SNDT Women's University, Mumbai

From the Selected Works of Professor Vibhuti Patel

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Vidura

Professor Vibhuti Patel

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Arun Ramkumar was perhaps influenced by the New Yorker magazine’s illustration style. To interpret his illustration (above) for readers, the main predator is the television set that shows ads, serials and films objectifying women. On the left is a woman’s hand trying to fight for freedom but ending up lightning a cigarette for a man. It also in a sense typifies the hypocrisy of women actors who claim to support women’s initiatives but end up acting in movies and soaps that treat them as mere objects that cater to the hero’s whims. On the right are liquor and women, a highly potent advertising trope that not only objectifies women but also treats them like liquor, something to be consumed and thrown away. The lustful hands at the top depict the voyeuristic and predatory attitude prevalent while depicting women in ads and soaps, not to mention pornography or acts of bondage; the hands not only prey on women but ensure the women are powerless to fight back. That’s how the system works. How do women break away from the groping, chainlike arms of immoral men? On the TV screen, male and female symbols have been used as props, with the two smaller female symbols bowing down or cowering before the central male symbol. It all works to a script.
If the mindset is to change, media must play its role

To force somebody to have sex with you when they do not want to by threatening them or using violence. That is the definition of Rape. I don’t remember having heard the word when I was in school nor was it bandied about in later years as I waded my way through college and the work place, as it is today. It perhaps shows how the standards of morality in India have dropped dramatically. It is also symptomatic of the gradual degradation of many of the principles we learnt to grow up with – honesty, ethics and respect for women. The lowest point was reached on December 16 last year when a girl returning home after watching a movie was brutally gang-raped by five or six men on a moving bus, thrown out and left to die. Even today, the story is too grotesque to believe, so frightening that it gives you the goose pimples just to think about it.

Despite public outrage, the poor girl dying a horrific death, and demands for the death penalty and life imprisonment for rapists, newspapers are reporting at least one rape a day. So you can imagine the number that goes unreported. The larger issue is about how we treat our women – in homes, offices, factories, at construction sites, on agricultural land… As Arun Ramkumar tries to show in his illustration on the cover, men consider women as mere objects, meant to be used and thrown. Women who have taken on responsible roles in gram panchayats, for example, have shown they have what it takes. So, will things change for the better if more and more women are pushed into administrative roles? The Women’s Reservation Bill that proposes to amend the Constitution of India to reserve 33 per cent of all seats for women in the Lok Sabha and in all state assemblies is yet to be voted in the Lok Sabha although it was passed by the Rajya Sabha in March 2010. Which goes to show that men really do not wish to yield power to women so easily.

Other horrifying stories that keep appearing in newspapers and on television channels these days are about child molestation, rape and murder. You wonder how it is possible for an adult to rape a five-year old girl and dump her or leave her to die. Small boys, too, are sexually assaulted, sodomised. What ails our society? Has there

New director at PII-RIND

Sashi Nair has been appointed director of the Press Institute of India – Research Institute for Newspaper Development, Chennai. He takes over from V. Murali, who served the organisation for about 16 years.

Nair will continue to be editor of Vidura, RIND Survey and Grassroots, the publications of PII-RIND.

Nair had earlier worked for The Hindu Business Line, The Times of India, The Economic Times, and for WAN-IFRA (World Association of Newspapers and News Publishers). He started his career as an officer in United India Insurance Company. After eight years, he moved to the TTK Group where he headed the PR function for a decade.

Nair (left) takes over from V. Murali who served PII-RIND for 16 years.

Chairman, Board of Trustees, PII-RIND
been some sort of soul-searching and has it helped? What must be playing in the minds of such lecherous men, it is hard to imagine.

Does the media have a role to play? Yes, indeed. Ranjona Banerji points to the sexist and offensive attitudes which the advertising industry perpetuates, giving the example of women in bondage positions being used to sell cars. How much more demeaning can it get! Ads target children at an impressionable age. As Lavanya R. Fischer and Devadatt Kamat say, there are no effective laws regulating children’s advertisements in India; they add that there is the need to safeguard children from ‘predatory marketing’ tools. Films also play a part in pandering to the male ego. Lalitha Dhara talks about mainstream cinema magnifying sexist images manifold and connects it to the increasing incidents of violence against women in the country. Patriarchal attitudes are deeply entrenched in our society and psyche and sexist jokes pass off as humour. Anita Medasani and Prof Padmaja Shaw have written about the role played by the media in creating misogyny among viewers; they say the pervasive presence of violent fictional entertainment on television poses a serious threat to the overall well-being of society. Drawing attention to the real issues media should address, M.B. Lal mentions that Pakistan, Nepal and Bangladesh, all poorer than India and having lower HDIs, do comparatively better when it comes to gender equality.

In many ways, Vidura is a mirror of the times. It is no surprise, therefore, that the focus in this issue is on the dehumanising effects of violence against women (be it domestic violence or rape) and gender inequality. Pamela Philipose, Shoma Chatterji, Kamla Bhasin, Suchismita Pai, Onkargouda Kakade, Sarita Anand and Pooja Akshay have brought together different facets to what is a wide malaise, one that must be seriously tackled. We need a drastic change in mindset, and nobody better than the media to lead the charge. As Shoma says, it is an unending struggle. But we haven’t lost all hope yet.

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Shift to e-journal

Dear Reader,

With increasing printing costs, the Press Institute of India, a non-profit trust, is compelled to stop publication of the printed edition of Vidura with effect from the October-December 2013 issue. Vidura will, however, be published as an e-journal from the October-December 2013 issue, and select content will be hosted on our website (www.pressinstitute.in). The annual subscription to the e-journal will be Rs 200 and payment (in the form of DD favouring Press Institute of India) can be sent to the Director, PII-RIND, RIND Premises, Second Main Road, Taramani CPT Campus, Chennai 600 113. Existing subscribers will receive either a PDF version or a password to log into the e-version. To receive either, please send us your email address. We look forward to your support always.

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Back cover advertisement: Courtesy WAN-IFRA (remembering World Press Freedom Day on May 3rd)
In the aftermath of the New Delhi gang rape on December 16 last year, Prasoon Joshi, head of McCann Eriksson and Bollywood lyricist, appeared on Storyboard, a programme about the advertising/branding industry on the business news channel CNBC. The other guests were Vanita Bali of Britannia, journalist Madhu Trehan and a gentleman from the entertainment channel Colors. What could the industry do about the way women were portrayed? Bali, Trehan and Colors all had their ideas and all pointed out that change was necessary. Joshi was clear that the advertising industry could not change and that whatever sold products would be used. End of discussion.

So was it a surprise to see him weeping with pain at Mumbai’s Juhu beach as he read out one of his own poems about the terrible way women are treated in India? He was with the other stalwarts of Bollywood, as they protested the Delhi gang-rape. Later, Joshi was heard at the Jaipur Literary Festival, arguing that Bollywood had to change the way women were portrayed.

That standard does not apply to advertising in India, it seems, in the Joshi book and now we have a case where JWT and its client Ford appeared to agree, until public opinion intervened. To do a recap, the advertising agency JWT India did a series of ads for its client Ford’s hatchback car, Figo. These ads showed caricatures of former Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi, socialite Paris Hilton and reality star Kim Kardashian in the drivers’ seats of the cars with three tied up women in the boot. The three women were in ‘bondage’ positions as used in pornography for instance.

The three ads were created to win awards, not to sell cars – known in the industry as ‘scam ads’. However, because the ‘creatives’ were sent to the adsfromtheworld.com website, they entered the public domain. The story was broken by Business Insider.com. The initial reactions from Ford and JWT tried to cover up the existence of these ads and repeat the not-for-public-consumption line. But the juggernaut of the social media and the Internet keeps little secret or hidden. It soon emerged that the ads had been cleared by the agency and the company.

As public outrage increased at the sexist and offensive nature of these ads, Bobby Pawar, chief creative officer and managing partner of JWT and Vijay Simha, VP and senior creative director of Blue Hive or WPP-Global Team Ford that works as part of JWT India both lost their jobs. But that was not seen as enough and a senior employee of Ford India who cleared the ads for the GoaFest was also axed. The ads which had been entered for the outdoor section of the Creative Abbys were withdrawn from the competition.

There are two issues at work here. The first has to do with the advertising industry and the work it puts into ads which exist only to compete for awards and the work it does to sell us, the general public, more things we really need like fairness creams. And the second, perhaps more pertinent issue is the sexist and offensive attitudes which the advertising industry perpetuates.

If the advertising industry is comfortable with advertisements which will never be seen by the general public and will never convince them...
to buy the advertised products being good enough to win awards for good advertising, then that is the industry’s internal problem. It seems a bit odd from the outside – like a film that has never been released and seen by the public winning an Oscar or an article that has never been published winning a Pulitzer or a book that has never been written winning a Nobel. But to each their own idea of how to run a business: being judgmental here serves little purpose. If they are being slightly adventurous with the truth, no one is unaware of that. After all, such ads are called ‘scam ads’ by the industry itself. So it is a well-known piece of delusion which deceives no one.

But when it comes to mindsets and attitudes, let the judgments pour forth – like Prasoon Joshi cannot be allowed to get away with his double standards nor can the JWT-Ford Figo fiasco be swept under the carpet. To show wailing women tied up in uncomfortable positions which can only be termed abuse is unacceptable. It does not matter that these ads were not for public consumption or to sell cars. They were not the drawings of a lone sex-crazed cartoonist with bondage fantasies sitting in his house. They were created by a well-known international advertising agency for a giant transnational car manufacturer. They were entered to win awards at a prestigious industry event and were uploaded on to a website that features advertisements from all over the world.

Both Ford and JWT therefore cannot pretend that they did not know what was happening. Not only that, senior people in both companies, one can conjecture, approved of the ads, perhaps even thought the idea of women in bondage positions being used to sell cars was amusing.

The advertising industry does not exist in a social vacuum and nor can it ignore changes happening in society by pretending that market forces determine their choices. Amidst their mandate to further their clients’ needs, they have to answer to society as a whole. Regressive ideas and blatantly abusive picturisations only expose you for what you are. Khap panchayats and similar village level kangaroo courts exist and they may even flourish but that does not mean that their outdated ideas on morality and their brutal punishments are acceptable to society as a whole.

The nature of sexism and women’s rights is being re-examined in India. One would imagine that this would be a time for the advertising industry to step forward and re-examine its own work. After all, some of the country’s most talented minds enter the industry. They are lauded and congratulated. And let’s face it – as hidden and obvious persuaders both, they influence us in very key purchasing decisions that we make.

In all the various media arms which are held up to scrutiny, the time has come to take a closer look at advertising. From time to time there is some ritual breast-beating about fairness creams or the over-depiction of home makers as if women embody no other roles. If some companies and agencies like Gillette and BBDO can pitch in with their Soldiers for Women campaign, then it is evident that everyone in advertising is not always too clever by half, misogynistic and self-obsessed. But even Josy Paul’s effort with BBDO and Gillette is not enough. The advertising industry – and JWT in particular – needs to examine the mindset that allowed the Ford Figo ads to go as far as they did. Because these ideas will inevitably percolate into legitimate work as well. Just as caste and race are taboo in the ad world, perhaps ads which denigrate women also need to be put on the banned list.

We in the journalism part of the media spend a lot of time looking in the mirror and finding fault – and we have learned to take it when others dish it out. It is time for the ad world to also take a look at how ugly it seems at this point in time.
Don’t ads targeted at children need regulation?

Every advertisement has a target audience. The question is whether there should be stricter regulations for advertising that focuses on more vulnerable sections, especially children. Is it all right to show smart looking middle class moms, usually played by popular actresses, serving their children a meal of instant noodles or cereals fortified with small quantities of vitamins? Lavanya R. Fischer and Devadatt Kamat provide some perspective.

Over the years there have been many controversies surrounding ads for children. The attempts by transnationals like Nestle to sell infant formula milk in the Third World in the 1970s by advertising it as being better than mother’s milk, is a case in point. In India, the sale of infant milk and formula is strictly controlled but such regulation does not extend to other products available to children belonging to a marginally older age group.

In May 2010, the member states of the World Health Organization (WHO) endorsed a new set of recommendations on the marketing of foods and non-alcoholic beverages to children. In January 2012, a framework for implementing the recommendations was published. The framework mentions Spanish, British and American laws, amongst others, and points to how domestic legislation in these countries has ensured that advertising there conforms to certain standards and regulations. There was no mention of India and its laws in the document. This is not surprising given that the advertising guidelines of the Indian Advertising Standards Agency are the only regulation, apart from the Cable Act, that make these standards compulsory.

In other words, there are no effective laws regulating children’s advertisements in the country. This is worrisome, especially given the fact that it is well known that children can identify and associate images with products from ages as young as three. Although they can differentiate between commercial advertisements and television programmes relatively early, their ability to judge veracity develops only as they enter adolescence. It is, therefore, particularly unsafe to inculcate ideas in young minds that will shape their future action.

A WHO Report, Marketing Food to Children: Changes in the Global Regulatory Environment 2004-2006, published in 2007, mentions that there has been intense lobbying by the private sector against proposals.
restricting ads of food products for children. It adds that this sector of marketing has been growing in tandem with globalisation, with the fastest growth having been registered – no surprise – in China and India. The study also notes the sluggishness that marks the rise in self-regulation and the measurably slow progress in the development of statutory precautions and standards for advertising. It states: “A survey carried out by the NGO, Consumers International, in India in 2001, showed that 40-50 per cent of advertising during children’s programming were for food, and that more than 50 per cent of parents cited pester power as influencing their purchasing decisions.”

The ‘pester power’ of children constitutes an important factor in influencing family decisions and this makes them a formidable force in the sales of even those products that are not primarily meant for them. Children make up an extremely attractive section of consumers for companies because not only do they constitute a market in themselves in the present, they grow up to become loyal brand ambassadors in the future.

Consider some of the claims made by popular ads that project the idea that their products achieve nothing short of miracles in the lives of the children who consume them. Both Horlicks (GlaxoSmithKline) and Complan (Heinz) have been criticised in India for giving the impression that they help children succeed in their examinations or make them grow faster. Although both companies state that these claims are backed by research, similar ads of the same products had been rejected by the UK Advertising Standards Agency in the UK.

The Law Commission of India has examined the issue of advertising in the context of obscenity, but even this limited study is close to three decades old. While regulatory mechanisms for broadcasting, such as the Cable Act, indirectly regulate the type of ads that appear on screens, a legal instrument to directly regulate content and information is lacking. How this plays out in a sector like food is important to understand.

Glucose products, for instance, are being advertised as having nutritional value, a claim that is in direct contradiction to international and domestic nutritional targets. Ads suggesting that cereals and instant noodles are substitutes for traditional breakfast fare are also extremely problematic as there is no available research to back these claims. In fact, whether these products even achieve the claims made by the ads is not backed by studies that are easily or widely available.

Although the sale of junk food is not allowed in schools across India, the enforcement of the regulation is well known to be patchy. Further, the sale of such food items near schools is allowed. A proper legislation based on the recommendations of the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India defining and standardising what constitutes junk food and regulating hygiene and ensuring enforcement is awaited. The Supreme Court, in many of its observations, has been urging the drawing up of such legislation.

While food is perhaps the most urgent area requiring attention, the issue of violence, aggression and false advertising are other aspects that impact adversely on the environment of a child. Of particular urgency is the need to safeguard children from ‘predatory marketing’ tools - usually toys, games or memberships to attractive groups as a consequence of buying the product - a concern highlighted across the world on the issue.

There is a rich store of research that focuses on the impact of advertising on children. One such study appeared in a 2006 article of the Academy of Marketing Science Review, ‘Children in family purchase decision making in India and the West: A review’, by Pavleen Kaur and Raghbir Singh. It examined the influence of children in family purchase decision making. The article, after citing relevant research, stated that “approximately, 80 per cent of all advertising targeted to children falls within four product categories: toys, cereals, candies, and fast-food restaurants.”

This advertising “to children avoids any appeal to the rational, emphasising instead that ads are for entertainment and ‘enjoyable for their own sake’ as opposed to providing any real consumer information.” And further “the most common persuasive strategy employed in advertising to children is to associate the product with fun and happiness, rather than to provide any factual product-related information”.

The question we have to ask ourselves is this: In a scenario of high malnutrition levels among children, and greater public awareness about the need to protect them from harmful influences of every kind, can India afford not to be more pro-active in regulating ads that prey on the ignorance and vulnerability of children? Further, is it not possible for India to lead the way in creating advertising standards for children that would serve as a beacon for the world to follow?

(Courtesy: Women’s Feature Service)
Hindi cinema fails the feminist test

Patriarchal attitudes are so deeply entrenched in our society and psyche that we fail to recognise them for what they are. Sexist jokes pass off as humour. Offensive, insulting and oppressive practices involving women are perpetuated in the garb of tradition or parampara. Women and men are stereotyped in ways that dehumanise them. Over to Lalitha Dhara

Nowhere is this dichotomy reflected more vividly than in the mass media, particularly in films, television, and advertising. If advertising is forever projecting the woman as a commodified object for male consumption, television thrives on idealising and projecting them as meek, submissive, passive housewives or scheming sirens – in either case glamouring for the attention of men. Mainstream cinema, being dynamic and larger than life, only magnifies these sexist images manifold creating its own brand of distortion. Thus we have ‘item numbers’ being passed off as ‘Bollywood dance’ and ‘eve teasing’ and ‘sexual harassment’ of the heroine by the so-called hero leading to romance between them. We must be aware and alive to this sexist imagery and its impact on the viewers, leading to increasing incidents of violence against women as has been witnessed in recent times around the country.

Hundred years ago, when Dadasaheb Phalke, also known as the Father of Indian Cinema, established the motion picture as a form of entertainment for the masses, his messages reflected mythological and swadeshi sentiments. Over the years, audiences have been treated to lavish romantic musicals, melodramas as well as plots that sensitively reflected the life of the working-class. From Awaara (1951), Baiju Bawra (1952), Do Bigha Zamin (1953), Mother India (1957) and Mughal-e-Azam (1960) to Sholay, Deewar (1975) to Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge (1995) and recently Dabangg (2010 and 2012), as filmmaking grew to new heights in terms of quality, cinematography as well as technical advances in special effects, and so on, story lines have only been devaluing the role that women play in them.

Let’s look at three fairly recent mainstream movies from a gender perspective. While two, namely Munnabhai MBBS and Rang De Basanti, are cult films that earned much credit and fame for their directors, the third, Paheli, written-directed by the well-known couple, Sandhya Gokhale and Amol Palekar, did not capture the nation’s imagination. Though the theme and sentiment of the first two were laudable, the sexism they portrayed is condemnable.

Paheli, in contrast, shone with a rare feminist sensibility that went completely unnoticed. Munnabhai MBBS, released sometime in early 2004, was a big hit. A ‘fun film’, which also took on the rigid, hierarchical medical system, was remade in Tamil and there was also a sequel. Unfortunately, amidst all the laughter and frolic, what has been missed out completely is that Munnabhai promotes sexism, machismo and anarchy sugar-coated in the form of the small-time don with a king-sized heart.
What spurs our hero into becoming a doctor? His need to avenge Dr Asthana, the dean of a medical college who exposed him (and rightly so) before his parents. How will he accomplish this mission? By ‘becoming’ a doctor and marrying his daughter, Chinky. It does not occur to him that Chinky would also have a say in the matter. Oh no! Heroes (on screen or off) propose and heroines have to fall in line or else beware, a can of acid is always handy. How does our larger-than-life, older than the woods, tenth class fail hero become a doctor? By faking his eligibility marks card, forcing a proxy at gunpoint to write his entrance exams and barging his way into classrooms. Not content with having his way, he pooh-poohs medical wisdom and substitutes it with his own solution – jadoo ki jhappi, a warm hug – all this in the name of taking on the system.

Agreed that the medical establishment is riddled with problems but can one counter authoritarianism with anarchy, whether in fun or in seriousness? The film is replete with sexist remarks, too – “I will get this entire hospital as dowry…” the hero quips. “What you need is a wife to cook for you and wash your clothes…” he tells the dying patient, Zaheer. Since Zaheer has not ‘handled’ a woman, the situation is made good by ‘providing’ one for him to experience … Does the film still tickle your funny bone?

Okay, now how about throwing the spotlight on the much talked and written about Aamir Khan starrer Rang De Basanti. Even as it has been appreciated for its tight script, deft editing, intelligent direction; it has been criticised for its crass jingoism and distortion of history. Viewing the film through feminist tinted glasses glaringly exposes its sexist overtones. Evidence for this is there right at the start when protagonist Sue swears at her female boss, blurtting:

“Teri maa ki aankh.” Not content with making a woman mouth “your mother’s vagina” as a swear word against another woman, the director, Rakeysh Omprakash Mehra, repeats it when friends, Sue and Sonia meet and gloat over the sexist usage.

As the film progresses, constantly juxtaposing past male camaraderie with present male camaraderie, it becomes obvious that this is essentially a story about male bonding. The few female characters there serve as mother, girlfriend or lover – mere appendages to the ‘heroes’.

Witness how DJ (played by Khan) gushes to his mother, “Dek,tere vaste kitni soni chez laya hoon (See, what a lovely thing I have got for you)”, as he shows off the fair-skinned Sue as his girlfriend. The film would have us believe: All angry young men are just that – MEN. Behind every angry young man is a woman – mother, wife, girlfriend, lover – supporting, cajoling, praying, crying but never acting on her own. Men have achieved, achieve (even when such achievement amounts to destruction), and therefore will continue to achieve.

So, what sets the otherwise mediocre box office offering, Paheli, apart? It is a simple but profound tale of a woman who loves and is loved with equal intensity. Set in rural Rajasthan, it explores life, love and work through the prism of a woman’s sensibilities. Betrayed by her uncouth, uncaring husband on her wedding night, the devastated Rani rejects him and accepts, in his place, an honest and sensitive ghost, who offers his unconditional love to her. This is made easy as her husband conveniently vanishes from the scene in search of wealth and the bhoot (ghost) lover takes the physical form of her husband.

The relation between the two is the stuff that dreams are made of. It has love, tenderness, fun, feeling, friendship, passion and respect in equal measure. And all this amidst the ordinariness of humdrum life lived within the confines of purdah in a large, rural joint Marwadi family. What is all this stuff about ghosts and so on, you may well ask. Such skeptics and cynics (I am one of them) can interpret the film as a woman’s ultimate fantasy – that of a loving, caring, and equal partner.

The film is feminist one from start to finish. Look at it any which way. No item numbers here with skimpy cholis (bodice). The camera does not drool over body parts but captures and celebrates colour, exuberance and the collective spirit in nature (of which humans are, but, a part). No conniving sirens. No macho males strutting their stuff. In short, no worn-out stereotypes. There is a moral to this feminist fable and it is loud and clear. Women will no longer sit around accept their fate a la Savitri and the bhoot (ghost) lover takes the physical form of her husband. Women will assess, evaluate and move on and they will do it here and now, not seven janams (lifetimes) later.

(Courtesy: Women’s Feature Service)
The real mean world of mega serials

What is lacking in production values is sought to be made up by means of bizarre storylines that create more and more impossible situations, banking on violence and hatred as the central theme. The pervasive presence of violent fictional entertainment on television poses a serious threat to the overall well-being of society. If media reinforces and exaggerates the violent portrayals, it desensitises the average viewer to real-life violence. And that is a serious concern. Media research may not have established causation so far between pervasive violence on media and the increase in violent crime in society; however, no one is able to confidently disregard this connection yet.

The recent brutality against women in metros and rural and suburban areas all over India has brought back the need for gender sensitisation to the fore. The debates around the issue also raised questions about the role played by media in creating misogyny among the viewers through various cultural products. TV serials certainly must occupy centre-stage in this debate. Not just because they are seen avidly by the audience but also because of the persistent nature of the message that gets reinforced every week-day in our living rooms.

The CMS Media Lab in Hyderabad in collaboration with the Journalism Department of Osmania University undertook an intensive study of Telugu daily serials to understand the violence depicted in them. The Lab has been studying news and entertainment trends in Andhra Pradesh.

The study measured (in minutes) the violent content in evening prime-time soaps telecast on the four major Telugu general entertainment channels: ETV, Zee Telugu, Gemini and MAA. This paper carries the first instalment of the data and what trends it indicates in terms of the extent of violent content in the serials. The instalment studied the 7.30 to 8.00 pm slot. The serials telecast on each of the channels were: ETV – ManasuMamatha; Zee Telugu – PasupuKumkuma; MAA – Anna Chellelu; and Gemini (serials changed during the study period) – MaaNaanna (1 episode), PadamatiGaali (5 episodes, dubbed), AlaaModalaindi (6 episodes, dubbed).

The sample of the episodes selected was from Mondays during August, September and October 2012. A total of 48 episodes from the four channels were studied, taking 12 episodes from each channel/serial transmitted during the 7.30 to 8 pm slot. Each event was measured in time from the beginning of a sequence of interaction to its end, generally constituting character continuity, location continuity, idea continuity or all of them. Violence was defined as actual violence, verbal violence, implied violence and graphical exaggeration. All instances of murder, physical abuse, rape, kidnap, other (deliberately causing physical harm for the victim, etc), were included. In verbal violence, conspiracy of violence, conspiracy of murder, talking about hitting, telling on people, abusing, conspiring (other than murder and direct violence to cause harm), talking about murder,
taunting, are included. Implied violence includes body language, facial expressions were included. In graphic exaggeration, visual effects, sounds/music, makeup, display/handling of weapons were included.

Out of a total of 48 episodes studied, 93 violent events were identified. ETV serial Manasumamatha had more number of violent events. Gemini TV across the several serials that were aired during the time frame had 26 such events and the other two channels, Zee Telugu and Maa, had 18 each. Study findings indicated that ETV led in the depiction of all forms of violence by a good margin, except in actual violence where it was in second position after Gemini. All the channels maintained a similar proportion of different kinds of violence.

The effort of the study was to see if there was gratuitous emphasis on violence in the daily serials on Telugu television. From the study, it was clear that some of the channels had nearly 44 per cent (ETV) to 38 per cent (Zee Telugu) of their episodes showing violence of various kinds. While depiction of actual violence might have been less, there was a pervasive presence of verbal violence, implied violence and graphical exaggeration that enhanced the portrayal of violent instances. The dialogues frequently referred to the desire to kill, maim, hang and quarter. There was a sense of extreme intolerance to differences and a penchant for resorting to violence as a primary response to conflict and not as a last resort. Significantly, it was women who predominated as both victims and perpetrators of violence, while men are fewer compared to women, even among perpetrators. It was also significant that men were also shown as victims of violence. Men and women playing positive roles were shown as victims more than those playing negative characters.

In one of the episodes (No. 543) of Manasumamatha on ETV, there is a prolonged attempted rape scene of 7.3 minutes that culminates in the positive female character stabbing the negative male character. Another 14 minutes of
the serial goes on to show physical assault with wooden clubs and bare-handed combat between a positive character who enters the scene and the henchmen of the negative character. The conflict is interspersed with threats of killing and revenge. While this is illustrative of the male-female conflict, there are many instances when women are bitterly battling other women.

In this randomly picked episode (No. 453) of Pasupu Kumkuma shown on Zee Telugu, the episode begins with conflict and continues to the end on a negative, exaggerated conflict mode for the next 18 to 19 minutes. The episode shows rivalry between two young women, one of whose face is smeared with ink. The father of the girl arrives and asks the girl to wash her face. The girl declares that unless she sees the dead body of her rival, she will not wash her face. Her father approvingly agrees, saying: “If you put a lakh of rupees in an envelope, her dead body will be home-delivered in a box.”

In the channel Maa (the serial Anna Chellellu), the lead character of the brother is disguised as a female household help, a la Tootsie. In episode No. 250, around 11 minutes into the serial there is a conflict event between the two female characters. One of them who is a resident of an opulent house, dressed in Western clothes, is portrayed as negative, while the visitor dressed in traditional sari portrayed as positive. The negative female character has henchmen and she goes on to threaten the female visitor, who grovels in helplessness, with death.

The general ecology of the serials is inhabited by socially unexplained desire for revenge and a pathological hatred that is unredeemed by any possibility of reflection or change. In some of the long-running episodes, the dominant emotions are fear and hatred. The violence-free parts of the serials seem to be just mere intermissions before another cycle of violence is unleashed. The world of violence is untouched by the larger society or its norms. One rarely hears saner voices presenting positive side of life; neither does one see the law and order machinery at work even in cases of murder and grievous injury. The characters, both negative/positive, subordinate/dominant, act lawlessly. Impunity is pervasive. There is no accountability, atonement or lawful punishment. After several episodes of impunity, the ‘positive’ characters are shown taking the law into their own hands and providing vigilante justice.

Because of the very nature of serial production as an enterprise, there are few locations and resources are not spent on improving production values. What is lacking in production values is sought to be made up by means of bizarre storylines that create more and more impossible situations, banking on violence and hatred as the central theme, as is evident for nearly half the running time. The Cable TV Network act and other such guidelines by industry bodies like the Indian Broadcasting Foundation have strict guidelines regarding such gratuitous display of violence. Yet, everyday one gets to see such scenes on our television channels.

TOI is 175, the celebrations begin

An estimated 761,5000 readers woke up every morning with a daily in the life of India. And the daily has been engaging with its readers for the last 175 years. This year sees The Times of India, also referred to as ‘the old lady of Bori Bunder’, achieve the landmark. The celebrations began with the launch of an innovative augmented reality christened Alive, which aims at bringing back youth to the hard copy of the newspaper, This is followed by a new award show, Times of India Films Award (TOIFA). In order to interact with its readers, the paper came out with a full-page ad and two special pages dedicated to the work done in the past.

The message to the readers stated: “As we complete 175 years, we don’t just look back at what we have achieved, but also took ahead at what we hope to do. We aim to begin a year-long programme of initiatives to mobilise the youth and make changes at the grass root level. And we prepare to not just write, but shape the story of a better, more powerful India.”

The two special pages took readers on a journey of some of the most prominent events that took place in India’s history – including India’s Independence, Mahatma Gandhi’s death, Olympics hockey victory, Cricket World Cup victory, and more.

To further corroborate the message of how the paper has been a part of and a spectator to the various landmarks in India, The Times of India has also unveiled a new TVC with actor Ranbir Kapoor, where he describes the long journey of the paper and how it plays a vital role in the development of the nation.
The ‘real issues’ the media should address

College students in America and Europe are scouring poor regions of the world in teams and service ‘brigades’ as volunteers to work in remote unreached areas. We emulate everything Western, why not emulate this practice of volunteering to serve social causes? Media can play a positive role in propagating such activities in provincial towns instead of discarding them as “dull reading or viewing”

The Economist of London rarely features on its widely read obituary page a celebrity who dies before the age of 70, preferably 80. Centenarians are welcome. One has to be really one of the ‘wonders of the world’ like Aaron Swartz to die at 26 and within a brief life span accumulate achievements so startling as to merit a full-page coverage in that acclaimed weekly. It is an even greater wonder that he had earned notoriety for doing things that are normally frowned upon by the conservative press of which the Economist is an icon. Moreover, in the eyes of the US laws, he was a criminal guilty of a crime punishable with 35 years in prison, which seems to have been the cause of his suicide on January 11, 2013.

Why I rejoice in the fact that such a man ever walked on earth, and so recently, is that he made an actuality of what I had been merely dreaming of. He gave us a glimpse of what it would be like when education, that is, knowledge, becomes freely available to the poorest man in the world. I rejoice in Aaron Swartz because he was the first modern age martyr to the cause of free education. He was a freak genius in his own right. At the age of 19 he developed in collaboration with three others Reddit, now the web’s most popular bulletin board. He was not interested in money. “He wanted a world that was better, free and more progressive,” says the paper. In 2002, at the age of 16, he wrote what reads like his own epitaph. He would be content to die, he had said, “as long as all the contents of his hard drives were made publicly available, nothing deleted, nothing withheld, nothing secret, nothing charged for; all information out in the light of the day, as everything should.”

To me, Aaron Swartz looks like an angel come to earth. By making public nearly five million articles from the MIT (Massachussetts Institute of Technology) Library, 20 million pages of US Federal Court records and vast data from the Library of Congress, he foreshadowed a world in which knowledge is free. It reminds me of the lines Tagore wrote a hundred years ago: “Where the mind is without fear and the head is held high, where knowledge is free...Into that heaven of freedom, my father, let my country awake!”

To me, the Aaron Swartz phenomena symbolises the worldwide thirst for knowledge at any cost. Suddenly, the world is realising that knowledge is power. Just imagine what the world would look like today if people like Robert Watson, Thomas Edison, Marie Curie, and the Wright brothers had not discovered and developed the steam engine, electricity, nuclear energy and the aeroplane, respectively. Then came the Space Age when, in October 1957, Russia launched Sputnik, the first satellite to circle the earth. I shudder to think what the fate of 1.2 billion Indians would be like if
Norman Borlaug and his team of researchers had not discovered the high-yielding varieties of wheat and rice raising our production of cereals from 50 million tons in 1947 to 280 million tons today. To me, the real liberator of India from hunger was not Gandhi or Nehru or the Congress Party but Norman Borlaug, father of the Green Revolution.

Latest developments in information technology, neuroscience, micro-biology and nanotechnology can perform miracles which till a few years ago were undreamt of. What is more, new technology that comes handy and cheap to the common man is developing at a mind-boggling speed transforming our ways of thinking and living. A knowledge revolution is blowing over the globe like a storm turning the whole world into a global university of new knowledge where every citizen is a stakeholder. These technologies place enormous power in the hands of the small man. Once again E.F. Schumacher’s slogan, Small is Beautiful, is coming true. The ordinary man will within a few decades enjoy the power to carry the whole world in his mobile phone.

Take the most intractable and vexed issue of rampant corruption in India. All efforts to stamp it out have failed. Some years ago New York’s Wall Street Journal in a front-page article by Peter Wonacott said “few countries, however, can match India’s numbers of (alleged criminals in Parliament and state assemblies). Following the 2004 election, almost a quarter of the 535 elected members of India’s national parliament have criminal charges registered against them or pending in court, according to the Public Affairs Center, an Indian elections watchdog. Half of those with charges pending against them face prison terms of at least five years if convicted…”

The country’s economy is ruled by black money. But few people are aware that all this will change within a few decades, once the
world takes to digital currency and discards cash currency as a primitive mode of conducting transactions. Every penny you spend or earn will be recorded on so many internet “servers”. Nordic countries have already performed this “miracle”. According to The Economist, a tourist does not have to change his money to local currency. From buying cigarettes and cups of coffee to paying taxi cabs and hotel bills everything is paid for by credit card. In Sweden all government documents are open to public inspection, on the mobile phones and iPads of every citizen.

India is understandably dragging its feet in introducing digital currency because this will reduce the scope for black money transactions. But sooner or later, it will have to make the switch-over to greater transparency. Instead of hypocritically harping on scams and anti-corruption drives, the media should demand the introduction of digital currency to gradually replace all cash transactions.

There are also other ways in which new technological developments are making privacy in public dealings a thing of the past. It is not inconceivable that in the not too distant future invisible microscopic drones will be developed to carry out what we call sting operations by a mere spray of these drones. Neuro-science is fast developing mind-reading gadgets that will make it impossible for a criminal to lie. Three dimensional viewing of distant places and other ‘miracles’ are not far away. Julian Asange has proved that governments can no longer prevent public access to their records. China, America, India and Germany are trying hard to restrict public access to classified documents or priced literature. But they will soon find that it is an impossible task.

In this scenario, what is the role of the media in India? Should it not be to spread awareness of these fast changes that are blowing across the world like a storm? In this context what Nobel Laureate Amritya Sen said in Kolkata recently, on February 3, assumes importance. In a dialogue with Sharmila Tagore he explained why the furore in the media over the bans imposed by some state governments on Salman Rushdie and film producer Kamal Hasan were “distractions from real issues”. “A lot of people who are enormously disadvantaged have enormous reason to complain about other things, not just Scheduled Castes or Scheduled Tribes… even in West Bengal, if you look at the Muslim groups in terms of the even-handedness of growth, the Muslim groups have not been as privileged as they should have been. To convert that into a completely different issue and to take offence about something else is distracting attention from the real disadvantage that is there.”, he said.

Sen has rightly pointed to the plight of the Muslims of West Bengal as an example of the ‘real issues’ that the media should address. A fact that the media consistently ignores is that India is a sub-continent with many ‘nations’ who have opted to work together as one country. Regional differences in this vast area covering one-sixth of the globe’s population cannot be ignored. When Independence came some 65 years ago and the country was partitioned, the millions of refugees who came from West Punjab quickly resettled themselves and became rich while most of the millions who came from East Bengal are still as poor as they were six decades ago.

Why? The difference was that Punjabis had education and skills which the Bengali refugees did not possess. This is not the place to dilate on this point. It is merely cited in support of the principle that progress in today’s world is directly proportional to the knowledge content of a society or nation. Was it not the duty of the Government to equip the refugees from East Bengal with productive skills?

The real issue to which the press gives scant attention is India’s growing gap between the rich and the poor. Welcoming the passing away of US-baiter Chavez as an opportunity for America to improve its relations with Latin America, Time magazine wrote: “Even if Maduro (Chavez’s chosen successor) loses (in the forthcoming election for president), Washington and the rest of the world need to remember the unmistakable reasons for Chavez’s rise to power — chief among them a failure to build the kind of democratic institutions in Latin America that can close the region’s unconscionable wealth gap. That flaw still lingers, which is why the memory of Chavez will too.”

Writing in The Hindu, perhaps one of the few newspapers that care for the common man’s issues, P. Sainath says: “Fifty-five wonder-wallets give India fifth rank in the world of billionaires on the Forbes list, behind only the US, China, Russia, Germany. Our rank in the 2013 United Nations Human Development Index, though, is 136 out of 186 nations, with almost all of Latin America and the Caribbean, bar Haiti, ahead of us. (We have, though, elsewhere managed to tie with Equatorial Guinea.) What also gets smaller is the idea of food security in a nation where the percentage of malnourished children is nearly double that of sub-Saharan Africa. How do they get past the porcine gridlock at the budget trough? Also getting smaller is the average per capita net availability of foodgrain. And that’s despite showing an improved figure of 462.9 grams daily for 2011. (Caution: that’s a provisional number). Even then, the five-year average for 2007-11 comes to 444.6 grams. Still lower
When India’s Human Development Index is adjusted for gender inequality, it becomes South Asia’s worst performing country after Afghanistan. New numbers in the UNDP’s Human Development Report 2013 show Pakistan, Nepal and Bangladesh, which are poorer than India and have lower HDIs, all do comparatively better than India when it comes to gender equality. The newly released new UNDP report ranks India 136th out of 186 countries, five ranks below post-war Iraq, on the HDI. The HDI is a composite indicator composed of three equally weighted measures for education, health and income. On the newly constituted Multi-dimensional Poverty Index (MPI), which identifies multiple deprivations in the same households in education, health and standard of living, only 29 countries do worse than India (though data-sets are from varying periods of time across nations). The MPI puts India’s poverty headcount ratio at 54 per cent, higher than Bangladesh and Nepal. India has the highest rates of death of new-born infants. Over one lakh children are kidnapped every year from Indian cities. The media is silent about the heinous crime as it is about other ‘real issues’ of poverty and deprivation listed above and mentioned by Amartya Sen.

President Pranab Mukherjee said recently that it was “unacceptable” that no Indian university has featured among the top 200 universities globally in the recent international rankings and that the only way forward was for the country’s universities to study and inculcate the ‘best practices’ of foreign universities. Though India earns 100 billion dollars from information technology sales and has over three million well paid trained people employed in it, in terms of innovation it is a distant back bencher.

Inculcating good practices of foreign universities should also include learning for better citizenship. Recently, I was thrilled on reading in the New York Times a report on how college students in America volunteer to serve their country and the world. “Thon— the world’s largest student-run charity, which is like a dance-a-thon, pep rally, rock concert and tent revival all in one. For 41 years, the students at Penn State — a university known more for its troubles than its triumphs in recent years — have raised tens of millions for pediatric cancer research and family care. They have raised so much — more than $101 million — that they have even financed a wing at Penn State Hershey Children’s Hospital. (This year’s collection was $12.4 million, two million more than last year) They are not really dancing the whole time. The rules are that they must stay awake for 46 hours and stay on their feet. It is a test of endurance. Of course it is uncomfortable and sometimes painful, but when they start to buckle and hallucinate, they remind themselves that if children can go through cancer therapy, they can tough it out. The fact is, Thon probably has more to do with Penn State students than football does. They are not looking to make someone an all-star; they are doing charitable work. And it wasn’t just one student, it was thousands doing that.”

Men like Aaron Swartz and Julian Asange have proved that no one can stop all knowledge from being freely available to everyone. It may take time but it will come. A time will surely come when the whole world becomes a global university and not only Indians but all humanity can sing with Poet Tagore his poem that we have a world where knowledge is indeed free.

**NaiDunia re-launches in Delhi**

NaiDunia, the Hindi daily that was acquired by the Jagran Group in April 2012, was re-launched in New Delhi, featuring enhanced content. The 14-page newspaper has different sections that will carry local and national news. NaiDunia’s Delhi edition has a cover price of Rs 3. In a bid to target the readers in Delhi who belong to other states, the paper will also carry news related to states such as Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Maharashtra, Rajasthan, and Gujarat. The Jagran Group has come out with several advertisements to announce the re-launch of NaiDunia in Dainik Jagran and other newspapers.

**Hindu’s Tamil daily launch expected**

Kasturi & Sons, publishers of The Hindu, is said to be foraying into the Tamil newspaper space. Industry sources have confirmed the news and say that the Tamil daily is expected to be launched some time in June-July this year. The Hindu has its largest base of circulation in southern India, especially in the states of Tamil Nadu and Kerala, where it is the most widely read English daily.
A call for more responsible reporting

Old-timers in the print media might well say that the press is no longer a vehicle of truthful, fair and unbiased reporting as it should be and as it was in the pre-Independence era. It is the business interest of the owner that now governs the writings, says Prof C.K. Sardana.

Let me recount how business interest come about and caught on in the media. America, like India, was also a British colony for centuries. While America became free in the 18th Century, India achieved independence in the 20th. Today, America is world’s No. 1 power as far as the economy, military strength and quality of life are concerned. The 30th President of the United States (1924-29), Calvin Coolidge, in an address to the American Society of Newspaper Editors, Washington DC, January 25, 1925, said, “It is probable that a press which maintains an intimate touch with the business currents of the nation is likely to be more reliable than it would be if it were a stranger to these influences.”

Notwithstanding our earlier pronouncements and policies of non-alignment and state-controlled economy, we are drifting at a very fast rate towards the policies adopted by US Government in line with the psyche of the American people as clearly spelt out nearly 90 years ago by no less a person than the then US President. Isn’t it a fact that following the era of globalisation commencing in 1990-1991, the private sector has emerged as a very strong economic force contributing to national growth and economy?

Today, media -- both print and electronic -- is largely owned by business magnates and business houses in the private sector. During the pre-Independence era, the owners of newspapers and journals were by and large activists themselves, in the one cause that united all Indians -- the struggle for freedom. But now, business interests of the media owners are paramount in the running of it. According to veteran journalist BG Verghese, “Newspapers are required to have editors who, under the Press Registration Act, carry primary responsibility for all the matter printed. However, editors have altogether disappeared or have in some cases been reduced to being brand managers, high-level public relations men or ‘editorial advisors’. They have no real editorial authority, which they have lost or willingly bartered for grandiose titles and fat pay packets. TV news channels have no legally designated editors though somebody or other may perform that role.”

Even so, I dare say there is freedom of operation in the media. There are umpteen examples of speedy reporting, analyses and broadcasting of views of persons of different ideologies, political parties, interests and backgrounds from a single platform provided by media, particularly electronic, within minutes of the event, for viewing by millions of people across the country and the world. While these persons are bound to keep their personal and party leanings at the back of their mind while responding or participating in discussions, there is a large amount of freedom in and of the media to carry their opinions.
I remember way back in the mid-1960s, a daily published from Bhopal had, amongst its reporting and editorial staff, persons with clear-cut ideological leanings. If the reporting or the desk man with leanings towards right was on duty, a story coming from a public sector enterprise would be carried less prominently than that from a private company. If, on the other hand, the person on duty had left leanings, the same story would be prominently published.

A leading English daily published from the capital, with several editions, carried a story with a byline about a business house whose top man was shown in poor light. The person happened to be a close friend of the paper’s owner. He rang him up in Chennai (then Madras) and said rather angrily, “what is this, you are my friend and your paper carries a damaging story about me and my business?” The owner coolly replied, “let me look into this.” He rang up the reporter and asked him whether the the story was factually correct. The reporter confirmed it was. The owner called up his friend and reiterated the point and added that in case the businessman had something to say his paper would be happy to carry it. The matter ended there. In their anxiety to steal a march over others with an exclusive, reporters today often forget to follow protocol or the niceties. As far as a business house is concerned, the reporter’s first point of contact should be the PRO. He or she should not rely on information from a rival organization or other sources.

Also, sometimes, there is national interest involved. For example, when a large public sector company is all set to receive a Rs. 1000-crore order for supply of products and services. It may be possible that a day before the release of the order, a rival company attempts to plant a story highlighting the poor quality of products and services of the
company concerned. A responsible journalist will always double-check and cross-check all facts before filing a report.

Freedom of the media is a double-edged weapon. It can help society and also damage it. Hence freedom of the media cannot be regarded as always good; it depends for what purpose it is being used. While Article 19(1) (a) of the Indian Constitution grants freedom to the media, this provision has to be read along with Article 51A (h) which lays down that it is the duty of all citizens to develop the scientific temper, humanism and the spirit of inquiry and reform. Those in the media are also citizens of India. Hence, it is their fundamental duty under the Constitution to promote the scientific temper and work for humanism and encourage the spirit of inquiry and reform so as to benefit society. I regret to say that while media persons lay great emphasis on their fundamental right under Article 19(1) (a), they usually forget their fundamental duty under article 51A (h).

Indian media is now largely controlled by businessmen who wish to make money. There is nothing wrong in making money but it must be coupled with social responsibility. The media is not an ordinary business that deals with commodities. It deals with information and opinion, which should be used to benefit people, not harm them.

The media has a moral obligation towards society – to enlighten rather then to incite. The power enjoyed by the media should be used for building bridges between various sections of society rather then dividing them, says Nagraj A.

The media provides readers and viewers news – of the expected and the unexpected. The various communication tools that we use either to communicate or to disseminate information is the cause for the changes we see in the world. Today, we live in a technological world; everything that surrounds and guide us into action is been driven by technology, our lives are constructed and dependent on these technologies, which are leading us to the path of destruction. Media rather then ‘constructing’ is ‘destructing’; it is the super weapon ever invented by the man to end the world. People tend to believe what they read, see and hear in media. In few countries, media acts as a propaganda tool for achieving certain goals in collaboration with governments and few individual groups. We are in a world where every one wants to outsmart the other by all possible means and one of the effective ways of controlling and influencing people is by using media, especially the electronic media. Media has become a powerful tool not to enlighten the masses, but to kill the opponents psychologically.

Few countries and individual groups around the world deliberately spread propaganda about their opponents. The propaganda is not confined to one field, it is visible in politics, religion, economy and in other areas. It is the news papers that we read; the television and the Internet we see that determine our actions. We understand world events and issues the way it is reported in media. At an individual level, one also shares and try to understand each other through exchange of information (communication tools), though we are separated geographically and physically. People are connected with each other virtually with the help of the latest communication tools. Media houses use most of these tools for reaching out to a wider audience and to put forward issues for discourse, issues of common interest and, at times, vested interests. The media as well as the common man are more interested in events that reek of rhetoric and are explosive. The selective publication and reporting of events can be dangerous at times; when the common man says something important very few people buy his argument but if the same argument is

(The writer is assistant professor in the Department of Mass Communication and Journalism, Tezpur University, Assam. He specialises in the area of electronic media, television and documentary film-making.)
made by the media everyone tends to believe and get influenced. With information out in minutes today, authentic or unauthentic, it is one of the reason for communities and societies becoming intolerant especially when such information is against one section of the society or if it hurts the sentiments of another. Information exchange between the individuals, organisations and countries happen at lightening speed. This can be life-saving at times (tsunami and earthquake alerts) but can also be destructive (political, religious, economical). Yes, speed thrills but also kills. Sadly, we live in a world where speed is considered a measure for success. People are in a mad race to be first. Each television channel wants to be the first to reach the spot, beam the visuals and report the ‘breaking news’. Individuals and communities can share information today in a jiffy – through Twitter and Facebook and the rest. When the cartoons of Prophet Muhammad in a Danish newspaper offended the sensibilities of one section of society, unrest and violence erupted in several parts of the world. This is the destructive side of media. The freedom of expression is a cause of worry for many nations around the world, especially nations that uphold democracy and freedom.

A film on YouTube can ignite a fire, as it happened in September last year, when a film on the Prophet was uploaded (it was in the same month that a French satirical weekly published several caricatures of the Prophet). The protests led to the killing of a senior American diplomat and four others in Libya, a place that had no connection with the film. Some countries banned YouTube, authorities in many did nothing to stop access to the film. So, you can really do anything on the Internet and almost get away. Media cannot be indifferent to issues affecting the religious sentiments of people. On the pretext of basing its exercised on the platform of freedom of expression, media houses ignore sensitive issues that can easily lead to chaos and death. Fundamentalist and other religious organisations take advantage to push their ideology.
There is little doubt that corruption is fundamentally a problem of governance. As a matter of fact, for the survival of democracy and society, it is important to ensure that citizens manage to shrug off the laidback view that corruption in governance is now part and parcel of life and beyond redemption. Online services may help stem the rot. Although the services are often touted as user-friendly, transparent and efficient especially for public service delivery, reality is different. Yet, there is some hope.

Corruption has taken a firm hold on all sections of the society in India. To look for corruption-free governance models, it is important to look at corruption with a micro lens. Identifying and analysing types of corruption as well as reasons for paying bribe or using ‘contacts’ is important. An in-depth empirical analysis of governance and corruption, unbundling governance into components is important. This allows a more detailed quantitative assessment of corruption, a more nuanced understanding of the causes of the problem leading towards a stronger foundation for policy advice.

For clarity’s sake, corruption can broadly be categorised as one, which directly involves common citizens and two, which can be identified as institutional or systemic. In both the cases, the ultimate sufferer is the common citizen. Of late, due to the much publicised high-end corruption or systemic corruption in government at national as well as state levels, the corruption faced by common citizens on a daily basis looks miniscule and gets unreported or unnoticed. However, it is not so.

Corruption in public services has become multi-layered and so it is difficult to isolate or separate corrupt practices related to the service delivery and directly effecting citizens, from systemic or institutional-level corruption. For instance, to get a contract from the government for supplying mid-day meals in schools or food grains at public distribution system shops or drugs to government health centres, if illegal means are adopted by ‘greasing the palms’ of bureaucrats and/or politicians, the contractor/supplier makes all efforts to ‘recover’ the spent amount by providing inferior quality food items or medicines and either overcharging the customer or diverting the stocks to the open market and earning more than what was paid as bribe.

Thus, the ‘transaction’ between contractor (supplier) and government officials can be categorised as institutional or systemic corruption while the diversion of essential items from the designated government centres to the open-market creating scarcity or non-availability at the government service delivery point makes it a case of corruption related to service delivery to citizens, popularly known as ‘petty’ corruption. In normal circumstances, a citizen could have bought at subsidised rate (food grains from government ration shops) or even free of cost (medicines in government hospitals). In
short, while corruption begins at a systemic or high-end level, it is ultimately passed on to the users of the services provided by these institutions.

The complexity in suggesting a solution is like the complexity involved in identifying and quantifying the extent and spread of corruption. In India with such a socially, economically and culturally diverse population, it becomes difficult to think of a single way of addressing the problem. High illiteracy, low access to modern and new mediums of service delivery such as online services, and linguistic barriers make the approach towards improving service delivery and making it corruption-free difficult.

**E-governance** is being touted as ‘ram baan’ or what may be called an error-free cure for corruption. Whether this will indeed be the case, only time will tell. No doubt, on paper, as far as its application models are concerned, e-governance looks to be one of the better solutions. But it definitely is not the only solution. It has to work in tandem with other good measures of governance, particularly in the context of India’s profile.

In India, as part of e-governance, online services are introduced in different public services by Central
and state governments with the aim towards efficient and corruption-free public services. The National e-Governance Plan as articulated in its vision statement is to “make all government services accessible to the common man in his locality, through common service delivery outlets, and ensure efficiency, transparency, and reliability of such services at affordable costs to realise the basic needs of the common man”.

However, from the common citizens’ perspective, most of the online facilities in public services are no more than pilot projects. The online service is not expected to change the scenario much in near future. For three major and critical concerns associated with online services: reach, accessibility and user-friendliness, and operationalisation of online services.

Reach: No doubt for a section of society that has access to a computer with an Internet facility, online services such as railway reservation or filling of income tax returns or paying public utility bills such as telephone/mobile phone and electricity bills, or life insurance premium, has become fairly easy. However, a quick back-of-the-envelope calculation tells you that the situation does not look impressive. As per Census 2011, only 3 per cent of households in India have a computer with Internet connectivity. Which means, users of an online facility, including those accessing online services from an Internet café, will not be more than 5 per cent. There is thus huge scope for expansion of IT services but one thing is clear: more than 90 per cent of the households use traditional methods of seeking public services and continue to be at the mercy of service providers. Needless to add, ‘online’ cannot come to the rescue of a major proportion of common citizens in the near future.

Accessibility or user-friendly portal/website: Most of the portals and websites, including the most visited ones such as the one for railway reservation (IRCTC/indianrail.gov) or for filing income tax returns are in English. As per Census 2001 (Census 2011 findings on this parameter is yet to be released), only 12.5 per cent of Indians have identified English as their first or second or even third language. A far less proportion of people can use online services if they are not in a language they are proficient in or at least have a working knowledge of. Until this happens, the users of services will continue to depend on ‘others’, most likely middlemen.

Another example is that of an e-stamp paper. The aim is to have hassle-free transactions and keep a check on fraudulent practices such as fake stamp papers getting circulated. But it has been observed that to buy an e-stamp paper, extra money (illegal) as commission is still charged at service outlets. The e-stamp paper may help reduce systemic corruption but at the delivery point level, the ‘service charges’ put on common citizens continues.

Operationalisation of services: It’s another major challenge, particularly for service providers. It has more to do with back-end efficiency unlike the first two, which pertain to front-end usage. With an increase in the number of users, the concern with online services is its capacity to handle demand. Besides the slowing down of web-based services, the updating of information at regular intervals is also noticeably missing on websites. For instance, e-procurement and e-tender are no doubt good tools that paves the way towards a transparent system but in transactions, particularly financial ones, the hacking of personal confidential information is a major concern for most online service users.

The National Crime Records Bureau Report, Crime in India 2011, has thrown light on how the nation has fared as far as cyber crimes go. According to the report, the number of cases registered under the country’s IT Act in 2011 year was 1791 – a considerable rise of 85 per cent from the 966 cases registered the previous year. The confidence-building exercise needs to be taken vigorously and highlighted as much as possible for increasing the usage of online services.

Another observation with regard to online services is the unaccountability of local offices. Previously, you would have gone to the local office for redress of grievance related to non-operation of a service. Now, with online services available, any complaint/request receives a standard response: the central server is down or slow and the local office staff is helpless as they cannot rectify the technical snag. Which is also true for service users. All this leaves a negative impression about online services and its efficiency.

A new-look Chennai Chronicle

Chennai Chronicle, the daily supplement with Deccan Chronicle, unveiled its new look recently. With Ajay Reddy as senior editor, Chennai Chronicle has a fortified editorial team that has driven the new product. The revamp involves new colour pages, new fonts, new shapes and new ideas. Chennai Chronicle was launched in March 2005. Over the past eight years, there has been two design revamps.
Community radio is a great tool for communicating information, especially for the poor and not-for-profit organisations that serve the society. It is in fact being used to great effect all over the country.

It was a pleasant surprise to read some months ago a story in The Hindu about the Bihar Government’s plans to utilise the services of community radio station (CRS) as a medium for the uplift of the socio-economic status of downtrodden in the state. Later, a news feature in the same newspaper spoke about a particular CRS near Manesar in Haryana, called Radio Mewat. It has managed to grow steadily in popularity and is accepted by the local masses as a convenient medium, the people’s own medium in their backyard, as the piece mentioned. A senior district-level police officer was quoted in the news the other day saying that as a forum for airing grievances and complaints about public atrocities and raising issues for wider publicity, community radio hardly had any competition; people can listen to messages even on their mobile phones. As a veteran programme producer of Radio Mewat says, it is all about people’s “own problems being talked about by our own people in our own language”.

Indeed, the concept of grassroots media acquired a new meaning when community radios were introduced in India in 2006. The medium is becoming more and more popular because of its presence among the masses in remote areas, rather than being an urban-centric tool. Providing people the means for freedom of expression and a choice for acquiring information are important aspects of the overall development process. It’s about providing voice to the voiceless, as Nobel laureate Prof Amartya Sen remarked. Our Constitution provides for the privilege under Article 19. CRSs can fulfill the expectation to a great extent if developed properly.

A close look at the Union Ministry of Information & Broadcasting statistics reveals that till August 3 last year, of a total of 135 operational CRSs, the maximum number belonged to educational institutions, followed by NGOs. The effort of NGOs is highly encouraging and should be emulated by other like-minded groups. Granting of licence to state agriculture universities to run CRSs is also an encouraging step. This will facilitate better interaction between the targeted community of farmers and the universities, which are storehouses of knowledge. Successful farmers can reach a wider audience as role models.

As far as granting a license to an educational institution is concerned, the prime concern of the institution will be to put the students’ interests as top priority. The interest will be to make the students proficient in different aspects of radio programming. In the bargain, the interests of the community are secondary. The sudden raising of spectrum fee from Rs 19000 a year to Rs 91000 is another issue that can be a stumbling block. While the move was aimed at garnering revenue for the government, for the majority of CRSs it meant an uphill task. Not so much for universities or private educational trusts, but for organisations with little financial support and NGOs. “The fee hike puts an unnecessary burden on community radio stations which are struggling to make ends meet. TRAI had in 2004

(The writer is associate professor and head, Mass Communication & Journalism Department, Tezpur University, Assam.)

Abhijit Bora
suggested that there should be no spectrum fee for community radio, which should be the case,” says N. Ramkrishnan, general secretary of the Community Radio Forum of India.

Then there are cost involved. People can’t be engaged on a ‘free’ basis. There is the cost of electricity, the initial cost of establishing towers and studios and, later on, maintenance (recurring) cost. Besides, the money that can be generated from advertising is a pittance compared to actual expenditure. Of course, there has been a constant demand from many quarters for revoking the order. There was a strong demand for considering even a complete withdrawal of spectrum fee for the CRS sector in order to encourage people at the grassroots, for whom community radio was actually meant. The other option was to classify CRS operators into various categories and to charge a differential spectrum fee.

Another point is, the licencing process is cumbersome. For example, a representative of the applicant is invited for a presentation to the consultation committee at the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting head office in New Delhi after about six months of filing the application. After other procedures are met, including obtaining clearance from the nearest base of the Indian Air Force or any other major defence establishment and verification from the Union Ministry concerned, a representative is again invited for the signing of the Grant Of Permission Agreement (GOPA) in Delhi before the licence is actually granted. Only after the licence is granted can construction work for the towers and studios be undertaken. So, the whole process is rather time-consuming and expensive, not convenient for those without sound finances. The ministry should seriously consider decentralising the process of interaction or presentation and the GPA signing with the ministry panel at a regional level will save considerable money for the applicant.

According to the National Knowledge Commission report, technology advisor to the government Sam Pitroda advocates the usage of community radio for spreading knowledge among the masses in the Indian subcontinent. The report says there is scope to set up at least 5000 CRSs in a phased manner. If not 5000, at least 500 CRSs should have been operational by now. However, due to bottlenecks, till early August last year, the ministry had received less than 1100 applications, of which 135 radio stations have become operational. There seems to be a lacklustre attitude on the part of the Union Government. After the Supreme Court declared airwaves as public property (to be opened for public usage with no monopoly from any quarter) in 1995, the government opened the airwaves for private FM Radio operators to generate revenue and deprived the general public of radio services. It was only after a lot of public debate and protest that the CRS concept was considered for operation – in 2006. Even today, the government does not seem too keen on open the airwaves fully as it has for television.

Another disturbing trend is the wide regional disparity in the number of operational CRSs. While Tamil Nadu leads with 22 CRSs or 30 per cent of the total number, followed closely by Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra and Karnataka in the top bracket with the number of CRSs touching double digits, many have less than 10 stations, with Jammu and Kashmir and Jharkhand having just one CRS each. This kind of imbalance needs to be addressed early. One solution may be to have more publicity efforts aimed at creating better awareness among the targeted masses so that there are serious-minded contenders for operating the special medium. Another is to allow CRSs a limited amount of airtime for entertainment purposes so that some amount of advertising revenues can be generated. Otherwise, many operators will be hard put to even manage their day-to-day operations.
A victory for women and the road ahead

If the gang rape of a 23-year-old student on a Delhi bus on December 16, 2012, led to a sense of both outrage over and despair about the entrenched violence women experience in India, the report of the Justice Verma Committee – emerging exactly five weeks after that incident – came as a heartening glimmer of hope for reform and justice. The response of women’s activists to the report was unanimous: It is, potentially, a game-changer and transforms the manner in which the issue has been framed thus far. Human rights lawyer Vrinda Grover puts it this way, “It marks a major paradigm shift in the understanding of violence against women in the country. It is quite rightly termed a women’s bill of rights and roots violence firmly within the framework of inequality.”

Many of the arguments made in the report had been voiced by the Indian women’s movement. Both Sudha Sundaraman, general secretary, All India Democratic Women’s Association (AIDWA), and Suneeta Dhar, director of the women’s resource centre, Jagori, see it as a reflection of the concerted work done over decades. Observes Sundaraman, “Women across the country have spoken out on this concern. Take just one issue we have fought against – the general refusal of the police to register cases and their overall gender insensitivity, which translates into the low conviction rate. We are, therefore, delighted that the Verma Committee Report lambasts the police for its failure to prevent such violence and makes the non-registration of FIRs (first information reports) a punitive offence.”

Dhar points out how women’s activists have routinely been portrayed in the most negative way – as home-breakers and Westernised harridans. “But what we were fighting for all along was really for our constitutional equality – something that has just been reiterated by the Verma Commission,” she says. She points to the systematic way in which women’s activists, academics and lawyers last year had suggested changes in the Criminal Law Amendment Bill 2012 and made representations to the Justice Verma Committee. Reveals Dhar, “We argued that the everyday violence women faced was part of a continuum, ranging from harassment to aggravated sexual assault and the close attention the Verma Committee paid to the submission we made before it recently was truly heartening.”

The rising graph of crimes against women, perceived internationally as a blot against India, arises out of a culture of impunity and apathy within the system. The Justice Verma Committee Report recognised this when it observed: “While we acknowledge and greatly applaud the concerns of feminists and various persons who have spoken in support of women, we still feel distressed to say that all organs of the state have, in varying degrees, failed to fulfil the promise of equality in favour of women.” Farah Naqvi, women’s activist and member of the National Advisory Committee, believes that what makes the report unique is the language it adopts, “It is one of the most progressive reports to emanate from the government system. It sees the crime of rape and sexual assault, not as driven by lust but as part of an exercise of power and control. The spotlight is on masculinity and the social construction of masculinity in India.”

(Reprinted with permission from The New Delhi-based writer is director, Women’s Feature Service, a features agency mandated to make visible gender in media (www.wfsnews.org). Earlier, she was senior associate editor with The Indian Express. She was awarded the Chameli Devi Jain Award for Outstanding Woman Journalist and the Zee-Asthiva Award.)
Nothing short of a thorough reform of the criminal justice system has been envisaged in the report. Not only has it recommended the discontinuation of anachronistic and deeply offensive practices like the two-finger test, it has broadened the definition of sexual assault to include hitherto unrecognised crimes like stripping and stalking. Marital rape – a demand first raised by women activists in the Eighties – is also deemed a crime for the first time. “It was sheer joy to hear Justice Leila Seth reading out that section of the report. It marked a fundamental shift in the recognition of a woman’s right to her bodily integrity,” remarks Grover.

Justice Verma Committee has also voiced the concern that “systematic or isolated sexual violence, in the process of Internal Security duties, is being legitimised by the Armed Forces Special Powers Act, which is in force in large parts of our country” and recommends wide-ranging measures to address the reality. This stance is of utmost significance given the tragic history of assaults on women by members of the armed forces. No justice has been done in the 1991 Kunan Poshpora incident in Kashmir’s Kupwara District, where 36 women were allegedly gangraped by the 4 Raj Rifles. It is also difficult to forget the desperate protest that a group of Manipur women staged in 2004 against the alleged rape and murder of Thangjam Manorama by personnel of the Assam Rifles, when they stripped in front of the Kangla Fort in Manipur, holding up a banner that read, Indian Army Rape Us. As Sundaraman puts it, “Greater accountability from the armed forces has been a long standing demand and we are extremely reassured to learn that the Verma Committee has also taken note of it.”

Precisely because the Justice Verma Committee Report is a path-breaker there is disquiet over its silences. Says Asha Kowtal, General Secretary, All India Dalit Mahila Adhikar Manch, “The Report holds up hope of change so it is disappointing that dalit women again find that they don’t figure in the recommendations. We had hoped crimes against dalit women would figure in the section on aggravated sexual assault. Have we been left out because we are deemed to come under the Scheduled Castes and Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act?”

Naqvi agrees this is a major oversight. “The absence of communal and caste violence as a category of aggravated sexual assault under Section 376, is very troubling.” Muralidharan, assistant convener, National Platform for the Rights of the Disabled, is similarly disappointed to find that sexual assault against physically or mentally disabled women has not been classified as an ‘aggravated sexual assault’, a crime that invites a more rigorous sentence. There are other concerns, too. According to Grover, the use of the term ‘person’, with reference to the victim of rape, could camouflage the issue of violence against women. She says, “Victims should have been clearly disaggregated into categories of women, men and transgenders. This is important given the specificity and intensity of the violence that visits women. I also find it difficult to understand why the report has made stalkers gender neutral when all evidence suggests that it is women who are stalked by men in India.”

Even as women activists savour this moment of achievement – some in Delhi even gathered for a celebratory picnic to mark it – they know that the gains spelt out in the Justice Verma Committee Report could prove elusive unless the political system takes ownership of its recommendations and translates them into laws, policies and practices. Ayesha Kidwai, associate professor, Centre for Linguistics, of Delhi’s Jawaharlal Nehru University and a long-time women’s activist, was categorical, “We know that our struggle cannot end with this report. We will now take it to every political leader in the country and to every party and state government.” The message from the women’s movement is clear: On this long and tortuous road to a violence-free future for women, there can be no turning back.

(Courtesy: Women’s Feature Service)
For a gender-just world, be the change

If we want to stop violence, establish the rule of law, create homes and societies where girls and women are accepted, respected, given dignity and freedom, then all of us have to begin with ‘ourselves’. As feminists have been saying for decades, the ‘personal is political’. We are all part of the problem and all of us can and should be part of the solution. Without this ‘inner’ change, nothing will change. If we want true equality between men and women, then we need nothing less than a cultural revolution, says Kamla Bhasin.

For years women activists and organisations had waged a lonely battle as they came out on to the streets in protest whenever rapes and molestations took place. The horrific gang rape of December 16, 2012, on a Delhi bus, proved to be a watershed. Finally, it was recognised that crimes of this kind were everyone’s issue, everyone’s concern. For someone like me, who has been part of such protests for decades, it was heartening to see people from across the spectrum break their silence and shed their apathy towards the biggest and most pervasive war in the world – violence against women and girls.

According to the United Nations, out of every three women, one experiences violence. This means over one billion women and girls face violence in their daily lives. All times are war times for women. It is this all-pervasive violence that has ensured that equality for women remains confined to the Constitution – just pious, politically correct words. Equality, dignity and respect for women do not mark the public sphere; neither do they inform family relationships.

While the teeming crowds at the recent protests made a glorious sight, the main slogans and demands raised seemed very limited and also very violent, especially during the initial days of the protest. The anger was towards others, towards the outside. “They” need to do something. Of course, “they” – whether they are politicians, police personnel or legal luminaries – need to do something, but what about us? What about the mindset that leads to violence, which considers women as bodies, commodities, targets?

Changing this mindset requires no less than a cultural tsunami. Before we stop violence against women, we would first need to demolish innumerable religious, cultural, and linguistic practices that we consider normal. For example, words like pati and swami for the man a woman marries, need to go. They all mean ‘master’/’owner’. In free India, an adult woman cannot or should not have an owner. There are thousands of words, expressions,
idioms, slang, that demean and insult women and which need to be purged from our consciousness.

Then take religious and cultural practices related to marriage. Take kanya-daan. In free India, no kanya (daughter) can be given as daan (donation) Patriarchal saptapadi needs to go because it venerates the man. The sindoor (red vermillion mark) on a woman’s forehead screams out her status, her suhaag, but what about the suhaag of the man, what about his patni-vrata (duties towards the wife)? The newly-wed woman who touches the feet of her spouse reinforces the same mindset. The giving of dowry, the behaviour of the bridegroom’s party, the treatment of the bride’s family, they are all patriarchal. They privilege the man and demean the woman; mark her out as inferior, as a burden. We also need to reflect at the reality (not just the laws) of inheritance. Until some years ago, women owned 1 per cent of the property in the world! Economic disempowerment of women is a major factor for the violence they suffer.

Then, let’s look at the media, especially television and films. We have enough insights and scholarship to indicate how much the media influence the way we think, dress, eat, consume, behave. If the power of persuasion was not there, would corporate bodies be spending billions on advertising in the media? Feminist research has produced volumes to show the patriarchal, anti-women, even misogynist nature of our media.

Thirty years ago, some of us in Delhi set up a committee on the portrayal of women in the media to respond and challenge the most harmful aspects of its coverage. We would review films, serials, children’s books, textbooks and write about the patriarchal biases that marked all of them. We protested in front of cinema halls, wrote to Doordarshan, to corporate houses about their anti-women advertisements, to educational authorities, and we were able to make a difference. In that not so free and liberal world of the early 1980s, we were able to influence things. Given today’s globalised media, it has become much more difficult to do this. The free market paradigm has made us ‘free’ of decency, responsibility, ethics, and morality.

The media, as well as stars from Bollywood, who have come out to show their concern after the recent gang rape, also need to ask themselves whether they are part of the problem; whether they too are not responsible for the commodification of women, on the one hand, and for making boys and men violent, on the other. Bollywood stars promote alcoholism, deception and immorality by participating in ads for alcohol masquerading as soda water. Today, stars like Saif Ali Khan and Salman Khan advertise for liquor companies but the first such immoral ad I saw was done by Shatrughan Sinha many years ago. Alcohol and masculinity both lead to violence. Film stars Akshay Kumar and Ranbir Kapoor have expressed their pain over the recent gang rape. They should now review some of the ads they have done and realise the links these ads have with aggressive masculinity; with violence in general and violence against women in particular.

Take two recent ads that Kapoor did for Pepsi Cola and IPL, both of which glorify indecency. In one of them, he with another man order a man (either a friend or sister) to go and buy a Pepsi for them. In the second ad, he walks into a hospital room where a friend (or relation) is lying encased in a plaster. He just picks up the man, shoves him in to a chair, occupies the bed, and watches IPL while enjoying his Pepsi. At the end of both these ads, Kapoor declares, “IPL na tameez se khela jaata hai, na tameez se dekha jaata hai (IPL is neither played decently nor watched decently)”.

If this is not a total glorification of masculine badtameezi or indecency, what is?

IPL’s mixture of sport, Bollywood and semi-nude cheerleaders has also encouraged indecency and aggression. Just consider the aggressive names given to IPL teams: Delhi Daredevils; Pune Warriors; Kochi Tuskers; Kolkata Knight Riders. As for the other teams, they are all Royals and Kings in democratic India. Is IPL all about the secret desires of reestablishing a feudalistic, masculinist world, with rich boys having ‘fun’ at the expense of ‘nautch girls’? Cricket icons like Virat Kohli take the formula a step forward. He has two ways to “fool girls” in an ad for a phone: “Ladki pataane ke do tareeque”. Virat is truly virat, or grand. He now possesses a phone to fool women. Truly, the owners and managers of our media may not be part of any khap panchayat (village council), but they seem to have the same mindset.

Look also at the violence, intolerance and indecency that mark Parliament debates. They have become slanging matches without anyone listening to anyone else. They could even pass off for our television talk shows conducted by award-winning anchors. One of the talk shows is actually called The Big Fight. The idea for this and other shows seem to be to just throw an opinion – like a bone – into the ring and get all the esteemed panelists snapping at it. How can anyone emerge any the wiser amidst this shouting and name-calling?

(Courtesy: Women’s Feature Service)
“I want to live.” These words from the death bed of a young Delhi student gangraped on a bus in mid-December 2012, can speak for many women caught in the vortex of violence. The violence may take place at different locations and may assume different forms, but every single act of this kind bears the imprint of patriarchy, which is the belief that men are socially supreme and have the natural right to exercise control over women. Nowhere is such control as widely manifest as it is within the family and home, often enjoiyed by cultural tradition or masked with a patina of emotions and couched in terms of endearment. The exercise of such control by men within the family can also be accompanied by violence against the women members within it, creating in them a sense of helplessness, a loss of dignity and an ever present fear of attack. Home is often not where the heart – but the hurt – is, says Pamela Philipose.

Peeling off the layers of secrecy that enshroud such violence within the home has taken monumental effort and the task is far from over. Seven years ago, the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act (PWDVA) came into force in India after at least a decade of public activism. Having emerged as a demand from the civil society, it had a rare dynamism not apparent in many laws. Not only did it seek to expand the definition of ‘domestic violence’, it widened the categories of women who are entitled to seek justice under it.

Today, even as more and more women are seeking relief under this important law, its effectiveness is being threatened by a range of factors, from the government’s failure in providing adequate financial and administrative support for its proper implementation to widespread social apathy which tragically continues to persist despite the mass mobilisations against violence that India recently witnessed. But what is perhaps one of the more disturbing trends is the plethora of court verdicts that have seriously undermined its impact. The just-released Sixth Monitoring and Evaluation Report of this law, conducted by the Lawyers’ Collective and the National Mission for the Empowerment of Women with support from UN Women, which evaluated over 9000 court orders under the PWDVA, notes that “Judicial biases have made themselves evident in the orders analysed.” The Report goes on to enumerate at least seven kinds of biases: The “narrowing down” of the definition of domestic relationship; the privileging of property rights over women’s rights; disbelieving the aggrieved woman; denial of orders when domestic violence is deemed to be slight; failure to frame domestic violence as a human rights violation; a tendency to prioritise the need to ‘preserve’ the family;
and even overt displays of hostility towards the complainant.

“How is it that judges across the country come to the same conclusion?” asked Indira Jaising, additional solicitor general, Government of India, and one of the most important figures behind the passing of the PWDVA. She was referring to the remarkable similarity of argumentation that marked most judgments on domestic violence. The answer came from Justice A.P. Shah, former chief justice of the Delhi High Court, speaking on the same occasion, “The fear was that a law against domestic violence would ‘break up’ families. This was the mindset and, remember, the judiciary is dominated by Indian males.”

Nearly one-fourth of the orders analysed under the Report revealed that judges continued to view domestic violence as a “strictly relationship problem amenable to marital counselling” and not as an instance of human rights violation. The overwhelming aim of the judges appears to be to preserve the ‘sanctity of the home’ and the institution of marriage, even at the cost of ensuring that the aggrieved woman lives a life free of violence. This mindset sometimes manifests itself in a tendency to disbelieve the woman and innumerable verdicts, especially by the lower courts, reflect this. Sometimes this is accompanied by an overt hostility. In a verdict (Application No 5/2010), quoted in thereport, the judge stopped just short of characterising the woman seeking relief as an extortionist: “Thus far we have been silent witness to the extortion of money or obtaining custody and a legal advantage in the divorce cases in more than 98 per cent false dowry complaints (as per court records), where it is the wife’s family that is demanding and taking money from the husband’s family in open court... and the same is not considered a crime.” It went on to state that the word ‘dowry’ has been misused by radical Indian feminist organisations and commends the dropping of the term altogether.

Exceptional though the order may be, verdicts of this kind can certainly intimidate many who have suffered domestic violence because of dowry demands from seeking justice. But there are also cases to suggest that some judges at least are arriving at a better understanding of the domestic violence law. In V.D. Bhanot vs Savita Bhanot, delivered by the Supreme Court in 2012, the retrospective application of the law was recognised. In other words, a woman who had once lived in a shared household with her husband and was no longer doing so, could still get relief under the law - an important gain given the time it sometimes takes for a woman to summon up the courage and resources to seek justice. There is also, generally speaking, a better judicial recognition that ‘domestic violence’ can be more than just physical assault and could include psychological, economic and other forms of abuse.

Getting all of India’s judges on the same page on a relatively new law like the PWDVA is a tall order and no one knows this better than the man who presides over the Indian judicial system, Chief Justice Altamas Kabir. But he is convinced about the urgency of the task. Speaking at the function marking the release of the Report, he indicated that every effort was now being made by the Supreme Court to “ensure that practice directions in the form of circulars are being sent consistently to the High Courts and in turn to the Subaltern Courts”. Ultimately – as Jaising argued – what is required is for the higher judiciary to signal to the 17000 courts in the country that the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act must be implemented, both in letter and spirit.

(Courtesy: Women’s Feature Service)
DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Yes, the media can help resolve disputes

Domestic has become so ubiquitous in cultures around the world that millions of women consider it a way of life. However, protection against domestic violence in India is a challenge due to multiple reasons. For instance, there are a number of laws in our country that provide equality to women but laws are meaningful only when you know about them and are able to use them. Then, there is a huge backlog of cases and family disputes and marital conflicts must be sorted out amicably. Most often, the poor are exploited and unable to seek legal help as they are unaware of their rights. Legal literacy helps break the vicious circle.

Civil society groups have tried to provide support to the victims of domestic violence in the form of counselling and economic and legal support. However, the two interventions – civil society engagement and the use of media – are different in their reach and impact. Civil society intervention is usually more intense, closer to the victim and helps them protect themselves. The media can highlight and create a public platform to raise such issues and be the catalyst in generating awareness. Aap Ki Kachehri - Kiran Ke Saath, a reality show produced by Synergy Ad Labs on the Star Plus channel was an attempt to resolve family disputes and generate legal awareness among those who complained of violence as well as viewers. This paper is based on the primary research conducted to analyse the programme’s effectiveness in serving as a tool for alternate dispute resolution and legal literacy and its impact on the women who benefited.

Aap Ki Kachehri - Kiran Ke Saath tried to bring together the strengths of two approaches – civil society intervention and use of the media – to highlight the extent and forms of domestic violence on the one hand and ways to question the perpetrators of violence and the use of legal means to protect women from violence, on the other. It was an attempt to resolve real-life disputes through mediation, which is one of the techniques of alternate dispute resolution. The show had Magsaysay Award winner Kiran Bedi as judge. She addressed conflicts of separation, inheritance, verbal and physical abuse, women’s rights, sexual harassment, dowry, gender discrimination and matrimonial disputes. She heard arguments and delivered justice. The process of justice delivery included a first-person account by the two parties, followed by an unbiased discussion in search of a speedy and just resolution of the dispute, while educating viewers on the legal aspects of such situations. Bedi played a facilitator in delivering justice and informing the complainants and viewers of the laws that one can use in times of crisis.

The study was conducted with 270 viewers of the programme to understand their perspectives about the effectiveness of such a programme.
Phase II of the study was conducted with 20 women beneficiaries of the programme. Since most of the cases were associated with family violence where women were the victims, case studies were conducted to capture in detail information about the impact on their lives after the resolution of the conflict and its telecast. Almost half of the respondents were below the age of 32 years. From the lower-income-group families, 17 per cent of the respondents were illiterate, 12 per cent were educated till Class 5 and 12 per cent till Class 12. The majority of the respondents from middle and high-income families were graduates.

More of respondents from the low-income group families found it a good opportunity to know and understand legal information. A large majority of the respondents (99 per cent) found it a good medium for making people aware about their legal rights, duties and a range of laws. Women respondents (59 per cent) liked the legal information provided at the end of the programme, may be due to lack of access to such information otherwise; 54 per cent of the respondents sought more legal information, most for them being viewers belonging to low-income families.

As compared to middle-income respondents (29 per cent), more of low-income (37 per cent) and high-income (39 per cent) respondents said people wanted to participate to get financial help. Half the respondents said they would approach the programme, followed by the court (17 per cent) and the police (20 per cent) to sort out similar problems in their lives. Twelve per cent of the respondents, mainly women, said they would not go anywhere but try to resolve the dispute at home. The majority of high-income-group respondents (74 respondents) were not in favour of showing personal life disputes on television, as compared to 38 per cent from middle-income and 13 per cent from low-income. Sixty per cent of the respondents liked the latter part of each episode when Kiran Bedi gave her judgment and legal information was provided.

Women were not in favour of letting others know about their problems because of the social stigma. Some of the problems articulated by the women included lack of support from their families and their upbringing that put pressure on them to always try and adjust and not jeopardise family honour by discussing family disputes in public. This in effect dissuaded them from seeking outside help to resolve domestic violence-related issues. Most of the women respondents said they lived in a male-dominated society and there was no point taking their personal problems outside home. One of the respondent pointed out that people seemed to listen to their stories with sympathy but later made fun of them.

Of the 20 women beneficiaries interviewed, most (75 per cent) were found to be in young and middle-age group. Ninety per cent had filed cases against their husbands. About one-fourth of them were illiterate and the rest had hardly any education, making them more vulnerable. In addition, due to economic dependence, they were found to be making lot of compromises. About 80 per cent of the cases related to marital maladjustment.

Most of the women seemed to have a guilt accompanied by anger and expressed that the patriarchal social order expected devotion to the husband. Most of them said that they tried to work towards such expectations but were unable to do so due to violent and abusive behaviour of their husband or in-laws. Almost 70 per cent of the women reported being physically abused by their husbands or in-laws or both, for dowry or for a baby boy. Other reasons were economic crisis (55 per cent), unemployment (30 per cent) and debts (30 per cent).

In most of the cases, it was found that only the men worked and the women were totally dependent, economically, on their husbands. About 35 per cent of the respondents reported alcohol addiction and no regular work by their husbands as also reasons for dispute. In four out of twenty cases, women reported that their husbands were involved in extra-marital relationships; they could tolerate battering but such relationships shattered them. They wanted to live separately or were already living separately. In three cases, women were ready to forgive their husband if they agreed to leave the ‘other woman”. Clearly, women were making compromises to save their marriage.

Aap Ki Kachehri - Kiran Ke Saath did provide financial assistance to some of the women based on their economic condition; the programme supported their children’s education and provided for rehabilitation therapy for de-addiction. The benefits were given either in cash or as fixed deposits for children, or as fee for vocational training courses or money to buy sewing machine or computers. Some of the suggestions made by viewers of the programme were to devote more time to providing legal information, a section for providing legal advice sought by viewers who wished to remain anonymous, and an address and helpline number to be displayed in public places.
Jammu and Kashmir once defined the beautiful backdrop for Hindi films in the 1960s and 1970s. When disturbances – political, military and militant – escalated and tourism came almost to a standstill, many gutsy documentary filmmakers stepped into the state to capture the impact of the turbulence on the common man, woman and child in Kashmir. But no documentary has focussed specifically on the women victims, who have got neither justice nor media coverage.

Documentary filmmaker Bilal Jaan has made Ocean of Tears, the first documentary that focusses on physical, social and filial violence on women in the state. It has been produced by Public Service Broadcasting Trust, Delhi and spans more than two decades of violence perpetrated on women both by Indian security forces and by Kashmiri militants. It covers rape, rape and murder, and victimsation of women whose husbands have gone missing. Ocean of Tears narrates the untold stories of victims who endured social, economic, physical, mental and emotional abuse and reveals their struggle for justice. The film was originally to premiere on December 15, 2012 in Kashmir University. “The State authority exerted pressure so screening was blocked because the University felt it might trigger law and order problems. I told them that the film had already been passed by the censors but they would not listen and screening was denied,” says Bilal Jaan. Redemption arrived when the film was elected by the 3rd Nepal Human Rights International Film Festival in February.

Ocean of Tears traces its beginnings to the gang-rape of 32 women in the village of Kunan Poshpora in Kupwara District, J&K, which took place on February 23-24 in 1991. According to villagers’ statements and newspaper reports, 32 women and children were gang-raped. It had snowed that day and the paths were covered with four feet of snow. At 11pm, the crackdown began. The men were dragged out of their homes and forced to remain on the snow-covered paths outside. Youngsters were taken to the torture camps and the women and girls were raped and beaten so much that most of the men could hardly recognise their own wives the next morning. The rapists, soldiers all, were from Panzgham camp. While researching the film, Bilaal and his crew came across a high percentage of violence against women due to the on-going conflict of the past 23 years, in terms of sexual violence—rape, abduction, eve-teasing of women and girls. Insecurity is the biggest issue in Kashmir, particularly in rural areas where military bunkers or police and CRPF check spots are a common sight.

The camera captures a group of angry husbands 20 years later, seated in a semi-circle, narrating their tales of despair and anger. Four of the victims died because of excessive bleeding. Some of them are still getting treatment. Zareefa died of excessive bleeding, leaving behind...
six unmarried daughters. Zoona, Rafiqa and Sara had to get their uterus removed. Sara says she had to spend more than Rs 8000 on medicines. Though the men approached the brigadier of the nearby camp, the superintendent of police and the corps commander of army who came to take the statements of the victims and the men, nothing happened. An FIR was finally registered after Wajahat Habibullah, the then divisional commissioner of Kashmir intervened and a case of gang rape was registered against the Rashtriya Rifles of the 68th Brigade who had visited the village and committed the heinous act. But the government of India refused the claims of the complainants because the FIR was lodged three days after the event. How could the victims file an FIR when they were held captive by soldiers and the women were not even able to walk and talk?

How difficult was it to make the film? “Filmmaking in Kashmir is still in its evolving stage. We have not reached from where Bollywood took off a century ago. Dadasaheb Phalke made Raja Harishchandra in 1913 and there was a cinema hall for him to screen it. There was also a film board. A film financing body was there. The filmmaker did not need to find out a theatre to exhibit the film. Kashmir does not have a film board, a film financing corporation and not a single exhibition hall for screening.”

Another focus of the film is on the attack on and subsequent deaths of two young women, Neelofar, 24, and Asia, 18, of Shopia who were molested, raped and killed by militant gunmen. One of the attackers, Wasam Ganai was killed in an encounter while Muzaffar Naik has not yet been captured. Nusrat Andrabi, social worker and civil rights activist, says that no action has been taken on 2500 rape cases by the security forces, which is the highest in the country.

Mymoona Banu’s husband Akhtar Hussan has been missing for 14 years and she is left alone to take care of the family. He disappeared after he left to attend a friend’s funeral. She is a microcosm of all the half-widows J&K has created, leading to the founding of the Association of Disappeared Persons formed in 1994 by families of victims of enforced and involuntary disappearances of family members. The association records that between 8000 and 10000 people have been missing during different regimes since 1989 and it is carrying an on-going campaign against their disappearing family members.

Did the victims and their husbands agree to be interviewed? “It was difficult to convince them, but during my reconnaissance, I visited them three times before going for shooting. It was a forgotten case despite a case in the SHRC. They are very angry and bitter with the media. They told me that whoever visits them from the electronic and media, seemed to empathise with their tragedy but later fabricated stories but also maligned them,” says Jaan, adding, “Everyone talks about women empowerment but nobody speaks about violence inflicted on women in the Kashmir Valley. So I thought this could be a good subject and I started working on it. Not only was justice denied to the victims of Kunan Poshpora but mainstream media even questioned whether this happened at all. This was also one trigger for me to make the film. I wanted to know what really happened in Kunan Poshpora in 1991. It seemed impossible that an entire village would cook up a story that would ostracise them even more when brought into the public domain.”
EMPOWERING WOMEN

Men have to be part of the solution

The United Nations puts the number of women affected by violence at over a billion worldwide. While violence against women is perceived as a crime, most organisations working on the issue tend to focus on helping the victim deal with it. But what if you could change the behaviour of the perpetrators of such violence? You have to view men as a positive resource in the cause of women’s empowerment. The approach has to be non-confrontational and non-accusative, says Suchismita Pai.

The global edition of the New York Times termed it a ‘lad magazine’ minus the scantily clad women and gadgets. For Harish Sadani of Men against Violence and Abuse (MAVA), Purush Spandan continues to be a great vehicle for pushing the cause of gender equality. Now in its 17th year, the Marathi periodical, with its thought-provoking collection of articles, short stories and poems “aims to create a safe, non-threatening space to address issues of masculinity in a contemporary context,” according to Sadani. If you think about it, India had pioneers like Jyotiba and Savitribai Phule who tried to fight orthodoxy by starting a school for girls as early as 1848, he points out.

Explains William Muir, the man behind Equal Community Foundation (ECF), “It is about the ‘Factor of 4’, as we like to call it. If you halve the discrimination and double the empowerment, women’s lives improve dramatically. You have to view men as a positive resource in the cause of women’s empowerment. The approach has to be non-confrontational and non-accusative. It’s not about blame allocation but about behaviour change – actually empowering men to empower women in their lives and communities.”

Muir, who set up ECF almost four years ago, believes that focused research on developing a solution to violence against women that can be scaled to groups that are already in the field, is the need of the hour. “Gender equality is not achievable unless men are a part of the solution – which needs to be easy, efficient and replicable,” he says.

Yet, of all the work being carried out by different organisations in the field of women’s empowerment less than five per cent involves men. Some like Akshara, which has been working with college students for the last 14 years, have evolved to engage youth of both sexes on issues like gender consciousness and equality. Nandita Gandhi, the founder of Akshara, points out that the United Nations too realised the value of involving men in such work a couple of years ago. In its most recent initiative Akshara has joined hands with the International Association of Women in Radio and Television (IAWRT) to use...
the powerful medium of cinema for the One Billion Rising (OBR) campaign in India, which is all about fighting violence against women. A film festival, screening around 90 films, ‘Our lives...to live’, was also conceptualised for the campaign.

MAVA’s Sadani is convinced that patriarchy oppresses men equally. “We need to provide men a vocabulary to talk about issues like gender roles and sexuality,” he says. Organisations like MAVA work with individuals as well as other groups to do this, those like ECF focus on individuals to bring about behavioural change. ECF calls it Action for Equality - programmes that train local men, boys and women to be positive agents of change. “By delivering the programmes themselves in their own communities they are providing change that’s both more permanent and more deeply rooted in the community,” says Aditi Tembe, who works with ECF.

This is an approach much appreciated by girls like Gauri Shendge, a resident of Pune’s Khadki Bazaar area – one of the 20 locations where ECF is active. “Why do we always have to ignore the harassment that men dole out to us when we walk down the street? Why do we have to ignore them or take a different route? Instead we have to ask them to change and behave themselves,” she states indignantly.

The ECF Graduate Programme trains and places qualified mentors in low-income urban communities. These mentors, in turn, run programmes engaging men aged from 14 to 17. These mentors, young men like Pune-based Ramesh Kokate, who are qualified in Social Work, gradually build a relationship of trust with the youngsters and address the issues that are of concern to them – including that of sexuality and reproduction – with the help of small rhymes and simple drawings. The young men are free to ask any questions they may have. Usually they do have many: ‘Can you ever run out of sperm? Do you ever do twins come from two-headed sperm? What is mental abuse?’ and so on. As Tembe observes, “Often with no one to pose these questions to, ignorance sometimes leads them to negative behaviour. Armed with matter-of-fact explanations, they do much better.”

ECF also monitors and measures the changes that take place in areas like helping with domestic chores, taking action against violence, being a source of emotional support, resisting violent or aggressive behaviour. According to recent data it has collected, over 47 per cent of women reported a reduction in negative behaviour and a consequent increase in positive behaviour within the communities with which ECF has been working.

There are cases like that of Abhishek Misal, 17, who was once an extremely disruptive young man. “From having to drag him awake from bed in the morning and handing him his toothbrush, toothpaste and a mug of water, I had to hand him each and every item of clothing from his underclothes to his pants, to get him ready every day. He would fight with his sister, eating was a battle, studies were a nightmare. Today, he keeps the morning tea ready even before he wakes me up. He helps around the home when I come back from work in order to ease my burden,” beams his mother.

The ECF programme includes personal development activities that cover gender equality issues. Participants in the 15-week, 45-hour programme discover the pivotal role women play in their own success – within the home and in the wider community. Currently working towards a diploma in Mechanical Engineering, Abhishek interns with ECF’s Alumni Programme, a follow-up to its Graduate Programme, where it provides young people with an opportunity to work on gender issues in their communities through a structured sequence of voluntary activities with their peers. “This helps prevent lapses into destructive behaviour. Building on the knowledge attained during the 15 weeks, it gives graduates the framework to develop and deliver interactive community events on gender inequality issues. Not only do our volunteers broaden their horizons, in the process, they actually become advocates for behavioural change for gender equality in their communities,” says Tembe.

Young Gauri affirms the need to include men and their families in the cause of empowering women in her community where a man who helps in domestic chores is seen to be demeaning himself and where he will be asked to concentrate on his studies while his sister is left with piles of housework. “We want to take on patriarchy in the new world order of ‘nuclear families’ ‘DINKs’ (double income, no kids), ‘live-in relationships’, which also leaves men grappling with issues that they have never been confronted with before. Men don’t have the vocabulary to discuss this without sounding unmanly and weak,” says Sadani. He believes organisations like his are working with men to create a space where everyone can seek solutions as equals. In other words, until men become a part of the battle for gender equality, both sides stand to lose.

(Courtesy: Women’s Feature Service)
EMPOWERING WOMEN

The hand that rocks a cradle can also rule

A woman is regarded as the Goddess of Power (Shakti Devate) in Indian society. But, unfortunately, women are treated as the second-grade citizens. Gender discrimination in society still remains a major challenge in India. Yet, the life of women is changing in modern society. She is slowly but gradually becoming empowered— educationally, economically, socially and politically. However, the winds of change have not blown over the lives of rural women. No major changes are visible in their lives.

Women in India suffer from various problems: inequality, health problems, female foeticide, malnutrition, illiteracy, injustice, domestic violence, blind beliefs, sexual exploitation in the name of rituals, etc. The Central and state governments as well as non-governmental organisations have launched various programmes to uplift women. The media, too, is striving to emancipate women from suppression and exploitation and help them live independent and dignified lives. For all that, in the eyes of many, mass media has become akin to a commercial commodity in the wake of globalisation and economic liberalisation. Many people believe that financial gains have become more important than social causes for a majority of newspapers and television channels today.

There is no doubt that the scope and responsibility of the media has widened considerably. It is almost like playing the multiple roles of family, community, religion and education. The role is not limited to providing information and knowledge; it is also about guiding society on the right path, working as a check-and-balance mechanism for political parties, and providing the common man a forum to discuss and mould public opinion on major issues concerning public life. It is not possible for a country to achieve progress only through the economic development. People’s perception about various issues should also change along with economic growth. The change of mindset is essential, especially when you talk about women’s empowerment. The media can play an active and pivotal role in changing the people’s perception towards the women empowerment. Women can use the media to express their views and seek and get information to help them get empowered, especially by highlighting the pitfalls in our social system and awakening people against blind beliefs and injustice.

In India, women are becoming empowered because of their collective efforts. It is difficult for them to achieve economic and social independence at an individual level. Women must have personal commitment and a strong belief in what they do. Active participation in the developmental process helps empowerment. The media often mirrors the successes and failures of women in different fields such as industry, administration, sports, culture, cinema, science and technology, medicine, the operative...
sector and education. Information about issues related to motherhood, child-rearing, home management, relationships, nutrition, health management, freedom, self-reliance, etc is being supplied in abundance by the media. Today, women perform their duties as elected people’s representatives in the panchayats (village councils) more effectively than men. They have proved that the hand that rocks the cradle can also rule a country.

Earlier, though women got elected to the panchayats, you saw their husbands, brothers and fathers participating in the meetings and taking decisions. Several newspaper reports brought this to light, about how women were being forced to playing a ‘pillion rider’ role in politics. After the amendments to the Constitution (Article 73) and the new Panchayat Raj system coming into effect, one-third of the seats were reserved for women. As many as 35305 women got elected to the panchayats in the elections in 1993. The number rose to 36901 in the 2000 elections and 38147 in 2005. Women showed they could perform effectively as panchayat leaders. Backed by media support, women leaders slowly but firmly came to grips with administration and took control, avoiding husbands and fathers and acting and deciding on their own.

Success stories
Self-help groups have been playing a pivotal role in bringing a qualitative change to rural life. The SHGs, which have been providing sustained financial support to women and working for women’s overall development, have instilled a sense of fulfilment and self-confidence among women. Women associated closely with SHGs live a peaceful and happy life. More such groups are coming up in Karnataka, for instance, with the scope of work and activities widened. They provide opportunities to rural women to grow – educationally, economically, socially and politically. Not only do SHGs strive to improve the standard of life of rural women and bring them economic stability by engaging them in income-generating activity (self-employment, cottage industries), they also help women get the benefits of various schemes launched by the government and help them get educated.

Vanjarkhed in Bidar District was credited with being the first and only all-women gram (village) panchayat in Karnataka in the early years of liberalisation. Members of Vanjarkhed Gram Panchayat, covering Vanjarkhed, Kongali and Jaamakhandi villages, had the responsibility of the overall development of the villages coming under its jurisdiction. The villages did not have minimum basic amenities even 50 years after Independence. Today, every villager here gets tap water. The
women members work hard day and night to get the basic facilities for their people. They met leaders, officials and used their authority to ensure that the villages get all the basic amenities. That was how they got sanctioned the main approach road to Vanjakhed from Mehakar under the Prime Minister Gram Sadak Yojana, and also the bus facility to every village from Bhalki Taluk headquarters.

Various surveys conducted by private as well as the government agencies have shown that wherever women are in charge of the gram panchayats, the villages are developing well. The women work efficiently and there is less corruption. Unfortunately, though they have achieved much progress, public opinion about a woman’s capacity as a leader or administrator is not encouraging.

The community of women has played a crucial role in bringing pressure on the government to ban arrack and lottery in Karnataka. These were two social menaces that directly affected the women more than anything else. The agitation against arrack and lottery, which began at the village level, gained momentum when more women joined; it later spread throughout the state, finally forcing the state government to put an end to both. At many places women, SHGs destroyed arrack shops and lottery ticket sale counters to express their ire against both. Protests and rallies continued for long. The media backed the pro-women agitations till the government acted, highlighting the ill-effects consuming arrack and dabbling in lotteries.

Vanjarkhed Gram Panchayat members at a meeting.

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The media played its part by reporting the success stories of Vanjarkhed.

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Saalu Marada Thimmakka, an illiterate woman from a sleepy village near Nelamangala in Bangalore District, who has the passion for planting and growing trees on the roadside, shot to international fame thanks to the media. Thimmakka, who hails from a poor family, did not have children. But she did not waste her time worrying about it. She developed the habit of planting and growing saplings on the roadside to protect the environment and help travellers and to make their journeys less tiresome. Thimmakka’s husband stood by her side.

Prajavani, a leading Kannada newspaper, broke Thimmakka’s story and explained to the world her relentless effort in helping nature and the people by nurturing plants and trees like her own children. Soon thereafter, the media was after her and published several stories about her mission. Thimmakka’s love for nature and society became a subject of discussion in every home. Several state, national and international honours and awards came her way, opening a new chapter in her life. She has now become a synonym for social work and love for nature. Felicitating and associating with her has become a matter of pride for religious, social and political organisations today.

Mosaic’s 2nd edition out

Goafest 2013 witnessed the unveiling of Mosaic 2012, a compendium of outstanding print ads from leading Indian agencies. Launched by the Dainik Bhaskar Group, Mosaic reflects creative ingenuity. The group seeks to lend recognition and establish a platform for creative agencies to showcase their best print work. Mosaic 2012 features 121 print campaigns across 105 brands from 31 top agencies. Making the book special is the inclusion of select regional print work and the personal favourites section, with industry experts offering insights.
A long wait for Aung San Suu Kyi

Mya Mya Aye, 62, fled Burma in 1995 and has been living in Delhi ever since. Today, she is fulfilled. She could meet up with leader, Nobel laureate Aung San Suu Kyi, chairperson of National League for Democracy (NLD), when she travelled to India to deliver the Jawaharlal Nehru Memorial Lecture. Once, Mya Aye was a home-maker not too concerned with politics. Married in 1970, she had focused on the job of bringing up her children. Her husband, Dr Tint Swe, a medical doctor who later became a politician, stood for parliamentary elections as a member of the NLD and won from the Paletownship in Monywa division in 1990. He then became the minister of information and public relations in the then National Coalition Government of the Union of Burma.

A massacre in 1988 that followed a popular uprising led by students and which came to be known as the 88 Generation Uprising in Burma changed the lives of all the members of her family drastically. Recalls Mya Aye, “My two sons were among the 88 Generation protestors.” Before long, Mya Aye found herself being drawn into the movement and she joined the NLD party. With the military junta cracking down on the 88 Generation students and the NLD party, her husband and her eldest son fled the country in 1990. The family home and clinic were sealed leaving Mya Aye and her four other children on the run. ‘From 1992, we couldn’t even get a house on rent, because of the constant surveillance and harassment meted out to house owners who offered us accommodation,” she recalls. In 1995, she came to India and reunited with her husband. The couple has been living in Delhi ever since.

Today, they perceive the winds of change, as a slow democratic transition begins to unfold back home. Mya Aye is now able to be in touch with her relatives and friends through the Internet and Skype, and recently, she could meet up with her cousin sister-in-law Kyi Than at Bodh Gaya in Bihar. Kyi Than had a visa to visit Bodh Gaya, but not one for Delhi. It was an emotional reunion. “We cried a lot – out of happiness, of course. We had so much catching to do, about our lives, our children, ourselves!” exclaims Mya Aye.

Nothing symbolised the change in Burma more powerfully than the release, in 2010, of Aung Sang Suu Kyi who had to suffer house arrest almost continuously from 1989 for her opposition to the ruling military junta. Which is why not just Mya Aye, but the 4000-strong Burmese community living in Delhi, was so excited about the prospect of greeting her on her visit to India after her long incarceration. It was her first visit in 40 years to Delhi, a city where she had spent her early college years.

According to a 2009 survey by Refugee International, there are approximately 50000 – 100000 displaced Burmese in India – most of whom are in the Northeast and
Two years ago in November, about 50 Burmese – largely women – celebrated the release of Aung San Suu Kyi at Delhi’s Jantar Mantar by holding placards and raising the cry, “Long live Aung San Suu Kyi.” This time they put up posters welcoming their leader, whom they fondly address as Daw (madam) Suu Kyi.

Take Hmaengi Lushai, a Burmese refugee living in Delhi who has been associated with several Burmese women’s groups. She has now learnt the Hindi word swagat (welcome) which was emblazoned on the posters that greeted Aung Sang Suu Kyi. “We were looking forward all these years for that chance to greet her personally. Fortunately, we got it,” she says. Hmaengi underlines the importance of Suu Kyi’s visit for the Burmese refugee community in India by pointing to the fact that the leader had, in fact, during her meeting in Geneva in June 2012, talked about the need to support and render help to refugees in India. The impact of her statement in making things easier for the community here was almost immediate, according to Hmaengi. But there is an element of anxiety that lingers. The community is very conscious of the delicate relations that exist between India and the ruling military establishment back home.

There is a general desire to go back home and be reunited with relatives left behind and some cannot hold back their feelings. Says Mya Aye, “I prayed to Buddha to give me a chance to meet Daw Suu Kyi so that I could tell her that everyone here is with her, and that we also want to go back home.”

Life in India is a struggle for the Burmese community, given the daily uncertainties entailed in being refugees. There are also innumerable cultural and behavioural differences to contend with, and women especially have many stories to relate - of discrimination and harassment, including sexual harassment. Some like Mya Aye, who assists her husband at his clinic in Vikaspuri, west Delhi, which provides free service and treatment, have rebuilt new lives for themselves. Others still feel that they are living in a limbo. But Mya Aye’s husband, Dr Swe, counsels patience, “Much will depend on both our countries working towards a mutually beneficial climate of accountability and responsible investment.” He adds with a smile, “Things are still uncertain at present but remember there will soon be a connecting flight from Bodhgaya to Mandalay. That’s a start.”

Ninglun Hanghal

(Courtesy: Women’s Feature Service. Aung San Suu Kyi delivered the Jawaharlal Nehru Memorial Lecture on November 14 at New Delhi’s Vigyan Bhavan.)
Destitution – a reality that cannot be camouflaged

Destitution is a grim word. It is a word which most shy away from. Certainly, it is seldom used in the same breath as ‘emerging’ ‘shining’ and ‘liberalisation’, words associated with the India of the late 20th and 21st Centuries. Yet, destitution is a harsh reality in modern day India, specifically in the State of Gujarat; it is a reality that can’t be camouflaged by juggling statistics nor blown away by sporadic gusts of political largesse, says Jan Bremen, professor emeritus, University of Amsterdam. Prof Bremen has been conducting anthropological studies among people at the bottom of society in Gujarat’s villages for over half a century.

Delivering the T.G. Narayanan Memorial Lecture on Caring for Destitution or Not? in Chennai, Prof Jan Bremen made a distinction between poverty and destitution. The poor don’t have enough, but somehow cope. The destitute has nothing, not even hope. Prof. Breman, who has authored several books on the labouring poor in India, based his talk on his impression of progress, or rather, the lack of it, in Gujarat.

Deviating from the prepared, scholarly lecture, copies of which were made available to the audience, Prof. Breman chose instead to speak from the heart, holding the gathering riveted with his account of his experiences in the villages. When he started his work, the villagers lived in crude dwellings they had to crawl into. “When they entered their homes, their eyes took time to adjust to the darkness because there was no light, but even when they had adjusted, they couldn’t see anything — because there was nothing to see,” Prof Breman explained. “These people had nothing, no possessions, not even a change of clothes.” That situation has changed now, he said, but stressed that the improvement was only marginal. He spoke of children still being fed earth to quell their hunger because there was nothing else to give them.

The growth path India had chosen did foster growth, but not necessarily employment, Prof Bremen felt, and argued that employment was a major consideration with the poor. When you’re unemployed you lack the means to sustain yourself. If you are ill and unable to work, you have no means to pay for treatment, you go on being unable to work, and become the victim of a vicious cycle. Old age was another issue, he pointed out. The people among whom he has been working are aged by the time they are 40, sapped by hard work and deprivation. Most of those who he interacted with in his early years here were no more. They would have been merely in their 70s, had they lived.

Social security schemes were just not serving their purpose, the sociologist felt, and pointed out that a vital difference in the West was that there, the state reached out to the needy, while here in India, it was up to the needy to chase welfare schemes. Yes, there were government social security schemes for the aged and the poor in India. But these were not of much help, in Prof Breman’s experience. They were mired in procedural quicksand and involved expenditure, which the illiterate poor baulked at. To produce the
mandated paperwork they had to depend on someone higher up the social order, and thus a culture of dependency was fostered. Apart from all this, the eligibility criteria were so hedged with clauses that it was practically impossible for the poor to qualify for benefits.

Disagreeing completely with the Narendra Modi Government’s claim of ‘inclusive growth’ in what was billed as India’s ‘fastest growing state’, Prof. Breman asserted that statistics were being manipulated to raise people to artificial levels of wellbeing on paper. If you have a grown-up son, you are removed from the category of people needing government support, because your son is theoretically expected to take care of you. But this doesn’t happen in reality. Also, if you are a widow, you have to be earning below Rs 2400 a year to qualify for social security benefits. To avail of disability benefits, you have to be at least 80 per cent disabled. Because of such unrealistic criteria, the BPL list was also unrealistic, and a false impression of progress and prosperity was created, he said.

With the help of a rural hospital, the Breman team, by dint of persistence, managed to get for a small proportion of the 589 destitute people in the study area the benefits they were entitled to. Following up with the beneficiaries, the team found that their lives had changed dramatically. They were no longer considered a burden by their families, nor were they dependent on the erratic charity of neighbours and friends. They had suddenly become human. That was the purpose of a social security scheme, pointed out Prof. Breman -- to give dignity and acceptance to a human being. Going by the findings of others on his team working in various places in India, he felt that schemes in the south were better, and better implemented than those in the north, particularly Gujarat. However, the sociologist said politicians and policy makers, and even the World Bank, did not make the aged poor a thrust area.

The provisions of the Social Security Act 2008 would only be effective if they were implemented by a pro-poor Government, with civil agencies actively mediating between the poor and the state, and the poor themselves participating in the schemes to which they were entitled, not just functioning as beneficiaries, he said. Prof. Breman felt deprivation, a fact of life, was understated in both media and scholarship, and urged the media to be the bridge between scholarship and life.

The T.G. Narayanan Memorial Lecture was instituted by Dr Ranga Narayanan in memory of his father, a renowned journalist and civil servant, and is held under the auspices of the Asian College of Journalism and the Media Development Foundation. This year, it took place on January 18th. Sashi Kumar, chairman, Media Development Foundation, thanked Prof Breman for his reality check on the practice of “airbrushing away poverty using statistical sleight of hand.” N Ram, director, Kasturi and Sons, and Foundation trustee, talked of the three-fold contribution of T.G. Narayanan, “an unusual journalist, an intellectual and a civil servant of some distinction”, whose book, Famine over Bengal, was a landmark of its kind.

Sreekumar Menon, a core faculty member of the Asian College of Journalism, delivering the vote of thanks, noted that deprivation was one of the signature courses of the college, and said Prof Breman’s talk was a timely reminder of the prevalent situation. Several members of the TGN family were among the audience comprising largely media students and professionals.

Hunger is solvable

During my several interactions with various groups, most of them said it was establishing hospitals and providing more doctors that was important. I differed with them and said it was tackling hunger. “For now, I ask no more than the justice of eating,” said Pablo Neruda, the Chilean poet. According to the World Food Programme, hunger and malnutrition are still the No. 1 impediments to health worldwide. Hunger kills more people than AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis combined. Hunger is manifested as wasting, stunting, underweight and micro-nutrient deficiency. Fifty per cent of child deaths are due to under-nourishment; under-nutrition is a silent emergency.

The International Food Policy research Institute says that the Indian hunger index is 67 and that 200 million Indians suffer from severe pangs of hunger; 76 per cent consume less than the adequate number of calories; and one-third of the world’s hungry live in India. Treating hunger-related diseases without providing adequate food to all is nothing but ‘medicalising’ starvation. Treating hunger-related diseases is costlier than providing food. The right to food is non-negotiable. Hunger is the greatest solvable problem, according to the World Food Programme. Food for all should be like universal health care. Let us ensure food for all by good production, by not wasting.

(From a postcard received from Dr Araveeti Ramayogaiah, former additional director of Health, Andhra Pradesh.)
An astonishing tolerance to mass deprivation

In January 2012, Prof Utsa Patnaik set the tone for the first of the T.G. Narayanan Memorial Lecture series, with her talk aimed at spreading awareness about mass deprivation and denial of rights and opportunities to large sections of the population. Here are excerpts from her speech:

The capitalist system of production rules virtually the entire world today after the break-up of socialist Soviet Union in the early 1990s and the increasing market and profit orientation of economic policies in China since the 1980s, where private property has been re-introduced over significant areas of activity. Despite the deep financial and employment crisis which have engulfed the advanced capitalist nations, we see therefore a certain arrogance, a hubris which marks the class of finance capitalists, that continues to rampage over the world seeking to remake it after its own image, against a backdrop where alternate models of socialism have either collapsed or exist only in a formal sense. International finance capital through its myriad institutions and the exercise of diplomatic pressure, has put in place in most developing countries, local servitors in key decision-making positions to implement that particular set of policies which serve the interests of global finance and to a lesser extent, of global industry. The core elements of these policies include as is well known by now, trade and investment openness, income deflating fiscal and monetary measures which reduce public development spending and social sector spending, privatization of public sector undertakings, an attack on labour unions, and an attack on the livelihood and assets of small producers mainly comprising peasants and artisans, in order to promote corporatisation.

In most developing countries, the peasantry and artisans numerically outnumber by far the class of wage-paid workers. The attack on the peasantry’s land assets and forest resources by the corporate sector – both domestic and foreign – usually aided by the ruling state power, is seen virtually everywhere in countries as diverse as India and China, in Asia, in Tanzania, Madagascar and Ethiopia in Africa. The bitter reaction which it has provoked, the resistance of the peasantry to corporate and state acquisition of its assets, is the stuff of the most significant unfolding of social and political mass mobilisation to be seen today. The present phase of primitive accumulation in developing countries, is transitional not to capitalist industrialisation but to the accumulation of riches at one pole of the social structure, with rising unemployment, pauperisation, the proliferation of small-scale services and increased absolute poverty at the other pole.

The actual history of capitalism raises important theoretical issues regarding the validity of associating capitalism with ‘free’ wage labour as contrasted with serfdom and slavery under pre-capitalist modes of production. In reality, the revival of modern slavery as a major form of class exploitation over a millennium after the slavery of the ancient world was the dubious gift of the rise of the capitalist mode of production. The same 18th and 19th Century English and French landlords who leased out their land by contract to capitalist tenant farmers at home and obtained capitalist rent also operated plantations based on slave labour in the Caribbean to extract slave rent. Does it follow that it is incorrect to associate the rise of capitalism with the ‘freedom’ of the worker? No, for free wage labour is an indisputable fact in the core countries, but so is lack of freedom imposed on peripheral populations.

As the unwilling recipients of the export of unemployment from today’s advanced countries, India, the former colony, and China, the former semi-colony, had ended up by the mid-20th century with mass poverty and with significantly tertiarised economies – a higher share of services and lowered share of both agriculture and industry in GDP – compared to their initial states. They inherited very high levels of unemployment and under-employment, which became a matter of serious concern as they sought to pursue an independent path of national development... However though the fastest expanding segments of manufacturing output in the first 15 years of Indian Independence logged 9 per cent annual growth rate, the associated employment growth was only 3 per cent. It was already very clear and widely recognised that no visible net shifting out of the work force from...
agriculture could be expected even at such high manufacturing growth rates. Subsequently, the elasticity of employment with respect to manufacturing output has been falling steadily and especially sharply after liberalisation in the 1990s for obvious reasons.

The second difference of the current phase of globalization relates to the inability of advanced countries to extract resources from developing countries while maintaining the legal fiction that the resources are legitimately their own... Even after its effective demise as world capitalist leader, Britain continued to exploit India for its own benefit. The burden of financing the Allies' war against Japan from 1941 to 1945 was placed on India, and a sum in excess of Rs 1.8 billion or over 1200 million pounds was extracted over the period mainly through a process of rapid price inflation redistributing incomes. This meant forced reduction of consumption by the peasantry and artisans of Bengal to such an extent that more than 3 million persons starved to death... Developing countries were told that it is passe to seek to be self-sufficient in foodgrains output, rather they should specialise in the export crops advanced countries demanded but could not produce while purchasing their foodgrains from the advanced countries. In the last two decades, dozens of countries in the global South have been successfully pressurized by the Bretton Woods Institutions to dismantle their grain procurement and distribution system, on the argument that they could always purchase grain from the main global suppliers.

The proposition that Marx repeatedly put forward, that the capitalist growth process produces riches for a minority at the expense of an increasing reserve army of labour, unemployment, and mass deprivation at the other pole, continues to be validated in the present era of globalisation. While even advanced countries experience increasing unemployment and growing income inequality, at the global level the bulk of the adverse outcome is seen in developing countries where already poor and inadequately nourished populations suffer further absolute decline in their standard of living. Absolute immiserisation is accompanied by an attack on the land, forest and water resources of peasant producers which emanate from the local and global corporations.

(Utsa Patnaik has taught Economics at Jawaharlal Nehru University since 1973 after obtaining a doctorate at the University of Oxford, UK. Her main areas of research interest are the problems of transition from agriculture and peasant predominant societies to industrial society, and questions relating to food security and poverty. She is the author of several books, including Peasant Class Differentiation – A Study in Method, the Long Transition, and The Republic of Hunger and Other Essays.)

‘An interesting and remarkable journalist’

T.G. Narayanan was born in 1911 in Kumbakonam and educated in Hindu High School, Madras and Madras Christian College in George Town. He obtained an honour’s in English. He worked as a teacher for some time before he joined The Hindu in 1939 as its Rangoon correspondent; he was later a war correspondent during the war years. He then moved to Calcutta and was kown for his coverage of the Bengal famine, the war on the Imphal front, and his interviews with India’s freedom fighters. His writings on the famine were one of the earliest instances of investigative journalism. After Independence, Narayanan joined the UN in New York and at the time of his death was the deputy and personal representative to the UN Secretary General, Dag Hammarskjöld, on Nuclear Disarmament at the 18-nation talks in Geneva. His life was cut off at the age of 51.

The T.G. Narayanan Memorial Lecture was instituted at the Asian College of Journalism by his son Dr Ranga Narayanan. N. Ram, director, Kasturi & Sons, and trustee, Media Development Foundation, said Narayanan was an “interesting and remarkable journalist who played a significant role in the UN... he made a significant contribution while writing about the Bengal Famine, highlighting which Amartya Sen and various others have discussed – the role of an independent press in relation to two types of hunger – hunger as crisis, and hunger as chronic”

Narayanan’s concentration was on the plight of the people and he went deep into issues that mattered. “It has been observed over the truly long term that the press along with much of public opinion does not seem to be sensitive to chronic hunger. This is a huge problem and it only shows what Prof Sen has pointed out – that there is astonishing tolerance to hunger, mass deprivation in India and the fact is Independent India has not done well with respect to mass deprivation and hunger,” said N. Ram.
Of Bollywood and, well, Kollywood

To the Indian Press, steadily, even dizzily, expanding its reach, I have a small plea: Can it possibly give up using the term Bollywood when referring to the Mumbai-based Hindi film industry? This plea is based on several grounds, the foremost of which is that Bollywood is etymologically – that is to say, in the manner it is derived – absurd. One Internet lexicon says the word is quite simply “Bombay + Hollywood”. You drop the first letter in Hollywood, replace it with the first letter in Bombay and, voila, you have Bollywood. Now that Bombay is Mumbai, should we call the film industry based there Mollywood?

The term has proved painfully infectious: the Chennai film industry is often called Kollywood: Kodambakkam, where most studios are, plus Hollywood; and sometimes even the Kolkata film industry is referred to as Tollywood: Tollygunge, the principal centre of West Bengal film production, plus Hollywood. The Hyderabad-based Telugu film industry has not yet been given a short name. What will it be?

Some wag, surely no sober critic, disappointed or even upset by the quality of some Bombay film, first coined Bollywood slightly over a decade ago. Now it is in general usage – in the entire Indian Press, it often seems. To one’s dismay, one finds that even the BBC has picked it up. So indeed has the New York Times. Also, it is to be found in the Internet dictionary, although it is not known yet whether the lexicographers who compile the authoritative Oxford English Dictionary have placed their stamp of approval upon it.

Hollywood (as, of course, you know) is a place name, specifically the name of a large tract of what was once grazing land just outside Los Angeles in California – possibly overgrown with holly, the shrub whose foliage and berries are used as Christmas decorations – before it became the home of America’s film industry in the early years of the last century. The term does thus have etymological basis.

That can hardly be claimed for Bollywood, Kollywood and Tollywood. These sound like sneering, sarcastic confections as much as gibberish – like saying “powdered and pulverised, culverised and mulverised”, as an exuberant Madras college lecturer used to declaim in the early 1940s. And they are less than fair to an industry that, though seemingly chaotic and without focus, yet frequently yields outstanding creations. The films of Sanjay Leela Bhansali, for instance – his Guzaarish was a stunner; and of Zoya Akhtar, whose Zindagi Na Milegi Dobara is particularly remarkable for its cinematography. Bhansali and Akhtar and a great many others are creative artistes of world calibre: any country will be proud of them.

Some years ago I took this up with the readers’ editor of a prominent daily, imploring whether he could not have the Bollywood abomination banned. I knew him a little, so I could be candid with him. His response? He agreed with me, to be sure, “but the boys love the word”! There are other words as well now increasingly in use that I find no less grating. “Interaction”, for instance, to refer to an interview. The word means a mutual or reciprocal action or influence. Can an old-fashioned interview be said to involve reciprocal action or influence?
“Presspersons”, which fortunately I do not find used often these days, is another word that grates. Not merely because of its Orwellian sound, but since it seems a longwinded substitution for the good old “reporters” or “press”. The growing substitution of “media” for “press” does itself make one wince. This has some justification, true, in our world of radio and ever expanding television, but cannot “press” collectively stand for all forms of communication – including what is increasingly, and not very elegantly, referred to as the “print media”?

The word “actor”, even when the reference is to a female, is one more in this same category. Some manner of “liberation” seems involved here; and, of course, the usage is common in the west; but what about good old grammar which seems to stipulate still that “actress” is the word to use for the female actor? In any case it does not sound right. (Incidentally, is consulting ABC of English Usage in vogue these days? Or, do newspapers have their own in-house style books to guide their staff?)

All this is no criticism of our newspapers and journals, which are making impressive advances even in the digital sphere despite a harsh economic climate and fierce competition especially from television. They merit kudos for that. It would be a benediction if they could also at the same time bestow a little more attention to pesky words.

Such as Bollywood.
WOMEN’S FILM FESTIVAL IN KOLKATA

Of oppression, struggles, triumphs and dreams

The International Association of Women in Radio and Television, which has an Indian branch that showcases films made across the world by filmmakers on subjects that reflect in different ways layers of humiliation women are subject to, in association with Swayam, a Kolkata-based NGO, organised a film festival, Our Lives to Live: No to Gender Violence - Films of Courage, Protest, Hope, as part of the International One Billion Rising Campaign in January. The three-day festival screened powerful films that focused on the lives of women from India, Pakistan, Nepal, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Afghanistan, Iran, Africa, Australia and South America. Shoma A. Chatterji reports

The festival was inaugurated informally with the screening of a very telling music video called One Billion Rising by Eve Ensler and Tony Stroebel, which defined the signature logo of the festival. It was an inspiring music video for the One Billion Rising campaign: women worldwide rising up against all kinds of violence. This was followed by Aparajita by Kanupriya Vijay Vargiya, a four-minute animation film on how a bride-to-be puts her foot down on dowry demands. Another Indian film Kaveri by Shilpa Munikempanne unspooled the sad tale of 13-year-old Kaverii whose carefree world turns upside down when she attains puberty that marks the end of her formal education and the beginning of an early marriage that will trap her forever.

The Sari Soldiers by Julie Bridgham over its 92-minutes of running time narrates the extraordinary story of six women’s courageous efforts to shape Nepal’s future in the midst of an escalating civil war against Maoist insurgents, and the King’s crackdown on civil liberties in Nepal. The juxtaposition of the picture-postcard setting of Nepal against the backdrop of its beautiful mountains, jungles, villages and cities against the brutal tragedy of innocents going missing, or ending up dead, or tortured and humiliated spells out yet one more irony of the co-existence of the beauty of Nature and the brutality of human nature in today’s world marred by conflict and endless ethnic warfare. The 8-minute film 1977 directed by Peque Varela of the UK merges animation with personal photographs to narrate the story of a girl in a conservative community struggling to come to terms with her gender identity.

Shabnam Virani’s 4-minute film BOL screened earlier across the world was part of a larger celluloid essay on domestic violence in India. It was a public service television campaign on the issue of domestic violence. Bangladeshi filmmaker Yasmine Kabir’s A Certain Liberation was about a woman reduced to begging in the streets of a city, a film documented to capture her grit and enduring power. The film documents how even 30 years after the Liberation War of Bangladesh, Gurudasi continues to roam the streets of Kopilmoni in quest of all she has lost. In her madness, she has found a strategy for survival. But the film is not a very impressive document one can carry with oneself outside the theatre. The director could also have seized on the opportunity of grabbing the first subject she could to tell her story that is common to thousands of women in Third World countries and does not have anything original to say.

India’s Sonia Jabbar in her 65-minute film Autumn’s Final Country unspools the story of four women who have suffered displacement. The film reveals an intimate dimension of the Kashmir conflict and raises questions about patriarchal values, communal identities, patriotism and war. Sujit Sircar and Gary’s 5-minute music
video Mann ke Manjeere remains as topical as it was around a decade ago when it was first screened. It sings out a special anthem about a woman who reconstructs her life after a long period of having suffered domestic violence. The script is based on a true story, of a woman who drives a truck to make a living for herself and her daughter. It remains an all-time favourite with Prasoon Joshi’s lyrics sung by Shubha Mudgal and visuals provided by the powerful performance of Mita Vashisht.

Saving Face was a USA-Pakistan co-production directed jointly by Daniel Junge and Sharmeen Obaid-Chenoy. Over the 40 minutes of its running time, the Academy Award-winner follows the battles for justice by women survivors of acid attacks in Pakistan, and their facial reconstructive surgery by Dr Jawad who regularly returns from London to work with the survivors. Amudhan RP’s Shit is another documentary that tackles a unique subject as its protagonist. It is a slice of life taken from Mariammal who sweeps up the shit in a street in Madurai every single day. The film raises critical questions about caste, working conditions, the indifference of the Municipal Corporation, and people’s lack of civic sense.

Branded Girls, jointly directed by Bijoyeta Das and Khaled Hasan of Bangladesh, is about girls and women who have migrated from their village homes to work in the garment factories in Dhaka and other remote parts of Bangladesh like Ghazipur, Shela and Maona located in the forests where people would fear to tread even in the daytime. The factories produce garments that go to make up 10 per cent of the country’s GDP but its workers draw the lowest salary averaging at around $23.00 per month; 80 per cent of the workers are women and girls who work and live in dismal conditions having lost all hope of ever returning to normal lives back in the village.

Deepta Dhanraj’s 86-minute-long Invoking Justice is set in Tamil Nadu. It explores how family disputes are severely subject to male bias as they are settled by all-male jamaats (formal gathering) that bar women from attending the settlement discussions. To counter male domination and oppression, a group of women have founded a women’s jamaat that works towards reforming the system, allowing men to take refuge in the most extreme interpretations (misinterpretations?) of the Quran to justify violence against women.

Mindscapes of Love and Longing directed by Arun Chada and produced by PSBT is a moving, true-story account of the sexual desires of the differently-abled in India. Attitudes to the sexuality of people with disabilities are often marred by misconceptions, prejudices and myths. The film delves into the lives of a few people with disability as they negotiate widely-held medical, social and cultural beliefs and try to claim their sexual rights as individuals. The subjects in the stories give first-person accounts talking candidly into the camera about having had sex, about having fallen in love, about having a crush and about wanting to diet in order to slim down to become more attractive to the opposite sex. These are sweet and touching stories that were just waiting to be told.

Facing Mirrors (2011), a feature film from Iran directed by Negal Azarbayjani is the first film in Iran to feature a transgender as a character with the film. Set in contemporary Iran, the film is the story of an unlikely and daring friendship that develops despite social norms and religious beliefs. Although Rana is a traditional wife and mother, she is forced to drive a cab to pay off the debt that keeps her husband in prison. By chance she picks up the wealthy and rebellious Edi, who is desperately awaiting a passport to leave the country. At first, Rana attempts to help, but when she realises that Edi is a transgender, a dangerous series of conflicts arises. The beauty of the landscape with snowcapped mountains and long, winding roads serves as a counterpoint to the strongly scathing response to alternative sexuality expressed as a lifestyle choice.

(The writer is a freelance journalist, author and film scholar based in Kolkata.)
HISTORY OF MARATHI JOURNALISM

In the vanguard of social and political reform

The Marathi press played a very important role in the development of Indian journalism in the latter half of the 19th Century. It distinguished itself by campaigning on two fronts, social and political. Outside Bengal, the battle for social reform first gathered strength in Pune and Bombay before it spread to other parts of the country. The Marathi press was in the vanguard of this movement.

On 6 January, 1832, Bal Shastri Jambhekar (6 January 1812 – 18 May 1846) published Bombay Darpan, a Marathi-English fortnightly magazine from Bombay. By May 1832 it became an eight-page weekly. The objective of Bombay Darpan was to “…convey information on passing events and to point out ways and opportunities for improvement of the conditions of the people.” It was the first medium of Marathi expression in engagement with current and ‘passing’ events. Bombay Darpan played a notable part in the social reform movement and had considerable influence. It specifically dealt with the issue of widow re-marriage and tried to develop a scientific temper among the masses. This resulted in a large-scale debate in society and, finally, in a movement for the support of widow re-marriage. After eight years, the weekly was named United Service Gazette Journal. It ceased publication two years after the death of Jambhekar in 1846. In 1840, Jambhekar started publishing the first Marathi monthly, Digdarshan, and edited it for five years. Jambhekar, considered the Father of Marathi Journalism,1 trained many journalists who went on to scale great heights in the field in Marathi.

On 24 October 1841, Govind Vithal Kunte began Prabhakar. Kunte was considered the first professional Marathi journalist. Like in other states, Christian missionaries tried to propagate their religion through publications in Maharashtra, too. They published Jnyanodaya in 1842 for the purpose. However, in the early years of Marathi journalism, many periodicals were concerned with social development, reform, spread of education and knowledge. These include Jaganmitra (from Ratnagiri), Shubh Suchak (from Ratnagiri) and Kshetram (from Ratnagiri) which were published in English.

1. His birthday 6 January- (incidentally it was the day in which Darpan was published in 1932) is celebrated as the Journalists’ Day in Maharashtra.

(The author; a journalist-turned-media academician, presently heads the Eastern India campus of the Indian Institute of Mass Communication located in Dhenkanal, Odisha. Besides teaching communication, he also writes columns and fiction. This article is the fifth in a series on the history of regional language journalism in India. The ones on Bengali, Urdu, Hindi and Gujarati journalism have appeared in previous issues.)
Satara), Vartaman Dipika and Vartaman Sangrah.

Krishnaji Triambak Ranade started Dynan Prakash in Pune in 1849. It was a weekly until 1904 when it became daily. It was later adopted by the Servant of India Society as its organ. Hari Narayan Apte, a famous Marathi novelist served as its editor. Some of its contributors included Mahadev Govind Ranade and Gopal Krishna Gokhale. Three popular weeklies during the period were Bartaman Deepika (Bombay) edited by V.B. Gokhle, Vichara Lahari (Pune) edited by Krishnashastrti Chiplunkar and Dhunkmetu (Pune). Most of the journals engaged readers on the progressive ideas of the West.

In 1862, Induprakash began in Bombay. It was a bilingual journal, edited by M.G. Ranade. It criticised orthodoxy and was the mouthpiece of many social reforms. In 1877, Mahatma Jyotiba Phule and Krishnarao Bhaskar began Deenabandhu, as part of the Dalit upliftment movement. Deenabandhu was the organ of the Satyashodhak Samaj founded by Phule. In Nagpur, the Hitavada, a weekly was published in 1882. It had a difficult existence and ultimately passed into the hands of the Servants of the India Society in 1911. It was converted into an English Weekly and in 1936 it became a daily.

Bal Gangadhar Tilak (23 July 1856 – 1 August 1920) began Kesari on 4 January 1881, along with Gopal Ganesh Agarkar, and Maratha, an English newspaper. Within two years of its publication, Kesari was attracting more readers than any other language newspaper in India. The editorials vividly portrayed the suffering of the people, and reported on actual events, calling on every Indian to fight for his rights. The language was intended to arouse, in the most timid reader, a passionate thirst for freedom. Tilak used to say to his colleagues, "You are not writing for the university students. Imagine you are talking to a villager. Be sure of your facts. Let your words be clear as daylight." However, Tilak had difference of opinion with other social reformers such as M.L.Ranade on the nature of reform. Gopal Ganesh Agarkar left Kesari in 1887 to start Sudharak (bilingual) along with Gopal Krishna Gokhale. After Agarkar’s death in 1895, it ceased publication.

In1890, Anandrao Ramachandra Dharandhar started Bhoot, published every new and full moon day. It was the first Marathi paper to carry cartoons on political and social matters. It was very popular but ceased publication in 1904. Shivarampant Paranjape (27 June 1864 – 27 September 1929) started weekly Kaal in 1898, which became very popular within a short time. Shivrampant’s writings were a blend of patriotism, intellectualism, refinement with irony and sarcasm. Kaal survived till 1909. In 1920 he started a new weekly Swarajya.

Mahadev Govind Ranade in a review of growth in Marathi journalism in 1898 noted the existence of three daily newspapers, two of which were published in Bombay. They were the Mumbai Vaibhav, started and edited by K.P. Mehendale in 1893 and Gurakhi edited by L.N. Joshi. The next Marathi daily to be published from Bombay was the Rashtramat edited by S.K. Damle and published by Rashtramat Publishing Company in the 20th Century. Sandesh was started in Mumbai in 1915 with A.B. Kolhatkar, another notable personality in Marathi Journalism and a strong supporter of Tilak. K.P. Khadikar started Navakal in 1923. It was Khadikar, who introduced modern methods of production in the Marathi press. In order to attract readers, he introduced regular weekly features of commerce, industry, agriculture, games, etc. Navakal had a sister publication, an evening daily titled Sandhyakal. Prabhat, edited by P.M. Bhagvat, was the first Marathi daily to have simultaneous editions in Bombay.


Bal Gangadhar Tilak.

Hari Narayan Apte.

Gopal Krishna Gokhale remembered on a postage stamp.

Mahadev Govind Ranade started weekly Kaal in 1898, which became very popular within a short time. Shivrampant’s writings were a blend of patriotism, intellectualism, refinement with irony and sarcasm. Kaal survived till 1909. In 1920 he started a new weekly Swarajya.
and Pune – a trend which became widespread in later years.

*Sakal* occupies a pride of place in Marathi journalism. N.B. Parulekar (fondly known as Nanasaheb) published it from Pune on 1 January 1932. It changed the way news used to be presented in Marathi newspapers. It made serious effort to publish the latest news. S.K. Kulkarni commented: “Only with *Sakal* Marathi readers tasted the flavor of fresh news. It was the beginning of a new era, the era of real newspapers in Marathi.” *Sakal* changed the way news was viewed, collected, written and presented. It set a new and higher benchmark for Marathi journalism. Within a year of starting *Sakal*, Nanasaheb launched a weekly titled *Saptahik Sakal*. A few days later he launched a low priced daily titled *Tej*. He started a daily *Swarajya* from Mumbai in 1936. However, financial considerations forced *Tej* to become a weekly and later it was shifted out of Mumbai and finally closed down. Nanasaheb had the rare combination of sharp business sense and social commitment. Both of them used journalism for social service, yet kept the venture on a solid business footing. A number of Marathi dailies came up in the 1940s. Among them was *Navashakti* founded by Sadananda in 1942 and *Loka Sangraha* from Pune.

After Independence in 1948, the Indian Express Group started *Loksatta* in Bombay, the first Marathi daily to appear after the country gained freedom. The *Maharashtra Times* started by the Times of India Group came out in 1962. Mention must be made of Govind Talwalkar (born 22 July 1925), who not only made *Maharashtra Times* a respected paper, but raised the benchmark of Marathi journalism. What Jambhekar was to *Darpan*, Tilak was to *Kesari*, Paranjape was to *Kaal*, so was Talwalkar to *Maharashtra Times* – inseparable. He became chief editor of *Maharashtra Times* in 1968, remained in that role for 27 years until he retired in 1996, thus becoming one of the longest-serving editors. He had written about a dozen books on modern history; *Sattantar*, his book on the transfer of power in India, being the masterpiece.

One of the interesting aspects of Marathi journalism was that from the earliest times newspaper publication was not confined to a few big cities or towns. Prestigious newspapers were published from several cities and from even small towns in Maharashtra and outside the state. *Sakal* from Pune, *Lokmat* and *Tarun Bharat* from Nagpur, *Pudhari* from Kolhapur, *Deshonnati* from Akola were the forerunners. Mention must be made of *Aikya* from Satara, *Gavkari* and *Deshdoot* from Nashik, *Matrubhumi* from Akola, *Janamadhyam* from Amaravati, *Sarvamat* from Shrirampur, *Prajavani* and *Godateer Samachar* from Nanded, *Ekmat* from Latur, and *Sagar* from Chiplun. *Tarun Bharat* of Belgaum, *Karnataka* and *Gomantaka* of Goa are examples of first-rate Marathi publications published from outside Maharashtra.

In fact, Marathi Journalism has a long history in Portuguese India, dating back to 1872. Henry Scholberg gives an account of it in his article, Journalism in Portuguese India 1821-1961:

The first Marathi journal, ‘Dexassudaranetxu’ or ‘Desudharanecchu’ (‘Friend of Progress of the Fatherland’) in Goa was founded by Atmarama Purxotama Sunctancar. Beginning as a monthly periodical, its first issue appeared in January 1872 and its last issue of the first series appeared in September of that year. A second series began March 1, 1877 as a weekly and continued...
until January of the following year. Published in Ribandar, it contained a section in Portuguese. It was critical of the government’s educational policies and, like other Marathi journals, strove to make the government understand the Hindu community. A number of short-lived Marathi journals came forth in the succeeding years, each with sections in Portuguese and each with Portuguese titles or subtitles:

- Journal das Novas Conquistas, 1882-1886
- O Goatma. A Alma de Goa: Jornal Dedicadeo a Defensa dos Interesses Hindus, 1885-1890.
- Gomantac. 1890-1891

Interestingly, many of the Marathi journals contained sections in Portuguese, but left no space for Konkani.

By early 1920s, more than 30 Marathi journals had been or were being published. A glitch occurred early in the 20th Century when “some extremists in British India tried to wage, in the Marathi journal Satsang, a campaign of hostility against British sovereignty, which they could not sustain with impunity in British territory.” The life span of Satsang was 20 years (1902 to 1922). Founded by Laxman Padma Bhandari, after 1908 it was edited by Ramachandra Nayak Kharand Shastry who vigorously championed the message of the Congress Party in British India.

By end-1984, there were 1168 Marathi newspapers according to the Registrar of Newspapers of India (RNI), of them 132 were dailies. By 2007-08, the number increased to 4122, including 553 dailies and 1991 weeklies. Marathi publications came out from Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Goa, and Andhra Pradesh as well. According to the IRS 2011 Q-2 results, the five most read Marathi daily newspapers were Lokmat (readership: 74.26 lakh), Sakal (43.99 lakh), Pudhari (25.11 lakh), Punyanagari (17.16 lakh) and Maharashtra Times (11.40 lakh). By the turn of the New Millennium, the trend of multi-location editions had caught Marathi media houses, too. By mid 2011, almost all major Marathi daily newspapers had editions from several places inside and outside the state. Most of the newspaper houses had upgraded news collection, dissemination, production and distribution facilities. Most of them had started multimedia operations, venturing into television, radio, Internet and other web-enabled platforms.

Radio

Bombay is the place where news broadcasting over radio started in India. The history of news broadcasting in India is much older than that of the present-day state-run All India Radio. The first ever news bulletin in the country went on air from the Bombay Station on July 23, 1927 with a private company banner, the Indian Broadcasting Company. A month later, on August 26, 1927, another bulletin in Bengali was started from the Calcutta station. Until 1935, two bulletins, one each in English and Hindustani were broadcast from Bombay and a bulletin in Bengali was broadcast from Calcutta. The Indian Broadcasting Company went into liquidation in March, 1930 following which broadcasting came under the direct control of the Government of India. The service was designated as the Indian State Broadcasting Service. It was renamed All India Radio on June 8, 1936.1

In 1967, commercial radio services started in India. Named Vividh Bharati, the service started operating from the headquarters in Bombay. By mid-2011, there were about two dozen AIR stations and over two dozen private radio stations, including Radio Nagar FM, Radio Dhamal, Radio City, Red FM, Radio Tomato, Radio Mirchi, Big FM, Radio One, Win 94.6, Fever 104 FM, Radio Meow FM, Must FM and My FM in about 15 cities of Maharashtra. There were five campus radio stations including Radio FTII (Film & Television Institute of India, Pune), Vidyavani (Department of Communication Studies, University of Pune) and 10 community radio stations including KVK Pravara Community Radio(Ahmednagar), Gyanvani (Aurangabad), Vasundhara Vahini (Baramati), Jago Mumbai (Union Park Residents’ Association), Mumbai, and Community Radio Mannvikas Samajik Sanstha, Satara.

Television

Marathi programming on television began in 1972 on state-run Doordarshan. Initially, it was confined to a half-an-hour slot. It increased to a daily three-hour slot in 1998. Later, the same year, Doordarshan started a 24x7 Marathi channel. It was called DD-Sahyadri. On 15 August 1999, Zee Network launched Zee Marathi. After some months the name was changed to Alpha Marathi, and later Zee Marathi. Many new private television channels were launched during 2001-02, including Prabhat TV and Tara Marathi (both now defunct) and ETV’s ETV Marathi. The first round-the-clock Marathi news channel, Zee 24 Taas, was launched in 2007. Star TV launched its Marathi news channel, Star Majha, in June 2007. IBN and Lokmat Group’s IBN Lokmat was launched in 2008. Saam TV Marathi from the Pune-based Sakal Group started in 2008. By mid-2011, several other news channels were functioning.

REMEMBERING S.K. POTTEKATT (1913-1982)

The Indian Marco Polo

I was invited to deliver a lecture on S.K. Pottekatt at the Kerala Club in New Delhi on March 22 only because I am an admirer of the great writer whose birth centenary was celebrated on March 14. My first encounter with his writing was when I had to learn a lesson entitled Ulnaattiloruulsavam (A festival in a village). Whoever had chosen the excerpt from Pottekatt’s book Balidweep (Bali island) could not have selected a better representative piece of his writing. I enjoyed reading it several times, because I felt the writer was describing a temple festival in my own village in Kerala. My love for the lesson prompted me to borrow the book from the local panchayat library. What a marvelous piece of writing it was! It was about his visit to the Bali Island, a Hindu-majority area in Indonesia, which has the world’s largest Muslim population.

When I read the book I felt I was reading a novel, rather than a travelogue. It opened my eyes to the world outside of Kerala. My transformation as an avid reader of Pottekatt was instant. I began reading his books one by one till I finished all that existed in the library. One of the most fascinating novels I read was Vishakanyaka (The Poisonous Virgin). It was about the travails of those who migrated to Malabar in the north, administered directly by the British, mostly from mid-Travancore in today’s Kerala. The migration continued till the late-Sixties of the 20th Century.

When one of my relatives, who had eight children, sold all his property and left for Malabar in search of greener pastures, I had a clear idea of the difficulties he would encounter there. Alas, he could not cope with the situation and returned to the village within a month. Had he read Vishakanyaka, the weak-hearted that he was, he would not have made that move. The settlers were mostly Christians and the keen observer that Pottekatt was, he was able to portray their life with all its idiosyncrasies intact. Death due to pestilence or accidents while driving away wild boars stared the settlers in the face. Only the brave could survive. Decades later, when I visited those areas during the 1991 LokSabha elections, I found Malabar one of the most prosperous areas in Kerala. Vishakanyaka is the mythical maiden who saps the energy of the man who falls for her and it was an apt description of the land where countless men and women fell ill or died fighting the vagaries of nature.

It was Pottekatt’s OruDeshathinte Katha (The Story of a Locale) that won him the Jnanpith in 1980. In the autobiographical novel, he sketches the men and women of Athiranippadam, drawing the history of the country while detailing the micro-history of the place. Ammukutty is a character who appears only once in the novel. The protagonist of the novel -- a budding poet -- finds the teenaged Ammukutty holding an umbrella, which is broken and twisted. Like a knight in shining armour, he offers his own umbrella to her and promises to get hers repaired. Months later, Ammukutty’s brother gives him a letter she had addressed to the “poet of Athiranippadam”. He also gets the chilling news that she is no more. Thirty-five years later, he returns to the village where he encounters a jeans-wearing, Coca-Cola-sipping youth who looks askance at the visitor. Yes, Athiranippadam had changed beyond recognition.

Pottekatt’s characters, as he mentions in a note to another novel, OruTheruwinte Katha (The Story of a Street) “were people in blood and flesh”.

(Courtesy: Indian Currents; reproduced here with the permission of the writer who is a senior journalist based in New Delhi, a member of the Assessment and Monitoring Authority of the Planning Commission, and president of non-profit organisation Deepalaya.)
The novel is in many respects like Hindi writer Phanishwar Nath Renu’s *Maila Anchal*, populated by living characters with fictitious names. Most of his short stories have a dramatic twist, *a la* O. Henry as in *Vesayariti* (Prostitution). A poor man learns that his wife has an affair with the moneylender. He rushes to the moneylender’s house to kill him but finds his wife in a lip-lock with her servant. He drops all his ideas of revenge and returns to his wife. After all, his wife slept with the moneylender only because of compulsion.

However, it is as a travel writer that Pottekatt will always be remembered. Travel writing is as old as Malayalam prose. *Varthamanapustakam*, written by Paremakkal Thoma Katharan, in 1778, about his visit to Rome is the first in the genre. There were many travelogues in Malayalam, written in verse form, mostly about visits to religious places like Kashi and Gangotri. *Parumala Thrirumeni’s Oorlessmotrivaranam* in 1895 about his visit to Jerusalem is considered the first ideal travelogue. In the 1930s, K. Kalyanikutti Amma’s *Njan Kanda Europe* (*The Europe I saw*) was the first travelogue by a woman writer. It is a different matter that Sanjayan (M.R. Nair) wryly commented that the book should have been titled ‘I who saw Europe’. Travel-writing reached its apogee with the advent of Pottekatt. He gave up his job, which he got after considerable waiting, to take up writing as a full-time profession.

If the world came to know about the conditions of ancient India through the writings of Chinese writers Fa-Hien, Huen-Tsang and I-Tsing, it was Marco Polo, who threw light on the Silk Road that led to China and Mongolia. For the Malayalee, Pottekatt was his Marco Polo, who threw light on the lands with their own distinct cultural practices. The tribes are as divergent as the Malayali and the Manipuri.

Pottekatt spent nine months in Africa and travelled 11000 miles to write that book. No, Pottekatt was not rich. His sole earnings were from his writings, which he would first serialise in a magazine before publishing them in a book form. He travelled on a shoestring budget, opting for the cheapest mode of transport. He never travelled by air, preferring always the cheap decks of passenger ships. He befriended people on the way and generously accepted their hospitality like a good hitchhiker. He travelled in third class, only because there was no fourth class in trains. On a visit to Jalandhar a few years ago, I saw a documentary film on the Saringetti National Park at PushpaGujral Science City. The acoustics were excellent and the visuals superb. I would have enjoyed it more if I had not read and enjoyed Pottekatt’s description of the same park in his *Simhabhoomi* (The Land of the Lion).

Pottekatt was also a good photographer. Small wonder that his books were profusely illustrated! Unlike most people who travel for sheer pleasure, he travelled for knowledge. He encountered many difficulties during his journeys. As he once explained, “It is not the comforts of travel that make good writing but the discomforts of it.” Yes, he had too many discomforts to describe. As one who has dabbled in travel writing, I know how difficult it is to write a travelogue. In a travelogue, the writer is constantly present in the work. There are two types of travel writing. One is about the place the writer has visited and the other is about the person who has visited the place. Pottekatt’s travelogues belonged to the first category and he never used his pen to eulogize himself. Narcissism was simply alien to him. One thing that can be said about him is that he wrote for the Malayalee, using similes, idioms and phrases that are comfortable to him.

Pottekatt would certainly have read about Marco Polo’s advice to travellers to be constantly wary of spirits that lure them away from their chosen path. Fortunately, he always came back hale and hearty to write accounts that opened a window to the world. Re-reading the chapter on the Vatican in his *Europiloode* (*Through Europe*), I am able to relive my own experience when I visited the Pope’s abode in the Jubilee Year of 2000. He is overwhelmed by the architectural and artistic grandeur of the churches in the Vatican that came into being as the world’s smallest sovereign state on February 11, 1929. But that does not prevent...
him from making some caustic comments on the pomp and the Pope.

The Keralites have a general disdain for writers and actors dabbling in politics. They made an exception in the case of Pottekatt, who contested for the LokSabha as an independent from Thalassery in 1957. He lost by a small margin of 1000 votes. In the next election in 1962, the Congress fielded another writer Sukumar Azhikkode against him but Pottekatt won by a huge margin. It is the Malayali’s loss that Pottekatt could not visit China and the Americas, not to mention Australia. As Mannodi Ravindran mentioned, the tragic death of one of his sons had a debilitating effect on him like the misleading news of the death of Aswatthma had on Guru Dronacharya. His wife’s death in 1980 was another blow and he died on August 6, 1982.

Love was a great motif for Pottekatt, whose first novel was NaadanPremam (Local Love). Written in 1941, it is as lyrical as it is poignant. However, it was his love for the unknown and the unexplored that took him to the far corners of the world to give his readers a peep into their cultures and diversities. Pottekatt’s travelogues are read even in these days of instant communication. Prof Chandrashekharan Nair would advise anyone who wants to know the greatness of Pottekatt to read his short story Pullimaan (The Spotted Dear). My advice would be to read his collected works.

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Working towards ‘more sensitive, nuanced’ coverage

The Network of Women in Media, India, celebrating its 10th anniversary at a national convention attended by about 80 media women from across the country, discussed various aspects of the theme, Women, Violence and the Media, over a weekend meeting in Mumbai (1-3 February 2013). A public meeting on 2 February 2013 focussed on how the news media can better report issues of women, violence and public space.

Taking note of the public outrage over, and media coverage of, the recent brutal gang-rape and murder of a 23-year-old woman in Delhi, the NWMI expresses grave concern over the increasing incidence of violence against girls and women all across India, in public as well as private spaces.

As women journalists, we believe it is important to recognise that the Delhi case exposed only the tip of the iceberg of gender violence, much of which does not receive adequate media or public attention. We appreciate the fact that the media responded to the gang-rape in Delhi and the public outcry that followed with prominent and largely sympathetic coverage.

However, we recognise that media coverage is often a double-edged sword. On the positive side, it increases public awareness about such crimes and puts pressure on the authorities to take action. On the negative side, incessant coverage of certain cases, particularly sensationalised cases of sexual violence, can obscure the widespread prevalence of many different forms of daily violence against women all over the country. Unless it is balanced and sensitively handled, such coverage can also be voyeuristic and titillating; it can increase the sense of vulnerability and insecurity among girls and women (including survivors of such violence), and lead to restrictions on their freedom and rights.

In addition, some of the media coverage in the immediate aftermath of the gang-rape in Delhi provoked and amplified strident calls for harsher punishments for such crimes – capital punishment, chemical castration, and so on – despite the fact that most women’s groups with long experience in dealing with gender violence have consistently cautioned against such knee-jerk reactions that could worsen the situation.

We recall the thousands of girls and women all over the country who have been physically, sexually, psychologically abused and injured or killed. As journalists, we urge the media to pay due attention to sexual violence perpetrated on Dalits and Adivasis, as well as women in militarised zones, where security forces are granted impunity by law.

We renew our commitment to working towards ensuring that media coverage of violence against women is more sensitive and nuanced, enabling victims and survivors to get justice in an environment where women feel safe and can exercise their right to equal citizenship.

(A release from Network of Women in Media, India)
REMEMBERING LOTIKA SARKAR (1923-2013)

A selfless torchbearer for gender justice

Prof Lotika Sarkar who played a central role in several path-breaking and crucial legislations for gender justice and empowerment of women during 1975-2005, passed away at the age of 89 on 23 February 2013. In the women’s rights movement, she was known as Lotikadee. When other stalwarts of women’s studies touched our hearts with inspirational speeches in the women’s movement gathering, Lotikadee floored us with her legal acumen. She was the first Indian woman to graduate from Cambridge. Lotikadee was in the peak of her career when she was asked to join the Committee on the Status of Women in India, 1972 that prepared the Towards Equality Report, 1974. As a pioneer in the fields of law, women’s studies and human rights, she prepared the chapter on laws concerning women with gender sensitivity and analytical clarity.

Prof Lotika Sarkar was the first woman teacher of law faculty at the University of Delhi and taught Criminal Law and was a mainstay of the Indian Law Institute, Delhi during the 1980s and 1990s. She was a founding member of the Indian Association for Women Studies. In 1980, along with Veena Mazumdar, Lotikadee founded Centre for Women’s Development Studies. Along with three professors of Law of Delhi University – Prof Upendra Baxi, Prof Ragunath Kelkar, Vasudha Dhagamwar – Lotikadee wrote the historic Open Letter to the Chief Justice of India in 1979, challenging the judgment of the apex court on the Mathura rape case. I remember cutting stencils and making copies on our cyclostyling machine of the four-page long letter for wider circulation. Translation of the letter into Gujarati and Hindi served a crash course for me to understand nuances of the criminal justice system, rape laws and sexual violence as the weapon to keep women in a perpetual state of terrorisation, intimidation and subjugation. Wide circulation of the Open Letter resulted in birth of the first feminist group against rape, Forum Against Rape in January, 1980.

When Lotikadee came to Mumbai for the first Conference on Women’s Studies in April 1981 at the SNDT Women’s University, we, young feminists, were awe-struck. Ideological polarisation in the conference was extremely volatile. Lotikadee’s commitment to the left movement did not prevent her from interacting meaningfully with liberals, free-thinkers and also with the ‘new left’ like me. The Indian Association of Women’s Studies was formed in this gathering. In the subsequent conferences, Lotikadee attracted innumerable legal luminaries to IAWS.

Lotikadee and her journalist husband, Chanchal Sarkar*, were kind, generous and trusting. After her husband passed away, she was under immense trauma and grief. Taking advantage of the situation, her cook and the police officer whose education they had sponsored, usurped her property and house. Her students, India’s top lawyers and judges, mobilised support and signed an open letter studded with such names such as Justice V.R. Krishna Iyer, Soli Sorabjee, Gopal Subramaniam and Kapila Vatsyayan. Jurists, advocates, academics, bureaucrats, journalists and human rights activists had signed the open letter.
demanding justice for her. Finally, during her last days, Lotika Sarkar’s property was transferred back to her and her assets handed over to her to allow her to live her life in peaceful serenity, which she so deserved. Lotikadee’s traumatic experience invited serious attention to safeguarding the rights of senior citizens by both state and civil society.

Lotikadee was a conscience keeper not only for policy makers and the legal fraternity but also of women’s studies scholars and women’s movement activists. The most appropriate tribute to her is to proactively pursue the mission she started with her team in 1980, to fight against rape and various forms of structural and systemic violence against women and to strive for social, distributive and gender justice. Resurgence of activism against sexual violence and feminist debate around Justice Verma Commission’s Report as well as Criminal Law (Amendment ) Ordinance, 2013 constantly reminds us of the pioneering work of Lotikadee in terms of creating a strong band of committed and legally aware feminists.

(A tribute by Vibhuti Patel, professor and head of the Department of Economics, SNDT Women’s University, Mumbai, and a member of the advisory board of the Department of Women’s Studies of NCERT, Delhi.)

*Note: Chanchal Sarkar was former director of the Press Institute of India. He passed away in October 2005.

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Legal radical, friend, feminist

We have to marvel at how the world has changed since r*** was a four letter word, and young Lotika Sarkar (1923-2013), the first woman lecturer in the Faculty of Law, University of Delhi, shocked the department by teaching rape to her students. This is what happens when you let women into hallowed institutions of learning: They don’t understand that, even when they are allowed to be seen, they may not be heard about the obscene. This was our LS-given, early version of the Vagina Monologues, without the theatre. Shift to the present: I suspect some will tell us that the battle to take rape to the classroom is far from over; except, thanks to LS, it is prudery that is on the back foot now.

When the letter protesting the Mathura judgment was written, it constituted many firsts. It was the first time that an ‘open letter’ was written to the Chief Justice of India – braving its contempt powers. A first for law teachers – Upendra Baxi, Vasudha Dhagamwar, Ragunath Kelkar and LS – questioning the legitimacy of the court’s decisions. The first time the cover of silence shrouding custodial rape was torn asunder by the written word. It is one of the contradictions of those times that, in the wake of the Mathura letter, the law was changed to make it a crime to reveal the identity of a victim of rape. Yet, Mathura remains Mathura, while Tukaram and Ganpat haunt the peripheries of feminist consciousness. Such is the stuff of which iconisation is made.

A while later, LS was to advocate caution in shifting the burden of proof: A matter that continues to need explaining, and demands debate – especially with the state having used terrorism as a causative agent for extraordinary laws. In a haze of cigarette smoke, in a room in Delhi’s Centre for Women’s Development Studies, dwarfed by the personalities of the two women in it, sits a third listening to a narrative unfold. “When they set up the Committee on the Status of Women in India (CSWI), no one in government expected the report that we produced,” chuckles Vina Mazumdar. LS smiles wryly. No one in the committee had anticipated the work, travel and discovery either. Soon, though, they had formed teams, and were coursing in all directions, meeting women of all ilk and hues, life experiences and dispositions all over the country. Before they knew it, the women they met unalterably radicalised them. The Status of Women in India Report is testimony to what they learnt from the women who spoke to them.

It was on reservation in legislative bodies that LS and Vinadi dissented. You see, we had not gone looking for how the political system should be changed for women. But wherever we went, women would raise the problem of political participation. The report had to reflect what they were saying. The Note of Dissent was to resurface years later with the Women’s Reservation Bill. Thinking back, this was a casual conversation while taking time off for a smoke. If this is the stuff of which feminist gossip is made, it is no wonder that the women’s
movement is now so articulate about how the law needs to change, and where it needs more thought; a far cry from a government that seems clueless that neither patriarchy nor paternalism can provide answers to the women's question.

Feminism, as feminists know, has its share of mirth, even when it is serious business. The serious business of feminism was on display when LS was co-petitioner in the public interest petition on the Agra Protective Home. ‘Protective home’. We know what that means. The conditions were abominable, the rules were like those of a punitive institution, and codes of civilised conduct seemed to stop at the doorstep.

In 1994, when she was over 70, it fell to LS to pursue the case in the Supreme Court. She was daunted, but determined. What was at stake? In illustration: Now that the ‘home’ was under the court’s scrutiny, it had directed the District Judge to file a monthly report on the ‘home’. In this document that was accessible to anyone who cared to look at court papers was the record for every woman in the ‘home’, tying up her identity with her HIV status.

On 30 August, 1994, the court directed that all persons testing positive be segregated. On 10 October, 1994, armed with a doctor’s opinion, LS stood her ground with a reluctant court to change its earlier order. Fighting prejudice is an everyday task for the feminist, right? It tired her out, and she did the rest of the case with Muralidhar - Murali to LS - by her side, but she stayed the course.

There was no fuss about LS. Just meticulous preparation and grounded work. Ask Gobind, Khem Singh, Dayalji in the Indian Law Institute library, and they would tell you that “Madam worked very hard.” And, they would say, in voices tinged with affection and respect that they were happy to take the books to her, but, no, she will go to the racks and get the books down herself. Mutual respect, no hierarchy, unacceptance of nonsense, and a deep sense of fairness. No pre-judgment, no prejudice; but excellent judgment.

Students who are now teachers speak of being ticked off by her, and then treated to a cup of coffee in her room. There was never any malice, jealous self-interest or meanness about her. Sure, there were those she did not like or trust – but isn’t that what judgment is about? There is just one person about whom I have heard her say ‘he should be punished’, and that after extraordinary provocation. Need I say more? With her friends, it was affection, jollity, respect and a free exchange of thought, opinion and ... well, lunch.

The three-tiered dabba (tiffin box) was not hers once she reached ILI, CWDS, perhaps the Law Faculty too. Her most delectable concoctions were made from – guess what? – leftovers. The thing is, it was true. A visiting friend may leave some mushrooms in a form that does little to add pleasure to the palate; overnight, it would become a creation whose recipe must be written; except, it had just one ingredient – leftovers. Politics and pleasure were on the same canvas. Who among us remembers LS, laid up after a hip surgery, spending the evening before 2006 was to arrive, with friends, wine and chocolate cake, discussing a freshly minted Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act which, she angsted, she needed to understand.

At the release of LS’s Festschrift (1999), I am told, the hall was full to overflowing. As the proceedings drew to a close, as indeed they must, there was a spontaneous standing ovation. I didn’t hear it then, because I wasn’t there. But, after four years of sharing a home and being witness to her inexhaustible charm, cheer, comradeliness, compassion, concern, quiet – very quiet - dignity, trust and fairness, we know why the applause will never stop.

(A tribute by Usha Ramanathan; courtesy: Women’s Feature Service)
Malayala Manorama celebrates 125

President Pranab Mukherjee inaugurated the quasquicentennial jubilee celebrations of Malayala Manorama, on completing 125 years of service to the nation. After unveiling the plaque to mark the occasion, the president has said that Malayala Manorama has actively participated in the nation’s struggle towards freedom. A commemorative stamp on Malayala Manorama completing 125 years issued by the Postal Department was released by the president.

Kerala Governor H. R. Bharadwaj presided over the function. Kapil Sibal, minister for Communications and IT delivered the keynote address. Chief Minister Oommen Chandy, Home Minister Thiruvanchoor Radhakrishnan and Jose K. Mani, MP, delivered the felicitation speeches. A jubilee special prayer song penned by celebrated poet ONV Kurup was recited by noted singers L. Subramaniam and Kavita Krishnamurthy.

It was on 14 March 1888 that Kandathil Varghese Mappillai established India’s first joint stock publishing company. However, the printing was delayed by two years as the Malayalam script needed to be reworked to suit printing. Importing printing press from England also took a long time. The Malayalam script was aesthetically redesigned after strenuous efforts. The historical journey of Malayala Manorama thus began on 22 March, 1890, with a humble circulation of 1000 copies. Currently, Malayala Manorama newspaper is published from 18 centers, including two editions in the Gulf region, with a total circulation of 21.29 lakhs copies (as per Audit Bureau of Circulation report) and 97.52 lakhs readers (as per Indian Readership Survey).

On September 10, 1938, C P Ramaswamy Aiyer, virtually duct-taped Malayala Manorama with the iron hands of power. However, the paper came out again after a certain period. CP’s authoritative might could not suppress the decision that time had schemed. As a result of the sacrifice, courage and adventure of people behind Manorama, the paper got printed from Kunnammulam, a place 120 miles away from Kottayam. Though Manorama from Kunnammulam was banned in Travancore, the paper continued to get published from there for another nine months from the same place.

(Sources: Manoramaonline.com)

Sivanthi Adityan passes away

B. Sivanthi Adityan, owner of Dina Thanthi, one of the largest circulated Tamil dailies, and well-known sports administrator, died here on Friday after a prolonged illness. He was 76 and is survived by wife, a son and a daughter.

Younger son of S.B. Adityan, a barrister-turned-newspaper baron and politician, who became the speaker of Tamil Nadu Assembly, Sivanthi Adityan was the president of the Indian Olympic Association and Volleyball Federation of India. The Sun Paper Mills owned by him has volleyball and kabaddi teams. He also constructed a state-of-the-art indoor volleyball stadium in the Adithanar College, Tiruchendur, where the Indian team used to practise.

He was a philanthropist and funded the renovation of many temples. In the southern districts, there are many sports clubs bearing his name. Though his father was with the DMK and once ran his own political party Naam Tamilar, Adityan kept away from politics.

Besides being one who popularised the habit of reading newspapers among the common people, he was a keen sportsman. He was also a recipient of Padma Sri.

(Courtesy: The Hindu)

Only self-regulation desirable: WAN-IFRA

Issues prompting the Leveson Inquiry are no cause for additional statutory regulation of the press, which would have a “chilling effect” on...
press freedom worldwide. The World Association of Newspapers and News Publishers (WAN-IFRA) and the World Editors Forum have appealed to the British government to rethink statutory regulation that threatens more than 300 years of press freedom in the UK. In a letter to Prime Minister David Cameron, the global organisation said the proposed Royal Charter on Self-Regulation of the Press risks having a devastating effect on the independent press, not only in the United Kingdom but also worldwide. Investigative journalism will be discouraged while a culture of self-censorship will prevail.

Under the proposal, publishers who do not sign up to the “approved regulator” system could be liable for punitive damages or alarmingly high libel costs, even if they were to win a court case. The proposal also calls for an arbitration service with powers that are “more extensive than any press regulator in the western world.” “Disputes currently settled easily without cost to either side could become major compensation claims for even the smallest of errors,” said WAN-IFRA and the WEF in the letter to the Prime Minister. The proposal would also have a “chilling effect” on press freedom in other countries, as oppressive regimes will cite the British model as an example and use it as an excuse to silence independent voices or those critical of government.

“The proposed Royal Charter on Self Regulation of the Press in its name is misleading,” said the letter, “given it does not stand alone, but instead interlocks with the Crime and Courts Bill and the Enterprise and Regulatory Reform Bill currently before parliament, which together can not be described as anything other than statutory regulation of the press.” WAN-IFRA stands firmly behind the need for a strong and independent press in the United Kingdom, underpinned by an effective self-regulatory system independent of both the state and the newspaper and magazine industry.

Mexican govt urged to improve safety

A report released by the International Press Institute (IPI) and the World Association of Newspapers and News Publishers (WAN-IFRA) following their February joint press-freedom mission to Mexico states that the new Mexican federal government must work to fully implement recent institutional measures designed to improve journalist safety. The report also reveals that Mexican state governments have become a major obstacle to defending press freedom in Mexico through their failure to prosecute crimes against journalists and the efforts of some state governments to control information through the harassment and intimidation of journalists.

The principal objective of IPI and WAN-IFRA’s three-day visit to Mexico was to evaluate strategies adopted by the federal government to ensure journalist safety in the country: first, a federal protection system for journalists in danger; and second, the federal Special Prosecutor for Crimes against Freedom of Expression, recently strengthened by a constitutional amendment granting the federal government the power to investigate crimes against the press. Such crimes are rarely investigated by local and state authorities. The report underscores that the constitutional changes related to the special prosecutor require the passage of secondary legislation to take practical effect.

Members of the Mexican federal congress told IPI and WAN-IFRA that this legislation was supported by all parties and prioritised for speedy passage. Specifically, on February 12, the president of the Human Rights Committee in the federal Chamber of Deputies, informed the delegation that the Senate was expected to pass the bill within 15 days and deliver it to the Chamber of Deputies, which could then pass it by mid-April. This legislation was approved by the Senate only last week, on April 12th, but has yet to be considered by the Chamber of Deputies. One the report’s key findings is the way in which certain state authorities have become a major obstacle for progress in both ensuring journalist safety and protecting press freedom.

Bangkok set for summit conference

The annual summit meetings of the world’s newspapers and news publishers have a new look in 2013, as the World Newspaper Congress and World Editors Forum will be joined by the World Newspaper Advertising Forum, making Bangkok the centre of the publishing universe come June. The 65th World Newspaper Congress, 20th World Editors Forum and 23rd Newspaper Advertising Forum, to be held concurrently from 2 to 5 June, are expected to draw more than 1000 publishers, chief editors, CEOs, advertising directors and their guests to the vibrant city of Bangkok.

With a venue in the heart of Asia, the Congress, Editors Forum and Ad Forum will get a close look at the region’s vitality and productivity and booming media industry. What better place to meet and network than at the Bangkok Convention Centre, at the heart of one of the world’s most exciting and welcoming cities? Innovation, inspiration and interaction are the three themes of the event, organised by the World Association of Newspapers and News Publishers (WAN-IFRA). The three conference streams are designed to provide participants with strategic knowledge and ideas emerging from the rapid, constant change that characterises the news media today, from technology
to consumer habits to advertising formats and new reporting and storytelling techniques.

Alka Dhupkar bags Chameli Devi Jain Award

The Chameli Devi Jain Award for Outstanding Woman Mediaperson for 2012-13 has gone to Alka Dhupkar of IBN-Lokmat TV, a leading regional Marathi news channel based in Mumbai, which she joined since its inception in 2007. The citation says Alka “stands out for her depth of engagement, concern and professionalism displayed in an extensive body of work covering a diverse range of subjects in both the broadcast and print modes. These qualities are evident from her work as a live reporter from the field, as one working on in-depth feature programmes, and as a studio-based anchor in specialised discussions issues of social, economic and human concern.”

The citation goes on to say, “Alka has defied current convention by pursuing off-beat stories and probing with compassion and understanding the motives, sordid or born of harsh compulsions, that drive people to acts of villainy or despair. Thus, her investigation of a doctor couple feeding on dead tradition to practise female foeticide, poverty-driven surrogate motherhood for childless foreign or otherwise wealthy couples, and the intense trauma of deciding the future of a child born of rape. The underprivileged and suffering have benefited from the spotlight she has turned on their condition and the corrupt, such as powerful land-grabbers, have been exposed.” She has done some outstanding reportage, even travelling the long distance from Maharashtra to Arunachal Pradesh for a story on developmental efforts in that Northeastern state.

B.G. Verghese, coordinator, TheMediaFoundation, points out that the jury made a special commendation of the body of work produced by Ambika Pandit of the Times of India for her investigative and analytical reports on a wide range of subjects tackling difficult and sometimes contentious issues in a challenging environment.

A panel of jurors comprising Sunit Tandon, Alok Mehta, R. Prasannan, and Arati Jerath had to choose from 24 entries spanning three different media: print, television and radio. Nearly half were in Indian languages, underlining the spread and growing importance of the non-English media. There were 13 entries in English, eight in Hindi, two in Malayalam and one in Marathi. Six of the 24 entries came from television. There were 17 print entries and one from radio. According to Jerath, the body of work represented in the entries was impressive and it was a challenge to zero in on one person for the award.

Here is Alka’s response: “Being happy is a state of mind and being. To be honoured is a validation of the same and brings with it a feeling of pride, responsibility, an urge to do more, mark new horizons and aspire to get there. Though this moment is filled with joy and contentment, I must tell you that covering, or rather uncovering, stories of corruption, malnutrition and female foeticide are not happy moments. A hospital that has murdered several girls, even before they were born is, trust me, not the happiest place in the world. Confronting ministers and questioning them about their nexus with corrupt contractors, or investigating the murky links of the diesel mafia has never made me feel good. Because it reflects the dreadful facts of the society we are living in. And hence I feel, it is the responsibility of us, developmental journalists, constantly to report and bring to public notice these criminal acts. Mentioning numbers, statistics and data is one part of reporting; but what one needs to do, is to give a human face to issues.”

First European Digital Media Awards presented

Telegraph Media Group in the UK, Verdens Gang in Norway, Dagens Nyheter in Sweden and Kleine Zeitung in Austria are among the winners of the first European Digital Media Awards, presented in a ceremony in London by the World Association of Newspapers and News Publishers (WAN-IFRA). The awards, which honour outstanding work in online media, cross-media, online video, infographics, mobile, tablets and social media, were presented to nearly 20 companies and publications. The ceremony was held during Digital Media Europe 2013, WAN-IFRA’s annual digital conference that has attracted nearly 200 media executives from 38 countries.

“The European Digital Media Awards provide compelling evidence of the innovation and consumer-oriented solutions that are emerging from European publishers,” says Stig Nordqvist, executive director of Publishing & Digital for WAN-IFRA. “The winning projects demonstrate how publishers are responding to the changing media habits of their audiences.”

The panel of judges included Mario Garcia, CEO and founder, García Media; Hans Peter Janisch, design consultant and former international director of the Society for News Design; Anette Novak, board member of the World Editors Forum; Peter Ong, CEO, Checkout Australia in Australia; and Randy Covington, director, WAN-IFRA Newsplex Training Centre.

7 in Top Ten lose readership

As per IRS data for Q4 2012, among the top 10 publications, Dainik Jagran, Dainik Bhaskar, The Times of India, Amar Ujala, Lokmat, Daily Thanthi and Mathrubhumi have seen decline in their Average Issue

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Readership (AIR). On the other hand, Hindustan, Malayala Manorama and Rajasthan Patrika have seen marginal rise in AIR. Dainik Jagran, still No. 1, has lost more than one lakh readers. In the previous quarter, IRS figure of Dainik Jagran was 16,474,000, which has decreased to 16,370,000. Dainik Bhaskar continues to be in the second spot, but it has lost more than 75,000 readers. In the previous quarter, the IRS figure of the publication was 14,491,000, which has come down to 14,416,000. Hindustan retains the number three spot. The daily has witnessed marginal readership growth of 4,000. In the previous quarter, IRS for Hindustan was 12,242,000.

Malayala Manorama has grabbed the fourth position among all the publication. It has added 8,000 readers this quarter. The AIR of Malayala Manorama was 9,752,000 in Q3, which has increased to 9,760,000 in Q4. At fifth position, Amar Ujala has lost more than one lakh reader, with an AIR of 8,536,000 in previous quarter and 8,434,000 in the current quarter. The Times of India is the only English publication in the list. The paper has lost 38,000 readers during the current quarter, taking its AIR from 7,653,000 in Q3 to 7,615,000 in Q4.

Daily Thanthi has seen a decline in AIR to 7,334,000 in Q4 from 7,417,000 in the previous quarter. Lokmat has seen the third largest fall in AIR of 96,000 readers during the quarter, taking its AIR down to 7,319,000 in Q4. Rajasthan Patrika is the second Hindi daily which has seen growth in readership, notching an AIR of 6,837,000 in Q4, by adding 19,000 readers. However, it’s decline for Mathrubhumi once again, which has registered an AIR of 6,334,000, losing 81,000 readers during the quarter.

Readership fall for English magazines

Nine out of 10 English magazine’s Average Issue Readership (AIR) declined in the Q4 quarter. The Indian Readership Survey (IRS) 2012 Q3 data had registered seven English magazines losing readership. Though India Today is at the top in the ranking, the magazine lost 46,000 readers in the quarter. The weekly magazine had recorded an AIR of 1,526,000 in Q3 and after losing readers in current quarter, the AIR of the magazine is 1,480,000.

Monthly magazine General Knowledge Today is the second largest magazine to lose readers among the top ten. The monthly had recorded an AIR of 1,047,000 in Q3 but has lost 54,000 readers in this quarter, with AIR of 993,000 in IRS Q4 2012. In the third position, Reader’s Digest registered the steepest decline in readership. It has lost 58,000 readers. The AIR of the monthly magazine was 1,016,000 in Q3 but is down to 958,000 in Q4. Competition Success Review lost 33,000 readers in the quarter. The monthly had AIR of 703,000 in the previous quarter, whereas after witnessing a huge decline, the current AIR is 670,000 in Q4. Weekly magazine Outlook lost 23,000 readers. The current AIR of the magazine is 451,000 in comparison of 474,000 in Q3.

The only silver lining was Pratiyogita Darpan gaining 14,000 readers. It climbed to No. 6 position. Its AIR in the quarter is 431,000. The Week lost 10,000 readers in IRS 2012 Q4. It has also slipped down one position, to No. 7. Stardust lost 14,000 readers and slipped to No. 8. he last two spots are claimed by Business Today and Wisdom.

HT, Telegraph show growth

The Times of India, which had seen growth in the previous quarter, has witnessed decline in this quarter. In the previous quarter, TOI registered marginal rise of 10,000 readers but has lost 38,000 readers in Q4. However, Hindustan Times, which had added 19,000 readers in the previous quarter, has registered almost double the number of readers with the maximum growth of 34,000 readers this time around, garnering an AIR of 3,820,000 in Q4 from 3,786,000 in IRS 2012 Q3. The Hindu, placed in the third spot, has seen the deepest decline in readership among English dailies, losing 94,000 readers. The daily had recorded an AIR of 2,258,000 in Q3 and added 50,000 readers in the previous quarter. The AIR of The Hindu is 2,164,000 in IRS Q4 2012.

The other dailies that have seen growth this quarter are The Telegraph, DNA, Mumbai Mirror, and The Tribune. The Telegraph registered an AIR of 1,265,000 in Q4, while DNA recorded an AIR of 972,000. Mumbai Mirror’s Q4 AIR stands at 819,000, while The Tribune has garnered an AIR of 671,000, adding 18,000 readers and reaching the ninth position. Deccan Chronicle saw a drop in AIR, from 1,051,000 in IRS 2012 Q3 to 1,020,000 this quarter. It’s decline for The Economic Times as well. The business daily lost 18,000 readers during the quarter, bringing down its AIR to 735,000 in Q4. The New Indian Express too has seen marginal decline in readership and reached last position, recording an AIR of 652,000 in IRS 2012 Q4 in comparison to 664,000 in IRS Q3 2012.

Decline for Lokmat, Dinakaran, Daily Thanthi

Six of 10 regional dailies have witnessed decline in readership in IRS 2012 Q4. Also, the four that have seen increase, have only seen marginal growth. Malayala Manorama retains top position, seeing increase of 8,000 AIR in the current quarter. In Q3 AIR of Malayala Manorama was 9,752,000, whereas in Q4 it is 9,760,000. Daily Thanthi, though it managed to retain the second spot in Q4, lost a huge number of readers – 83,000. Lokmat witnessed the steepest fall – losing 96,000 readers, but still managed to retain
third position. The Marathi daily had lost 98,000 in the previous quarter. The AIR of Lokmat in previous quarter was 7,409,000, which decreased to 7,313,000 in Q4. Mathrubhumi lost 81,000 readers; its AIR decreased from 6,415,000 in Q3 to 6,334,000 in Q4.

On the other hand, it’s a growth story for Eevasadu; it has managed to add 15,000 readers, taking its AIR to 5,972,000 in Q4 from 5,957,000 in Q3. Ananda Bazar Patrika has lost 38,000 readers in this quarter, taking its AIR of 5,788,000 in Q3 to 5,750,000 in Q4. In the seventh spot, Sakshi has added a good number of readers in the current quarter. In the last quarter, it had added 37,000 readers, whereas in this quarter it has added 36,000 readers, increasing AIR from 5,343,000 in Q3 to 5,379,000 in Q4. In eight place, Gujarat Samachar saw a decline of 39,000 readers. In the previous quarter, AIR of Gujarat Samachar was 5,153,000, which has declined to 5,114,000 in the current quarter. Dinakaran, in ninth position, saw a decline of 96,000 readers in the current quarter. The AIR was 4,912,000 in Q3, whereas the current AIR is 4,816,000. In last place, Daily Sakal saw maximum growth in readership, gaining readership of 66,000.

New IRS survey goes tech-savvy

Media Research Users Council (MRUC) and Readership Studies Council of India (RSCI) had awarded the contract for a new avatar of the Indian Readership Survey (IRS) to the Nielsen Company last year. Now, they have come up with a new version of the readership survey, which will be released in December 2013. The pilot study commenced in March this year, while the IRS field work will commence from May.

The new methodology is more monitor-based and user friendly. The new computer-aided personal interview technology has been introduced. As sections are completed, movement to the next section is automatically programmed into the process. There is no need for show cards. Respondents are able to check that their answers are being accurately recorded. In order to avoid fudging, a global positioning satellite system is used to accurately pinpoint the location of the GPS device. This means that as interviews are completed, the GPS device is able to tag them with the exact place where they were conducted. When check backs are done, the supervisor can confirm that the respondent was actually found at the latitude-longitude specified in the interview.

The new survey will consider a sample size of 235000, which will be spread across 32 states and union territories covering 95 cities and 92 districts. It will consider the Kolkata, Mumbai and Delhi zones. The districts have been considered based on their demographics and linked very well with the readership, besides representing the entire state. Nielsen has appointed 700 people for this survey for the first year and will change the numbers according to the demand. The study has also introduced a new consumer classification system, which will take off soon.

HT Media launches MintAsia

In keeping with its strategy to make business daily Mint a regional media brand, HT Media has launched MintAsia in Singapore. The paper is touted as Asia’s weekly window into Indian business and economy. MintAsia will be published every Friday. Commenting on the idea behind the launch of the paper in Singapore, Rajiv Verma, CEO, HT Media said, “When we conceptualised Mint, we were clear that it would be a regional media brand, and I am delighted that with this launch in Singapore of MintAsia, we have started on that journey. This is amongst the first for an Indian media company.”

The paper was unveiled at the Impact alumni event in Singapore on April 6, 2013, by Raghuram Rajan, chief economic advisor to the Government of India and R Sukumar, editor, MintAsia. The content of the paper will be distributed into various sections, including Banking & Finance, Policy & Corporate Affairs, and Opinions & Views of experts across industries and a Lifestyle section, offering insights into the Indian business market. R Sukumar remarks, “Singapore is one of the world’s foremost financial centres and many decisions regarding investments in India happen here. With our unique Web First approach and a weekly print offering, both backed by an integrated newsroom, we will try and cater to the India-specific information needs of the discerning Singapore reader.”

Delhi Press acquires BS Motoring

BS Motoring, the automobile magazine published by Business Standard, has been acquired by the Delhi Press Group. Both the groups had been in talks since January this year and the deal was in April between Paresh Nath, chairman, Delhi Press, and T.N. Ninan, chairman, Business Standard. It is learnt that the deal is estimated to be valued at around Rs 10 crore. The magazine will be published by Delhi Press from the May issue onwards.

The 17-year old magazine was initially started as a page exclusively devoted to automobiles in Business Standard in 1995. It was later turned into a standalone quarterly magazine in 1998 and a monthly in January 1999. In 1996, BS Motoring was the first auto magazine in the country to announce a Car of the Year award.

In the coming few months, the magazine will undergo a radical change. Though the content
will not be touched, the design will become more sophisticated and edgy. A new website is also in the pipeline, which will be more interactive with videos, photos and graphics. Post the change, promotion will follow within the distribution network and a new name will be unveiled around August-September this year. Delhi Press publishes 34 magazines in nine languages, including The Caravan, Woman’s Era, Grihshobha, Champak, and Saras Salil.

**DNA gets more interactive**

Daily News and Analysis has gone for a makeover in order to engage more readers with an interactive approach. Though the logo remains the same and there is no change in the colour of the daily, the packaging, presentation, pages and website have been changed and have been made more user friendly. The group has redesigned the website and made it more responsive, which will dynamically fit into the screen of any device. The group believes that the look of the paper hasn’t changed since its inception and the consumer is looking for a change. The new look is expected to help readers navigate faster.

Page number four of the paper is dedicated to the readers and for the readers. The entire content will be filled by the readers with their views, pictures and so on. In order to be more interactive, the paper has started to provide the Twitter handle of their correspondents and stories. This will allow the readers to engage and respond. The new DNA is based on six platforms, which have been named as Attitude, The Thought, Masala, Fun, Interactivity, Graphics and Visuals.

**And now, Aval Kitchen**

Vikatan Group has swelled its magazine bouquet with a new food magazine, Aval Kitchen. Priced at Rs 60, the special focus is on recipes and chefs, along with FAQs and everything related to cooking. Says Pravin Menon, national head, Ad Sales, Vikatan Group, “Vikatan Group has been on the forefront to launch verticals. We are the only women’s magazine to give out a 30-recipe booklet with every issue of Aval Vikatan. We have dedicated content within the issue on food, restaurant review and so on. We have been getting lots of positive feedback from readers via Hello Vikatan on these sections. We have had some readers telling us they have collected the recipe booklet.”

To create an initial buzz for the magazine, the group is promoting it across all their magazines, website vikatan.com and through Facebook to ensure download and purchase. A poster campaign is also underway at points of purchase across Tamil Nadu. A 128-page half-yearly issue, with a print run of 1 lakh copies is also made available on the Vikatan apps. The next issue is expected after Diwali. The major target audience for Aval Kitchen is anyone who loves cooking.

**Patrika launches 7th edition in Madhya Pradesh**

The Patrika Group recently launched its 31st edition from Satna region. The paper is already present in different cities of Madhya Pradesh such as Bhopal, Indore, Jabalpur, Gwalior, Ujjain and Ratlam. With a cover price of Rs 2 for four days in a week and Rs 2.50 for three days, the Satna edition covers five districts – Satna, Rewa, Panna, Sidhi and Singrauli. The initial print run of the paper is 25000 copies.

The group has planned various promotional activities through surveys, outdoor and activations. The survey activity have knocked more than 50000 household and received almost 30000 orders in last four months. The outdoor campaign highlights local issues at all prominent sites in the city. Also through banners, auto branding, mobile vans etc. The group is creating awareness through interactive events with locals, door to door sales pitch, special events on occasions like Holi and water day.

**Delhi Press in revamp mode**

Delhi Press has dedicated the year for re-branding and promoting all its publications via various media platforms, a series of on-field activities and revamping some of its prominent offerings, including Saras Satil, Champak, Grihshobha, Caravan, and Sarita.

In order to promote Caravan magazine among its niche audience, Delhi Press has embarked on an initiative titled Caravan Quarters in three cities – Delhi, Bangalore and Mumbai. The idea is to engage people in bookstores and cafés as these places are part of the daily life of readers, artists, poets and writers. 150 cafés and bookstores in the three metros will be shortlisted through a process of reader/consumer voting and jury evaluation, and Caravan will identify the most vibrant cafés and bookstores from within this list as Caravan Quarters.

In a move to consolidate its presence in the children’s genre, Delhi Press’ signature activity, Champak Creative Child Contest, is being undertaken across 38 cities involving 600 schools and targeting one lakh children to explore their writing and drawing abilities. Meanwhile, Champak magazine has got a new avatar, with the entire animal characters redesigned, giving the magazine a new look. Moreover, feedback column and interactive columns have been spruced up to build a stronger relationship with the readers.

The second oldest magazine in the Delhi Press bouquet, Sarita, which has crossed five decades of
publishing, will now come out in a new format. The magazine has moved away from the earlier digest size to A4 size. Plans are afoot to unveil the magazine’s website soon to get maximum reach in the Hindi heartland, including Tier II and III cities. Grihshobha will be further fortified amongst the middle class and upper middle class group. For this, the group is introducing a Grihshobha Club, which will serve as a platform where readers can get together and take part in different activities. Delhi Press has also tied up with American publishing group Highlights to launch two new English magazines – Highlights Genies and Highlights Champs – for the 2-12 age group. The magazines are scheduled to be launched around April 2013 with a print run of 25,000 each. Both the magazines will have a cover price of Rs 40.

**Employment News gets new logo**

Minister for Information & Broadcasting Manish Tewari has unveiled a new logo for Employment News. The publication now gets a new brand identity, and is likely to become attractive to the aspiring youth. An e-version of Rozgar Samachar in Urdu was also. Tewari said that the initiation of the e-version also reiterates the perseverance of the Publications Division in a competitive environment, where content is balanced with the prevailing business models. The initiative also reflects the use of technology in reaching out to the people in a form and language understood by them.

The new logo of Employment News was selected from among entries of an in-house competition conducted by the College of Arts, New Delhi. The logo depicts the search for jobs through a lens. The holder showing a nib on one side and the wrench on the other shows that Employment News is for both skilled and unskilled jobs. The hand is the human element in the logo. With a circulation of over 4 lakh copies a week, Employment News carries information about job opportunities in Central and state government organisations across the country and is published in Hindi, English and Urdu.

**Mathew to take charge at Mid Day**

After a decade-long stint with Mid Day, Manajit Ghoshal put in his papers on March 1, as MD & CEO. Cyriac Mathew, currently COO of Mid Day, will take charge from him. Mathew had joined Mid Day in 1986 to help launch the Delhi edition of the paper as well as Urdu daily Inquilab. During his tenure at Mid Day, Mathew spent most of his time in Delhi, managing the regional office and was instrumental in achieving phenomenal growth in revenues from the North. He has been a key member of the senior management team in-charge of the IPO of Mid Day Multimedia, the first publication in the country to do so many years back. He also oversaw the complete turnaround of Gujarati Mid Day. Mathew has been a core member of the Radio Group to lobby and support the government in taking the decision to privatise the radio broadcasting business in India. He is a commerce graduate and a postgraduate diploma holder in business administration. He also has a diploma from the Scandinavian International Management Institute for the Leaders programme launched by WAN and IFRA and held in Denmark.

**ACK Media targets young with Bright Start**

Amar Chitra Katha (ACK) Media, the education and entertainment conglomerate which owns brands such as Amar Chitra Katha, Tinkle, Karadi Tales and Brainware, has announced its entry in the ‘young audience’ category with the launch of a new brand, Bright Start. Bright Start is aimed at making learning a pleasant and easy experience for young children in the 2-6-year age group. The first lot of Bright Start books will be available throughout the country, from modern retail chains to mom-and-pop and stationery shops, at a cover price of Rs 55. The group is focusing on a pan-India launch with major emphasis on B and C level cities.

Bright Start includes all activities that combine knowledge with fun such as colouring, jigsaw puzzles, mazes and dot-to-dot, among others. In order to promote the new offering, the group is relying on a retail base and also targeting new booksellers. Several on-ground activities during the school summer vacations and consumer awareness programmes are in the pipeline for promotion. A preschool contact programme is planned to create buzz among the buyers.

**Vijayavani launches 10th printing centre**

Kannada daily Vijayavani has flagged off its 10th printing centre in Karnataka. Vijayavani, published by VRL Media from the house of VRL Logistics, had recently created media frenzy by being the only Kannada newspaper in the state to launch nine editions within 90 days of its launch. The 10th printing centre was launched in Belgaum.
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