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**Exit, Voice, and Compliance: Portraits of journalistic
agency within Indian newsrooms**

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Anvisha Manral
(India)

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Members of the Examining Committee:

Dr. Farhad Mukhtarov
Dr. Sunil Tankha

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Inquiries:

International Institute of Social Studies
P.O. Box 29776
2502 LT The Hague
The Netherlands

t: +31 70 426 0460
e: info@iss.nl
w: www.iss.nl
fb: <http://www.facebook.com/iss.nl>
twitter: [@issnl](https://twitter.com/issnl)

Location:

Kortenaerkade 12
2518 AX The Hague
The Netherlands

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List of Acronyms

RSS	Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh
BJP	Bharatiya Janata Party
CAA	Citizenship Amendment Act
NRC	National Register of Citizens
JMI	Jamia Millia Islamia
JNU	Jawaharlal Nehru University

Abstract

The agency of journalists remains an under-explored topic in authoritarian settings, while the role of institutions in shaping their daily practice and perception of roles has been consistently researched. Responding to this gap in literature, this study takes journalists to be individuals with agency. As people who are tasked with finding out and presenting objective ‘truths’, journalists often confront a dissonance between the editorial line of their organisation and their personal beliefs on issues. In addition to the dissonance, they are often faced with multiple oppressions, involving multiple actors. This study, therefore, highlights how journalists exercise their agency in response to those constraining powers. In doing so, it reveals the coping strategies of journalists working in mainstream Indian media, taking the anti-CAA protests of 2019-2020 in New Delhi, India as its departure point. Following a Foucauldian approach, this research uses concepts such as power, oppression, and resistance to show how journalists interact with them.

Relevance to Development Studies

There is strong consensus that India is witnessing a steady rise in populism. Hindutva, the ideology that makes claims for a Hindu nation, has permeated nearly all aspects of daily life. Among institutions, scholars have noted that the Indian media reinforces the idea of Muslims as the “other”. This is reflected in how mass-media produces representations of suspect communities in collusion with the state. A recent example of this is the media coverage of the anti-CAA protests that occurred in New Delhi, India, from 2019 to 2020.

Despite its urgency in the present political context, studies on the role of media in authoritarian regimes have not gone beyond political pressures in documenting how the media operates in authoritarian settings. Texts have so far been limited to self-censorship or the ways in which journalists perceive their professional roles in authoritarian regimes.

Since media is an important institution that affects policy and polity, in this study, journalists are understood as political actors with agency. Set against the backdrop of the anti-CAA protests, this research explores the concepts of power, oppression, and resistance to show how journalists negotiate pressures in newsrooms. Debates on these concepts have piqued the interest of social scientists over the years, and yet, there never seems to be enough work on their intersection, especially in the context of journalism. Therefore, research responds to that gap.

Keywords: Power, Resistance, Media, Nation-building, CAA-NRC, anti-CAA protests, India

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Introduction: Vignettes of resistance from Nazi Germany, Israel, and India

In a letter to his wife, Carl von Ossietzky wrote, “Amid cheers, I passed through the prison gate. This day that could have become the saddest day of my life has actually become my proudest.”

This was 1931, when he was sent to prison for 18 months for exposing the secretive rearmament of the Reichswehr, the German armed forces.

A journalist and a pacifist, Ossietzky was arrested again after the Reichstag fire of 1933 in Germany and sent to various concentration camps thereafter for his continued criticism of war and the Nazi Party. The same year in October, the propaganda minister passed the Editor’s Law, a draconian policy under which all journalists were to register in a professional roster to continue working, and only those with “Aryan certificate” were allowed to do so. From that point on, any member of the press became accountable to the Ministry of Propaganda, instead of their organisation (Arolsen Archives, 2021).

Three years later in 1936, Ossietzky accepted the Nobel Peace Prize for his work and resistance. The decision was made against the wishes of the Nazi regime and Hitler was furious. Two years later, Ossietzky died (Rayman, 2014).

Before dying, he praised the Nazi government in an uncanny interview for letting him accept the prize money from the peace prize committee. However, the interviewer noted that Ossietzky’s words were not entirely his: “Hollow-eyed and pale, Ossietzky knew that if he got himself imprisoned again, it would be his death.”

Several links have been drawn between German fascism and the “rise of fascism in contemporary India” (Mazumdar, 1995). The goal of the Indian movement is to seize political power and redefine the country as a Hindu nation. But while much has already been written about Hindu nationalism, there has not yet been a rich documentation of anti-fascist resistance, particularly of resisters such as Ossietzky in the Indian context.

Roughly 30 years after the passing of Ossietzky, ‘refuseniks’ appeared in Israel (Algazi, 2004). These were Israeli soldiers who refused to serve in Occupied Territories. The refuseniks gained momentum as a political movement after the Lebanon war in 1982, when 3000 soldiers refused to serve in Lebanon. The third and most recent wave of refuseniks was observed during the second Palestinian Intifada of 2000 (Livio, 2015). Among the 1000 soldiers who refused to serve in Occupied Territories or declared an intent to refuse, 200 were jailed. Despite the loss of military status, they subsequently sparked an organised movement called Courage to Refuse. In the media discourse, the refuseniks are often termed ‘traitors’ since refusing to serve in the army is perceived as treachery by many

Israelis (Gur-Arieh, 1998). Therefore, while showing courage has also brought them occasional favourable attention, which has been attributed to the fact that most of them are Israel's elite class and therefore possess organisational and public relations skills (Livio, 2015), the refuseniks are also exiles in their own country (Helman, 1997).

Like Nazi Germany, comparative studies between Indian and Israeli fascism have also been conducted (Sen, 2016). However, while the discourses of refuseniks and their cultural implications have been foregrounded before (Epstein, 1999), (Livio, 2015), similar instances of resistance remain understudied in India. Some scholars have posited that direct historical comparisons do not reveal much since fascism today is quite different to fascist movements in the past. However, continuities and scrutiny are a critical area of research (Cammaerts, 2019).

A quote from an interview conducted in India, with Danish Khan – a participant in this research, speaks to that continuity and demands scrutiny:

“The differences between Muslims, non-Muslim, RSS, non-RSS had begun appearing in the newsroom after 2014. I still believed that things might improve if the BJP lost the 2019 General elections, but they won. Since I had the resources to leave, I quit Zee News and left. Those who could not are languishing in India.”

There is growing consensus that India is undergoing a rise in populism and authoritarianism (Chacko, 2018). Hindutva, an ideology that imagines and makes claims for a Hindu nation has gained significant ground since the ascent of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), with Muslims and Christians being cast as “undesirable others” (Nizaruddin, 2020). Under the BJP regime, Muslims have been projected as not only an internal, but an external threat. The party has consistently stoked the threat of ‘illegal’ migration from neighbouring Bangladesh to push an ethno-national identity (Leidig, 2020). In recent times, the Citizenship Amendment Act, 2019 (CAA) in combination with the NRC (National Register of Citizens) has been a significant step in politicising citizenship in India to homogenise the country (Chapparban, 2020).

Among institutions, scholars have been examining the role of media in nation-building for decades. For Waisbord (2004), nation and media are almost one and the same as “the media greatly contribute to the persistence of the national in a supposedly post-national era.” But while it is common for states to use legislation or ownership structures to secure media compliance, sometimes the media itself can be subservient to a political regime.

Pleines and Somfalvy (2022) have shown that studies on authoritarianism do not perceive journalists as significant actors. While there is research on the reaction of media organisations to political pressures, texts have not gone beyond self-censorship or the ways in which journalists perceive their professional roles.

In this study, however, journalists are viewed as actors with agency and media is seen as having a significant role in nation-building. Journalists arguably often face dissonance between the editorial perspective of their news channel and their personal beliefs. While there is more to that dissonance, I draw on the experiences of mainstream journalists to highlight their coping strategies under oppressive mechanisms originating from state interference, organisational constraints, and peer control. To achieve this, I set this research against the backdrop of the anti-CAA protests in India's national capital, New Delhi, from 2019-2020. Being the epicentre of the protests, New Delhi's Shaheen Bagh and Jamia Millia Islamia (JMI), became key sites for CAA-related dissent. Being the political centre of India, New Delhi was a strategic choice both in terms of access and political significance.

1.1 Literature Review

Scholarly writing on the role of media in authoritarian states tends to take a macro approach, reflected in the ample literature on press freedom, media control through ownership or regulation (Pleines and Somfalvy, 2021). However, the same focus has not been lent to the micro perspective, among which, the agency of journalists remains one. While there is literature on the circumstances in which journalists in authoritarian regimes operate, the focus is found to be more on institutions, rather than the journalists' agency (Pleines and Somfalvy, 2022).

An increasing body of research suggests that journalists struggle to find a balance between their personal and professional identities. These studies so far have relied heavily on content analyses and large-scale surveys, demonstrating the changing norms journalists use to guide their daily practice (Boddio & Holton, 2018). While many journalists accept the limited scope of their reporting and engage in conformism, there might be those who push the limits of the permissible. There may also be cases of explicit resistance (Pleines & Somfalvy, 2022).

Resistance has been widely researched from different perspectives. However, a systematic typology of the various ways in which journalists might exercise their agency in authoritarian settings has not yet been undertaken (Pleines & Somfalvy, 2022).

With this research, I seek to fill the gap in the literature on journalism in authoritarian settings and the role of journalists as political actors who exercise agency in response to pressures.

1.2. Research Question

After engaging with literature on journalism in authoritarian texts, as well as existing research on journalists as political agents, I arrive at the following question:

How did journalists in mainstream India media covering the anti-CAA protests exercise their agency amid oppressive structures?

1.2.1 Sub Questions

1. What are the oppressive structures pervading newsrooms and how are they operationalised within newsrooms?
2. How do journalists negotiate oppressive structures within newsrooms and how are the negotiations rationalised by journalists?

A notable finding that has emerged out of these discourses is the compelling intersection of resistance and compliance. Recent research on resistance has subjected informal and disguised acts to a duality and a bifurcation (Ybema and Horvers, 2017). This frame has led to a negation of individual positionings as well as social dynamics in exercising agency (Mumby, 2005; Pfeiffer, 2016). In the context of this research, I would argue that even though the analytical framework employs a similar typology to categorise resistance and compliance, I have nonetheless demonstrated that individuals can both comply with and resist oppressive structures based on individual motivations and limitations. At many points in this study, participants are seen exercising agency to push discursive limits or remain within them depending on how critical they perceive the onslaught of oppression to be, and how enduring their rationalisations of the acts are. Resistance and compliance are, therefore, understood as negotiations in this research that are not mutually exclusive. They can and do co-exist.

Chapter 2: Conceptual Framework

In this research, I use Foucault's (1998) conception of power as an ubiquitous force. Since resistance is inextricably linked with power in Foucault's work, I inform my understanding of it with Scott's (1985) theoretical concept of everyday resistance. Additionally, I acknowledge more recent developments in everyday resistance by invoking the modifications introduced by Hollander and Einwohner to the concept (2004). Resistance occurs as a response to abuse of power and therefore, oppression emerges as a key concept in this research. To identify and examine different forms of oppression qualitatively, I invoke the model of Five Faces of Oppression by Young (1990).

2.1. Power

Foucault's (1976) conception of power tells us that it flows more radically than conventional thinking can decipher. It is everywhere, "not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere." He also posits that resistance is bound to exist where there is power and the two reinforce one another. In a later essay, Foucault (1982) highlighted the importance of developing a new "economy of power relations" to understand how power really disperses. What he means is that because power is not coercive like a direct act of violence, it needs to be examined as a set of uneven relations wherein the asymmetry of these relations create some possibility of resistance. This approach, more empirical and rooted in our present, takes resistance as a departure point, than power itself. As an example, Foucault suggests that one can study insanity to decode what society means by sanity. Applying the same logic to power and resistance, examining forms of resistance and the efforts made to sustain power structures can help locate power relations and the methods used in their application.

2.2 Oppression

Power and oppression are two sides of the same coin. Despite its significance in the realm of social sciences, there have been few attempts to theorise oppression. Scholars such as Lane (1988) and Young (1990) have outlined specific aspects of constraining power, or oppression. When these aspects are abused, power is exercised in an illegitimate manner. Young's argument, in particular, is a critique of classical Marxist perspectives on oppression that is limited to class struggle and does not explicate emotional forms of oppression. Therefore, for this research, I rely on Young's model to study constraining power called the Five Faces of Oppression. Shlasko (2015) provides an efficient summary of Young's model, nothing that:

1. Exploitation constitutes the systematic transfer of resources from one group to another. These resources include wealth, labour or land
2. Marginalisation is operationalised through the prevention or limitation of full participation of individuals in society. This is attained through exclusion from, for example, the health care system, job market, programmes related to public benefits, and community activities
3. Powerlessness is dispossessing individuals of the ability to make choices about their living or working conditions. Powerlessness erodes a person's autonomy, making them vulnerable to persecution and other forms of damaging treatments due to their status.
4. Cultural imperialism is the valuing and enforcement of the dominant group's culture, norms, and characteristics. Those in power can determine how the powerless are understood and talked about.
5. Violence is the imminent threat of systematic violence. The oppression in this case is not just embedded in the act itself, it is also exercised through the social context of such acts, which allows them and even accepts them at times.

Young's reasoning for coming up with five separate categories is theories that try to explain oppression as a singular phenomenon leave out either some groups that the theorist does not perceive as oppressed or other manners in which groups might be oppressed (Zutlevics, 2002). Therefore, in addition to underlining the different ways in which oppression takes place, the model above provides a pluralistic view by not confining it to one single attribute. One limitation of Young's work though can be compensated for in the works of Bartky (1979), where the focus is evidently on psychological forms of oppressions. However, since psychological oppression is not the focus of my research, Young's typology fits well with my objective.

2..3 Resistance

Resistance has been a much-contested topic in social science and despite its ubiquity, there is little consensus on what constitutes resistance. Hollander and Einwohner (2004) highlight the heterogeneity of resistance in writing how everything from collective acts such as revolutions to individual symbols like hairstyles have been termed as resistance by scholars. It is no surprise, they say, that a consensus on resistance has not been reached yet.

The debate on resistance gets more complicated when it is expressed in terms of power and oppression. While ‘intent’ and ‘recognition’ are two widely accepted elements in the scholarly research on resistance, the demand for the latter has made it hard to categorise acts that are carried out unconsciously or go unrecognised by the target. Scott (1985) defines resistance as a variety of activities differing in scale. Among these are acts of everyday resistance that are feasible for the relatively powerless as they are usually not openly defiant. Some everyday acts of resistance include “foot dragging, dissimulation, false compliance, pilfering, feigned ignorance, slander, arson, sabotage, and so forth” (p. 29). This research uses the typology developed by Scott to codify distinct types of resistances reported by the participants. In this typology, resistance is categorised as:

i) Publicly declared resistance

These include undertaken in the public domain such as open revolts, petitions, letters, demonstrations, land invasions etc.

(ii) Assertion of worth by desecrating symbols of domination

Acts like desecration can be symbolic attacks carried out against domination. Spaniards, for example, considered desecration as a declaration of war.

(iii) Counter ideologies against ideological domination

Scott (1990, 1985) argues that the subaltern produces culture and ideologies that undermine the ideologies of dominant groups. These discourses remain hidden from the dominant but give rise to specific forms of disguised resistance.

Similarly, hidden resistance is classified into:

(iv) Direct resistance by disguised resisters

Common examples of such resistance include foot-dragging, daydreaming, voluntary absence if domination is exercised through the presence of individuals, squatting, desertion, evasion, foot-dragging.

(v) Hidden transcripts of anger or discourses of dignity against status domination

Such critiques of power occur “offstage.” These transcripts can take the form of gestures, speeches, or practices and are not seen by the dominant as they are hidden from their gaze. The interplay of domination and exploitation engenders insults to human dignity that typically inspires hidden transcripts (Scott, 1990, pp. 24-25).

(vi) Dissident subcultures against domination in the form of class heroes, folktales, songs, gossip, mythology etc.

Building on Scott’s conception of everyday resistance, Hollander and Einwohner (2004) use the term ‘overt resistance’ for behaviour that is visible and easily recognized by both targets and observers as resistance and, further, is intended to be recognized as such. Additionally, they theorise ‘covert’ resistance as intentional acts that go unnoticed (and, therefore, unpunished) by their targets, although they are recognized as resistance by other, culturally aware observers.

Baaz et al., (2016) go one step further in offering recognition for unintended acts of resistance in declaring that “resistance is not always intended to impact power”. I find this understanding of resistance as a bottom up “subaltern practice” particularly useful in the context of this research because not only does it free the participants of a certain political awareness that is often desired in social science (Lilja, 2016), but it also creates spaces for more kinds of non-confrontational, disguised resistances. In many ways, this research then also contributes to subaltern studies since it foregrounds the coping strategies of individuals and groups facing subordination in terms of caste, class, culture, gender, and race in the Indian context.

While looking for an analytical framework to study resistance, I came across research that put Scott’s conception of ‘everyday resistance’ under scrutiny. Lilja (2022) argues that the notion of ‘everyday resistance’ today excludes more collective forms of hidden resistance. However, for this research, I use Scott’s typology of resistance because it is difficult to research collective resistance, if at all possible. Moreover, recent research on hidden collective resistance is focused on the temporal and spatial dimensions of resistance (Baaz et al., (2016). My focus, on the other hand, is on the impact of power relations on individual conundrums and subsequent negotiations.

Chapter 3: Research Context

It has been documented that Indian media “stages and reinforces” (Ahmad, 2014) the definition of “the other”. In addition to national media, which has continued to have a hand in establishing a vicious anti-Muslim rhetoric in popular discourse, there has been a collusion of mainstream media in both India and the West to present a threatening, treacherous Muslim “other”. This is reflected in how mass media consistently co-creates suspect communities with the state by “surreptitiously promoting sectarian and hate speech,” observed specifically in the construction of discourses on acts such as the demolition of Babri mosque, or the abrogation of Article 370 in Jammu and Kashmir (Manchanda, 2002).

In recent years, this construction has only become more complex and, in many ways, more sinister due to the emergence of digital media spaces. In India, this can be traced in the changing landscape of online media: a rise in online platforms that, even though mired in prejudice, fashion themselves as “alternative discourse” (Bhat and Chadha, 2020). These are websites that claim to bring the “right” side of India to its viewers in response to mainstream news. However, mainstream media itself has been reeling under “commercialism, rising levels of concentration and cross-media ownership, as well as the expansion of control by politicians and industrialists over the media” (Chadha, 2017). Apart from these structural shifts, the degrading quality of journalism itself poses an urgent challenge to a pluralistic media. Symptomatic of this are the stunning claims, forgotten as easily as they are made, on news channels. And as a result of the amplification of the party line, the regime tightens its grip on the media as the media complies (Sen, 2021).

For journalists in authoritarian regimes, it becomes important to “fulfil their duties” and report the news as truthfully as possible. Moreover, when the regime is challenged, especially in the form of overt resistance, the role of journalists becomes central in the dissemination of information and subsequent shaping of public opinion.

The Citizenship Amendment Act and National Register of Citizens has long been a contentious political issue in India. Under the most recent amendment to CAA, persecuted Buddhists, Christians, Hindus, Jains, Parsis and Sikhs who migrated from the neighbouring nations of Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Afghanistan to India before 31 December, 2014 can apply for fast-tracked citizenship and are no longer considered ‘illegal’ immigrants (The Constitution of India, 1950). However, the Act makes no mention of Muslims and several other communities such as the Sri Lankan Tamils in India, Tibetan refugees, Rohingyas from Myanmar, Jews, and even atheists. These exclusions render the law unconstitutional as they stand in direct opposition to India’s secular values, enshrined in the Constitution (Chandrachud, 2020).

In addition to the CAA, the Hindu nationalist BJP has expressed a clear intent of implementing a nationwide NRC. This implies that each citizen will have to prove their citizenship by furnishing specific documents. The decision to validate these documents lies at the discretion of government officials.

The NRC was first created in Assam in 1951 to determine who was born in the state and

was therefore Indian, as opposed to migrants from the neighbouring Bangladesh. However, in 2013, the Supreme Court of India instructed the Indian government to update the NRC in the north-eastern state to control illegal migration from Bangladesh – a persistent issue between the two nations. The most recent NRC list was released in 2019, in which 1.9 million people were excluded. This posed a risk to their citizenship rights and other protections. Such persons may be sent into exile, expelled, or rendered stateless (Chatterji, 2021). While Hindus excluded from the list will be protected under the CAA, tribal, ethnic and minority communities are most at risk. The government has set up a Foreigners Tribunal of Assam to determine the validity of the documentation of those excluded from the list. However, researchers have noted that 95 percent of the individuals who have been declared ‘foreigners’ by these tribunals 2014 onwards are Muslims (Chatterji, 2021).

To house these ‘foreigners,’ India has around 13 detention centres and are being built in various parts of the country. Scholars have noted that for Muslims, these prejudicial processes for attaining citizenship bolster the rise of already perverse majoritarianism. Moreover, when viewed in succession, the NRC and CAA have the capacity to disenfranchise Muslim citizens (Bhatia and Gajjala, 2021).

On 17 December, 2019, Shaheen Bagh, a locality in Delhi, emerged as the site of a sit-in protest led and sustained by Muslim women against CAA and NRC. The communities in Shaheen Bagh initially rose in solidarity with Jamia Millia Islamia (JMI) university, where students were brutalised by the Delhi Police for protesting against CAA. It is interesting to note that not only are the two in close proximity with each other, the university conducts several outreach programs in Shaheen Bagh (Bhatia and Gajjala, 2021). Later on in this research, both JMI and Shaheen Bagh emerge as important sites in the subjectivities of the journalists interviewed.

On 23 February 2020, two months after the CAA protests, BJP leader Kapil Mishra delivered an inflammatory speech. Violence erupted in the aftermath of the speech after Hindu right-wing mobs attacked anti-CAA protesters. Official records say 53 people were killed, most of the Muslims, in addition to thousands that were injured and displaced.

While citizenship is at the heart of the CAA-NRC debate, this research focuses on journalists as actors operating at the intersection of the state and citizens. The CAA-NRC protests help stage the context of this research, but the spotlight remains on journalists navigating power relations and creating spaces for resistance.

The CAA-NRC protests have been defined as a “new discursive challenge to the Hindu nationalist rhetoric of the BJP” (Edwards et al., 2021). Here was an event where a section of the Muslim population from different social locations claimed political agency while retaining their other roles. But while it commanded much media attention, a closer look at mainstream media’s narratives of the protests reveals ample misinformation, sensationalism, and an explicit othering of Muslims.

News18, a leading multilingual news channel, speculated that conversion was being used to attain citizenship under the CAA. The source, even though kept anonymous, was claimed to be from within the Information Bureau of the Indian government. Times Now, the self-proclaimed ‘most watched’ English news channel in India, ran programs misidentifying a shooter as an anti-CAA protester (Goel, 2019). Several such campaigns contributed to the vilification of dissenters and anti-CAA protesters. To this day, the kin of individuals

arrested for partaking in the protests maintain that the media had a huge role to play in portraying them as “key conspirators” in the ensuing violence.

Chapter 4: METHODOLOGY

Beginning 16 July, I began writing to journalists based in India who had covered the passing of the CAA and the subsequent protests. In the end, I had reached out to about 30 individuals, out of whom several expressed a clear interest in wanting to share their experiences. However, due to time constraints and the pressures of full-time jobs, nine interviews materialised. These nine individuals – representatives of seven organisations – were contacted either via social media or through my personal network, with immense help from friends and former colleagues. Five of these individuals are Hindus and four of them are Muslim. Even though I tried my best to maintain a gender balance in the sample, I found gaining access to women journalists difficult. This could be because of reasons due to personal safety, since both offline and online threats and violence against women journalists has been on an alarming rise. Some women journalists were contacted, but could not make time for further communication. Since Covid-19 was still a reality in India during the summer of 2022, people were cautious about travelling. That perhaps gives another explanation for why some interviews did not materialise. Coming to the interviewing process, I posed questions that were mostly open-ended, unless I needed specific clarification. Therefore, I employed a semi-structured technique of interviewing my participants.

Despite having easy access to most of them, I often thought about why the participants were willing to share sensitive information with me. I do not know if it was out of kindness or the frustration of performing a job they repeatedly termed “thankless.” Perhaps my epistemological privilege sustained access, something I will touch upon in the next section, by creating a sense of safety and trust between the participants and me. But the question of access continued to pique my interest. After I had written a few thousand words of this thesis, I reached out to an interviewee that I am on good terms with, to ask what made him share such profound experiences with a stranger like me. He said he would reply to the question in a few days, but did not follow through. Maybe I will ask him again, another day and hopefully, receive an answer.

The seven organisations were selected based on the available data on television viewership for both Hindi and English language channels, their followership on social media, and my own experience and knowledge as a journalist. In a few cases, I reached out to participants after their name had been mentioned in an interview with another participant. To ensure that they had a body of work related to the CAA-NRC protests, I consulted the journalists’ repertoire, which influenced my decision to seek their support. It was also important that my sample reflected varying degrees of power and authority within the newsroom. This was ensured by conducting a preliminary check on their professional roles through social media or word of mouth. These decisions were also a product of my discretion and advice from media experts and colleagues.

According to Statista (2022), News18 emerged as the most watched English news channel in primetime segments in 2022, followed by Republic TV. A second Statista report (2022) names Republic Bharat, Zee News, and News Nation among the five most watched Hindi channels between January 1 to March 5, 2022. The digital portals included in this research – Firstpost, News18.com, and an unnamed website – have a combined followership of 1

million to 3.5 million on Instagram and Twitter. While the credibility of these media houses has come under scrutiny at different intervals, they nonetheless occupy various positions on the political spectrum.

It was important that the people I worked with during my fieldwork did not feel like I ‘needed’ something from them. Even though, in a way, it was obvious that I did. It was only fair that I showed them that I was interested not only in their thoughts and negotiations, but also how they came to be. That their imaginations of themselves were as important as their present reality. In Forester’s (2006) commentary on critical listening, I found ways to examine how the identities of people influence their presumptions of others. He encourages looking beyond baseline facts and towards the subjective desires of the participants. I took this as an indication to begin questions with a ‘how’ and not a ‘why.’

Framing questions in such a manner helped me gradually step away from an objective enquiry that places importance on ‘scientific’ truths. My questionnaire had a set of guiding questions, but I did not invoke them in a predetermined sequence. I let the participants establish the flow of the conversation, tweaking my questions based on verbal and non-verbal cues.

Name	Organisation	Designation	Classification	Language
Aarif Sheikh	Times Now	Junior Reporter	TV	English and Hindi
Raman Unnikrishnan	Firstpost	Executive Editor	Digital	English
Sudip Roy	Outlook	Editor in Chief	Print and Digital	English
Participant A	A Digital Newspaper	Reporter	Digital	English
Ayush Kumar	News18.com	Sub Editor	Digital	English
Nabiya Akhtar	A leading News portal	Assistant Editor	Digital	English
Vaibhav Yadav	News Nation	Edition in Chief	TV	Hindi
Sumit Anand	Republic TV	Principal Correspondent	TV and digital	English
Danish Khan	Zee News	Head - Digital News	TV and digital	English and Hindi

4.1 Ethics and Positionality

In a classroom somewhere in India, I learnt the “5 Ws” of journalism.

“Who,” “What,” “When,” “Where,” and “Why.”

The remainder of the year was spent in learning to find the answers you needed. In hindsight, often the only way I could do that was by asking the tough questions, not being intimidated, and not giving away too much of myself in the process. Perhaps that is why I felt there was something strangely mechanical about the profession itself – moving on was always easy.

*

In a classroom in another part of the world, I recognized the importance of the “H.”

“How.”

*

In many ways, my ontological position as a journalist was essential in shaping this research. Working for a mainstream media organisation in India brought me my share of frustration, helplessness, and small victories. Having a prior awareness of your participants’ subjective realities has been defined as “epistemological privilege” by Stanley and Wise (1993). This privilege enabled me to have relatively easy access to participants and communicate with them openly. Having a similar professional history helped build rapport with the participants and in some cases, it transcended the boundaries of this research; I remained in touch with most of them even after the writing process.

'Positionality' describes an individual's perspective and the position they assume about a research task and its social and political context (Foote & Bartell, 2011). This perspective is constituted by the assumptions of the researcher about ontology, epistemology, human behaviour, and agency (Holmes, 2020). Therefore, every piece of work is coloured by the researcher's personal beliefs, political allegiances, and interactions with their immediate environment.

It is fair to say that my positionality unveiled itself to me in a slow yet powerful unravelling. At the beginning of this research, I had more belief in my abilities to make sense of the participants' experiences. However, weeks passed, and I stewed in the stories I had been told. The weight of the narratives slowly started becoming apparent as I became aware of the fundamental differences in the epistemologies of the participants and me. Carter and Little (2007) summarise the privileges of being a researcher in pointing out the “ethical weight” of epistemology. Society is built on asymmetrical relations of power, and this results in socially structured differences in knowledge (Merton, 1972). Since relations of inequality are a feature of social research, I felt the weight of these relations both when I entered the research site as an Insider and Outsider. On the one hand, I was an ‘insider’ by

virtue of being a journalist and sharing a lived familiarity with the researched. However, there were times when I did not hold intimate knowledge of some participants due to my status as an ‘outsider’ in terms of religion and social class.

Given these differences, there were moments when I questioned the authenticity of my solidarity with the participants. However, engaging with the “Insider/Outsider” debate helped overcome that initial disorientation. As Griffith (1998) writes, “The beginning of the research story and not the end.” My research began with the familiarity of an insider, and as I traversed the inside/outside worlds, the differences, and similarities of my experiences with the participants’ both shadowed and enriched my research.

In hindsight, having a methodology rooted in critical listening made this negotiation easier. And perhaps, being able to build friendships with some of the participants helped. Friendship is important because it helps “demystify the world of the oppressors from within, to expose its weakness and incoherence, to point out its lies” (Issai-Diaz,1993). Since I see myself as complicit in some of the depravities voiced by the participants, I also view this research opportunity and process as a mechanism to foster accountability in myself and my communities.

4.2 Anonymity of Research

“Anonymity is a continuum (from fully anonymous to very nearly identifiable) (Scott, 2005: 249), through which researchers aim to strike a balance between two priorities: protecting participants’ identities and maintaining the value and integrity of their stories and experiences (Saunders et al., 2015). Interestingly, anonymity has also been challenged by many scholars who claim that identifying participants can lead to an empowering effect (Giordano et al. 2007). Some go as far to argue that the harm perceived from a lack of anonymity is exaggerated in many cases (Moore, 2012).

Anonymising can be a difficult practice since researchers often tend to use locations that are accessible (Walford, 2005). Therefore, there can be cases where it is nearly impossible to conceal identities since anyone in proximity with the research field might be able to recognize both participants and places (Nespor, 2000). While I find all the previous discourses on anonymity valid and do acknowledge participants’ agency in deciding between being identified and anonymised, I agreed with Kelly (2009) in that the challenges of anonymising do not explain its abandonment.

There were participants in my study who were comfortable being identified, some of these individuals had already changed professional fields, organisations, or places. However, there were a considerable number of participants who expressed a clear preference for anonymity for reasons relating to physical safety and professional well-being. Therefore, in this research, I have employed a combination of pseudonymisation and anonymisation to honour the terms put forth by participants who were comfortable being identified and those who wished to conceal their identities.

Chapter 5: Power, Resistance, and Compliance

5.1 Oppression

During the interviews, several participants referred to being faced with constraining powers within the newsroom that impact their daily practice and conduct. While initially I believed the constraining power to be completely embodied in the editorial line, it was interesting to note that the journalists' accounts invoked multiple and multi-layered, arguably more pressing, constraints. Therefore, in this section, I directly draw from the accounts of the participants to show the kind of power(s) operating within newsrooms. I then show how the participants negotiated these powers through engaging in either resistance or compliance, or both.

Since the link between power and oppression has already been established in Chapter 2, I categorise participants' discourses on experiencing constraining powers using Young's (1990) model of Five Faces of Oppression. As explained earlier, the five tenets of oppression in the model are:

- (i) Exploitation
- (ii) Marginalisation
- (iii) Powerlessness
- (iv) Cultural Imperialism
- (v) Violence, emotional and physical

5.1.1 Exploitation through transfer of resources

Exploitation is operationalised through a systematic transfer of resources from one group to another. Not only does this activate a structural relation between the two groups, but it also sets social rules about who does what work, what work is compensated. In this way, relations of power and inequality are kept functioning.

In the case of this research, several editors reported facing financial constraints within the newsrooms that led to a reset in editorial priorities. While, in general, operating on a shoestring is common across newsrooms, it was mentioned in one of my interviews by a former chief editor that it was not due to an "innocent coincidence" that newsrooms across this country had decreased budgets for reportage.

"Resources are not made available primarily because it is one way of ensuring that these stories do not get reported as much as they should. And this is also by design in the sense that almost every

newsroom in this country has reduced budgets for reportage, not primarily because they want people want to save money, but because it saves them the bother of having to answer to a government or to withstand pressure from a government because you are reporting stories which are far more powerful than sitting in a studio and shouting at each other.”

Similar constraints were faced by Ayush, who in his news stories wanted to “humanise” the protesters at JMI. Having seen some of his friends get beaten up by the police for participating in the anti-CAA protests, he wanted to write about how they were just a bunch of students, not the “rioters” that popular media channels were portraying them to be. However, none of his pitches were approved by the editors. When asked why, he answered matter-of-factly,

“The channel does not go against the narrative of the government, the BJP. For the government, the protesters were violent stone-pelters. And so, the channel toed the line. It always does.”

Contrary to Ayush’s experience, Nabiya noted how the same organisation hired a novice reporter, who would consistently file reports on the protests, albeit, from an unusual perspective.

“I remember reading his headlines – they were extremely dangerous at the time because they were mostly about how the minority communities had also been attacking the majority, the Hindu population. That it was not just Hindus who were vandalising shops and houses during the protests. So, it appeared to me that, perhaps, they cannot make people like me or others who have been here for four to five years, to write such things because we have an idea of what kind of stories we should work on. But they have got somebody else to do it for them.”

5.1.2 Powerlessness and emotional violence

In her description of powerlessness, Young invokes several injustices linked to powerlessness. Some of these are reflected in the “inhibition in the development of one's capacities, lack of decision-making power in one's working life, and exposure to disrespectful treatment because of the status one occupies (Young, 1990).

In this subsection, I combine powerlessness with violence to better analyse a recurring pattern in the respondents’ discourses. The inability to make decisions that could change their working and living conditions was reported by quite a few of them. The deprivation of the power to make decisions about their material lives paints a troubling portrait of institutional mechanisms and contributed to their marginalisation within the profession by impacting their mobility and access within the organisation. Moreover, this inability was often followed by a “suffocating” feeling of helplessness

that participants bravely touched upon.

In the first week of March in 2019, Nabiya was sent to Shaheen Bagh to execute a special report on Women's Day. She had developed an affinity with the women-led protest as the demonstration resonated with her thought process: "I am neither on the Left nor on the Right. I have my own views," she noted during our conversation. Therefore, she was looking forward to speaking with them and eventually writing about their experiences. However, once she reached the site and began introducing herself to the protesters, she realised that this was going to be a difficult assignment to execute.

"Some well-known anchors had maligned the protesters on their programmes on the Hindi channel of News18. That made it extremely challenging for me to win the trust of the protestors, who thought that because I was from the same organisation, I would portray them the way other anchors had been portraying them."

She also noted how organisations like hers would "invisibilize" employees by not rewarding them adequately for their work by withholding promotions.

Additionally, the emotional fallout of such episodes was immense. It resulted in Nabiya developing grave mental health issues such as self-hatred and lack of confidence in her own work.

"I felt useless. It was such a difficult phase — I used to wake up hating myself. Good journalism means that you are aligned to the needs of the time. But what I was doing was not journalism."

Another anecdote about negotiating institutional constraints was shared by Danish wherein he was moved to a different department after voicing concerns over the editorial direction of the news channel he was part of.

"My supervisor said the move would be good for me as it would allow me to be away from politics for a while. But when I went to the new department, I realised the employees there were following the same agenda, the same editorial command."

5.1.3 Cultural Imperialism

While the categories of exploitation and powerlessness explicated the role of structural and institutional relations that constrain people's access to opportunities that can improve their material lives, cultural imperialism sheds light on another kind of oppression that influences their meaning-making processes. It is operationalized through the acceptance of

the dominant group's establishment, culture, and experience as the norm.

In the context of this study, narratives of a rise in anti-Muslim hostility within newsrooms were shared by four of the journalists interviewed. These discourses provide insights into both everyday acts of persecution carried out within media organisations, and how the changing political landscape of the country has permeated newsrooms. For some participants, such discrimination became more blatant while the anti-CAA protests were underway in the country. Reflecting on a related incident, Aarif Sheikh shared:

“Despite doing my job diligently, there are people in the newsroom who view me within a specific frame that has three focal points – that I used to study in Jamia Millia Islamia¹, that I am a Muslim, and that I live in Okhla².” My colleagues began asking me questions about why I knew people who were being summoned by the police for being part of the protests. I felt like I was being viewed as a suspect wherever I went.”

During our interview, I noticed that as many as three journalists spoke from two temporal positions: one from before 2014, and one from after.

The Danish from 2014 would put his work first; his identity always came second:

“When you work in an organisation, your personal faith goes to the background because you are not working for your religion, you're working for the society and its reformation.”

After 2014, the topography of the newsroom changed in a way that demanded Danish to become aware of, first, his political views, and second, his religiosity.

“Eventually, your identity started being attacked in the newsroom. The first attack was on your Liberals. After a few years, the target changed to Muslims. But even in that scenario, if you were a person holding Liberal views, you would still be considered a part of society's collective culture. There, your differences would be discussed in a healthy manner. But if you were a Muslim, you were seen from a completely different lens. This was not the case before, but it is now.”

Reiterating Danish's observation, Aarif Sheikh shared:

“Things have changed a lot in the past five to six years. People used

to think before speaking earlier, but now there is an external power that gives them moral support to share their opinions boldly. Earlier the attack was on your political leaning, but now it is on your religion.”

Similarly, for Journalist A, her religious identity invited several impediments in the form of microaggressions and rejected pitches:

“I am called into question because of my identity. I know that my Hindu colleagues will be able to criticize the government for being anti-Muslim, but I cannot. They can get away with saying that. I, on the other hand, will be accused of not being objective, or being too sensitive, too emotional, or lacking the ability to be ‘professional.’ That is just Hindu privilege.”

The above categorization of oppressions answers the first two sub-questions pertaining to the oppressive structures pervading newsrooms and the manner in which they are operationalised.

The above categorization of oppressions answers the first two sub-questions pertaining to the oppressive structures pervading newsrooms and the manner in which they are operationalised.

To negotiate the power structures identified above, the participants appeared to rely on two coping strategies. This section explains the two recurring strategies of a) Resistance and b) Compliance. A crucial aspect of these strategies is how these two responses were rationalised. Therefore, this section also shows the participants’ rationale behind resistant and compliant responses. A brief explanation of the three categories is as follows:

Rationalisation is a mechanism that allows an individual to deal with conflicts and emotional turmoil caused by internal or external stressors. It occurs when an individual performs an action and then justifies that action through some beliefs and desires that would have made it rational. Rational action, as stated by Cushman (2019), starts with beliefs and desires, based on which the individual reasons the optimal action to perform – the one that maximises desires, conditioned on beliefs. For the individuals participating in this research, rationalisation was an integral mechanism in coping with the oppressive norms of their respective organisations, which were explained in the previous section. It enabled them to justify acts wherein they resisted and complied with such norms.

Resistance was most often found in the responses of the participants; therefore, I primarily focus on understanding how such acts came about. As noted in Section 3 of Chapter 2, to study various oppositional acts, Scott (1985) divides resistance into six brackets. Here, public resistance is categorised as:

- i) publicly declared resistance
- (ii) assertion of worth by desecrating symbols of domination
- (iii) counter ideologies against domination.

Similarly, hidden resistance is classified into:

- (iv) direct resistance by disguised resisters
- (v) hidden transcripts of anger or discourses of dignity against status domination
- (vi) dissident subcultures.

Using Scott's typology, I expand on the journalists' resistance in this section.

Compliance, classical research has shown, can often be elicited in circumstances where an individual faces social pressures in the form of rules, standards, procedures, orders etc. (Asch, 1956). Compliance, amid constraining powers, can be the most welfare-maximising action available (Khader, 2021). In this regard, compliance is different from conformity as it can be forced upon people. Conformity, on the other hand, is voluntary. It has also been found to be one of the most common ways of coping with unwanted pressures. During the interviews, a number of participants reported complying with the editorial norms of their organisation.

5.2 Resistance

5.2.1 Publicly Declared Resistance

Many of the research participants displayed publicly declared resistance as a central strategy for coping with the pressures that came with following the editorial line. Even though types of overt resistances varied across the sample, quitting was reported by some journalists as a form of direct resistance.

"When I thought of the whole scenario – where Zee had started from, where it stood now, and where it would be in the future, it became clear to me that it was not right for me to stay in the organisation."

said Danish , who worked with Zee News for 13 years. On 22 December 2019, he broadcast the news of his resignation on social media in a message addressed to the students of JMI, revealing that the channel tried to "mislead the nation" during the anti-CAA protests. Before resigning, he reflected on the two options before him: a "healthy exit" with relevant financial benefits or an open letter explaining the real reasons behind his resignation, and no employee benefits.

"I thought that if I expose them right now, I will lose three-months' salary but my resignation letter could be used as evidence against media organisations like Zee News. So, I chose to expose them the way I did."

In another newsroom in New Delhi, sub-editor Ayush Kumar had been toying with a similar idea. A former student of JMI himself, he had graduated from the university's journalism major just six months ago. During the anti-CAA protests, he was a frequent visitor to the campus both

to express his solidarity with the protesters and to gather information for his news stories. But a month after the CAA protests, he quit News18:

“Several of my interviews – with politicians from the opposition party, activists, and students – were not published by the organisation. I was not allowed to write anything of my own. It is strange because even though there was no official communication about the editorial line the organisation was going to take on the issue, it was understood across the newsroom that the organisation had a clear stand. And my stand was different from theirs.”

5.2.2 Countering Narratives

Some participants did not perceive quitting as a feasible option to voice their dissent but reported alternative ways of resisting the editorial line. In such stories, countering narratives crafted by their organisation in an individual capacity emerged as a consistent response among journalists. Sometimes this meant expressing views that were counterfactual to the organisation’s narrative. Participants largely reported attempts to replace derogatory descriptions in news scripts or debunk misinformation during editorial meetings to prevent the organisation from adopting a prejudiced slant.

Journalist A, a former reporter covering women’s issues with a digital newspaper, highlighted the value of honesty in coping with clashes between the expectations of the organisation and her personal ideals. For her, that honesty shapes her work regardless of the organisation she becomes part of. It is how she ensures that there is some “rootedness” in her stories.

“There were instances where I did not censor myself and wrote something that I knew would not complement the editorial perspective of the organisation. Making that conscious choice to be your honest self and be as honest as you can in your journalism is important. And to do that while knowing that what you write might never get published or might be published in a very different manner.

Similarly, Danish recounted several instances, some as old as from 2016, where he understood the editorial line to be coloured by misinformation. Although it was not up to him to decide how the channel would report certain political developments, he remembered countering misinformation behind the scenes:

“In 2016, Zee News ran a show claiming that the slogan of “Pakistan Zindabad” was raised in Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU). More recently, the channel claimed that pro-Pakistan slogans had been raised at the JMI campus by students in a protest against CAA. Both these times, I informed the editors in the newsroom

that the news stories were inaccurate, and we should refrain from making any such claims.”

A day after violence had erupted at the JMI after the Delhi Police entered the campus and assaulted students (ref), Aarif Sheikh went to his office at the outskirts of Delhi to work the night shift. Like every other day, he had to record a voiceover to accompany the news bulletin scheduled for the next morning – which was about JMI itself. Nothing stood out in the routine, until he glanced at the script he was given:

“There was a particular sentence that seemed out of place in the script – “The terrorist students of Jamia...” Whoever had written the script had described the students as terrorists. I have an understanding of my own – I have been writing news for a long time too. I know what to say and what not to say. That description felt wrong to me, so I removed it and changed the sentence to “the students of Jamia...”

Soon after this incident, Aarif Sheikh got into an intense argument with a senior journalist at the organisation, who reprimanded him for changing the script without consulting anyone. Aarif Sheikh was also reminded that night that he was “supposed to write what he is told to, not what he necessarily wants to.”

5.2.3 Disguised acts of resistance

Among the participants, there were journalists who consistently engaged in disguised acts of resistance in solidarity with anti-CAA protesters. Aarif Sheikh acknowledged that when at work, he was bound by professionalism and allegiance to the organisation. While on inside he knew he had to conform to the editorial line, outside, he was living a different life. In a conscious effort to push the boundaries of what he was capable of as a journalist, he regularly engaged in fact-checking and disseminating information that he considered accurate and important:

“There were many rumours going around about the protests, usually false alarms about violent clashes between the protesters and the public in some areas of Delhi. In such situations, I would contact someone I knew in those areas to verify the information. Once I had all the information, I would share and amplify it on social media with the help of some friends.”

Aside from the digital space, he would also frequent Shaheen Bagh and the areas around it to capture stories that would have gone untold had he pitched them to his editors. One such story, he said, was of a Sikh man, who sold his apartment so that he could fund the meals of those sitting in protest. Aarif Sheikh proudly revealed

that he was the first one to have broken that story:

“I began maintaining audio-visual records of the protests. I would go to Shaheen Bagh and conduct interviews with the people there. I knew my organisation’s stance on the protests was different from mine – so I began sharing the content with friends who could disseminate it through their social media.”

Several of the interviews shared clandestinely by Aarif Sheikh were shared widely on social media. He also remembered recording a video on “things to know before you go to Shaheen Bagh” while he stood at the protest site. Not only did the content go viral, but his inbox was also flooded with queries from people whose relatives were either participating in the protest or were stuck somewhere in Delhi due to the chaos caused by violence in some parts.

More such ‘disguised’ acts were performed by Danish during the course of his association with Zee News. For one, he had stopped attending the editorial meetings in the newsroom as he could not bring himself to directly partake in discussions where the news agenda for the day was decided.

“For a liberal person like me, sitting through those meetings was like torture. The human resources department noticed my absence and asked me to join the meetings. But I refused.”

5.2.4 Hidden transcripts

While Aarif Sheikh’s resistance was a disguised yet direct act, Nabiya Akhtar’s paintings were a more private way of archiving her emotions. In this symbolic form of resistance, she

“I had a fire inside me, and the journalism that I was doing was nothing compared to that fire. I was helpless. I needed to convey my anger one way or another. So, I turned to art. I painted falcons, I painted lynchings³.”

Since hidden transcripts include gestures and practices that would be censored if recognized by the target, something as insignificant as a ‘smoke break’ seemed to speak to the idea of such type of resistance. Danish reflected on the time him, and his colleagues would smoke cigarettes outside the studio and lament the “mess” they had got themselves into:

“There was a strong sense of collective guilt... we would sit down and discuss how we had come to be trapped in a situation like that. There would also be talk of discouraging aspiring journalists to join the industry because we knew the upcoming days were only going to be worse.”

5.2.5 Compliance

Many journalists displayed a clear understanding of the nature of their organisation and the impact of its journalistic practice. However, parallel to that awareness were the reasons for their association with the organisations. In some cases, there was a conscious rationale backing the discourses of the journalists on why they complied with certain pressures within their organisations. However, there was also a case where a participant displayed an unconscious rationalisation of his association with a news channel.

This awareness was reflected in Aarif Sheikh's understanding of their role and responsibilities:

“[When you are in the newsroom] you are aware that even the smallest piece of information and the way it is framed can lead to bloodshed,”

But in Aarif Sheikh's case, this realisation led to two strains of reasoning: On the one hand, he admitted that his ethics had been compromised a long time ago by virtue of being part of Times Now. On the other hand, he found a way to talk himself out of that 'feeling':

“I tell all my journalist friends that they are part of a system – and they have to carry on because there is no system that exists apart from this one. It is the profession of journalism that is the problem, not us. We are just following orders.”

For Nabiya, who had been living in a city in Uttar Pradesh, the ambition to move to the national capital outweighed the organisation she was going to be part of. Therefore, it did not matter what organisation she would be joining as there were other goals to be met:

“I had come from Aligarh, and I was now reporting on the government, the ministry of education, the politics of RSS. It was a big canvas for me.”

At some point in our conversation, Sumit Anand, principal correspondent at Republic TV, declared that his views were in alignment with the editorial line of his channel. Therefore, he did not experience any dissonance between how they had reported the citizenship protests and how he perceived them. However, he soon clarified that his ability to “detach” himself from his work may be the reason behind his compliance with the organisation's editorial decisions. This detachment, he said, had not been easy to foster and had about over a period of time. He explained the reason behind his rationale to comply, albeit unconsciously, with the norms of his organisation:

“Detaching with my work helped me a lot because I stopped thinking my actions were contributing to something sinister in the

country. I remember how the whole newsroom had started referring to Sharjeel Imam⁴ as ‘anti-national.’ Even though I did not necessarily agree with them, I started thinking along the same lines – that he should be thrown in jail. The environment of the newsroom shapes the way you think about news, and detachment is my way around it.”

13 years is a long time, and Danish realises that. For a few years before his resignation, he had a comparable way of looking at his role in the organisation: he was only following instructions in the form of an editorial line.

"I would tell myself that the organisation had an agenda, and since it was not up to me to set the agenda, I should let it run and not object. Moreover, for me, a lot was pinned on hope. The hope that things might improve if the BJP lost the 2019 elections. But they won, and things worsened.”

For editors, this compliance was brought on by a lack of resources – a trend they insisted is prevalent across newsrooms in India, of all persuasions. In a fairly independent newsroom like the one Raman Unnikrishnan was heading during the time of the CAA protests, the most critical component of news gathering and telling stories: reportage, which is a factual, journalistic presentation of events.

“For a story like CAA, which has pockets of the Muslim community reacting to it in diverse ways across the country and similarly NRC which required reporting from various parts of Assam, much more should have been done by way of reportage. But unfortunately, we did not have the resources to do it.”

Many participants mentioned that being part of a “broken” media system has made it “impossible to not be complicit in some type of “oppression.” Elaborating on the present state of the media system, Raman lamented:

“The model in which the media and this country functions are not conducive to good journalism, which is ironic, right? So, if the entire business is predicated on certain aspects, activities or ways of behaviour which run contrary to what good journalism is, then your model itself is broken, isn’t it?”

As indicated in the statement above, the justification for remaining in the field of journalism stemmed from the acceptance of the crudity of the business for many participants. Characterising the industry as a “trap,” one journalist said it was not right to assign the blame for the failings of the media to individuals as the rot was much bigger and more sinister.

“Where will one go? There is no place in the media where you can secure your future. All the big networks and channels are owned by people of a particular mindset. If you want to remain there, there can only be two outcomes – either sacrifice your job, or

compromise your ethics.”

Conclusion

The chapter has categorised the various forms of oppressions prevalent in the newsrooms where the interviewed participants work or used to work. In addition to oppressions, the second part of this chapter has explained the two negotiating mechanisms of resistance and compliance among journalists. Showing different vignettes of power and then resistance, this chapter has established a causal relationship between the two. In doing so, this section has answered my two subquestions, and partly responded to my main research question.

Chapter 6: Discussion and Conclusion

It can be deduced from my findings that power takes on oppressive forms within newsrooms. Exercised in the form of exploitation, powerlessness and emotional violence, and cultural imperialism, these oppressions are shown to have impacted the social experience of the participating journalists, evident in their accounts.

Initially my research was shaped by an inkling – emerging from my own professional experience – that most journalists would perceive the editorial line of their organisation to be the biggest constraining power shaping their practice. However, during my fieldwork, I found that the participants responded to constraints extending far beyond the editorial slant of their organisation and with multiple actors involved. I have also demonstrated in Chapter 5, Section 5.2 that many journalists exercised resistance varying in scale in the face of these oppressions. This observation affirms the Foucauldian (1978) theory of “where there is power, there is resistance.” Building on key findings presented in the previous chapter, in this section, I discuss my data in more detail to communicate a detailed portrait of the nexus of power, resistance, and power relations.

It is evident from the narratives of the participants that exploitation is exercised through various institutional practices within newsrooms. While for journalists this is observed in not being able to do certain stories of their choice that do not fit the editorial line of their channel, for editors, it manifests in the government’s interference in editorial affairs and ensuring that stories that might generate politically opposing responses do not get published. The participants’ narratives demonstrate that news organisations have institutional mechanisms to ensure that journalists remain within certain discursive limits. These practices can be as normalised as the editor pulling rank to turn down certain pitches or as critical as intimidation from the government to curb reportage. An interesting finding that has emerged from the category of exploitation is how, on the one hand, some participants implicate the state in the exploitation of news organisations through media control. But on the other hand, some journalists maintain that certain news organisations willingly conform with the narratives of the government, specifically on the issue of the anti-CAA protests. While the usage of a compliant mass media as a tool to advance the ideas of the regime is common across authoritarian states, it can be deduced that certain mainstream media organisations have been posing as an extension of the state by propagating the government’s agenda. However, despite these developments, there are notable attempts among journalists to not toe the line and resist in the face of such pressures.

Several accounts in this study point towards a consistent invisibilization of certain journalists who work on the desk as an editor or in the field as a reporter. For instance, when Nabiya joined the organisation, she thought she had access to promising career avenues. However, she soon confronted the harsh reality of television anchors having greater editorial control over the publishing agenda. The experience of multiple desk journalists in this study is consistent with Foucault’s ideas on truth that see it as a product of power (1980). In this production of power, the most accepted participants are not desk journalists, but recognizable television anchors, my data indicates. These dynamics also

affirm that newsmaking is strongly influenced by internal power apparatuses that manifest in the form of editorial politics, perceptions of audience interest, and the everyday cadence of the newsroom (McMullan and McClung, 2006). When operationalised in combination with emotional violence, as experienced by multiple participants, such invisibilization engenders feelings of despair, individual and collective guilt, and lasting trauma. Oppressive systems thrive on the negation of emotional welfare (Khader, 2021) and compliance is often the only way for individuals to exercise self-preservation. The coping strategy of detached compliance, for example, is consistent with this notion. It can be a way for journalists to cope with the emotional fallout of the profession and help foster objectivity. However, on the flip side, it can also keep individuals from feeling responsible for their actions. In the newsroom, it can reinforce the idea that emotionality gives rise to irrationality. Therefore, archiving emotions, in a system that forces you to practise emotional detachment, becomes more potent against domination.

The rise in anti-Muslim hostility within newsrooms has been a compelling finding in this study. Three participants noted that the BJP and Narendra Modi's political ascension, beginning in 2014, heralded a certain kind of 'othering' in their organisations where they felt that their religious identities were starting to be called into question. Young (1990) writes that the culturally dominated group suffer from a double-edged oppression wherein, they are stereotyped and delineated as the Other, but invisibilised at the same time. In being labelled with such stereotypes, dominant groups confine the imperialised to an essence that is tied to their identities. In line with this argument, my research demonstrates that Muslim journalists are marginalised within newsrooms, and this marginalisation became more prominent while the anti-CAA protests were underway. Additionally, certain damaging characteristics were attributed to Muslim journalists, which were then employed to augment stereotyping against them. It was this attribution of dominant, unwanted meanings to their beings that prompted several journalists to engage in resistance against them. However, for one journalist of Muslim faith, such oppression resulted in self-censorship during her coverage of anti-Muslim violence that occurred during the anti-CAA protests in some parts of north India. This inhibition, the journalist said, was "symptomatic of the tendency to not believe Muslims or anything explicitly anti-establishment." This implies that journalists from minority backgrounds have to engage in tougher verification procedures to be able to report sensitive matters from the field. Her experience, once again, reinforces the Foucaudian idea (1980) that a multitude of knowledges compete in the production of truth in media organisations.

Organisations are rooted in the systematic inequalities that plague institutions. Therefore, they can function as a tool of oppression and reinforce the marginalisation prevalent in societies (Adams & Balfour, 2004). Based on my findings and analysis, I conclude that mainstream media has an active role in the proliferation of the Hindutva ideology, which imagines India as a nation with a singular, Hindu identity. Moreover, my data also supports that Muslim journalists working within mainstream media organizations are being steadily cast as "undesirable others" (Nizaruddin, 2020), mirroring the tide of nationalism observable outside. This othering is being operationalised through multiple layers of oppressions, encompassing organisational structures, peer control, and pressure from the state. Based on these observations, I infer that the mainstream media in India has a hand in the erasure of minority discourses. It does this by both marginalising journalists working to bring them to the fore and peddling anti-minority narratives simultaneously. However, what is more compelling to note is that in response to this nation-building project, there are

pockets of resistance within newsrooms.

When I began the interviews for this research, I did not expect to find such variegated forms of resistance within media organisations. However, perhaps the sheer force and nature of power/oppression demands that resistance be produced in myriad forms. In addition to this conclusion, an interesting learning emerging out of this research has been the duality of power and compliance and how the two co-exist with one another. As documented previously, many participants found themselves responding to power differently at different points in time, based on individual rationalisations, motivations, and limitations. This shows that like power and oppression, compliance and resistance are not mutually exclusive.

During my fieldwork, I discovered how journalists like Participant A, marginalised in the very organisations they worked in, are pushing the editorial boundaries of what is permissible. An analysis of the participants' discourses indicated that the reverberations of nation-building had not only permeated newsrooms, but were also provoking resistance among journalists who had much to lose. For some of those journalists, their resistance is not even intended to directly impact oppression. However, just by virtue of responding to a diabolical power, their resistance acknowledges and documents the erasure of discourses that undermine it. 89 years ago, Nazi Germany tried to erase the last vestiges of Jewish identity and history with the objective to create a homogenised state, which now India shares. Similarly, in Israel today, a consensus exists that the nation can be a home for only Jews, and non-Jews cannot have a hand in defining its ethos, aims, intents, and purposes. However, nine decades ago, there was resistance within the Third Reich by the likes of Ossietzky. In today's Israel refusal still emerges amid prison walls where many Refuseniks serve three consecutive terms in jail for refusing to enlist in the Israeli military (Hamad, 2022). Through this research, I document the passivity, compliance and resistances, along with their justifications, to show how a people negotiate the contours of a diabolical state.

With the above in-depth discussion of power, oppression, resistance, and compliance, I have fully answered my main research question of how journalists negotiated oppressive power structures during the anti-CAA protests with this section.

6.1 Limitations and Future Avenues for Research

My research took place in a specific time frame and there was only a limited number of days I could spend in the field. Therefore, I had to narrow down my sample to nine journalists and seven organisations. All the organisations covered in this study are national media houses, concerned with developments in the country as a whole. My sample does not include regional media and therefore not representative of local news organisations and local journalists that work on issues pertaining to smaller territories. Diversifying my sample more than its present state would have meant investing more time and effort that I did not have the time or resources for. While gender seemed like an interesting arc in this research, my interviews were already quite long and comprehensive. Therefore, working with more data specifically on gender might have split the focus of the paper. The project was also to fall within a certain word limit and introducing additional nuances to my research would not have done justice to the participants and their experiences.

Exploring the concepts of power, oppression and resistance in the context of nation-building has fascinated me deeply with the abundance of perspectives emerging out of their intersection. In getting to understand power and its many facets, I have found it to be connected to the notion of governmentality, which has been defined by Foucault (1978) as “the conduct of conduct” or “art of government” where government includes an array of mechanisms through which subjects are made governable. These techniques have been briefly touched upon in this research in forms such as nudging, peer control, sanctions, among others. However, these remain promising avenues for future research. Additionally, a gendered approach to studying journalism in authoritarian settings is something that can be another interesting line of enquiry for future research possibilities.

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