

**IMAGE OF INDIA IN THE WESTERN MEDIA
(2009-19)**

*Thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements
for the award of the degree of*

Doctor of Philosophy

Prabhat Kumar

Registration No: MCP18101 of 2018



Department of Mass Communication and Journalism

School of Humanities and Social Sciences

Tezpur University

Napaam, Assam, India

May, 2023

CHAPTER 5

KEY FINDINGS & CONCLUSION

This chapter has been divided into five sections. The first section looks at the key findings and brief discussion. It tries to answer the research questions and objectives. The second section provides conclusion. The third section offers some suggestions which originated out of this study which could be implemented. The fourth and the last section talks about the further scope of study.

5.1 Key Findings

5.1.1 The Coverage of India in the Western media.

Previous studies such as MacBride Commission report (1980), Poornananda (1998) and Talpade (2005) had shown that not much coverage was given to India in the Western media. It was not considered an important country to be given much coverage by the international media and visibility was a big issue. MacBride Commission report (1980) also found that the major news agencies devoted somewhere between 10 and 30 per cent of their news to the totality of the developing world and maximum number of these news stories were related to accidents, tragedy, disasters, crime or some crisis.

Poornananda (1998) in his study on the coverage of South Asia in *The Washington Post* and *The Los Angeles Times* found that these newspapers gave very little coverage to South Asian countries including India. Even if they published news stories on these countries, the articles generally focused on crimes, disasters, conflicts, and the failures of governments and other institutions, while areas such as science, arts, and culture were significantly ignored.

Talpade (2005) studied the image of India reflected in French print media from 1995 to 1998 and found that in the above mentioned period the French print media took notice of India only four times that too when the events were of some significance to France. Similarly, Ayres (2018) found that a few decades ago American media covered India for reasons such as the Bhopal gas leak, Hindu-Muslim riots, insurgency in Kashmir or some natural calamity. India-centric news stories in the international media were mostly negative and crisis centred.

But the results from this study reveal that the quantity of news coverage given to India in the Western media had increased significantly compared to the past. During 2009-19, a total of 5484 news stories were found on the two news portals combined. In NYT there were 1123 news stories and in TG there were 1613. This quantitative increase clearly shows that India now ranks high on the agenda of the Western media. In fact, according to Lydia Polgreen (the previous NYT correspondent to India), on The New York Times news website, 'India' is almost always in the top ten searched items (Ghose, 2010).

Earlier, the American media depicted India as a land of saints and beggars, a place defined as a combination of faith, deprivation and chaos but now India makes the headlines for economic growth, investments and geopolitical reasons (Ayres, 2018). Country's overall global media visibility has increased substantially. Earlier not so many foreign correspondents were present in India but India is now considered a much-coveted assignment for them and the number of foreign correspondents has been increasing (Ghose, 2010).

The possible reasons behind the increased coverage of India might be as follows: Indian economy post 1991 has witnessed a continuous growth. Today it is the fifth largest economy in the world. It has a larger middle class which serves as a huge consumer base for the multinational companies. India is a big market for media and entertainment companies as well who have invested a lot of money in Indian business houses. In addition to it, India's geopolitical engagements have grown in the recent times. India is a member of important international bodies and it is seen as the only Asian power which can check the expansionist rise of China. Due to these factors the interest of Western media in India has grown in the recent years.

5.1.2 Major issues related to India covered in the Western media during 2009-19.

Political issues were the topmost priority in the Western media followed by the Social and Scientific issues. Among the Political news category, The New York Times gave the highest coverage to the issues related to International Relations (friction in the Indo-China ties, strains in the Indo-Pak relations, growing co-operation between India and the US) while The Guardian gave highest coverage to Domestic Politics (regular updates on the state elections, Lok Sabha polls).

In the Social news category both The New York Times and The Guardian gave highest focus to issues related to Crime (honour killing, female feticide, rape, murder, mob lynching, dowry related harassment).

In Economic news category both the portals gave highest coverage to Business issues (new start-ups, acquisitions, investments) etc. In the Cultural news category, NYT focused more on Sports (about star players and key sporting events such as IPL and Olympics) while TG paid more attention on Cinema sub-category (controversies related to movies, new releases) etc.

In the Scientific news category, Environmental issues were the topmost concern for both the news portals (mostly related to pollution, environmental degradation, extinction of species, efforts to conserve environment) etc. In the Miscellaneous news category, Accident was the highest covered news sub category in both the portals.

5.1.3 Similarities and differences in the news coverage of both news websites.

The Guardian gave greater coverage to India (59%) compared to The New York Times (41%). The frequency of appearance (every week wise) of news stories was much greater on The Guardian's news portal. Both news portals gave more emphasis on in-depth reporting of any issue or event taking place in India and the news reports were long in their writing style.

News related to International Relations was topmost on the agenda of The New York Times whereas Crime was topmost on the agenda of The Guardian. In The New York Times, news related to International Relations received the most favourable coverage. News related to Crime was found to be most unfavourable and that related to Domestic Politics received most neutral coverage. On the other hand, on The Guardian news website the news related to International Relations received most favourable coverage; news related to Crime received most unfavourable and those related to Domestic Politics received highest neutral coverage.

Overall, the most favourable coverage in Western media was given to International Relations. Prime Minister Modi's visits abroad; closer ties with the United States; becoming an active member of global forums and groups such as Quad, BRICS and the

UN were some themes that received a positive and favourable coverage. Most unfavourable coverage was given to Crime (mostly news related to rape and atrocities against women) while the most neutral coverage was given to Domestic Politics (electoral updates).

5.1.4 Image of India presented by the Western media

Highest coverage in the Western media was given to Crime related news stories. The overall tone was mostly unfavourable with 46.5% of news stories having negative tone. Most of these unfavourable news stories were related to crimes (rape, honour killings, female feticide, murders), internal security challenges (riots, stone pelting, protests and violence in Kashmir), environmental issues (air pollution, threats to wildlife and endangered species), international relations (Indo-Pak conflict) and human rights violations. Rape of women, Kashmir conflict, air pollution, Indo Pak conflict were some themes which garnered maximum attention. It was also visible in the headline analysis. In this study, the most repeated words in the 2736 headlines were as follows: Delhi, Rape, Kashmir, Modi, Mumbai, Pakistan, Women, Bollywood etc.

These findings were quite similar to the findings of another study conducted by Parth (2021) on more than 3000 India- related news articles published by Western media. His study found that the language that the publications like (The New York Times, The Washington Post, Wall Street Journal, TIME and The Guardian) had used in context of India was mostly negative, divisive, outrageous, full of contempt and ridicule for India. In an analysis of 500 headlines, his study found that the most used words to describe India were: Fear, Hate, Violence, Riot, Hindu, Muslim, Kashmir, Cow, Mob and Protest.

5.2 Conclusion

The amount of coverage given to India in the Western media had increased significantly from the past. This may be because of India's economic rise and its increased role in the global affairs. But this coverage was mostly unfavourable in its tone. The headlines of almost 46.5% news stories presented an unfavourable image of India. This research finding is a matter of grave concern for India as a negative country image can have various socio-economic consequences.

For example, the excessive coverage of rape related news after the Nirbhaya Gang Rape case (2012) had a big negative impact on India's tourism industry. On 31st March 2013, The Guardian reported that the number of foreign tourists arriving in India had dropped by 25% following the global media coverage of the fatal Delhi gang rape. The number of female tourists fell by 35% in the same time period largely because of fears about the risk of sexual assault.

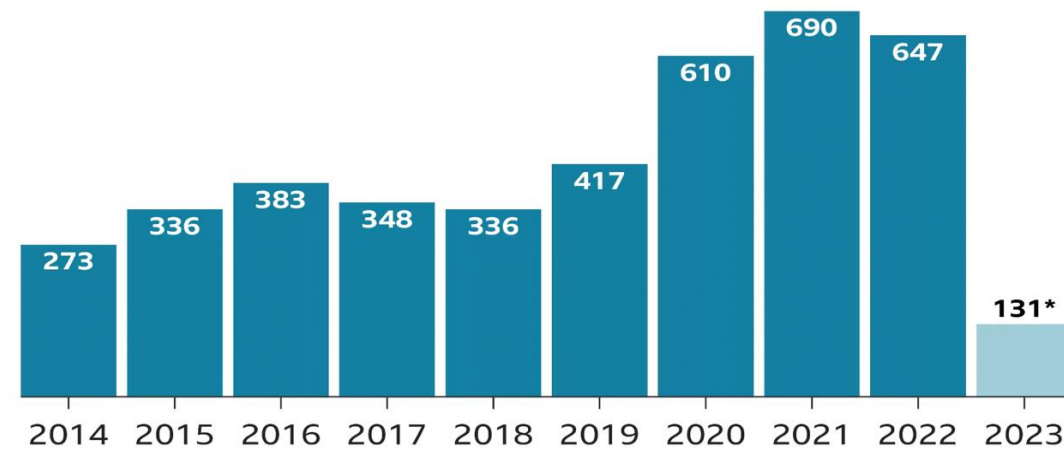
In another incident, in 2015 a German professor of biochemistry at Leipzig University refused to give an Indian student an internship, citing India's "rape problem". Prof. Annette Beck-Sickinger, in her emailed response to the request for an internship, wrote : *"Unfortunately, I don't accept any Indian male students for internships. We hear a lot about the rape problem in India, which I cannot support. I have many female students in my group, so I think this attitude is something I cannot support."* She also mentioned the fact that *"many female professors in Germany decided to no longer accept male Indian students"*(Osborne, 2015).

Like any other country in the world there are various types of socio-economic and political problems in India too. According to the National Crime Records Bureau's (NCRB) 'Crime in India 2021' report India registered 31,677 cases of rape in 2021 -an average 86 daily- while nearly 49 cases of crime against women were lodged every single hour (PTI, 2022). The number of rape cases in 2020 was 28,046, while it was 32,033 in 2019. This data gives an idea that crimes against women are quite high in India and there can be no denial in it.

But no country in the world (even the developed ones like the US or the UK) can claim to be free from criminal activities, violence, protests, social conflicts, industrial and natural disasters etc. For example, statistics from the US Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) showed that 48,830 persons died in the US in 2021 as a result of gun-related injuries. This figure represented a rise of over 8% from 2020. The statistics further reflected that in the US, firearms killed more than 50 people per day. With 120.5 guns per 100 citizens, up from 88 per 100 in 2011, the US vastly outpaced other nations in this regard (BBC, 2023). But crimes like these cannot be the only thing while reporting about a vast nation like the United States.

Mass shootings in the US are on the rise

Incidents in which four or more people were killed or injured



*data up to 28 March

Source: Gun Violence Archive



Source: BBC News, 29th March 2023

It is the duty of media to report the facts as it is. But excessive focus on negative aspects like the criminal activities or terror attacks can prove detrimental for a nation's image. That kind of picturization becomes the only story and the most dominant image in the minds of readers about that country. Media should be more balanced, unbiased and free from prejudices while reporting about any country.

The possible reasons for misrepresentation

India is a vast and very diverse country. The number of foreign correspondents assigned to cover a continental size country like India has been increasing in recent times but still it is not enough. These publications have not more than two or three correspondents in India. Some of them have to cover the entire South Asian region. Some don't even have a single dedicated correspondent; instead, they hire freelancers who paint similar picture about a particular development for multiple foreign media houses (Parth, 2021).

Most of these foreign correspondents are based either in national capital Delhi or financial capital Mumbai. Their local sources are from Delhi and Mumbai and hence these sources themselves have limited reach and understanding of an event happening in a distant part of India. The correspondents lack an in-depth understanding of the socio-cultural

intricacies of a multicultural country like India. It is due to these reasons that sometimes the reports published in the Western media do not appear to be balanced in their tone.

5.3 Suggestions:

A negative country image can affect India's foreign relations, economic interests, investments and tourism industry badly. Thus, India needs to take some important steps to improve its global image and international media representation. India, too, as it becomes a bigger player on the world stage and given its civilizational history, must have its own narrative.

For this, firstly, India needs to invest more in its soft power. Compared to United Kingdom's British Councils, France's Alliance Française, Germany's Goethe Institute, Spain's Cervantes Institute and China's Confucius Institutes, the performance of the Indian Council for Cultural Relations, with centres in about 35 countries and aimed at promoting Indian culture, has been lackadaisical (Pant, 2022). China spends about US\$ 10 billion (1000 crore) a year just on its Confucius Institutes and soft power promotion whereas ICCR and other agencies put together spend around 300-400 crores (Mattoo, 2022). In addition to the lack of funding what is of greater concern is the lack of coordination and collaboration among the various government as well as non-government agencies.

India needs to have a strong international media presence. It is a sad situation that despite being the largest democracy in the world, India has no international television channel that represents the country in the world. In the metropolis that characterises the borderless world we now live in, the BBC is Britain's finest worldwide spokesperson. Al Jazeera, on the other hand, is Qatar's force multiplier and a sophisticated voice across numerous regions. Similarly, our national channel, Doordarshan, desperately needs a makeover and it should strive to become a global broadcaster like BBC, CNN or Al-Jazeera (Rao, 2022). Even the private news channels should try to create a global network.

Prof. Daya Thussu during email interview also suggested that India should consider developing its own global media networks. India has an English-fluent professional journalistic class, a huge diasporic presence and with growing economic might and cultural strength, the time for such an initiative is perhaps now. India should also offer greater

number of scholarships to international students to study in its universities. It should organise more cultural as well as student exchange programmes. More number of cultural centres need to be established globally. It should take a lead in organising important global events like Olympics, Commonwealth Games, climate summits, economic summits etc.

Further Scope of the Study

There are several other related areas in which further studies can be conducted. India's image constructed by other western news outlets such as BBC, CNN, The Washington Post, USA Today, New York Post, Daily Telegraph, The Sun, Le Figaro, Le Monde etc. can be studied. Another important area of study can be the image of India in the Chinese media as the latter has emerged as a big challenge for India in the recent times. India's image in the Middle East, Latin America and Africa can also be the potential areas of study. One can also conduct a research on the representation of India in Hollywood movies, web series, television shows and OTT platforms etc.

References:

- BBC. (2023). How many US mass shootings have there been in 2023? *BBC News*.
<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-41488081>
- Mattoo, S. (2022). *Lack of funding, coordination hurt India's soft power strategy, says panel*. Mint. <https://www.livemint.com/news/india/lack-of-funding-coordination-hurt-india-s-soft-power-strategy-says-panel-11670852058957.html>
- PTI. (2022). India lodged average 86 rapes daily, 49 offences against women per hour in 2021: NCRB data. *The Hindu*. <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/india-lodged-average-86-rapes-daily-49-offences-against-women-per-hour-in-2021-government-data/article65833488.ece>
- Rao, N. (2022). *The Case for Harnessing Soft Power, or Why India Cannot Be Insular*. The Wire. <https://thewire.in/diplomacy/india-soft-power-nirupama-rao>