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Mass Media & Ethnic Relations

By

J S Yadava
MASS MEDIA & ETHNIC RELATIONS

Summary of Activities:

General: In Indian context, the 'communal' issues reported in the Indian Press forms the part of the study. Similarly in administering the questionnaire to the readers of the selected newspapers the term 'ethnic' has been replaced with 'communal'. Likewise the reporters have been identified, if at all possible by the community they belong to.

Selection of Dailies (Newspapers) for Content Analysis: Out of the large number of dailies in different languages and from different centres of publications, the following five dailies were chosen for content analysis:

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<th>Paper</th>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>The Hindustan Times</td>
<td>English</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>Nav Bharat Times</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>The Pioneer</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>Quami Awaz</td>
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Ram Janam Bhoomi - Babri Masjid (Ayodhya, Distt. Faizabad in UP) issue and other related news items dealing with
the two communities that appeared in the selected newspapers were content analysed.

Two months, May & June 1992 have been taken as the period of reference for the content analysis of newspapers and 'constructed' and 'continuous weeks' formed.

Selection of Cities: Delhi, Lucknow and Banaras were chosen for administering the questionnaire to the readers of the newspapers.

Interviews: In each city 120 readers of the selected newspapers were randomly chosen from different areas and the questionnaire administered. Thus in all 360 interviews were conducted.

Before conducting the interviews, the research assistants were recruited at Delhi and given training for two weeks in the methodology of content analysis and interviewing. Content analysis was done by the five research assistants, of whom four had training in journalism and the fifth one, a female, was from sociology background. All the research assistants had experience of conducting interviews.

The interview schedule was translated/converted into Hindi language before administration.

Media Personnel: With the help of an interview guide for the personnel, 65 journalists, mainly from the press (including news agencies) were interviewed.

Most of these journalists were reporters and correspondents. Only a few of them are working on editorial
desks. A majority of them had reported on communal issues mainly Ram Janam Bhoomi-Babri Masjid.

The data collected from the cities have been processed and univariate tables have been drawn including the data of content analysis. At present the data is treated to percentiles only.

The information from secondary sources relating to press laws, growth of press in the country etc. have also been collected.

Other secondary sources for aspects on state, nation building and communalism are being tapped.

FINDINGS

A. CONTENT ANALYSIS

Items: The selected five newspapers of two weeks duration carried 156 items on communal issues. The maximum items (40) appeared in Quami Awaz followed by Nav Bharat Times (39), Aaj (33), The Hindustan Times and The Pioneer (22 each).

The consolidated data of the two weeks ('constructed' and 'continuous') of the five selected newspapers showed that Quami Awaz (Urdu, Lucknow Edition) and Nav Bharat Times (Hindi, Delhi Edition) have reported more (40 and 39 items respectively) on communal issues in comparison to the other dailies.

Space: More than half of the items (58%) occupied space upto 150 sq. cms. Of the remaining items one fourth were of the size between 151-300 sq. cms and 16% were more than 300 sq. cms.
Thus the items on communal issues generally are of medium size. Only the features and news analysis stories were of bigger sizes which find place in the press less often.

Photographs: The news items dealing with communal issues do not include many photographs. Only 15 photographs appeared along with these stories. 3 photographs without stories appeared in Nav Bharat Times. Out of these 8 photographs were not bigger than 50 sq. cms. in size. Four occupied 101-150 sq. cm. space.

Placement: Most often (about 33%) of these items have appeared on the front page followed by local, national and regional pages.

Aaj (Hindi, Banaras Edition) has given more coverage in comparison to others on the front page (42%).

Hindustan Times (English, Delhi Edition), Nav Bharat Times (Hindi, Delhi Edition) and The Pioneer (English, Lucknow Edition) have almost equally used the front page for the communal items (the proportion being about 31%).

Type of Item: Most of these items (77%) are news stories. Features account for about (13%). Other types of items of communal aspects are a few.

In Aaj, all the items were news stories whereas in the Nav Bharat Times the items were varied.
Source: Mostly the items were the reports by the correspondents of the newspapers and stories of the news agencies. However some of the stories are filed without specifying the source. Such source-unidentified stories have appeared more in Quami Awaz and Aaj.

Though efforts were made to identify the community of the reporters of the stories with by-line but it was not easy to ascertain the community to which the reporters belonged. The identified reporters constituted 13% and belonged equally to two communities (Hindus and Muslims).

The newspapers in addition to their own reporters and correspondents have filed a few stories from the two main wire agencies (UNI and PTI). Stories from UNI have been used more than that of PTI. Some newspapers have their own news services and some stories have been attributed to these also.

Headlines: Communities generally do not find mention in the headlines of these stories. However in a few stories the headlines have included the two communities (Hindus a little more than Muslims).

Stories: Though normally in the communal reports the communities have not been mentioned but about one third of the items did include the two communities (Hindus mentioned more than the Muslims). Items of Quami Awaz have included the Hindus more than the Muslims in the stories whereas in the stories of Nav Bharat Times the two communities have been mentioned equally.
Explicit Treatment: One-third of the items analysed explicitly dealt with the ethnic (communal) relations.

Of the total items, 43 were such that explicitly dealt with the ethnic (communal) conflict.

The comparison between the two communities (Hindu and Muslim) appeared in 18 items only.

Condemnation: The newspapers have generally followed the norm 'not to condemn any community'. However only five items appeared (2 in Nav Bharat Times and 3 in The Pioneer) wherein one or the other community seemed to have been condemned.
B. **SURVEY FINDINGS:**

**Sex:** The sample survey is male dominated as about 70% were males and 30% were females.

**Age:** The largest group of the sample constituting about 30% was between 40-49 yrs. closely followed by younger group (30-39 yrs.) comprising 27%. Those who were still young (below 30 yrs) comprised 22%. Those above 50 yrs of age were 21%.

**Religion:** The sample comprised predominantly of Hindus (66%). Muslims were about 29% and the rest belonged to other religions.

**Education:** All were literate. Majority of them were graduates (60%) followed by those with secondary education i.e. 10th standard (28%). Primary and literates were about 6%.

More than three-fourth (78%) had their school education in government-run schools. However about 20% studied in English medium private schools.

**Occupation:** Occupationally the major group belonged to service class (39%) followed by business (26%) and students (19%).

**MASSMEDIA EXPOSURE**

**Press:** An overwhelming majority of the sample read one or the other of the five selected newspapers daily.
T.V.: Similarly TV is watched by over 85% of the sample. But they did not view TV for long hours. The largest group constituting about 42% watched TV between ½ hour to one hour daily followed by those who viewed between 1-2 hrs. daily (35%).

More than two hours daily viewers of TV comprised nearly 11%. They mainly watched news and current affairs, serial, plays, drama and entertaining programmes like film, chitrahaar and music. Some also watched programmes on sports, education, health hygiene, women and culture etc.

Radio: Likewise, among the radio programmes the most popular ones are entertaining programmes of songs and music followed by current affairs and news. Sports commentary and plays are listened to by a few only.

News Interest in Press Reports: The newspaper readers were mainly interested in the news reports on domestic politics followed by international/foreign news, communal issues, economic issues and sports that appeared in the dailies. News reports on education were of less interest to them.

Majority of the sample often read whole of the reports on communal issues whenever these appeared in the press. Headlines of such reports got the attention of about 27% of the sample. Another 19% read only some part of these reports.

Similar trend is observed in case of the TV viewers and radio listeners in regard to their interest on various types of news reports through these two media.
Reportings on communal issues in English papers are perceived fair by larger proportion of the readers in comparison to that of the Hindi and Urdu papers. Hindi press seems to enjoy greater credence than Urdu press among readers so far as the fair reporting regarding communal issues is concerned.

Perception of Press Reportings on Communal Issues: Though the respondents read one or the other out of the five newspapers chosen for the study but the number of sampled readers of each newspaper were different. For example in Delhi sample the readers of The Hindustan Times (64) and Nav Bharat Times (58) were much more as compared to the The Pioneer (4), Aaj (2) and Quami Awaz (26). Likewise the readers of The Pioneer (66) and Quami Awaz (47) in Lucknow sample and of Aaj (110) in Banaras sample were significantly more. Because of this variation the citywise analysis of respondent's perception in terms of adequacy, sufficiency and unbiasedness of reportings in the selected newspapers about the different communities has not been considered appropriate. Instead the readers of each newspaper in the three cities have been clubbed together and their answers analysed. The analysis showed that majority of the respondents (in some cases more than two-third) have expressed that all the newspapers except Aaj give sufficient, accurate and unbiased coverage about the communities (Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs and Christians) in their reportings of communal issues.

On comparing the answers about five newspaper's reportings giving sufficient coverage to the four communities it was observed
that the The Hindustan Times and Quami Awaz enjoyed higher credence than the others. Sufficient coverage to Hindus in the The Hindustan Times (77%) and Muslims in Quami Awaz (79%) has been perceived by higher proportion of respective readers of the two newspapers. Comparatively speaking a slightly higher proportion of readers of the newspapers (except Quami Awaz) expressed Hindus getting sufficient coverage than the Muslims, Sikhs and Christians. The trend is similar with regard to sufficient coverage given by Quami Awaz except that a higher proportion of its readers felt Muslims getting sufficient coverage.

The Hindustan Times in its reportings on communal issues appeared to be giving equal treatment to all the communities (except Christians). So far as the accuracy is concerned about 67% were of the opinion that the three communities are getting accurate coverage. Among the readers of the The Pioneer about 74% felt that the Hindus and the Sikhs got accurate coverage in comparison to 70% who felt that the Muslims and Christians got accurate coverage in the reportings on communal issues. In the Nav Bharat Times, the Hindus and the Muslims got equal treatment (71%) so far as accurate reporting is concerned. Similarly the Sikhs and the Christians are treated at par (67%).

Almost an equal proportion of readers (55%) of Aaj felt that the Hindus and the Christians got accurate coverage in reportings on communal issues. The proportion of those who considered the Sikhs and Muslims got accurate coverage was less (40% and 51% respectively). A higher proportion (77%) of readers of Quami Awaz felt that it gave accurate coverage to The Muslims in comparison
to the Hindus (74%), the Sikhs (74%) and the Christians (72%).

Among the readers of the The Hindustan Times the proportion of finding unbiased reporting about Muslims in its coverage on communal issues is less (58%) in comparison to the coverage on Hindus (61%), Sikhs (64%) and Christians (63%). Similar trend is observed about other papers' reportings except that of Quami Awaz where a higher proportion of its readers (74%) found the Muslims and the Sikhs getting unbiased coverage.

Satisfaction over Press Reportings during Elections

Parliamentary Elections in India were held in 1991. Prior to these elections the country witnessed some important political developments. During 1990 the Babri Masjid—Ram Janam Bhoomi issue reached its peak first because of the Rath Yatra and then upsurge of the Kar Sevaks for the construction of temple at the disputed site. To disperse them the then state government in UP took certain decisions. In the Police action at the site some casualties took place. All these events were extensively reported in the press (some local press reported irresponsibly without facts that raised the emotions and tempers of the two communities). The Central government changed and soon the new government that came to power lost in the Parliament leading to the announcement of elections in 1991.

The Rathyatra and the Babri Masjid—Ram Janam Bhoomi issue was in the minds of the people at the time of voting as the Indian press has played a very significant role during that period.
During the survey the samples were asked to indicate how much satisfied they were about the way the communal issues had been reported in the newspapers in terms of accuracy, sufficiency and objectivity during elections in 1991.

The analysis of the answers on the five point scale showed that in terms of accuracy of reporting about 11% were 'very satisfied', 41% 'satisfied', 34% 'dissatisfied' and about 7% were 'very dissatisfied'. The remaining about 8% had no opinion to express.

So far as the sufficient coverage of communal issues during the election period is concerned the results indicated that the majority (53%) expressed 'satisfaction'. Only 5% were 'very much satisfied'. The 'satisfied' constituted about 27%. Another 7% were 'very dissatisfied'. The remaining 8% or so did not express.

The trend is similar in regard to maintaining objectivity in reportings during that period. The proportion of 'satisfied' was 39%, 'very satisfied' 7%, 'dissatisfied' 33%, 'very dissatisfied' 13%. The rest had no opinion to express.

Reaction on Newspaper Reportings

Though quite a good proportion of the sample comprised of graduates and secondary educated who read newspapers daily and had dissatisfaction, very many did not react to the newspaper reportings on communal issues in terms of sufficiency, accuracy and objectivity.

About 30% claimed to have thought of reacting but hardly 10 of them actually reacted by writing to the press.
Hope of change in Press Reportings

Out of the total sample of the three cities about 37% were hopeful of some changes in the Press reportings on communal issues.

TV Programmes on Communal Issues

Exposure: Doordarshan does not telecast very frequently specific programmes on communal issues. However, during communal tensions, certain talks and information is given through talks, TV news and discussions and interviews of leaders, academicians and journalists are organised and telecast. In addition the various TV serials, Nataks, dramas and other programmes include the messages of communal amity and harmony.

These programmes on communal issues are watched, 'often' by 43%, 'sometimes' by 33% and 'rarely' by 10%.

Mostly they watched news telecasts, followed by serials, Nataks etc., TV documentaries and discussions and talks telecast on communal issues.

Satisfaction over TV Reporting on Communal Issues

In response to the question about the level of satisfaction on the way the communal issues involved have been reported in the TV news programmes during Parliamentary Elections 1991 the majority of them expressed satisfaction. In regard to the accuracy in reporting hardly 9% claimed to be 'very satisfied'. Those who were 'satisfied' constituted about 46%. The 'dissatisfied' and 'very dissatisfied' comprised 19% and 3% respectively. When the
data relating to these TV news reports being sufficient and unbiased were analysed the similar response pattern emerged.

Only a small proportion of the respondents thought of reacting on the manner of TV news reportings on communal issues but actual action was taken by a couple of them only. Only a segment constituting about 21% appeared to be hopeful about some change taking place in future in TV reportings on communal issues.

Radio Reportings on Communal Issues

Exposure: Majority of the respondents constituting about 61% did not listen to radio reportings on communal issues. Those who claimed to listen to such broadcasts 'often' were about 13%. Among the remaining, about 15% listened 'sometimes' and 11% 'rarely'.

Mostly they listened to news reportings followed by Nataks/Dramas, documentaries, cultural programmes, talks, discussions and interviews on communal issues.

Most of them did not express when they were asked to indicate how satisfied they were with the way the communal issues had been reported in the news programmes on radio in terms of accuracy, sufficiency and objectivity. However the data of those who indicated their level of satisfaction on five point scale showed that 'very satisfied' as well as 'very dissatisfied' were a few, 'satisfied' were some (18%) and 'dissatisfied' about 7% on the radio reports being objective, sufficient and accurate.

Only a few thought of reacting to these radio reportings but none actual reacted and kept their feelings to themselves.
Again only a few of the radio listeners were hopeful of any change taking place in radio reportings on communal issues. Those who were hopeful of change felt that these would depend on the decisions of the government, changes that take place in the behaviour and relationship between communities and leaders and reporters alongwith the awareness among the masses.

Interaction with Communities

'Very frequent' interaction was reported with Hindus by 76%, with Muslims by 36%, Sikhs by 14% and with Christians by 9%. Further analysis of the data revealed that the sample mainly had 'frequent' and 'occassional' interactions with the four communities. However there were some who reported interaction with Christians (22%), Sikhs (10%) and Muslims (3%). This shows that largest section had very frequent interaction with Hindus mainly may be because of the Hindu dominance in the sample. Level of interaction with Muslims, Sikhs and Christians becomes lesser in that order.

The experience of the interaction with any of the community is not reported 'very good' by majority of the respondents. 'Very good' experience with Hindus was reported by 47%, with Muslims by 32%, with Sikhs by 24% and with Christians by 23%. The sample's interaction experience has been generally 'good' and at times 'mixed'. 'Bad' and 'very bad' experience was reported by a few only.

There has not been much variation in the proportion of the respondents reporting 'good' experience with different communities. The pattern is similar with regard to the 'mixed' and 'bad'
experience reported.

Over-representation of Communities

The perceived magnitude of over representation of Hindus in the occupations i.e. Doctor, Teacher and Police is quite high. By and large Hindus are perceived to be over-represented in all the rest occupations i.e. Entertainment industry, Taxi Driver, Rikshaw puller and Hawker. The proportion of respondents perceiving Hindus' over-representation varied among the three cities.

Inter-religion Marriage

Generally Indian people marry within their own caste. Though marriages outside one's religion is something rare but with the spread of education all round change is taking place. Now in large cities and towns every year a few inter-religion marriages take place, people come to know of this and talk about it in their circles.

About 65% of the total respondents were aware of inter-religion marriages that had taken place either in their cities or some other places. The Lucknow respondents were more in know of such marriages (72%) followed by Banaras (63%) and Delhi (61%). What do they think of inter-religion marriages? Majority of the respondents in the three cities either do not approve of these marriages or have not formed any clear opinion. Thus they did not clearly favour such marriages.

Inter-religion marriages find a little higher favour in Banaras and Lucknow (47% in each city) than Delhi (43%) a bigger metro-
politician and capital city of India. Majority of the respondents expressed not to marry their sons (53%) and daughters (59%) in other religions.

C. MEDIA PERSONNEL

The media personnel interviewed included journalists from Delhi, Lucknow and Banaras. In Delhi journalists of The Hindustan Times, the Times of India, Indian Express, Financial Express, Economic Times and Nav Bharat Times were interviewed, and some from news agencies like UNI, PTI and Bhasha, Univarta (last two Hindi) were also interviewed. In Lucknow mainly journalists from the The Pioneer (Eng.) and Quami Awaz (Urdu) and in Banaras from Aaj, Dainik Jagran, Swatantra Bharat, Gandiv, Janvarta (all Hindi) and Awaz-e-Mulk (Urdu) were interviewed.

Most of them were reporters and special correspondents who had reported on communal issues mainly Ayodhya. A few sub-editors of regional papers and Associate Editor, Assistant Features Editor were also spoken to. There was a preponderance of male journalists with female journalists accounting for only nine out of sixty five.

Most of these journalists were in the age group of 25-45 years and followed Hindu religion with exception to those working with Quami Awaz. Three journalists declared themselves atheists and some other liked to be known as Indians only. Their work experience ranged from one year to twenty five years.

Most journalists had last reported on ethnic issues from a month ago to a year and a half back and mostly on various aspects
of the Ram Janam Bhoomi—Babri Masjid dispute. Other issues included the Jamia controversy, the Aligarh Hospital case, Shahbano case, Communal riots in Lucknow and Kanpur, Varanasi bomb blasts in mosques and even the banning of the Salman Rushdie's book.

Freedom of the press has always been a question of debate. Linked to this is the freedom of the journalist in expressing his or her view without any undue pressure. When asked this delicate question, most journalists of English dailies were on the defensive. The journalists in the The Pioneer were of the view that they had 'total freedom' which was adequate. Only one journalist felt that "we have to be cautious and can't express our views freely". Journalists in other English dailies also expressed satisfaction at the degree of freedom they exercised. Quami Awaz journalists were of the opinion that they had complete freedom as long as they remained pro-Congress. Journalists of Hindi papers too were satisfied at the freedom they possessed. Two journalists said that freedom was "upto a limit", two were indecisive about the question and another two of Quami Awaz said that they should get more freedom as sometimes they are requested by the government to publish or not publish certain stories. This hampered their freedom.

Editorial Controls & Policies: In Quami Awaz 10 out of 15 journalists said that control & policies did not pose as an impediment in reporting ethnic issues. The rest said that they had a general policy of writing about the nation rather than individual parties. Since the paper was pro-Congress they cannot
write against the Congress. They all had to follow the code of conduct. In the The Pioneer too, majority of the Journalists said that they feel no constraints as far as editorial policies were concerned. But one was of the view that the The Pioneer had its leaning towards the Congress. In papers like Aaj, Jagran, Gandeev & other regional Hindi dailies also editorial policies didn't act as an impediment. In the The Hindustan Times the journalists are told to "cut down the gory frills", in papers like Indian Express & Financial Express which are considered as pro BJP, though there is no policy laid down as such, the reporter is expected to have a pro-Hindu slant. Even if they don't write like this, they cannot be anti-Hindu.

Government Censorship: There is no government censorship as far as press reports are concerned. It is only during sensitive times like the emergency that the government is empowered to censor news-items.

Threats of physical harm by organized groups: Though faced by a lot of journalists, they did not consider it as a serious threat. It was an occupational hazard. The nature of this threat ranged from threatening phone calls from VHP leaders both at the place of work & residence, threats from Muslim organizations during the Rushdie episode, threats in Srinagar, Bihar & Punjab by KLF etc. threats by militant groups in Punjab & indirect threats by the Kabirpanthis. In relation to the Ayodhya issue some journalists claimed to have received threatening phone calls from
VHP goondas, but they were just brushed off since they would be in trouble if they physically harmed any journalist.

**Owners' Control/Policies:** Most journalists had not seen their owners and felt that owner's policies were non-interfering. If at all they had any specific policy it was conveyed through the editor & not directly. A journalist said that such a situation arise in small newspapers & not in big newspapers.

**Bribery:** Many journalists felt that bribery was not possible in communal issues since this was an emotional issue. Bribery is possible in political & economic issues only, they felt. Another point mentioned was that small, regional papers suffered from this problem since the journalists received less payment & were thus prone to bribes. Some journalists mentioned that bribery was prevalent and was generally in kind. Plots of land, expediting work in government offices was the type of bribe offered may be by local Hindu or Muslim leaders to present their point of view.

**Self Restraint:** Most journalists exercise self-restraint while reporting ethnic issues. Stating facts, not mentioning names of community, writing in an objective manner, crosschecking facts, giving no importance to bombastic statements made by religious leaders are some ways of maintaining self-restraint. Other journalists were of the view that nothing should be written which inflames passion. Especially in sensitive matters like Ayodhya facts should always be verified. Instances which are provoking shouldn't be written. Two journalists cited examples of this.
During the Rath Yatra in a district of Gujarat a man cut his veins and with that blood put a tilak on Advani in front of a crowd. Similarly he was offered 2 bowls of human blood as a sacrifice but this episode was not mentioned. Another incident which was not given coverage was in 1989 when at the site of the Shilayanas dugup—the place was a graveyard actually—there were photographs of VHP people dancing with bones in their hands but this was not used.

So by and large self-restraint is exercised, though one journalist expressed that he 'writes whatever he sees, without any camouflage, otherwise he won't be presenting the truth'.

Policies of media organization: No journalist gave any concrete or specific policies of his or her media organization while reporting communal issues. In general, all the journalists said of their respective newspapers & agencies that all reports on ethnic issues should be factual & non-provocatory. The code of conduct laid down by the Press Council should be adhered to. Most newspapers have 'some sort of political leanings' and this was stated by the Journalists. The Pioneer is pro-Congress, Awaz-e-Mulk is anti-BJP and is against the policies of the State government relating to the Masjid—Mandir issue, Gandeev's policies are pro VHP.

The journalists of Nav Bharat Times said that at present the paper was running without a formal editor so they could not describe their policies.
Tension: On the question of whether the Press contributed to an increase in ethnic conflicts journalists of the English Press said that it was the Hindi Press which fuelled ethnic conflicts. Their sensational headlines created communal tension. The Hindi press has become synonymous with Hindu Press and inflames passions unnecessarily. Regional papers like Aaj, Dainik Jagran, Ajit (Punjabi), Amar Ujala, Pratidin have been accused of indulging in sensationalism and increasing communal tensions. Aaj and Jagran were censored for writing objectionable and false things regarding Ayodhya in 1991. Another journalist cited the example of Nav Bharat Times which in '91 wrote that the mosque has been demolished (which was untrue) and led to riots in Patna. During October 90-91 the Press Council censored Aaj and Jagran for writing communal news. Only two journalists were of the opinion that it was not the press which increased ethnic tension, but the politicians.

Majority of the journalists were unanimous in their opinion that the English press was responsible and Hindi & other regional press contributed to an increase in communal tension.

Healing Touch: Contrary to this viewpoint is the question of the Press playing the role of a healer. If it aggravates communal tension, then does it also play the 'healing touch'? Answers to this were varied. Journalists of Quami Awaj felt that by and large the press played a healing role in resolving ethnic-conflict situations. This is done by presenting balanced and accurate reports. Journalists in the The Pioneer categorically
denied that the Press plays any healing role. They are so caught up in their daily reporting that they are not aware of any healing. Or the press is a mouthpiece of a particular community so it heals one community at the cost of another.

Journalists in news agencies said that only the English press played a healing role by highlighting the positive aspects of an issue and by not publishing inflammatory speeches verbatim. Journalists in Banaras were very optimistic about the healing role played by the press. They said if the reports were objective, unbiased and non-controversial conflicts could be eased.

Objective Information: On the question of whether the Press was giving sufficient and objective information to educate people on the nature of ethnic issues most journalists (in Banaras particularly) felt that many facts were being deliberately concealed regarding ethnic reporting. Some were of the opinion that sometimes to fill space such articles were given so the aim was not to educate the masses. Journalists in news agencies said that they always covered the history of the issue and gave adequate and objective information.

A journalist in The Pioneer had an interesting point of view. He said that the Press doesn't intend to educate but most often the paper is used as a ground for healthy debate between people of opposing view points. In the The Indian Express the Hindu side was presented by Arun Shourie and to that Shahbuddin presented the Muslim picture. Both quoted extensively from scriptures and chronological accuracy was maintained. So in this
manner the public gets educated. This information is sufficient but whether it is objective or not is debatable.

Sometimes the reporter being pressed for time has to sacrifice objectivity, but information per se is there.

**Government Control Press:** Government controlled Press came in for scathing criticism by all journalists. Government controlled Press has been accused of being unprofessional, overcautious, blatantly biased, controlled and deliberately covering up its weaknesses. Government Press has also lost credibility since no one believes what they write. Journalists also believed that government owned media were directionless. They depend on the official source of news and operate under the control and formula of the government. Most journalists also said that government press refrained from reporting on communal issues. They skirted over any controversial matter/issue involving the government. Because of lack of competition, the govt. controlled Press was also complacent and had closed all doors for improvement as one journalist remarked government press is for the government, by the government and of the government. On the other hand, privately owned Press is professional, investigative and because of stiff competition try to outdo each other by better stories. Though they may have leanings towards certain groups, their reportings on communal issues try and present both sides of the story.

**Group Influence:** Press has often been accused of conniving with different groups or parties for their vested interests. When
asked this question most journalists were reluctant to name the papers which were used by specific groups to spread communal discord, more so in the case of the English papers. A majority said that the BJP/RSS were using Aaj, Jagran & Pratidin. Also Organizer & Panchjanya were organs of BJP. The Journalists in Quami Awaz said that no Muslim paper was being used by any group or party. But this was refuted by one journalist who claimed that Muslim India and Radiance were Shahbuddin's papers. Siyasat of Kanpur was said to be Mohammad Arif's paper voicing his ideologies. A journalist of Nav Bharat Times remarked that during the Kar Seva under the Mulayam Singh government, VHP was using UNI (United News of India). So basically what one gathered from the responses was that local and regional papers were more prone to being used by groups than the national press.

**English Language Press:** It is commonly believed that the English language media is more balanced in reporting ethnic issues than the local language media. Most of the journalists supported this and gave reasons for this discrepancy. They said that the Hindi press because of lack of resources and less awareness, believed in sensationalizing communal reports. Another reason is they want to increase circulation and they do this by playing on people's emotions. Though some journalists said that on the national level both the English and Hindi press were balanced but at the local level there was biased reporting. English Press, by and large, is more responsible in its reporting of ethnic issues, though some journalists alleged that it is losing relevance with ground reality. It carries established opinion and caters to the
elite. The English Press appears to be balanced because it does not go deep into any issue, remarked one journalist of Nav Bharat Times. But now news agencies have started Hindi & Urdu service so even smaller newspapers can get authentic news and would be balanced. Local Hindi papers like Amar Ujala, Pratidin, Swatantra Bharat are examples of papers which publish one-sided stories. Most of the papers which give partisan news are confined to the UP Belt as this is the epicentre of communal violence.

Influential Medium: With regard to ethnic issues, about 50% journalists asserted that the electronic medium (TV, video, Audio cassettes) was the most influential on people's mind, but in the smaller cities the newspaper still had not lost its importance. Journalists thought of the newspaper as a potent force in influencing public opinion in communal issues. Journals & magazines were also quite influential. Some journalists however felt that with regard to ethnic issues, word of mouth was most influential. Mass meetings, friends & neighbourhood groups played a dominant role.

Eighty per cent journalists said that their above said comments regarding the reporting of ethnic issues was generally applicable. While the remainder said that it occurred in special circumstances when the environment became communal.