Spectacles of Gender and Globalization: Mapping Miss World’s Media Event Space in the News

RADHIKA E. PARAMESWARAN
School of Journalism, Indiana University

The 1996 Miss World pageant in India turned into a controversial event when activist groups launched protests against globalization and cultural imperialism. Approaching news texts as portals into the larger moral order, this article examines the Times of India’s representations of the Miss World controversy. The newspaper’s colorful photographs of Miss World’s organizers, sponsors, and beauty contestants resuscitated the hegemonic cultural politics of consumer modernity while the visual imaging of activist groups inscribed protesters within paradigms of delinquency and disorder. The crafting of news through objectivist signifiers of consent for Miss World legitimized the authority of state and consumer discourses, excluded the poor, and marginalized activists’ voices. News stories on Miss World’s charitable support for handicapped children inserted institutions of global/local capital into sympathetic templates of Third World salvation. In concluding, the article situates my textual analysis within the economics and professional routines of media production and the discursive inheritances of colonialism.

On November 23, 1996, the live performance of the Miss World pageant was staged for an audience of 16,000 at the state-owned Chinnaswamy Stadium in Bangalore, a cosmopolitan city in south India. Beauty contestants from eighty-nine nations, reputed folk and classical dancers and musicians, and a parade of

This research was made possible through the generous support of an Indiana University Grant-in-Aid and a Summer Faculty Fellowship from the School of Journalism, Indiana University. I am grateful to David Nord and Beverly Stoeltje for nourishing this project in many ways from its early beginnings. I thank Carol Polsgrove for her insightful comments and David Weaver for his guidance with the budget for the grant proposal. Kavitha Cardoza, Janine Riding, and Chelsea Wald provided outstanding research assistance. An earlier version of this paper won a First Place Faculty Paper Award (Cultural Studies Division) at the annual convention of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication, August 2002.

Address correspondence to Radhika Parameswaran, School of Journalism, Ernie Pyle Hall 200, Indiana University, Bloomington, IN 47405. E-mail: rparams@indiana.edu
richly decorated "ethnic" elephants entertained reporters, celebrities from the fashion and film industries, corporate business leaders, and the sea of ticket-holders who had gathered to witness the event. Welcoming the audience to Miss World's first performance in South Asia, host Ruby Bhatia Bali animatedly invoked India's colonial history to hail the pageant as a trope for new egalitarian partnerships in a global economy, "The 1996 Miss World in Bangalore will convey the magic of the East and West coming together. Unlike the days of the British Raj when India was subordinate, the West is now seeking India out as an equal global partner." In contrast to Bhatia's optimism and the dazzling pantheon of multicultural femininity being displayed on the illuminated stage, the hundreds of heavily armed guards patrolling the shrouded darkness of the stadium grounds signaled the grim specter of the state's masculinized power and authority. Blurring the boundaries between private/public, capital/state, and leisure/work, the silent and hypervisible bodies of the guards reminded the audience that unexpected violence could erupt at any moment. Under the leadership of Bangalore's police commissioner, over 12,500 law enforcement personnel including Central Armed Reserve Force soldiers, seven divisions of the elite Rapid Action Force, two all-women police platoons, and a bomb-fighting squad created a thick blanket of security for the pageant.

To unpack the puzzling question of why a formidable array of state security personnel would be stationed at a seemingly banal entertainment event, media scholars would have to shift their attention from the orchestrated order of Miss World's rehearsed performances to the scenes of disorder that exploded outside the walls of the stadium. Standing a few feet away from a statue of Mahatma Gandhi, CNN correspondent Anita Pratap relayed news of impending suicide protests by conservative women activists who had declared their intentions to sneak into the stadium and burn themselves in order to sabotage Miss World. During the live staging of the contest, activists also blocked traffic, deflated tires of state-owned buses, and threw stones at the doors of the stadium as police fired tear gas shells and used lathis (long wooden sticks) to restore order. Journalistic accounts that chronicled these tense climactic moments in the history of Miss World's arrival in India were only a few pages in the closing chapter of a prolonged tale of debate and controversy that unfolded over several months. Since August 1996, soon after the event management firm Amitabh Bachchan Corporation Ltd. (ABCL) announced that Miss World would be held in India, a host of special-interest groups hijacked the global contest as a conduit for disseminating narratives of local opposition to global culture.

The transformation of Miss World from a mere beauty contest into a newsworthy spectacle illustrated the creation of "media event space," a chaotic cultural domain that emerges when special-interest groups manipulate staged events and public figures to attract media attention (McLaughlin, 1998). To the dismay of Indian organizers—who were eager to package Miss World as a
modern ritual of feminine achievement that would herald the nation’s endorsement of global capitalism—activists, political parties, and trade unions seized the international contest as a forum to generate public debates on moral decay, preservation of national traditions, economic imperialism, and the Indian state’s recent collusion with the business interests of foreign multinationals. In attempting to mobilize popular sentiment, both the rhetoric of support for and opposition against Miss World focused sharply on the potential impact (empowering and damaging) of First World consumer culture on Indian women’s bodies, behaviors, and sexual identities. The mining of Miss World by organizers, sponsors, and protest groups to promote their agendas in the public sphere revealed the manner in which constructions of gender and sexuality are inextricable from discourses of nation, tradition, and modernity in postcolonial India (Banet-Weiser, 1999; Fernandes, 2000; Munshi, 1998; Oza, 2001; Parameswaran, 2001).

The prominence of media images in the representational politics of capitalist democracies is a key concern of recent cultural studies work that has examined the ways in which institutions and activist groups harness media spectacles to disseminate narratives of race, gender, class, and nation in the public sphere (Callahan, 1998; Hinds & Stacey, 2001; McLaughlin, 1998; Steiner, 1999). Building on such recent discussions, this article examines visual and textual representations of Miss World’s “media event space” in the *Times of India*, an English-language newspaper that is widely recognized for its “reliability and reputation for balance and fairness” (Shah, 1994, p. 8). Approaching news texts as portals into the larger political, social, and economic order in India’s current context of globalization, my study seeks to unravel the symbolic meanings of gender, nation, and consumer modernity that were embedded in the *Times of India*’s construction of the Miss World controversy. How did the newspaper’s signification of pageant sponsors and organizers, state officials, beauty contestants, and women activists legitimize or challenge hegemonic regimes of gender and class? What selecting, ordering, and framing practices did the *Times of India* employ in its discursive production of the voices that affirmed or questioned Miss World’s credibility as an event that symbolized women’s empowerment and national progress? Mapping the complexities of local reception to projects of globalization, whose interests—global/domestic capital, state, or activist—did the newspaper’s representational strategies highlight, eclipse, or exclude? What economic factors and historical legacies shaped the politics of Miss World’s journalistic production in the *Times of India*? Addressing these questions, the ultimate objective of my analysis is to offer intertextual readings that explore how the visual and linguistic repertoire of journalism intersects with and operates in relation to the institutional contexts of patriarchy, consumer culture, state authority, and the public policy process. Scrutinizing a select sample of news texts, I argue that the semiotics of gender, nation, and modernity in the *Times of India*’s composite narrative on Miss World privileged the moral claims of
organizers, sponsors, and the state, thus consolidating middle- and upper-class news consumers' support for the classist ideologies of globalization.

In examining journalistic texts as culturally articulated knowledge and as commodities that circulate within India's expanding consumer culture, this essay's approach to news as a symbolic system of representations contributes new insights to feminist cultural studies and interdisciplinary debates on globalization. Politicizing the private sphere as a crucial site for studying the constitution of gender, race, and class identities, feminist cultural studies critics have documented the ways in which advertising discourse, soap operas, women's magazines, television dramas, and romance novels reflect, renew, and sometimes challenge patriarchal and capitalist structures of power. Without diminishing the value of feminist research on "lowbrow culture" and while borrowing methodologically from existing work in cultural studies, this article's interrogation of "middlebrow culture" steps away from the disciplinary focus on fictional texts of entertainment and fantasy. Deconstructing the politics of gender, class, and nation in the cultural accounts of journalism—an institution that claims to foster citizenship rather than consumerism—is crucial to uncover the architecture of "reality" and challenge the objectivist epistemology of news texts. Furthermore, although the potential impact of globalization on the economies and cultures of Third World nations has attracted much theoretical attention, few studies have empirically examined the complex and heterogeneous strands of local responses to global rituals, products, and services. Charting the discursive domain of global-local collaboration and conflict in the Times of India, this paper's case study of the Miss World controversy illustrates the process by which news media shape, translate, and manufacture "truths" about globalization for local audiences.

The first section, which engages with recent work on globalization, gender, and beauty pageants, has two goals. This section weaves together the political and economic context for the article's analysis of the Miss World controversy and describes the different protagonists—from founders to organizers, sponsors, and protest groups—who shaped Miss World's media event space. The second section details my theoretical and methodological approaches to news analysis and outlines briefly the quantitative parameters of Miss World's news coverage in the Times of India. In the third and fourth analytical sections, I deconstruct photographic and textual representations of Miss World in the Times of India to show that the constitutive relations between structures of power and systems of representation reveal themselves with as much force within news narratives as they do in the texts of popular culture. Finally, in the concluding section, I first address the economic imperatives that guided the production of Miss World as news for the growing middle-class markets of post-liberalized India. Historicizing the analysis, I then locate the semiotics of gender and globalization in the Times of India within the cultural politics and discursive inheritances of colonial modernity.
Globalization, Gender, and Consumer Culture: Global Pageants and Local Protests

In August 1996, when film actor Amitabh Bachchan announced that his media company had won the contract to stage Miss World in India, prominent celebrities, business leaders, and advertising agencies hailed the pageant as a historic event that would offer spectacular evidence of India's enthusiasm for and receptiveness to globalization (Parameswaran, 2001). At the same time, a coalition of left-wing politicians and feminists claimed that the pageant's performance in Bangalore would signal India's capitulation to the interests of global multinational companies at the expense of the poor. Why did two divergent groups—one representing domestic capital and the other activist opposition—view an international beauty contest as a symbol of globalization?

During the past decade, numerous scholars have debated the impact of globalization on the economies and cultures of Third World nations (Ang, 1996; Appadurai, 1996; Grewal, 1999; Tomlinson, 1996). While David Harvey (2000) notes that the business practices of globalization per se are not new because international trade dates back to the fifteenth century, the increased mobility of capital and the rapid circulation of goods, services, and images across geographic borders marks the "complex, overlapping, and disjunctive order" of the global economy (Appadurai, 1996, p. 32). Close collaboration among nation-states, global and domestic capital, and local culture industries has spurred the steady incorporation of Third World countries into the global economic order. In the case of India, the national government accelerated the arrival of globalization when it launched economic reforms in the late 1980s to dismantle inefficient state controls, promote a free-market economy, and facilitate the entry of multinational companies (Dutt, 1997). The Indian government's economic liberalization package, which was designed primarily to attract foreign capital, resulted in a shift in the emphasis of state economic policies from socialist modernity—encouraging infrastructure development and the elimination of poverty—to capitalist modernity—promoting the urban Indian middle class as a lucrative market for the sale of global consumer culture (Varma, 1998). As Appadurai (1996) observes, the consuming potential of the "actual and potential" middle class, an audience that Indian market research firms pursue relentlessly, has become the basis for much of India's public culture formations (p. 7). Consumption, however, is not the only mode through which India has gained visibility in the global economy. Participating in the production and labor sectors, India's English-speaking middle classes have also become a much-sought-after workforce in the global information and software industries.

The transformation of the postcolonial Indian state's protected economy into a burgeoning location for global consumption and production has produced dramatic changes in urban landscapes, forms of consumption, and media culture (Oza, 2001). Red-and-white Coca-Cola and Pepsi logos painted on walls, store
shutters, and street-side vending stalls signal the competition between multi-
nationals vying for the attention of the Indian consumer. The high-rise buildings 
of Euroamerican software companies adjoin modest middle class homes in 
Chennai, Bangalore, Pune, and Hyderabad. Supermarkets, shopping malls, and 
fast-food businesses sell consumer goods—toilet paper, deodorants, Barbie dolls, 
and pizza—that were well beyond the reach of the middle class a decade ago. Due 
to the privatization of television and satellite services, viewers who were earlier 
resigned to dull and didactic programming on health, agriculture, and science on 
state-controlled channels now have the luxury of access to over fifty channels 
including CNN, MTV, BBC, and STAR TV. Reflecting and creating the condi-
tions of possibility for globalization in India, television's mesmerizing images 
have authorized the reworking of the nation from a quasi-socialist state into a 
promising candidate for multinational capital (Khilnani, 1997). In India's current 
climate of consumption, the colorful experience of the visual thus embodies 
modernity as a "structure of feeling," a deeply felt sense of the quality of life that 
shapes a culture's collective imagination (Williams, 1975, p. 63).

Following the trajectories of consumer culture in industrialized nations, 
gendered forms of representation and consumption, with implications for the 
construction of tradition and modernity, mark the new field of global commodity 
culture in India. While advertisers mine images of young Indian women to sell 
cars, computers, and cell phones, middle-class women themselves have also 
become a much sought-after market in the global economy. Analyzing popular 
culture's symbolic deployment of the feminine in India's current phase of global-
ization, Sunder Rajan (1993) observes that women's displays of sartorial 
modesty, acceptance of arranged marriages, and performances of domesticity 
including the preparation of fresh food for family and celebration of religious 
holidays have become the embodied emblems of a feminized pan-Indian tradi-
tion. The signaling of modernity takes place through representations of women in 
jeans, skirts, and short dresses, mothers buying packaged foods, and rebellious 
young women participating in dating and courtship practices. The "New Indian 
Woman" in consumer advertising of post-liberalized India negotiates skillfully 
her traditional roles as honorable and dutiful daughter, wife, and mother with her 
modern roles as an entitled and educated consumer and worker in the capitalist 
economy (Munshi, 1998).

One expanding arena of Indian women's global consumption that is also 
linked to Western metropolitan modernity in the popular imagination is the 
beauty and cosmetics industry. Mushrooming beauty parlors in cities and small 
towns and ubiquitous supermarket cosmetic counters serviced by women attent-
dants in white coats index the pervasive presence of beauty culture. The loud 
voices of multinational cosmetic companies like Revlon, Oriflame, Avon, 
L'Oreal, and Benckiser have begun to present a serious threat to the previous 
monopoly of Lakmé and Ponds. With an investment of $1.7 billion and the 
highly publicized tours of supermodels Claudia Schiffer and Cindy Crawford in
1995, Revlon managed to secure 18 percent of the market share in one year (Parihar & Raval, 1996). Embedded in this context of the booming cosmetics and personal hygiene industries, beauty pageants and beauty queens have become symbols of Indian women's new visibility in the public sphere.

Challenging the simplistic equation of beauty pageants to kitschy low culture, recent scholarly work approaches these contests as spectacles of gender, race, class, and nation that serve the interests of various social, economic, and political forces (Banet-Weiser, 1999; Callahan, 1998; Cohen, Wilk, & Stoeltje, 1996; Oza, 2001; Parameswaran, 2001). For instance, Callahan traces the history of the Miss Thailand contest from its early staging as a nationalist instrument of the state to a consumerist institution that created audiences for the products advertised on television. In India, cosmetics, fashion, food, and personal hygiene companies routinely sponsor beauty pageants at the school, college, state, and national levels to build brand awareness and customer loyalty. Victorious beauty queens on billboards and in advertisements promote soap, shampoos, skin-lightening cosmetics, and bicycles. Femina, the largest circulation Indian women's magazine, manages the national Miss India contest and regularly features successful beauty queens on its cover. Indian women have won Miss Universe and Miss World titles six times in the past decade and former international beauty queens Sushmita Sen and Aishwarya Rai have become celebrity film stars in the Hindi film industry. The media-saturated world of beauty culture in India is thus a field of consumption and production that is a "shifting array of texts and experiences, which constitute evolving contexts for each other" (Appadurai & Breckenridge, 1995, p. 13).

Propelled by the momentum of these economic and cultural currents, the production of the Miss World pageant in India, like other capitalist ventures of globalization, required cooperation among global and local event managers, multinational and domestic commercial sponsors, and state officials. As many global companies have discovered since their entry into India, success with Indian markets has been contingent on the effective localization of their cultural products, a task that has demanded strategic alliances with local Indian partners who have the cultural expertise to translate the standard global into the customized local (Fernandes, 2000; Grewal, 1999). The British founders of Miss World, Eric and Julia Morley, sought the assistance of the fledgling ABCL to organize and manage the pageant's local incarnation in India. Sponsored mainly by Godrej, one of India's oldest producers of soaps, shampoos, and office furniture, Miss World also owed its financial support to MasterCard, Citibank, Coca-Cola, Europcar, Omega Watches, Revlon, Lakmé Cosmetics, Air India, and Welcom Group of Hotels. Linking Miss World to the compassionate mission of the state and local nonprofit organizations, the ABCL decided that 10 percent of the profits obtained from the sales of tickets would be donated to the Spastics Society of India, a respected association that offered free therapy, medical consulting, and special education for disabled children from poor and low-income families. Eager to harness the pageant for its potential to put Bangalore on the map of
global tourism, government officials promised to clean up the city, offer easy access to state property, and make public appearances at major events. Along with Amitabh Bachchan, the chief minister of Karnataka, J. H. Patel, presided over the inaugural news conference of Miss World, which was held at the Vidhana Soudha, the colonial state legislature building. The state also permitted the ABCL to hold the live performance of Miss World at the open-air Chinnaswamy Stadium. Furthermore, when public protests in Bangalore turned violent, the state police commissioner supervised massive security arrangements on behalf of the ABCL.

Examining the rhetoric of protests against Miss World, Oza (2001) writes, "The opposition to the pageant emerged from many different political positions producing a complex discourse on gender and sexuality in contemporary India" (p. 1071). In expressing their objections to Miss World during strikes and demonstrations, spokespersons for the conservative political right such as Premila Nesargi a member of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), and Kina Narayana Sashikala, leader of Mahila Jagran Samiti, focused on the pageant's "polluting" impact on traditions of Indian femininity that emphasized women's modesty and virtue. Mirroring the impulses of their previous campaigns to outlaw obscenity in public culture (Fernandes, 2000), conservative activists filed a series of petitions that requested the Karnataka High Court to charge the ABCL for its use of state property and services, ban Miss World's swimsuit competition, restrict distribution of alcohol at charity dinners, and enforce advance censorship of any proposed indecent exposure of women. In deference to the court, the ABCL agreed to pay the state for law-and-order services, shift the swimsuit competition to Seychelles, and serve liquor only at private parties.

Progressive feminists, allied with the political left and the farmers' group Karnataka Rajya Raithu Sangha (KRRS), distanced themselves from the political right when they chose to oppose the pageant as a symbol of the state's classist policy-making machinery that favored the middle class at the expense of fulfilling the basic needs of poor women. A consortium of women's organizations including Mahila Jagruti, Vimochana, and the All India Democratic Women's Association (AIDWA) also argued that the pageant's commodification of women signaled the state's support for multinationals. Protesting against the collusion of global/local capital and the state, Mahila Jagruti activists illegally entered an upscale Godrej showroom and smeared products with cowdung and tar. The feminist coalition with KRRS disintegrated soon after KRRS leader Nanjundaswamy announced his support for the right-wing Bharatiya Janata Party.

Approaching News as Cultural Narrative: Meanings, Myths, and Textual Analysis

Relying upon the qualitative methodology of textual analysis to explore the cultural politics of gender, class, and nation in the *Times of India*, this study draws inspiration from a growing body of qualitative media research that examines
news as a symbolic regime of myths and narratives and as a commodity in a political economy (Bird & Dardenne, 1988; Carey, 1986; Carter, Branston, & Allan, 1998; Fair, 1996; Hartley, 1982; Polumbaum & Weiting, 1999; Rakow & Kranich, 1991; Zelizer, 1992). Studying African women’s images in American television news stories on famine as part of a history of colonial knowledge production on Africa, Fair (1996) writes that scholars must use textual analysis to “explore more fully the relations among knowledge, organizational practice, consciousness, experience, and cultural contexts in which news circulates” (p. 3). Similarly, in their qualitative analysis of print and electronic news media coverage of Tiger Woods, Polumbaum and Wieting (1999) contend that “mining sports stories for nuance, background, contradiction, and complication” is a productive endeavor to understand the metaphoric ways in which the racial order of a national community gets embodied and conveyed (p. 70). Arguing that the representational limits of mass media offer clues to accepted knowledges about critical issues of the day, scholars locating themselves within a tradition of qualitative studies of journalism have thus employed textual analysis to reveal the ideological lenses through which news institutions filter discourses of gender, race, class, and nation.

A small yet significant stream of qualitative and cultural-studies research on Indian newspapers situates the English-language news media within histories of British colonialism, local structures of power, and institutions of elite authority. Although the readership of metropolitan English-language newspapers represents a small fraction of India’s population, the Indian press today is not just a “mediator between state and civil society, but an important part of the apparatus of governance itself” (Dhawan, 1991, p. 33). State officials, legislators, activists, politicians, and—more recently—global and local corporations depend on the urban press to influence public opinion among the educated middle and upper classes, key socioeconomic categories of deification in current policy and corporate discourses on modernization (Shah, 1994). Summarizing the power of the press as a source of cultural capital for the urban elite, Joseph and Sharma (1994) write:

The power of the English-language press is enhanced by its class composition . . . the press is run by the same dominant group to which it primarily caters . . . traditional definitions of news, accepted by the mainstream English-language press in India, conform to the generally liberal, yet elitist values espoused by the relatively affluent, upwardly mobile, university educated, upper caste urban male. (p. 17)

Using techniques of textual analysis that allowed him to investigate how the media “operate to classify people, create meaning, establish parameters of debate, defend the status quo, and squelch dissent,” Shah (1994) examines the Times of India’s coverage of elite student demonstrations against a proposed state
policy that sought to reserve a portion of government jobs for the lower castes (p. 7). Shah’s qualitative analysis shows that the Times of India’s corpus of stories on upper-caste student unrest enabled hegemonic forces of class and caste to gain public sympathy for their cause and thus preserve the status quo.

Indian feminists have analyzed the limits, possibilities, and boundaries of journalistic knowledge production on key events that have shaped the ideological trajectories of debates over gender and citizenship in India’s political landscape. Examining public discourses of the state and community elites during battles for the custody of Ameena, a ten-year-old Muslim girl who was “rescued” from her impending marriage with an elderly Arab man, Mankekar (1997) demonstrates that news texts are cultural narratives, and hence profoundly implicated in the turbulent politics of gender, sexuality, and religion in postcolonial India. Focusing on media responses to feminist activists’ public campaigns, some textual analyses have shown that newspapers can perform a dual role in challenging and reinforcing the operation of patriarchal power in the private and public sphere. The record of the Indian newspaper industry thus registers both sympathy and antipathy for the goals of the women’s movement. Contrasting the regressive overtones of Indian television with the more progressive historical legacy of print media before the arrival of globalization, Misra and Roychowdhury (1997) argue that almost all legislative reforms and “major women’s rights campaigns have been waged primarily” through the press (p. 248). For instance, the press mobilized public support for legislative action against such gendered forms of violence as dowry deaths, female infanticide, and domestic abuse; however, newspapers have also failed to provide adequate context, critical analysis, and sustained coverage of these social problems (Balasubrahmanyan, 1988; Joseph & Sharma, 1994). Luthra’s research on the public framing of “female foeticide” (selective abortion of female fetuses) discovered that the English-language press in Mumbai accommodated some elements of the feminist campaign to pass a law banning sex determination tests even as these reports muted simultaneously more radical feminist language that challenged systemic discrimination against women (Luthra, 1999).

Borrowing conceptual and methodological insights and contextual cues on the Indian press from qualitative analyses of news narratives, this study’s primary goal is to explore the latent meanings of gender, class, and nation in the Times of India’s news stories on Miss World. The sheer quantity and intensity of news on Miss World that saturated Bangalore’s public sphere in 1996 reflected the global pageant’s semiotic fertility and resilience as a media spectacle. Photographs and stories of the pageant stayed on the front pages of English-language and vernacular newspapers for over two months. The editorial sections of Bangalore’s newspapers expanded to accommodate the hundreds of letters that poured in from citizens, special-interest groups, and politicians opposing or supporting the pageant. In an effort to organize and process the volatile politics that surrounded Miss World, local versions of national newspapers like the
Mapping Miss World in the News

*Times of India, Deccan Herald,* and the *Indian Express* produced special weekend features to showcase and profile beauty contestants, well-known columnists, and activist leaders. To compete with the frenzied pace of Miss World’s event planners and protest groups’ daily demonstrations, two reporters and two photo-journalists at the *Times of India* were asked to abandon their routine beats (crime, courts, and lifestyle) so they could assist their colleagues who covered city politics. The sample of *Times of India* news photographs and reports that I examine in this study spans a ten-week period from September 18, 1996, the day of the first large-scale public demonstration, to November 25, 1996, two days after the pageant’s live performance.

During the ten weeks in 1996 that my analysis emphasizes, the *Times of India* carried 127 news photos related to Miss World—75 of these illustrated Miss World contestants and a range of the pageant’s supporters while 52 supplemented news of protest activities. The newspaper carried 252 stories on Miss World, and 106 of these were front-page stories. Positive stories that described and endorsed the staging of Miss World—features on contestants, prepageant events, plans for the event, and columns—outnumbered stories on local opposition to the pageant—marches, speeches, silent vigils, and columns—by approximately one and one-half to one (113 to 76), and there were more front-page stories that favored the pageant’s sponsors and organizers. Experts supporting the pageant were more visible and frequent, and the newspaper cited a wider range of people (in twelve categories) who expressed support and sympathy for the pageant’s organizers. Revealing the impact of binary models of objectivity on the *Times of India’s* oscillations between consent for and dissent against Miss World, the newspaper published twice as much material on conservative protests as they did on feminist and left-wing opposition, and among activists Kina Narayana Sashikala, the conservative leader of Mahila Jagran Samiti, captured maximum editorial space. Going beyond counting stories and assessing their positive or negative tone, my textual analysis tracks the contextual meanings and institutional genealogies of strategically chosen examples of news artifacts and representational practices.

This paper’s exploration of Miss World in the *Times of India* is based on cultural historian Robert Darnton’s premise “that the individual expression takes place within a general idiom, that we learn to classify sensations and make sense of things by thinking within a framework provided by our culture” (Darnton, 1984, p. 6). Approaching the *Times of India’s* photographs and reports on Miss World as textual elements that intersected with a larger system of representations in post-liberalization India’s popular domain, this article attempts to “tease meaning from the newspaper’s content by engaging with the surrounding world of significance” (p. 6). To uncover the latent meanings of gender, class, and nation in Miss World’s media event space, I explore the intertextual relations among representations in the *Times of India* and those in other media, including newspapers like the *Deccan Herald, Indian Express,* and *Hindu,* magazines like
Femina and India Today, local television news on STAR TV, and marketing discourse. Through my emphasis on intertextuality, I aim to show how the dominant meanings of journalism emerge, not from an isolated story or photograph, but from an accumulation of aligned accounts that produce a particular public record of an event (Carey, 1986).

My investigation of Miss World’s mediated zone of public debate in the Times of India’s news photographs and reports elaborates recurring discourses and themes and probes the hierarchical ordering of journalism’s representational techniques—size, placement, and positioning—that signal prominence, newsworthiness, and legitimacy. In narrating the beginnings of the first rough draft of Miss World’s history, whose side of the story did the Times of India’s pictures privilege? Given the wider context of colorful visual modernity in post-liberalized India, whose photographs did the newspaper choose to print in color? In the process of crafting the human face of the Miss World controversy, who were the individuals featured in news images and how were they shown? How did the captions to photographs contribute to the visual framing of organizers, contestants, and activists? Addressing the deeper implications of media practices, the analysis of news stories assesses the Times of India’s role as a mediator of public opinion on Miss World. In what ways do specific textual practices of representation articulate the power of the state and local/global capitalism? Foregrounding the rise of celebrity endorsement and corporate philanthropy, I examine the implications of the Times of India’s news content on Miss World organizers’ efforts to link the pageant with the charitable work of the Spastics Society of India. Finally, complementing the textual analysis, I draw periodically on interview data to flesh out and illuminate internal processes of news production and the institutional imperatives that shape the content of newspapers. In 1998 and 1999, I conducted interviews with Indian newspaper, magazine, television, and marketing professionals and key members of feminist organizations in Bangalore to gain access to their memories of experiencing the 1996 Miss World controversy on the ground.

**Animating Modernity, Disciplining Dissent: The Visual Register of Miss World**

Competing with global television’s mission to constitute the regime of the visual as the quintessential discursive vehicle for consumer modernity, the textual terrain of Indian print culture has shifted to privilege the semiotic power of images and illustrations. Polychromatic discourses of visual titillation in the glossy new magazines that flooded the 1990s market—India Today Plus, Verve, Cosmopolitan, Elle, and New Woman—prepare the burgeoning Indian middle and upper classes to become modern subjects by participating in the culture of commodity fetishism. Anxious to soften their stodgy image and ensure their long-term economic viability in India’s new and robust climate of visual modernity, major metropolitan newspapers have increased their allocation of editorial
space to images and doubled their investments over the past decade in the acquisition of advanced technology and the services of professional photographers and cartoonists. Documenting the design elements that indexed the emergence of an aesthetic of modernism and the simultaneous rise of the market-oriented newspaper, Barnhust and Nerone (2001) write that the ascent of the front-page photograph signaled both the consolidation of modern journalism's empirical authority and the "acceptance of photographers as partners in journalism instead of merely as artists" (p. 201). Paying homage to the visual hegemony of global modernity, Times of India's photographs of the Miss World controversy represented a milestone for the newspaper's record of illustrations for a single story. Guiding the interpretive boundaries of Miss World's media event space for the busy and casual browser of the newspaper, the pageant's field of images accounted for 40 percent of the newspaper's visual output in 1996.

**The Colors of Globalization: Masculine Capability, Smiling Femininity, and Local Hybridity**

In the Times of India's photojournalistic rhetoric, Miss World was dramatically anchored to the kaleidoscopic hues and multicolored prosperity of the modern while local opposition was consigned to the routine and drab world of gray, quotidian news. Mirroring the practices of newspapers across the globe that move gradually towards a full integration into the world of color, in 1996 the Times of India printed color photos only on the front pages of its different sections. Within the newspaper's intricate order of images and text that calibrated a hierarchy of newsworthiness, both prominence and color coalesced around the ABCL executives, founders, and contestants. Although brief news reports of simmering resentment against the pageant coincided with the publication of the pageant's schedule of events, the Times of India's first Miss World photograph that appeared on the right corner of the front page (a prime location) linked the pageant to the confident aura of masculine celebrity and the affirmative power of the state. Resplendent in "patriotic garb," actor Bachchan and Bangalore chief minister J. H. Patel, who were dressed in white *khadi kurtas*, long hand-spun cotton shirts that evoke nostalgic memories of Mahatma Gandhi's anticolonial struggle, shook hands to signal the productive collaboration of state and private enterprise in forging globalization projects. Accentuating the nationalistic flavor of the two men's white clothing, the Indian flag with its brilliant green, white, and orange colors lingered in the periphery. Similarly, three front-page color photographs also renewed the vitality of Miss World as a model project for fostering harmonious partnerships among the successful masculine elite of the Indian state, local business, and multinational capital. Signifying India's newly resuscitated postcolonial relations with the West, these images revealed groups of men—Bachchan, Miss World founder Eric Morley, J. H. Patel, state tourism officials, and business executives from Godrej, Revlon, and Citibank—arrayed
on the stately green gardens of the Vidhana Soudha, the palatial redbrick building that houses the state legislature.

Color photographs and illustrations that recorded preparations for Miss World on the front pages of the business and entertainment sections wove the pageant into dynamic narratives of architectural progress and achievement. Two large news photos of construction work on the stage at Chinnaswamy Stadium showed several men suspended precariously on elaborate scaffolding outlined clearly against the blue sky. One caption noted that the "magnificent spectacle" of the 1996 Miss World would unfold on the 110-by-60-foot stage, a massive multilevel structure that ensured "unprecedented excitement" for Miss World's live audience in India, unlike previous performances of the pageant that had been packaged exclusively for television. In vivid contrast to these images, the caption to another small photograph of the crumbling Qutub Minar, a historic seventeenth-century tower featured on the same page, drew the reader's attention to the stagnant backwardness of the Archaeological Society of India, which had "denied ABCL permission" to shoot images of beauty contestants posed in front of the monument.

Several striking images of male software professionals working on Miss World's technological production blended seamlessly with Bangalore's coveted reputation as one of the world's leading suppliers of knowledge-based products and services. By the mid-1990s, Bangalore was well recognized as a thriving technopolis and Third World "Silicon Plateau" of cheap skilled labor for scores of multinational firms including IBM, Intel, Microsoft, and Oracle. Structured by a masculine narrative of high technology, these Times of India images projected the pageant's potential to escalate the momentum of the city's forward-moving urban energy. Three young men dressed in blue jeans were huddled around a glowing computer screen that displayed a brilliant orange graphic of the India map in one photograph while the caption noted that Bangalore's "seasoned software experts" were planning to project high-resolution images of the nation's natural and historic "treasures" on stage, an aesthetic innovation that was designed to lend a "patriotic flavor" to Miss World's visual spectacle. Hinting that the greatest uncertainties in staging large-scale pageants hinged often on the unpredictable performances of women contestants, who turned out to be fallible humans, the caption to one photograph of Richard Steinmetz (the white South African host of Miss World's live show) surrounded by blue electric generators and gray audio, video, and lighting equipment claimed that Miss World's combination of "spanking new" technology and international talent dovetailed with the city's prevailing goals to become the "geographic pulse" of the global information economy.

Echoing the representational styles of fashion and lifestyle magazines, other large Times of India color photographs that harnessed the allure of young, feminine beauty disturbed the fragile boundaries that separate hard and soft news and photojournalism and commercial imagery. A series of front-page color images in
the main section that chronicled beauty contestants’ participation in inaugural rituals invited the newspaper’s middle-class reader to momentarily enter the glamorous world of the privileged Indian upper classes. Close-up and medium-shot photographs of beauty contestants’ arrival at Bangalore’s airport and at Windsor Manor Hotel’s ostentatious opening reception emulated the visual aesthetic of soap operas and personal care advertisements that encourage consumers’ intimate identification with their female characters. Dressed in form-fitting bright purple-and-red clothing that flattered their slim and innocent beauty, two wide-eyed young women from Holland and Ireland with long, flowing hair stared warmly into the camera as they waved to their imaginary audiences. Posed Playboy-style pictures of young female contestants clustering around an older man—alternately industrialist Vijay Mallya, south Indian actor Rajanikanth, and Amitabh Bachchan—reproduced the gender/class/age asymmetries that structure the discourses and practices of sexuality in entertainment culture where an older man’s intimate proximity to multiple feminine trophies of beauty indexes masculine success and pornographic desire. Creating a similar spectacle of feminized beauty, although with a radically different representational technique of male worship that emphasized distance and inaccessibility, another image showed Miss Aruba and Miss Israel, dressed in short skirts, sitting cross-legged in chairs on a small stage as a crowd of eager male photojournalists operating their cameras circled the two women.

The ubiquitous “lovely-to-see-you” pearly white smile, a gendered bodily adornment and welcome convention that evokes the “analogy of family warmth” to interpellate the viewing public, rarely left the faces of beauty contestants in news photographs (Holland, 1998, pp. 26–27). Holland (1998) argues that the fantastic excess of the pretty white woman’s relaxed, friendly smile, a modern representational trope of middle-class femininity that pervaded the popular press of Britain in the late 1960s, indexed the dramatic softening of hard news through the assertion of the female body as spectacle. Outnumbering front-page images in the Deccan Herald and the Hindu, fifty-five Times of India color photographs that appeared over three weeks exhibited Miss World participants attending welcome celebrations, charity dinners, and social events hosted by local celebrities. In over 90 percent of these illustrations, well-groomed smiling young women, colorful figures who typically saturate the semiotic world of Femina, the glossy magazine that has reinvented itself as the training manual for aspiring global beauty queens, conveyed a feminized “entertainment” rather than an “informational address” in the newspaper’s front pages. In the midst of the growing protest against Miss World on the streets of Bangalore, one vivid medium-shot image displayed a smiling Miss India and Miss Ireland “brimming with confidence despite the explosive atmosphere created by protesters” on the lawns of the Maurya Sheraton Hotel. An eye-catching visual feast that covered the entire front page of a weekend special feature on Miss World contained ten small images of Bangalore’s business and social elites accompanying beaming beauty
contestants. Claiming the inseparable combination of color and smiling women in visual images of Miss World to be an instinctive and "common sense" technique of representation, one Times of India photo editor remarked, "How else would you show modern and beautiful women?" Revealing the epistemic force of the beauty codes that govern the realm of the feminine in India’s public culture, Madhu Bhushan, a slim, young, and attractive feminist, noted that she, rather than several older feminists who were also involved in the left-wing protest movement, received numerous requests from journalists for posed photographs.

Traveling from the newspaper’s lifestyle pages to the front page, these smiling young women in the Times of India’s premium editorial space are surrounded by a wider discursive regime of media culture that persistently utilizes the trope of smiling femininity, combined with a rebelliousness linked to unconstrained canons of dress, to signal India’s openness to the seductive spell of First World modernity. Reaching out to the urban middle class, a key economic bloc whose purchasing power fueled India’s receptiveness to globalization, most Internet versions of Indian news magazines regularly feature a smiling young woman model or celebrity costumed in Western clothing on the first page. The cover of the first issue of India Today Plus, an upscale lifestyle publication (produced by the more serious news-focused India Today) that caters to the affluent transnational class of Indian consumers, featured a smiling young woman with deep red lips dressed provocatively in a tight, white tank top. Distilling in grand fashion the pleasures of modern material abundance, this feminine mascot of Western modernity flaunted the boldness of her exposed skin while seated in a flashy red-and-white classic Chevrolet car. Furthermore, as some business publications have claimed, the exuberant feminine smile that circulates visibly in media culture had to be harnessed as institutional practice if India wanted to become a modern capitalist nation that appreciated First World standards of excellent service to the consumer. Sharing his difficulties in training Indian service staff at airlines, five-star hotels, and retail outlets to be pleasant and responsive, the director of Aditi Communications (formerly a TV anchor) lamented the traditional obstacles that hindered the cultivation of a First World corporate culture in India: “Some Indian women think it’s wrong to smile at strangers because that sends a sexual message, and the men say it’s weak and womanly to smile all the time. I teach them the modern business meaning of service with a smile.”

The Times of India’s smiling Miss World contestants’ signifying capacity emerges from the larger cultural embodiment of cosmopolitan modernity that takes place through pervasive displays of affluent, happy Indian women who are packaged within the transgressive sexual aesthetics of “othered” Western femininity. Such metaphoric uses of women’s bodies in the news media to symbolize cultural narratives of prosperity, progress, or poverty is indicative of the ways in which women’s spectacular and silent hypervisibility in the public sphere can in fact underscore their marginality (Schein, 2000). Deconstructing television news
texts in the United States, for instance, Fair (1996) writes that repetitive images of the horrors of the feminized “other”—the shrunken body of the desexualized African woman with flaccid breasts—mapped the spectacle of famine in the Third World even as African women’s voices and subjectivities were framed as peripheral appendages in these stories. The cross-cultural process of classifying women’s “othered” bodies as sexualized icons of consumerist euphoria or desexualized colonial artifacts of hunger in the news is ultimately a form of powerful objectification that silences the interests of women.

Projecting a discourse of global modernity that was different from the images of smiling contestants bathed in the aura of Hollywood-style evening glamour, another set of fifteen Times of India photographs showcased women’s bodies as canvases that illustrated the hybrid fusion of the hegemonic Euro-American global with trendy forms of local multiculturalism. Conveying the exotic appeal of combining Western beauty with native sartorial practices, several photographs exhibited young white women in Western clothing with red dots on their foreheads, sandalwood garlands around their necks, and jasmine flowers in their braided hair attending traditional welcome rituals. In one quarter-page photograph that appeared in mid-November, Miss Germany, Miss Sweden, and three Bollywood film stars wearing short black dresses and traditional Indian jewelry stood in the foyer of the Windsor Manor Hotel as twelve Indian bridal couples representing their “home” states serenaded the guests with song and dance. Captioned “Miss World is welcomed Indian style,” another image portrayed three European contestants in extravagant South Indian silk saris frozen in traditional Indian dance poses. Forming a circular flame-shaped centerpiece on the first page of the city section, a creatively designed collage of photos showed women dressed in different styles of ethnic dress lighting oil-filled lamps to inaugurate the celebration of Diwali, the Hindu festival of lights that commemorates the victory of the god Rama. News images of Julia Morley and reporter Maya Sharma “trying on” glass bangles and shawls at a Miss World-sponsored handicrafts bazaar gained maximum airtime on STAR TV’s evening news on November 20, 1996.

The Times of India’s prominent illustrations of Miss World contestants’ local incorporation into the fabric of ethnic Indian culture demonstrates the successful harnessing of tradition and difference to resonate with the local consumer fever for “ethnic chic.” Indian newspaper representations of such feminized global multiculturalisms, that is, local manifestations of global culture, resonates with a host of global products and services that have also had to go ethnic in order to gain acceptance among Indian markets. The Indian visage of the white beauty contestant, part of the ABCL’s marketing strategy to sell the pageant as a hybrid ritual of East and West, echoed eerily with yet another feminine tale of reincarnation in Asia—the ethnic transformation of the traveling Barbie doll. When Mattel’s blond American Barbie doll first appeared in India in her standard mode, she did not “take the Indian market by storm” (Grewal, 1999, p. 804).
Soon after Barbie donned a sari and Mattel’s advertising campaigns utilized the specificities of cultural practices in India to translate Barbie, sales among the urban middle class improved. Just as the standard white American femininity of Barbie had to be reworked to target local audiences, the Times of India’s images of white women contestants partaking of staged traditions reformatted Miss World for the new nationalist and cosmopolitan Indian consumer.

These twin crosscutting currents of global-local consumption in Asia, as Schein (2000) notes, reflects paradoxical impulses to, on the one hand, turn the gaze outward in pursuit of a fetishized cosmopolitan West and, on the other hand, to also retreat inward in a nostalgic search for authentic national culture. Schein’s observations on China’s “almost obsessive” consumption of the West ranging from “dishwashers to divorce” hold true for urban India’s frenzied fascination for the “emblematic riches” of Western commodity culture (p. 22). For postcolonial India’s urban elite, who are haunted by histories of anticolonial nationalism, such a compulsive “mimicry” of the Occident can, however, also have the implicit effect of ranking India as stagnant and “humiliatingly backward” on a global scale of progress (pp. 22–23). To assuage the inferiority that is implicated in their adulation of the West, urban Indian elites have hence borrowed from and modified Orientalist discourses and practices of colonial modernity that objectified India’s premodern folk and traditional culture. Along with an insatiable appetite for all things American, an escalated boom in domestic travel and consumption of traditional/folk products rivaling international tourism and exports characterized the changing landscape of Indian middle- and upper-class lifestyle in the 1990s. As ethnic pride intersects with the logic of the market, traditional culture, which is “isolated and cherished in the realm of feminine leisure” (clothing, home furnishings, jewelry, cookbooks, toys, and cosmetics), is witnessing its “fragmentation into little bits that are suitable for exchange” (Schein, 2000, p. 271).

The Layout of Local Opposition: Retrograde Rebels and Dutiful Police

Confined mostly to the outmoded grainy realm of black, white, and gray news, numerous images of protesting women demonstrators in the Times of India elaborated stories of anger, chaos, anonymity, and irrelevance. In contrast to the intimate close-up and medium-shot images of beauty contestants, long-distance camera techniques crafted distant images of dark-skinned, angry women in saris with their mouths wide open and their arms and hands raised in midair. Pitting disruptive women protesters in opposition to the model Bangalore citizen, a responsible, middle-class woman who struggled everyday to negotiate her traditional (mother, wife) and modern (career) roles, a front-page close-up image of an annoyed female commuter’s face in the Times of India was positioned immediately next to a large inchoate gathering of women holding banners and posters. Shown sitting in her car waiting for protesters to finish crossing the street, this
image of a busy woman engaged in the routines of productive modernity was captioned “Bangalore’s working people try to keep moving on in the midst of upheaval.” Portraying rural women as hapless and ignorant pawns of opportunist male politicians, one photograph of women farmers from the Chitradurga village silently listening to a member of parliament standing on a podium was captioned “Not the faintest idea what Miss World is about.” Finally, with the exception of three photographs that clearly identified the names of protest groups and organizations, generalized caption terms like “anti-pageant protestors” and “demonstrators opposed to Miss World” that accompanied visual documentation of street protest conflated the agendas of feminists, progressive male activists, and conservative women’s groups.

Reinforcing readers’ morning encounters with the Times of India’s images of uncontrollable, angry mobs, the representational techniques of television news also implicitly inserted women activists into contrastive discourses of normal/disruptive, order/disorder, and responsible/irresponsible. STAR TV routinely showed its young and sophisticated female reporter, Maya Sharma, standing close to the camera, speaking impeccable English (linked to cultural capital and class mobility) as scenes of women protesters shouting in Hindi and Kannada (vernacular languages associated with the rural/traditional) unfolded on the streets in the background. As an icon of civility surrounded by deviant and disorderly demonstrators, STAR TV’s calm and composed news professional offered her English-speaking viewers a hegemonic representation of middle-class normalcy. In a similar analysis of the semiotic relations between the messengers of news and racialized subjects of crime in the United States, Campbell (1995) notes that well-dressed black anchors, who function as token symbols of orderly middle-class merit, convey the message that individual Blacks with drive and ambition can rise above the relentless visual stream of black criminality.

Legitimizing corporate-and state-sanctioned discourses of discipline and punishment, more than one-third of Times of India photographs of public protest in the vicinity of Bangalore elaborated a well-worn tale of a heroic and besieged police force struggling to maintain law and order amidst exploding hysteria. On the most benign level, several large photographs illustrating brief stories on protest groups’ planned activities mapped out hectic police preparations that would ensure the smooth operation of Miss World’s events and the minimum disruption of everyday public life in Bangalore. The newspaper’s visual archive registered the arrival of special law enforcement forces from New Delhi, the organization of emergency training sessions for Bangalore’s new police recruits, top police officials’ inventory of weaponry, and soldiers’ early morning reconnaissance of busy streets. One sympathetic human-interest image of fatigued and hardworking police officers on the front page showed three men covered in blankets warming themselves around a campfire. In another photograph, policemen from New Delhi stood in a line in the darkness of the night in front of an illuminated telephone booth as they waited patiently for their turn to call their
families. One celebratory set of images simulated the “before” and “after” technique of miraculous transformation that permeates visual representations of home improvement, cosmetic surgery, and weight-loss programs in Indian women’s magazines. A photograph of a chaotic “Rasta Roko” (block the traffic) protest campaign on the left was juxtaposed with an image on the right of cars and pedestrians on the street outside the Chinnaswamy Stadium that also showed the police commissioner and Bachchan (founder of the ABCL) congratulating uniformed men for successfully “shepherding traffic while protesters went berserk.”

Perpetuating an axiomatic notion of causality, which implied that violent protesters deserved censure and police brutality, the Times of India’s visual lens of identification irrevocably meshed with the perspective of the powerful (the police, the Morleys, commercial sponsors, and the ABCL). Rendered as tasteless, deviant, and out of control, women protesters entered the public sphere of the news as renegade citizens who lacked the willpower to comply with middle-class codes of decency. The very same weekend supplement that showed Miss World contestants expressing their enthusiastic appreciation for Indian culture also carried photographs from the previous week of police reprimanding and hitting women protesters. The Times of India’s November 3, 1996, issue carried one picture of dogs sniffing Mahila Jagruthi’s feminist protesters and another of police frisking four women outside a Godrej showroom, which they had illegally entered to vandalize electronic appliances. Another Times of India news photograph, which occupied almost the entire top half of the page, generated a script that cast Miss World’s chief sponsor, Godrej, as violated victim and law enforcement as the righteous agent of control. This image showed a washing machine, dishwasher, and answering machine—objects widely extolled in advertisements and lifestyle pages as coveted artifacts of modernity—smeared with tar and oil, labeled, and neatly arranged on the floor of a police station. Parlaying the disciplinary effectiveness of the criminal justice system, a long-distance photograph of four women looking grim and dejected as they stood in front of Bangalore city’s prison gates illustrated a story that was headlined with the phrase “Arrested Mahila Jagruthi women sober after prison term.”

Unlike the colorful and empathetic imaging of business leaders and state officials, the most vivid and prominent images of protest in the Times of India rarely revealed the personalities of activist leaders or the hidden transcripts of peaceful demonstrators collaborating or working in their homes and offices to coordinate campaigns. Other than three close-up photographs of Nanjundaswamy, the male leader of the farmers’ group, and Sashikala, the female leader of the conservative faction, the Times of India did not publish any close-up images of activists engaged in “normal” life. Describing the excitement of working together, five feminists reported during interviews that newspapers, despite repeated phone calls from activists, ignored news of the historic alliance among Bangalore’s feminist organizations—Vimochana, Manasa, Manini, Shakti, and
Madhyam—that grew out of the 1996 antiglobalization campaign. The leader of Mahila Jagruthi, another left-wing feminist group, also expressed disappointment because news media failed to cover less violent forms of protest that included staging street skits, organizing panels at schools and colleges, and distributing food to the poor.

As cultural studies critics of news have argued, journalism’s covert complicity with official experts and state institutions of control can sustain the status quo by inscribing dissenting subjects into mythologies of otherness and paradigms of delinquency (Fiske, 1996; Reeves & Campbell, 1994). Critiquing the disturbing convergence in repertorial and policing outlooks in their analysis of television news on “crack houses” during the Reagan government’s “War on Drugs” campaign, Reeves and Campbell (1994) argue, “In the routine, ritualized visual imagery of TV crack coverage—the unstable, hand-held camera bounding from the back of police vans following gun-toting authorities as they break down the door of yet another crack house—journalism became an agent of the police, putting Americans, sitting in the comfort of their living rooms into the ‘shoes of the police’” (p. 79). Recuperating discourses of consumer modernity and persistently refracting narratives of dissent through activists’ hostile encounters with law enforcement, the Times of India’s visual narrative of Miss World thus fortified the moral agendas and goals of the state and global/local capital.

**Perfect Numbers, Imperfect Bodies: Miss World’s Textual Archive**

The emphasis of the Indian state’s current economic policy discourse has shifted from the purportedly isolationist, anti-Western, and socialist-oriented rhetoric of development (heavy industry, basic health, and universal literacy) to a new era of reconciliation with the West and integration into the global economy. Historically speaking, the postindependence Indian state’s modernization policies were linked to a grand discourse of scientific modernity in which large-scale dams and steel plants “were the spectacular facades, luxurious in their very austerity, upon which the nation watched expectantly as the image of its future was projected” (Khilnani, 1997, p. 62). Jawaharlal Nehru, the first prime minister and architect of a new future of national liberation, crafted a euphoric vision of Indian citizens breaking the shackles of caste and religion so they could march toward prosperity based on the wonders of Western industrialization (Varma, 1998, pp. 25–64). Reformist rather than revolutionary in its tone, the Nehruvian paradigm of scientific modernity imagined a socialist democratic state and a patriotic middle-class citizenry harnessing medicine, research, and large-scale industry to achieve social justice and economic equality. In such early visions of the nation, educated Indian middle-class bureaucrats and professionals had a right to seek happiness and material comfort, but not at the expense of collective responsibility and welfare of the poor (Varma, 1998, p. 32). Although Nehru’s extended political leadership (seventeen years) could not erode the power of the elite English-
speaking urban classes, an audible grammar of service, ethics, and restrained materialism interrupted the 1950s and 1960s public sphere debates on national progress.

Since the late 1980s, however, the state policy machinery has changed gears from pressing questions of economic inequality to open markets for information technology and global consumer commodities (luxuries for a majority of India’s population) as the fuel to drive the engines of economic reform. In the early 1990s, prime minister Narasimha Rao and finance minister Manmohan Singh decided to dismantle inefficient state controls and closed-market regulations, archaic obstacles that prevented India (unlike the prescient neighboring China) from enjoying the benefits of globalization. Interpellated aggressively by new state liberalization policies as consumers, rather than as producers of scientific knowledge and goods that would raise the quality of life for the entire nation, the urban middle class found that its purchasing ability and consumerist thirst had to be configured as objective knowledge to court the attention of First World economies. The discursive production of the Indian “middle class” in the arena of public policy, that is, the transformation of a contingent, chaotic, and fluid social formation into a knowable category of classification thus began to demand authoritative modes of signification (Mukherjee, 2002).4

Numerical Modernity and Celebrity Endorsement: Crafting Surveys as Objective Knowledge

The public policy process that favored India’s incorporation into the political economy of globalization has served as a fertile site for the creation of new national subjects. Supporting the policy shift toward opening India’s markets, state and corporate knowledge institutions plunged into the task of discovering, coding, and fixing middle-class consumer desire. Prime minister Narasimha Rao’s regime seized upon the science of polling as a key instrument to insert the unruly urban Indian middle class into the modern subjective space of the consumer. In 1995 and 1996, Indian news and business media publicized with much fanfare the magical efficiency of the survey, a somewhat low-profile research technique that had circulated largely in the musty halls of development agencies and Indian academia. The front pages of reputable newspapers, newsmagazines, and business publications announced the results of national surveys carried out by the National Council on Applied Economic Research (NCAER) and the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII). Exulting in their discovery of the Indian market’s ravenous appetite for consumer durables including automobiles, fast food, and wristwatches, the NCAER survey’s “stunning statistics” in Business Today’s cover story claimed to shatter the myth of a thrifty and unsophisticated South Asian middle class. Importing the pedantic language of First World marketing textbooks that devote entire chapters to the science of demographics and psychographics, the Business Today article offered detailed numerical bio-
graphies of the “very rich, the consuming classes, the social climbers, and the slow aspirants” (“The new marketplace”, 1996, p. 8). Feeding on the frenzy for numbers and labels, Indian advertising discourse has also begun fusing the rational flavor of polling data with heart-tugging emotional tales of nation, community, and family. Inundating consumers with the language of numbers, charts summarizing food nutrient values and fictitious technical experts spouting dense jargon on appliances’ cost-saving features interpellate the successful modern Indian woman as a scientific manager of her domestic space (Munshi, 1998).

Demonstrating the osmotic manner in which freshly minted forms of numerical representation in the public sphere shaped the boundaries of Miss World’s media event space, citywide and statewide surveys measuring the average woman’s positive attitudes became the ABCL’s “objective” weapons of defense to stem the tide of the protest movement’s momentum. In the last week of October 1996, just as the Karnataka High Court was preparing to deliver verdicts in petitions against ABCL’s free use of state police and state-owned property, the corporation announced the results of its “womanist” poll, a survey carried out “by Indian women for Indian women” that proclaimed Bangalore’s overwhelming support for beauty pageants and globalization. Flaunting the credible reputation of the Indian Institute of Management (IIM), a prestigious academic establishment that was hired to carry out its research, the ABCL invested in full-page newspaper advertisements, local television commercials, and a lavish press conference at the Windsor Manor Hotel to persuade audiences to accept its encouraging survey results. Judiciously erasing all traces of its self-serving origins, the first full-page ABCL advertisement in the Times of India confirmed that a majority of the city’s population agreed with the statement “Hosting Miss World will put the city and the state on the world map” and that “90% of Bangalore Votes for Miss World 96.” A second, more ornate advertisement, which addressed Indian women readers, borrowed its emotional tour de force from state-sponsored media campaigns that were designed to forge nationalism among citizens divided by language, ethnicity, and religion. Evoking the patriotic refrain of “unity in diversity,” the second ABCL advertisement contained randomly spliced portraits of Indian women dressed in ethnic clothes from different regions. Embedded in the center of this festive smorgasbord of multiethnic femininity, the text of the advertisement read “IIM Study: 89% of Bangalore’s Women Say Yes to Miss World.” Bestowing its stamp of “unbiased approval” and reinforcing these advertisements’ blatantly persuasive agenda, the Times of India reported the ABCL’s survey results on its front page. Mirroring the newspaper’s editorial ordering of importance, hard news articles confirming IIM’s discovery of the astounding consensus in favor of Miss World peppered the front pages of the Indian Express, Deccan Herald, and the Hindu.

In an unexpected turn of events, the ABCL’s victory in the newly emergent discourse of numerical modernity did not remain unchallenged for very long. Igniting a controversy that ensued immediately after the ABCL announced the
results of *Miss World: A Perception Study*, the IIM accused the corporation of fraudulently using the institute’s name on advertisements. Addressing reporters at a press conference, the director of the institute, Dr. K. R. S. Murthy, disavowed any official association with the survey and declared that the institute found the ABCL’s practice of withholding its name from advertisements unethical. It was at this juncture, just as the scaffolding of support for Miss World began to disintegrate, that the *Times of India* decided to become an objective “third party” vendor of public opinion for its readers. Shedding light on the ways in which news rearticulates modes of knowledge production that emerge from corporate culture and the public policy process, the editor of *Times of India*’s special weekend features argued, “It was a hot moment to do a survey that readers could really believe. We had a duty to set the record straight. What better way to intervene than invest time and money in our own scientific poll.” Promoted widely on local television news as the “answer to the crisis facing the city,” anchors presented *Times of India*’s survey as a prudent intervention that would restore the sanctity of public opinion in a democracy. Promising to publish details of the survey process, the newspaper vowed to earn readers’ trust by demystifying the complex science of polling.

Exactly six days after the IIM denounced the ABCL’s poll, in the wake of a semiotically ripe climate of controversy that propelled the mobilization of surveys as news, the *Times of India*’s Sunday special feature revived the idea of modern subjectivity as a product of the rational science of statistical enumeration. A dynamic composition of pictures, line drawings, text, and graphs on the first entire page of *Times of India*’s feature organized synergistically the results of the newspaper’s Miss World survey. Pictures of beauty contestants splashed the page with feminine color and animated the cool and abstract quality of the numerical data. Perched above two bar diagrams, a portrait of Rani Jeyraj, (Bangalore’s well-known Indian representative in Miss World) that was captioned “India’s hope” infused the page with local flavor. Numerical data that condensed systematically a random sample’s responses to different questions documented consensus among the city’s residents in favor of Miss World. Breaking down survey results by gender, the newspaper’s numbers indicated that a majority of Bangalore’s women (like the men) expressed a clear mandate against the protests when they agreed with the statement, “We’re proud that the city is hosting the pageant.”

Dispersed in bits and pieces among credible signifiers of indisputable science percentages that crystallized citizens’ positive opinions of Miss World, protest activists’ and progressive columnists’ voices in the *Times of India* seemed to reflect the shrill, arbitrary, and self-serving interests of an outnumbered minority. In the graphic layout of the newspaper’s special Sunday feature, interviews with protest leaders and activist columns were wedged between boxes of “objective” survey data that resuscitated popular sentiments of support for Miss World. Interviews with Nanjundaswamy of the farmers’ group, Sudha Sitaraman and
N. Ramesh of the People’s Democratic Forum, and Brinda Karat and Subashini Ali of the (AIDWA), which offered critiques of Miss World as an elitist symbol of an economic process that favored the aspirations of the middle class, seemed to clash impotently with the views of ordinary citizens who had little time to squander on violent and uncouth protests. Measured against the empiricist rhetoric of “transparent and neutral” quantitative data that projected the considerable weight of the average woman’s consent, feminists’ writings (eg., Ammu Joseph, Visa Ravindran, and Kalpana Sharma) on the commodification of femininity, racist and classist beauty standards, and eating disorders transmuted into futile activist propaganda.

Within the week, two other local newspapers also leaped into the public opinion arena with their own survey research. Eager to distinguish their news product as different from the *Times of India*’s poll of adult women’s attitudes, competing newspapers staked out their command of new turf in the modern race for counting bodies and minds. The *Indian Express* brandished numbers that showed surprising support for international pageants among older citizens and the *Deccan Herald*’s arithmetic proved that young, college-age men and women did not empathize with left- or right-wing protesters. Outdoing the *Herald* and the *Express*, the *Times of India* then returned with a much more spectacular numerical strategy of news production. Claiming to be the first institution to measure the impact of beauty culture on the modern Indian woman, the newspaper launched an informal survey of women and men celebrities to discover their “educated and intelligent” opinions on pageants, beauty salons, and exercise and fitness. Timed fortuitously, celebrity endorsement for Miss World spilled into the *Times of India*’s editorial and front pages at the same time as news of activist plans to intensify campaigns and the High Court’s decisions favoring opposition groups’ petitions against the ABCL began to circulate in the public sphere.

Maneuvered into the semiotic fabric of celebrity culture in the *Times of India*’s front pages, Miss World received positive certification from a riveting sample of the rich and the famous. A contingent of carefully chosen local and national celebrities, who represented a spectrum of political affiliations, modern professions, and traditional arts, testified that Miss World was a safe, healthy, and harmless import to India. Former beauty queens (Sandhya Chib, Aishwarya Rai), magazine editors and journalists (Ramjee Chandran, Sathya Saran, V. N. Subba Rao), classical artists and performers (Suma Sudhindra, Vani Ganapathy, Gangubai Hangal, Mahesh Dattani), ethnic fashion designers (Sujit Mukherjee, Prasad Bidappa), and film and television actors/creative professionals (Suman Ranganathan, Shabana Azmi, Waheeda Rehman, Mohena Singh) defended the legitimacy of Miss World. Attacking conservatives for labeling Miss World as a ritual of cultural imperialism, some celebrities stitched global beauty pageants into the local tapestry of Indian history and tradition. These interlocutors suggested that India’s artistic appreciation for the physical aspects of feminine
beauty was inscribed in Hindu myths and legends and etched into ancient cave and temple sculptures, which were a sumptuous archive of idealized female bodies. Headlined as “A travesty against Indian culture,” a front-page story on Roopa Sathyan indicated that the former Miss India found the protests against Miss World to be a violation of *athithi seva*, long-standing traditions of Indian hospitality that prescribed a courteous and effusive welcome for “guests” (founders and contestants). Eclipsed by the objective patina of news on reader consensus for and celebrity affirmation of Miss World, activist critiques morphed into messages that seemed to be incompatible with the vicissitudes of progress.

How did the *Times of India*’s inclusionary myths of democratic and objective surveys mask the exclusionary practices of class and gender that were at the heart of feminist arguments against Miss World? Madhu Bhushan, an activist from the feminist organization Vimochana, remarked that the *Times of India*’s decision to juxtapose activist interviews and essays with survey data took them by surprise: “If we had known well ahead about these grand surveys that would overwhelm our voices, we might have exposed the serious problems that underlie the media’s recent obsession with polling.” Inspired by economist Vinod Vyasulu’s writings, feminist publicity materials elaborated the disadvantages of globalization for the state’s lower-middle class, working-class, and poor women whose interests had been pushed to the periphery by recent policy changes. One Vimochana press release examined the “open” arena of Bangalore’s high-tech industry, a modern global business whose leaders had vowed to nourish a qualified meritocracy by exorcising the hierarchical ghosts of caste, religion, and nepotism. The release argued that upper-caste men and women continued to occupy managerial, design, and creative positions in the information industries while lower-caste women worked predominantly as data entry operators and programmers. Another feminist’s unpublished essay detailed inequalities in the beauty industry, where scores of urban middle-class women entrepreneurs manage beauty parlors in their homes while migrant rural women, flocking to the city with aspirations of gaining class mobility in the beauty industry, find themselves trapped and exploited as low-paid beauty workers (along the axis of gender, both classes of women bear the burden of childcare and domesticity). Scrutinizing the media’s use of surveys to perpetuate a classist notion of normativity, the feminist leader of Mahila Jagruthi commented, “English-language surveys executed on the telephone, a luxury in a nation where thousands struggle for basic needs and less than 10 percent of the population can speak and write fluently in English is no less than a mockery of the democratic process.” In the midst of deafening silence in the mainstream public sphere on the implications of globalization for India’s poor (Varma, 1998), the commodification of the average citizen’s voice in the news media illustrates the hegemonic “emptiness of the concept of opinion,” that is, the deployment of ill-informed consent by dominant forces as a “prophylactic against moral accountability” (Stabile, 2001, p. 265).
Corporate Compassion, Feminine Redemption: Global Philanthropy as News of Local Salvation

Not all media advocates for women’s causes suffered the punishment of marginality in the *Times of India’s* news on Miss World. Noted left-leaning Bollywood film actress and antipoverty activist Shabana Azmi, who had spearheaded campaigns against real estate developers’ plans to displace Mumbai’s poor and homeless, made the front page of the newspaper in late October 1996 for her candid assessment of protests against Miss World. Visiting Bangalore soon after she received a Chicago Film Festival Award, Azmi distinguished her brand of committed activism from the embarrassingly violent “outbursts” in Bangalore that did not “augur well for a country that calls itself a mature democracy” (Rao, 1996, p. 1). Registering a shift in her perceptions of beauty pageants, Azmi declared that she no longer held the view that pageants were symbols of elitist frivolity because the international beauty queen, who embraced her role as global ambassador for charitable causes, professed a “deep commitment towards society.” After dismissing women protesters as unlikely to “qualify for even the first round of a beauty contest” in his weekly *Times of India* column, *Business World* editor Dillip Thakore argued that Miss World’s sponsorship of the Spastics Society of India elevated the pageant from a sexist display of women’s bodies to an event that could impart lessons to Indian business leaders on how to inculcate a First World corporate culture of social responsibility.

Publicized as “Beauty with a purpose,” not just “Beauty, skin deep” in the ABCL’s press releases, Miss World was presented to the news media as a compelling example of the capacity of modern private enterprise (unlike the slow-paced Indian state bureaucracy) to hasten the reduction of gender and class inequality in South Asia. Miss World’s sponsorship of the Spastics Society of India was an illustration of “strategic philanthropy,” a capitalist model of “pragmatic altruism” that is designed to “cultivate name recognition among consumers, increase employee morale and productivity, and build reputation by stimulating positive media coverage” (Mullen, 1997). Corporations seek out strategic philanthropy as a means to inoculate consumers from journalists’ and activists’ charges of labor exploitation and other less-than-savory business practices that stress the bottom line (Stabile, 2000). Maximizing a return on corporate investment in philanthropy, however, demands the shrewd mobilization of public sympathy for uncontroversial causes of redemption that can tap the sympathies of large existing and potential consumer markets. Hence, sponsorship of a social ill or charity has to hold the promise of generating media images that can insert corporations into spectacles of national pride, wholesome family, mythic individualism, and therapeutic motifs of healing and recovery. Corporate support for domestic violence intervention in the United States, a feminist problem that Revlon, Lifetime TV, and Johnson & Johnson have adopted for its images of fragile femininity, besieged motherhood, and deranged masculinity, is one example
of such populist philanthropy. Viewed in the context of pragmatic altruism, widespread global corporate endorsement of local children's causes must be seen as more than a merely harmonious, reciprocal relationship between business and community. Emulating the global Mattel Corporation whose recipient of charity is the girl child (Grewal, 1999), a captivating subject of concern in missionary and United Nations discourses, Miss World's founders decided that the 1996 pageant's social cause would be the "poor and handicapped Indian child." The ABCL's publicity materials represented Miss World's alliance with the Spastics Society of India as a timely and hygienic alternative to a myopic and corrupt state's failures to rehabilitate India's disabled children.

The Times of India's front pages and STAR TV's evening news plugged Miss World into voyeuristic spectacles of salvation that evoked sympathy for the hypervulnerable body of the disabled Indian child. Simultaneously, as news of college students' sympathy for feminist opposition and film star Rajkumar's rejection of Bachchan's invitation to be a judge in Miss World began to trickle in, stories with extravagant headlines of praise for the ABCL and the Morleys—"Indian cricketers applaud Miss World for support of Spastics Society," "Nobody argues about value of children: Eric Morley," and "Amina Hassan, Director of Spastics Society thanks Bachchan, Morleys"—were scattered on the front pages. Drawing on the color-blind and race-effacing "feel good" logic of First World discourses of rainbow multiculturalism (Mukherjee, 2002), Miss World founder Eric Morley's voice in the Times of India argued for the universal value of the world's fragile "brown, blue or purple" children whose lives could not be held ransom to the fickle interests of transitory political parties. Gaining tailored forms of positive visibility in the Times of India while undermining feminist critiques of global capitalism's invisible forms of exploitation, the Indian child's poverty and disability became outer garments that cloaked Miss World in the rhetoric of child empowerment and human rights.

Times of India articles inserting Miss World into the genre of hard news on the conditions of disabled children offered an informational counterpoint to soft-news photos that fixed beauty contestants in nurturing poses of concern and affection. Front-page news on Miss World that was reminiscent of public health discourse summarized ongoing medical research on cerebral palsy and described resources available for disabled children's parents, outreach programs, and hospice care. Five large newspaper images portrayed young, beautiful women bending down toward, gazing into the eyes of, and gently smiling at disabled children who were seated in wheelchairs. Maya Sharma of STAR TV led the evening news on November 11, 1996, with a feature "Blitz of glitz for Bangalore's kids" that broadcasted Miss World contestants' arrival at a children's party where the proceeds from selling their international gifts to invited Indian celebrities was intended to benefit the Spastics Society of India. A feature news story on poor Indian citizens' deplorable access to mental health services contained a visual prop of a smiling Miss World founder Julia Morley holding a disabled child in her lap.
The *Times of India*’s moving templates of the global beauty queen’s maternal devotion for the indigent Third World child illustrate the discursive production of globality as a symbolic regime that absorbs and reworks nationalist and feminist politics. Disputing the thesis that processes of globalization mark the demise of the nation as a territorial and semiotic entity, feminists have argued that the representational trajectory of the global in India’s media and consumer culture resuscitates signs, symbols, and idioms of the nation to gain a foothold in the public imagination (Grewal, 1999; Fernandes, 2000; Parameswaran, 2001). Journalistic productions of endangered childhood or “media juvenation,” as Hartley (1998) defines it, have become newsworthy public spaces for a host of moral entrepreneurs to assert the links between the governance of children and the maintenance of healthy and democratic nations. The *Times of India*’s news narratives on Miss World’s founders, sponsors, and contestants as protectors of India’s innocent children rearticulated elements of the nationalist media rhetoric that erupted in 1991 when state officials, activists, and religious leaders constructed the rehabilitation of Ameena, a young Muslim girl who was rescued from a “foreign” Arab man, as a quintessential crisis of redemption for the post-colonial nation (Mankekar, 1997). Media accounts of empowered globe-trotting women changing the world also serve as signifying resources for the creation of new icons of popular feminisms that negotiate the tensions between femininity/feminism and selfish individualism/selfless public service (Banet-Weiser, 1999; Hinds & Stacey, 2001). Repressing a more insidious subtext, the *Times of India*’s imaging of Miss World’s vision of caring feminine empowerment in India, the “jewel in the crown” of Britain’s former empire, concealed the neocolonial logic of the pageant’s strategic philanthropy. Spectacles of beautiful queens, symbols of modern corporate aristocracies, tending to unfortunate local citizens draw from earlier colonial discourses of benevolent white women saving the sick, elderly, and poor in the colonies (Stoler, 2002). Finally, replacing religious myths of miraculous healing with stories of secular beauty queens “touching” the afflicted, the *Times of India*’s representations disavowed the ultimate paradox of a beauty contest that accords a high status to the groomed “perfect” body becoming a pious human rights advocate for the disabled Third World child. The virus of spectacle fever, however, can also infect the politics of activist opposition—soon after Miss World sponsors declared their compassion for the Spastics Society of India, the Akhil Bharatiya Vidya Parishad (students’ union) organized a protest march led by disabled children in wheelchairs holding anti-Miss World banners.

**Spectacles of Gendered Modernity in the News: Market Metaphors and Colonial Cadavers**

Questioning the exuberance of corporate, state, and national elites’ discourses on the promises of global modernity, Bauman (1998) points out that the term “globalization” has become a “fad word fast turning into a shibboleth, a magic
incantation, a pass-key meant to unlock the gates to all present and future mysteries” (p. 1). As my textual analysis of Miss World’s media event space in the Times of India demonstrates, journalistic images and texts can function as key sites for manufacturing and distributing the misty smog of progress and empowerment that envelops globalization. Gaining further insight into the factors that guided the Times of India’s positive representations of Miss World—smiling beauty queens, celebrity women’s endorsements, and middle-class readers’ enthusiasm for the rituals and commodities of beauty culture—requires a careful consideration of the institutional and economic contexts of newspaper ownership, market-driven goals of increasing circulation, and Indian journalists’ professional training.

The Times of India’s corporate association with a well-established women’s magazine that plays a key role in sustaining India’s beauty and cosmetics industries may have influenced the trajectory of the newspaper’s representations of Miss World. Founded in 1838, the Times of India is a subsidiary of Bennett Coleman, a leading chain publisher of newspapers and magazines that controls almost 10 percent of India’s entire newspaper circulation which has an estimated annual turnover of more than Rs. 400 crores (approximately $120 million) (Jeffrey, 2000). Bennett Coleman also produces Femina, an upscale women’s publication whose editorial and advertising content thrives on India’s expanding global fashion and beauty industries. Apart from managing the annual Miss India contest (whose winners participate routinely in the Miss World and Miss Universe contests), Femina magazine’s staple fare includes beauty queen testimonials of success, advice columns authored by managers/owners of beauty schools and salons, and pictorial features of social events attended by Mumbai’s business and entertainment celebrities.

Indian newspapers’ fascination for numerical forms of news representation and the Times of India’s colorful images of business executives and beautiful young women are thickly implicated in the competitive challenges of increasing and retaining newspaper circulation in the midst of globalization. Charting the ways in which Indian print news has reinvented its mission in the 1990s context of consumer culture, Jeffrey (2000) observes that the place of capitalism in the news business was explicitly illustrated through a series of “market wars” for readers and advertisers that were fought as openly as Coke and Pepsi’s bitter media battles for winning the Indian consumer’s loyalty. The 1990s has been a boom time for the Indian advertising industry, which grew by an average of 30 percent a year from 1991 to 1997, with the highest increase being a 50 percent growth from 1994 to 1995 (Jeffrey, 2000, pp. 58–63). By the mid-1990s the total billings of leading Indian advertising agencies was Rs. 4,000 crores (approximately $1 billion). Narrating their corporate identities through objectivist paradigms of numerical signification (bar diagrams, pie charts, and percentages) to attract the interest of advertisers, scores of newspapers have begun brandishing self-serving statistics from national and corporate readership surveys in premier advertising trade journals.
Awakening to the possibilities of carving out bigger slices of the lucrative advertising pie, newspapers have also increased their investments in marketing campaigns to boost their readership, the ultimate commodity for sale to advertisers. Representing its own history in relation to histories of transnational capital, a series of *Times of India* advertisements in 1995 measured the newspaper's enduring success through the aesthetic of the global commodity (Fernandes, 2000, p. 619). One such advertisement showed an elderly middle-class man standing outdoors reading the *Times of India* against the backdrop of small stores sporting large Pepsi signs—the caption above the image read “Pepsi, born in 1896, *Times of India*, born in 1838.” Furthermore, in seeking out new markets in south India, the *Times of India* has recently launched local editions of the newspaper in Bangalore, Hyderabad, and Chennai, cities that already boasted two or three existing English-language newspapers. As the newest resident in Bangalore's news block, the newspaper's upper-management had decided that the best competitive strategy to build circulation was to focus on younger readers, a vulnerable market whose brand loyalties were more easily maneuverable than older audiences whose established reading preferences may be difficult to dislodge. Citing market research, the newspaper's editor argued that Bangalore's local media had not yet plumbed the purchasing power of the city's growing middle-class youth and professional markets, the TV-addicted generations who were raised on a robust diet of visual images. Aligned with the marketing mission of the newspaper's daily lifestyle supplement on entertainment and beauty culture, the *Times of India*'s consumerist representations of Miss World may have been crafted to reach out to younger readers.

The *Times of India*'s fewer and less-than-flattering portrayals of local opposition against Miss World speaks to Indian journalists' potential susceptibility to the influence of the corporate public relations industry, an indispensable companion of global/local capital that has received far less attention in media studies than advertising. Explaining the new challenges that Indian reporters face in the context of economic liberalization, Parvathi Menon, a seasoned journalist, remarked: “We know how to be vigilant about government corruption, but we're not trained on how to treat new kinds of corporate speak. We're very wary of advertising pressure, but the flurry of PR materials has caught us off guard.” Reinforcing Menon’s observations on journalists’ lack of experience in handling the products of the public relations machinery, a 1994 issue of *Sunday* magazine described a recent phenomenon that was puzzling to many Indian reporters—well-dressed, smiling visitors (not the lowly poor “office boy”) who circulated announcements about upcoming events and treated reporters with great respect. Since the late 1980s, with the arrival of multinationals “wishing to cultivate good feelings among the locals” and the incursions of numerous global affiliates and local agencies like Ketchum, Ogilvy and Mather, Good Relations, Genesis PR, and Mudra Diversified, industry insiders claim that the “Indian PR industry is on the threshold of a major explosion” (Greenberg, 1996). During the height of
antiglobalization protest in Bangalore in October and November 1996, over two hundred ABCL press releases reached Times of India, Hindu, and Deccan Herald reporter news desks. In contrast to feminist activists’ sporadic and typewritten essays photocopied on dull and coarse yellow paper, the ABCL’s slick releases, crafted by Clia Public Relations, were produced on thick, white, expensive paper that displayed Miss World’s attractive logo, a bold yellow, blue, and green image of an apsara (heavenly dancer). The ABCL’s releases were also short and frequently hand-delivered in embossed folders that contained tips for stories, photographs, and lists of newsworthy candidates for media interviews.

Shifting the interpretive lens from institutional factors to the historical realm of cultural politics illuminates the ways in which the discursive inheritances of colonial modernity seep into contemporary public debates on progress, gender, and the West in postcolonial India. Surveys of women citizens, images of women embracing hybrid culture, and narratives of feminine compassion, which permeated Miss World’s media event space in the Times of India, indicate the enduring cultural purchase of the feminine in constituting the semiotics of nation in the public sphere. Nineteenth-century debates over modernity and tradition that were waged in Europe’s colonies also harnessed womanhood as an ideological vehicle to advocate for and argue against the progressive promises of Western imperialism. Countering British colonizers’ charges of “horrific” patriarchal native traditions that oppressed Indian women, elite Indian male social reformers began to fashion a nationalist discourse of superior morality that was based in the glorification of the devoted and chaste Indian wife, mother, and citizen (Grewal, 1996; Kandiyoti, 1991; Mani, 1991). Although my analysis of the Times of India shows that the range of meanings assigned to the feminine in tandem with the nation have broadened to include cosmopolitan consumer culture, classist economic policies, moral pollution, and corporate philanthropy, these representations suggest that women’s bodies and imagined subjectivities continue to serve as fertile ground for cultural bargaining in the midst of the West’s new invasion of India.

The constrained and sporadic presence of the feminist campaign against Miss World in the Times of India’s media event space offers clues into the ideological resilience of nationalist paradigms of women’s equality that were crafted during the height of colonialism. Analyzing Indian newspapers’ positive coverage of the feminist campaign against sex-selective abortion, Luthra (1999) writes that the Indian press accommodated the feminist framework with relative ease because poor and illiterate Indian women’s termination of female fetuses was a social problem that remained well within the boundaries of “liberal middle- and upper-class welfarist definitions of women’s upliftment, without challenging caste or class divisions directly, and without questioning the role of the state in women’s lives” (p. 18). Luthra observes that news reports amplified feminist critiques of “primitive” Hindu traditions that fueled poor citizens’ sexist reproductive practices, but the same reports also attenuated activists’ indictment of capitalism and consumer modernity as equally culpable agents in contributing to
the rise of female feticide. During my interviews with news professionals, several reporters and editors expressed their frustration in making sense of feminists’ news releases and essays that explained the invisible manner in which the classist nexus between global/local capital, state forces, and elite middle-class consumers disenfranchised poor Third World women.

On the one hand, feminists’ Miss World protest materials probably did not evoke the more captivating mythology of linear narratives of women’s empowerment that feature visibly abused victims (poor burned or physically battered women and murdered girl babies) who need immediate rescue from ignorant and callous villains (patриarchal, lower-class men and opportunistic male politicians). On the other hand, Indian newspapers’ crusading zeal against dowry deaths, rape, and female infanticide, rather than patriarchy or modern capitalism, enables the industry to perform its role as a progressive “watchdog” without threatening the systemic hierarchies that reproduce inequality. Middle-class news professionals’ inability to understand new forms of less-visible oppression perpetrated by capitalism evokes and reproduces the hegemonic limits of nineteenth-century Indian nationalists’ models of women’s liberation. Joining hands with British architects of colonial modernity in their project of civilization for the colonies, upper-caste Hindu male reformers fought tirelessly to outlaw widow burning, child marriage, and polygamy; however, the impulse to eradicate such spectacular practices of women’s horrific oppression left intact the structural hierarchies of caste, class, and gender that produce discrimination in the first place (Kandiyoti, 1991).

Finally, the ascent of polling as news strategy in India’s current economic context echoes the historical deployment of surveys by the British administration to domesticate and translate the vast heterogeneity of India into a language that would be amenable to the priorities of empire building. Tracking the purportedly irreversible course of consumer modernity and its ability to erase local barriers of region and caste, the survey as a methodology of news production continues to project the economic and classificatory power of neocolonial regimes of global/local capital. Following the Times of India’s public opinion survey on Miss World in 1996, the March 12, 1998, issue of the Telegraph newspaper published a survey headlined “Who am I, women speak out,” which claimed to index the progressiveness of Indian cities by measuring women’s positions on careers, marriage, and childcare. Announcing that women in Calcutta scored the highest points, unlike Chennai’s backward women, the survey claimed that some Indian women, who were more willing to wear skirts and buy packaged foods, were racing toward modernity at a quicker pace than others. Charting the genealogy of the number in the administrative arena of the colonial bureaucracy, Appadurai (1996) outlines the imaginative and practical role that “numbers, measurement, and quantification” played in the exercise of imperial power over the colonies. Confounded by the vast landscape of India’s “exotic” peoples, detailed surveys documenting India’s cultural and geographic diversity in digestible categories aided the transformation of the colonial experience into terms “graspable in the
metropolis” (p. 126). Emphasizing the colonial crafting of the survey as an instrument of discipline and surveillance rather than a mere utilitarian tool of data collection, Appadurai writes that “by the end of the eighteenth century, number, like landscape, heritage, and the people had become part of the language of the British political imagination, and the idea had become firmly implanted that a powerful state could not survive without making enumeration a central technique of social control” (p. 117).

Notes

1. My approach to news as a “portal” into the moral order is borrowed from Polumbaum and Weiting (1999), who develop a hybrid interdisciplinary approach to sports news in their analysis of news representations of golf celebrity Tiger Woods.

2. I am indebted to Oza (2001) for the organization of this section and the secondary sources cited.

3. My presentation of the quantitative dimensions of Miss World’s media event space follows closely Shah’s brief quantitative analysis of the Times of India’s coverage of the Mandal Commission controversy (Shah, 1994).

4. Please see Mukherjee (2002) for an excellent Foucauldian discussion of the intersections between public policy discourses and mass media texts in the realm of affirmative action.

References


