

Moral Dilemmas of an Immoral Nation: Gender, Sexuality, and Journalism in *Page 3*<sup>1</sup>

Radhika Parameswaran  
Associate Professor  
School of Journalism  
Indiana University  
[rparames@indiana.edu](mailto:rparames@indiana.edu)

At the end of a shopping trip in Mumbai's Fabindia outlet, a retail chain that specializes in ethnic and East-West fusion clothing, the store's chic shopping bags made of newsprint from the *Times of India*'s entertainment and lifestyle pages caught my attention. Fabindia's elegant bags – mass produced commodities that simulated street vendors' age-old practices of wrapping food and trinkets in cheap newspaper – signaled the postmodern adaptation of India's frugal street economy for a middle class consumer market's newfound appetite for “shabby chic.” Colorful photographs of Mumbai's young and glamorous men and women; fashion, film, and television celebrities; and prominent business and political families decorated these bags' exterior surfaces. When I quizzed the store's manager about their unique “newsprint bags,” he explained, “Page 3 *kagaz* (paper) is perfect for our shopping bags. It is colorful and fun news, and there is no better way to recycle *and* create a bag with the right mood to finish ladies' shopping experience.” This manager's seamless conflation of “page 3” news with the pleasures of upscale shopping, corporate environmentalism, and cosmopolitan women consumers strikes at the heart of young Indian film director Madhur Bhandarkar's gritty 2005 film *Page 3: The Inside Story*. Narrating a fast-paced tale of journalism's moral decay in post-liberalization India, *Page 3* articulates powerful images of soft journalism's corrosive effects on its producers, subjects, readers, and in the end, on the institution of Indian print journalism whose history is intertwined with the nation's triumphant liberation from colonialism.

This article examines *Page 3*'s cinematic critique of the newly emerging commodity of soft (entertainment/lifestyle) news, a genre of print journalism that has emerged in the past decade in the wake of India's rapid integration into the global economy. Venturing into the uncharted terrain of journalism's portrayals in India's popular domain, the article's investigation of Bhandarkar's film focuses mainly on its chief protagonist Madhavi Sharma, a woman reporter who lives in Mumbai and works for the page 3 section of the film's fictional English-language newspaper *Nation Today*. The article scrutinizes *Page 3*'s narrative on journalism's degradation in globalizing India, a nation that according to the film has fallen prey to the vulgar excesses of Western modernity, through the lenses of postcolonial feminism<sup>2</sup> and scholarship on images of journalism in Hollywood films.<sup>3</sup>

This deconstructive analysis of *Page 3* concentrates on two crucial aspects of the film's gendered constructions of reporter Madhavi Sharma's overlapping private and public identities. The article first probes the ways in which *Page 3* affirms the female reporter's wholesome identity, middle class respectability, and professional competence in contrast to the other less intelligent and depraved women in her life. The film's seemingly positive fabrication of the female reporter's gender identity sets her apart from the seamy world of soft journalism, but it also returns ideal Indian femininity to nationalism's constrained and essentialized models of virginal and pure womanhood. Second, the article tackles the film's depiction of Sharma's relationships with her male colleagues and her struggles to achieve professional success in *Nation Today*'s male-dominated newsroom. In the end, although *Page 3*, which won National Film Awards (2005) for Best Film, Best Editing, and Best Screenplay, avoids churning out simplistic or crude portraits of soft journalism's female reporter, its critical commentary

nevertheless aligns good journalism with nationalism's patriarchal ideologies of middle class morality, female sexuality, and male superiority.

Set in Mumbai, India's commercial and entertainment hub that is home to the nation's wealthiest celebrities and tycoons, *Page 3* follows reporter Madhavi Sharma as she covers soft journalism's circuit of celebrity parties and public relations events and mingles with the rich, the famous, and the upwardly mobile ("wanna be rich and famous") models, artists, and actors. Echoing Robert Altman's complex and multi-layered cinematic style,<sup>4</sup> Bhandarkar resists making the movie exclusively about the character of Madhavi Sharma. Madhavi's female roommates (Pearl, an airline stewardess, and Gayatri, an aspiring Bollywood actress), her friends (a gay make-up artist), her lover (a male fashion model), her co-workers (the editor of the paper and a crime reporter), and her acquaintances from the page 3 beat's elite social milieu also occupy significant narrative space in the film. Intense and long-drawn scenes of lavish parties unfolding against the backdrop of upbeat musical numbers track the trivial, gossipy, and occasionally powerful insiders' chatter of the elite classes.

For Madhavi, an earnest and hard-working young woman, the page 3 beat is merely a stepping-stone toward a more meaningful reporting career in mainstream/hard news. While initially content with her work on the page 3 beat at the prestigious *Nation Today*, she soon begins to discover the ugliness lurking beneath the wild and happy parties, artificial smiles, and casual camaraderie. Halfway through the film, Madhavi becomes disillusioned with her job and manages to persuade her reluctant editor to assign her to the crime beat; the editor pairs Madhavi with an experienced male crime reporter (Vinayak Mane). While Madhavi's crime beat mentor is out of town on another assignment, she uncovers a major story when she stumbles upon a group of Mumbai's wealthiest men sexually abusing poor children. However, her editor, facing

pressures from his own boss, suppresses the story and fires Madhavi. After failing to land a job in crime reporting, Madhavi returns to the page 3 beat for a competing newspaper.

For scholars interested in understanding gender and cinematic portrayals of journalism in India, *Page 3* represents an exemplary cultural artifact because it is one in a handful of Indian films to approximate closely what Matthew C. Ehrlich defines as Hollywood's enduring "journalism movie genre."<sup>5</sup> Although similar to other popular genres in its reliance on narrative dichotomies (civilized/rugged, good/evil, idealism/cynicism, male/female, etc.), Hollywood's robust journalism movie genre's essential elements include a prominent reporter character, an editor character, a love interest, and a plot that foregrounds the obstacles the reporter faces in pursuing an important story. Bollywood's filmography, as Aabha Raveendran notes, rarely features journalists, preferring instead to glamorize business magnates, underworld dons, military officers, select working-class heroes, doctors, and lawyers.<sup>6</sup> More often than not, the professional work of male and female journalists in films like *Dil Hai Ki Maanta Nahin* (1991), *Rain* (2001), *Dil Se* (1998), *Mr. India* (1987), *Mission Kashmir* (2000), *Wajood* (1998), *Sache Ka Bol Bala* (1989), and *Mohra* (1994) remains peripheral to their talents in singing, dancing, and seducing the protagonist of the opposite sex. Another group of Bollywood films – *Elaan* (2005), *Guru* (2007), *Pratibandh* (1990), *Tridev* (1989), *Krantiveer* (1994), and *Chot* (2004) – contains more serious and substantive portrayals of reporters, editors, and publishers, but the work of journalism itself plays a minor role in these narratives. Only a small set of older films – *Nayak* (1966), *New Delhi Times* (1986), and *Main Azaad Hoon* (1989) – along with more recent films including *Phir Bhi Dil Hai Hindustani* (2000), *Lakshya* (2004), and *Page 3*, take up journalism as the main course on the narrative menu.<sup>7</sup>

Ehrlich's argument for studying movies as cultural material that allows scholars to probe

the “tensions and conflicts that long have been part of journalism’s cultural and institutional fabric” captures this paper’s analytical approach to *Page 3*’s cinematic commentary on Indian journalism’s moral decline.<sup>8</sup> Critics of Hollywood’s representations of journalism have noted that popular culture’s mythic public narratives engage journalism’s moral boundaries, its professional practices, and its workers’ uneasy relations with social and economic institutions of power (government, corporations, patriarchy and family, criminal justice system, and newsroom hierarchies).<sup>9</sup> Ehrlich writes that Hollywood’s stories about journalism’s roles and responsibilities may offer distorted images and caricatures of the profession, but these fictional accounts also produce “ennobling and seductive myths” about journalism’s dedication to truth, justice, and ordinary citizens’ rights.<sup>10</sup>

Taking on a mythic pedagogic role, Bhandarkar’s film *Page 3* tackles the moral predicament of Indian journalism’s quick embrace of sensationalism and market commodification at the expense of serving the public, particularly the majority of Indian citizens who are excluded from English-language journalism’s elite readership and from the benefits of consumer society more generally. *Page 3*’s moral critique of print journalism’s opportunistic turn towards soft news in global India both draws from and resurrects the mythic historical past of Indian newspapers’ vigorous participation in the nationalist movement to liberate India from Britain’s colonial rule. In tying its moral lessons on contemporary journalism’s corrupting influences to the figure of the female reporter, the film also engages some of the ongoing dilemmas that fictional female journalists have faced – frustrations with being confined to soft journalism and struggles to overcome condescending male editors and reporters – in Hollywood’s prolific journalism movie genre.<sup>11</sup>

The first section of the article provides background information that situates the film

*Page 3* within the economic context of globalization's impact on print journalism in India. After tracing briefly Indian journalism's historical evolution, this section outlines the booming newspaper industry's creation of page 3 news supplements to capture youth markets, a recent development that the film targets for its censure. The second section locates *Page 3*'s realistic fictional narrative on journalism within the generic conventions of the newly birthed category of multiplex films. The third and fourth sections offer a close deconstructive analysis of the film's representations of the page 3 beat's female reporter, specifically the film's portrayals of her femininity, sexuality, professional competence, and relationships with male colleagues in the newsroom. The concluding section reflects on the progressive potential of *Page 3*'s critique of capitalist news media in light of the patriarchal subtext that structures its disparagement of entertainment and lifestyle journalism.

### ***Page 3* News and Youth Markets: Print Journalism's Evolution in India's Global Economy**

The opening scenes of *Page 3* define the new genre of lifestyle and entertainment journalism that has spread like a virus within the Indian newspaper industry. Hiren Sanghvi, a returning expatriate from the United States, is eager to start a new company in India's booming economic climate. He has a meeting in Mumbai with employees from a well-known PR firm he has hired to help him network and raise money from venture capitalists. A poised and articulate woman representing the PR firm first reassures him that he has returned to a prosperous homeland, an India that now has "beauty queens, fashion, cosmetics, cars, and all the global brands." She then advises him that investing funds in a page 3 party could earn him two good returns immediately: publicity announcing his new business plans in Mumbai's leading newspapers and the opportunity to interact with the city's celebrities and the wealthy business community. When a skeptical Sanghvi quizzes the PR professional about why Mumbai's rich

and famous would consider attending a complete stranger's party, the woman replies that they would welcome the opportunity that such an event affords to earn coveted pictorial space in the page 3 sections of the city's newspapers, the "colorful pages that cover cricketers, actors, industrialists ... the pages that even those people who do not read newspapers always read."

The film *Page 3*'s characterization of a reincarnated print journalism's appeal for a new demographic profile of readers who fit into the traditional postcolonial readership (older, male, upper middle class, fluent in English, college educated, professional) of newspapers hints at the changed cultural and economic landscape of the Indian news industry. Historically, the growth and maturation of Indian newspapers took place in the mid to late part of the nineteenth century when anti-colonial sentiments against British colonial rule began to fester and gain momentum across the country. Within a century of East India Company employee Augustus Hicky's founding of the *Bengal Gazette* in 1780, more than 140 newspapers were being published, providing a forum for the emergence of a burgeoning nationalist movement.<sup>12</sup> During British rule, the press was instrumental in creating a pan-Indian imagined community of educated male nationalist citizens. Upper and middle class male intellectuals, social reformers, industrialists, writers, and politicians (including Mahatma Gandhi) deployed the press as an activist tool to mobilize hundreds of Indian citizens to join the freedom struggle. Prasun Sonwalker traced the tremendous output of Indian print journalism by the mid-twentieth century: "By 1941, about 4,000 newspapers and magazines were in print in 17 languages, all anticipating and seeking to hasten the end of colonial rule."<sup>13</sup>

While an exhaustive summary of the press in post-independent India is beyond the scope of this article, in the decades following India's liberation from British rule in 1947, the power and influence of newspapers – especially the English-language press – among bureaucrats,

industrialists, corporate executives, intellectuals, and the educated Indian middle class has steadily increased.<sup>14</sup> Despite lapses and even scandals that exposed corruption within the profession, Indian journalism grew in stature and prestige in the decades following independence as a watchdog of government, an agent of rural and urban development, and a restrained vehicle to promote commerce.<sup>15</sup> Although not explicitly visible in the film *Page 3*, the opening scenes and the film's didactic tale of contemporary newspapers' moral decline build on this crucial contextual knowledge of Indian print journalism's more illustrious historical past of nation building and its exclusive circulation among the educated upper and middle class elite in the decades (1947-1990) following independence.

*Page 3*'s timely cinematic critique of soft print news was launched in the midst of Indian journalism's rapid growth and its "Murdochization" in India's transformed climate of economic liberalization. Sonwalker noted that newspapers' aggressive pursuit of profits in the last decade and the adoption of a corporate culture that "gives an over-riding primacy to marketing rather than editorial" – has led to news becoming a product that is no different from soap or toothpaste.<sup>16</sup> In contrast to reputable American newspapers' hemorrhaging circulations,<sup>17</sup> post-liberalization India, along with China, has witnessed an unprecedented expansion in the newspaper industry. The 2007 World Press Trends Report revealed that India was the second largest world market for newspapers and that Indian newspaper sales increased 12.93 percent in 2006.<sup>18</sup> According to the National Readership Study Report, India's national newspaper readership grew by 30 percent from 2005 to 2006; the circulation of India's English-language newspapers increased from 26.2 million in 2003 to 35 million in 2006; and the *Times of India* occupied first position as the most read English-language daily with 7.4 million readers in 2006.<sup>19</sup> A *Los Angeles Times* report on Indian newspapers' vibrant and "propitious



circumstances” states that a booming economy, increasing literacy rates, marginal Internet penetration, an expanding middle class, and widespread desire for upward mobility have led to nearly 2100 newspapers making their debut in the year 2005-2006.<sup>20</sup>

As Daya Kishan Thussu observed, the enthusiastic reception and critical acclaim accorded to the film *Page 3* indexed the ways in which metropolitan celebrity and lifestyle news has contributed greatly to the economic success story of journalism in globalizing India.<sup>21</sup> While the label “page 3 news” in the title of Bhandarkar’s film may invoke the salacious visual aesthetics of smiling topless female models who grace British tabloids’ third pages, this newly minted genre of print journalism neither features nude women nor can it be relegated easily to the low culture realm of tabloid literacy. “Page 3 news” in urban India’s everyday parlance refers to the metropolitan lifestyle and entertainment supplements that routinely accompany the mainstream daily newspaper whose pages carry the usual fare of traditional or hard news (national and international politics, business, crime, and sports).

Monitoring the evolving genre of “feel good” journalism in leading newspapers like the *Times of India*, *Hindustan Times*, *Telegraph*, and *Indian Express*, Siddhartha Deb commented that celebrity news has become a staple ingredient in the daily diet of regular news: “The pin-up phenomenon is only one aspect of the makeover of India’s English-language press. None of the publications mentioned above are tabloids; most of them have long histories as serious newspapers, conservative in political sensibility and taste, while the language they work in restricts their audience to those chiefly living in urban India.”<sup>22</sup> For English-language newspapers vying for the attention of a younger reading public – an audience that has been more immersed in television than any other Indian generation – the colorful, tabloid style page 3 supplement has become the bait to lure pop culture savvy urban Indian readers with disposable

income and aspirations to belong to a transnational middle class.<sup>23</sup> The explosion of an urban youth culture focused on newly introduced lifestyle commodities and consumer practices – participating in beauty pageants, shopping at malls, eating out, social drinking, dating, and watching foreign and hybrid TV programs – is possibly among the most visible markers of globalization’s arrival in India.<sup>24</sup> Newspapers are thus inserting tabloid news supplements into their regular daily newspapers in order to woo an expanding youth consumer segment even as they try to hold on to their traditional base of readers (older; more interested in politics, literature, and fiction; upper caste; highly educated; and less attentive to lowbrow television/popular culture).

Registering the paradox of negative publicity’s positive outcomes in a competitive media market, the *Times of India*, whose pioneering brand of soft news earned director Bhandarkar’s scathing criticism, awarded the film *Page 3* a four star rating that is featured prominently on the front and back covers of DVD releases. The *Times of India* publishes page 3 news supplements for 10 different metropolitan areas in the country. The editorial and advertising content of these city-based supplements create a feminized “soft” counterpart to the main section’s traditional hard news content. My informal analysis of the *Times of India*’s supplements for the Delhi and Hyderabad metropolitan areas revealed an editorial emphasis in the front pages on Indian diaspora and national celebrity news (Bollywood film and TV stars, singers, cricketers, supermodels, and beauty queens); soft news about the private lives and hobbies of personalities who might otherwise earn hard news coverage (politicians, bureaucrats, and business executives); and stories targeted to young college students, professional workers, and female readers. Colorful images of Indian and Western female celebrities positioned above the masthead direct readers to the inside pages, and celebrity news dominates the inside sections, “Showbiz,”

“Matinee Masala,” “Entertainment,” and “Backbeat.” Pictorial collages splashed on the second and third pages of the *Delhi Times* titled “Delhi Is Talking About” chronicle the social lives of local Delhi sports, entertainment, and arts celebrities, as well as influential business families.<sup>25</sup> The “Must See, Must Do” pages list local arts events and exhibitions, food festivals, and cinema and television schedules. In addition to the editorial content, the pages of these supplements are filled with local advertisements for cinema theaters, automobile dealers, health clubs, fast food restaurants, supermarkets, and retail outlets for electronic goods, clothing, jewelry, and beauty products.

### ***Page 3 as a Multiplex Film: Globalization and Film Viewing Practices in India***

The same economic changes in India that have fueled the newspaper industry’s production of page 3 news have also had a lasting impact on Indian audiences’ film-going experiences and the film industry’s production modes. From an economic standpoint of film distribution strategies and audience demographics, *Page 3* belongs to the new and evolving genre of the multiplex film, a medium budget, non-formulaic film that explicitly seeks out affluent and younger middle class urban consumers, who pursue bundled leisure experiences – shop, eat, and watch movies – in the conglomerated space of the multiplex mall. College students and more affluent workers of the new “outsourced” global economy – employees of information technology and call center businesses – comprise the predominant multiplex viewing audience of “young people in the age group of 18-35 with a fair mix of both sexes.”<sup>26</sup>

Studying the rise of multiplex films as a sociological phenomenon, Gita Viswanath tracked the widened horizons of Indian filmmaking in globalizing India through ethnographic research on the changing economic habitus of urban consumers’ viewing practices rather than the intrinsic narrative elements of films.<sup>27</sup> As Viswanath’s work documented, the multiplex

cinematic experience represents a new form of class segregation in postcolonial India. For decades, the independent single screen theater, with a multi-level ticket price structure that enabled viewers from different socio-economic classes to occupy the same physical space, had constituted the dominant film viewing experience for urban moviegoers in postcolonial India. Although consumers are segregated *within* the theater, the film viewing experience in this collective space is participatory, boisterous, spontaneous, and intense.<sup>28</sup> In contrast to the more unruly character and diverse class composition of the single screen theater's film audience, the multiplex film, with its fixed single price structure, is screened in small theaters housed in multi-use, air-conditioned buildings that are similar to shopping malls in the United States. These well-policed metropolitan malls, that prohibit the entry of the poor and lower classes, offer safe and clean middle class entertainment environments for elite consumers who may want access to restaurants, food markets, upscale shops, and videogame parlors alongside the movie-going experience.

*Page 3*'s offbeat story about modern journalism, its pursuit of narrative realism and Altman-style aesthetics, and its cast of talented actors known for their dedication to acting rather than becoming media celebrities reflect the multiplex film's generation of an alternative creative space in the Indian film industry. Emboldened by the easier availability of a niche – young and elite – audience, a new breed of Indian filmmakers have ventured to produce offbeat films with original themes and new talent rather than recycled narratives of sex, glamour, and violence with high-budget star casts. *Page 3*'s distinctive narrative identity in the more differentiated socio-economic arena of work and leisure in globalized India emerges in contrast to Bollywood's entrenched and familiar package of action, hyperbolic dialogue, comedy, romance, and musical numbers.<sup>29</sup> Multiplex films like *Page 3* depart from Bollywood's formulaic emphasis on

celebrity film stars, extravagant musical numbers, heterosexual romance, and exotic tourist settings. Exhibiting a hybrid middlebrow aesthetic, these films weave together mainstream cinema's slick production conventions with the realist social commentary of India's highbrow alternative film genre. Bhandarkar's multiplex film *Page 3*, one in a repertoire that includes *Traffic Signal* (2007), *Corporate* (2006), *Satta* (2003), and *Chandni Bar* (2001), solidified the young director's reputation for producing hard-hitting, realistic films that expose corruption and exploitation in the business, political, and social worlds of India's powerful and elite classes.<sup>30</sup> Both *Page 3*'s topical content and visual-narrative aesthetics, which work together to mark its singular membership in the journalism movie genre in India, are thus products of the current historical moment of globalization's arrival on the subcontinent.

### **The Wholesome Woman Journalist: Purity, Impurity, and Ideal National Subjects**

Intervening in the public sphere, the film *Page 3* anchors its moral condemnation of Indian journalism's "Murdochization" to young reporter Madhavi Sharma's subject position; Madhavi's work and home experiences and her gender identity – her biography, sexuality, and interactions with other women – act as a semiotic filter for viewers to judge the page 3 world she routinely covers on her beat. This section examines *Page 3*'s representations of the woman reporter's feminine and sexual identities in relation to the film's portrayals of other female characters—her roommates and the subjects of her soft news reporting and writing—who are part of her new life in Mumbai. Drawing on the insights of postcolonial feminist studies, the analysis shows that Madhavi, the female journalist, represents the good middle class Indian woman, educated and ambitious, but chaste and maternal, while the sorority of women she meets on her page 3 beat symbolizes all that has gone wrong with India. Madhavi's distance from and reactions to the deviant women who populate *Nation Today*'s page 3 beat stand in for the film's

assessment of journalism's decline, its willingness to abandon its mission of public service and pander to the shallow interests of the upwardly mobile consuming classes. From a postcolonial feminist vantage point, Bhandarkar's film mobilizes the patriarchal semiotics of nationalism's gendered binaries even as his cinematic critique of journalism inserts a crucial alternative voice in the public sphere. The film articulates its critique of Indian newspapers' commodified elevation of bourgeois urban readers, particularly its contempt for the empty consumerism and narcissistic interests of old wealth and the nouveau riche alike, on the discursive ground of gender, the familiar nationalist binary of moral versus immoral femininity.

In his canonic work on nineteenth century Indian nationalism, Pantha Chatterjee argued that elite male reformers' anti-colonial rhetoric harnessed women's purity and virtue as emblems of a resilient India whose tradition and culture could withstand British colonial rule.<sup>31</sup> As Chatterjee and other postcolonial feminist scholars have noted,<sup>32</sup> the desexualization of the educated and refined middle class Hindu woman, a key ideological project of early nationalist discourse, was achieved by displacing active female sexuality and women's agency to disrupt patriarchal order onto the white European woman, an immoral feminine figure who was sexually promiscuous, flouted social conventions, and rejected domesticity. In Indian films from the 1950s through the 1980s, a Westernized Indian woman wearing tight skirts and skimpy tops, smoking cigarettes, drinking alcohol, and dancing in bars signified the ubiquitous vamp.<sup>33</sup> The good heroine, on the other hand, may temporarily stray from the right path, but in the end, she returns to the familiar embrace of her traditional culture when she dresses modestly, marries the hero, and signals her acceptance of future roles as wife and mother. Although social and economic forces have altered and expanded the meanings of nationalism's gendered binary in globalizing India, *Page 3's* demarcation of women's bodies and imagined subjectivities as

symbols of unregulated modernity illustrates the enduring cultural purchase of the feminine in constituting national identity.

Early in the film, viewers see Madhavi, the page 3 journalist, mingling with guests at expatriate businessman Hiren Sanghvi's debut party in Mumbai. The female PR expert hired to host the party introduces her as "Madhavi Sharma from *Nation Today*" to a dazed Sanghvi, who is clearly overwhelmed by the crowd at his party. On her train trip home after covering the party, Madhavi reflects on her decision to come to Mumbai to become a journalist. A voice-over in the background in Madhavi's own voice invites viewers to travel into the past to witness her departure from her home in the South Indian city of Bangalore. This short flashback scene, set in Madhavi's home in Bangalore, shows her sitting on a couch in a modestly furnished living room. She argues with her mother, an older woman dressed in a simple cotton sari with long graying hair in a braid, about her choice to move to Mumbai to work for a newspaper. When the worried mother questions her stubborn daughter's decision, the father interrupts to express support for Madhavi's aspirations. Later in the film, in a scene that portrays Madhavi at work, her male boss, newspaper editor Deepak Suri, requests her to write a good report, and then reminds her that she has a B.A. with distinction in mass communication. In yet another moment in the film, Madhavi tells her boyfriend, male fashion model Tarun Sanyal, that her father is an ex-army officer while her silence about her mother's occupation implies that she is a homemaker.

When stitched together, these details yield a particular biographical profile of Madhavi as a respectable, educated, and ambitious middle class woman who wants to work her way up in journalism. As noted above, viewers are introduced early in the film to Madhavi "Sharma," not merely Madhavi; while "Madhavi" itself is an old-fashioned first name, the last name "Sharma" cues audiences to identify Madhavi first as a Hindu subject *and* then as an upper-caste Brahmin

woman. The visual showcasing of Madhavi's simple home and her down-to-earth mother, combined with references to her meritorious performance in college and her father's military service, encase her within the semiotics of educated and salaried middle class respectability and a patriotic family history. Madhavi's journey from Bangalore to Mumbai maps the story of a wholesome South Indian middle class woman migrating to India's busiest center of commerce and entertainment. This young page 3 journalist in this film is thus not a hardened, ultra-modern "Bombay girl." Bombay (the older name for Mumbai) is one of India's oldest cities with a seamy underside of drugs, sex, prostitution, and gang violence (the worst of Western modernity), while Bangalore, the Silicon Valley of South India, stands in for an idealized hybrid space where Indian tradition has blended with the newfound prosperity of global capitalist technology (the best of Western modernity).<sup>34</sup>

Besides the film's biographical portrait of Madhavi as a clever and decent South Indian woman, her identity as a good/pure woman reporter who has been thrust into the unsavory world of page 3 journalism emerges in contrast to her female roommates and the women she encounters in her professional work. *Page 3*'s profiles of Madhavi's roommates mobilize two different and contrasting archetypes of femininity that bolster Madhavi's identity as the ideal feminine citizen-subject, a woman who knows how to reconcile her traditional middle class femininity with masculine career aspirations. One roommate, Pearl, who is neither intellectual nor invested in her traditional culture, bears residual influences of Bollywood's Westernized vamp; she wears the semiotic garb of the shrewd and calculating modern Indian woman. When the film introduces Pearl to viewers, we see a tired Madhavi returning from work to her apartment late at night only to be greeted by Pearl, who is smoking, drinking alcohol, and watching young people dancing to the beat of popular music on television. Waving her cigarette



around, Pearl then accuses Madhavi of being a “boring girl” when she turns down Pearl’s enthusiastic invitation to join her in the festivities.

Pearl works as a flight attendant, and her attitudes about work make it clear that her occupation is marginal to her identity and her future plans. Pearl never discusses her professional life, career struggles, or ambitions; instead, her naked mission in life is to secure a rich husband. Thirsty for financial security and class mobility, Pearl speaks openly about her gold-digger quest for a millionaire spouse in Mumbai. Eventually, after joining Madhavi at party 3 parties to hunt for a husband, she meets and ensnares an older wealthy man, gets married quickly, and moves to the United States. Madhavi speaks softly and firmly in contrast to an impulsive, loud, and aggressive Pearl. In Pearl’s most visible moments in the film, she launches into an angry and crude tirade against an obnoxious male neighbor. In this scene, when Pearl begins yelling at a man in the neighborhood for spreading rumors that she and her roommates are promiscuous women, a concerned Madhavi tries to calm Pearl down before the confrontation escalates into an ugly scene.

The other roommate, Gayatri, is starry-eyed for success as a Bollywood actress. She is portrayed as a naive ingénue, a somewhat foolish and emotionally unstable woman who is incapable of navigating the entertainment world’s shark-infested, patriarchal waters. Early in the film, Gayatri has an appointment with a well-known older male film director, but when he makes sexual advances, she appears shocked and runs from the scene crying hysterically. Then, imagining a mutually romantic and respectful relationship with a well-known actor, Gayatri sleeps with him, and when she gets pregnant, he callously commands her to leave and abort the baby. In a dramatic turn in the film’s narrative, a disappointed Gayatri again performs the role of the immature and volatile female subject when she tries unsuccessfully to commit suicide by

slitting her wrists.

Madhavi, the woman journalist, who is neither calculating and brazen nor erratic and submissive, occupies the desirable midpoint of modern Indian female subjectivity that is located between the brash Pearl and the timid Gayatri. Calling forth tropes of motherhood, a dependable Madhavi nurtures and takes care of people around her. At the beginning of the film, she befriends the lost Gayatri and invites her to share the flat; she tries to secure modeling assignments for her boyfriend; she consoles a distraught Gayatri after she escapes from the lewd director's office; she acts as a good hostess when Pearl's wealthy boyfriend visits the flat; she protects Gayatri from Pearl's harsh comments; and she tenderly cleans her gay friend Abhijit's wounds after two homophobic men attack him. In one of the most poignant scenes in the film, a slow visual collage of mourners gathered at socialite Anjali Thapar's funeral, it is the reporter Madhavi, not family members or friends, who attempts to console Anjali's daughter.

Madhavi's sartorial and sexual packaging codes her middle class modesty, particularly in contrast to the fallen women, the victims *and* mascots of unbridled modernity who are frequently the objects of her journalistic scrutiny. Madhavi dresses fashionably, but is always modestly covered up; she wears jeans with long sleeved shirts, beautiful and bright ethnic blouses, and traditional cotton shalwar kameezes (billowy pants with long, knee-length blouses) with light/almost invisible make up on her face. Madhavi's detached gaze distills scenes of celebrity parties while the constant clicking sounds of photojournalists' cameras in the background invite viewers to occupy voyeuristic subject positions in relation to the wayward women whose images are being captured to feed newspapers' commercial appetite for page 3 news. Although the film seeks to offer a critique of tabloid journalism, its abundant supply of visual images that showcase allegedly immoral women's uncovered bodies and corrupt behavior ends up blaming the female

subjects who reside *within* the textual space of *Nation Today*'s page 3 sections rather than the news industry's profit-driven pursuit of metropolitan youth markets.

Framed within the darkened interior space of lavish settings and flashing psychedelic lights at expatriate Hiren Sanghvi's party, gyrating young women – smoking, dancing, and drinking out of wine glasses – display their slim and curvaceous bodies in revealing clothing (short skirts, tank tops, and see-through dresses). These upwardly mobile women, who are yearning to become models and actors, pose eagerly for intimate page 3 pictures with Sanghvi, a stranger they have just met at the party. In another scene at a sumptuous dinner party with a Bollywood costume theme, a wealthy couple's "uncontrollable" daughter performs a highly suggestive erotic dance set to sexually explicit lyrics as her concerned mother and Madhavi look on. Driving home its argument, one crucial set of scenes that preview a police raid about to take place criminalize the rebellious Westernized Indian woman for abandoning her national culture. The camera first foregrounds drug-induced hallucinogenic young women, again dressed in Western clothing, swaying to the beat of disco music in the darkened rooms of an empty house. After conducting the raid and rounding up his suspects, a righteous police inspector berates a dazed young upper class woman (a drug user) for failing to preserve her authentic national identity: "First, why don't you try to be a good cultured Indian, then you could try to be Western." In another scene, when Madhavi's roommate Gayatri gets involved in a sexual liaison with married actor Rohit Kumar, a celebrity whom Madhavi has often interviewed, the film offers graphic visual evidence of their illicit relationship; after coming out of the shower in a hotel room, Rohit joins an apparently nude and happy Gayatri in bed.

Supplementing the camera's displays of women's bodies as symbols of a degraded moral universe, the oral dialogues of women featured in *Nation Today*'s page 3 sections testify further

to their capitulation to an immoral Western lifestyle. At one social gathering where a flashy TV reporter introduces celebrity guests to her viewers, several rich older women gossip cattily, reveling in others' misfortunes, while a lengthy monologue in the film records a shallow and unfaithful socialite's loud verbal abuse of her husband. In another instance, two jaded older women display their insensitivity and impropriety when they discuss their mutual obsession with sex at the funeral of philanthropist Anjali Thapar, who has unexpectedly committed suicide. Toward the end of the film, Madhavi's former roommate Gayatri, who had earlier fled to Delhi after the married actor rejects her, returns to Mumbai, unable to resist the allure of a Bollywood career. As Madhavi traverses a palatial mansion's living room looking for page 3 candidates to interview, she bumps into Gayatri and, to Madhavi's surprise, the very same older male director whose sexual advances had disgusted Gayatri in an earlier part of the film stands at her side. Reacting to Madhavi's reproachful gaze, Gayatri brushes off her friend with the words, "Arre yaar [buddy]. You know what it takes don't you, and besides I think I like him."

The film's secondary female characters thus operate as a narrative foil for Madhavi's intelligent *and* virginal persona; they embody the feeble quality of a nation that has been weakened by the sweeping influence of Western modernity. Cast as impure, unstable, and inappropriately Westernized, the page 3 women who drift in and out of Madhavi's life stand in symbolically for the decline of morality, concerned citizenship, and good taste. In contrast to these narratives of women's sexuality gone amok, Madhavi, the chaste onlooker whose covered body and demure comportment set her apart from the page 3 subjects she covers for *Nation Today*, weaves her way through these parties, her intelligence and respectability intact. Page 3's female reporter stands on the virginal pedestal of ideal modern middle class femininity. Viewers do not witness a controlled Madhavi displaying her body in a similar uncontrolled fashion as her

subjects, nor does the camera show her consuming alcohol, smoking cigarettes, or expressing views that may compromise her integrity. Sanitizing her romantic relationship, the camera reveals tender and affectionate moments between Madhavi and her boyfriend Tarun, but the film never shows them engaged in full-frontal kissing, fondling, or caressing in the intimate arena of a bedroom.

The film's construction of Madhavi's subjectivity as a good middle class woman has implications for her work as a soft news reporter. Madhavi's gendered subjectivity as an appropriately modern and moral middle class woman intersects with her professional subjectivity as a detached reporter; she achieves her professional distance from her sources because she is clearly not one of *them*, the impure women of page 3 parties and events. Her competence as a page 3 journalist, particularly her ability to act as a neutral observer rather than a participant-observer, is crafted through scenes that position her as an outsider to the depraved world she covers for *Nation Today*. Her feminine purity and elevated morality in the film are inseparable from her skills as a good and virtuous journalist, who is able to stand at a distance and clinically inspect the page 3 realities she turns into news. The film's representations of the soft news beat's female reporter appear positive on the surface, but on probing further, Madhavi's intelligence, maternal instincts, and respectable exterior – qualities that may bolster the woman journalist's image in India's public culture – are earned at a considerable cost to the collective construction of modern Indian womanhood. Absolving capitalist newspapers, patriarchy, and an apathetic educated middle class of all blame, young Westernized women who fail to conform to nationalism's model of ideal womanhood are held responsible for journalism's downfall.

### **Soft Women in Hard Journalism: Masculine Authority and Feminine Naiveté**

If *Page 3* assigns the female reporter a superior moral position in relation to her

roommates and women she meets on her beat, what is the quality of her relationships with *men* in her professional and private life? Taking up this question in the context of the United States, Joe Saltzman's historical survey reviews the ways in which fiction, television, and film in the United States have portrayed women reporters' struggles in a male-dominated profession. While early twentieth century American popular culture's women reporters (labeled as "sob sisters") languished in the ghetto of soft news, more recent images of women in hard/mainstream journalism try to reconcile traits (compassion, emotion, and selflessness) and roles (daughter, sister, wife, and mother) linked to femininity/womanhood with the seemingly masculine attributes (ambition, ruthlessness, and workaholic behavior) that good journalism demands of its workers.<sup>35</sup> Television's *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* (1970-1977) and *Murphy Brown* (1988-1998) inaugurated some of the most positive images of women in journalism, but more often than not, female reporters in popular culture have been portrayed as less intelligent, less talented, less entrepreneurial, and less strong and independent than their male counterparts.<sup>36</sup> *Page 3*'s narrative does not diminish Madhavi's thinking or writing capabilities or her desire for professional fulfillment, but her interactions with *Nation Today*'s male editor and her male crime beat mentor construct her as a naive, idealistic, and immature rookie, who cannot make a successful transition to hard news because she fails to understand the true business of journalism.

To a certain extent, *Page 3*'s unusual images of editor Deepak Suri's emotional moments of vulnerability violate conventional notions of professional masculine aloofness and restraint. The camera lingers on Suri, an accomplished, older middle-aged man, crying in the privacy of his office after he fires Madhavi, obeying a direct order from his newspaper's publisher to get rid of her. At another pivotal moment in the film, Madhavi, frustrated with her work for the page 3 beat, refuses to write a bland "feel good" story on socialite Anjali Thapar's funeral. With angry

tears pouring down her face, she demands that Suri transfer her to a hard news beat on the main desk, and then despite his reservations, the editor moves his young and inexperienced female reporter to the crime beat. Although such footage in *Page 3* departs from the traditional script of strong older men exercising control over gentle/feminine/younger women, the dominant template of gender and journalism in the film reproduces a hierarchical top-down relationship between men and women in print journalism's workplace.

Throughout the film, aside from editor Suri's unexpected emotional breakdown at work – which in any case remains invisible to his colleagues and thus does not disrupt the film's public social order – he and Madhavi have a clearly established boss-subordinate relationship. Early in the film's narrative, when Madhavi, still new to the page 3 beat, submits a story on an artist about whom she is passionate, the editor cuts the report without consulting her, and, in an avuncular fashion, commands her to write stories that bring in the money. Later, in a similar incident, the editor cuts out most of Madhavi's story on Anjali Thapar's charity work for an orphanage with no explanation and without any advance notice. After a visit from the newspaper's publisher, Suri informs his editorial staff that the budget for page 3 journalism has been increased so his reporters will have to begin producing more entertainment stories. Looking pointedly at Madhavi, he asks her to work extra hard on celebrity profiles and interviews, but also tells her not to expect any extra money. The editor's authority over Madhavi is most evident when he scolds her in public and then orders her to apologize to actor Rohit Kumar for writing a negative story about the actor's extra-marital relationship with a woman (Madhavi's roommate Gayatri) who had aborted his baby. Taking his infantilization of Madhavi a step further, Suri accompanies her to meet Kumar, and a chastened Madhavi is compelled, under Suri's watchful eye, to apologize to the actor who had treated her roommate disgracefully.

When Madhavi demands a shift to another beat, Suri assigns her to the crime beat under the mentorship of Vinayak Mane, a senior male crime reporter and a journalist who has earned a reputation at work for his fearless independence. *Page 3*'s pairing of Madhavi (young, female, and amateur) and Vinayak (older, male, and experienced) follows a fairly classic patriarchal mold that has structured the stories of Hollywood films like *Up Close and Personal*. During Madhavi's only brief prior contact with Vinayak, he mocks her naiveté for imagining that she is a journalist, telling her: "Who told you that you were a journalist? What you do is entertainment, not journalism." Not surprisingly, given his contempt for page 3 reporting and writing, Vinayak shows no enthusiasm for coaching Madhavi. During a private moment of male bonding, the editor reassures Vinayak that his teaching task would not last long. Dismissing Madhavi's frustration with the page 3 beat, Suri tells Vinayak that her fascination for writing hard news is a newfound novelty, a transitory phase that will end soon after she gets a taste of the crime beat's grueling routine.

Vinayak, the seasoned male crime reporter in the film, stands in for journalism's vigorous and glorious past, for its historical legacy as an anti-establishment and anti-elite agent of progress, and for its role in birthing an India free and independent of British colonial rule. Dressed casually in jeans and old cotton shirts, with no visible personal history, family connections, or lovers, Vinayak signs in as the committed, anti-materialistic reporter whose dedication to his work is supreme. Vinayak's persona, which incorporates elements of Bollywood films' rebellious anti-hero of the seventies, evokes Ehrlich's description of the outlaw journalist: "He (or she, but most often he) holds no particular hope for society's betterment ... Resolutely independent, he shuns convention and obligation and scorns officially sanctioned truth and morality."<sup>37</sup> Scenes showing Vinayak driving at night on his motorcycle



through the city solidify his link to the solitary masculine figure of the outlaw journalist. When a hardworking police chief, in a fit of anger, throws a corrupt drug seller out of his truck, killing him in the process, Vinayak, in clear defiance of conventional journalistic norms, reassures the chief that he will not be filing a story on the unexpected casualty. His silence, even complicity, in the death of the drug dealer upholds a vigilante form of justice and troublingly aligns him with the state. In *Page 3*'s critique of print journalism's conversion from justice and idealism to market commodity, Vinayak becomes the symbolic vehicle to "look nostalgically to an idealized past for examples of what the present could be."<sup>38</sup>

While the film eventually shows Madhavi achieving some measure of success in her work with Vinayak, he ultimately proves to be stronger and wiser than her in the field. When Madhavi accompanies him to interview victims of gang violence in a poor community, an unexpected series of bomb explosions leave several innocent bystanders injured and some others dead. Madhavi and Vinayak abandon their interviews and rush to the scene. As Madhavi stares passively at the carnage in a numb state of shock, Vinayak hands her his bag and plunges into the chaos to rescue the wounded and gather information. When Vinayak goes out of town for another assignment, Madhavi gets involved in a crime story that implicates Ramesh Thapar, one of the city's wealthiest businessmen, in a child abuse scandal. Madhavi manages to secure several compromising pictures of Thapar, along with some older white men, fondling poor young boys who have been kidnapped by these men. To Madhavi's utter surprise, her editor, who congratulated her the previous night for her successful reporting of a difficult story, returns in the morning to fire her after succumbing to pressures from the publisher. When Vinayak comes back to Mumbai, he learns that Madhavi has been fired for filing a negative story about the rich and the famous. Viewers witness a grim and resolute Vinayak knocking on Madhavi's

door. A tearful and subdued Madhavi greets him at the door and they go on a walk. Vinayak first commiserates with Madhavi, and then lectures her bluntly on how she could have handled the situation more effectively. Pointing out her mistakes as an amateur journalist (without criticizing the editor for unethical behavior), he tells her that she failed because she does not know how to “work within the system in order to change the system.”

*Page 3* showcases Madhavi’s success as a journalist in the narration of her dogged determination to pursue the story of poor children who were being sexually abused by some of Mumbai’s most powerful men. But, on examining further the film’s modest allowance of success for the woman journalist, even Madhavi’s achievement begins to conform to a gendered pattern of journalistic labor. Madhavi’s professional proximity earlier with Anjali Thapar, who manages an orphanage, combined with her later work with children on the crime beat – her discovery of child sexual abuse – plugs her professional identity into a maternal and feminized arena of children’s issues. In contrast, viewers are introduced to Vinayak, the male crime reporter, when he is in the midst of covering a police sting operation to capture drug dealers, and we learn from his colleagues that he is adept at confronting corrupt politicians. Furthermore, the film’s “unhappy and realistic” conclusion – Madhavi cannot succeed in crime reporting – distinguishes it from Bollywood’s “happily ever after” stories of moral order and conjugal bliss,<sup>39</sup> but its pessimistic treatment of Madhavi’s foray into crime reporting suggests that young women are not fit to participate in hard journalism or its proud historical legacy. After getting fired from *Nation Today*, Madhavi fails to secure a reporting position in the political, business, or crime beats, and she ends up working for the page 3 beat on a competing newspaper. Madhavi accepts her fate as linked to page 3’s soft news ghetto, and the film’s concluding scenes show her back at a party bumping into the same set of people she left behind.

The absence of any strong women journalists in *Nation Today*'s newsroom compounds the problem of *Page 3*'s alignment of male news professionals with authority, power, success, and, independence. The film's narrative does not include any substantive footage of women managers, reporters, editors, or columnists who produce content for *Nation Today*'s hard news pages, despite the fact that most English-language newspapers in large Indian cities (especially Mumbai, the setting for the film) employ senior women reporters, editors, and columnists.<sup>40</sup> Disavowing any possibility for female solidarity at work, the only brief footage of women at *Nation Today* captures them commenting cattily about Madhavi's unseemly propensity to argue with the editor or defy his orders. The absence of any authoritative and respected women journalists in *Page 3*'s narrative heightens its conflation of journalistic success and competence with the masculine subject position.

Finally, Madhavi's identity as a liberal and modern woman journalist is crafted through scenes that portray her close friendship with Abhijit, a young gay make-up artist, who works with Bollywood actors and fashion models. For the younger, urban middle class multiplex viewing audience in India, one that is familiar with the television sitcom *Will & Grace* and films like *My Best Friend's Wedding*, *Page 3*'s nod to an alternative gay and transgendered community in Mumbai – the token inclusion of a gay man and a flamboyant transvestite “queen” (well-known designer Zulfi Khan) in the plot – authenticates its credentials as a “hip” global Indian film. *Page 3* is one among several multiplex films like *Metro* and *Kal Ho Na Ho* that feature gay men or references to gay sexuality in their narratives.<sup>41</sup> Abhijit and Madhavi are close friends, and when she begins dating Tarun, Madhavi continues to include Abhijit in her social life. *Page 3*'s progressive gesture towards gay sexuality is, however, undermined when Abhijit betrays Madhavi by initiating sexual relations with her boyfriend Tarun. In a graphic shot

of Abhijit's betrayal, the film reveals a shocked Madhavi, who returns home early one evening and opens her bedroom door to find Abhijit and Tarun locked in an erotic position.

### **Conclusion: Gender, Nation, and Journalism in *Page 3***

Circulating in the midst of journalism's booming expansion in globalizing India, the film *Page 3*, along with recent films *Phir Bhi Dil Hai Hindustani* and *Lakshya*, is a welcome addition to the landscape of Indian cinema because of its serious scrutiny of the news industry. Much like the Bollywood film *Phir Bhi Dil Hai Hindustani*, which portrays two vulnerable and imperfect television reporters engaged in a ratings competition, *Page 3* has a complex narrative that avoids serving up simplistic or romantic visions of print journalism. Bhandarkar's documentary style critique of print journalism's embrace of lifestyle and entertainment stories at the expense of meaningful development, political, and international news dovetails with the criticisms that Phalguni Sainath, recipient of the 2007 Magsaysay Award for journalism, has made of recent trends towards soft news in reputable Indian newspapers. Voicing his critique of India's misplaced priorities in the editorial essay "The Decade of Our Discontent," Sainath wrote:

The early decades were at least decades of hope. There were improvements, significant if not impressive in literacy, life expectancy, and other human development indicators. There was a sense that "India lives in her villages." The slogan that caught the nation's imagination, even if in wartime, was "jai jawan, jai kisan" (*Hail the soldier, hail the farmer, my translation*). The farmer was seen as carrying the nation's future on his or her shoulders ... sixty years on, rural India is a shambles. The most severe agrarian crisis since the eve of the Green Revolution rages on, but does not hold elite or media interest for long. ... The government tells us over 112,000 farmers have committed suicide since 1993. A gross underestimate but the figure is bad enough. These are suicides driven by debt.<sup>42</sup>

Sainath has argued that inequality is neither new nor unknown in India, but what makes the last decade different is the "ruthlessness with which it has been engineered" and the "cynicism with which it has been constructed."<sup>43</sup> Taking newspapers to task for their abandonment of good

journalism, Sainath noted with sarcasm that the first lead story on the front page of a leading newspaper was about a young man who had paid Rs. 15 lakh for a fancy cell phone number.

*Page 3* attempts to serve the public interest in a deeply divided India by revealing the extent to which newspapers are in hot pursuit of “feel good” lifestyle and entertainment stories that cater to middle class readers and affirm their desire for upward mobility. Yet the irony of its critique lies in the film’s screening in multiplex theaters located in malls that are designed to promote lifestyle consumption and create pleasant consuming environments that exclude the very marginalized and poor population that reporter Madhavi Sharma wants to help.

When we approach *Page 3* from a feminist perspective, the film’s narrative and visual cartographies of class critique – the newspaper industry and the lifestyle of its metropolitan page 3 subjects – draw on gendered discourses of endangered and degraded Indian femininity to articulate discontent with newspapers’ preoccupation with soft journalism. The institutional forces that have led to the rise of page 3 journalism and the “Murdochization” of news – state policies encouraging lifestyle consumerism, media dependence on advertising revenue, newspapers’ pursuit of young urban readers with purchasing power, and the general abdication of social responsibility by the middle class – are muted in the film, which instead foregrounds the questionable character of women who inhabit the textual space of page 3 news. Bhandarkar’s camera points to Indian women’s crude discussion of sexual pleasure at a funeral as a sign of page 3 journalism’s unseemly appetite for trashy news. But, as a feminist viewer of the film, I found the discussion of sexuality between two older Indian women progressive to the extent that such a representation challenges patriarchal constructions of elderly women as sexually passive.

The film’s realistic conclusion in which a wiser Madhavi acknowledges that the page 3 beat’s “party is over” for her does show the young Indian female reporter’s ability to mature and

persist in the pursuit of a reporting career. Nevertheless, its portrayal of journalistic achievement in the end reinforces patriarchal notions of masculine superiority with the male reporter in the hard news arena indexing journalism's productive nationalist past. In addition, the film invests the female reporter with a subjectivity that includes intelligence and passion for public affairs journalism; however, the narrative limits this young woman's capacity to achieve full-fledged fulfillment in her career. The female reporter in *Page 3* also works in isolation from other women journalists, who are denied narrative space within the film, and thus excluded from embodying professional power and authority. In the end, *Page 3*'s strong and provocative commentary on Indian print journalism, as well as its pungent disclaimer of Indian newspapers' shift towards commodity news, cannot be divorced from its equally strong and disturbing patriarchal subtext.

## Endnotes

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<sup>1</sup> Earlier versions of this paper were presented at the 2007 International Communication Association's annual convention and the 2008 Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication's annual convention. The author thanks Nivedita Raju, Sunitha Chitrapu, Purnima Bose, and Carol Polsgrove for their excellent comments and their encouragement and support.

<sup>2</sup> For influential work in postcolonial studies see Partha Chatterjee, "Recasting Women: Essays in Indian Colonial History," in *The Nationalist Resolution of the Women's Question*, ed. Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1989), 233-253; Inderpal Grewal, *Home and Harem: Nation, Gender, Empire, and the Cultures of Travel* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996); Raka Shome and Radha Hegde, "Culture, Communication, and the Challenge of Globalization," *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 26 (2002): 172-189; Nita Kumar, *Women as Subjects: South Asian Histories* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 1994); Lata Mani, "Cultural Theory and Colonial Texts," in *Cultural Studies*, ed. Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson, and Paula Treichler (New York: Routledge, 1991); and Rajeswari Sunder Rajan, *Real and Imagined Women* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993).

<sup>3</sup> See Bonnie Brennen, "Sweat Not Melodrama: Reading the Structure of Feeling in 'All the President's Men,'" *Journalism: Theory, Practice, and Criticism* 4 (2003): 113-131; Matthew C. Ehrlich, *Journalism in the Movies* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004); Howard Good, *Girl Reporter: Gender, Journalism, and the Movies* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 1998); Joe Saltzman, *Frank Capra and the Image of the Journalist in American Film* (Los Angeles: Norman Lear Center, 2002); Joe Saltzman, "Sob Sisters: The Image of the Female Journalist in Popular Culture." *Image of the Journalist in Popular Culture Project*, (paper, 2003), <<http://ijpc.org/sobessay.pdf>> (accessed April 15, 2009).

<sup>4</sup> Film reviewer Shahid Khan notes that *Page 3* "like much of Altman cinema has no main plot, but looks through stories of many characters." Shahid Khan, "Film Review: *Page 3, the Inside Story*." *Planet Bollywood*, <<http://planetbollywood.com/Film/Page 3/>> (accessed April 16, 2009).

<sup>5</sup> Ehrlich, *Journalism in the Movies*, 10.

<sup>6</sup> Aabha Raveendran, comment on "Journalism in Bollywood" in Blog "Just Like Dat," comment posted March 18, 2006, <<http://aabharaveendranblogspot.com>> (accessed January 1, 2008).

<sup>7</sup> Raveendran's commentary was a valuable resource in putting together this filmography of journalism in Bollywood films. Thanks also to Sunitha Chitrapu for pointing out some other films. See Ashish Rajadhyaksha and Paul Willimen, *The Encyclopaedia of Indian Cinema* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999) for a more exhaustive list of Indian films in vernacular languages that reference journalism. Examples of films from 1985 to 1995 that

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feature newspaper publishers, journalists, cartoonists, and photojournalists as characters include *Paroma* (1985, Bengali/Hindi), *Susman* (1986, Hindi), *Panchagni* (1986, Malayalam), *Sangliana* (1988, Kannada), *Thartharaat* (1989, Marathi), *Sukrutham* (1994, Malayalam), and *English August* (1994, English). *Aranya Rodana* (1992, Oriya) and *Vartha* (1986, Malayalam) are two films from this decade that focus on journalism as a main theme. Directed by the veteran South Indian filmmaker I. V. Sasi, the well-known film *Vartha* tells the story of an intrepid newspaper editor who brings down a corrupt political regime.

<sup>8</sup> Ehrlich, *Journalism in the Movies*, 10.

<sup>9</sup> For an exploration of these themes in film, see Brennen, 2003; Ehrlich, 2004; Saltzman, 2002.

<sup>10</sup> Ehrlich, *Journalism in the Movies*, 6.

<sup>11</sup> For an introduction to scholarship on images of women reporters in popular culture in the United States, see Saltzman, "Sob Sisters."

<sup>12</sup> Prasun Sonwalker, "'Murdochization' of the Indian Press: From By-line to Bottomline," *Media, Culture & Society* 24 (2002): 823.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 823.

<sup>14</sup> Hemant Shah analyzes the impact of India's English-language newspapers' elite readership on the content and tone of newspaper coverage of particular issues that conflict with the interests of this readership. See Hemant Shah, "News and the 'Self-Production of Society': *Times of India* Coverage of Caste Conflict and Job Reservations in India," *Journalism Monographs* 144 (1994): 1-31.

<sup>15</sup> In the arena of women's equality, for instance, the press has shown support for women's rights issues such as the enactment of progressive legislative action against dowry deaths, female infanticide, and domestic abuse even though close examinations of the coverage itself has revealed a lack of attention to institutional sexism and systemic discrimination against girls and women. For analyses of women's issues in Indian news media, see Vimal Balasubrahmanyam, *Mirror Image: The Media and the Women's Question* (Mumbai, India: Centre for Education & Documentation, 1988); Rashmi Luthra, "The Women's Movement and the Press in India: The Construction of Female Feticide as Social Issue," *Women's Studies in Communication* 22 (1999): 1-24; Purnima Mankekar, "To Whom Does Ameena Belong? Towards a Feminist Analysis of Childhood and Nationhood in Contemporary India," *Feminist Review* 56 (1997): 26-60; and Kalpana Misra and Debasmita Roychowdhury, "Vigilantes, Virgins, and Long-suffering Wives," *Contemporary South Asia* 6 (1997): 247-258.

<sup>16</sup> Sonwalker, "'Murdochization' of the Indian Press," 827-828.



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<sup>17</sup> Katharine Q. Seelye, "Newspaper Circulation Falls Sharply," *New York Times*, October 31, 2006, <<http://www.nytimes.com/2006/10/31/business/media/31paper.html>> (accessed November 10, 2006).

<sup>18</sup> World Association of Newspapers, "World Press Trends 2007: Newspaper Circulation, Advertising Increases," <<http://www.moscow2006.com/eng/news/congress/1375/>> (accessed November 13, 2008).

<sup>19</sup> National Readership Studies Council. "NRS 2006-Key Findings." <<http://www.auditbureau.org/nrspress06.htm>> (accessed March 21, 2007).

<sup>20</sup> Henry Chu, "In India, Newspapers Are Likely to Be a Long Story," *Los Angeles Times*, March 18, 2007, <<http://www.latimes.com/2007/may/18/business/fi-newspaper18>> (accessed March 23, 2008).

<sup>21</sup> See Daya Kishan Thussu, "The Murdochization of News: The Case of Star TV in India," *Media, Culture & Society* 29 (2007): 603. To a large degree, Indian newspapers' recent emphasis on editorial and advertising content focused on celebrity lives and lifestyle consumerism reflects Thussu's evaluation of broadcast news in the dramatically altered scenario of global, national, and regional television's accelerated invasion of India's national airwaves. Examining the ways in which proliferating and competitive television news channels have sought to win the ratings battles in India, Thussu observes that sensational news of Bollywood celebrities, cricket stars, and urban crimes is beginning to outweigh international news, development stories on poverty, and public affairs programming.

<sup>22</sup> Siddhartha Deb, "Letter from Delhi: The 'Feelgood,'" *Columbia Journalism Review*, March/April 2005, 40.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid*, 42.

<sup>24</sup> For examples of scholarship on India's youth culture see Vamsee Juluri, "Music Television and the Invention of Youth Culture in India," *Media, Culture & Society* 3 (2002): 367-386; Ritty Lukose, "Consuming Globalization: Youth and Gender in Kerala, India," *Journal of Social History* Summer (2005): 915-935; and Arun Saldanha, "Music, Space, Identity: Geographies of Youth Culture in Bangalore," *Cultural Studies* 16 (2002): 337-350.

<sup>25</sup> While newspapers' intensified coverage of Bollywood and television celebrities reflects a new form of media intertextuality in global India, these supplements' feminine address is also "remediating" older genres of women's print culture for larger youth audiences, namely, the gossipy and informal tone and pictorial content of well-known entertainment magazines *Stardust* and *Filmfare* that have been around for decades. Newspapers' page 3 sections' importation of older popular film journalism's modes of address is also reflected in the frequent use of *Stardust*'s trademark "Hinglish," or English blended with a smattering of Hindi words to reflect young urban readers' spoken English and their hybrid global-national identities. See Rachel Dwyer, *All You Want Is Money, All You Need Is Love: Sexuality and*

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*Romance in Modern India* (London: Cassell Books, 2000) for a history of India's film magazines.

<sup>26</sup> Gita Viswanath, "The Multiplex: Crowd, Audience, and the Genre Film," *Economic and Political Weekly*, August 11, 2007, 3289.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> For examples of ethnographic research on Indian audiences' film viewing experiences, see Steve Derne, *Movies, Masculinity, and Modernity: An Ethnography of Men's Filmgoing in India* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2000); Lakshmi Srinivas, "The Active Audience: Spectatorship, Social Relations, and the Experience of Cinema in India," *Media, Culture & Society* 24 (2002): 155-174.

<sup>29</sup> Raam Tarat writes that *Page 3*, a film that offers an "opinionated take" on Mumbai high society, is "not your typical Bollywood fare as it is devoid of your characteristic song and dance routines, fluffy love stories, A-Team style action, or melodrama." See Raam Tarat, "Review: *Page 3, The Inside Story*." *Future Movies*, March 15, 2005, <<http://www.futuremovies.co.uk/review.asp?ID=305>> (accessed April 16, 2009).

<sup>30</sup> Bhandarkar's 2001 film *Chandni Bar*, for example, takes viewers deep into the life of an urban dancing girl/prostitute to reveal the struggles of sex workers whose lives are shaped by poverty, a self-serving political and law enforcement bureaucracy, and a hypocritical middle and upper class male clientele.

<sup>31</sup> Chatterjee, "Recasting Women: Essays in Indian Colonial History," 233-253.

<sup>32</sup> Key examples of postcolonial feminist scholarship on gender and Indian nationalism include Purnima Bose, *Organizing Empire: Individualism, Collective Agency, and India* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003); Grewal, 1996; Kumari Jayawardena, *Feminism and Nationalism in the Third World (Third World Books)* (London: Zed Books Ltd., 1986); and Deniz Kandiyoti, "Identity and Its Discontents: Women and the Nation," *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 20, (1991): 429-443.

<sup>33</sup> See Somnath Zutshi, "Women, Nation, and the Outsider in Hindi Cinema," in *Interrogating Modernity*, ed. Tejaswini Niranjana, P. Sudhir, and Vivek Dhareshwar (Calcutta: Seagull Books, 1993), 83-142.

<sup>34</sup> For a moving, intimate, and shocking ethnographic account of Bombay's darker side (underworld, police corruption, religious fundamentalism, and slum life), see journalist and fiction writer Suketu Mehta's book *Maximum City: Bombay Lost and Found* (London: Review, 2005).

<sup>35</sup> Saltzman, "Sob Sisters," 5.

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Ehrlich, "Journalism in the Movies," 8.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>39</sup> Chitra Mahesh, a film reviewer for *The Hindu*, expresses her appreciation for the film's ending: "It makes the film even more acceptable when the climax is left nebulous. Probably, because such situations will continue to exist. And injustices will keep happening." Chitra Mahesh, "Page 3." *The Hindu*, January 28, 2005.

<http://www.hinduonnet.com/thehindu/fr/2005/01/28/stories/2005012801960200.htm>  
(accessed April 18, 2009).

<sup>40</sup> India's English-language newspaper industry has, until recently, been a predominantly patriarchal and middle/upper middle class institution, both in the composition of its ownership, management, workforce, editorial contributors and its readership, but Indian women have managed to carve out notable careers as newspaper reporters and editors. Ammu Joseph's research based on 200 interviews with women journalists, documents the successes and difficulties – sexual harassment within and outside the office, ghettoization in soft news, and balancing career and family – that Indian women reporters and editors faced throughout the eighties and nineties. See Ammu Joseph, *Women in Journalism: Making News* (London: Konark Publishers, 2000).

<sup>41</sup> See Betsy Jose, "Cinema's Scope: Gay and Lesbian Visibility in Contemporary Cinema" (paper presented to the 2009 International Communication Association Convention, Chicago, May 21-25, 2009) for an analysis of the problematic ways in which gays and lesbians are being incorporated into mainstream Indian cinema.

<sup>42</sup> Phalguni Sainath, "The Decade of Our Discontent," *The Hindu*, August 9, 2007, 10.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.