Introduction: Urban deadlines – The twin mediations

In the 1990s, close on the heels of India opening up for foreign capital, the southern Indian city of Bangalore emerged, quite unexpectedly, as the outsourcing hub for the global high-tech economy. Global capital made its way into the city through new high-tech sectors of information technology and a motley mix of low-end business process outsourcing entities. In popular parlance, Bangalore became the 'Silicon Valley' of India, and a test case for what liberalization could do in the world's largest democracy to unleash a wellspring of domestic entrepreneurial energies, challenging even the mightier West. Litterateurs penned books on the city, just when the Man Booker-award-winning novel *The White Tiger* offered a dizzying view of Bangalore – the center of outsourcing companies that 'virtually run America', where men with the gut of an entrepreneur could move from the 'darkness' of old India to the 'light' of new India.[1] Perhaps no other city exemplified so vividly the 'aspirations' of globalizing India and the global South more generally. If Barack Obama warned American youth of the threat posed by 'Beijing and Bangalore' in the job market, lexicographers were quick to make Bangalore a verb to indicate loss of jobs in the West due to outsourcing. The eruption of the city onto the global marketplace was a sign of massive urban transformation under way, in Mumbai, Delhi and Pune, or Shanghai and São Paulo.

This book uncovers a significant strand of the sweep of urbanization triggered by global capital in cities like Bangalore – the dynamics of news media and their entanglements with urban transformation. At first glance, it may appear that a focus on journalists and news cultures might at best be a story of the media's transformation in a changing city, with little or no consequence for how we understand urbanization in the latest phase of global capitalism or its salience in the tantalizing narratives of 'Third World' enterprise. Scholars of globalization and urban explosion in the global South pay little attention to the expanding media, treating it implicitly as a reflection of a broader transition. This book challenges this approach to media as a mere epiphenomenon, and shows that the

commercial news media, especially the expanding newspapers and their army of journalists, played a critical role in the churning up of urban landscapes in postcolonial cities drawn into global templates of urbanization. It demonstrates how the flourishing news media in Bangalore are an important instance of global capital's constitutive overlaps with media cultures in the developing world that confront the cities, their publics and politics. It shows, in other words, that the expanding news media and global urbanization are deeply interconnected.

What happens when commercial news media multiply within transforming urban landscapes in thrall to new linkages with the global economy? What happens to news as a cultural-social practice invested in shaping public opinion when it finds itself in the middle of urban changes fueled by flows of global capital and rearranged regional capital? What is the nature of this inter-relation in a polymedia context where television news, FM radio and newspapers expand across overlapping fields of practice?

These questions become important with the rapid expansion of media in India in the years of reforms, as with the 'media wave' in other countries in the global South. At the turn of the millennium, the rhythms of everyday life and politics in urban India were inseparable from the cadences of media narratives and the cycles of publicity they provoked. The transformations of the news media were telling. News audiences multiplied with the dramatic growth of private news entities in print and television. There was a frenzy of new launches of television news channels and news dailies,[2] not to speak of the innumerable small ventures of niche publications, gossip papers and gaudy magazines with risqué revelations, busy enticing the readers into impulse buying. Newspapers reached more than 350 million readers, close to 39 percent of the Indian population above the age of 12 in 2011. Twenty of the world's 100 largest newspapers were Indian. Newspapers expanded their circulation from five million in the 1960s to more than 250 million in 2010.[3] If in other parts of the world newspapers were mired in fears of survival in a digital age and the new media expanded on small, hand-held gadgets, spurring new hopes of democratic participation in regions as diverse as West Asia, North Africa and Eastern Europe, the print media's expansion in India continued apace. The press underwent significant transformation in the midst of the growing popularity of television and new media, but, unlike in the West, these transformations formed the core of a news explosion in India rather than being reduced to the anxieties of a quick demise. Expanding television and radio channels complemented and even financed the growth of the press, and no media platform was cannibalized by another. More importantly, the crossover of labor between

print and television and common ownership in many cases established a shared habitus. A focus on newspapers was, then, not a chronicle of a dying medium. There was excitement around proliferating media as vehicles for citizens' voices, and an equally widespread cynicism that the media were fully bought up by mighty politicians and businessmen who waste no time tricking the publics for selfish gains.

The growth of news media was particularly striking in the city of Bangalore. Television and print expanded hand-in-hand, and all media platforms surged ahead to make the most of a growing middle class and their 'consumption power'. The mid-1990s was a watershed moment for the city's news media. The *Times of India* (*TOI*) group, the largest media house in India, which prides itself on publishing the most widely circulated English-language daily in the world, re-launched its Bangalore edition.[4] With aggressive marketing techniques, colorful page layouts and freshly minted lists of news themes, the *Times* group boosted the circulation of newspapers in English and in Kannada, the regional language. Excited by the success of the *Times* group, other major national media houses eyed the city for market expansion, and the existing newspapers defensively revised their marketing and editorial strategies to retain and tap a growing readership. In the regional-language news market, a similar churning occurred when a local politician-businessman launched *Vijaya Karnataka*, which became the largest-circulated Kannada newspaper in quick time, with its claims to compete with television and older newspapers through colloquial and racy prose, meticulous distribution strategies and cover-price wars.[5] As the news industry expanded in the city, and with it a hypercompetitive news ethos, criticisms about journalism and its falling ethical standards swelled not only among concerned citizens but also among professional journalists themselves. The narrative of decline enveloped the climate of news and its public reception, even as the galloping march of the news industry proceeded unabated. Amid this media makeover, what also took root was the *TOI*'s distinct discourse of aspirational 'New India' ready to take on the world with its liberalizing economy. Bangalore stood at the center of these imagined futures, with the high-tech sector the promised gateway.

For corporate actors, liberalization-friendly state bureaucrats and a section of the English-language media, Bangalore was an exemplar for new linkages with the global economy – the very contrast to the trope of the 'chaotic Third World metropolis' construed in the Western imagination as 'always in trouble, always needing remedy'.[6] It was a star city poised to reap the benefits of globalization in post-reforms India and a model for 'successful' liberalization. The stereotyped sleepy city had transformed from a relatively marginal center in the national landscape,

known for its state-sponsored higher education and public-sector enterprises in the 1960s and 1970s, into a symbolically powerful outsourcing hub for the high-tech industries.[7] The changes followed the larger global trends shaped by transnational commodification of information, when the post-industrial Western economy looked to the promise of spatially flexible knowledge services and spatial disaggregation of business became a key strategy for capital mobility and capital fluidity.[8] The postcolonial nation state's investments in higher education and public-sector heavy industries in the city presented an opportunity for the global high-tech industries to establish their bases, as with the erstwhile Mysore monarchy's modernizing efforts in formal education and industrial development in the colonial era.[9] Excited by the new opportunity, regional governments promoted the high-tech industry with favorable tax policies, tax holidays, duty-free imports of equipment, subsidized land and several regulatory favors.

Riding on the wave of global capital and state incentives, a new transnational class of computer software professionals and entrepreneurs emerged in the city with close ties with the centers of high-tech production in the West, alongside a significant number of expatriate groups serving multinational companies in the new economy sectors. Business success in the domestic high-tech industry soon spilled into the development priorities of the city. The eagerness to build a world-class city found an ally in the discourse of market efficiency peddled by the multinational aid agencies that had set foot in major subnational states in India.[10] At the peak of the liberalization-friendly regional state regime (1999–2003), as Carol Upadhya demonstrates, the development priorities of Bangalore became even more aligned with the interests of this emerging class of high-tech industrialists, especially the domestic IT entrepreneurs.[11] Corporate-sector representatives influenced policy processes through new institutions of 'public–private partnership'. Parastatal bodies with corporate actors on the board were vested with significant powers in executing large infrastructure projects in and around the city. The rhetoric of 'world-class infrastructure' echoed the euphoria around 'global boom-towns' in the global South, with many mega-cities building urban infrastructure to compete with the global cities of the North and national economies contending to connect with the global marketplace through these 're-planned' cities.[12]

Tacking between the global marketplace and domestic policies of urban revival, local capital was quick to reconfigure around real estate and ancillary sectors feeding on the new industries, spawning massive networks of profiteering. As a result, together with the IT boom and its symbolic arsenal of a 'global city' (the ideology of a globally competitive

world-class city), Bangalore also became a key conduit for new networks of gray and black capital tapping the global demand for iron ore (especially from China) and other raw natural resources, and the murky capital was invested back into several sectors in the city, real estate in particular. All the while, new garment factories mushroomed on the city outskirts, feeding the global garment industry with unregulated labor standards and convenient nexuses with local authorities.

The rising cultural prominence of young, cosmopolitan and consuming classes employed in the globally connected high-tech industries as well as the dominance of corporate and political classes exploiting the boom in the economy through canny networks of global–local capital was starkly contrasted with the experiences of exclusion and marginalization of a growing number of lower-middle-class segments and the urban poor, who faced the detrimental effects of rising land prices, precarious land titles and spiraling costs of services, including drinking water, housing, education and health. At the same time, the new economy sectors spurred consumer markets and employment-generating activities across various economic segments in the city, leading to a vast expansion of the unorganized sector and large-scale migration of unskilled labor into the city. The rapid growth of media thus occurred at a time when Bangalore underwent significant changes in its demography, political culture and economic makeup.

In such a milieu, the expanding news media, this book argues, co-create urban cultures to deepen the class project of global capital, but in so doing, they animate multiple claims on the city that defy the evaluative divides between media as capital's ideological factories or liberal democracy's exalted spaces of 'public' deliberation. The divide between 'dominance' and 'democracy' runs through many recent studies on news media expansion in India, although not explicitly in relation to urban transformation. Indeed, urban transformation has rarely been a field of inquiry for journalism scholarship in India and elsewhere.

Concerned with broader political cultures and democratic participation, a growing body of insightful scholarship has shown that post-liberalization media in India represent a definite departure from the avowed nationalist agenda of news media in the colonial era and the decades of developmentalist media when the postcolonial Indian state held a monopoly over television and promoted the ideology of media participation in its developmental agenda.[13] Despite their common emphasis on the transition, the descriptive and evaluatory perspectives vary between what a seam of research considers as media-led democratic participation and a more critical account of the hypercommercialization of media, sharply termed the Murdochization of the press. Critical scholarship in

the Marxist cultural studies and political economy traditions draw attention to the growing commodification of news that results in the 'dumbing down' and personalization of news, and the withering of its public agenda. This echoes popular denigration of infotainment media as well as criticisms within the Western academy on the growing market dominance over news and 'journalism's institutional reconciliation with its commercial function as a form of entertainment' in the last three decades.[14] The counter-claim that the 'encroachment of tabloidized techniques and content' has softened news, making it more accessible for diverse publics in regions like South America, appears far-fetched in these accounts of Indian media.[15] Scholars argue that the historical association between colonial administration, the English language and upper castes, followed by the growing influence of the English-language press over policy-makers and corporate power in postcolonial India, ensures that the smaller, yet influential, elite English-language press normalizes the symbolic violence of the state and corporate power over a large majority of poor and marginalized people.[16] Optimistic evaluations, on the other hand, draw attention to the avenues of democratic participation opened up by the expanding media, especially the growing field of regional-language press, which shape more inclusive domains of public debate by drawing diverse sections of people within the fold of legitimate news. This is evident, according to some studies, in the burgeoning Hindi media creating greater 'political awareness' in provincial India and prospects for political participation.[17]

Following the theoretical premises of public agenda versus capital interests, one would assume that greater commercialization of media leads to unequivocal pro-market urban discourse. In Bangalore, news media wedded to advertising revenue did not in fact create a uniform market-friendly urban discourse. This book unravels this puzzle by showing how news media's interface with urban politics is shaped by global capital's collisions with diverse cultural practices of news and their distinct genealogies and logics, foremost of the regional-language cultures of cities and caste practices among journalists.[18] These varied systems of mediation and multiple logics of news instigate struggles irreducible to market power. To chart these struggles and their implications for urban transformation in the current phase of global capitalism, it is important then to move beyond criticisms that condemn the post-1990s Indian media – and commercial media elsewhere in the world – for commoditizing news and trumpeting market reforms. This book shows that the news media are not as monolithic as is often presumed in such criticisms. Neither is this a case of media-led democratic resurgence that successfully 'resists' class-exclusive projects of global urbanization. The thick

mesh of mediations and variegated news cultures needs new concepts of media analysis – beyond the normative divide between public good (development media) and private accumulation (commercial media).

To illustrate this point, I will begin with an extended description of two urban controversies in Bangalore that flared up during my fieldwork.

The *Pink Chaddi* campaign

'It is breaking news', yelled a desk editor, 'the live visuals are here.' At a local television news channel in Bangalore, I watched the editor quickly process the feed and alert the team on the studio floor to insert it instantly into the live news bulletin. This feed was particularly shaky, the sort an amateur would capture. But the editor had little doubt about its value. The technical shabbiness was a sign of 'liveness', of authenticity, a proof of being there when the action unfolded. The feed had come from the coastal city of Mangalore, not far from Bangalore, showing male activists of the *Hindu Jagarana Vedike* (HJV, the Hindu Awareness Forum), a local right-wing Hindu nationalist group, barging into a 'homestay'. Along the region's coastline and the mountain ranges adjoining it, a string of homestays had sprung up on coffee estates and agricultural fields, when a number of households turned their bungalows into tourist lodges to reap the quick returns of micro-tourism against the faltering incomes of farming. In one such homestay, seductively named 'Morning Mist', the *Vedike* activists had appeared all of a sudden. In less than 30 minutes, they had vandalized and disrupted the birthday celebrations of a group of college students at the homestay.

The activists pitched the attacks as a cultural war against the 'decadent' values of Western modernity, exemplified by the carefree youth parties of homestays. For them, the parties bore all the signs of 'moral depravation': revealing outfits on women, alcohol, dance, gyrations and the sheer audacity of socializing with the opposite sex. Concerned with how this episode would develop in the news media, I stood focused on the editor's next steps with the feed. I realized soon that a handful of journalists, including the channel's Mangalore correspondent, had received the cue from the attackers well in advance to roll their cameras for an impending sensational action. The editor was aware of his crew's presence at the homestay during the attacks and the ethical dilemma that such a presence could provoke, but the feed was too 'live' to be abandoned in the musty wrangle of ethics.

The presence of the television crew at the venue, however, came under fire soon after, inviting criticisms of blatant connivance of local television journalists who were accused of failing to alert the police before turning

on their cameras. The journalists on their part blamed the incumbent government of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), the Hindu nationalist party, for orchestrating the event and bullying the journalists into admitting ethical collapse to obfuscate its own back-hand support for the attackers. The criticisms against the news channels mounted, even as these channels tussled to find the 'best' visuals capturing the attacks: young male attackers dragging the women in the party, pulling their hair, slapping them and forcing them to reveal their faces before the television cameras. The cameras had moved in sync with the attackers, matching their pace, tilts and turns. As quick as the attackers and the cameras that followed them, the live feed beamed into news bulletins across the region and, the very next minute, on national television channels.

The newspapers were not far behind. Full-length pages displayed banner headlines, pull-out quotes, pictures, screamers, editorials and opinion columns. No doubt the presence of the television crew at the venue was a cause of embarrassment, since some of the papers sat awkwardly with these channels as sister publications of the same media company. If media ethics remained a part of the print media coverage, the incident itself flared in multiple directions in the media: the Hindutva (Hindu nationalist) agenda of the BJP government fueling purportedly spontaneous attacks such as those of the HJV; the morality of alcohol consumption among the youth; the rights of urban women ('city girls') to wear dresses of their choice; the ethical lapse of news-hungry television channels eager to seize the visuals of anything deemed sensational to remain at the top of the breaking news pecking order; the alleged sleazy networks of prostitution and sexual innuendo lurking behind unregulated homestays; the profitable 'business' of organizing public attacks with all the trappings of extortion and intimidation; the political ambitions of the underemployed male attackers; and finally, the symbolic charge of cultural war against Western modernity that had as many intricate dimensions as the incident itself.

The attacks received widespread condemnation from newspapers in English and Kannada. If Kannada papers labeled the attackers as Duṣyāsana and Kīcaka – Hindu mythological characters embodying vice and violence against women – English-language newspapers invoked the image of the Taliban to liken HJV's politics of sexuality to the violent conservatism of the Afghan militants. A few Kannada papers borrowed the frame of 'Talibanization' in their reports since major political leaders of the opposition Indian National Congress Party used the metaphor copiously in their strongly worded 'sound bites'.

As the episode disappeared from the media discourse as quickly as it had erupted, I realized that the controversy signified a broader dilemma of urban transformation, when 'urban modernity' stood as a sign of

something larger, a portent of things to come. It also revealed that the expanding news media were at the very heart of how the cultural war was conceived and executed. The presence of the television crew and the promise of wide media coverage were not just significant but, by any measure, constitutive of the controversy. In their war against 'decadent' urban modernity manifest in 'global cities' like Bangalore and its spill-over effects in smaller cities like Mangalore, right-wing activists (as well as the ideologically promiscuous underemployed youth) not only drew upon the gendered rendition of Indian culture that linked questions of sexuality with discourses of nation and tradition, but also made good use of the expanding media networks to maximize the effect and sharpen their claims on 'the urban'. For the growing army of television camera crews and print journalists, the episode was apt for the day's breaking news, promising captivating visuals of live action and loud sound bites. In many ways, the episode illustrated what this book considers as the constitutive overlaps between news media and urban politics in a globalizing milieu – media are the practical loci of power where value is constantly produced and contested through modalities that are tenuous and continually emergent.[19]

The homestay controversy revealed something more. The newspapers in English and Kannada mediated the event differently, reminding us that the bilingual nature of news fields somehow remains persistently salient for news cultures in this mix of things and suggests something further.[20] Despite a common frame to criticize the attacks, the HJV activists' alleged concerns about the cultural purity of the local land and depredations of Western modernity had leaked into the narratives of a section of the regional-language newspapers, however hushed and veiled. In *Kannada Prabha*, a major Kannada newspaper, columnist Vinayaka Bhat Muroor expressed surprise at the intense media coverage given to the event by the English-language media when 'Mangaloreans are used to witnessing such common [*māmūli*] incidents'. Playing down the event combined with reflexive ethico-cultural commentary by the columnist on how it is bad to be 'overly modern' (*tumbā ādhunika*), just as it is not advisable to stick to too much tradition. Even while strongly condemning the attacks, the editorial in the paper remarked quite plainly that the women at the party had indeed not dressed like '*gouramma*' – fully clothed, 'traditional', timid and often homebound women.

The verdict was more openly divisive and the differences in the representational practices of the press in English and Kannada much sharper three years ago when a similar attack was planned against a group of pub-visiting teenage women in the same coastal city of Mangalore. In contrast to the homestay attacks, the vandalizing act by another Hindutva

outfit, Sri Rama Sene (Sri Rama's Army), in a suburban pub had seemed morally more ambiguous for the journalists and was less plainly communalized in the media narratives. As with the homestay attacks, the strong-arm tactics of the male activists were captured by a television crew who had accompanied the attackers, armed with prior knowledge of the attacks and ready with their camera. The first televised images showed the young men forcibly dragging the women out of the pub, beating them and parading their will to 'cleanse' their town of the 'social evils' that allegedly enticed young women into the traps of alcohol consumption. If Rama Sene activists claimed that pub visits by women were against 'our culture', 'progressives' backed by the English-language media condemned the attacks and upheld women's right to drink, dine and dance. Soon, a group of e-enabled women activists based in Bangalore came together, called themselves a 'Consortium of Pub-Going, Loose and Forward Women' and started a campaign named *Pink Chaddi* ('pink underpants') on Facebook to protest the attacks. They urged women to send pink underpants to the architect of the attacks and chief of Rama Sene on Valentine's Day. The protest's use of pink chaddi as a symbol overturned the notion of privacy as a mode of political struggle through its clever reference to the brown shorts worn by members of the right-wing *Rashtreeya Swayam Sevaka Sangha*, the Hindu nationalist organization (invoking the popular sobriquet 'chaddi brigade' by which they are often known). At the same time, the use of the Internet enabled the activists to draw support from unexpected corners of the world.

As with the homestay attacks, what intrigued me was the hesitation of a large section of the Kannada news media and a section of the English-language media to embrace the 'liberal' narrative of prominent English-language dailies aggressively defending the rights of the partying youth and the *Pink Chaddi* campaigners. For the English-language newspapers toeing the line of liberalism, the attacks symbolized a formidable barrier to the country's onward march in the global marketplace and the very promise of 'New India' and 'global-cosmopolitan Bangalore'. The liberal discourse around women's rights symbolized the 'youth spirit', when ideologies of liberty and liberation were conflated with those of economic liberalization. For many Kannada journalists, it not only embodied a threat to their local cultural autonomy but it also reinforced their discomfort with the growing commercialization of news and the discourses of urban modernity peddled by the 'new-age' English-language newspapers launched or re-launched in the years of economic reforms. The English–Kannada binary was then not just a simple difference in news content and news frames, although this difference itself was highly uneven. It signified a larger tension in the semiotic