

Course correction – **The drumbeaters of dystopia**

The Indian media can barely question the state narrative on Kashmir, while global outlets can only pick holes in it

On the last morning of October 1984, Rajiv Gandhi was campaigning in West Bengal when a police jeep intercepted his Mercedes to deliver the message: "There's been an accident in the house. Return immediately to Delhi." His mother, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, had been shot at by her Sikh bodyguards in her garden, on the way to a TV interview. As he waited for a helicopter to take him to Calcutta, the Congress General Secretary turned on his transistor radio to get the latest. He tuned in, not to All India Radio but the BBC. The news was not good but that is not the point.

Even in pre-reforms India, when broadcast media was a government monopoly and mouthpiece, a would-be Prime Minister's first resort of trust was "Auntie", not mummy's Akashvani. Thirty-five years on, with 400 private TV news channels, 1,000 newspapers, and 3,000 radio stations, it is a telling commentary on the credibility of the Indian news media ecosystem — in fact, on the theology of "competition" in a free-market economy — that nearly every piece of information which contests the establishment narrative that all is well in Kashmir, has come from a non-Indian source.

Stark contrast in coverage

Here's a baker's dozen since the "lockdown" began: First video of protests, firing: BBC, 'Al Jazeera', Reuters; Number of arrested: AFP, AP, Time, The New York Times; Minors among those detained: The Washington Post; Detenus flown out of overcrowded jails: AFP; First pellet injury death: 'Huffington Post'; Soura, epicentre of resistance: Reuters; First bullet injury death: France 24; Beatings, torture: BBC, The Independent; Harassment, sexual abuse of women: Deutsche Welle; Civilians forced to chant 'Vande Mataram': Foreign Policy; Doctor detained for speaking of shortage of medicines: BBC; Hospitals turning into 'graveyards': The Wall Street Journal; Emerging medical emergency: The Lancet editorial.

With most "national media" plunging into the patriotic duty of drumming up support for the "constitutionally contentious" move — privileging the interests of a rampaging State over that of the caged citizen — the contrast provided by global outlets unmasking the suppression of human, civil and fundamental rights of Kashmiris, has been so stark that one website was constrained to ask: "Are foreign and Indian media reporting on the same place?" A mainland journalist on assignment says she has encountered so much hatred for the media's part in painting a monochromatic picture, that she has had to apologise on behalf of her fraternity multiple times.

Ground zero in Kashmir

Therein lies the great paradox. For a whole month in the 21st century, Kashmiri journalists have worked in the 20th. They have not been able to freely use the phone and the Internet, write or transmit stories, print or distribute newspapers. They have been denied curfew passes, harassed at security checkpoints, made to delete photos and videos. They have had to beg travellers flying out of Srinagar to carry pen drives and printouts of mobile screenshots. Of the Valley's 174 dailies, fewer

than 10 are being published; their e-papers are frozen in time, on August 5. One editor going abroad for training was stopped inside an airport after he had picked up his boarding passes.

Yet, with foreign correspondents being denied permits to go to Kashmir, American, Arabic, British, French and German media organisations have relied entirely on home-grown journalists for their stand-out coverage, which begs the question as to why Indian mainstream media (MSM) vehicles have not been able to find the space or the resources for them. Or, why they have felt duty-bound to “broadcast sunshine stories that life is back to normal and getting better every day”, in the words of a British academic. Either the Indian media is so true to its craft, or so craven, that not a single report has had to be disputed. For the first time since 2014, the parrot cannot hear the cries of the majority, Muslim in this case.

Near capitulation

It is not as if all the Indian media has buried the story: there have been tiny isles of valiance in an ocean of conformity. Just that, after the initial flurry, the giants are coasting in the routine and the official, as per the sage advice: “Some news is best not reported”. Pockets of English print and digital journalism still offer some exceptions but large swathes of language media have served unvarnished, Islamophobic propaganda sans scrutiny. “Whatever [the] Indian media is reporting, the opposite is true,” says one Kashmiri journalist. “Editors give directions to field reporters on the kind of soundbites they want from the ground to fit into their studio scripts. People oblige but viewers do not see the security men behind the camera.”

A charitable explanation for the near-wholesale capitulation — the “underhand censorship” as one media watcher called it — is that, in the epoch of hyper-nationalism, Indian journalism is reverting to its historical and dutiful role of “nation-building”. Newspapers at the time of Independence, TV now. So, while the “western” media can only see anger, abuse, chaos, trouble and violence in the kaleidoscope, ‘swadeshi’ media can only see peace, calm, order, happiness and acceptance. In the battle between hard reality and ‘sarkari’ spin, between democracy and ‘desh bhakti’, loyal owners, editors, anchors and other toadies know which perception has greater purchase in the #NewIndia market.

The peak of lows

In truth, however, Kashmir marks the apogee in a long orbit of evisceration of the Indian media, an ongoing project that has overturned the profession’s credo to “comfort the afflicted”. Successive low benchmarks — JNU, cow lynchings, love ‘jihad’, Sabarimala, triple ‘talaq’, Rohit Vemula, demonetisation, Pulwama, surgical strikes — have taught the watchdogs to assume a supine pose. The pliancy in Kashmir, therefore, is a Pavlovian response. As The Economist commented: “The Press’s current sycophancy rises from a hinterland of intimidation, trimming and currying favour dating back to Narendra Modi’s rise in power in 2014.”

The strategem to subjugate the Kashmiri voice is, of course, a work in progress but it gained steam when the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) joined hands with the Peoples Democratic Party in 2016. Standard intimidatory tactics with plausible deniability built into them — labelling newspapers as “anti-national”; denying government advertisements; arresting and interrogating editors — served to send the signal to the rest of the tribe. Battered by revenue shortfall, salary cuts and job losses, most fell in line. An artfully created class divide among journalists, between local and national,

Pandit and Muslim, Indian and foreign, has polarised positions, and removed empathy from the equation.

Despite Brexit and Hong Kong, Kashmir has sparked a scramble among international news media houses, each trying to scoop the other. As the communications blackout took hold, BBC Radio thumbed its nose at Delhi by increasing the duration of its Hindi and Urdu bulletins with the teasing tagline: "Neither Internet shutdowns nor power cuts can stop independent news". Meanwhile, the Indian MSM was resting its oars, having done its bit in the sacred task of manufacturing consent on the mainland. With the hashtag #KashmirWithModi trending on social media even without Kashmir being connected to the grid, Umberto Eco's warning of the "invasion of the idiots" has come good.

In the "Brave New World" of Kashmir, the Indian state has worked out the Huxleyan circuitry of how to make the media relay a unitary message without explicitly making it appear so. Therefore, a scarcity of dissent in spite of a plethora of evidence. It is a model that can be developed further and replicated anywhere else at short notice — within the pretence of a democratic framework.

In 1954, Gabriel García Márquez wrote: "Journalism is a biological necessity of humanity." To the eternal shame of the Republic, in 2019, from the judges of the Supreme Court to the former judge who heads the Press Council, from the Information and Broadcasting Minister to industry bodies, the open-ended trade fineprint "Conditions Apply" seems to be the operative clause. And to think that the train of events — from the BJP pulling out of the coalition, to the abrogation of Article 370 — was set off by the assassination of a journalist: Shujaat Bukhari, the founding editor of 'Rising Kashmir'. But, then, does a Chinar tree make noise when it falls, if the Indian media is not around?

Meanings of Difficult Words :

- **drumbeater** (noun) – (originally) a supporter of going to war; (generally) an intense supporter of a cause, idea, etc.
- **dystopia** (noun) – an imaginary place where people live in fear under totalitarian/oppressive/undemocratic system; an imaginary community or society that is undesirable or frightening.
- **narrative** (noun) – a representation of a particular situation; portrayal/ account.
- **pick holes in** (phrase) – find fault with, complain about, criticize.
- **intercept** (verb) – obstruct, impede, interrupt.
- **monopoly** (noun) – exclusive/complete control of something by a person/organisation.
- **mouthpiece** (noun) – a person/newspaper that only conveys a particular party/organisation's opinions; spokesperson, propagandist, voice.
- **telling** (adjective) – revealing, significant, important.
- **commentary** (non) – narration, report, review, analysis.
- **credibility** (noun) – trustworthiness, reliability, integrity.
- **ecosystem** (noun) – living things, living beings.
- **free market** (noun) – an economic system of buying and selling that is not under the control of the government, and where people can buy and sell freely.
- **stark** (adjective) – (unpleasantly) clear, distinct/ evident; harsh, grim.
- **lockdown** (noun) – confinement, restraint, encirclement.
- **detain** (verb) – hold, take into custody, arrest.
- **detenu** (noun) – French Word détenu means a person in custody, detainee.
- **pellet** (noun) – lightweight bullet, shot.

- **epicentre** (noun) – the main point of unpleasant or problematic situation.
- **resistance** (noun) – ability to fight off, ability to counteract/withstand, immunity from.
- **harassment** (noun) – persecution, persistent annoyance, coercion/intimidation.
- **graveyard** (noun) – cemetery, burial ground/place.
- **plunge** into (verb) – fall sharply/steeply, plummet, drop rapidly, slump.
- **patriotic** (adjective) – nationalist, loyalist, loyal to one's country.
- **drum up** (phrasal verb) – attempt to obtain something by canvassing/appealing.
- **contentious** (adjective) – controversial, disputable, debatable.
- **privilege** (verb) – exempt, except, immune.
- **rampage** (noun) – wild/violent behaviour, running amok, berserk.
- **suppression** (noun) – defeat, subduing, repression.
- **hatred** (noun) – dislike, hostility, resentment/aversion.
- **fraternity** (noun) – group, profession; a group of people with same job, interest and etc.
- **ground zero** (noun) – the center or origin of violent/intense activity; a site of violent attack.
- **therein** (adverb) – in that respect.
- **paradox** (noun) – mystery, absurdity; incongruity.
- **curfew** (noun) – a rule which is instructing people to stay at home, typically at night.
- **harass** (verb) – oppress, disturb, trouble.
- **rely on** (phrasal verb) – depend on, resort to, have recourse to.
- **home-grown** (adjective) – belonging to one's own country.
- **stand-out** (adjective) – very good.
- **beg the question** (phrase) – raise a point; invite question.
- **duty-bound** (adjective) – under an obligation, filled with gratitude, appreciative.
- **sunshine** (noun) – happiness, cheerfulness, joyfulness, gladness.
- **academic** (noun) – scholar, teacher, educator.
- **craven** (adjective) – cowardly, timid/weak, shrinking/cowering.
- **parrot** (noun) – someone who repeats/echos/says again something mechanically.
- **capitulation** (noun) – surrender, submission, yielding/giving in.
- **isle** (noun) – a small island.
- **valiance** (noun) – great courage, determination.
- **conformity** (noun) – compliance with, adherence to, accordance with; following the crowd, running with the pack.
- **flurry** (noun) – spate, series, succession.
- **coast** (verb) – make progress without making much effort.
- **swathe** (noun) – a wide area (of something).
- **unvarnished** (adjective) – straightforward, plain, simple.
- **islamophobic** (adjective) – a person's point of view involving an baseless fear and dislike of Muslims.
- **propaganda** (noun) – information, promotion, publicity/advocacy.
- **sans** (preposition) – devoid, deprived, in need.
- **scrutiny** (noun) – observation, inspection, examination.
- **sound bite** (noun) – sentence, phrase, group of words.
- **oblige** (verb) – require, bind, compel.
- **charitable** (adjective) – considerate, broad-minded, understanding.
- **epoch** (noun) – era, period, time.
- **hyper-nationalism** (noun) – extreme nationalism, ultra-nationalism.

- **revert to** (verb) – return, go back, change back.
- **chaos** (noun) – disorder, turmoil, confusion/disruption.
- **underhand** (adjective) – deceitful, dishonest, disreputable, unethical.
- **epoch** (noun) – period, time, era.
- **hyper-nationalism** (noun) – excessively, above normal (nationalism).
- **chaos** (noun) – disorder, disarray, disorganization.
- **kaleidoscope** (noun) – it consists of a lot of very different parts, such as different colours, patterns, or shapes.
- **toady** (noun) – puppet, stooge, sycophant.
- **perception** (noun) – insight, understanding, discernment/thoughtfulness.
- **purchase** (noun) – support, firm contact, attachment.
- **apogee** (noun) – the furthest point in the Moon or satellite's elliptical orbit around Earth.
- **evisceration** (noun) – deprivation (something) of its essential content.
- **overturn** (verb) – reverse, overrule, nullify/cancel.
- **credo** (noun) – attitude; morality, belief/idea.
- **the afflicted** (noun) – people in trouble/distress; people who are affected adversely.
- **benchmark** (noun) – standard, guideline, basis.
- **lynching** (noun) – an act of punishing/killing someone by hanging for claimed offence by the group of people without legal trail.
- **surgical strike** (noun) – the military attack aimed to cause damage on a particular target with small/no collateral damage to surroundings.
- **watchdog** (noun) – inspector/supervisor, observer, ombudsman.
- **supine** (adjective) – weak, spineless, yielding.
- **pliancy** (noun) – yielding, compliant, docile nature.
- **pavlovian** (adjective) – relating to a method to cause a reflex (automatic) response or behavior by training with repetitive action; (Classical conditioning) suggested by the Russian physiologist I. P. Pavlov.
- **sycophancy** (noun) – submissive/obedient behaviour towards someone important in order to gain advantage.
- **hinterland** (noun) – remote areas of a country away from the coastal areas/the banks of major rivers.
- **intimidation** (noun) – frightening, threatening, oppression.
- **curry favour** (phrase) – bring oneself into favour with someone by submissive/obedient behaviour.
- **stratagem** (noun) – plan, tactic, manoeuvre; trickery.
- **subjugate** (verb) – conquer, vanquish, defeat.
- **join hands** (phrase) – work together.
- **intimidatory** (adjective) – frightening, menacing, terrifying.
- **plausible** (adjective) – valid, convincing/credible, logical.
- **deniability** (noun) – the ability to deny something.
- **interrogate** (verb) – question, cross-examine, probe.
- **shortfall** (noun) – deficit, inadequacy/deficiency; shortcoming/defect.
- **fall in line** (phrase) – conform with others.
- **empathy** (noun) – compassion, sympathy, pity, feeling.
- **the equation** (noun) – the situation, the problem; a situation in which several factors must be taken into account.

- **Brexit** (noun) – a term used for the (supposed) departure of the United Kingdom from the European Union.
- **scramble** (noun) – struggle, tussle/scuffle, battle.
- **spark** (verb) – give rise to, trigger, activate/initiate.
- **blackout** (noun) – suppression, cut-off, silence.
- **take hold** (phrase) – start to have an effect.
- **thumb one's nose at** (phrase) – defy, go against, disregard, ignore, disobey.
- **bulletin** (noun) – communication, report, news.
- **tagline** (noun) – saying, formula, legend.
- **rest on one's oars** (phrase) – relax one's efforts.
- **manufacture** (verb) – fabricate, make up, formulate, frame.
- **invasion** (noun) – attack, incursion, assault/assailing.
- **Huxleyan** (adjective) – pertaining to Thomas Henry Huxley (1825–1895), English anatomist, known as "Darwin's Bulldog" for his advocacy of Charles Darwin's theory of evolution.
- **circuitry** (noun) – circuits collectively.
- **unitary** (adjective) – relating to a system of government in which power is provided to the central government.
- **explicitly** (adverb) – clearly, unequivocally, without any doubt.
- **scarcity** (noun) – shortage, undersupply, dearth/lack, rarity.
- **dissent** (noun) – disagreement, disapproval, opposition.
- **in spite of** (phrase) – despite, notwithstanding, regardless of.
- **plethora** (noun) – excess, abundance, surplus/too many.
- **replicate** (verb) – copy, reproduce, duplicate.
- **pretence** (noun) – (outward) appearance, impression/image, display.
- **humanity** (noun) – humankind, the human race, people.
- **eternal** (adjective) – everlasting, continuous, permanent.
- **pull out** (phrasal verb) – withdraw, leave, get out.
- **abrogation** (noun) – abolition, repeal, cancellation (of a law/agreement).
- **set off** (phrasal verb) – leave, depart, embark/start out.
- **assassination** (noun) – murder, killing.

Course Correction – **Deadly spread: On 'vaccine hesitancy'**

Overcoming 'vaccine hesitancy' can reduce the global spread of measles infection

With a 30% increase in measles cases worldwide in 2018, the World Health Organization, in January 2019, included 'vaccine hesitancy' as one of the 10 threats to global health this year. The threat from vaccine hesitancy, which is defined as the "reluctance or refusal to vaccinate despite the availability of vaccines", only appears to have grown more dangerous to public health. After a surge in measles cases in 2018, there have been around 3,65,000 measles cases reported from 182 countries in the first six months of 2019. The biggest increase, of 900% in the first six months this year compared with the same period last year, has been from the WHO African region, with the Democratic

Republic of the Congo, Madagascar and Nigeria accounting for most cases. There has been a sharp increase in the WHO European region too with 90,000 cases recorded in the first six months — more than the numbers recorded for the whole of 2018. The infection spread in the European region has been unprecedented in recent years — 1,74,000 cases from 49 of the 53 countries between January 2018 and June 2019. Last month the U.K., Greece, the Czech Republic and Albania lost their measles elimination status.

A 2018 report on vaccine confidence among the European Union member states shows why vaccine coverage has not been increasing in the European region to reach over 90% to offer protection even to those not vaccinated. It found younger people (18-34 years) and those with less education are less likely to agree that the measles, mumps, and rubella (MMR) vaccine is safe. According to a March 2019 report, only 52% respondents from 28 EU member states agree that vaccines are definitely effective in preventing diseases, while 33% felt they were probably effective. More alarming is that 48% of the respondents believed that vaccines cause serious side effects and 38% think vaccines actually cause the disease that they are supposed to protect against. A striking similarity was seen in India too. A 2018 study found low awareness to be the main reason why 45% of children missed different vaccinations in 121 Indian districts that have higher rates of unimmunised children. While 24% did not get vaccinated due to apprehension about adverse effects, 11% were reluctant to get immunised for reasons other than fear of adverse effects. Thus, much work remains to be done to address misinformation. With social media playing a crucial role in spreading vaccine disinformation, the commitment by Facebook to “reduce distribution” of vaccine misinformation will be helpful in winning the war against vaccine deniers. Measles vaccine not only provides lifelong protection against the virus but also reduces mortality from other childhood infections. This is because measles viruses kill immune cells, leaving the child vulnerable to infectious diseases for two to three years.

Meanings of Difficult Words :

- **vaccine** (noun) – a biological preparation that improves immunity to a particular disease.
- **hesitancy** (noun) – reluctance, unwillingness, disinclination.
- **vaccine hesitancy** (noun) – a reluctance or refusal to be vaccinated or to have one’s children vaccinated; reluctance or refusal to vaccinate despite the availability of vaccines.
- **overcome** (verb) – get control of, deal with, succeed in dealing with (a problem/difficulty).
- **measles** (noun) – a viral infection that’s serious for small children but is easily preventable by a vaccine.
- **surge** (noun) – a sudden/sharp increase.
- **vaccinate** (verb) – immunize, protect from, safeguard from, shield from.
- **account for** (phrasal verb) – constitute, comprise, form.
- **unprecedented** (adjective) – not done or experienced before.
- **mumps** (noun) – a viral infection that affects the salivary glands that’s easily preventable by a vaccine.
- **rubella** (noun) – it is also known as German measles or three-day measles, is an infection caused by the rubella virus.
- **MMR vaccine** (noun) – a vaccine against measles, mumps, and rubella.
- **respondent** (noun) – disputant, claimant, complainant.
- **alarming** (adjective) – worrying, disturbing, shocking/distressing.
- **striking** (adjective) – noticeable, obvious, visible.

- **vaccination** (noun) – treatment with a vaccine to protect against a particular disease; immunization.
- **unimmunised** (adjective) – not immunized/not vaccinated.
- **apprehension** (noun) – doubt, misgiving; concern.
- **adverse** (adjective) – unfavourable, disadvantageous, bad.
- **address** (verb) – attend to, tackle, deal with.
- **disinformation** (noun) – lie, deception/fake news, false information.
- **mortality** rate (noun) – (in a particular time/for a cause) the rate of death.
- **vulnerable** (adjective) – weak, unprotected, feeble.
- **infectious** (adjective) – communicable, transmittable, spreadable.

SOME IMPORTANT IDIOMS & PHRASES

1. Take to task

Example – I failed to impress the foreign clients so my boss took me to task in front of everyone.

Meaning – To scold someone.

2. The worse for wear

Example – The radio is really worse for the wear. Send it to the repair centre.

Meaning – In a poor condition.

3. A lion's share

Example – The lion's share of the company's profit goes to the charitable trust.

Meaning – The biggest part of something.

4. To turn one's back on

Example – I can't turn my back on what I have done. It was my responsibility to take care of everything.

Meaning – To deny or reject or abandon.

5. To bite the dust

Example – The soldier was too young to bite the dust.

Meaning – To break/fail/die/give out.

6. Bolt from the blue

Example – I had met my uncle last week. He was so energetic and fit. Today his death news came as a bolt from the blue.

Meaning – A sudden and unexpected event.

7. To draw a blank

Example – I tried to remember the address. But I could only draw a blank.

Meaning – To fail to remember something. / To get no response.

8. To go against the tide

Example – It's not easy to go against the tide in defence of our principles.

Meaning – To do the opposite of what other people are doing.

9. To pick a hole in my coat

Example – My boss is waiting for a chance to pick a hole in my coat.

Meaning – To find a mistake in something someone has done or said.

10. On tenterhooks

Example – People were on tenterhooks when the possibility of an earthquake was announced.

Meaning – Waiting nervously for the outcome.

☞ "AN OUNCE OF PRACTICE IS WORTH MORE THAN TONS OF PREACHING" ☜