based-power-plants-circular-124101600515_1.html

[61] Adani Green Energy becomes India's first to surpass 10,000 MW renewable energy. https://www.adanigreenenergy.com/newsroom/media-releases/adani-green-energy-becomes-indias-first-to-surpass-10000-mw-renewable-energy. And Colossal three-fold expansion of coal power at Kawai proposed by Adani, Adani Watch, https://www.adaniwatch.org/colossal_three_fold_expansion_of_coal_power_at_kawai_proposed_by_adani as well as, Coal imports surge: Adani bullish about coal in India, Adani Watch, https://www.adaniwatch.org/coal_imports_surge_adani_bullish_about_coal_in_india

[62] The Economic Times, Delhi resumes crackdown on 10-year-old diesel, 15-year-old petrol vehicles, Oct 12, 2024. https://shorturl.at/uqCUt. And, Indian Express, What a total ban on diesel vehicles could mean in India, May 11, 2023. https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/explained-economics/total-ban-on-diesel-vehicles-india-impact-explained-8599373/

Security of the media

Media security is not so much an issue of the physical safety as of the security of the integrity of media – the threat to journalistic independence and autonomy. This threat comes from what is often described as "media capture" – a process where the media is predominantly used by the state or other vested interests to promote their agenda.[63]

"Captured media" describes media that is either ideologically controlled by the state, swayed by advertisers or controlled by the owners – in other words, media which pushes a specific agenda.[64]

Subsidised by advertisers, governments, corporates and social and political groups, including political parties, captured media exists everywhere in varying degrees.

In India, media capture takes place through all these routes. The capture of the print and TV news by the state actors has been especially evident in India since 2014. Those who do not fall in line face the consequences of defiance – loss of access, raids by government agencies and since the government still is one of the largest advertisers, by loss of revenue because of withdrawal of government patronage.

There is also corporate capture of the media not only through advertising[65] but also by outright purchase of the media across its various genres[66] as there is no restriction on cross-media holdings.[67] There has been both a vertical and horizontal concentration of media because of corporate take-overs. Owner control has also increased because businessmen, real estate companies, politicians and political parties have invested in the media to facilitate their own agendas and shape public discourse on various issues.

The risk and the process of media capture is different for legacy print/broadcast/TV and digital media.[68] The legacy media is normally captured through corporate owners affiliated with India's political elite – such as the Ambanis and Adanis, for example, in the case of India – leaving little scope for an objective political debate.

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[63] Anya Shiffrin (ed), In the Service of Power: Media Capture and the Threat to Democracy, Centre for International Media Assistance. https://www.cima.ned.org/resource/service-power-media-capture-threat-democracy/

[64] Mireya Márquez-Ramírez, "Media Capture: The Conceptual Challenges for Studying Journalism in Transitional Democracies" in The Routledge Companion to Journalism edited by Bruce Mutsvairo, Saba Bebawi and Eddy Borges-Rey, 2024. https://www.academia.edu/113705311/Media_Capture_The_Conceptual_Challenges_for_Studying_Journalism_in_Transitional_Democracies

[65] Raju Narisetti, How Advertising Fuels Media Capture in India, Global Investigative Network, July 22, 2021. https://gijn.org/stories/how-advertising-fuels-media-capture-in-india/

[66] R Srinivasan, The corporate takeover of India's media, Down to Earth, May 6, 2024. https://www.downtoearth.org.in/governance/the-corporate-takeover-of-india-s-media-95981

[67] Manisha Pande, What is cross-media ownership? And do we need to regulate it? News Laundry, July 21, 2014, https://www.newslaundry.com/2014/07/21/medias-criss-crossing-interests

[68] Anya Shiffrin, *op. cit.*

Digital media, on the other hand, can afford to become platform for dissent and resistance. Because of low entry barriers, it can easily proliferate and can avoid capture. However, because its revenue models are underdeveloped as yet, it is also a target for capture not only by advertisers but also digital intermediaries like Google, Face Book, Instagram, LinkedIn, etc.

What does "media capture" do?

Because what is published or broadcast is no longer autonomous but under the influence of specific agendas of various vested interests, it is impossible for citizens to know what their own interests are. It worsens information inequality and breaks the firewall between editorial and advertising as the influence of advertisers or the funder increases. Media capture, therefore, prevents the problems and vulnerabilities of the poor and the marginalised from being debated and discussed. It concentrates power in the hands of the political and securitising elite and disempowers vulnerable communities and populations.

Media capture can be prevented through various measures (not the subject of detailed discussion here) such as restrictions on cross-media ownership, diversification of media revenue streams, regulations, competition laws to prevent media oligarchies and state support for public broadcasters with arm's length relationship with the government.[69]

Lastly, there is the issue of impact of social media on democratic debate and public perception. Social media has provided an effective tool to the powers that be to monitor people online.[70] This information can not only be used by governments to target alternative perspectives and silence dissent but powerful groups can trap individuals into information bubbles, narrowing their political worldview. Social media also has the power to spread disinformation, undermining the capacity of citizens to form well-informed political views. It also helps in micro-targeting of individuals for manipulating their political views and this has been witnessed in the run up to election campaigns in India.

These processes of media capture and social media manipulation make the media a partner in securitisation by facilitating the concentration of decision-making powers in the hands of the state and specialists.

Conclusion:

The uncritical facilitation of the securitisation perspective of the State in the long run leads to the erosion of public trust in the media and the marginalisation of communities and exacerbation of social tensions. It skews policies in ways that may not be in the

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[69] *Ibid.*

[70] Costica Dumbrava, Key social media risks to democracy. Risks from surveillance, personalisation, disinformation, moderation and microtargeting, European Parliamentary Research Service. December 2021. https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/IDAN/2021/698845/EPRS_IDA(2021)698845_EN.pdf

best interests of the citizens, supresses critical voices and dissent, and leads to erosion of ethical values of objective and unbiased reporting. [71]

With the media as active collaborator in the process of securitisation, complex political issues are reduced to choosing the "right" policy solution. Through its framing of a wide range of social and economic issues as security issues and their proffered solutions, the media helps the political actors or the state in pushing under the carpet crucial aspects of inequality, citizens' rights and democratic debate in society.

The uncritical facilitation of the security approach can be countered by encouraging a more complex and layered media discourse of the issues that are sought to be securitised.

In the newsrooms, this is a virtually impossible task because of large-scale deskilling of journalists over time. The expertise on food, health, disease control, climate change, forced migration, etc. no longer resides in newsrooms. Such expertise lies in research institutions, universities and NGOs with sectoral expertise. Their interventions on the subject have to be brought into the mainstream public and policy discourse.

A possible method of achieving this is by establishing a network of stakeholders who are readily available for interviews, open to writing articles, appearing on TV to suggest multi-level solutions to the securitisation challenge.

These networks have to shaped as mechanisms to leverage the expertise, knowledge and research of universities, research institutions and NGOs to generate editorial content that can inform, contribute, and shape public discourse. They should be committed to being a valuable resource for policymakers, stakeholders, and the community in understanding the social, economic and political complexities of the issue and identifying effective solutions.

What securitisation does is to reduce complex political issues to one of following the "right" policy prescription and solution. The media through its complex and layered framing of these issues and the proffered solutions – with the help of researchers, academics and civil society – can prevent the political actors or the state from pushing the issues of inequality in society under the carpet and instead offer charity-based solutions.

These networks, which can vary in size, can be conceived as bridges between the stakeholders and the media facilitating a better-informed and multi-dimensional discourse on such issues that the state or vested interests want to securitise.

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[71] Role of Indian media in national security, Ipleaders, August 30, 2022. https://blog.ipleaders.in/role-of-indian-media-in-national-security-strategy/?form=MG0AV3; and also, Akhilesh Dwivedi, Ayushi Tiwari, Media Representations Of Security Threats In India: A Critical Analysis, International Journal of Creative Research Thoughts, Volume 11, Issue 8 August 2023, https://ijcrt.org/papers/IJCRT2308683.pdf?form=MG0AV3

These networks can also undertake media training programmes for imparting the requisite knowledge to reporters on issues of right to food, health and well-being, climate change and its consequences, among other issues. This may help equip the media to critically question the single solution and 'leave-it-to-the-experts' mindset of the state and political actors in securitising an issue.

As for the security of the media itself, there is a need to create a framework for the safety of journalists by changing national policies and opposing laws that seek to restrict and homogenise the media discourse.

Ends.