

# VIDURA

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**With great power comes great responsibility**



**"OUT WITH THE OLD AND IN WITH THE NEW!"**

- Development journalism in the age of the big spender
- The Anna Hazare show - manipulating an event to earn TRPs?
- It's a jungle out there - where might is often right
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# Full of sound and fury signifying nothing?

**S**ting operations, phone hacking, intrusion into privacy, snooping... these and similar other words have surfaced again thanks to the *News of the World* saga. Although it all happened in the UK and involved an English newspaper, the episode certainly has lessons for the media in India as elsewhere. In India, more than newspapers, it is television that's often been accused of going overboard, hyping things a bit, and sometimes, being instrumental in media losing credibility. Many feel some of the anchors tend to behave as prosecutors and judges and the heated debates (very often between the same people) resemble charged-up courtroom scenes.

There was a time not too long ago when television in India was only about Doordarshan. Programmes on DD 1 (as it was called then) would be telecast for two or three hours in the morning, and the evening transmission would begin at 6pm or so, ending around 10pm with the English news. People of today's generation might not believe that the newsreaders on the national channel even then were stars in their own right – Sashi Kumar, Komal G.B. Singh, Tejeshwar Singh, Minu, Neethi Ravindran, Salma Sultan... Then came suave psephologist Pranoy Roy and NDTV 24/7; perhaps more than anybody else he was instrumental in changing the television news scene completely in India. His protégés Barkha Dutt, Rajdeep Sardesai and Arnab Goswami have become larger-than-life figures today; they are superstars who can question directly on TV anybody short of the President or the Prime Minister. And whether you like it or not, television has become the most powerful media in the country today, with Goswami possibly the most powerful man, with his much-watched and much-talked-about daily Newshour Tonight show on Times Now.

Although this issue focuses on how the *News of the World* went about publishing stories, I refer to television here because more than any other medium it is television in India that has led the charge in exposing the corrupt and the ugly, and somehow when words such as sting operations, snooping, hacking, intrusion into privacy, etc are brought up, it's television that first comes to mind. Yes, some newspapers, too, do come up with exclusive scoops but somehow the kind of excitement brought about by 'investigative journalism', the kind Arun Shourie was known for, is distinctly passé. So, did some of our friends in the electronic media exactly cover themselves with glory while covering frenzy-like the Anna Hazare fast, for example?

The media today talks to the 250-odd million who are presumed to be potential consumers in the market; it has almost come to represent the interests of the men and women who control the market, says Pamela Philipose. Citing the 24x7 coverage of Anna Hazare's fast against corruption, she is convinced that the TRPs-driven coverage devoted to the Anna phenomenon led to the news camera eye being trained largely on one stage at Delhi's Ramlila Maidan, almost non-stop for 12 days. Buttressing her case with the Sardar Sarovar Project example, Philipose says the big media interests of the day made invisible the whole issue of displacement, indeed going all out against the Narmada Bachao Andolan and allied groups. Development journalism is all about being able to communicate the real issues of our times and speak truth in compelling ways, she adds. Ranjona Banerjee supplements Philipose, saying the extent to which the television media swallowed the Hazare line was equally galling – and if it was not innocent, then it was mischievous and manipulative. There can be no doubt that a dangerous game was played here, where an event was manipulated to make it appear larger than it was, in order to boost ratings, she adds.

Many feel that television anchors and reporters push it hard because of cut-throat competition for eyeballs, for TRPs. But television anchors might well ask: so what's wrong with wanting TRPs? After all, if you are running a business, would you not aim to make profits? Taking a dispassionate view, I can say for sure that TRPs will rise once viewers realise that there is credibility. There is the danger of overkill, and that is what television anchors must understand. So, how far and no further can TV anchors go while asking questions? Is there a sort of *Lakshman Rekha* that has to be followed? Can you interrogate a chief minister when he has been accused of something? Or, must people occupying high office keep away from the temptation of appearing on TV channels? Should there be a code of ethics governing journalists? Is the media meant to expose and stop unacceptable happenings in society? And if it is to do that, can it go to the extent of poking and prying? These are questions that can and must be debated at length.

Providing a series of examples, Sakuntala Narasimhan says sophisticated technology enables us to snoop and unearth wrongdoing but also makes us vulnerable to exploitation. Technology is a tool in the hands of media persons, who are humans, and it is ultimately human discretion and adherence to ethical values according to codified norms that will determine whether a sting operation amounts to 'snooping' or whether it becomes part of social monitoring, she points out. Reflecting on the deteriorating standards of reporting and the sacrifice of ethics at the altar of popularity, Suvabrata Roy says media is nowadays too keen to step into the private space of celebrities often forgetting that it is falling for a well-orchestrated PR exercise.

Some journalists often do not practise what they preach. In the light of the Nira Radia tapes (featured in the April-June issue of *Vidura*) shouldn't the journalists accused have quit their offices till they were absolved of the charges? A.J. Philip thinks so, and adds that the Public Accounts Committee should have summoned the journalists to get their version of the Radia tapes that would have helped it to submit a more informed report, but that the PAC chickened out when it came to questioning them. According to P.N. Vasanti, we are much more (than the West) immune to unethical methods practised by media professionals and organisations and we don't really expect high ethical standards from corporations or media houses. She adds that in India, we are used to media compromising on ethics as well as on accuracy, and that practices such as paid news and private equity have been institutionalised.

It's interesting in this context to note what India's Vice President Hamid Ansari had to say recently. "The necessity for media to function effectively as the watchdog of public interest was recognised in the freedom struggle. The founding fathers of the republic realised the need to balance the freedom of expression of the press with a sense of responsibility while such freedom is exercised. Adherence to accepted norms of journalistic ethics and maintenance of high standards of professional conduct was deemed to be a natural corollary." Self-regulation by media organisations, he adds, has failed due to personal predilection and the prevailing of personal interest over public interest. Ansari also mentions the lack of active media watch groups engaged in objective analyses of the media, discerning prejudices and latent biases; the controversy over 'paid news'; and the slow erosion of the institution of the editor in Indian media organisations.

In the midst of the continuing debate about whether media is behaving responsibly or not, journalists would do well to read B.G. Verghese's book, *First Draft – Witness to the Making of Modern India*, which S.R. Madhu, who has reviewed it here, calls "a remarkable book". The article about the mentally ill is rather touching and there is a lot to learn from what Vandana Gopikumar says – about how reporting on such people should be driven by goals and responsibility. Read also about what Jacob Mathew, WAN-IFRA's first Indian president, and Christoph Reiss, CEO, have to say about protecting content, press freedom, media consumption and the Wage Board recommendations.

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# Sting operations – a lot depends on the journalist’s moral sense



Sakuntala Narasimhan

*The writer, based in Bangalore, gave up a job (1978-84) with the Times of India Group in Mumbai to write her columns, acquire two PhDs and become an activist for consumer rights. A recipient of the Media Foundation’s Chameli Devi Award for Outstanding Woman Journalist of the Year (1983), a national award for her writings on consumer protection (1994), the PUCL National Award for Human Rights Journalism (2000), the Deepalaya National Award for Child Rights Journalism (2000) and the K.S. Aiyar Memorial award for Outstanding Writing on Socially Relevant Issues (1993), she has published more than 2,900 articles in leading Indian newspapers and is the author of 11 books. Her fortnightly columns on gender issues and consumer rights ran in the Deccan Herald for 27 years, till 2008*

Where does one draw the line between ‘snooping’ and ‘exposing for the public good’? Can hacking be selectively used in the pursuit of truth? Debatable questions, indeed. Sophisticated technology enables us to snoop and unearth wrongdoing; it also makes us vulnerable to exploitation. However, as far as ethics is concerned, the onus is on the journalist.

In May 2011, the BBC put out a film in its Panorama series, showing how, in a hospital in the Bristol area, the staff were abusing the inmates who were all in need of special care as autistic or otherwise differently-abled citizens. The film showed staff dragging and beating the patients, pushing them to the floor in the bathroom. On June 1, the print media as well as television channels were all focusing on the furore following the expose, with public officials as well as ordinary citizens expressing indignation. The images were filmed secretly, using hidden cameras. A police investigation ensued and 13 employees at the facility were soon suspended. There are no two opinions about whether such secret filming was acceptable – morally, socially and legally. “This is what the media is meant for – to expose and stop unacceptable happenings in our society,” said one comment.

That same month, the same media (print and TV) were full of reports about the then chief of the International Monetary Fund and the accusation of attempted rape made against him by a maid in a New York hotel. In the wake of the allegations by the maid, the media quickly publicised various other sexual misconduct allegations against him, from women who had had work-related interactions with him over the years. His lawyers promptly protested, saying their client’s “right to a free trial was being compromised by leaks about his other ‘sexual escapades’ and that the media had no right to pry”.

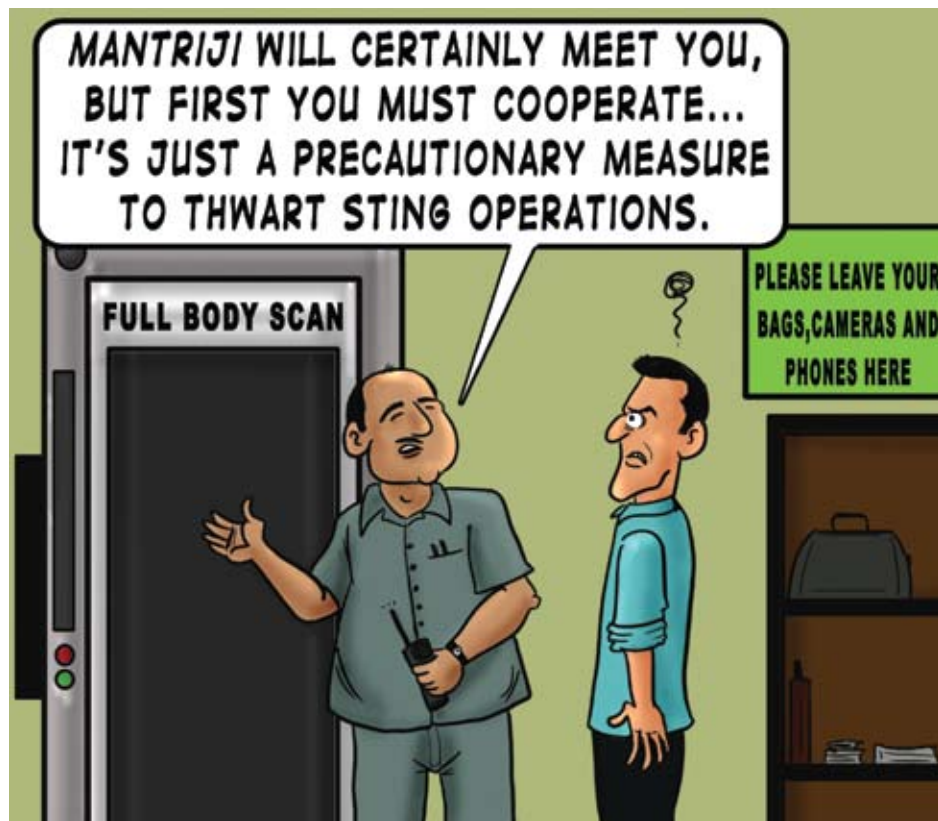
*The Guardian*, in June 2011 asked readers to look through 24 pages of emails sent to, or by, Sarah Palin (who hit the headlines as a vice-presidential candidate in the US Presidential election). Access to the emails was obtained under a Freedom of Information law. More recently, the *News of the World* closed down following allegations of extensive phone tapping and snooping, which were described as unethical (the tapping included messages on the cell phone of a girl who had been murdered)<sup>1</sup>.

So where does one draw the line in reportage? What is ‘ethical’ and what isn’t? If it is for the ‘common good’, is filming secretly the goings-on in a hospital acceptable? Yes, and again, an unequivocal yes – but what about cases where prying crosses over into ‘invasion of privacy’ and becomes unacceptable, morally wrong?

Do we need to know about the private lives of a President (Clinton, and the allegations against him by White House intern Monica Lewinsky) or is it 'none of our business'? President Richard Nixon had to step down following a 'snooping operation' to harvest information about a political party's planned election tactics. Nearer home, N.D. Tiwari as governor, was in the news last year after video tapes of his diverting himself in unacceptable ways with three women. It goes without saying that the video was not filmed with his permission or with apologies for invasion of his privacy, but the issue was clear – he was a respected public figure, expected to maintain the decorum of the high office he was appointed to, and what he did in the privacy of his bedroom was something the media had a right to publicise, because the country had a right to know what kind of morality a person holding the office of governor observed<sup>2</sup>.

Private lives of public figures become relevant indeed, because they add up to the character and competence of those entrusted with leading the masses, as politicians, policy-makers and administrators, or even leading social figures who become role models for youth – film and sports personalities, for example. So where does one draw the ethical line of demarcation, between 'snooping' and 'exposing for the public good'?

Nixon had to go because his authorisation of break-in and snooping was for personal gain, not the country's benefit. The *Tehelka* sting operation resulted in Minister George Fernandes stepping down, and defence deals coming under scrutiny. On the other hand, media reports about the Arusha case in the Indian media, were, according to some, "not acceptable" because these crossed the boundaries of "decency" – but can decency be



defined in quantifiable terms, to separate the 'acceptable' from the 'unacceptable'? In recent months, such questions about ethics have been raised repeatedly, in India and elsewhere, with no clear answers emerging yet.

Snooping by the media need not necessarily be only into individuals' affairs – sting operations to expose corporate malpractices are also known, and are more readily accepted because the public has a stake in corporate activities, as buyers, shareholders, or even victims. The human rights issue tilts in favour of exposure, with no grey areas for debate, because citizens' rights are threatened by non-disclosure of information that would not become available to the public through voluntary disclosure by the corporations, if it is not in their interest in terms of economic profitability, to make such disclosures. Private citizens – no;

public figures – yes; corporations – yes? Is it possible to make clear-cut demarcations of this kind? Or does one go by whether the expose reveals "abuse of power", either by an individual or by a conglomeration? Certainly, that lends a little more clarity to the issue – the people have a right to be informed, and the media has not merely a role to play but a duty to unearth and place such information before the populace.

There are also other dimensions to the picture. Sophisticated technology that enables us to snoop and unearth wrongdoing also makes us vulnerable to exploitation in mind-boggling ways. It is now possible to 'doctor' tapes and video pictures. My student told me recently, when I remarked that one of my concerts was "not worth putting on a CD because my voice was not at its best during the concert and sounded harsh", that it was "no

problem” and that one could use a small strand of my regular voice and put it into the computer, and it would then convert the whole concert into the ‘new’ voice. Which means – technology can in fact cheat.

There have been incidents of women’s photographs being meddled with, by ‘removing their clothes’ or ‘splicing one woman’s face onto the body of another’ and putting out such pictures out on the Internet, to defame or hurt her. So how does one ensure that the media uses technology’s sophistication only to ‘do good’ – and who defines ‘good’ anyway? Where is the guarantee that all media ‘expose’ pieces are genuine and not fake, or put out with ulterior motives?

There was the infamous case of a teacher in Delhi ‘caught’ last year on camera and being accused of using her girl students for immoral purposes. The film turned out to be fake but the damage done to the teacher’s reputation can never be undone. It was undertaken with questionable ulterior motives by someone who had decided to harm her. The proliferation of blogs, where there are no controls, and where the authors cannot be traced, is another threat to the ethical use of media – anyone can put out reports defaming someone, or making unsubstantiated allegations, and even if an apology is subsequently offered, the damage is done and cannot be wiped off.

If new technology has facilitated greater openness, it has also raised contentious issues in the ‘personal rights v public right to know’ debate. So, is democracy aided by the use of sting operations to unearth information not generally accessible, or does it get curtailed through a diminishing of an individual’s right to privacy? The answer perhaps depends on whose perspective we are focusing on – the one who was the subject of a

sting operation could (and would) consider it a curtailment of his/her right to privacy, while, for the public, it could be a democratic assertion of the right to know.

*Harper’s Magazine* in its August 2011 issue carried a long report on how even the US Federal Bureau of Investigation organised sting operations, even supplying incriminating weapons, to implicate Muslims in the post-9/11 paranoia. Mullahs with no intention of turning terrorists were engaged in conversations that were secretly recorded, putting words into the mouths of unsuspecting Muslims, who were then brought before magistrates with the charge that they were “potential terrorists”, while even the prosecutors conceded that there was actually “no evidence” to prove the charge.<sup>3</sup>

Such doctored sting operations can be actually a terrorising tactic against innocent citizens. What happens to ethics in such cases? Will the Bill on the Right to Privacy that was slated for the Monsoon Session of Parliament help us in drawing up the contours of ethics, or are there dimensions of media reportage that cannot be quantified or legally fenced in, to ensure fairness? Where does an individual’s ‘legitimate personal space’ end, and does that line depend on who the person is (with public figures assessed according to different norms)? Maybe not always -- everyday, “the National Security Agency in the US intercepts 1.7 billion emails, phone calls, instant messages, bulletin board postings and other communications” as part of ‘spying’ on its own citizens, in the name of counter-terrorist operations.<sup>4</sup>

The ‘ulterior motive’ for coming up with ‘fake’ or unethical ‘revelations’ or reportage comes in also because the media (print, TV, Internet, billboards, radio) have become commoditised, with ‘generation of profits’ (or

increasing viewership/readership/TRPs/circulation) becoming the overriding criterion, rather than the dissemination of information or even creating public awareness. If a media owner wants to boost the share prices of companies in which he has holding interests, he merely has to suppress reports that trash the company or get favourable reports written about the company (it has been known to happen, both in India and abroad).<sup>5</sup>

It is not just unethical links between journalists and those in positions of power (the Nira Radia revelations, for example) that the public, consumers of media reports, has a right to know, but also declaration of interest clauses – that a newspaper owner has shares in a company that is being written about in his pages in glorious terms (whereas the insider information is that the company is headed for trouble). As Paranjay Guha Thakurta, former member of the Press Council of India, concedes, “Drawing the line between the appropriate and the inappropriate can be contentious”<sup>6</sup> and “ascertaining when information is in the public interest, and when it is just voyeurism, is not an easy task.” Has hacking in search of scoops become an end in itself, instead of being just a tool to be used with discretion, in pursuit of truth?

Again, can – and do – truth and freedom go together, asks journalist Jyoti Punwani, who has covered communal conflict stories for years. She points out how not reporting the truth can also be sometimes in the public interest – for example, when photographs of the burning train at Godhra were banned during the trial, because it could inflame communal passions).<sup>7</sup>

Can we then, use a “means-and-ends” criterion? Assange’s WikiLeaks are all right even if they expose secret diplomatic

exchanges, because the public has a right to know what is going on, especially since the US and India claim to be the world's leading and largest democracies, respectively. Or is it 'totalitarian intrusion' in the name of 'safety'? Is intrusion acceptable in the 'national interest' but less acceptable in the case of individuals who have a 'right to privacy'? What about groups of individuals (activists, NGOs, committees) then? Too many questions in search of answers. Even the legal domain has trouble locating unequivocal guidelines.

*The Daily Mail* (UK) on May 21, 2011 carried a front-page report about a Premier League footballer launching a legal bid to silence Twitter and seeking a 'super injunction' to silence exposure of his adulterous affair with Big Brother contestant Imogen Thomas. The Lord Chief Justice who heard his plea for an injunction was accused of 'gagging the media' by suggesting that even those who report on super-injunctions could be guilty of contempt of court. The judge observed that "modern technology has gone totally out of control."<sup>8</sup>

However, technology is only a tool, in the hands of media persons who are humans, and it is ultimately human discretion and adherence to ethical values according to codified norms (acceptable to the media and to society, legally, socially and ethically) that will determine whether a sting operation amounts to 'snooping' or whether it becomes part of social monitoring. As a journalist, I am expected to use my discretion and exercise great care in the use of methods as well as in decisions about what (or how much) information I will publicise in the media I write for. As a journalist, I am (in my personal opinion) supposed to have not just writing skills (stringing together sentences in a readable manner), but also have the discretion to aid

me in decisions about exposures for 'the public good', or to fight corruption, or promote socially desirable trends (except that, it is easier to say 'socially desirable goals' than drawing their contours or filling in the small print details).

There are occasions – when I am given access to very hard-hitting information about illegal money in bank accounts and remittances from kickbacks, for instance – when it becomes very difficult to decide whether, how much and how to reveal these for 'the public good', given the reality of whistleblowers' risks, and also given the fact that journalists are often forbidden by their editors to report on whatever they unearth if such exposure is not in the interests of the corporate owners of the media house he/she works (or writes) for.

Media persons are also often 'fed' information with ulterior motives, so it becomes important to independently verify the information – which of course, is not always possible or easy. It is in fact scary – that as a journalist one has the power of God, almost, to make or mar reputations, topple governments, even harm innocent people (as in the case of the Delhi school teacher who turned out to be not guilty). All the more reason, then, to use your power as a media person with great responsibility and maturity. It can go to your head – like it does, in the case of dictators.

The bottom line is that the media's ethics are only as good (or bad) as the ethics of the person writing or airing a report. What happens in (or to) the media cannot be divorced from what happens to society's components in terms of individuals, and the values inculcated in them (through education, precept, values upheld by social leaders). Degeneration in one automatically and inevitably leads to degeneration in the other. ■

#### End notes

<sup>1</sup> According to latest reports, Murdoch, owner of *The News of the World*, is reported to have offered a hefty compensation of 3 million pounds (the largest ever such offer) to the family of Milly Dowler, the girl who was found murdered and whose mobile phone messages were accessed by the publication as part of its snooping for news.

<sup>2</sup> Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger of the US was also in the news recently, following revelations about his affair with a maid, but that does not come under the category of a 'sting operation' because he himself gave out information about his affair, it was not accessed through secret snooping.

<sup>3</sup> 'To Catch a Terrorist', by Petra Bartosiewicz, *Harper's Magazine*, August 2011 issue. The US government's informant posed as a wealthy Pakistani businessman, offered a huge loan for business, drew him into conversation about jihad, and charged him with being a terrorist, although in court the prosecutor conceded that there was "no evidence of connection to terrorism – but he had the ideology" (wrote poetry about jihad). The report adds that sting operations are now institutionalised as a permanent law enforcement priority by the US, post 9/11) and it is called "forward leaning preventative-prosecutions" (sic)

<sup>4</sup> Peter Singer, in 'Visible Man', *Harper's Magazine*, USA, August 2011 issue. As the author points out, WikiLeaks' exposure of diplomatic and other communications, was also "snooping" into secret comments, in an attempt to "fight back" against such pervasive snooping (or withholding of information that the public has a right to know).

<sup>5</sup> The ratings agency Moodys "made a fortune giving a high rating for Morgan Stanley as AAA when its own rating said it was "crap") See the documentary film, *Inside Job* ([www.insidejob.com](http://www.insidejob.com)). The movie also reveals that the financial sector, held responsible for the great recession now gripping the US and also the world economy thanks to global links, employed 3000 lobbyists who spent \$ 5 billion on campaigning and lobbying in the corridors of power – this kind of insider information is ethically public property, by right. And the media is the only source for accessing such details.

<sup>6</sup> Paranjyot Thakurta and Alice Seabright, 'Indian Murdochs Beware', in *Sunday Spotlight* (24.7.2011).

<sup>7</sup> *Agenda*, issue 22, 2011, Infochange, Centre for Communications and Development Studies, Pune.

<sup>8</sup> Since Twitter which exposed the details about the footballer's affair, is San Francisco-based, it is out of the jurisdiction of UK law. However, those in favour of revelations about private lives point out that league footballers are role models for thousands of youngsters, and so their conduct, on as well as off the playing fields, are of concern to the public.



# Learn from the mother of all parliaments



A.J. Philip

One of the finest moments in British parliamentary history was when Rupert Murdoch, who owns several newspapers in the country and was aspiring to take full control of Britain's cash-rich television network BskyB in which he already owned 31 per cent stake, was called by a parliamentary committee investigating a scandal linked to his company, News Corporation. He was accompanied by son and heir-apparent James Murdoch. Those who eagerly watched the event on television would have been impressed by the tough questions the MPs asked, much to the delight of their constituents in particular and the British public in general. While asking questions, they were not in the least bothered by the fact that the Murdochs were media moguls, whose empire included newspapers and television and radio channels reaching almost every nook and cranny of the world, including India, where they have large stakes in Star TV and Asianet, for instance.

Murdoch Senior described the experience as the most humbling in his life. It was indeed difficult to believe that it was the same newspaper baron who used to boast that it was his media power that enabled John Major to win the elections in 1992, after Iron Lady Margaret Thatcher faded out of British politics. The scandal also embarrassed Prime Minister David Cameron, on whom he is believed to have exercised undue influence. The issue at hand was one of the most shameful episodes in media history. A British teenaged school girl, Milly Dowler, was found missing and her body was recovered later. The *News of the World* (NOTW), which was, variously, nicknamed as 'Screw of the World' and 'World of the Screw' because of the sex scandals it specialised in, hacked her cell phone connection and, based on the data her mailbox contained, did a series of stories on the hapless girl.

Worse, the *News of the World* reporter even deleted old messages to accommodate new ones giving the family false hope that she was alive, as she was accessing her voicemail. By no stretch of the imagination could the newspaper justify the conduct of its staff, which bordered on the horrible. Earlier, it had employed the same technique to report on some 9/11 victims and celebrities like actor Hugh Grant. Rather than admitting guilt and apologising to the people offended by the unethical act, the Murdoch Empire sought to brazen it out by using money and political power. It was the same newspaper group which published the fake autobiography of Hitler knowing full well that it was fictitious, for the sake of sensationalism it offered. But when it was caught, Murdoch is reported to have asked, "What is journalism, if it is not entertainment?"

When painstaking reporting by *The Guardian* exposed the shenanigans of the *News of the World*, the Murdochs could not ignore it. The national outrage it caused had crossed all limits with demands that he be arrested. Initially, he was not ready to appear before the parliamentary committee. But with several of his senior staff in the *News of the World* under arrest and the possibility that a court might even summon him to appear before it, he thought discretion was the better part of valour. When all his contrived apologies did not make an impact, he was left with no option but to close the 168-year-old NOTW, which at one time was the world's largest

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newspaper. Even at the time of its closure, it had an average circulation of over two million, a sizeable figure in these days of depleting circulation.

However, while asking 200 employees of the paper to go home, Murdoch Senior was hesitant to take action against Rebekah Brooks, the combative editor, till

such an action became inevitable. She, too, was arrested by the police. All through, the top management claimed it had no clue about the goings-on in the paper. Murdoch has a reputation as a hands-on publisher and how could he and editor Brooks claim that they were not kept in the loop? When an English newsweekly, published

from the south, faced a defamation case in Guwahati, the chief editor submitted an affidavit in the court saying he had no say in the day-to-day affairs of the magazine and the Guwahati correspondent alone was responsible for the report published. After that, almost every newspaper started publishing the name of a humble editor in the

imprint line as the one responsible for selection of news under the relevant Act. In other words, such a person alone would go to jail and not the editor-in-chief.

Be that as it may, the British episode is of considerable relevance to the media in India. Readers may ask why is it so when there has not been a single case of any Indian newspaper choosing similar means to publish sensational stories. For the present, let us focus on how the British Parliamentary Committee had dealt with the situation. A somewhat similar incident happened in India. As is well-known, a reporter of *The Pioneer*, J. Gopikrishnan, scooped the story about the 2G Spectrum scam. His reports revealed that huge sums of money had changed hands when then Telecommunication Minister A. Raja allotted 2G Spectrum on first-come-first served basis without following any of the established procedures of the government. Later, the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) estimated that the country had suffered a notional loss of Rs 1,76,000 crore. One can certainly challenge the figure, but that is not the issue here.

When the controversy was at its peak and the government was hesitant to act against the culprits, two news journals published details of the secretly taped conversations PR professional Niira Radia had with politicians, captains of industry like Ratan Tata and media persons like Barkha Dutt of NDTV and *Hindustan Times* columnist and former editor Vir Sanghvi. The recording of the conversation was done by a government agency and was submitted to a court hearing the case. The tapes revealed that the corporate lobbyist had sought the journalists' help as a go-between to influence policy decisions at the Centre. When the UPA-2 government was formed, she did not want Dayanidhi Maran to become the Telecommunication

Minister. It can, of course, be argued that she was doing legitimate work as a lobbyist's work involved cultivating people who mattered.

All claims that the journalists concerned were "stringing" Radia for a story failed to convince anyone. Had they done a story on how the corporate bodies were trying to influence cabinet formation, a prerogative of the Prime Minister, by engaging Niira Radia of Vaishnavi Communications, then everybody would have believed them. Far from that, one of them wrote a whole column on the lines suggested by the lady in question. The 2G scam rocked Parliament so much that a whole Winter Session was washed out by it. The UPA government did everything possible to ward off a Joint Parliamentary Committee probe as demanded by the Opposition. This did not, however, deter the Public Accounts Committee, chaired by the BJP's Murli Manohar Joshi, from conducting its own probe. It should have summoned the two journalists to get their version of the Radia tapes that would have helped it to submit a more informed report.

But the PAC chickened out when it came to questioning them. Instead, it questioned Vinod Mehta, editor of *Outlook*, and Manu Joseph, editor of *Open*, which published the tapes. But when it came to Barkha Dutt and Vir Sanghvi, it merely sent some questions to them. It is not known whether they sent any answers to those questions.

Why were they not summoned by the PAC like Rupert Murdoch in the UK? Now, a Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC), headed by P.C. Chacko of the Congress, is looking into the entire gamut of the 2G scam but it, too, has not shown any courage to subject the two journalists to some probing questions.

Journalists often ask those accused of any charge to quit their offices till they are absolved of the

charges. Is that not applicable to journalists themselves?

It may be recalled that Jawaharlal Nehru as the then Prime Minister had little hesitation in clearing the proposal to arrest the proprietor of a leading newspaper, who was involved in a scandal. The so-called successors of Nehru do not have the courage even to summon a bureau chief-level journalist. The mother of parliaments may have indeed become very old but it is more active and assertive than its young Indian progeny. ■

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# Media in India needs to be more ethical, responsible



P.N. Vasanti

“We have standards, but there are slips. We believe in ethical journalism, but (it is) not always applicable to us. We are sorry, but we were not responsible.” This was the message left behind after the recent *News of the World* newspaper debacle led by the Murdochs – the owners of the second largest media company in the world. Robert Murdoch has been seen as an icon in media sector for creating a gigantic empire across media in popular entertainment and in news genre. His empire straddles boundaries, covering all the continents of the world. Numerous books and scholarly articles have been written on how Murdoch has been able to globalise the world through his various media armaments.

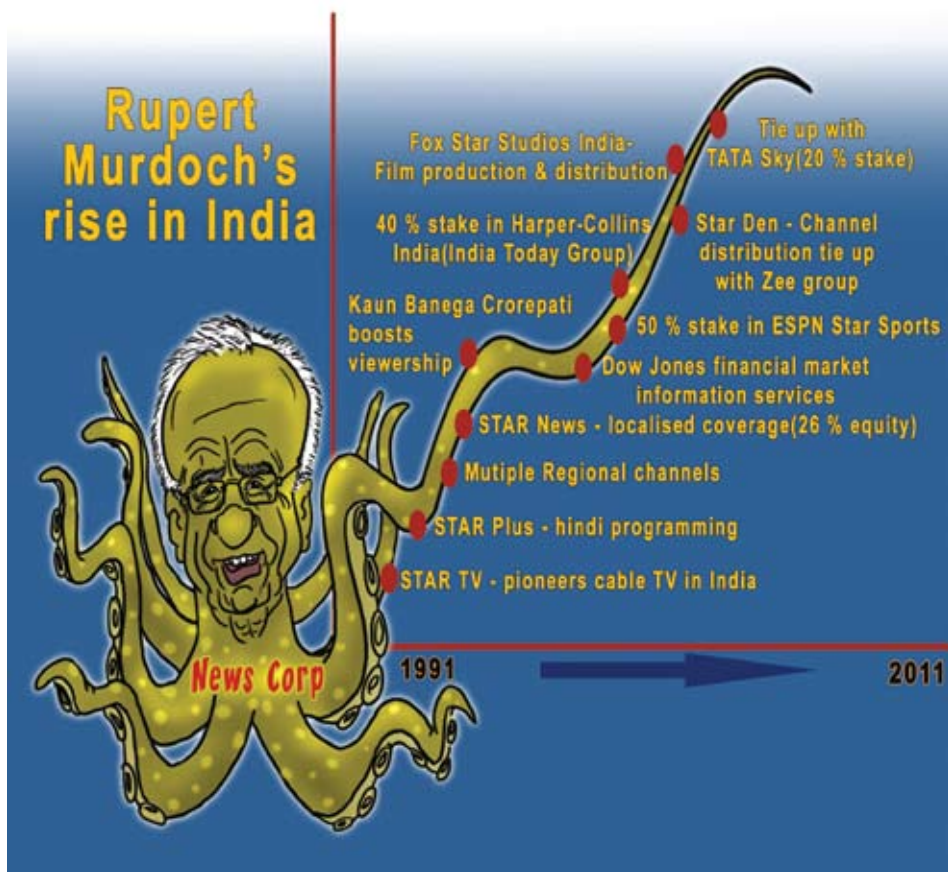
Worldwide, the Murdoch media conglomerate owns assets worth USD 66 billion (about Rs 3 lakh crore) and it has a significant presence in India, including in the television content and distribution segment, and in publishing, films and news businesses. In India, the group’s TV channels are mostly operated under the Star brand, while the Fox brand is used for films, Harper Collins for book publication, Sky for satellite TV distribution and Dow Jones for financial market information services.

News Corporation, the main parent organisation, owns Star India – a network of 32 channels in eight languages – and holds 26 per cent equity in the Hindi news channel, Star News. In the south, its presence is marked through Star Vijay and Asianet. The Star Group has also partnered the Tata Group for its direct-to-home (DTH) TV distribution operations. The Star India Group is one of the biggest (in terms of turnover) media conglomerates in the country. The Indian business has also been a key contributor to News Corporation’s global TV advertising revenues.

Rupert Murdoch is known for his business acumen and ability to read the writing on the wall. Leveraging the erratic foreign investment rules in India, Murdoch’s was one of the first transnational media corporations to enter India in 1991. He revolutionised the news and entertainment media in the early 1990s with his satellite television channels. Thereafter, he has been steadily expanding his empire.

Apart from its size, the distinguishing feature of News Corp is its aggressive posturing and strategy, which has earned for it revenues and helped engulf competition wherever it has ventured. The large number of legal experts and academic consultants of the company ensure that the right tone and message is conveyed to government and to peers. The Murdochs are well known for their political clout and legal might. Influential newspapers in the kitty are believed to be Rupert Murdoch’s source of political influence (News Corp reports only 13 per cent profits from publishing, including newspapers). Against the backdrop of such might, it came as a surprise when the media giant had to recently close

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New Delhi-based Centre for  
Media Studies and the  
CMS Academy*



down one of its popular British tabloids (*News of the World*) and its owners were publicly grilled for unethical practices.

The shock worldwide perhaps was more about the Goliath in the media firmament being brought down to its knees for what seemed to be a relatively routine practice of information gathering.

The *News of the World* was found to be illicitly hacking into the voicemail messages of prominent people to find stories. The tabloid, long known for its dubious undercover reporting techniques, had gravely offended the British public by hacking into the cell phone voicemail of a missing teenage girl, Milly Dowler, possibly even interfering with the police investigation into her murder.

What was an acceptable, even if illegal, tactic used to gather scoops on celebrities, politicians

or film stars suddenly became completely unacceptable when missing children, the relatives of soldiers slain in Afghanistan or the families of victims of London's 2005 terror attacks were targeted. The consequence was public outrage and formal inquiries into illegal and fraud practices of the newspaper and its owners.

While newspapers shutting down is not uncommon in the United States and even in Europe, the subsequent closure of the 168-year-old *New of the World*, popular for its tabloid style of journalism, was indeed a fiasco. In India, while it made headlines for few days, the episode was not something new or surprising as it was made out to be in Europe and in the United States.

We are much more immune to such unethical methods practiced by media professionals and organisations. And, of course, we

don't expect high ethical standards from corporations in India, let alone media corporate groups.

*News of the World* may have compromised on ethics but not on accuracy. In India, we are used to media compromising on ethics as well as on accuracy. Indeed, to cover up critical issues of ethics in media, practices such as paid news and private equity been institutionalised. Paid news is a phenomenon that involves paying newspapers and broadcasters for positive coverage or promotion disguised as news. Similarly, the scheme of private equities involves giving advertising space to corporate entities in exchange for equity shares. Clearly, the two practices are blatant violations of basic journalistic ethics. Sadly, they are rampant today.

There are many examples to show (specially on television news), of how accuracy has been compromised with no later corrections or apologies – be it the false rumours during the Mumbai terror attack, the false claims after the Y.S.R. Reddy helicopter accident and also during the Arushi murder case investigation in Noida, or the more recent supercilious news coverage of the anti-corruption agitation in Delhi. Rarely does the media practise what it preaches regarding accountability and transparency. In the current Indian media clutter, issues or basic regulations relating to minimum standards, social responsibility and best practices are still relatively novel.

Star India is perhaps a classic case of a media company following all possible policy requirements and mandatory disclosures. In fact, it may be one of the few media organisations in India to have taken a lead in the matter of having internal standards – both for practices and content (their product) – and also in the matter of adopting 'self regulatory' initiatives. However, the trouble Rupert Murdoch's media empire has brought upon

itself by crossing the line is a ringing warning for journalists and media organisations across the world and in India, too. Unlike in the West, the Murdochs are not the face of their companies in India, nor do they have a significant presence in the news segment. Their strategy to operate under multiple brands will help buffer its Indian businesses from any possible fallout of the crisis engulfing the group in the United Kingdom. It was public outrage that brought down a media giant in Britain. The profession of journalism has *News of the World* to thank, for launching a period

of intense global scrutiny of the media sector. Questions being asked, such as who regulates, owns, manages and creates content and to what ethical standards, are all a result of the fiasco.

In India, however, the media still enjoys unchallenged supremacy. So, it is not surprising that even today such critical questions are not taken seriously by policy makers or the media industry. Meanwhile, readers and viewers are finding alternate ways and means to talk back and protest against the medium. Increasingly, voices from civil society, the judiciary, elected representatives

and even schools and parents regarding the excess, exaggeration and ethics relating to Indian media are getting shriller. Popular culture (advertising, cinema, comedy shows and theatre, for instance) openly ridicule television news channels. The media coverage of the Mumbai terror attack provoked a strong backlash that was difficult to ignore. The Arushi murder case created a sense of antipathy towards TRP-driven news channels. Clearly, the lesson from the Murdoch saga calls for more ethical and responsible media – irrespective of size or might. ■

**NEWS CORPORATION** As of June 30, 2010  
News Corporation is a diversified global media company, which principally consists of the following:

**FILMED ENTERTAINMENT**

**UNITED STATES**  
Fox Filmed Entertainment  
Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporation  
Fox 2000 Pictures  
Fox Searchlight Pictures  
Fox Music  
Twentieth Century Fox Home Entertainment  
Twentieth Century Fox Licensing and Merchandising  
Blue Sky Studios  
Twentieth Century Fox Television  
Fox Television Studios  
Twentieth Television

**AUSTRALIA AND NEW ZEALAND**  
Premium Movie Partnership 20%

**TELEVISION**

**UNITED STATES**  
FOX Broadcasting Company  
MyNetworkTV  
FOXSports.com  
FOX Television Stations  
WNYW New York, NY  
WWOR New York, NY  
KTTV Los Angeles, CA  
KCOP Los Angeles, CA  
WFLD Chicago, IL  
WPWR Chicago, IL  
WTFX Philadelphia, PA  
KDFW Dallas, TX  
KDFI Dallas, TX  
WFXT Boston, MA  
WAGA Atlanta, GA  
WTTG Washington, DC  
WDCA Washington, DC  
WJBK Detroit, MI  
KRIV Houston, TX

KTXH Houston, TX  
KSAZ Phoenix, AZ  
KUTP Phoenix, AZ  
WTVT Tampa Bay, FL  
KMSP Minneapolis, MN  
WFTC Minneapolis, MN  
WRBW Orlando, FL  
WOFL Orlando, FL  
WUTB Baltimore, MD  
WHBQ Memphis, TN  
KTBC Austin, TX  
WOGX Gainesville, FL

**CABLE NETWORK PROGRAMMING**

**UNITED STATES**  
FOX News Channel  
FOX Business Network  
Fox Cable Networks  
FX  
Fox Movie Channel  
Fox Regional Sports Networks  
Fox Soccer Channel  
SPEED  
FUEL TV  
FSN  
Fox College Sports  
Big Ten Network 49%  
Fox Pan American Sports 33%  
National Geographic Channel 71%  
Nat Geo WILD 71%  
STATS 50%

**INTERNATIONAL**  
FOX International Channels  
FOX Europe, Africa, Asia and Latin America  
FOX LIFE Europe, Asia and Latin America  
FX Europe, Africa, Asia and Latin America  
FOX CRIME Europe and Asia  
FOX RETRO Europe and Africa  
FOX NEXT Europe  
FOX SPORTS Europe, Africa and Latin America

FOX MOVIES Asia and Middle East  
STAR MOVIES Asia  
STAR World Asia  
CHANNEL [V] Asia  
CULT Europe  
VOYAGE Europe  
BABY TV Europe, Asia and Latin America  
UTILISIMA Latin America  
SPEED Latin America  
TVN Asia  
AQUAVISION PRODUCTIONS Africa 51%  
NHNZ PRODUCTIONS Asia  
National Geographic International Channels 52%  
National Geographic Channel Europe, Africa, Asia and Latin America  
Nat Geo Wild Europe, Africa, Asia and Latin America  
Nat Geo Adventure Europe and Asia  
Nat Geo Music Europe, Africa and Asia  
.FOX Europe, Asia and Latin America

**LATIN AMERICA**  
LAPT 55%  
Movie City Pack  
Cinecanal  
The Film Zone  
Telecine 13%  
FOX Telecolombia 51%

**AUSTRALIA**  
Premier Media Group 50%

**ASIA**  
Hathway Cable and Datacom 17%  
STAR PLUS  
STAR ONE  
STAR CHINESE CHANNEL  
STAR WORLD  
STAR UTSAV  
VIJAY 81%  
Asianet 75%  
STAR DEN 50%  
XING KONG

**STAR CHINESE MOVIES**  
STAR MOVIES  
STAR GOLD  
Star News 26%  
CHANNEL [V]  
ESPN STAR SPORTS 50%  
PHOENIX SATELLITE TELEVISION 18%

**MIDDLE EAST & AFRICA**  
Rotana 1%

**DIRECT BROADCAST SATELLITE TELEVISION**

**EUROPE**  
Sky Italia  
Sky Sport  
Sky Calcio  
Sky Cinema  
Sky TG24  
Sky Uno  
British Sky Broadcasting 39%  
Sky Arts  
Sky News  
Sky Sports  
Sky Travel  
Sky 1  
Sky Movies  
Sky Deutschland 45%

**ASIA**  
TATA SKY 20%

**AUSTRALIA AND NEW ZEALAND**  
FOXTEL 25%  
Sky Network Television Limited 44%

**NEWSPAPERS AND INFORMATION SERVICES**

**UNITED STATES**  
The Wall Street Journal  
Dow Jones Newswires  
Factiva  
Barron's  
MarketWatch  
Dow Jones Client Solutions  
Dow Jones Local Media Group  
SmartMoney  
New York Post  
Community Newspaper Group

**EUROPE**  
The Times  
The Sunday Times  
The Sun  
News of the World  
The Wall Street Journal Europe  
eFinancialNews  
The Times Literary Supplement

**AUSTRALIA**  
Almost 150 national, metropolitan, suburban, regional and Sunday titles, including the following:  
The Australian  
The Weekend Australian  
The Daily Telegraph  
The Sunday Telegraph  
Herald Sun  
Sunday Herald Sun  
The Courier-Mail  
Sunday Mail (Brisbane)  
The Advertiser  
Sunday Mail (Adelaide)  
The Mercury  
mX  
Sunday Tasmanian  
The Sunday Times  
Northern Territory News  
Sunday Territorian

**ASIA**  
The Wall Street Journal Asia

**PAPUA NEW GUINEA**  
Post Courier 63%

**INTEGRATED MARKETING SERVICES**

**UNITED STATES AND CANADA**  
News America Marketing Group  
In-Store  
FSI (SmartSource Magazine)  
SmartSource iGroup  
News Marketing Canada

**BOOK PUBLISHING**

**UNITED STATES, CANADA, EUROPE, NEW ZEALAND AND AUSTRALIA**  
HarperCollins Publishers

**ASIA**  
HarperCollins India 40%

**OTHER**

**UNITED STATES**  
News Corp Digital Media Group  
MySpace  
IGN Entertainment  
Foz Audience Network  
AskMen  
Fox Mobile Group  
Hulu 32%

**EUROPE**  
NDS 49%  
News Outdoor Group 79%  
News Corporation Stations Europe  
Millipond.com

**AUSTRALIA AND NEW ZEALAND**  
National Rugby League 50%  
News Digital Media  
Realistate.com.au 58%

An overview of the Rupert Murdoch empire.

# How a media baron's 'audacious spirit' besmirched an industry's reputation

M.R. Dua

The phone-hacking revelations involving the *News of the World* shocked many across the world. For those in the media it was even more of a shock. In the United Kingdom, the media enjoys a great deal of freedom. But a lot of that freedom can be misused and, as the *News of the World* episode has shown, it can in one fell swoop bring disrepute to the media industry. An aggregation of impressions about the scandal...

If driven solely by the love of lucre..., media persons access the health and medical records, tax statements, bank accounts and voicemail messages of hi-fi politicians, sports celebrities, film stars, and scandalise these as juicy stories, should the law and order authorities, media regulators and, above all, the readers, viewers and listeners be silent, 'enjoy' the spicy stuff, and allow the media houses to escalate their bank balances? Well, that sentence is from a column by James Poniewozik in *TIME* Magazine, focusing on Rupert Murdoch after *The Guardian* broke the *News of the World* report on the world stage in the first week of July and followed it up with several comprehensive reports.

The *News of the World*, a Sunday tabloid owned by Rupert Murdoch's News Corporation, was at one time the largest selling English language newspaper in the world; circulation was fairly high even around the time of its sudden closure earlier this year. Allegations of phone tapping against the newspaper surfaced in 2006. Matters came to a head on July 4 this year when *The Guardian* published a story saying that a private investigator hired by *News of the World* had hacked into a British teenager's cell phone; the girl was later found murdered. Thirteen-year-old Milly Dowler had failed to return home from school on March 21, 2002. She was found murdered on April 13, 2002, around 6 pm in a county forest. In June this year, Levi Bellfield, a former nightclub bouncer with two previous murder convictions, was convicted of the murder. A serial killer, he was sentenced to life in prison. At the time of Dowler's disappearance, Bellfield lived close to where she was last seen, but he escaped police notice for years, according to a report in the *Wall Street Journal*.

Although News International, the company which also manages *The Times*, *The Sunday Times* and *The Sun*, apart from *News of the World*, had always maintained it had no knowledge of phone-hacking by anybody, *The Guardian* in a July 8 (2011) report stated that in January 2007, *News of the World* reporter Clive Goodman was indeed jailed for hacking into the mobile phones of the three royal staff. *The Guardian* story added:

*The writer is former professor and head of the Journalism Department, Indian Institute of Mass Communication, New Delhi. He put together this piece while on holiday in Lexington, Massachusetts, USA*

"A private investigator who had worked for News International group, Glen Mulcaire, was also jailed in January 2007. He admitted hacking into five targets, including the chief executive of the professional footballers association, Gordon Taylor. Among the phones he hacked were those of the Liberal Democrat MP Simon Hughes, public relations celebrity Max Clifford, model Elle MacPherson, and football agent Sky Andrew. The News Group denied all knowledge of the hacking, but Gordon Taylor last year sued them on the basis that they must have known about it. In documents initially submitted to the high court, News Group executives said the company had not involved in any way in Mulcaire's hacking of Taylor's phone. They denied keeping any recording or notes of intercepted messages... The Scotland Yard files included paperwork which revealed that, contrary to News Group's denial, Mulcaire had provided a recording of the messages on Taylor's phone to a *News of the World* journalist who had transcribed them and emailed them to a senior reporter, and that a *News of the World* executive had offered Mulcaire a substantial bonus for a story related to the intercepted messages."

Although the Murdoch empire straddles newspapers, television, film and book publishing, it's widely believed Rupert Murdoch's major interest lies in newspapers. But it has not been easy to take him on. *Newsweek*, in its July 18, 2011 two-page feature by human rights lawyer Geoffrey Robertson points out: "Kowtowing to Rupert Murdoch has been the political norm on the three continents, but most excruciatingly in Britain. His tabloids are believed to be delivering the working class vote more effectively than trade unions are. It has taken massive fit of moral outrage at the obscure action of the News Corp. contractors to bring Murdoch to some form of accountability."

Robertson goes on, "...everyone in the business knows how he routinely calls up his editors to gossip (which he loves) and to check that their expenditure on stories has given him value for his money... Rupert's avidity to hear scandals, before they are published never caused him to ask about their sources, or inquire about hundreds of thousands of dollar paid illegally for them."

A few days after *The Guardian* expose, *News of the World* closed down. Heir apparent James Murdoch, News Corporation's deputy chief operating officer, admitted "personal fault in handling the escalating phone-hacking scandal", according to the *Financial Times*. Said *The Economist*: "Not since the East India Company was finally brought to heel in the 19th century has political power over an influential private enterprise in Britain been so brutally enforced." In the process, several senior and junior editorial and managerial staff working for *News of the World* had to confront massive public outcry and derision. Former British Prime Minister Gordon Brown, whose son Fraser's medical record was broken into, charged the newspaper of using "freedom as a licence for abuse".

The scandal not only smeared the reputation of the Murdochs, it also led to the arrest of Rebekah (Wade) Brooks, editor of *News of the World*; Andy Coulson, director of communications; and Clive Goodman, reporter accused of hacking phones belonging to the British royal family. Meanwhile, the Murdochs took full-page space in many newspapers to apologise to the Dowler family. A letter signed by Rupert Murdoch saying 'We are sorry' appeared in several British newspapers on Saturday, July 15, 2011. "Our business was founded on the idea that a free and open press should be a positive force in society. We need to live up to this," it said. In a note to staff, the media baron said: "I have led this company for more than 50

years and have always imbued it with an audacious spirit. But I have never tolerated the kind of behaviour that has been described over these past few days."

Though the hearing of the Murdoch journalists' alleged wrongdoing is likely to continue for a long time, this is perhaps first time in the history of global media that any dishonourable editorial activity received such wide-spread world-wide coverage. Many media houses, for example, *The New York Times*, flew two senior special correspondents to London to provide extended reportage on the scandal. Many media persons did stories with some kind of glee, exult, and enthusiasm, while many scoop-hungry showed extremely repugnant, loath-some 'dog-bites-dog' attitude.

"Only a god of vengeance could conjure a crueller punishment than prison for Rupert Murdoch, who might be happier in stripes and behind bars, where he would not have to read newspapers and watch television everyday. Thus, he would be spared from seeing his humbled self, his jumped-up scion and his warrior wife vulture-packed by the press. With his reputation shredded beyond repair, his craven minions reduced to road kill and his victims lining up with ravenous lawyers seeking just compensation for his dastardly deeds, the News Corp wizards face a dark future of law suits and countersuits, rulings by Parliament, a criminal investigation... and worst of all global opprobrium." Those were the lines from Kitty Kelly, writing in the *Chicago Tribune* on July 27.

Said the *Chicago Sun-Times* editorial on July 20: "Murdoch needs to take responsibility, not talk about a hollow apology... there was no mea culpa, not even close...his media empire embraced pitifully low standards. He has poured most of his energy into news operations that make a mockery of quality journalism, outfits that under cut the notion of journalism as a public good."



Even a small town daily, the *Peoria Star-Journal* published from Peoria, Illinois, less than 200 miles from Chicago, had some remarkable advice to tender: “Murdoch, a man of great wealth and influence, now finds himself the hunted rather than the hunter, if not quite a target of the kind of disreputable journalism he has long been accused of practising. A journalist’s job is to find out things that not uncommonly, others don’t want them or anybody else to know. But there are lines, ethical boundaries. Being a reporter does not exempt one from responsibilities as human beings. Even if Murdoch & Co. weren’t alone, that doesn’t excuse it.... If what has been alleged is true, people who Murdoch forgot, that and he help establish that environment. In so doing they have potentially jeopardised the future work of free press, which while imperfect, is on balance far preferable to the alternative.”

The *Wall Street Journal*, a part of the Murdoch empire which has been for years challenging the *New York Times* in serious journalism, took quite a balanced stand on the scandal, and elaborately reported from London, occasionally stressing reasons for the Dowler-type stories. “It was kind of news event that fell squarely in the tabloid’s sweet spot,” the paper said. Quite hard-hitting was its 1300-word three-column editorial. “It’s also worth noting the irony of

so much moral outrage devoted to a single media company, when British tabloids have been known for decades for buying scoops and digging up dirt on the famous. Fleet Street in general has long had a well-earned global reputation for blind-quote, single-sourced stories that may or may not be true. The understandable outrage in this case stems from the hacking of a non-celebrity, the murder victim Milly Dowler... The British politicians now bemoaning media influence on politics are the same statesmen who have long coveted media support. The idea that the BBC and *The Guardian* newspaper aren’t attempting to influence public affairs, and can’t stand a day’s scrutiny. The overnight turn toward righteous independence recalls an eternal truth: Never trust a politician...In braying for politicians to take down Mr Murdoch and News Corp., our media colleagues might also stop to ask about possible precedents. The political mob has been quick to call for a criminal probe...”

Noted journalist Carl Bernstein, writing for *Newsweek*, saw Murdoch as a victim of the culture he had created. He wrote that Murdoch had established “in his tabloid newsrooms a reckless disregard for the essential elements of good journalism: fairness, concern for context, and a commitment to the best obtainable version of the truth.” Bernstein praises Nick Davies of *The Guardian* who

“doggedly pursued the story for five long years, along decisive help from *The New York Times* in 2010. Thus, old-fashioned hard work has exposed how deep the corruption ran with the Murdoch enterprise.”

In a cover page story, *Time Magazine* came up with this one: “Rupert Murdoch sacrificed the UK’s biggest Sunday paper to protect something more precious—his influence. The affairs has left Britain wrestling with a crisis of faith so profound that it may prove to be the nation’s Watergate – but with the media as the bad guy. Four out of five Britons no longer trust the press. The scandal has also undermined their confidence in the police. Nor is the public inclined to listen to politicians.”

The *Columbia Journalism Review* executive editor, Mike Hoyt, sees a moral in the entire saga. “One lesson of the great scandal unfolding in Britain is that newspapers can choose to use their power for bread and circuses, like the *News of the World*, and to accumulate more and more power. That works, until it doesn’t. Or they use their power for public service—to explain, to encourage and shape honest debate, and best of all, to expose the abuse of power of any kind, even of other news outlets. In the end, the public will appreciate that, and perhaps repay the kindness with loyalty.” ■

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# Ethical underpinning of journalism has weakened: Hamid Ansari

Speaking at the Bhashayi Patrakarita Mahotsav 2011 (Prabhash Prasang) organised by the Indore Press Club in July, on the occasion of distinguished journalist-editor (late) Prabash Joshi's 75th birth anniversary, India's Vice President M. Hamid Ansari made some pertinent points, which those in the journalism profession simply cannot afford to ignore. Here are excerpts:

Friends, we have been witness in recent years to rapid, and unprecedented, changes in our society, economy and polity. These have also transformed the Indian mass media system. The growth in its scale, reach and influence, however, has not been matched by corresponding sensitivity towards non-commercial and non-market dimensions. This aspect is of relevance because the media is the fourth estate in a democracy. It plays a major role in informing the public and thereby shapes perceptions and through it the national agenda. Its centrality is enhanced manifold by increased literacy levels and by the technological revolution of the last two decades and its impact on the generation, processing, dissemination and consumption of news.

The necessity for media to function effectively as the

watchdog of public interest was recognised in the freedom struggle. The founding fathers of the republic realised the need to balance the freedom of expression of the press with a sense of responsibility while such freedom is exercised. Adherence to accepted norms of journalistic ethics and maintenance of high standards of professional conduct was deemed to be a natural corollary.

Gandhiji, a journalist himself, cautioned that "an uncontrolled pen serves but to destroy". Jawaharlal Nehru warned that: "If there is no responsibility and no obligation attached to it, freedom gradually withers away. This is true of a nation's freedom and it applies as much to the Press as to any other group, organisation or individual." It is no exaggeration to say that media represents the sector of the economy that is the envy of others because of the extremely buoyant growth rates witnessed over the last two decades, in an environment characterised by minimal or no regulation. The sole statutory, quasi-judicial body set up for media regulation in the country is the Press Council of India. While it aims to preserve the freedom of the press and maintain and improve the standards of press in India, it has no way of imposing punishments or enforcing its directions for professional or ethical violations.

In the absence of any other government regulator, the focus has shifted to self-regulation by the

media organisations, individually or collectively. Collective self-regulation has failed because it is neither universal nor enforceable. Individual self-regulation has also failed due to personal predilection and the prevailing of personal interest over public interest. It is relevant to note that, to an extent, the most effective de facto media regulator happens to be the advertisers and sponsors who determine the bulk of the revenue stream of our media industry. Their aims and desired outcomes, however, might not align with public policy goals of the government or markers of public interests and may, instead, stand in opposition to them. The common citizen, who is a consumer of media products, is thus faced with a piquant situation.

As we debate the issue of media regulation, the following aspects need closer scrutiny: First, the objective of regulation in democratic societies such as USA, France and others is to enhance diversity, competition and localism among media outlets and to promote public interest with a focus on upholding constitutional values, protecting minors and limiting advertising. Intrusive content regulation is minimised because those who are aggrieved can resort to legal means in the knowledge that the justice delivery system will address their grievances in a reasonable time period. Unfortunately, the same cannot

be said about our justice delivery system. The time taken to settle court cases deters individual citizens, and even corporate entities, from seeking legal options and forcing the search for alternate tools of administrative justice and facilitation for grievance redressal.

Second, we have not had an informed debate in the country on the issue of multiple-ownership and cross-ownership nor a cogent national media policy that covers print, radio, television, cable, DTH platforms, video and film industry, internet and mobile telephony. In most developed countries, rules on cross-ownership and multiple-ownership are intended to prevent emergence of monopolies and cartels and promote competition. Many states in India have a few media groups dominating both the print and electronic media. At the national level, we have seen the emergence of a handful of media conglomerates spanning the entire media spectrum. Its impact on moulding public opinion, generating political debate and safeguarding consumer and public interest is a moot question.

Third, India is among the few democracies without active media watch groups engaged in objective analyses of the media, discerning prejudices and latent biases, and subjecting the media to a dose of their own medicine. For an industry that has over fifty thousand newspapers and hundreds of television channels, systematic media criticism is non-existent. What this means is that in the absence of government and industry regulation, even civil society has been unable to provide an effective de facto media regulatory mechanism.

Fourth, no discussion of media regulation can ignore the recent controversy over 'paid news'. The last speech of the late Prabhaskar Joshi dwelt on this at some length. We need to introspect whether the strategy of relying on

advertisement rather than subscription as the main revenue source for media outlets has created a difficult set of ethical problems for the media industry as a whole. Once content ceased to be the revenue driver for a media outlet, the effort to leverage it as a direct revenue source began. The inability of the industry and the Press Council to go public with its report on paid news is also another pointer to the problems of self regulation and the 'culture of silence' in the entire industry when it comes to self-criticism.

Fifth, the structural biases of the development process have favoured urban areas over rural ones, metropolitan areas over other urban areas, English-speaking over those speaking other Indian languages, the middle and upper classes over the others who constitute the vast majority of our citizens, and the service sectors over other areas such as agriculture.

These biases have prompted the media industry to resort to 'sunshine journalism' where the focus is on the glass that is quarter-full rather than that which is three-quarters empty. When media portrayal is of a life that is always good, optimistic, going with the tide of those with discretionary spending power and their causes and pet themes, the role of the media as a defender and upholder of public interest relegates to the background and its commercial persona takes over, replete with its allegiances to the market and the shareholders.

Sixth, no discussion of media regulation can ignore the slow erosion of the institution of the editor in Indian media organisations. When media space is treated as real estate or as airline seats for purpose of revenue maximisation strategies, and when media products are sold as jeans or soaps for marketing purposes, editors end up giving way to marketing departments.

One might ask, if the situation is so stark, what can be the way forward?

A good starting point would be for all stakeholders of the media industry to realise that the ethical underpinning of professional journalism in the country has weakened and that the corrosion of public life in our country has impacted journalism. It is for the journalistic community to take the initiative and seek to address the various concerns regarding the profession. At the same time, all categories of regulation or binding guidelines must be strengthened with a view to securing and defending public good – by the government, the media organisations and the industry, civil society, advertisers and sponsors, and the audience and readership of the media.

We should not forget that vibrant journalism in a democracy is watchdog journalism that monitors the exercise of power in the state, stands for the rights and freedoms of citizens, and informs and empowers citizens rather than entertains and titillates them. Vibrant journalism always springs from the bedrock of professional ethics. Our media, and democracy, are fortunate that we have shining examples of journalists who not only embody the ethical dimension, but sadly, also laid down their life for the same.

Allow me to recall in conclusion a remark of the eminent American journalist of yesteryear, Walter Lippmann. The real danger to the press, he said, springs not so much from the pressures and intimidation to which it may be subject but from the sad fact that media persons can be captured and captivated by the company they keep, their constant exposure to the subtleties of power. ■

*(Courtesy: Journalism Online and <http://vicepresidentofindia.nic.in/sp150711.htm>)*

# Development journalism in the age of the big spender



Pamela Philipose

Mainstream media in India has been transformed in at least four significant ways. First, there has been a deliberate narrowing of focus. The media, which had earlier spoken for the country as a whole, has more or less seceded from Bharat. Today, it largely talks about, talks for, and talks to the 250-odd million who are presumed to be potential consumers in the market; it has almost come to represent the interests of the men and women who control the market.

In a *Businessweek* article, *Next Big Spenders: India's Middle Class*, writers Diana Farrell and Eric Beinhocker were enthusiastic observers of the process: "As the seismic wave of income growth rolls across Indian society, the character of consumption will change dramatically over the next 20 years. A huge shift is underway from spending on necessities such as food and clothing to choice-based spending on categories such as household appliances and restaurants. Households that can afford discretionary consumption will grow from 8 million today to 94 million by 2025." The article was written in May 2007 and global recession had not yet then dealt the world its cruel reality check but nevertheless it is on the "next big spenders" that the mainstream media in India effectively focuses on.

Related to this is the second phenomenon: the erasure of the distinction between reader/viewer, on the one hand, and consumer, on the other. The pressure to retain readership/viewership and attain higher profit levels has led to a conscious blending of news with entertainment as a strategy to gain higher readership/viewership ratings. A major study conducted by the Project for Excellence in Journalism, which examined the US mass media over a span of 25 years, has carefully plotted the distinct shift towards lifestyle, celebrity, entertainment and, of course, celebrity crime/scandal in the news. It is the fear of falling Television Rating Points (TRPs) and National Readership Survey positions, that drive staged television exchanges, manufactured 'breaking news' and pumped-up headlines.

The battle against tedium has impacted content decisively: it means "less was better"; "the more sensational, the better"; "the more simplified, the better"; "the most visually pleasing, the better"; and "the more dramatic, the better". We saw how this panned out in the 24x7 coverage of Anna Hazare's fast against corruption. Many important developments had taken place in the country during the interregnum, including calamitous ones such as the landslides in Himachal Pradesh and floods in central Bihar, but the TRPs-driven, wall-to-wall coverage devoted to the Anna phenomenon meant that the news camera eye, by and large, remained trained on one stage at Delhi's Ramlila Maidan almost non-stop for 12 days. There is a third transformation that also needs to be noted: the conspicuous shortening of the time between events as they play out, and their reporting. This makes the process of chasing and generating news in almost real time very exciting indeed, but it also means that almost no event is digested or understood in its entirety before it is replaced by another. Life-changing developments can be presented within hours of their occurrence and just as quickly passed over.

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*Earlier, she was senior associate editor with The Indian Express. She has been awarded the Chameli Devi Jain Award for Outstanding Woman Journalist and the Zee-Asthiva Award for her journalism*



All the three trends are accentuated by a fourth, very decisive, transformation: the rise of new media and social networking, which in turn has impacted mainstream media which have Web sites of their own. One needs here to acknowledge the positives of the new media. It has the potential, for instance, of being more participative and participatory; it is certainly more immediate and it gives power to ordinary people to involve themselves in the discussions of the day – or the moment. At the same time, it does not have the rigour and accountability of ‘old journalism’, where sub-editors and editors hone and enhance the credibility of the material put out for public consumption. New media is also far more partisan and encourages instant, prejudiced

and even polarising responses. The ‘news balance’ of an earlier age, the careful separation between news and opinion, the norm of presenting both sides of the story, now appears anachronistic, even unnecessary.

One of the major reasons for the media consciously sloughing off its broader social and political perspectives, valorising individual success and prioritising the interests of the top two quintiles of Indian society, was economic liberalisation that came in during the early 1990s. Its impact affected every institution, not just the media – the very centre of parliamentary democracy got transformed. P. Sainath, in a *Hindu* article, quoted statistics put out by National Election Watch on the general election of 2009. The combined assets of the 543 MPs

in the 15th Lok Sabha are worth close to 28 billion, with 64 Union Cabinet members from the Lok Sabha accounting for Rs 5 billion. There should be no surprise then that there is large-scale collusion between the ruling elite, captains of industry and media barons/editors at a scale unprecedented in the history of the country, and the rise of egregious practices like ‘paid news’.

Post-liberalisation India redefined ‘development journalism’. Let’s see how this was done in a story that dominated the headlines for over two decades and which paralleled, in its time frame, the emergence and early evolution of economic liberalisation in this country: the Sardar Sarovar Project (SSP).

The SSP saw anywhere between 40,827 (a figure acknowledged by the Supreme Court in 2000) to 100,000 families displaced. Since each family means at least five people, the number of actual those ousted could be actually in the region of 200,000 to 500,000 people. The critical dislocation of such a huge number of people was invariably presented by mainstream media as a simple consequence of ‘development’, and the project in turn was constructed as an imperative for the ‘good’ of the nation and highly desirable in the ‘national interest’. But the question as to what constitutes ‘national interest’ and the ‘public good’ was never raised, or indeed who constituted the ‘public’ and who benefited from the ‘good’. The essential cost benefit assessment that takes into consideration not just direct economic costs but the social costs of the project, the exploration of the least-displacing alternatives, putting in place an oversight regime to ensure that over-acquisition of land did not happen or that the declared use of the land was not changed, just did not mark the preparations for, and execution of, the project. A Supreme Court judgment on

Sardar Sarovar expressed the hope that “a properly drafted R&R (rehabilitation and resettlement) plan would improve living standards of displaced persons. For example, the residents of villages near the Bhakra Nangal Dam, Nagarjun Sagar Dam, Tehri, Bhilai Steel Plant.... are better off than people living in villages in whose vicinity no development project came in”. The media largely took this as having been translated into reality. There was hardly any attempt to record the price that the project-affected people had paid and whether the ‘rehabilitation measures’ for them were indeed satisfactory. What little came to the displaced communities by way of rehabilitation happened not because of media coverage but because of the vigilance and activism of the Narmada Bachao Andolan (NBA) and allied groups.

In fact, mainstream media went the extra mile to vilify the NBA, and its leader, Medha Patkar, even portraying her as anti-national.

Looking back at the SSP coverage, you can see the way the big media interests of the day made invisible the whole issue of displacement – defined by the UN as the “removal of individuals, families or communities from their homes, land or neighbourhoods, against their will, directly or indirectly attributable to the state” – and underplayed the life-threatening vulnerabilities of innumerable voiceless people. In the process, development journalism became more about roads, dams, shiny airport terminals and a model of ‘growth’ that no longer pretends to be inclusive.

Today, when the well-being of an increasing number of people is being threatened directly and

indirectly, by reversals of all kinds, ranging from the food and environmental crises to a global recession, it is time perhaps to return to an earlier, more people-centric definition of developmental journalism. We need more than ever media practitioners who travel beyond the confines of privileged enclaves, leaving behind the ‘big spenders’ of metropolitan India, to tell their stories. We need media practitioners who have the knowledge, capacity and technological ability to communicate on the real issues of our times and speak truth to power in compelling ways. That, ultimately, is what development journalism is about. ■

## All you need to know about the printing industry.....



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# Media is a perpetrator of crass commercialisation



Pallavi Barua

**H**ome loan, car loan, education loan, health loan, travel loan... a whole life dependent on loans? Well, 20 years after liberalisation, this is where the great Indian middle class finds itself. Typically, a modest Hindu family would be ensnared in debt - one owing to *janma* (birth), the second to *vivaha* (marriage), and the third to *mrityu* (death). All thanks to the cunning strategy of the priest and the ruler to engage the working class in economic bondage.

The 20th century saw the springing up of major cities in India and as the 21st century opens out, the towns and cities are growing larger. The upwardly mobile life-styles of the urban rich have only added a new dimension to the debt basket.

In the ongoing campaign against corruption, people have come out on the streets with innovative and catchy slogans on banners. One of them read: 'The origin of Ganga is Gangotri. The origin of Corruption is Parliament.' Do we ever ponder about where lies the origin of corruption for the average family in India? It lies in marriage. Not in the institution of marriage as such, but in the elaborate processes associated with it.

A householder's savings, energy and resources are all drained into an event called marriage. In the name of 'customs and rituals', the yellow metal, gold, plays an indispensable role in marriage. The demand for gold in many regions in India is shamelessly high. Some communities in the hills of the north-east may live under an illusion that their society is free from such customs, but beads as jewellery are worn by women on festival days. Today, women who can afford would rather not settle for anything less than diamond and platinum.

The 3G (Gold, Guests and Gifts) make or break a marriage in India. The more of each, the better. Less means shame, you are a loser. So, you have to compete with your neighbour or relative. Gone are the days of simple meals common in most marriages; present times demand sumptuous dinners.

Sometimes, it's almost a food fair. Black marketing of LPG cylinders is a common sight during peak marriage seasons. No one complains. After all, marriage is no longer a private affair.

It is important to note that media has been the medium to bring about change in our life-styles in the past 10 or 15 years. Be it visual or print, whatever commercial mass media decides becomes the 'in thing', the fashion statement of the public. Mass media then, a perpetrator of crass commercialisation, dons the watchdog's role when it comes to corruption in the wake of crony capitalism.

From dressing, eating and drinking, to kissing and item dancing, it is the media which dictates to the masses. The message percolates through TV shows, films, magazines, glitzy tabloids, newspapers and glossy supplements, the Internet, the mobile phone... and we are still counting. Forget mega cities such as Delhi, Mumbai and Bangalore, the Cobra brand of beer launched in London finds its way to smaller cities - Mysore, Guwahati, Shillong - and towns - Amravati, Jorhat and Khonoma - in a few days or weeks. A Bollywood movie has a worldwide release

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**THESE ANTI-CORRUPTION MARCHES ARE GREAT, OFFICER, BUT *SAHEM* COULD YOU PLEASE CLEAR THE AREA? OUR *BARAAT* IS ABOUT TO BEGIN.**

and with it comes a new set of life-style choices.

The media thus creates an urge, a demand, among the masses. Corporate groups use visual and the Page 3 brand of journalism to create demand among the working class, and a voracious middle class is created. Today, even a village girl thinks twice before stepping out of her home without dabbing lipstick. An entire generation has been made to feel inadequate. Youngsters feel the urge to flaunt

a Blackberry in public. To add to that, we now have 'corporatisation' of education, education fairs being an example. Not to forget the great Indian wedding, promoted at regular intervals by the media. Anyone criticising such obnoxious display at the initiation to conjugal love is labeled 'cynical'.

There is a silencing of voices; akin to the 'spiral of silence' that finds mention in mass communication theory. The middle class is caught in a *chakravyuh* (vicious cycle). It

listens to the media, but not to its conscience. So, you know what a conscience vote in Parliament means. How many Indian families would be willing to settle for a small marriage celebration or ceremony, bereft of the gold and grandeur you witness today? Getting the Jan Lokpal Bill voted for in Parliament will probably prove equally difficult. ■



# The Anna Hazare show – manipulating an event to earn TRPs?



Ranjona Banerji

Sometimes watching Indian television news is like entering a parallel universe, one where everything is black and white and the ruling deity is George W. Bush with his immortal ‘with us or against us’ hymn to patriotism. Or it seemed a bit like that during the coverage of the anti-corruption movement led by Anna Hazare. When Hazare began his movement to get his approved version of the Lokpal Bill passed in April this year, there were already signs that this was becoming an emotive issue with public support. But after the fiasco with Baba Ramdev’s attempt to crash the party, it is possible that the government had hoped that Hazare’s promised resumption of his demands just after Independence Day would be diluted. Instead, the movement spread and grew as the whole country got involved. Or did it?

If you watched only TV news and did not venture out of your house or read a newspaper, you will be forgiven for thinking this. If however, on the off chance that you have to make a living or just live your life, you would have been aware that Anna Hazare and his anti-corruption movement was not as all-consuming as television made it out to be.

There were, sadly, a number of transgressions here. The first was an exaggeration of the support and a corresponding inability to put events in perspective. Yes, there was tremendous public rage against corruption in India and the rage went from the highest to the lowest levels. It could well be said that the revelations of the loss to the national exchequer in the 2G spectrum bandwidth allocation, coupled with the controversies over the Commonwealth Games, enflamed the public. There was also empowerment from the fact that ministers, powerful politicians and businessmen were put in jail. Given the extent of corruption at the higher level, every Rs 100 bribe to a traffic policeman started to become unbearable. It was this public anger which the Anna Hazare movement capitalised on and which the government completely misread.

But the extent to which the television media swallowed the Hazare line was equally galling – and if it was not innocent, then it was mischievous and manipulative. For instance, the greatest crowd which gathered at the Ramlila Maidan stood at about one lakh. This is not, by any stretch of the imagination, a game-changing number. There was no cause, therefore, for the media to behave as if the whole of India had taken to the streets.

The second failure was the reluctance to delve into the provisions of the Jan Lokpal Bill – put together by what was given the catchy moniker of ‘Team Anna’. Television bolstered the viewpoint of Team Anna that the Jan Lokpal Bill would solve all our corruption problems and that the government was trying to fool the public with its watered down version. However, the details of both bills were left suitably vague. The idea was to project Team Anna as the saviours of modern India and the government as an evil power out to destroy India.

Then came the third manipulation and this was in a sentimental sense, the most absurd of all: comparing the anti-corruption movement with

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India's freedom movement. There seemed to be no doubt in the minds of either the media or of Team Anna that Anna Hazare was a latter-day Mahatma Gandhi. No disclaimers were permitted at all. Hazare was a self-proclaimed 'Gandhian. This put him on the same level as M.K. Gandhi. He also wore a Gandhi cap which soon became a fashion accessory and what more is required to make a folk hero in the days of media frenzy than a convenient symbol. So what was once a prison cap in South Africa now became an Anna cap and soon these sought-after-items were in great demand and short supply.

By then, we were two weeks into the movement. Newspapers had begun to raise uncomfortable questions. Aruna Roy and the NCPRI (National Campaign for People's Right to Information) came into focus with another version of the Lokpal Bill and a number of objections to the Jan Lokpal Bill. Also the intransigence of Team Anna and its insistence that every demand be met, no matter how unreasonable, was beginning to grate. Even the excitable TV bosses had to acknowledge that other points of view may not be pleasant but they could not be permanently ignored.

The concern had also now become one of Anna Hazare's health as second-by-second bulletins were issued on television. It must be pointed out that no other news happened in the two weeks, anywhere in the world. It was only India's anti-corruption movement. And this is where the 'patriotism' of our TV channels went into glory mode. If you were against Anna, you were not only a traitor but you were callous and heartless in your lack of concern for an old man's condition. It may be true, our anchors bleated – Times Now and Headlines Today are by far our most patriotic channels – that there are other points of view but surely now, the government and the naysayers should back



down? It was here that Team Anna did itself in because it appeared to be least concerned about Hazare's health by having a few last-minute tantrums based on minutiae. When you ride a tiger you have to be aware of the risk of the tiger biting you – and an angry media can be a vengeful media.

After the heat and dust had settled, the country realised that the Jan Lokpal Bill had its problems and corruption was not going to vanish quite so easily. Also, the news cycle played its own role as other issues came up. Many commentators pointed out that had TV not covered this movement so relentlessly, it would have died out in the first few days. There can be no doubt that a dangerous game was played here, where an event was manipulated to make it appear larger than it was, in order to boost ratings. It was perhaps a combination of luck and circumstance that

good sense – and the sceptics – managed to make a last-minute dent in the madness. When a media loses objectivity, scepticism and professionalism in an attempt to ride a populist wave, you run the risk of having a population unable to think for itself being pushed in a certain direction. The next time it happens, we have to be better prepared. ■

# It's a jungle out there – where might is often right



Suvabrata Ganguly

*The writer, based in Kolkata, is the editor of Core Sector Communiqué, a monthly that provides a micro view of the Indian economy. He also contributes to top English and Bengali dailies*

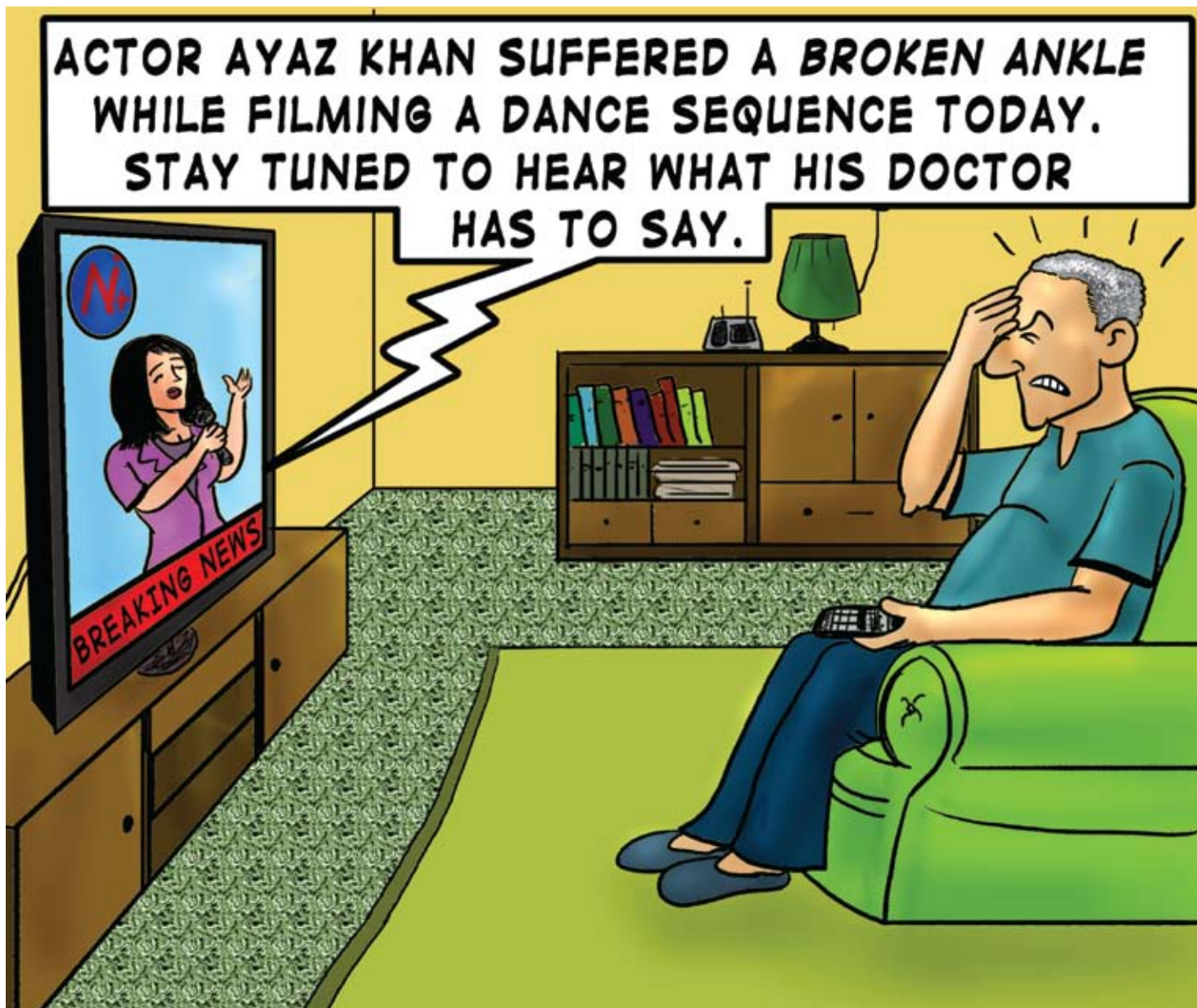
As raw reporters learning the ropes, we were exposed to an exercise. We were asked to turn our back to the television set while the news was being read out. The idea was simple, the teacher had explained, “If you can understand by just listening, then it is radio, not television.” The underlying message conveyed was that on television, both the audio and visual parts are of equal importance and any tilt towards one breaks the fine balance and begins to jar on the nerves. That is why ‘footage’ and ‘byte’ are the two canons of television journalism.

As reporters belonging to the print media of another age, we had it fairly easy. We could pass off our ‘educated’ opinion by quoting ‘sources close to the establishment’, or by referring to ‘experts in the know’, or even to people who enlightened us on ‘conditions of anonymity’. On television, you not only have to show someone talking, you also have to ensure that what is said by your source is in sync with the story.

This, too, was manageable. In the early days, the lure to be on television was enough to get people to talk. Yes, of course, they did not quite often say the things we wanted them to, but that was often overcome by framing the right questions and, when all else failed, by clever editing. Then television channels proliferated faster than rabbits, and almost overnight, everyone was running after the same sound bytes. In the process emerged a class of media-savvy people who were ever ready to beam on screen – ever willing to say exactly what you wanted them to. The first quid pro quo was thus established.

As competition got fiercer and as the battle for TRPs raged, it seemed that the consumers never had it so good. Now, the latter started demanding more – aware of the fact that they could make or break the mighty channels by a mere flick of the remote. Gratification had to be instantaneous – and Breaking News became the order of the day. The passion to stay ahead of competition at any cost became an obsession. And as obsessions go, the limits had to be stretched and even broken, when the situation so demanded.

Mind you, television journalists are no longer scared of traditional media. But they now have to contend with social media, which in effect includes anyone or everyone. Most people with mobile phones have inbuilt cameras and footage can be beamed even before the outdoor broadcast vans arrive. Naturally, the biggest casualty has been content – the quality of a story being reported. In the mad haste to be the first to go on air, reporters seldom have the time to either verify facts or bother about the nuances of right wordings. This has led to an overall degeneration of reporting standards. When ethics



can conveniently be sacrificed at the altar of popularity, seldom does one think before shooting from the hip. For, it is a jungle out there and it is a case of the fittest one surviving to tell the tale. No wonder we have so many sting operations, and so many infringements into private space.

Take the classic case of the Baba Ramdev fiasco at Ramlila Maidan in Delhi. The underlying issue

was that of corruption and ways of tackling it. But surprisingly, the morning following the police action, the so-called 'pertinent' issues went largely to the background as the mainline media focused more on the Baba's disguised escape and on apple-munching pretty young things who were supposedly on a hunger strike to support the Baba's cause. But why blame the media alone?

We are a nation obsessed with three Cs – Corruption, Cricket and Celebrities. We are choosy though – we are not bothered about the supply side of corruption, choosing to regale at only the demand-side stories. Thus, people paying bribes – belonging largely to the corporate sector that keeps the wheels of corruption in motion – do not make good stories, people taking them do. It would

seem strange that the most vocal proponents against corruption are traders from the cow belt, many of them representing a political party that has been squarely accused of maintaining the status quo.

The same can be said of cricket and celebrity-related stories. The media just loves to over-hype, seeking to bask in the reflected glory of men and women in tinsel designer wear. Unknown starlets and obnoxious cricketers routinely get more space in the media, than people who are actually making a difference to the Incredible India saga. Here, too, the media tends to shirk its responsibility by stating that it is giving the audience what it wants. And that it runs the risk of falling by the wayside if it does not provide the dollops demanded.

So, in this game of hot pursuit, we often cross the boundaries of decency and ethics, stepping into the private space of celebrities who we wish to glorify or castigate. Our

apology is typically masochistic and we yell in unison – those who occupy public space cannot opt for a veil of privacy. Not forgetting to point out that most of what appears in the media, warts and all, is but a part of an elaborate PR trip, the efforts aimed at increasing the visibility of the protagonist by spin doctors who believe that it is more important for their clients to attract eyeballs, reasons be damned.

Trivia, albeit gleamed and garnished, however, cannot pass muster as the staple part and it is high time we raised our standards bar. Sure, the remote-wielding consumer has a voyeuristic streak that we have to pander to, sure we have competition to contend with, sure in a nation where values are a mere measure, it is a bit out of place to talk about old-time ethics, yet the onus is squarely on us to set our own standards and stick to them. In dynamic times such as these, there cannot be any didactic

ombudsman telling us what to do; rather, the urge should come from within to tell us thence and no forth. Let me end by recounting a story I had heard a long time ago. The greatest comedian on earth was celebrating his birthday. While the who's who gathered waited downstairs, he made his grand entrance at the top of the massive winding stairs that led down to the assembly hall. As the crowd broke out in simultaneous applause, he took a few steps, only to stumble and fall. Assuming it to be a part of his act, the people started laughing. As the comedian continued to roll down, the crowd went hysterical... and the shrieks of laughter almost reached a crescendo when he slumped at the bottom of the stairs, toppled over and died.

What's the moral of the story? Well, half of any art is in knowing when to stop. As journalists, we are no different. We have to learn in our own way when to stop. ■

## The killer projects of northeast India

Here is an interesting email the Press Institute of India received from Ngurang Simon, Itanagar, with a subtle message for the media:

Power projects will not change the economic face of the northeast. They will, however, change the region's environmental face, in a destructive way. The biosphere of Arunachal Pradesh and Assam will be destroyed forever because of the corporate greed of India. The recent earthquake in Sikkim showed how dams have brought untold suffering and destruction. In one project, many labourers and engineers were killed by the collapse of the dam. Had the Indian news media reported it properly, the world would have known how politics and company greed has destroyed the ecology of northeast region.

We the people should decide what type of development we want. If solar energy can bring about so much of development in many villages and towns in different parts of the world, why can't experts be brought to set up solar panels to generate power? If wind energy has brought so much prosperity to small European countries like Netherlands, Holland and Denmark, why can't we bring in experts from those countries to help the state governments here set up windmills for power generation?

The reason is lack of goodwill and true concern for the people of the northeast. Even if hundreds of villages are washed away, and lakhs of people die, politics will only bow down to corporate interest. The cries of the poor do not reach the commercial mass media based in metro cities nor does it affect our so-called leaders. It is greed which makes the power lobby attack the natural flow of rivers and disturb their route. If we the people believe that such man-made activity on a river will be tolerated by the river waters, it will be our foolishness.

# Whatever be the mode of distribution, content is king: Jacob Mathew

WAN-IFRA's first Indian president urges print publishers to evolve a strategy to protect content, says the newspaper industry has a resilience of 400 years in its genes and the impression the industry is in a crisis is a misleading one. The fundamentals of newspaper journalism continue to be strong, he adds. Sashi Nair (editor, *Vidura*) on the WAN-IFRA 2011 Conference inaugural in Chennai...

Speaking for the first time in an official programme (at the inaugural of the WAN-IFRA 2011 Conference in Chennai in September) since he took over as president of WAN-IFRA on July 1 this year, Jacob Mathew said that the industry was well aware of the challenges in the digital world. "Those in the industry should realise that while newspapers may not be growing in circulation in many mature markets, they are winning in the world of digital fragmentation. We have quality demographics and substantial leadership and if we add the audience we get from online we have little to worry about media fragmentation. What is important is how a newspaper connects to the reader who has many options to choose from. Globally and in the Asia-Pacific region, we need to take special note about the rapid penetration of the mobile (phone). In the process, if we intelligently

engage our consumer, we will no doubt emerge as the winner," he said.

As far as newspapers go, there has been a growth in circulation in India, China, Brazil and South Africa. According to Mathew, the global online market in 2013 was expected to be \$ 95 billion or 18 per cent of the global ad revenue pie, with two-thirds of it going to Google. "Despite the revenue migration to online, the total print industry would generate \$ 136 billion in 2013, which should be about 27 per cent of the global ad revenue pie. So let us be positive while addressing the future, and our objective should be to emerge as credible in the media arena," he added.

Dwelling on the conference, Mathew said that in earlier years it focused mainly on technical issues but now it gave adequate importance to circulation, marketing and materials proficiency, besides journalists and publishers. "WAN-IFRA has been helping traditional newspapers to adapt to the latest technological innovations and devise print media strategies for the changing world.

The newspaper industry has a resilience of 400 years in its genes. The impression that today our industry is in a crisis is a misleading one. Often, we ourselves are responsible for this negative propaganda. If you look at the media map you will find that newspapers have expanded their presence in this region," he said.

The print media in India has had 15 per cent growth in advertising and 5 per cent in circulation in the past three years. "It is by no means a sunset industry. The total print reach is about 20 per cent of the Indian population and our literacy rate is about 75 per cent. There is still good potential," Mathew was confident.

Newspapers in India are sold for a song. People pay more for a cup of tea or coffee. Assessing free news on the Internet is also costlier. Low cost has helped some newspapers expand in the country and increase circulation. Circulation is growing faster than readership.

"While this business model has led to over-dependence on advertising, it has helped newspapers generate resources for modernisation and expansion. Small and medium newspapers, however, do not consider this a healthy business model. Many feel the print media can afford to set a higher selling price and that the reader would pay for good and credible content. The Indian reader trusts print more than any other media and its credibility level is by far the best.

Controlling costs (salaries, overheads) would be a challenge in the future. Distribution also remains a great challenge when compared to paperless media. New technology can help us here. Whatever be the mode of distribution content will be king. It will take ages for other media to match print media's strengths and

combine its storytelling and visual aesthetics," Mathew explained.

The WAN-IFRA chief stressed that it was important that print publishers got together to prevent others from freeloading precious content. He said there was little cooperation among publishers and a strategy must be evolved for protection of content. "It is important to tailor-make multimedia content for the Internet generation. We need to understand the new generation. The fundamentals of newspaper journalism continue to be strong and this will be an added benefit for the Internet. One problem that is likely to dog us in the Internet domain is that we may lose control over customers as distribution changes from physical to cloud," Mathew said, adding that walls erected by Apple and Google prevent publishers from getting feedback, research inputs or developing subscription drives.

More than 600 delegates representing newspaper companies from 23 countries had registered for the conference. There were 65 exhibitors from across the world. "It signifies the growing influence of India in the global newspaper industry. India setting the course is becoming true in more than one sense," Thomas Jacob, deputy CEO, WAN-IFRA said, specially welcoming the first Indian president of WAN-IFRA, and adding, "We are confident our new president will bring the dynamism of the Indian newspaper industry to the global arena. It is no secret that traditional media is going through tough times trying to cope with the tsunami of the digital media business. We at WAN-IFRA believe that digital media opens up opportunities for publishers and innovative newspapers to better connect with customers."

Earlier, welcoming the gathering to the 19th edition of WAN-IFRA's annual conference, Kasturi Balaji, managing director, Kasturi & Sons and chairman, WAN-IFRA



*Jacob Mathew, WAN-IFRA's first Indian president, speaking at the WAN-IFRA 2011 Conference inaugural in Chennai.*

South Asia Committee, said that thanks to the tremendous support from suppliers to the industry, Chennai was in a position to play the perfect host. That the conference featured three parallel sessions – the newsroom, printing and cross-media summits – was a recognition of the importance of the revenues coming from the digital platform, he added.

The conference was co-sponsored by the Indian Newspaper Society, supported by sponsors CCL, DIC, Goss, Mitsubishi, Kodak, Micro Inks, TPH Orange and TechNova. The Hindu was the media partner.

#### **WAN-IFRA CHIEF ON:**

##### **Wage Board recommendations**

Sadly at this critical juncture, the Government of India continues to constrict the media with a Wage Board. There is no wage board for TV channels, no wage board for digital media and there is no wage board for any industry in this country. The latest Wage Board has even gone beyond its brief. The recommendations, if accepted, will hobble the print media and at a time when the print media is facing challenges on all fronts. In fact, this is the time when the government should be supportive to print media. It should take a

holistic approach and we want them to be considerate to the employers and the employees. We request the Union Cabinet not to do anything that will harm the industry and stifle press freedom.

#### **Journalism**

As in many parts of the world, journalism continues to be a risky profession in our country. Journalists from both print and electronic media brave threats and assaults to report events and issues unpalatable to governments, non-governmental groups and criminal gangs. In the past 12 months three journalists were murdered in India and 100 suffered injuries. Jyotirmoy Dey, investigations editor of *Mid-Day* was murdered in Mumbai in June; *Nai Duniya* lost a reporter, Manish Vajpayee, in the central Indian state of Chattisgarh in January; a month earlier Sushil Pathak of *Dainik Bhaskar* was killed in Bailaspur. All of them were courageous men. They died while doing their duty. WAN-IFRA salutes them and requests the government to safeguard the freedom of expression.

#### **Press freedom**

While freedom of the press is paramount we cannot ignore aberrations like the recent phone tapping by a UK newspaper. It calls for introspection and self-correction in the media industry. Privacy issues will become more complex when journalism tools become more technology driven. Media houses in their pursuit of excellence will have to act in a manner respecting the law of the land without compromising on their own credibility. The important point is that increased government regulation is not the answer (stressed). We already have adequate laws in place as well as restraints imposed by self-regulating bodies in this industry, especially in this country. Let's not forget an important point – it was newspapers themselves that unraveled the phone-tapping scandal. ■

# Asia accounts for only a third of newspaper ad revenue worldwide



*Christoph Reiss speaking at the WAN-IFRA Conference inaugural.*

Excerpts from the WAN-IFRA CEO Christoph Reiss's speech at the WAN-IFRA 2011 Conference inaugural in Chennai; some of his impressions are quite pertinent.

The evolution of newspapers has been different in each region (of the world) during the past couple of years. The United States is not any more on the leading edge. Growth and investment in the newspaper business comes from Asia, Latin America, Middle East and Africa. If you look at media consumption, the minutes spent on different media, India is still a nation with low per capita penetration and significant growth potential. Media consumption within India only in the past two years has increased about 50 per cent, with the dominant media consumption being newspaper, TV and radio. Media consumption of newspapers is quite stable.

The Indian media industry size (not advertising), in terms of importance to the country's development, has TV at the top and fast growing, followed by newspaper and radio, with films coming later. In different countries in Asia, there's a different importance in the media share coming from the print area. In India and Malaysia, most of the advertising is in the printed newspaper (over 50 per cent in India) and thus has a higher impact. In Thailand, Philippines, Vietnam and Pakistan, TV is the most dominant medium and most of the money from the advertising pie goes into this segment. Here, the printed newspaper advertising share is relatively low.

Two of three copies of newspapers sold worldwide come from Asia, with India and China being the big players. However, the money comes from advertising, not from circulation. And here, Asia does not play the role it should play, accounting for only one-third of newspaper advertising worldwide. North America accounts for the major chunk. Nevertheless, circulation-driven countries like India are doing the right thing, pushing circulation. India is by far the country that has the highest growth in circulation the past couple of years, creating a good base for getting advertising revenue.

Due to the political and economic environment, sometimes the increases in advertising are not always a given. There is a

thrust on local advertising and smaller companies contributing to revenues, as newspapers get hyperlocal. So, it's important to go local to get more advertising.

Everybody is talking about the damage Internet has brought to the newsroom, that Internet advertising is progressing fast and hitting the newspaper business. Clearly, it is not true. In India and in Asia as a whole, Internet growth matches growth in circulation, both the highest in the world. Countries such as New Zealand and Pakistan with slow Internet growth have not done well in circulation. Internet growth, therefore, does not damage print growth, it might be the contrary.

Internet or mobile phone? Advertising or content paid? Do pay walls work for Internet sites? What we have to make our lives easier is to have the hybrid models on one side, technology, which is tablets, and a business model which is paid content with ads. India could leapfrog the Internet stage and distribute content on the mobile phone. Don't wait too long to get new readers on this platform. The best prepared companies are those that survive and go into the future. ■



# Showcase positive stories of survivors of poverty, deprivation, inequity



Vandana Gopikumar

*The writer has a master's degree in Medical and Psychiatric Social Work from the Madras School of Social Work, Chennai. In 1993, soon after she obtained her degree, she co-founded The Banyan with Vaishnavi Jayakumar. Together with the latter, she was nominated as one of the 50 most influential people by India Today and The Week and has won the Rotary Paul Harris Award and the Government Sree Shakti Puraskar. She is an advisor to the special commission appointed by the Supreme Court on homelessness-related issues and is also a member of the Mental Health Policy Group constituted by the Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare*

In partnership with UNICEF, Tamil Nadu and Kerala, the Press Institute of India has been conducting workshops for journalists in several cities and towns in South India to sensitise them to issues concerning women and children. In the field of health especially, sensitive reporting is critical. In this issue we look at the aspect of mental health, an issue that most people do not comprehend or care much about.

**H**ari is in his late 40s and on most days spends a large part of his time in a teashop close to his house. His mother, now nearing 80, and his wife, Valli, in her mid-40s, support him and the family. Their family of five lives in a small, single-room accommodation in a lower middle-class community in Chennai and barely manages to pay the monthly rent. His wife and mother fondly recall old times when Hari was responsible, productive and loving. While in his late 20s, they observed significant behavioural changes that got to a point where they couldn't be neglected anymore. He was diagnosed as being affected with a mental health issue and has been on psychotropic drugs ever since. Somewhere along the way he also began using tobacco in large measures. Overnight, the primary breadwinner of the family was lost to disability. The wife and the mother, though uneducated, had to step in actively and take on multiple jobs just to keep the family and the children alive and afloat. Sheer grit, determination and perseverance have ensured a stable and bright future for the children (a girl and a boy), both now in college. But the years of pain, insecurity and hopelessness that the family experienced cannot be discounted. Further ill health affecting other family members, stigma, unemployment, and utter poverty: any of these factors could have tilted the balance and the family, like several others would have gone down under. Imagine the shift in Valli's life at the age of 20; from a carefree, village belle to a person who literally held the family together, with no sense of prior preparedness. The influence of environmental factors in triggering a depressive episode and the further vulnerability of women is now well established. What if Valli had succumbed as well, despite her inner strength, in the absence of all opportunity, with nothing but a bleak and dull future to look forward to?

Gaja and Ravi, both in their late 60s live somewhere close by, but in a slum area. Their accommodation is a 100 sq ft thatched hut with holes bringing in both skylight and the rain. Gaja affected by depression ever since the loss of her child has been cared for lovingly by her husband who is now almost 70. She is now cheerful and has remained so for a long while after she sought treatment at The Banyan clinic that operates out of Loyola College in collaboration with the Department of Social

Work. They live a full life within the means that they have, but fear for a time when Ravi can no longer work interrupts their thoughts often. He earns a meager salary of Rs 2500 as a watchman. Gaja has sought work in many places, "but nobody wants to hire older people these days, everybody is in a hurry", she says. When out of job altogether, they borrow money at a reasonably high interest and often sell or pledge the little jewellery they possess to get out of their debts. Their love for each other and for life has seen them through this long. But the fear of approaching old age, lack of social support networks and ill health continue to worry them.

Similar is the case of Kanamma, who lives in a village in Kanchipuram District in Tamil Nadu. She lost her husband to suicide as a result of chronic alcoholism and she herself is affected with schizophrenia. She now stays with her elderly parents and children. Her father suffered a stroke and is paralysed; her mother now in her 60s travels almost five km everyday to earn a daily wage of Rs 100. Kannama's children study in a government school, but the elder of the two seems preoccupied and worried and speaks about discontinuing school to support his family. Unlike, Hari and Valli, this family is not hopeful about its future and seems to be disintegrating under pressure in the absence of other productive and able-bodied family members who are able to contribute. The quality of life of the family, in the process of dealing with the illness, suicide and poverty, has suffered tremendously.

Hari, Gaja and Kanamma have been a part of the mental health system for anything between 10 and 20 years. While many policy and programmatic changes have been introduced in the period, the translation of recommendations and measures at the grassroots levels remains questionable. The National Mental Health

Programme was launched in 1982 with laudable objectives that included the 'availability and accessibility of minimum mental health care for all'. The District Mental Health Programme was launched in 1996 as the flagship programme of the government and is today operational in 123 districts of the country. While there has been a lot of debate on whether or not the programme has been successful, it still remains the only way by which people in rural pockets can access mental health care through the primary health centres, taluk and district hospitals. The district programme has received criticism: the number of social workers and psychologists are minimal, there is lack of adequate referral pathways, insufficient and poor quality training of doctors, nurses and community workers manning the PHCs, poor administrative backup and limited monitoring and evaluating processes that would perhaps have thrown up the glaring deficiencies and helped plug some gaps at least. It has also been observed that the approach is primarily top down with minimal inter-sectoral linkages and community participation, unlike what it was intended to be.

Furthermore, health is a state subject and bureaucratic delays on a whole range of issues between centre and state including some on fund disbursement sap further energies of the programme that lacks a brand ambassador. It is today a known fact that mental health and wellbeing are critical to productivity, good health, happiness and progress. According to recent statistics, it is estimated that 6-7 per cent of the population suffers from mental health issues in the country. According to a WHO statistic, one in four families is likely to have at least one member with a behavioural and mental disorder. Despite this closeness and the belief / evidence that early identification, treatment, counselling and social support can

address these mental health issues, stigma and superstitions remain embedded in our personalities and psyche. Campaigns stronger than the usual public service advertisements need to be resorted to, to bring about a significant change in the perception of a person with mental illness. One sure-shot method to break the stereotypes is to showcase positive stories of survivors. But a deeper and more strategic response would be to reform the mental hospitals, that are otherwise are viewed with suspicion and fear. How can a place that promotes positive mental health be seen as a perpetuator of human rights violations? Opening up these places to outpatient services, to rehabilitation and making it more accessible, transparent and client friendly will indeed help influence health seeking patterns. The idea is not to create more closed institutions, but to have adequate supply of services that will be utilised meaningfully.

My argument though is not so much to do with the district programme or stigma. While stigma can be countered, notions challenged, models fine-tuned, psychosocial interventions introduced, human resources trained, one thing will remain unchanged and that, in my opinion, is the single largest reason for poor quality of life, for poor mental health and perhaps even for people to slip into depression, develop anxiety disorders, phobias – poverty, deprivation and inequity. Much of my work has been with the most marginalised; the homeless. I have seen them come to The Banyan with broken limbs and maggots, even pregnant. Research conducted by Dr Guy Johnson and Professor Chris Chamberlain in Australia determined that 16 per cent of people from a sample group of 4,291 homeless persons developed mental health issues, particularly anxiety and depression after becoming homeless vs. 15

per cent who were unwell and hence ended up homeless; 78 per cent of them were 24 or younger and a significant population was abusing substances. Their argument is that housing has to be provided first to this population and treatment sought next. And that circumstance on the streets could have led to their ill mental health. Similarly, the first report on Disability put together by the World Health Organisation and the World Bank states explicitly that 'disability must be seen as a development issue'. It goes on to state that 20 per cent of the world's poorest people have disabilities and nearly 80 per cent of people with disabilities live in low-income countries. Robert Zoellick, the president of the World Bank states that 'addressing the health, education, employment and other development needs of people living with disabilities is fundamental to achieving the UN Millennium Development Goals'.

That children and women with disabilities are more vulnerable and face greater risk of incurring catastrophic health costs that push them below the poverty line is also established. Despite all the knowledge and a large body of research, the problems faced by Hari, Valli and many others still remain pretty much the same. A large part of my work includes interactions with people with disabilities (primarily mental illness) and their families, particularly in rural pockets. While some aspects of rural life have changed, electricity, sanitation, access to quality health etc remain a challenge to date in many areas. This coupled with disability is often devastating. Mental health is unusually looked at from a singular lens and less from a development/ positive health/ wellbeing point of view. It is this transition alone that will address certain deep-rooted issues that are intrinsic to physical, mental and social ill health of the rural

and urban poor. Basic amenities in terms of food security, housing, education and health need to be provided to all. And the nature of support has to be justifiable and practical, and offered in a humane, dignified manner. So, when one refers to psycho social interventions, such needs have to be addressed alongside bio-medical needs.

Some positive and progressive developments in India today are the focus on the needs of people with disabilities, the signing of the UNCRPD (United Nation's Convention on Persons with Disabilities), the amendment of the Mental Health Act, 1986 and the formulation of a policy group that rethinks mental health in India. The bureaucracy at this moment seems driven to make a genuine effort and engage with civil society and multiple stakeholders and revamp the sector, so it rises to the challenge of providing equitable health to all. While doing so, amongst many other areas, such as integration with public health services, training at primary care centres, inclusion of allied professionals, setting up effective and transparent administrative, implementation and monitoring systems, promoting inter-sectoral and interdisciplinary dialoguing (with related departments such as social welfare, disability, indigenous medicine, NGOs, traditional systems of healing, and with local, political and social systems), the focus should also be on the BPL (Below Poverty Line) indicators that are now being developed by the Ministries of Rural Development and Housing, Urban Poverty Alleviation and Registrar General Of India.

If the automatic inclusion and exclusion criterion are followed, Hari and Valli's family would not classify as a BPL families, merely because the male child in these families is above 16 and able-bodied, based on the criterion 'Households with at least one

disabled member and no able-bodied adult would be considered a BPL household'. This would also take away the access to the disability allowance that Valli and her family can rightfully access.

One of the most recent and welcome changes that Tamil Nadu Chief Minister J. Jayalalithaa has initiated has been to increase the disability allowance from Rs 500 to Rs 1000. However, intricacies in the delivery system, especially with reference to persons with mental illness, needs to be monitored closely. The struggle that one undergoes as a user of the mental health system to merely access disability allowance is immense. A host of issues ranging from lack of information to lack of human resources plagues the system. Worst amongst these are cases where an already battered family pleads to the authorities to certify a loved one as being disabled and the attitude and response of the system is harsh, negligent and impatient to say the least.

Are things as bleak as they seem? Maybe not. But to me, a grassroots worker and a mental health activist, to be confronted with the same situation over a 20-year period with not many changes and reforms in the health system is disillusioning. Tamil Nadu has perhaps far better indicators than most other states on many health and development factors. With the co-relation between mental ill health and poverty being so evident, it is imperative that the basic quality of life of a person is improved and enhanced. His/ her essential needs being met will go a way a long way is ensuring emotional health and wellbeing. This is the very least that a progressive society can offer and fight for, even as we view with utter disbelief the many billions of dollars that our nation has been swindled off, as majority of our population fights a battle everyday, even to eat three whole meals. ■

# 'Reporting on mental health can be more goal-driven'

Vandana Gopikumar responded to questions sent to her by Sashi Nair, editor, *Vidura*

**How easy or difficult is it to understand or comprehend the existence of mental illness in a person?**

Well, it depends on diverse approaches adopted by people. One needs to be aware of the differences / changes in one's behaviour that are triggered by a mental health issue.

Awareness levels are indeed a lot higher today. The importance of evidence-based interventions that combine medical treatment and psycho-social interventions are well received and proven to showcase best results. This, from a scientific point of view. From an emotional point of view, it is indeed a difficult experience to

both go through an episode of mental illness and to provide care for a loved one.

Whether a common mental disorder or a severe one with symptoms varying from disinterest, suicidal ideation, self-withdrawal to unexplainable highs and lows in moods and distorted perception of reality, the journey can be quite disturbing. On an existential and philosophical level, interpretations can be sought in multiple ways.

However, in the real world, people are affected by mental health issues, life does change, and the earlier the detection the more rounded the treatment, and the greater the support from family and friends the better the prognosis.

To keep interest and hope alive is an absolute necessity. Small lifestyle changes such as meditation, music, hobbies, a pet, etc could help hugely.

**Generally, are journalists / reporters (based on people you have met or who have done stories or interviewed you etc) well informed about mental illness, and if they are not, do they show an interest to understand?**

Several reporters are well informed, aware and have engaged in a considerable amount of research work to understand the subject well. Those who aren't seem ready to learn. Those who are neither interested nor well informed constitute a very negligible number.

**Do reporters covering the health beat show passion / interest in highlighting sensitive issues such as mental illness or any such disability?**

Yes, I have in the past 18 years seen a lot of sensitivity and interest to focus on disabilities, including mental health issues. I feel this has steadily grown as well.

**Do you think editors or media houses are doing enough to sensitise reporters to the issues involved, to the nuances of reporting such as balanced stories, not taking names, not revealing too much etc? How can awareness be created in journalists of the need to be sensitive?**

To balance journalistic ethics, marketplace demand, commercials



*Two different faces - one of a smiling child, and the other of an old woman deep in thought. Both were cared for by The Banyan, Chennai.*



*Other heart-stopping images - of people who found a home, love and care, all at The Banyan.*

and balanced, sensitive and factual reporting remains a huge challenge. I'm not aware of the existence of formal training programmes that help inculcate scientific reporting systems at multiple levels (not just those covering health issues) in media houses. Training programmes (with field visits) and refreshers could help fill this gap and also enhance a reporter's knowledge level. When the larger picture is clear to a young reporter, sensitivity, value sets, ethics etc almost immediately set in. The interplay between truth, human interest, a sense of right and wrong and achieving the desired impact becomes a lot clearer. I believe that sensitivity is to a large extent an inherent trait. One can help develop positive and progressive value sets through training, exposure, field visits etc.

**In the eyes of many, wandering women with mental health problems simply do not exist ... has the situation changed a little, at least after The Banyan arrived in 1993 and how have you tried to raise awareness among reporters?**

Both homelessness and mental health have become significant and visible issues now. With the Supreme Court having mandated state governments to care for its most marginalized – the homeless – the future of these

deprived groups seem somewhat more secure. However, there is a huge wait between policy and its translation into implementable, actionable programmes. Society's attitude and approach is a different debate altogether. For a society that cares for those with homeless people with mental health issues, it's a combination of policy, governance, advocacy and implementation that is needed. But most of all, it calls for a change in mindset. Our definition and understanding of society, home, family is very uni-dimensional and limiting. Unless we promote equity and place ourselves as a responsible part of the process in society, the changes will be driven top down and may not be sustainable. As a society, we should feel responsible for others around us; that's when we will achieve progress in the real sense.

**When you talk about the inclusive approach and the onus being on different elements of society to be a part of the exercise, the media is very much a part... so how can the media play a meaningful role to try and ensure that the mentally ill are gradually accepted as a part of society?**

Well, for starters, reporting on mental health can be more goal-driven. For example, what I hope to convey to readers: that mental illness is treatable, to promote early identification, to focus on the

person and not just on the illness, to create a better living environment, to focus on social health/well being. I can also then influence policy by focusing on inadequacies in the system, human rights violations in institutions and by highlighting the gaps in health care. I can inspire people, governments and civil society organisations by being appreciative of good work in the field. I can help mitigate stigma by focusing on success stories in a non-patronising way – there are several achievers with mental health issues who can lead by example and help build confidence amongst other user/ survivors/ consumers. So, my goals can be multifold and my reporting, based on these, a lot more strategic. ■

# The steady decline of documentaries



Seetha Ratnakar

So many channels and so little to choose... This is a lament voiced by many people today. The TV remote has become a much sought-after, fought-over and coveted gadget in the family. I once watched two programmes on two different channels simultaneously (intermittently is more like it) while my son expertly switched channels during commercial breaks. Surprisingly, I did not miss much of the storyline. I was all admiration for my son's dexterity until I chanced upon the television screen at a friend's place which looked like a mosaic of unconnected sights and sounds because of her son's frenzied channel surfing. This seems to be a common sight in many households today.

Indeed, television viewing habits have changed drastically in recent years. Most people shift channels either when the programme does not sustain their interest or when they are bombarded with a barrage of commercials. They tend to lose patience when the train of thought is interrupted and once the mood shifts they start searching for better options. There is also such a surfeit of choice that most of us have by now become trigger-happy remote switchers. My maid who is from the northeastern part of India switches between Tamil, Malayalam, Telugu and Hindi programmes at every commercial break even though she barely understands a smattering of Tamil. I cannot fathom whether she has equal interest or disinterest in all the programmes. But I have noticed that even during such restless searches, her fingers linger involuntarily when she catches a panoramic shot on any channel. I pondered over this and came to the conclusion that beauty has no language and hence will continue to fascinate.

I must confess I am an avid television viewer and I have seen many features and documentaries that offer exhaustive knowledge ranging from the cosmos at a macro level to microbes at a micro level. But I still do not get to see enough research-based in-depth documentaries about personalities and places around us. I wonder if one of the reasons could be because information can be easily accessed on the Internet nowadays. But that can only satisfy our thirst for knowledge. What about aesthetics? Just as an artist portrays what catches the eye beautifully in a painting, the documentary maker creates a captivating moving picture on the screen. Anything that is visually appealing is easier to appreciate and assimilate.

I have vivid memories of the documentaries that were made by the Films Division which used to be screened before feature films in theatres. They used to be our only window to the world before the advent of television. With television, our vision was further revolutionised as hitherto inaccessible, remote, exotic locales and events were visually transported into our very homes. I remember watching a fascinating series that traced the course of the river Ganges from its origin in the Himalayas till it merged with the sea in the Bay of Bengal. The topography, temperatures and rituals varied vastly as it cascaded through mountains and valleys, cities, towns and villages. The tapestry of colours changed as it flowed through different locations, sometimes turbulent against pristine snow-clad mountains and sometimes like a tranquil sheet of blue.

*The writer is assistant station director,  
Doordarshan, Chennai*



The writer with her camera crew in Kalakshetra, Chennai, while making a documentary on Rukmini Devi Arundale. Here, a class is in progress under the banyan tree.

What a range of panoramic beauty each visual communicated! It was an amazing vicarious experience.

The first full-fledged documentary I directed for television was about *kolam* or *rangoli* as it is more popularly known. *Kolam* was something we saw on the threshold of every house everyday but knew very little about its significance.

The research revealed many interesting facets. Intricate motifs used to be drawn with rice flour outside every home in order to feed the insects and prevent them from entering the house. *Kolams* came in many shapes and sizes. Most popular were the square, round and hexagon patterns made with dots and intertwining or connecting lines.

There were *kolams* decorated with flowers, serpentine and crisscross patterns, *kolams* on water and musical *kolams* that were drawn skillfully to the beat of a song.

There were also specific patterns that were associated with different festivals and occasions. The drawing of *kolams* was an artistic eco-friendly pest-control enterprise in which every housewife excelled.

The documentary on *kolam* was a well planned, researched, scripted, shot and edited in a

comprehensive manner over a few months as befitting the subject.

A totally different experience was when I had the rare privilege to make a documentary on the legend, Rukmini Devi Arundale, founder-director of the Kalakshetra School of Fine Arts. Renowned journalist and writer Sabitha Radhakrishna did extensive research and provided an excellent script. When we had completed about 20 per cent of the shooting, Rukmini Devi fell ill and our project got postponed indefinitely due to her deteriorating health.

After almost a year, Rajiv Gandhi, then Prime Minister of India, inaugurated the new auditorium in Kalakshetra for which Rukmini Devi agreed to give us a two-minute statement. Even though she was very frail, I managed to gently coax her to share her views on various subjects that were close to her heart. Despite her failing health, she looked stunningly beautiful and spoke profoundly with clarity of thought and vision.

Unfortunately, she passed away a few days later. The documentary took a totally different shape due to this unforeseen and tragic loss. The script was amended poignantly and 'A tryst with tradition' was telecast as a touching tribute to

the creative genius on her first death anniversary.

I have narrated two first-hand experiences of subjects that interested me deeply and left an impact. The question is: will they be of relevance to the present day viewer? Are there simpler methods to access information? Has infotainment become redundant? Is there a decline in documentaries being featured on channels due to the paucity of viewers or it is the other way around? Whatever the reasons, this is a gentle reminder to the powers-that-be to rekindle the passion in documentary filmmakers by providing them the right support, funding and, most importantly, air time to showcase their documentaries. ■

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# Nine suggestions for effective coverage of disasters



Mrinal Chatterjee

*The author is a journalist turned media academician, presently working as head of the Eastern India campus of Indian Institute of Mass Communication (IIMC), in Dhenkanal, Orissa. Besides teaching communication, he also writes columns and fiction*

A disaster offers a challenge to the media. The media has to play various roles during such a time. It has to act as a town crier, warning people about the impending disaster. It has to report what has happened when disaster strikes. It has to play the role of a watchdog as far as relief and rehabilitation measures are concerned. It has to chronicle human misery and suffering. It has also to play all these roles in mitigating human suffering. People by and large look up to media to play all these roles and more.

Here are some suggestions as to how we, journalists and those associated with the media, should cover disaster:

**1. Forewarn:** The first thing that the media should do is to forewarn. These days we have technology to apprehend at least some impending natural calamities such as cyclone and flood. The meteorological office can and often do predict with fair accuracy where the cyclone is about to strike, and with what force. Often, the warnings are either ignored or not conveyed properly to the people about to be affected. Media should take the responsibility to warn people about the impending natural calamity, and what possible steps they should take. It should prompt the respective authorities to take steps. This could considerably reduce human and material loss.

**2. Be Prepared:** Plan. Advance planning is absolutely necessary for disaster coverage. The editor should plan the stories and assign them to individual or groups of reporters, briefing them as to what exactly they have to report. Logistical details should be tied up as soon as possible. For example, if a cyclone is about to hit Puri, a reporter should be sent to Puri immediately to be there when it happens. This way, the news organisation will save precious time in reaching the spot. Since roads and telecommunication links often snap during flood and cyclone, alternative modes of getting reports should be ensured. Media organisations should tie up with the state administration or the army for logistical help like providing transport support for reporters to reach affected areas and to send reports from there.

**3. Speed and accuracy:** When a disaster like a cyclone or flood strikes, it disrupts normal communication channels. This is one of the reasons why people look up to the media to inform them about what is happening out there. This is a test of the reporter's ingenuity and grit. He has to take extraordinary pain to collect information and send them. Speed is of paramount interest here. But the reporter has to guard against sending inaccurate news, which might prove disastrous. Rumours abound during disasters. The reporter has to guard against falsehood masquerading as truth. It is here that he has to bank upon his skill in getting accurate information quickly. However, during disasters speed assumes even more importance. I have often found reporters holding



on to stories waiting for some more information to reach them, which they feel would make the stories better. My suggestion: Do not wait. Send whatever you have. Do not think about your story. Think about the people waiting impatiently for some news. In such times, even a nugget of information is vital.

**4. Inform as well as educate:** It is the duty of the media to inform people about what is happening 'out there'. It should also tell people what they should do to mitigate misery and suffering. The media should write about the relief measures being undertaken by various agencies. It should inform people about the steps being taken for relief and rehabilitation. Absence of reliable information breeds rumour and leads to misunderstanding. When people are suffering, tempers can run high. Hooligans and unsocial elements take advantage of such situations. The media thus should play a role in maintaining law and order in the affected areas. It should also educate people regarding health and sanitation aspects. Often epidemics follow disasters like floods. The media can play a decisive role here by educating people as to what they should do, what precautions they should take, whom should they contact in case of an emergency.

**5. Be humane:** Disaster unleashes human misery. Human tragedy makes good copy. But a journalist has to deal with such stories humanely. There is a difference between being sensitive and becoming sentimental. Bring empathy to such stories. Look for interesting human interest stories. There ought to be many. There might be some really hardworking men and women doing yeomen service. Highlight them. This will boost their morale. And others might try to emulate their feat, thereby triggering a chain reaction.

**6. Visuals:** A picture, it is said, is worth a thousand words. Try

to get good quality pictures, depicting mainly the extent of damage, human suffering and struggle for survival, and relief measures being undertaken.

**7. Be Balanced:** Criticise by all means, but do not be a cynic. Report accurately about the situation on the ground. Often reporters file negative reports. Deliberate negative reports do no good either to the suffering people or to the readers. A surfeit of negative reports creates an atmosphere of suspicion. It lowers the morale of persons engaged in relief and rehabilitation measures. But that does not mean the reporter should close his eyes to wrongdoing. Report with an open mind and a positive outlook. These days, there is a growing tendency to sensationalise. It attracts attention. But sensationalism eats into the very vitals of the credibility of media. News media is respected because of its credibility. So avoid avid sensationalism. It is a fact that at times it becomes necessary to resort to ways to grab attention, to stand out. But frequent and indiscriminate use of a sharp weapon also blunts its edges. Present the facts. Facts would speak for themselves. Do not overplay. It might create panic and unnecessary tension. Do not underplay either. People by large, and administration in particular, might underestimate the gravity of the situation. Present a true and balanced picture.

**8. Keep your cool:** When you are on a disaster reporting beat, you have to keep your cool. It is easier said than done. With bloated dead bodies strewn around, you tend to become hyper-sensitive. You tend to believe the gory tales doing the rounds about millions being washed away into the sea. Looking at the scores of shelterless children in one village, you tend to believe that nothing is being done anywhere by anybody. You become angry. You become a cynic. Guard against being getting carried away. Keep your cool.

I am not urging you to become insensitive robots. I am urging you to become more professional.

**9. Follow up:** Public memory is short. Effects of disaster are not. We tend to forget what had happened. But for the affected people, the suffering does not end for a long time. Scars do not heal easily. It is more the reason why media has to follow up on a disaster. Have the affected persons been rehabilitated? Have the farmers gone back to the fields? Has life become normal? What about the little child whose entire family perished in last year's super cyclone? Is she attending school? Has the road which was washed away been rebuilt? Have cyclone shelters promised by the minister been built?

**You can get answers to these questions from two angles:**

a. From the government, by probing into government records and finding out what is the status of relief and rehabilitation measures, and what has been done.

b. From people, by going to the affected areas and finding the answers for yourself.

The media can and should suggest ways to mitigate the misery of the affected. This by no means is a complete list but it can work as a rudimentary plan to help those in media. In practical life, a reporter may find innumerable problems and has to find solutions himself. ■

# Significant legal cases that have changed women's lives

The first Progress of the World's Women Report brought out by the new UN entity, UN Women, focuses on justice. In this telling extract from the report, we bring you four stories of women who refused to stay silent in the face of injustice, women who persisted despite overwhelming obstacles to use all legal avenues available in pursuit of their cause, and ended up changing the world. In India, many women lead suppressed lives with no hope of freedom as such. The onus is on the media to highlight such cases and help women come out of bondage.

**W**omen who refuse to stay silent in the face of injustice, who persist in spite of overwhelming obstacles to use all legal avenues available in pursuit of their cause, these women have changed the world. Strategic litigation is the process of bringing a case to court with the goal of creating broader legal and social change.

Alongside political lobbying and mobilising social movements, it is a tactic that advocates have used to challenge gender discrimination and raise awareness of women's rights.

Where it is successful, strategic litigation can have groundbreaking results. By identifying gaps and changing laws that violate constitutional or human rights principles, such cases can motivate government action to provide for citizens, guarantee the equal rights of minorities or stop discrimination. The greatest impact is achieved when cases are part of wider campaigns for social change that provoke public debate and discussion in the media, to help ensure that progressive decisions are embraced by society as a whole.

The cases highlighted have increased women's access to justice in countries all over the world. Some have advanced the legal understanding of women's human rights under international law and confirmed that they are enforceable at the national level; some have enforced or clarified laws already on the books; some have challenged laws that should be repealed; and some have created new laws. All have led to positive changes in women's lives.

## **When a husband rapes his wife, it is a crime**

In Nepal, married women subjected to rape by their husbands had no recourse to justice until 2002, when



*The court is where people finally turn to for justice. The greatest impact is achieved when cases are part of wider campaigns for social change that provoke public debate and discussion in the media.*

the Forum for Women, Law and Development (FWLD) brought a case to the Supreme Court. The case invalidated the provision of the criminal code that exempted husbands from being charged with the rape of their wives.

In rejecting the government's argument that outlawing marital rape would offend Hindu beliefs, the ruling also ended the conflict between the country's Muluki Ain civil code, based on Hindu religious principles, and the 1990 Constitution, which pledges to end all forms of gender discrimination.

The court stated: "Sexual intercourse in conjugal life is normal course of behaviour which must be based on consent. No religion may ever take it (marital

rape) as lawful because the aim of a good religion is not to hate or cause loss to anyone.”

The court ordered Parliament to amend the rape law, but the penalty for marital rape was only six months’ imprisonment, significantly lower than for other types of sexual assault. FWLD went back to court, winning a decision that the difference in penalties was discriminatory and that the law must be amended.

Cases such as these reflect sweeping changes to the assumption that a wife implicitly consents to all sexual activity. By April 2011, at least 52 states had explicitly outlawed marital rape in their criminal codes.

### **Women have the right to be free from sexual harassment in the workplace**

When Bhanwari Devi was gang-raped by local men while doing her job as a social worker in a village in Rajasthan, she not only initiated criminal proceedings, but she also sought a broader remedy for

other working women. Supported by five women’s organisations, including Vishaka, she took the case to the Indian Supreme Court, where in 1997 she eventually won watershed recognition of sexual harassment in the workplace, against which the government had an obligation to provide legal protection.

Undeterred by the absence of existing sexual harassment laws, the court’s decision recognised the right to gender equality and to a safe working environment free from sexual harassment or abuse, based on the Constitution and India’s international obligations under CEDAW. The court used the case to produce the first enforceable civil law guidelines on the rights of working women to be free from violence and harassment in both public and private employment. This prompted the government to introduce a long-awaited Bill prohibiting sexual harassment in the workplace in 2007.

The case has also inspired other reformers in the region.

In 2009, the Supreme Court of Bangladesh, referring to the Vishaka case, recognised that the ‘harrowing tales of repression and sexual abuse of women in their workplaces’ were a result of the government’s failure to enact a sexual harassment law. The detailed guidelines on protection against sexual harassment set out in the case now have the force of law in Bangladesh until the government enacts the relevant legislation. Similarly, in Pakistan, advocates looked to the Vishaka guidelines in preparation for their successful push for legislation to protect women from harassment in the workplace.

### **It is not enough to have laws in place, they must be implemented**

Sahide Goekce and Fatma Yildirim were both murdered by their husbands following years of brutal abuse. Despite reporting the violence to the police and obtaining protections orders, lack of coordination among law enforcement and judicial officials resulted in repeated failure to detail the offenders and ensure the women’s safety.

Two non-governments organisations (NGOs) took the cases to the CEDAW Committee under the Optional Protocol. The committee’s decisions on the cases in 2007 were of global significance because they made clear that the state’s obligation to protect women from domestic violence extends beyond passing laws. The committee found that Austria had failed to act with ‘due diligence’, by not ensuring that the law was implemented properly in the Goekce case. It said: ‘In order for the individual woman victim of domestic violence to enjoy the practical realisation of the principle of equality of men and women and of her human rights and fundamental freedoms, the political will...must be supported by state actors, who adhere to the state party’s due diligence obligations.’



Photos: Anjali Singh/WFS

*In India, at least three significant hurdles have come in the way of women’s pursuit of justice: lags in enlightened law making; the critical failure of the criminal justice system; and the lack of voice of significant sections of women.*



*The UN Women Report specifically observes that “the infrastructure of justice”, constituted by the police, the courts and the judiciary, has clearly failed women.*

In response to the Committee’s recommendations and the media attention that surrounded the case, the Austrian Government introduced and accelerated legal reforms to protect women from violence, including an amendment to the Code of Criminal Procedure, new protection measures and the creation of specialised domestic violence prosecutors. In order to support these reforms, the government increased funding for implementation of the law by 60 per cent in 2007.

**The case of Maria da Penha Fernandes v Govt of Brazil**

As she slept at her home in May 1983, Maria da Penha Fernandes was shot by her husband. Having suffered years of debilitating abuse, the mother of three children was left paralysed from waist down. Two weeks after her return from the hospital, her husband attempted to electrocute her. The case languished in the criminal justice system for years and Maria’s husband remained free for nearly two decades. When he was finally sentenced in 2002, he

served just two years in prison.

In a landmark ruling, the Inter-American Court of Human Rights held the Government of Brazil responsible under international law for failing to take effective action to prosecute and convict perpetrators of domestic violence. It stated: ‘Failure to prosecute and convict the perpetrator...is an indication that the Brazilian State condones the violence suffered by Maria de Penha and this failure by the Brazilian courts to take action is exacerbating the direct consequences of the aggression by her ex-husband.’

The case contributed to the growing international consensus that states have a legal obligation to take positive steps, measured by the standard of ‘due diligence’, to uphold women’s human rights. In 2006, the Government of Brazil enacted domestic violence legislation, symbolically named the Maria da Penha Law on domestic and family violence, mandating preventive measures, special courts and tough sentences. Maria da Penha

continues to campaign for justice for survivors of domestic abuse and is outspoken about the need for thorough implementation of the law. ■

*(Excerpted from UN Women’s ‘Progress of the World’s Women 2011-12: In Pursuit of Justice’; courtesy: Women’s Feature Service)*

# What really makes a newspaper sell?



S. Muthiah

Newspapers need to have good editorial departments, but they need better advertising, production and circulation departments if they want to sell newspapers.

What makes a newspaper sell? If anyone knew the answer to that, they'd be billionaires. Many people, including this writer, have, however, what they think are the right answers, but not having become even millionaires, it's obvious the last word eludes them. But they keep trying – like I have in these columns in the past and am doing so again today. Today's musings arise from two recent approaches to better sell a couple of local newspapers. In one instance, there's been a total change in layout and design and an even further character change in the Sunday magazine. In the other case – as well as in the case of other local dailies – there's been a total going overboard on the IPL, that cricketing extravaganza, with a particular focus on the Chennai Super Kings in the case of the daily that's "the other case".

Does a change in design and lay-out, no matter how excellent, improve circulation? I've never known it to, but perhaps others do, particular those who write boxes about the change not to the general public but to those who are already readers of the paper! As far as I'm concerned, two things sell newspapers. One is content, the other, and the more important factor, is better managements.

Content certainly is important, especially in the case of street sales, where a headline promising a sensational story will grab the reader. But ask those who've recently run stories on Wikileaks, UN leaks on

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Newspapers and magazines displayed near a pavement to catch the attention of passers-by.



*This is a picture of The Hindu newsroom in Chennai. Although content is important, it's the inputs that better managements provide that have a lot to do with selling newspapers.*

Sri Lankan war crimes, and other exclusive exposés, whether they have sold extra papers, and if they have, whether the extra circulation has stuck when the story died out. The answers have invariably been in the negative. It's been the same case with the IPL and the Chennai Super Kings; for all the space devoted to them, there's been no commensurate increase in circulation that I've heard of.

Of course, for any newspaper or journal to sell it must have sufficient quality content to meet the readers' expectations. But at the end of the day, it's the inputs that better managements provide that have a lot to do with selling newspapers, I tend to feel. Management is a term I use loosely to cover three areas, Production, Circulation and Advertising. And they are all necessary for the successful sale of a newspaper.

Production involves producing a paper on time and of a quality that makes it easy for the reader to read as well as appreciate pictorial content. To an extent, this involves managements providing quality raw material and employing technically qualified staff. A badly printed paper is not going to hold

its readers, nor is a paper made available late. The availability of a paper on time is not only due to the efficiency of production but also to the organisation of the circulation department and its distribution system. If delivery to the customer is perennially late, or if the paper is not available in certain areas and the reader has to go looking for it, then managements should not be surprised if readers prefer other newspapers which reach them on time or are more easily available. After all, most of the content in newspapers in India is about the same; only presentations, language and nuances vary. The third area is advertising. There is a school of thought that strongly believes that advertising is content. Particularly advertising of the 'notices' and 'classified' variety. The greater such advertising, the greater the sales of the publication, it has been found in several markets.

Advertising that provides information to the individual reader, a circulation department that makes the paper accessible in the remotest areas in what the reader considers 'time', a production department that

produces a paper that makes reading and viewing easy on the reader's eye as well delivering it in time to meet the circulation department's demands will sell far more papers than content that's fairly universal. But get any editorial department to buy that and they'll tell you that you're talking through your hat. After all, there are many in that department who actually believe the editorials/leaders sell newspapers. As I see it, newspapers need to have good editorial departments, but they need better advertising, production and circulation departments if they want to sell newspapers. Ask any marketing man.

As a person who has been on the editorial side all my life, my fellow journalists will no doubt think that all I've said above is heresy. But I've been one of those peculiar journalists who have spent hours in production departments, worked closely with advertising departments, and ridden in early morning vans racing along narrow roads to drop off papers in remote little townships up to 100 miles away. If you've done all that, you can only appreciate what those in the three departments under management contribute to selling the paper you write for. Even if you don't agree with me, think it over – and spend some learning time in those three departments. ■

# Longer the sentence, greater the strain



Nirmaldasan

*Nirmaldasan is the pen name of N. Watson Solomon, an independent communication consultant. He is the creator of a readability formula called the Strain Index. He blogs at Readability Monitor, is founder-editor of the Journalism Online newsletter and secretary, Indian Online Media Forum, Chennai*

All plain English experts echo Robert Gunning's advice: "Keep sentences short." The longer the sentence, the greater the strain on the reader. Harold Evans, author of *Newsman's English*, writes: "The real seduction of the simple sentence is that taken by itself, it is short and it is confined to one idea. The real trouble with so many compound-complex sentences is that they have to carry too many ideas."

Martin Cutts, in the *Oxford Guide to Plain English*, has this to say: "More people fear snakes than full stops, so they recoil when a long sentence comes hissing across the page." He recommends an average sentence length of 15-20 words.

Jyoti Sanyal, author of *Indlish – the book for every English-speaking Indian*, writes: "Based on several studies, press associations in the US have laid down a readability table. Their survey shows readers find sentences of 8 words or less very easy to read; 11 words, easy; 14 words fairly easy; 17 words standard; 21 words fairly difficult; 25 words difficult and 29 words or more, very difficult." We will return to this readability table a little later.

Rudolph Flesch, creator of the Flesch Reading Ease Formula, studied the readability of various magazines: Scientific (very difficult), Academic (difficult), Quality (fairly difficult), Digests (standard), Slick-fiction (fairly easy), Pulp-fiction (easy) and Comics (very easy). He counted the number of syllables per 100 words and measured the average sentence length in words. He put these two variables into a complex formula in an article titled 'A New Readability Yardstick', published in the 3 June 1948 issue of the *Journal of Applied Psychology*.

Now, words may be monosyllables (short), disyllables (medium) or polysyllables (long). So an average sentence comprising 17 long words may still be a strain on the reader. In early 2005, when I was a senior sub-editor with *The Hindu*, I realised that the best way to overcome this problem was to measure the sentence in syllables.

While it is easy to count words, counting syllables may not be all that easy. But with a little practice, anyone can count syllables swiftly. Remember that it is the syllable that determines the rhythm of prose. The syllable is the basic unit of utterance. Each syllable has only one vowel sound. 'Television' has four syllables; 'Internet' has three; 'Radio' has two; and 'Print' has only one!

Flesch writes: "If in doubt about syllabication rules, use a good dictionary. Count the number of syllables in symbols and figures according to the way they are normally read aloud, e.g. two for \$ ('dollars') and four for 1918 ('nineteen-eighteen')."

The readability table, which we have already seen, may be better expressed in terms of syllables. Sentences of 10 syllables or less are very easy to read; 14 syllables, easy; 19 syllables, fairly easy; 25 syllables, standard; 33 syllables, fairly difficult; 42 syllables, difficult; and 56 syllables or more, very difficult.

But this table, derived from a simplification of Flesch's observation of a pattern of 'Reading Ease' scores, does not identify the level of the readers for whom a text may be easy or difficult. So, here follows a formula

S.No.	Average sentence length (words)	Average sentence length (syllables)	Description of style
1	29 or more	56 or more	Very difficult
2	25	42	Difficult
3	21	33	Fairly difficult
4	17	25	Standard
5	14	19	Fairly Easy
6	11	14	Easy
7	8 or less	10 or less	Very easy

that measures the readability of a text on a scale of 1 to 17+ years of schooling. The Strain Index, which I evolved as an alternative to Gunning's Fog Index, is a syllable-counting formula. Unlike many a readability formula which intimidates the user with a complex equation, the Strain Index is very easy to use. The plain

English expert William DuBay called it "remarkably simple". In its popular form, Strain Index =  $S3 / 10$  (S3 is the number of syllables in three sentences). Let us take an example:

*"I just don't agree with this hoo-ha about short sentences and simple words," said PM. "If I can write long sentences well, why shouldn't I?"*

Nor does PM agree with the advice on the use of everyday words.

That passage comes from an article titled 'Shrink or Sink' in Sanyal's *Indlish*. The sample has 53 syllables. So, Strain Index =  $53 / 10 = 5.3$  years of schooling; a Standard V student can understand what Sanyal has written. But to get a better estimate of the readability of a text, one must test more three-sentence samples or choose a long sample. In its non-popular form, Strain Index =  $S30 / 100$  (S30 is the number of syllables in 30 sentences). This is the same as taking 10 three-sentence samples and calculating the average.

It is possible, though not necessary, to apply the formula to a full text consisting of 'n' sentences. In this case, the general form of the Strain Index =  $0.3 \times (S_n / n)$ , in which  $S_n$  is the number of syllables in 'n' sentences. But always remember that any readability formula should only be applied on well-written texts. ■

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# The human interest story never fails to touch the reader



N. Meera Raghavendra Rao

It was Lord Northcliff who said, “It is hard news that catches readers. Features hold them.” It is true that readers look for the latest happenings when they open the day’s newspaper, and top stories that constitute hard news catch their eye. But it is soft news or features that have to do with the daily lives of people that hold and sustain attention. Television brings to our drawing and bedrooms visuals of events and people, their joy and sorrow. For instance, the game show Kaun Banega Crorepati made the anchor of the tweet: “Each story is full of despair, remorse, hardship and struggle. Yet to see them in person fighting all odds with grit... awe inspiring.”

We find there has been a perceptible change in the content of newspapers, in that more human interest feature stories/ side bars are included. Examples of this are accident and crime stories accompanied by heartrending pictures. Though in a broad sense all feature stories irrespective of genre have an element of human interest, we do have features which are based wholly on ‘human interest’, which may or may not have any news value but certainly touch the reader’s emotions. That is because they allow a reader to respond, the stories go to the heart directly.

When a story horrifies or amuses a reader, excites or depresses him, stimulates his sympathy, saddens or angers him or appeals to his self-interest in anyway, the reader becomes a vicarious participant in the experience instead of an outside observer.

Some human interest features compel the reader to stop for a moment and place mundane things in proper perspective, reflect on them and respond.

The reader wants to be right there – to feel, to share the whole mosaic of human emotions. He wants drama and excitement, joy and despair. Well-written feature and human interest stories provide the reader such emotions.

Animal stories and pets of various kinds also make for extremely popular human interest features. Pleasant and humorous events with a touch of oddity too make us react emotionally.

The following caption, though not a story as such, is a good example of the above kind which was published in a regional newspaper in Bangalore: (see picture next page).

*Two blind persons wanted to drink water at the RagiGudda (Raghavendra Swamy) temple, Bangalore. When they were unable to operate the tap, this mother monkey opened the tap for them, allowed them to drink water, drank some water herself and then closed the tap before leaving the scene.*

Themes or sources for human interest stories can be drawn from life itself in its various hues and shades. Since the stories are true to life and about real people, the writer abstains from exaggeration or hyperbole. They can be written in the form of a tribute; the best example are

*The writer has taught journalism at the Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Chennai. Feature Writing is a book authored by her*



A touch of oddity always gets the reader to react. A picture from a regional newspaper.

articles published in celebration of Mother's Day and Father's Day by mainstream newspapers. They are accompanied by apt illustrations by well-known artists, which attract the reader.

The following article, titled 'Not just my mother... my teacher too', by this writer was published in *The Hindu* Open Page on Mother's Day (the illustration is by well-known cartoonist

Keshav). Needless to add, feature stories stand out when you have an arresting cartoon.

My mother, Leelavathi, was the third child in a large family of three brothers and four sisters. Her father, a government employee, was a strict disciplinarian. She was still in her 7th grade when she was married off at 13. Despite studying in Telugu medium, our mother tongue, my mother picked up English out of sheer interest and love for the language, and read the novels of Pearl S. Buck and Rabindranath Tagore, among several writers. She related these stories to me and my two elder brothers. However busy she was with her routine — of cooking three meals a day, keeping the house spic and span, performing daily prayers — she would never miss reading the newspaper. The time she normally kept aside for her 'indulgence' was before siesta, the only time she had for herself, she would say. I would often find her dozing off in an easy chair with the newspaper lying on her face. I would gently remove the paper and her spectacles without disturbing her.

My mother was well informed of worldly affairs and she enjoyed discussing them with us as well as



with visitors who regularly dropped by. Though an opinionated person on men and matters, she would patiently listen to others who tried to convince her but rarely would she concede their point. She had strong likes and dislikes and was never the one to suffer fools or entertain hypocrites. She was brutally frank and outspoken, a quality very few understood or appreciated in her. The positive way of looking at it, I thought, was a total absence of hypocrisy in her. She had a particular dislike for snobs and the vain who were status conscious and were condescending in their manner. She tried to keep them at arm's length though and didn't avoid them completely for the sake of civility.

An orthodox woman, my mother wore a nine-yard sari in the traditional way, carried her four feet, eight inches with dignity and was light on her feet. She was efficient and brisk in whatever she did. She would prepare breakfast and lunch by 8 am (cooking on a charcoal oven) and all of us (with the exception of my father who would come home for lunch) would leave home with our lunch boxes and return in the evening by which time she would be ready with some home-made snacks for us.

"As far as possible don't make it a habit of buying clothes or jewellery by paying in instalments. Save a little from your earnings and pay the entire amount at one go which will leave you with peace of mind," she would advise. She herself had a very sparse collection of expensive saris and very little jewellery as my father earned enough for us to lead a life of comfort, not luxury. Our wants were limited and we were taught not to keep up with the Joneses (our well-to-do relatives and friends). My mother had to necessarily repeat wearing the same sari on formal occasions, be it at a wedding or a party she would attend with my father. Sometimes, she would face embarrassing queries and sarcastic comments from the well-to-do but who were not necessarily well mannered. She would either smile in response or say, "I like this sari very much, that's why I wear it often."

## When technology dictates how headlines are written

Newspaper headlines must 'sell' news and tell the story. For the past four years, Search Engine Optimisers (SEOs) have been criticised for influencing newspaper headline-writing for the lone purpose of 'selling' the story online. According to a study by comScore, 8 per cent of visitors to The New York Times Web site come from Web search – 68 per cent from Google's search services. The traffic redirection concept has advertising revenue support, and it is one of the reasons for sites changing the way of headline writing.

If a news item is ranked low, it won't attract traffic. For generating revenues from advertising, news organisations train journalists to rewrite the print headlines so that they may attract Google's search engine. Google has a news publisher's help site, where administrators and publishers of news Web sites can get information of sitemap protocols. If the Web sites do not strictly adhere to the protocols, news items from the Web sites may not be included in the crawling process and, subsequently, the items may not be posted for display on the Google News homepage.

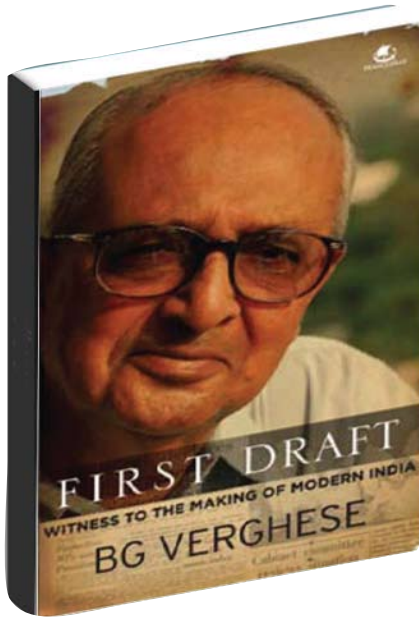
An algorithm of Google News, without human intervention, uses the grouping technology to select news by 'reading' titles, text and publication time. Google's clustering algorithm identifies headlines and stories from news sources. If the headline merely describes the story, the machine (algorithm) better understands and includes it in the cluster of breaking news items. Witty wordplay (to attract readers) and such nuances are totally lost on machines. So, even if the headline is written creatively, the algorithm may or may not list the story in the news aggregation on a particular news topic.

Headlines constitute an important visual tool in brightening up a newspaper, and they lend a distinct character and identity to a newspaper. But is the creativity of headline writing getting lost somewhere? Many Indian news sites post stories from the wire services on their Web sites and often lacking the creativity and character that mark their print editions. Indeed, technology seems to have affected the way subeditors write headlines.

S. Nagarathinam

*(The writer is associate professor, Department of Communication, Madurai Kamaraj University.)*

# History as a journalist saw it



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 Pages: 580  
 Price: Rs 695

B.G. Verghese's *First Draft* is a remarkable book. It is many things: an autobiography, a journalism memoir, a political chronicle. It offers some rare insights into the mind and personality of former Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. Verghese is quite simply one of India's best journalists. Few have had such varied experience. He has been a roving reporter, an editor, a researcher, a social activist, information adviser to the Prime Minister, visiting professor at the Centre for Policy Research, a Fellow of the Administrative Staff College of India, an author, winner of the Magsaysay Award, adviser to many committees and commissions including the Commonwealth Human Rights Commission.

The 580-page book intertwines national history with personal and professional autobiography, and strides smoothly across the worlds of media, journalism, politics and development. Verghese

describes the book as "an unfolding of India's history as a journalist saw it." He says most school books on history end with Independence. So "we live with large blanks in our mind." His book attempts to fill some of these blanks.

## Unbelievable integrity

One needs to dwell a bit on Verghese's incredible integrity (which makes him a maverick by today's standards). Ramnath Goenka himself, who was never guilty of extravagant praise, said of him, "George is a saint. But he should be in the Vatican." Verghese had a 'boy scout' reputation within *The Times of India* – he would never join in any agitation for higher pay or additional perks. When editor-in-chief of the *Hindustan Times*, he issued instructions that the editor and his family should never figure in the newspaper. On one occasion, star reporter Prabha Dutt broke into a staff meeting. She excitedly told Verghese that his son Vijay had stood first in the all-India secondary board examination. Verghese's response was "You have broken a rule. You are not supposed to disclose results in advance to parents. Make sure you don't tell my wife as well."

There is this story, most probably true, that Verghese, wife Jamila and son Vijay, then a young teenager, went to a theatre in Bombay screening an 'adults only' James Bond film. The theatre manager said, "If you tell me that your son is 18, we can allow him in." Verghese insisted that Vijay was not yet 18, and preferred to skip the movie; the family was not amused.

George Verghese stood for election to Parliament from Kerala as an Independent candidate in 1977, after the Emergency was lifted. It is said that he was the only election candidate anywhere in the world who praised his rival and underplayed himself. The voters took his words seriously and elected his rival. Then Verghese did something else that's without precedent. He returned money – whatever was left of it – to the donors of his election campaign. It's perhaps fortunate for India that Verghese didn't get elected to Parliament – and remained in journalism rather than join the murky world of politics.

## A pioneer of development journalism

Verghese's most useful contribution to India is as a pioneer of development journalism. At a time when newspapers were obsessed with politics, he wrote about dams and power projects and water resources. The challenges of Bhakra Nangal, Damodar Valley and Nagarjunsagar, HAL, HMT, BHEL and ONGC had rarely been chronicled earlier,

capturing the vision of an India on the march, a changing India. Verghese's book discusses one of India's landmarks in development journalism – 'Our village Chhatera', a six-year feature series in the *Hindustan Times* focusing on Chhatera, a village 25 miles northwest of Delhi with a population of about 1500. The campaign was his brainchild.

Chhatera was fairly remote despite proximity to Delhi, because a bridge to the village across the Jamuna was in a state of disrepair. But the *Hindustan Times* transformed the village – enabling an all-weather bridge, a soil survey, water analysis, a new cropping pattern. The Green Revolution came to the village with the introduction of high-yielding varieties. Tractors were provided by Escorts, and the people of Chhatera paid for it with their own savings. A bank opened a branch there. Agriculture, water, transport and banking got a fillip. Chhatera became a part of international development and research literature, and of the curriculum of journalism colleges. It became the best documented village in India, maybe the world. US Ambassador Kenneth Keating inaugurated a *pucca* well and toilet block in the village.

Says Verghese, "A newspaper is not equipped to be a rural extension agent or community development manager. But the Chhatera experiment succeeded. It told urban readers about rural India.

The young reporters became better journalists and more rounded Indians. The *Hindustan Times* had won the affection of the village. That happened between 1969 and 1975. Verghese believes that many of India's problems – communalism, casteism, disparities, distress migration – stem from lack of understanding and knowledge of society and social change. These in turn are a result of under-reporting by the media, which is obsessed with political events.

#### About babus and babudom

Verghese is at his wittiest in writing about the perks of Babuland, to which he was exposed when serving as Indira Gandhi's press adviser. "I was allotted a room in the Prime Minister's secretariat in South Block... There was no air-conditioner in the room as the previous incumbent was a mere Deputy Secretary who was not entitled to feel overly hot. The official theory was that the blood grew thinner with ascending seniority, entitling the officer to one, two or more air-conditioners.

The same theory worked for arm rests, back rests and foot rests, durries vs carpets, cupboards, bookcases, doormats, book racks. Protocol also dictated the amount of red and gold your peon or *chaprasi* might wear, that is, if you had a *chaprasi* at all. Mine had a lot of red but not quite so much gold." Verghese also writes about how he explained Parkinson's theory and cautioned Indira Gandhi about the "abominable no-men" who paralysed decision-making through committees and inaction.

#### PICTURES FROM THE BOOK



Cambridge, 1946: (left to right) M.M. Dhar (later director, Central Drugs Research Institute, Lucknow), Jagat Mehta (later foreign secretary) and the author.



Jamila and the author being greeted by President Nasser of Egypt in Delhi, 1967.



Jamila and the author with President Giani Zail Singh at Rashtrapati Bhavan, 1984.

### Indira Gandhi

Five chapters of the book discuss Indira Gandhi. He says in an interview: "I saw her closely; I got to know her very well. My personal relationship with her was one of affection. She treated me very well, though I later became one of her strongest critics. I criticised her for objective reasons. She became prisoner of some very unfortunate forces, and tolerated degrees of corruption and the so-called committed bureaucracy and committed judiciary. But she was a great politician... she did many good things" like helping liberate Bangladesh. Verghese says his duty in the book was to write honestly, and let history decide.

He writes: "Mrs G had taste and savoured the good things in life – food, books, theatre and music, films and exhibitions. She was conscious of her figure, would eat with gusto, but lay off foods she thought were fattening. She liked mangoes and would carefully choose the ones she ate... Her work schedule was punishing... She would sometimes work past midnight and even receive people at that hour... She was informal and could relax easily, was generally unflappable... Always found time for private friends. "Her great qualities were sound instincts and common sense. She was more decisive than her father and could be ruthless in getting her way.... She could be disarmingly frank and would sometimes speak with brutal candour. She was generally brevity itself, often monosyllabic, and would doodle while listening to long-winded speeches."

After relinquishing his job as Press adviser, Verghese became editor of the *Hindustan Times*. For me, his most interesting writings in the paper (apart from the Chhatera experiment) related to Sanjay Gandhi and to Sikkim.

### On Sanjay Gandhi and the Maruti plant

The *Hindustan Times* proprietor K.K. Birla, who was close to the Congress Party, kept asking Verghese to write about Maruti. Verghese visited the plant He writes with searing candour (in the book, not in *Hindustan Times*) about his impressions. Says Verghese: "Sanjay explained the features of the product he had designed and its economics before showing me the contraption he had produced. It was all I could do to prevent myself from laughing. I had spent years looking at and writing about a variety of industrial plants and projects and had some knowledge of work sites and management practices. What I had been told and shown was plainly a piece of monumental nonsense and revealed a degree of naivety and arrogance that was truly extraordinary. I conveyed my views to K.K. Birla.

About Indira Gandhi's role in promoting Sanjay Gandhi's plant, Verghese points out that "at every stage issues were fudged, rules bent, rivals frustrated, records fabricated, officials subjected to pressure

or victimised if they refused to comply. Besides, safety norms and standards were compromised and illegalities condoned. The PMO was used to orchestrate efforts to secure an industrial licence for Sanjay's Maruti with an approved capacity of 50,000 units per annum."

### Sikkim

Verghese's sense of moral outrage is perhaps best exemplified by his stand on India making Sikkim an "associate state" by a Constitution amendment bill passed by Parliament. His stand was contrarian – the rest of the media, barring *The Statesman*, adopted a tone of self-congratulation in reporting or analysing the event. A *Hindustan Times* editorial of 30 August 1973 thundered: "If it is not outright annexation, it comes close to it. Sikkim is to be reduced from a protectorate to a colony through nominal representation in the Indian Parliament. To what end? What deep-seated urge of the Sikkimese people is this intended to satisfy?" The editorial said, "The crusading zeal and effectiveness the government has displayed over Sikkim has not been available for tackling far more urgent problems and mounting crises at home. Perhaps no need for the common man to ask for bread. He's getting Sikkim.

It is fair to infer that Verghese's stand on Sikkim was one reason behind his ouster from the *Hindustan Times* under government pressure.

### Optimism about the future

Verghese says that though he has been "roundly critical" of many events and trends in his book, he has done so to "sound a note of caution rather than utter a cry of despair." He adds: "I have been an incorrigible optimist about India and it utter resilience, diversity and values that will ultimately triumph. There is a great churning going on and much scum has surfaced. But this will be skimmed off and there will be a cleansing, India is today far stronger, more stable and more democratically rooted and integrated than ever before."

**S.R. Madhu**

*(A consultant writer-editor, the author had served as information officer in the United Nations for 15 years. He served earlier with The Times of India in Bombay, with the USIS Bombay as editor, and SPAN Magazine in New Delhi as assistant managing editor.)*

**REWRITING NETWORK NEWS**  
**Word Watching Tips from 345 TV and Radio Scripts**

**Author:** Mervin Block

**Publisher:** CQ Press, Washington

**Pages:** 221

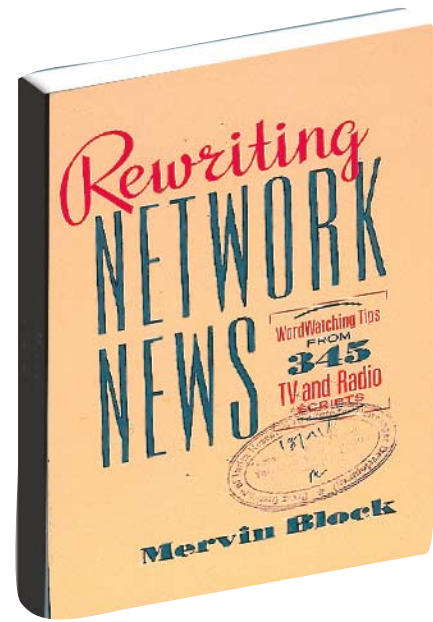
**Price:** Not mentioned

The first thing that struck me in the book was that Mervin Block, unlike in his earlier book co-authored by Joe Durso Junior, *Writing News for TV and Radio*, which opens with the contents listing out the chapters, makes a departure by plunging straight into the subject explaining the motivation behind writing a book on Rewriting TV and Radio Scripts. He begins, "Anyone can make a mistake, and everyone does. But smart writers make the most of their mistakes – by learning all they can from them. News writers are especially vulnerable. We often work amid frenzy: producers screaming, reporters scrambling, audio blaring. And through this bedlam, we must fight deadlines, balance the diktats of our bosses with the dictates of journalism – and write." I suppose all these constraints apply to scriptwriters of news for newspapers as well, notwithstanding the relative advantage writers for print enjoy.

The author has collected examples of several hundred flawed scripts, which mostly broadcast on a network according to him, includes corrections, comments and suggestions for improvement. He covers all aspects featuring problems in grammar, news judgment, broadcast style and storytelling for the benefit of his readers – script writers constituting the senior and the seasoned.

A book of this kind, which is very practical and down-to-earth with live examples, warrants a reproduction of some of the examples for the reader to get a feel of them. The headings conform to an alphabetical order and the wrong usage of the word is underlined, facts are checked by the author for accuracy, which is followed by a memo (this appears in small typeface in the book) to the writer and, finally, appear comments and suggestions.

Under the heading 'Absolutes', we find the following paragraph which highlights the importance of accuracy in reporting. "The schools are expected to remain closed at least through tomorrow, but the critical shortage of natural gas here is a problem that won't go away until the unprecedented cold spell ends ('unprecedented' is underlined)." Whenever an editor sees a superlative, a red flag should go up in his or her mind. So after I read the script, I phoned the meteorologist in Kansas City and asked him about the weather the previous



day when the script was telecast. That's how I found out the correspondent was wrong.

On adverbs: 'Boats literally cannot move; from Cairo to Saint Louis, 38 barges and 300 tows literally locked in the ice.' If the boats can't move, they can't move. 'Literally' adds nothing but length.

On characterising news: 'The Soviet Union seldom reports crime or disaster, but there was an interesting exception today.' Let the listener decide whether it's interesting. The way to make a story interesting is by writing it in a way that engages listeners' interest – not by describing a story as interesting.

On an example of good writing: "The situation in the far south of Lebanon, where rightists and Palestinians have been clashing off and on for months, now stands somewhere between heavy rhetoric and light combat (words from 'between' to 'combat' are underlined). Well said, says the author and adds: "Why did I choose that script? Its originality. The writer came up with a metaphor that I had never heard before. Writing under the gun, he could have fallen back on a cliché. Instead, he told a much reported story in a creative way. Sometimes our efforts at originality fall flat, but if we don't try – and fail once in a while – we bore ourselves and our listeners.

Yes, *situation* in the script is hollow .Stronger: *conflict*.

What constitutes good news writing? Writing that's clear, concise, understandable and graceful, says Block. "Writing that flows so smoothly and naturally we're not conscious it's writing, writing that says something. Our job is not to write writing, even if we could. In journalism, our job is to write, if we don't have facts, we have nothing to write, nothing to report.

Television and radio script writers of news would do well to refer to the book from time to time to help them use the right word to convey the news in its right sense.

**N. Meera Raghavendra Rao**  
*(The reviewer has taught journalism at the Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Chennai.)*

**WHAT IS HAPPENING TO NEWS**  
 The Information Explosion and the Crisis in Journalism

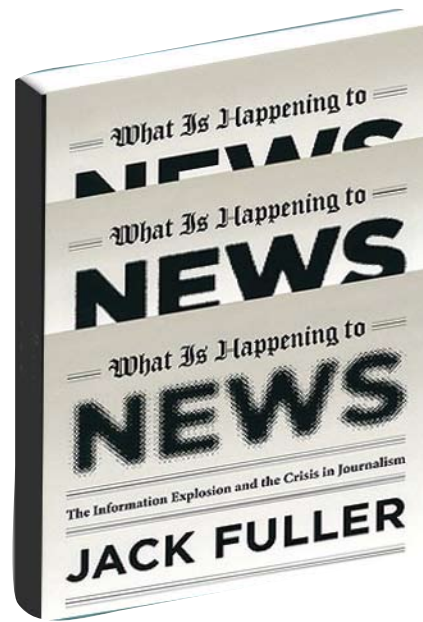
Author: Jack Fuller  
 Publisher: The University of Chicago Press  
 Pages: 214  
 Price: \$ 25

Although ‘news’ must be as old as human beings, ever since they stepped on earth, communication specialists sometimes find it difficult to precisely define what news is and what it means to us. Today, news forms have changed like never before, perhaps even surprising the reader.

Jack Fuller, veteran journalist and a former editor of *The Chicago Tribune*, endeavours to solve the conundrum. In his view, many aspects contribute to the change in the “sum and substance” of news : information overload, multiple tasking, distortions; critical self-analysis and logical reasoning; raising overall rates of emotional arousal; confirmation bias; eroding status of media; tightening religious grip on masses; corporate scandals; corruption and scandals involving political leaders, armed movements and violent struggles among groups and their impact on social moorings; gross journalistic malpractices; terrorist killings; declining conduct of political parties; and above all, globalization-shaping economies.

Fuller goes on to elaborate on the emerging worrisome “state” of news. In the 21st century, he says, newspapers are roughly divided into two clear categories: the ‘story’ model, such as the untimely closure of *The News of the World*, or the defunct Indian tabloid, *Blitz*; and the ‘information’ model, such as *The New York Times*, and *The Hindu*, both highly regarded as they follow the “standard journalism discipline”.

A major part of the book looks at why and how human beings react in a certain way to an information overload of contemporary life, and why people are increasingly more receptive to sensational news.



Fuller feels the study of neuroscience in relation to the human mind helps a great deal, as the human brain relates to the information environment and sends emotional messages, engendering a bias towards some news items and lesser to others.

Fuller’s undoubted erudition shows through in the book although he employs a rather laborious style of writing. But the book has enough in it to provide a solid base for further research on the subject.

**M.R. Dua**  
*(The reviewer is former professor and head of the Journalism Department, Indian Institute of Mass Communication, New Delhi.)*



## The Economist to handle sales directly in India

The *Economist* has announced that it will be handling the magazine's advertising sales and sponsorship offerings directly in India with effect from August 1, 2011. Until now, Business India's International division was handling this portfolio. The *Economist* has been actively marketed in India for over three years now. Its circulation in India has doubled and the number of advertising pages in the edition is close to doubling this year.

The *Economist* online has grown to become the world's most valuable community for intelligent analysis, discussion and debate. The launch of the iPod, iPhone and iPad applications have been runaway successes with over two million downloads. Its social presence is equally impressive, with over a million Twitter followers and a Facebook fan following of over a quarter million.

## Sam Balsara is ABC chairman

Sam Balsara, chairman and managing director, Madison World, was unanimously elected chairman of the Audit Bureau of Circulations (ABC) for 2011-2012. Balsara has been a member of the Bureau's Council of Management since 2002 and was deputy chairman of the Bureau during 2010-2011. T Venkatram Reddy (Deccan Chronicle Holdings Ltd), publisher member on the Council, was elected deputy chairman of the Bureau for 2011-2012. On the management council from the advertiser community this year are S. M. Ahmad (ITC), Ravi Pisharody (Tata Motors), Debabrata Mukherjee (Coca-Cola India) and Anil Dua (Hero MotoCorp). Representing ad agencies will be Shashidhar Sinha of Universal McCann Erickson India (honorary secretary).



Sam Balsara.

## Ashish Bagga is president, IRS



Ashish Bagga.

The Indian Readership Survey (IRS), at its 72nd Annual General Meeting held in Bangalore, elected as its president for 2011-2012. The CEO of the India Today Group will succeed Kundan Vyas of Mumbai's Vyapar-Janmabhoomi Group. Bagga was deputy president of IRS during 2010-2011. K. N. Tilak of *Prajavani*, the vice-president of IRS, is likely to take Bagga's place

following this development. Ravindra Kumar has been elected the vice-president. Bagga is a Physics Honours graduate and an MBA and was awarded the prestigious British Chevening Scholarship in 2003. He has been associated with the Indian media business for over 25 years and is active in various industry bodies as well.

## TOI only English daily in Top 10

No major changes are seen in the top ranking of dailies in India. According to IRS Q1 2011 data, *Dainik Jagran* is still the most read daily in the country, followed by two other Hindi dailies, *Dainik Bhaskar* and *Hindustan*. The *Times of India* is the only English daily to find a place among the top ten dailies in the country. *Dainik Jagran* with an AIR (Average Issue Readership) of 1.59 crore has maintained the top rank among the most read dailies in the country. However, the daily has seen a decline in AIR numbers as compared to the IRS Q4 2010 results.

On the other hand, *Dainik Bhaskar* and *Hindustan* have witnessed growth in readership numbers as against the IRS Q4 2010 results. While *Dainik Bhaskar* registered an AIR of 1.40 crore, *Hindustan* recorded an AIR of 1.18 crore. *Malayala Manorama*, with an AIR of 99.38 lakh, is ranked the fourth most read daily, while *Amar Ujala* is placed fifth with an AIR of 87.47 lakh. Marathi daily *Lokmat* registered an AIR of 74.86 lakh (ranked sixth), while Tamil daily *Daily Thanthi* (ranked eighth) recorded an AIR of 71.87 lakh. Malayalam daily *Mathrubhoomi* with an AIR of 68 lakh is ranked tenth. The *Times of India* registered an AIR of 74.42 lakh and is ranked seventh, while Hindi daily *Rajasthan Patrika* with an AIR of 70.33 lakh is ranked ninth in the list of top ten dailies in India.

## Hindi monthlies grow 2 per cent

There is some cheer for the Hindi magazine industry in the Indian Readership Survey (IRS) 2011 Q1, with monthlies witnessing positive feedback from readers. According to IRS 2011 Q1 data, Hindi monthly magazines have seen growth trends compared to IRS 2010 Q1 in AIR (Average Issue Readership) numbers. Meanwhile, negative trends in AIR numbers have continued for weekly and fortnightly magazines. The biggest gainers are *Jagran Sakhi* and *Pratiyogita Darpan*, both receiving double digit growth – 27.01 per cent and 16.36 per cent, respectively, in AIR. *Pratiyogita Darpan* has emerged as the most read Hindi monthly in the country. Fortnightly Hindi magazines have seen negative growth of 9.23 per cent in AIR as against IRS 2010 Q1. The top two fortnightlies – *Saras Salil* and *Grih Shobha* – have witnessed double-digit negative trends in readership numbers. *Champak* is the only

magazine among the top eight to have recorded positive growth of 1.93 per cent (as compared to IRS 2010 Q1) with an AIR of 8.43 lakh.

## M.P. Veerendrakumar elected PTI chairman



Veerendrakumar.

M.P. Veerendrakumar, chairman and managing director, Mathrubhumi, has been elected chairman of the Board of Directors of the Press Trust of India (PTI). Veerendrakumar had served as PTI chairman twice earlier. He was president of the Indian Newspaper Society (INS) and is one of the trustees

of the Press Institute of India – Research Institute for Newspaper Development (PII-RIND). He has written several books in Malayalam and won the Kendra Sahitya Academy Award last year. R. Lakshmipathy, publisher, Dinamalar, was elected the vice-chairman. Lakshmipathy, besides running several educational institutions, was president of INS, chairman of the Audit Bureau of Circulation and a member of the Press Council of India.

## Deccan Herald set to enter Delhi

Karnataka-based English newspaper Deccan Herald is all set to enter the Delhi market by the end of 2011. The estimated Rs 1500-crore English newspaper market is currently dominated by two major players – *The Times of India* and *Hindustan Times*. The two apart, *The Hindu* and *The Indian Express* are among the players that can give tough competition to new entrants in the market. The Printers (Mysore), the company that publishes *Deccan Herald*, has come up with advertisements in leading dailies for multiple vacancies for its new edition from the capital. According to recent IRS data, *Deccan Herald* has an average issue readership of 4.23 lakh in Karnataka and is the second most popular English daily in the state after *The Times of India*. Overall in Delhi, the average issue readership of English dailies has declined. Presently, *Deccan Herald* has editions in Bangalore, Mysore, Hubli, Mangalore, Gulbarga and Belur.

## Sunday Standard to expand to north, west

*Sunday Standard*, the weekly newspaper published by Express Publications (Madurai), is planning to expand its base in north and west Indian markets. The paper is currently distributed in the Delhi NCR Region. The new editions will be identical to the national edition; however, local news of the region

will be given preference. The Sunday newspaper would have three more editions by the beginning of 2012.

## NRS-IRS merger likely

Industry leaders had never lacked the vision of what the combined strength of the National Readership Survey (NRS) and the Indian Readership Survey (IRS) could achieve for the Indian print industry. However, for many years the fraternity was unable to unite and get the two surveys on the same platform. Good sense on both sides has finally prevailed, and the deadlock has been finally broken. The Media Research Users' Council (MRUC) and the Audit Bureau of Circulation (ABC) are all set to sign the agreement announcing the merger of the NRS and IRS within the next two weeks. MRUC owns the IRS, while the ABC is fronting NRS on behalf of the National Readership Studies Council (NRSC). The newly merged entity, which is understood to be a partnership of equals between MRUC and ABC, is called Readership Studies Council of India (RSCI). The new readership survey under the aegis of RSCI would continue to be called IRS in order to leverage the continuity of the brand that the IRS has become for the Indian print industry in the last many years. However, the new survey would be embellished with more value addition and greater refinement in the research methodology to make it more accurate, which has been the biggest drawback of the current IRS.

## K.M. Mathew on postage stamp

Postage stamps were released in honour of K.M. Mathew, the late chief editor of *Malayala Manorama*. At a function held recently in New Delhi, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh handed over a set of postage stamps carrying a picture of Mathew to his daughter, Thangam Mammen, and son and present chief editor of *Malayala Manorama*, Mammen Mathew.



In honour of K.M. Mathew, the late chief editor of *Malayala Manorama*, commemoration postage stamps were released. At a function held in New Delhi Prime Minister Manmohan Singh handed over a set of postage stamps picturing K.M. Mathew to his daughter Thangam Mammen and son and present Chief Editor of *Malayala Manorama*, Mammen Mathew.

## Hindustan to expand in UP

Buoyed by growing readership numbers in Uttar Pradesh, Hindi newspaper *Hindustan*, from Hindustan Media Ventures, is set to strengthen its presence in the state. With UP set to witness Assembly elections in the beginning of 2012, *Hindustan* is geared to launch its Moradabad and Aligarh editions. The newspaper competes with *Amar Ujala* and *Dainik Jagran* in UP. Based on Q1 2011 results of the Indian Readership Survey, *Hindustan* has added almost 11 lakh readers compared to last year. *Dainik Jagran* is on a decline mode in the state, losing 2.5 lakh readers in a year, while *Amar Ujala* has maintained its growth in the state, adding 4.29 lakh readers.

## Dainik Divya Marathi in Jalgaon

The Dainik Bhaskar Group launched the third edition of its Marathi newspaper *Dainik Divya Marathi* from Jalgaon, Maharashtra in September. With the launch of the Jalgaon edition, within a period of four months, the group has expanded into three major cities of the State, and to 63 editions. The first edition of *Dainik Divya Marathi* was launched in Aurangabad in May, while the second edition was launched from Nasik in July. Jalgaon is a vast market with a rapidly developing industrial belt and is emerging as a premier educational hub. It has a strong cultural heritage and is now making progressive strides expanding its infrastructure, transport, communications facilities. Understanding the important role brand building plays for a new entrant, the planning has been meticulous, including strategically classifying city to understand its demographic nuances. The Dainik Bhaskar Group publishes eight newspapers in four languages (Hindi, Gujarati, English and Marathi) covering 13 States.

## Naidunia Fast in Bhopal

In a bid to further strengthen its position in the Madhya Pradesh market, *Naidunia* has launched a new edition, *Navdunia Fast*, in Bhopal. The focus of the eight-page paper, which has a cover price of Rs 1.50, is to report on hyper-local news. The content will be based on local reports and focus on local problems and issues. All aspects of the civil society will be reported in the paper, be it politics, sports, entertainment or any other civil issue.

## DNA enters MP with Indore edition

Daily News & Analysis entered Madhya Pradesh with the launch of its Indore edition in June. Monday to Saturday, the daily is priced at Rs 2, while on Sundays it is priced at Rs 2.50. The targeted circulation for DNA is around 20,000 copies. On

Sundays, DNA will be a 20-page newspaper, including a four-page supplement of *After Hrs*, which will attempt to capture the spirit of Indore with its feature coverage. According to an official note from the group, since its launch in 2005 the daily now has a total print run of over one million copies. DNA has editions in Pune, Bangalore, Jaipur, Ahmedabad, Surat and Mumbai.

## Patrika expands in Chhattisgarh with Bilaspur edition

After almost a year since its entry in Chhattisgarh with Raipur and Bhilai editions, *Patrika* launched its Bilaspur edition recently. With a total of 20 pages, including four-page daily supplements, the newspaper is priced at Rs 1.50 on week days and Rs 2.50 on weekends. For the launch in Bilaspur, *Patrika* carried extensive pre-launch campaigns. A team of 50 surveyors went round the city and conducted research for four months. Interestingly, *Patrika's* Bilaspur launch has come at a time when the IRS 2011 Q1 data reflects a decline for topline Hindi dailies in Chhattisgarh. According to the latest IRS results, the top five Hindi dailies in the state, including *Dainik Bhaskar*, *Hari Bhoomi*, *Nav Bharat*, *Nai Dunia* and *Dainik Jagran*, have witnessed a decline in the average issue readership (AIR) numbers compared to the corresponding period last year. The content of the *Patrika* Bilaspur edition includes the daily supplement *Just Bilaspur*, weekly supplements *Parivaar* (on Wednesday), *Me Next* (on Saturday) and *Hum Tum* (on Sunday).

## Jagran Punjabi launched

Jagran Prakashan Ltd launched its Punjabi newspaper *Jagran Punjabi* in June. The newspaper, printed from Jalandhar and Ludhiana, is circulated across all districts of Punjab. JPL hopes to add new readers and strengthen *Jagran's* presence in Punjab. *Dainik Jagran* has completed 10 years in Punjab. However, there will be some tough competition for the newly launched paper in a market that has several Punjabi language dailies. *Ajit* and *Jagbani* are two of the larger Punjabi dailies and both are very well established and powerful brands. *Jagran* supported the launch with a slew of campaigns, riding on the theme 'Punjabi Pride' or 'Punjabiyaan di Shaan'. Popular singer and Punjabi icon Gurdas Mann endorsed the brand.

## Champak in new avatar set to lure more kids

Children's magazine *Champak*, from the stable of Delhi Press, looks to attract more children with a new look, bigger size, new design and more

content. Delhi Press is set for a complete revamp of all the eight editions (English, Gujarati, Hindi, Kannada, Malayalam, Marathi, Tamil, and Telugu) of *Champak*. The new avatar of the magazine will hit the newsstands in the month of October. Recently, the cover price of the fortnightly was revised from Rs 15 to Rs 20. However, the final decision on the cover price and ad rates of the revamped-*Champak* is yet to be taken by the group. Launched in 1968 by Delhi Press, *Champak* competes with Amar Chitra Katha's *Tinkle* and *Chandamama*.

*Champak* has a rich history and readers have a deep emotional connect with the magazine. Published in eight languages, the magazine offers a bouquet of short stories, comic strips, puzzles, brain teasers and jokes. The group runs several engagement programmes for children, as well as the yearly competition 'Champak Creative Child Contest'. Under the 'Champak Cheeku Club' scheme, schoolchildren get discounts of up to 60 per cent on the cover price of the magazine. *Champak* totally sells 2.5 lakh copies in eight languages.

### **Hindustan Jobs now in English**

Within three months of the launch of *Hindustan Jobs*, a Hindi weekly newspaper, Hindustan Media Ventures Ltd has launched its English edition, thus expanding its footprint to Punjab, Haryana and Chandigarh. *Hindustan Jobs* covers Delhi, Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Jharkhand and Bihar as well. While Hindi edition of *Hindustan Jobs* has a cover price of Rs 6, the cover price of the English edition has been kept at Rs 7. The product will now present a stronger value proposition for recruiters by taking jobs to a larger number of potential recruits.

### **Hari Bhoomi set for revamp in Chhattisgarh**

Amid falling Hindi newspaper readership numbers in Chhattisgarh, according to the Indian Readership Survey Q1 2011 data, *Hari Bhoomi*, the second most read daily in the state, is set to attract readers with a refreshing new look. Starting with its Bilaspur edition, the daily will adopt an all-colour format with a new design and added content. However, there will be no change in either the cover price or the advertisement rates of the newspaper as of now. Recent results of IRS shows that *Hari Bhoomi* is not far from becoming the No.1 newspaper in the state, and the move will surely take it closer to leadership position in Chhattisgarh. For its Bilaspur edition, the Group has set up new infrastructure, including new advanced printing equipment. In the coming days, the Group has plans to get all its editions revamped with changes in content, design and colour format, and also to launch new editions in Chhattisgarh and in central India.

*Dainik Bhaskar*, with the highest AIR of 9.66 lakh in the state, is still the leader. *Hari Bhoomi* and *Nava Bharat*, fighting neck-and-neck till last year, have broadened the gap in the recent round of IRS – *Hari Bhoomi* registered an AIR of 8.93 lakh (- 0.22 per cent), *Nava Bharat* an AIR of 7.92 lakh (-4.92).

### **Sandesh Group launches weekly Agro Sandesh**

Sandesh Group, publishers of Gujarat's leading vernacular daily *Sandesh*, has come up with a new weekly newspaper called *Agro Sandesh*, dedicated to the agro and allied industries of Gujarat. *Agro Sandesh* will include news and views about agriculture, dairy, animal husbandry and the co-operative sector of Gujarat, political news affecting the socio-economic life of farmers, national, international and state-level developments, success stories of farmers, research and developments and new projects, information on processing of agri-produce, market rates and trends, weather forecasting and guidance. Various government schemes, science and technology related to agriculture, export of agricultural produce, and export procedures and facilities are also part of *Agro Sandesh's* editorial content.

### **Amar Ujala's Safalta hits newsstands**

Hindi magazine *Safalta*, from the Amar Ujala stable, hit newsstands on August 1. The magazine will cater to the needs of a large audience of readers who will be appearing for various competitive exams. Priced at Rs 60, it will have a total of 180 pages. The circulation of the magazine is estimated to be one lakh copies. The all-colour magazine will include sections such as detailed current affairs articles on international topics, India and the world, economy, science, sports, achievements and culture, special features on international affairs, geography, environment, constitution and history. The magazine will also carry various competitive examination question papers, details of employment, admission to various courses and examinations, and an open forum where readers can give views and seek advice.

# VIDURA

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