

influence that goes far beyond their combined circulation of 500,000.

Shukanshi defenders argue that the mainstream dailies, with their system of press clubs actually embedded in government agencies, provide only the superficial *tatemaē*, or official, view of events, while the weeklies try to get at the *honme*, or substantive and truthful, version of the story. Though it's true, say Watanabe and Gamble, that the establishment press

serves up *tatemaē*, the *shukanshi* don't consistently get at the reality either. They're supported by the powerful advertising agency Dentsu, which is very much a part of the establishment, and their politics are nationalistic and conservative. "They sometimes present subjects in greater depth. They have even been known to break important political scandals. However, they rarely offer much in the way of genuinely important journalism."

Who Owns the Media?

"The Media Monotony" by Jack Shafer, in *Slate* (Aug. 4, 2004), slate.msn.com.

Ben H. Bagdikian is at it again. In *Media Monopoly* (1983), the eminent media critic—a former *Washington Post* ombudsman and emeritus dean of the Graduate School of Journalism at the University of California, Berkeley—maintained that 50 companies dominated the newspaper, broadcast, magazine, book, and movie industries. Updated five times, the book is still required reading in many college journalism and sociology courses. Now Bagdikian has published a seventh edition, with a new title, *The New Media Monopoly*, and a new thesis. The number of companies is down to five: Time Warner, Viacom, News Corporation, Disney, and Bertelsmann. "These five corporations decide what most citizens will—or will not—learn," Bagdikian writes.

That's largely hogwash, says Shafer, who writes the "Press Box" column for *Slate* (which, significantly for the conspiracy-minded, is owned by Microsoft). Yes, Bagdikian's Big Five own or control four major movie studios, nearly 60 cable channels, five broadcast TV networks, a satellite TV oper-

ation, book publishers, and magazines, though only Rupert Murdoch's News Corporation owns major newspapers. Says Shafer: "The Big Five determine what the majority learns only in those places where the newsstand sells only *The New York Post* and *Time* and where TV receivers have been doctored to accept signals only from CNN, ABC, CBS, and the Fox News Channel."

"If anybody decides what most citizens learn," asserts Shafer, "it's the agenda-setting editors at *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *The Wall Street Journal*, and *The Los Angeles Times*. The TV news would go dark if it couldn't crib from the Big Four Newspapers. NPR's *Morning Edition* would fall mute. The newsweeklies would have to run more cover stories on ice cream, dreams, and guides to colleges."

Hard as it may be for Bagdikian to admit, the news media's quality and variety "have never been better," says Shafer. "Who longs for the days of William Randolph Hearst? Of three broadcast networks? Of the days before the Internet?"

RELIGION & PHILOSOPHY

Nehru's Model Morality

"Nehru's Faith" by Sunil Khilnani, in *The New Republic* (May 24, 2004), 1331 H St., N.W., Ste. 700, Washington, D.C. 20005.

Jawaharlal Nehru, the first prime minister of independent India (1947–64), is often held up as the rational, scientific opposite to the deeply spiritual Hindu leader Mohandas

Gandhi. These are "simplifications that border on caricature," asserts Khilnani, who finds in Nehru's "deeply held moral convictions" an appealing quest, "not always successful, to base

public life on a reasoned morality.”

Nehru “believed in the moral life not just as sustaining private life, but also as necessary for the living of any kind of political life.” Using reason, and often engaging Gandhi and others in probing dialogues, Nehru attempted to filter all his decisions through his own demanding moral prism before adopting a course of action. Sometimes the process became ag-



India's Jawaharlal Nehru eschewed religion in his personal life but brought a deep moral sense to his role as prime minister.

onizing, as when he faced demands during the early 1950s to redraw India's internal boundaries along linguistic lines. Having already overseen the disaster of partition in 1947, when Muslim Pakistan broke away from the Indian state, Nehru feared that the language question would further divide India. In Khilnani's view, by “temporizing and refusing to give in immediately to popular passions,” Nehru arrived at a series of subtle compromises and adjustments “that actually strengthened the Union and [have] endured remarkably well.”

Throughout his political life, says Khilnani, a professor of politics at Johns Hopkins University's School of Advanced International Studies, Nehru struggled with the choices and responsibilities that came with power. As his

torian Arnold Toynbee wrote, “It is more blessed to be imprisoned for the sake of one's ideals than to imprison other people, incongruously, in the name of the same ideals. Nehru lived to have both experiences.” But where some might turn to religious faith for guidance, as did India's other influential leaders Gandhi and the poet Rabindranath Tagore, Nehru stubbornly resisted religion. Khilnani suggests that it was Nehru's deep understanding of European history that gave him such insight into the dangers of mixing religion and politics. To Nehru, there was equal disaster in “attempts to define the character of the state in terms of the claims of religious faith” and in concentrating too much power in one person. A democracy grounded on secular principles seemed to offer the only safe course for India.

Khilnani believes that Nehru's method of moral reasoning offers a model for the modern world. “In a world in which religion was declining (as in the West) or in which religious faith existed in multiple forms (as in India), no particular religion or belief system could claim universal allegiance, no shared morality could be taken for granted.” How best to guide such societies into proper ways of thinking and acting? Or, as Khilnani puts it, more fundamentally, “how can we create and sustain a moral public life?” Nehru believed that “reason, and the processes of reasoning, are the greatest resources we have through which to create and to sustain our moral imagination.”

Religion today, observes Khilnani, “almost never refers to an inner space of contemplation and private struggle, and almost always to an outer realm of conflict and commotion.” It is being drained of its moral content. Perhaps Nehru's methods, which sometimes seemed out of step with the India of his time, “may be better suited to today's world, disjointed and disrupted by the claims of identity: They are more deeply and innately sensitive to the claims of diversity in the construction of a moral public life.”