

Kazuo Ishiguro and “Godi Media”: A Reading of his Select Novels and the Post-2014 Indian Media

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Abstract

In an interview, Kazuo Ishiguro highlights the central issue of his novels: failure of individuals not taking a stand against the tide of the times and instead go with the flow, or zeitgeist, which recurs in contemporary times as well. As an interdisciplinary approach, this article situates *An Artist of the Floating World* and *The Remains of the Day* in the Post-2014 Indian “godi” (lapdog) media, particularly in English-language prime time “debates”. Swati Chaturvedi’s question, ‘has the free press failed in its first and only covenant, of holding power to account’, and, if so, how far, shall be explored. Parallels, for instance, between the protagonists, who betray their set ideals and the way anchors of prime time debates in India tend to do the same; and the debates between democracy and fascism in the three timeframes, this paper analyses the way most prominent individuals, instead of looking at significant issues objectively, however, grow into, play complicit roles and justify or rationalise what they do, did or are doing in the name of free speech, leading them to act not merely as propagators of majoritarianism and ‘fake news’ but ‘gatekeepers’ of information as well, three monsters that plague our democratic values.

Keywords : Democracy, fascism, “Godi” media, interdisciplinary, majoritarianism, zeitgeist

Introduction

In announcing the 2017 Nobel Prize in literature to Kazuo Ishiguro, the secretary of the Nobel committee referred to him as a novelist “who, in novels of great emotional force, has uncovered the abyss beneath *our* illusory sense of connection with the world” (*The Nobel Prize in Literature 2017*, 2017 emphasis added). The word “our” in the accountment is significant in that it reinforced his oft-repeated claims that the themes of his novels transcend linguistic, national, or generic boundaries, and that readers failed to “take off” the metaphorical and universal import of his novels. As Ishiguro’s reply to a question that the dramatic parallels we discern, for instance, in some of the incidents in the life of Ono, the protagonist of *An Artist of the Floating World*, underlie the idea of universal themes he often suggests he tries to convey through his novels. That, he adds, his use of “Japan as a metaphor [and . . .] that the need to follow leaders” is not “something peculiar to Japan” but a “human phenomenon” (Mason, 1986, p. 10). His novels mostly concern the individuals flooded under the collective responsibility, about “people who feel an urge to do good work but fail terribly, with effects beyond their own welfare” (Shen, 2021, p. 7).

In line with this, this article aims to explore the thematic parallels between the protagonist-narrators, Masuji Ono, an artist of *An Artist of the Floating World* (1986) [AFW onwards], Mr Stevens, a butler, of *The Remains of the Day* (1989) [ROD onwards] and the post-2014 anchors of primetime debates carried out in English by Indian media, characterised as “lapdog” or “Godi” (lapdog) media, The question that arises is: How does one compare two different forms of media, novels set in Japan and England, and prime

time debates in India? The possibility of the comparison may be determined when comparing the themes of the novels and the “debates” in “godi” media. The thematic comparison aligns with Ishiguro’s above claim that what he depicts in his novels is what he considers universal and common to us all irrespective of any marker of identity and difference. The other factor has to do with the idea that we are comparing the role of professionals, for instance, artists and butlers and the “godi” media anchors in the way they play their part. The commonplace idea of professionalism is that they would carry out their duties as unbiasedly as possible, which is not what happens both in the novels and the primetime debates in question. In addressing what he calls Narendra Modi’s “dramatic promises”, James Manor (2019) reports that when his promises do not materialise, compliant media outlets, or what Bardhan (2019) calls “fawning media” describe them as inaugural speeches of new initiatives to which he responds (2019, p. 176; 2019, p. 120). A discussion of these compliant and fawning media outlets forms the basis for the paper’s argument, by explaining how these influential people, the professionals, in our case, are unable to provide independent and objective analysis, as their profession requires, but instead act as propagators of majoritarianism and fake news, as well as gatekeepers of information, thereby undermining democracy.

It is also a type of “exercise” that Ravish Kumar, the senior executive editor of *NDTV India*, in his book, *The Free Voice*, invites the Indian viewers of doing by examining how many times since 2014 a question has been asked by the “godi” media with respect to the current dispensation (2019, p. 20). A key question, therefore, explored in this article is whether the free press has failed in its first and only obligation to hold the power accountable (Chaturvedi, 2018, para. 02).

Ishiguro and “Godi” media

Ishiguro states in a recent interview that in his novels he depicts individuals who could not rise above the tide of the times but instead go with the flow, zeitgeist, therefore, end up doing contrary to what their profession demands (Matthews, 2014, p. 115). In his novels, he has taken the perspective of ordinary, banal characters who, in their banality, end up embracing a cause that is out of sync with the new world. In this regard, his two novels, *AFW* and *ROD*, set in post-Second World War Japan and England, respectively, are about two professionals Mr Stevens and Masuji Ono both of whom find the new trajectory of their life as well as of their country out of sync with what they had experienced before and during the Second World War.

AFW tells the story of a former artist, Masuji Ono, of Imperial Japan. It is during this new Japan, occupied by America, that he reflects on the years he spent before the war and the Atomic Bombs. He narrates his life to us from the time when he was an artist of the floating world, creating art for art’s sake, to the time when he became a propagandist of Imperial Japan. *ROD* tells the story of a butler, Stevens, who, while on a tour, in a Ford car, to visit his former colleague, Miss Kenton, recollects his life in and around Darlington Hall serving his master, Lord Darlington. He depicts characters who use “the language of self-deception and self-protection” (Mason, 1986, p. 5).

“Godi” media

April 2014 was the cruellest month, as it were, both for the Indian National Congress (INC), that had served two terms consecutively in power, its “worst defeat” (*Modi Wave Wipes out UPA Cabinet, Congress Records Its Worst Defeat in Lok Sabha Polls*, 2014, p. para 1) and what many believe for the very idea of India, bringing Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) in power. The 2014 general election was “biggest in the world”, ushering in the era of one-party rule in India, post-1984, without any official opposition party (*India Announces Election Dates*, 2014, para. 1; S, 2014). This election was unprecedented in several ways (George, 2014). For instance, for the first time, the lowest vote share by a party won the majority (*Lok Sabha Elections: BJP’s 31% Lowest Vote Share of Any Party to Win Majority—Times of India*, 2014). Because

since 2014, most of the national media in India, “the Fourth Estate, more far important than they all” [other three estates], of democracy, has ignored the vocation it holds in speaking truth to power (Carlyle, 1872, pp. 6–10). As such, for instance, in India, it has been complicit in its role as “godī” (lapdog) media by contributing to moving “the needle”, writes Chatterji et al. (2019), “decisively toward the consolidation of a Hindu nationalist-majoritarian polity” (2019, p. 6). Several commentators have called this Hindu majority a “hoax” so as to go against “Muslims and other religious minorities” (Dwivedi et al., 2020). Accordingly, Sikandar (2020) asserts that Indian “godī” media is “waging a holy war against Muslims” (2020, para. 01).

Translating the term lapdog as “godī” in Hindi language, Ravish Kumar uses it to describe a large section of media in India characterised by its blatant support of the powers be, hence, the metaphor. Instead of being the watchdog, or guard dog, it has turned into a lapdog, “a third ‘dog’ in the repertoire of the media” (Watson & Hill, 2012, p. 121). The characteristics of it include: “total submissiveness to authority, total lack of independent power, obliviousness to all interests except those of powerful groups, and framing all issues according to the perspectives of the highest powers in the system” (Donohue et al., 2018, p. 120).

Professional integrity

Professionalism demands that one should keep biases and emotions at bay as far as possible, for instance, the way Mr Stevens maintains at Darlington Hall who is not “shaken out by external events, however surprising, alarming, or vexing” (Ishiguro, 1989, p. 43). Mr Stevens, the butler and Masuji Ono, the artist, protagonist-narrators of AFW and ROD, respectively, are professionals whose unreliability as narrators is pointed out and questioned in several studies (Shaffer, 1998, p. 07).

Barry Lewis (2000) states that AFW “traces the rise and fall of Ono, and his career as a painter from the first decades of the twentieth century through to the early 1950s” (2000, p. 50). Stevens recalls a story his father, Stevens senior, would tell him about an Indian butler who killed a tiger without fuss so that it would not disturb the equipoise of a colonial tea-party (Ishiguro, 1989, p. 36). Wherein, he says, “lay the kernel of what true dignity is” (Ishiguro, 1989, p. 42). It perhaps applies equally to the English-language primetime “godī” media anchors in India who “are like the Indian butlers ready to kill anyone, figuratively, of course, who dares to disturb the equipoise of the current dispensation; and would itself not disturb the equipoise of the present dispensation by posing questions to them rather than to the unofficial Opposition (Chaturvedi, 2018).

The distinction in the novel made about butlers by Stevens falls into two types. One has to do with that which believes in what Stevens calls “idealism”, that suggests that “butlers should aspire to serve those great gentlemen who further the cause of humanity”; the other has to do with that which rejects such idealism as “just high-flown talk with no grounding reality” (Ishiguro, 1989, p. 101). The struggle between the two, idealism and realism, is part and parcel of the novel. Perhaps the novel demonstrated the failure of the idealism of such figures as Lord Darlington and Stevens both of whom thought they were trying to serve humanity. For instance, Stevens’ thought at the end of the narrative that he should try and learn the art of bantering perhaps illustrates his transformation from the idealism of his generation to the realism of the new world order occasioned by the arrival of his new master, Mr Faraday of America.

According to Wendel, ROD is an “inquiry into the moral accountability of professionals” (1995, p. 62). Stevens’ moral accountability as a professional can be explained by his act of trying to delink Lord Darlington and Britain from the charges of anti-Semitism. He confirms that Lord Darlington had met Sir Oswald Mosley a couple of times but, he adds, only before the organisation had “turned its true nature” (Ishiguro, 1989, p. 101). Organisations such as British Union of Fascist, claims Stevens, “were a complete irrelevance to the heart of political life” in England (1989, p. 101). Were they irrelevant, one might ask? This can be answered by referring to the Britain’s infamous policy of “appeasement” before the war (*Britain’s Policy of Appeasement: The Coming of War*, 2022). And also by the fact that Lord Darlington’s dismissal of two Jewish maids which

to Stevens seems to be “a minor episode” and “an untypical incident” (1989, p. 101,104). The reasons Lord Darlington cites as to the dismissal of them as saying, “In the interests of the guests we have staying here”, and “for the good of this house”, “We cannot have Jews on the staff here at Darlington Hall” (1989, p. 105). The reasons for such orders Stevens tells us is that Darlington had been under the influence of Mrs Carolyn Barnet, “a member of Sir Oswald Mosley’s ‘blackshirts’ organization” (1989, p. 104).

Why Lord Darlington did what he did can perhaps be understood by his understanding and definition of the kind of “professionalism” he wants to advocate, one that has the “desire to see goodness and justice prevail in the world” rather than one that runs on “greed and advantage” as exemplified by Mr Lewis’ in the novel (Ishiguro, 1989, p. 103). In line with the latter definition of a professional, and in contrast to the previous generation of butlers in various houses of England, Stevens explains that his generation was less snobbish and much more idealistic regarding the owner’s status they serve. The former considered their service worthy only to the ‘old families’, and the latter centre their “professional prestige” around the moral status of the owner, meaning that “we were ambitious, in a way that would have been unusual a generation before, to serve gentlemen who were [. . .] furthering the progress of humanity” (1989, p. 114).

The above passages are perhaps the most illuminating definitions of the type of professionalism Indian “godi” media has been demonstrating since 2014. Under what category does the Indian “godi” media fall, one could ask? Do they further the cause of humanity or of their political masters? In part, to both. The very idea that some commentators have categorised them as “godi” media, or “Modia” [combining Modi and media], testifies to the latter (Kumar, 2019, p. 35). Unlike Stevens, who gives up his private affairs in service to his professional self, the anchors of “godi” media primetime debates do the opposite, that is, they “abandon their professional being for the private one at the least provocation” (1989, p. 42). He does not seem to have any agency in matters related to his master and the Darlington Hall. All that he does is accept what his master thinks is right however wrong that thought or decision might turn out to be.

Rob Atkinson’s distinction and categorisation of the two types of professionalism is represented by Stevens and Kenton (1995, pp. 199–214). The former argues that everything within the limits of the law is permissible, and the latter argues that there are other limitations, such as morality, that limit one’s actions beyond what the law permits (1995, pp. 199–214). He situates the ROD as mediating between the two kinds of what he calls the flawed professionalism, the “perfectionist” and the “nihilistic”, one that “accepts the imperfection [. . .] of both the individuals and institutions, without rejecting the possibility of virtuous professional lives and cultures” (1995, p. 200). This is perhaps equally true of Indian “godi” media as well. The gross oversimplification would be that the Stevens’ camp would not question the law and that Kenton’s would vehemently oppose it. As Arundhati Roy (2012) puts the *Caravan* magazine’s work as opposite to what “godi” media is doing by “calling the powerful to account” (2012).

In contrast to Atkinson, Luban in his analysis of ROD, in part, exonerates Steven, by categorising two kinds of professionalism: One, the “professionalism of deference”, he associates with Stevens, and the other, “professionalism of expertise”, with Mr Lewis, an America senator; the latter “consists in reducing every practical question to a technical question having no moral dimension”; and the former “begins with a moral among employers, but, from then on, the employee offers loyal and efficient service while deferring to the employer in all further moral decisions” (1996, pp. 304–305). Nevertheless, what the butler profession signifies to Ishiguro himself, is explained by him in a talk in 2015, thus:

I thought I would use this internationally well-known stereotype [butler] to go into these two things. I thought this figure could very well stand for that part of all of us that’s actually afraid to get engaged, afraid to open ourselves to love and to the possibilities of being loved, the dangers of becoming emotionally engaged and hiding instead behind some sort of professional role. (*Kazuo Ishiguro on the Remains of the Day*, 2017)

Being afraid to get engaged, afraid to express what he feels, afraid to let his emotions loose, Stevens exemplifies a classic case of repressing his emotions (Shaffer, 1998, p. 64). In effect, he has been hiding behind

this sort of professional role that leaves him in the end in part a failure at both his private life as well as public one. His repression is such that Miss Kenton once furiously asks him the rhetorical question of “Why, Mr Stevens, why, why, why do you always have to *pretend*?” (Ishiguro, 1989, p. 110 emphasis original). His professional language curtails him in expressing his emotions either to his dying father or Miss Kenton as his “language is not an adequate emotional framework” but “of those he serves”, his employers (Tung, 1997). In the end, neither Miss Kenton nor Lord Darlington remains in his life. However, what remains of his days is to learn a new skill, bantering, to serve a new master, Mr Faraday.

In his book, *The Free Voice* (2019) Ravish Kumar’s emphasis on cultivating the feeling of love towards others and rooting out hate perhaps points towards what Ishiguro says in the above passage. The same kind of professional role underlies the emotional and sensational newsroom debates of “godi” media, which have “unlocked new levels of unethical, political, jingoistic behaviour where each debate seems no less similar to an average Indian daily soap” (*Prime Time Religion: Indian Media And Debates In 2019*, 2020, para. 01). “Godi” media in India has been seen as going against its professional role. For instance, commenting on the quality of journalism *Caravan* magazine has been doing, Arundhati Roy devises the questions the future will likely ask of the Indian media thus:

What were you doing in those five years when a government came to power that spread hate and poison, that controlled the media? What were you doing then? And very few in the Indian media will be able to hold their heads up and say that we were calling the powerful to account. I think *Caravan* is one of the few magazines that will be able to hold its head up, if it stays afloat. And I hope it stays afloat, which is why I’m saying, please read *Caravan*. (2012, para. 01)

This posterior questioning of the role of media underlies the exploration of this article. And the answers to these questions lie in the partisan role of “godi” media. Rather than calling the powerful to account, what “godi” media has been doing is that they are less interested in reporting and more interested in following the *Twitter* account of Prime Minister Narendra Modi because “it would be instructive to see what kind of reporting these journalists have done since 2014” (Kumar, 2019, p. 20). Such news, Kumar laments, “began to disappear from India news channels and papers some years ago” (2019, p. 15). The practice of “godi” journalists doing fieldwork these days is rare, since they rely heavily on social media feeds rather than what is beyond these feeds—the real world (Haneef, 2020, para. 17). Just as the tour through England in a Ford car opens Stevens’ horizon of thinking even though he relies on an anachronistic guidebook, same can be said to be the case with journalists who do fieldwork for reporting rather than rely on social media feeds. Stevens’ is not the world of *Rolls-Royce* England but of *Ford*, the quintessential symbol of something produced for the masses.

Credited as the watershed moment for this transition, Kumar writes that it was after 2014 that the “political winds began to change course” (2019, p. 34). As a means to manufacture fears, to troll and to demonise anyone who asks questions, IT (Informational Technology) Cell was set up, which “rapidly transformed media into godi media—lapdog media”—which then swung into the “laps of power and repeated the Modi Chalisa” [in contrast to *Hanuman Chalisa*, a devotional religious song in praise of Lord Hanuman] (2019, p. 35). However, IT Cell is not confined to a single party, he clarifies, but it is “a mentality” that has “transformed a large section of the [Indian] society into trolls” (2019, p. 35). These trolls, well documented by Chaturvedi (2016), create fear in this “enfeebled democracy”, maintains Kumar, adding further that “it was the government which used to strike fear into the hearts of citizens”, however, “now the mainstream and social media are its active allies” (2019, p. 42). For example, in the wake of the Ayodiya verdict, *Newslaundry*, “a reader-supported, independent news media company”, started a weekly series called *Blood Lust*, decrying the Indian “godi” media’s majoritarian stance before the court decision, going against the rules set by News Broadcasting Standards Authority for the verdict proceedings (Pande, 2019). Kohli writes that our readers and viewers deserve impartial, objective, and efficient journalism at this crucial time for journalism, which is facing a crisis (Kohli, 2018). Writing about the 2019 amendments to the Right to Information Act, 2005 (RTI), Sethi trails the proverbial Manmohan-silence [former Prime Minister of India] of “godi” media by saying that “there has been no concerted push back from media houses about the government’s current

move” (2019, p. 16).

Similarly, both Ono and Stevens, under the garb of professionalism, remain dead silent by not speaking a word even when other characters point out their wrongdoings. For instance, when Mr Cardinal worries that Stevens does not “understand” Lord Darlington being used as a pawn by Hitler in his “propaganda tricks” (Ishiguro, 1989, p. 224). Moreover, he was told by Miss Kenton that what he was doing was not only “*wrong*” but he was committing “a sin as any sin ever was one” on dismissing her two Jewish maids (Ishiguro, 1989, p. 107 emphasis original). Unlike Stevens, Ono recognises that his art had been used for the wrong ends of the state, as he is comforted by his daughter that he “must stop believing he has done some great wrong” because he was “just a painter” (1986, p. 111). However, he defines his position in the Imperial Japan thus: ‘I am Masuji Ono, the artist and member of the Cultural Committee of the Interior Department. Indeed, I am an official adviser to the Committee of Unpatriotic Activities (Ishiguro, 1986, p. 182). Being an official advisor, Ono does not even spare his pupil producing art that violates the standards set by the Committee. What he does to his pupil recasts in fact what had been done to him by his own master when he had produced a painting that had somewhat departed from what the rules of his master had set. Why does he do this to his pupil when he had the first-hand experience of the act he was opposing? The answer to this might be seen in the position itself he is holding now, for instance, as a member of an official governmental committee whose definition of what might be considered proper art was narrow and nationalist and imperial.

The parallel can be seen in a report to *The Caravan* about the murder of the journalist, Rajdeo Ranjan (Dubey, 2016). In another story for *The Caravan* about Anjana Om Kashyap by Saxena. He writes that journalists reporting honestly on current affairs have found themselves out of work and sometimes dead on the streets, however, Kashyap “enjoys extraordinary popularity both on the streets and in the highest offices” (Saxena, 2019, p. 37). It is perhaps this desire to survive in the “new India” that has turned many Indian media outlets into godi media, or what Shukla calls “bhakti” [devotional] media, akin to the one Stevens follows in watching the fall of his master with the rise of the new one (2018, para. 10). Godi, or lapdog media, maintains Ranjan, “is a condition where the news media display a lack of independent power and act as a trained pooch” (2019, para. 02).

Propaganda

At a time like this, when the pandemic of Coronavirus (Covid-19) is getting worse by the day, public health is certainly of increasing concern. But what is equally alarming is the fear many prominent figures have, for instance, about popular democracies passing laws contrary to the values they swore to defend and maintain (John & M, 2020; *Impact On Constitutional Rights In Response To Coronavirus Pandemic*, n.d.; *The Coronavirus Pandemic and Fundamental Rights*, 2021). In addition, this alarming situation is further exacerbated by the fact that most major national media outlets not only report on, but actively endorse these laws. However, India is not an exception. For instance, “the propaganda that is central to the channel’s [*Republic TV*’s] behaviour is symptomatic of a much bigger, scarier disease plaguing the media industry worldwide” (Kohli, 2018, para. 12; Repucci & Slipowitz, 2021).

Manufacturing and the production of propaganda is more an old phenomenon than a new one (Stanley, 2015, pp. 27–38). However, what is new is that in our age of the internet and mass media, it spreads like wildfire beyond its origin, as demonstrated by the covid-19 pandemic. If we accept Noam Chomsky’s statement that “propaganda is to a democracy what the bludgeon is to a totalitarian state” (2006, p. 10). In that case, it follows that propaganda is essential to a democracy, therefore, to India as well, since it is the largest one in the world. The manufacturing of propaganda by mainstream media in India is not unprecedented, which lies beyond the argument of this paper (Rawat, 2004). However, what is unprecedented is its manufacturing and dissemination by media, the professionals, to almost every corner of the country. This was made possible by the launching on July 1, 2015, of the Digital India Initiative by the Government of India that aims to emphasise e-governance and transform India into a digitally empowered society (Nidhi, 2015, para. 01). This digitalisation provided electronic media with a new edge.

In his analysis of AFW and ROD, Peter Sloane suggests that these two novels are “works of personal and political propaganda masquerading as the often ethically distasteful memoirs of a superannuated generation” (2018, p. 156). Pointing out the propagandist role of both the protagonists, he adds that Ono could overstate the consequences of his propaganda, but Stevens must also magnify the role of Lord Darlington “in culturing an international political consensus to soften some of the punitive conditions leveled on the German republic in the treaty of Versailles and, subsequently, in condoning and facilitating the British government’s appeasement of the Nazi regime prior to World War II” (2018, p. 160). As Ishiguro points to an idea in an interview that he considers to be universal, that is, that we have a tendency to follow strong leaders (Mason, 1986, p. 10). The above quote is suggestive in the sense that it perhaps points to Thomas Hobbes’ idea that suggests that we should leave ourselves in the lap of an “absolute monarch” and not question him. And in not doing so, he adds, we would fall into the state of nature that is “solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short” (1998, p. 84). As *Aljazeera*, a news channel based in United Arab Emirates, quotes Mohan Guruswamy, who works with the Centre for Policy Alternatives, a thinktank, saying, “I think everyone is looking for strong leadership. This places Modi at an advantage. He’s showing that he’s a strong leader” (*India Announces Election Dates*, 2014, para. 13). Both Stevens and Ono, without questioning, follow what their employers command and are “so deeply implicated in the destructive values of an imploded imperial past that they do not understand (although the reader must) how the world has changed around them” (MacKay, 2011, p. 53). In effect, prominent individuals turn away from their roles and beckon to the call of the collective, majoritarian perspectives, a trend that can have observed both in the novels and in the “godi” media. As Gudavarthy points out that the “godi” media has abdicates its responsibility (Gudavarthy, 2018).

Ono is a prime example of how he turns away from being a successful artist under the tutelage of his master, Mori-San, to being the one who produces art in service of his nation. He aligns himself and his art with the ruling power, Imperial Japan, in producing such art contrary to his profession as an artist. Ono had started off as an artist of the school of art for art’s sake, “of the floating world”, but with the passage of time he drifts to the propagandist one. He turns away from being “an artist of the floating world” of his master Mori-San, a world of “pleasure”, of “beauty”, of “a decadent and enclosed world”, to what he defines as “a progress” to the more “tangible” world, the real world, that the “troubled times” need (Ishiguro, 1986, p. 103). His transition from the former to the latter is characterised by what he calls “the new patriotic spirit emerging in Japan” in his petition to the authorities for the establishing of Migi-Hidari, a bar, he adds, where the “city’s artists and writers whose works most reflect the new spirit can gather and drink together” (Ishiguro, 1986, p. 36). What task they had, he tells them after its establishment, was that as “a new generation of Japanese artists, you have a great responsibility towards the culture of this nation” (1986, p. 86). To this end, he even gets his pupil, Kuroda, arrested for being a “traitor” by not aligning with the concept of art Imperial Japan had defined as proper, because the Imperial “policy [is] to destroy any offensive material” (1986, pp. 65, 104). Ono learns that Kuroda had been “hostile to my memory” as suggested by the tone of Kuroda’s pupil, Enchi (1986, p. 65). Why was he hostile to him is because it is Ono “on whose information” Kuroda had been arrested for paintings that are described as the “Unpatriotic trash” (1986, p. 104). The officers who arrest him than Ono for “his help” (1986, p. 104).

Moreover, Ono is asked to join in and contribute through his art in the “restoration” of Imperial Japan, not only because the businessmen and politicians wield power more that the Emperor, but also because being a “giant amidst the dwarfs” in Asia, Japan has the capacity to compete with and to “forge an empire as powerful and wealthy as those of the British and the French” (Ishiguro, 1986, p. 99). Influenced by and sympathetic to the ideas of Yamagata, a veteran soldier, Ono promises him that he would do whatever he could, hence the writing of the above petition, to which the “authorities responded”, he adds, “not simply with acquiescence, but with an enthusiasm that surprised me” (1986, p. 36).

Arnab Goswami is one of the parallel instances of how a prominent well-spoken anchor turned to being a “godi” one, as can be seen in his decision of leaving the channel *Times Now*, to founding one of his own, *The RepublicTV* that “redefined news to be structured around real or manufactured controversies, one for each day’s prime time show” (Ninan, 2019, para. 39). A recent study by *The Caravan* analysed the

primetime *RepublicTV* debates from its launching in 2017 to April 2020, discovering that the “accusation of partisanship against *RepublicTV* is undeniable” (Jaffrelot & Jumle, 2020, para. 03). The study concluded that the debates on *Republic TV* have consistently supported the Modi administration’s policies and the BJP’s ideology (2020, para. 03). In addition, these debates have rarely addressed some of the most pressing issues that affect Indians, such as the economy, education, and health. In contrast, they have often been directed at the Opposition and any groups or individuals that oppose the ruling government (Jaffrelot & Jumle, 2020). The stark similarity in the findings suggests a trend leading to undermining the professionalism of the media through their “evident bias” and serving as “political tools of distraction” (2020, para. 33). Looking at the data about the coverage of issues in the channel, the authors answer in affirmation the question, “is *Republic TV* its master’s voice?”, by writing that the channel’s debates clearly reflect the priorities, policies, and ideology of the incumbent government (2020, para. 29).

The openly biased role of media, particularly of television media channels such as *Times Now*, has been observed during the first term of the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government led by BJP, writes Ninan, in that the anchors display almost comical levels of disdain in response to criticism of the government made by members of the Opposition or studio guests and “berate [them] vociferously after inviting them to speak” (2019). For instance, he adds, “it is the channel’s former anchor Arnab Goswami, who tested the winnability of an anti-liberal editorial stance during his stint with the *Times Group* and went on to found a commercially successful news channel, *Republic TV*, that redefined news to be structured around real or manufactured controversies, one for each day’s prime time show” (2019, para. 39). In addition, this channel uses its shows to ridicule other journalists who criticize Narendra Modi and his government (2019, para. 39).

Another of the parallels of the instance that can be cited is the resignation of Faye D’Souza, executive editor of television news channel *Mirror Now*, on the questions she raised about the government’s decision to revoke on 5th August, 2019 the special status accorded to Indian Administered Kashmir (IAK), the crackdown on local leaders, Internet blocking and the curfew (Ayyub, 2020). In contrast, what was reported was the “constant [“godi”] media coverage of Kashmir as “normal” [. . .] and that the narrative of normalcy was put forth on primetime television, on the front pages of newspapers, and on *Twitter* by journalists that boasted that they flew over Kashmir in government helicopters” (Dev, 2019, para. 03).

Similarly, Mr Stevens abandons his professional self in the belief of serving his Lord Darlington without protest, let alone question, for example, the order to fire two Jewish maids. Not only did he felt that the execution of this duty was an instance of “dignity” as a professional but admonishes Miss Kenton’s concerns as matters beyond their judgement, reminding her that “our professional duty is not to our own foibles and sentiments, but to the wishes of our employer” (Ishiguro, 1989, p. 107). As he says that the “butler’s ability [is] not to abandon the professional being for the private one at the least provocation” because, he continues, “great butlers are great by virtue of their ability [. . .] not be shaken out by external events, however surprising, alarming or vexing” (1989, pp. 42–43). Even though his employer later refers to this “minor incident” as “wrong” Stevens does not even for a moment thought it that way (1989, p. 109). Moreover, in service to his master, he even abandons his dying father by rationalising it with a thought that his father “would have wished me to carry on just now” (1989, p. 80). What he was to carry on was to attend to the guests of his employer who had come to attend “the conference of 1923” (1989, p. 52).

Narrow Nationalism

Finding the new world order of the present narrative restrictive, with America as the hegemon, both Ono and Stevens recollect memories of their old-world order characterised by monarchical and imperial systems. The concept of nationalism in both the novels pertains to a narrowly defined, or an ethnic one. Sim comments that in his novels Ishiguro “probes and questions a restrictive notion of national identity” (2010, p. 155). Both Ono and Stevens consider their respective nations as unique and superior to the one beyond their borders. For instance, Stevens’ understanding of nationalism is so narrow that every other nation appears to

him as “inferior” (Ishiguro, 1989, p. 29). Of course, he is referring to the landscape of these countries, but what is suggestive is that he next connects the “greatness” of his country, “Great Britain”, to the greatness of his professional role as a butler, aspiring to that “greatness” (1989, pp. 28–29). Perhaps, his “sense of restraint”, which to him seems so essential to Britain, in times of “speaking out”, aligns with it as well. In other words, he interrelates his silent approval of his employer’s orders with the quiet restraint of the country, mixing the individual with the collective. He says, for example, that his service to the great men of his country, such as Lord Darlington, entails serving not only the country but the whole of humanity as well.

Becoming the artist of the state pushes Ono to the extent that every other nation appears to him as the other. He begins to see Japan as “giant amidst the dwarfs” in Asia (Ishiguro, 1986, p. 99). As he suggests to his pupils that they should “spearhead of the new spirit”, the “manly spirit”, emerging in Japan (1986, p. 42). And when they do not follow this, he gets them arrested as exemplified by his tip off to the police about Kuroda’s “unpatriotic trash” (1986, p. 104). One of his famous paintings, “Eyes to the Horizon”, was about two soldiers and an officer with a sword pointing towards Asia, with the tagline, “No time for cowardly talking. Japan must go forward” (1986, p. 96). In addition, those artists who go against the Imperial Japan are considered a threat, hence, arrested. For instance, Kuroda is branded a “traitor” when his unpatriotic paintings are confiscated.

It tends to appear in line with what the English primetime debates have been disseminating in India, since 2014. We often see such tendencies in the attitude of “godī” media English Television anchors in India, for example, when they conflate the current dispensation in power with the nation and brand as “anti-national” every citizen who questions its policies (*Branding Dissent As Anti-National*, 2016; Purohit, 2018, para. 01; Singh & Dasgupta, 2019). Included in this list is the recent farmer protestors (newslaundry, 2021). As Roy emphasised in a recent speech that “we watch the media that is meant to afflict the comfortable and comfort the afflicted do the very opposite” (2020, para. 12). To probe and question the restrictive notion of national identity promoted in primetime debates by “godī” media can be gleaned from a huge number of their debates on what some commentators refer to as “irrelevant issues” (Katju, 2011). For instance, a recent study analysed the previous 202 prime time debates hosted by channels such as *Zee News*, *Aaj Tak*, *News18* and *India TV*, shows that out of 202 debates, 79 were on Pakistan, 66 on attacking the Opposition, 36 praising Modi and BJP and, ironically, none on the economy, education, women safety, environmental protection, mob lynching (Bureau, 2019).

The concept of “availability heuristic” explains why some subjects are highly salient while others are forgotten by the public (Kahneman, 2011, p. 08). Kahneman explains that a large part of how people judge the relative importance of an issue is based on the ease with which they can recall it from memory—and this is determined by the extent of media coverage. Even while others slip away from awareness, often-mentioned topics occupy the mind. Consequently, what the media reports reflects what the media believes is on the minds of the general public. The fact that authoritarian regimes exert substantial pressure on independent media is not accidental, but, he adds, since public interest is easily piqued by dramatic events and by celebrities, media feeding frenzies are common (2011, p. 08). This availability heuristic perhaps explains what the “godī” media in India has been doing in shaping public opinion in whatever way they want, for instance, by disseminating and covering events and issues “irrelevant” to the general public (Katju, 2011).

Majoritarianism

Debates concerning the undermining of the values of democracy and the ascendancy of the anti-democratic ones worldwide seem highly likely to rise in the various forums of the world, particularly in India, as the covid-19 fast spreads across tight-knit borders. As BJP’s coming to power in 2014 described as a combination of four elements that are seen to be recurrent the world over: “populism, nationalism, authoritarianism, and majoritarianism” (Chatterji et al., 2019, p. 1). Since 2014, most of the national media in India, “the Fourth Estate, more far important than they all” [other three estates], of democracy, has ignored the vocation it

holds in speaking truth to power (Carlyle, 1872, pp. 06–10). As such, for instance, in India, it has been complicit in its role as “godī” (lapdog) media by contributing to moving “the needle”, writes Chatterji et al. (2019), “decisively toward the consolidation of a Hindu nationalist-majoritarian polity” (2019, p. 06).

Haneef comments that “the crisis of democracy can be perceived but is as invisible as coronavirus” (2020, para. 28). Much as coronavirus demands a new economic world order” he maintains, “it is time for the economies of love, and not hate, to endure” (2020, para. 28). Kumar similarly calls out the hate spread by “Godī” media but at the same time, in addition to economic development of the country, he calls for what he refers to as economies of love by emphasising time and again that “not just eco-friendly, we must make our cities *ishq*[love]-friendly as well” (2019, p. 127). He provides thorough scrutiny of several pressing issues, particularly the part played by what he calls “bad journalism” in undermining the democratic values in India. He writes that “Bad journalism never had the kind of credibility that it has today. News channels have worked tirelessly to kill India’s democratic ideals” (2019, p. 10). His concern is with this type of journalism Indian media is doing, that has become a byword for official propaganda, as he writes, “the press as an instrument of official propaganda is now a plain fact of our democratic system” (2019, p. 11).

The parallels can be seen by taking a look at Nick Rennison’s account of AFW that it “is the story of Masuji Ono, an ageing artist in a Japanese city still suffering from the after-effects of wartime devastation” (2005, p. 74). He adds that it is not just that Ono’s past is characterised by idle bohemianism and sensitive aestheticism, but also by his complicity in the expansionist imperialism that has brought such suffering to his country and himself (2005, p. 74). In addition to the complicity in Ono in his support of the expansionist empire of Japan, “the new spirit”, the parallels we can see of complicity in the approach of the primetime debate hosts in India, running debates such as attack Pakistan, a neighbouring country, which disregard every international law (Ishiguro, 1986, p. 36; *news*laundry, 2016; *#TimeForRevenge: Is It the Ultimate Time for Revenge on Pakistan?*, 2019).

The lesson Ono learnt he tells his friends while working in Takeda firm in his early days as a young artist was that while it was “right to look up to teachers, it was always important to question their authority” (1986, p. 42). We can see this lesson exemplified when he confronts and refuses to hand over his paintings to his master, Ogata-San. However, he does not follow this lesson when he becomes a master himself, and his authority is challenged by his pupil, Kuroda. He goes even to the length of getting him arrested. Instead, he is proud of what he and his pupils are doing by being “nothing less than the spearhead of the new spirit” emerging in Japan (1986, p. 42). He has transformed his pupils in such a way that, he adds, anyone they meet with having “disagreeable views, they would be quick to squeeze him out” (1986, p. 43).

Ono’s elder daughter asks him to visit his “old acquaintances” such as Kuroda, his formal pupil, so that no “misunderstandings” arise in the marriage prospects of his younger daughter with Saito family whose “detective” might meet the acquaintances before Ono does (1986, p. 49). Why does she ask him his to do this? Although it is not made but clear but there is a hint that in the last marriage prospect the other party “pulled out” because of the association of Ono with something of the past (Ishiguro, 1986, p. 29). In fact, the whole idea of buying a large house as the present one he lives in, had to do with the notion of marriage of his daughters in mind. When he began to earn enough money, he tells us, his wife “pressed him to buy a new house” (1986, p. 1). Perhaps the narratee, who is new to the city, is a marriage prospect for his daughter.

Unlike the readers of the novel, the viewers of the primetime debates learn not in hints and oblique suggestions but vividly. Talking about how the media has abandoned its role as speaking truth to power, Ravish writes that the media poses questions, not to the current dispensation but the Opposition, adding that “News is suppressed, manipulated, manufactured with impunity” (2019, p. 11). Whatever little agency Indian people had, he suggests, “they have surrendered it to the powers about whose true intentions they know next to nothing” (2019, p. 12). The author blames not just the political authorities but also the people, as he states, that probably never before in the independent history of India has there been this “degree of faith in political authority and such an appetite for non-news and fake news” (2019, p. 12).

Fake News

Dissemination of false news, deflecting of truth, or what in media studies is called gatekeeping of information by several media platforms seems to have risen in this era of mass media and the internet (Husain, 2020, para. 02; Yadav, 2020, para. 02). As used in India for a fake news hub, “WhatsApp University” [a pejorative coined by Ravish Kumar, referring to the fake news and misinformation spread in India through WhatsApp forwards] has become a more reliable source of information and knowledge than the actual universities, “a black hole of fake news” (Ponniah, 2019, para. 30). That WhatsApp is being used by the “volunteers of the ruling party” as a tool to spread fake news is well documented (Perrigo, 2019; Sinha et al., 2019, p. 01).

Moreover, according to Kumar, WhatsApp University, the “laboratory” of the IT Cell, teaches “history” that is “fake and poisonous” (2019, p. 35). Quoting a statement made by Narendra Modi on December 9, 2017, during the election campaign for Gujarat assembly elections, exemplifies what he calls “the classic example of fake news”, that most of the media did not double-check what the PM had said but “quoted him verbatim” (2019, pp. 57–58). They plunged, he writes, into “constructing the narrative he [PM] desired”; that “Pakistan was interfering in the elections underway in Gujarat, and the Congress was colluding with it” (2019, pp. 58–59). He states further that fake news is not merely created for the sake and fun of it but, being a “phenomenon”, is a “highly-skilled game”, centring around less on facts and more on impressions (2019, pp. 60–61). Nevertheless, not only WhatsApp but prestigious institutions of the country such as Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), Kharagpur, for instance, are used to promote “lies, misleading ideas, and fanciful fictions” (Arora, 2021, para. 01).

In contrast to some studies which have attempted to show no effect of fake news on democracy, Kumar confirms that it often does, by adding, “which is why the Prime Minister’s ‘secret meeting’ speech remained hotly discussed throughout the elections in Gujarat” (2019, p. 62). To him, it not only produces fake debates, which in turn results in fake politics but also acts as “a means to take the focus far away from the real problems that affect people” (2019, p. 62). For a comprehensive explanation of the “godli” media’s role in spreading fake news and misinformation and communal hatred, what he says is worth quoting:

Today, most of media platforms speak the same language. The society which falls within the ambit of their influence is left with very limited options to seek facts [. . .] The media has begun to present communal attitudes as valid, legitimising them as nationalism [. . .] It is not easy to escape this web of images and misinformation, and very few actually do. (2019, pp. 63–64)

The only tool left for citizens to fight this spreading of communal hatred and misinformation, he suggests, is “truth”, the “only thing that citizens have with which to challenge authority—the truth which springs from the conditions of their everyday realities” (2019, pp. 63–64).

Spreading of fake news by major political parties in India such as Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP), India National Congress (INC) and Samajwadi Party (SP) and Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) is a common well documented phenomenon. As findings by Narayanan et al. suggest that a quarter of the content shared by the BJP and a fifth by the INC is junk news, while the SP and BSP share very little sensationalist, extremist, or conspiratorial content (2019, para. 01). Bansal et al. write that the “Association of Billion Minds (ABM) is, Amit Shah’s [Indian Home Minister] personal election unit, recommending election candidates, running Nation with NaMo and creating fake news sites”, and that “has tasked . . . with running sophisticated misinformation campaigns to spread fake news and false claims on social media and WhatsApp and in staged conversations in public gatherings” (2019, para. 06). In his review of a book by Martin Moore, *Democracy Hacked: Political Turmoil and Information Warfare in the Digital Age*, M. Haneef summarises the point made about the situation of digital media in India that, like everywhere else, the digital armies of political parties publish posts, upload memes, organise disinformation campaigns, fill forums with misinformation, produce disinformation campaigns and spread discord and hate (2020, para. 09). More recently, writing for the *AltNews*, a fact-checking website committed to “debunking misinformation, disinformation and mal-information that we encounter on a daily basis on social media as well as mainstream media”, Kalim Ahmed (2021) has reported as several media outlets such as *Hindustan Times*, *India Today*, *Mint*, *Times of*

India, *ABPNews*, *RepublicTV*, spreading fake news about Balakot airstrike on Pakistan, by a reference to a “clipped, doctored” video (2021, para. 04).

Conclusion

The thematic parallels between the two novels of Ishiguro and the English primetime debates in Indian “godi” media point to the way that the lack of professional integrity in both the latter and the former leads to the undermining of democratic values. Democracy is at stake and, the article argued, subverted in damaging ways by “godi” media. Moreover, the article itself is designed as a solution, making people aware of the pernicious work being done and distributed in the name of journalism.

Borrowing what Rennison noted about Ono, “Godi” media in post-Modi India will be anachronistic whose values will be rejected by a younger generation and be an embarrassment to those who aspire to follow them (2005, p. 74). In the words of Stevens, moreover, let’s “try to make the best of what remains of [our] day” (Ishiguro, 1989, p. 244).

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