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Study finds many gaps in journalism education

Many journalism and mass communication institutes in India offer a postgraduate diploma instead of a master's degree. For students, interaction with industry professionals is not a regular event on the timetable. Many journalism departments, particularly in state universities, do not have adequate infrastructure or current technology. Many who teach have no practical experience of working in the media. All this and more is revealed in a Centre for Media Studies assessment recently conducted.

Media education in India has undergone tremendous changes in titles and the types of courses available, the result of an attempt to address the needs of the sector which is booming in India. Journalism – both print and electronic – is still growing in terms of audience and numbers. The latest figures show that there are more than 400 news (24x7) channels in various languages and over 80000 registered publications in the country.

It was estimated that India requires about 1500000 media professionals. Given the large-scale opportunity, today there are private, government, corporate and semi-government institutions, and even individuals, offering degree, diploma, higher education and certificate courses. In the early 1980s, there were only some 25 media institutes (including university departments), whereas today there are 300.

A wide range of technical and creative journalism courses are available. The rapid mushrooming of media institutes (both public and private) in the country has meant a serious shortage of faculty and quality education. There is no separate government body to regulate media education, and this has an adverse effect on quality and standardisation. Most Mass Communication and Journalism departments have very few approved positions and even the positions that do exist are filled up only in a very few universities. The media market is therefore flooded by professionals who are basically generalists and need further training to deliver quality work. Media education specifically requires faculty that have both practical and theoretical knowledge of subjects. Media institutes struggle to cope with the challenge of providing students with hands-on knowledge of the field while providing theoretical grounding.

In this context, an assessment of training needs of faculty teaching journalism or related courses was conducted as part of a UK-India Education

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FROM THE EDITOR

Too much knowledge can be a dangerous thing

The Golden Pen of Freedom, the annual press freedom award of the World Association of Newspapers and News Publishers (WAN-IFRA), was dedicated this year to all journalists “killed in the line of duty”. According to World Editors Forum President Marcelo Rech, since 1992, more than 1100 journalists have been killed “just because they brought the truth to light or manifested their points of view”. This year, 19 journalists have been killed in the course of their work, eight in the 7th January attack on the newsroom of French satirical weekly Charlie Hebdo. Sixty-one journalist deaths were recorded in 2014.

In India, the recent horrific deaths of Jogendra Singh (in Uttar Pradesh), and Sandeep Kothari and Akshay Singh (Madhya Pradesh) are only reflective of how unsafe the country has become for journalists who dare. Jogendra Singh, in a declaration made before a judicial officer shortly before he died, identified his assailants and charged they had carried out the attack on behalf of a local government minister. Clearly, investigative journalism is a risky venture these days and if your work antagonises people (those in power) within and outside government, then you are in dangerous territory. Yes, too much knowledge can be a dangerous thing for journalists.

Trends in Newsrooms 2015, the annual report published by the World Editors Forum, lists ‘source protection erosion’ as the rising threat to investigative journalism. It used to be possible to promise confidentiality to sources – guaranteeing the protection of their identities, even on pain of jail – in countries where legal source protection frameworks were robust. But these protections are being undercut by government surveillance and data retention policies, and it may no longer be ethically possible to promise confidentiality. These developments have an enormous impact on investigative journalism and are giving rise to increasing attention to risk assessment, self-protection and source education, says the report. The report also talks about how the Charlie Hebdo attack in Paris “graphically demonstrated that journalists continue to be terrorism targets – at their desks as well as in war zones”. Indeed, as I have mentioned before, the attack brought to the fore the need for “culturally sensitive reporting”.

It was quite by coincidence that I chanced upon a report in the Press Gazette, UK, stating that parents in the UK would rather their daughter marry a banker, marketer or teacher than a journalist. The article by William Turvill refers to a Yougov Survey which found that 3 per cent of 1756 UK adults would like their prospective son-in-law to be a journalist. Women journalists (as prospective daughters-in-law) fared slightly better, with a 4 per cent score. However, the rankings fell way short of other professions. The most popular son-in-law profession was doctor (38 per cent), followed by lawyer (24 per cent) and architect (23 per cent). Even teacher (15 per cent), entrepreneur (11 per cent), banker, musician (both 6 per cent), and nurse, soldier, athlete (all 5 per cent) ranked higher. Doctor was also the most popular choice of profession for daughters-in-law (35 per cent), followed by teacher (26 per cent), lawyer (24 per cent), nurse (16 per cent) and architect (14 per cent). So, is there a story here? Is it because journalists are losing jobs and are considered rolling stones, because journalism has become dangerous, or because people are slowly losing trust in the media? Perhaps it’s a combination of all this and more.

Trust. Which brings me to the BBC’s annual review. The report shows that BBC News has “yet to fully recover from the scandals of 2012 in terms of perceptions of trust from the public... Audiences continued to rate BBC News much more highly than other news providers, although perceptions of trust in BBC News have not returned to the record levels of 2012.” BBC still scored with 53 per cent for “impartiality of news”.

Overall, the situation is rather grim. It’s a trying time for journalists worldwide. Apart from the daily pressures of the job, you now have to contend with danger at every corner. And when your job is to expose, without bias, the misdeeds of those in power, the harsh realities on the ground are making it well-nigh impossible.

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and Research Initiative (UKIERI)-funded project titled ‘Faculty development programme – To support research and innovation in media institutions in India and the United Kingdom’.

The project envisions faculty development as the mode to develop quality standards and standardisations in the sector, on the basis of the view that faculty are key for enabling research culture and innovation. The programme will address emerging developmental needs of educators from the media sector in India with a special focus on News Media Education. For the assessment, interviews were conducted with media graduates, faculty and heads of institutes in New Delhi, Mumbai, Chennai, Bangalore, Bhopal, Kolkata, Guwahati, Chandigarh, Shillong and Tezpur between April and June 2014. Journalists from print, television and digital media organisations were also interviewed.

**Key findings**

Journalism education in India is still developing and though it has grown in size and importance, it is still not treated on par with other traditional disciplines. The discipline is striving for an identity and unfortunately, there have not been adequate efforts by academia, industry or policy makers to improve the situation. Issues facing media education in India relate to theory versus practice, the quality of faculty, updating curriculum and syllabus to keep pace with advancements in media technology, lack of research in media institutes and departments, paucity of reference books, and modules not relevant to Indian contexts.

It was found that faculty teaching journalism and media-related courses included both academia and practitioners who had opted for full-time teaching. Around 10 faculty members had industry experience of not less than five years. However, most of those (21) interviewed had no practical experience of working in the media sector. The study found that research conducted on Journalism in India is still at the infant stage, particularly in electronic and new media. One reason is the paucity
of specialised faculty available in media institutions. Most of those interviewed mentioned that research and research methodology needed to be included in any faculty development programme. A managing editor of a regional TV news channel who is a visiting faculty at media departments, observed that the assignment, projects or dissertation that the students conduct are very theoretical and generally they do not learn anything from it.

Unlike other disciplines, the teachers in communication / media education are expected to ‘know’, and ‘teach’ as well as ‘apply’ things in their own classrooms, which can correlate to the media industry “We need a combination of practitioners and in house faculty. And teaching is not everyone’s cup of tea. As a professional in the media, you know how to get a work done. But as a teacher, one needs to explain why a work is done a particular way,” stressed a media practitioner and academician.

The subjects of the interview revealed that they used a combination of methodologies to teach their classes. These include:
- Theory - Notes, PowerPoint presentation, book reviews, film screening, discussions,
- Practice campus newspaper, short / documentary films, field visits

Besides, internships, field training, case studies, projects in community and use of mock newsroom, reporting, etc are also used for teaching various journalism courses. Some of the alumni of various institutes who were interviewed remembered some impact-filled teaching methodologies, including
- Analysis of newspapers - headlines, focus of the story, etc
- Public speaking training
- Sample news website pages

The study brought out the fact that various institutes and the faculty are making all-out efforts to make journalism education more practical and skill-based. The emphasis on practical journalism training was understood as hands-on practical training. This also led to most facets, including industry internship, being seen as a critical component of the curriculum.

The study found that there is no uniform curriculum followed for the various media courses offered in the variety of institutes and university departments. The University Grants Commission (UGC) that regulates and funds universities does have a model curriculum drafted in 2001. A few follow or have adapted the UNESCO model curriculum (2007). However, most courses have designed their own curriculum. Colleges affiliated to various universities also adopted the university curriculum and systems related to enrolment and examination. A wide variety of courses were available in these departments/institutes. Some of the courses include:
- Conflict reporting
- Lifestyle/ Fashion/ Entertainment/ Film journalism
- Business Journalism
- Social media
- Media freedom
- Citizen journalism
- Graphic design and animation
- Data Journalism
- Global journalism
- Sports Journalism

Most teaching staff, a few experts and some alumni interviewed stressed the need to revise and update the curriculum, to make it relevant to changes in the industry. On the other hand, most media professionals interviewed felt that graduates from most journalism schools are unprepared for the industry challenges and requirements. A senior TV journalist said: “Students... do not come with the basic ability to write let alone have some news sense. The reason is the theory-heavy curriculum our media institutes follow. They completely lack hands-on training which can be achieved by involving industry professionals in journalism classrooms on a regular basis and having field visits with practicing journalists.”

Journalism departments in universities have to face the additional challenge of getting funds allocated for necessary infrastructure. Many journalism departments, particularly in state universities do not have adequate infrastructure. An important dilemma for all institutions is the fast rate of obsolescence of technology, which in turn leads to lack of servicing facilities. Some faculty members surveyed revealed that they were unable to cope with the dynamic new media tools that are ever-evolving. Some suggested that regular orientation to new technology (both hardware and software) and techniques would be useful for the faculty.

Faculty - industry interaction
Due to the norms of UGC for recruitment of assistant professors, at times a deserving candidate who comes with industry experience is not selected as he/she does not have either a NET/SLET qualification or sometimes a master’s degree. Many mass communication institutes in the country offer a post-graduate diploma instead of a master’s degree which forms one of the pre-requisites. A senior editor of an English daily in New Delhi who visits institutes as a guest faculty agrees that the UGC regulations for the selection of faculty prevents media professionals like him from being appointed as permanent faculty, despite their skills.

The importance of bringing a balance in news media curriculum has been stressed time and again. As part of the curriculum, in most courses, industry professionals are invited to interact with students or conduct classes. The media faculty surveyed were unanimous in their opinion that classroom interaction with industry professionals was important. Some were concerned


that such interactions were not regular. While some institutes and departments make it compulsory to have regular guest faculty from the industry at set intervals, some do not do so. A number of media graduates (38) revealed that interaction with industry professionals was not a regular event on the timetable. All 62 respondents in the category felt that for quality media training, industry interaction and exposure are necessary.

Industry experts also emphasised that unless there is equal involvement of media educators and industry professionals, the curriculum cannot be complete in its approach. One expert respondent said, “There is a mismatch between the industry needs and departmental outputs. Faculty not the industry is teaching in departments and that is the very reason why media organisations are opening their own institutes.”

As part of journalism education, students need to undertake internships in a newsroom. Internships provide a chance for students to apply their formal learning to practice. Most alumni surveyed (44) underwent internships in various media organisations for a period of one or two months as part of their curriculum. They interned in organisations such as ESPN Sport, Zee News, The Statesman, Doordarshan, Rajya Sabha, CNN IBN, ND TV, Hindustan Times, Dainik Jagran, Times of India and Mumbai Mirror. They were exposed to reporting, production, researching, editing, design (layout), etc. Respondents who underwent training during the course felt that the experience was useful in acquiring hands-on skills. However, very few institutes or departments evaluated the students’ performance or the training they received during this internship.

Most of the faculty interviewed had not attended any UGC-supported orientation and refresher courses for teachers. They felt that orientation or capacity building programmes were a must at least once a year. The few who had attended such programmes felt they were quite general, and should be made more relevant to requirements, and include aspects such as technological advancement in electronic media, convergent journalism, citizen journalism, new media, etc. “With the widening and deepening of this sector, the teachers also need to broaden their horizons and learn from others in industry and academia across the country and abroad. I recall attending workshops by BBC and they really made a difference in how good training can influence teachers,” said a veteran academician. “I think we should have more formal systems of interactions both within academia and also with the industry – these could be either annual conferences or even online platforms,” suggested a young participant. (To be concluded)

(The Centre for Media Studies is a resource centre for media, visual communication, theatre and film, which attempts to study communication tools, society and visual culture in an effort to initiate and inspire radical changes in academia and society and ensure a quality-oriented approach to education in the field. The ‘Needs assessment of Indian news media faculty’ study was conducted by the CMS Academy, New Delhi, with grant from UKIERI.

P.N. Vasanti was the project head; she was supported by Indira Akotijam and Prabhakar. The team likes to acknowledge the guidance of B.P. Sanjay, Shravan Garg, Nalini Rajan and Ashok Ogra. This is the first of a two-part series presenting the salient findings of the assessment.)

ACJ institutes investigative reporting award

To recognise exemplary efforts in the field of investigative reporting, the Asian College of Journalism (ACJ) has instituted the ACJ Investigative Journalism Award from 2015.

The award will be given to the best investigative work in two categories: Print and Online and TV and Radio, Sashi Kumar, chairman, Asian College of Journalism, announced at the convocation of the 2015 batch recently. “The best work in each category will receive prize money of Rs 2 lakh, and the first awards will be handed over during the next convocation on May 3, 2016, which is also World Press Freedom Day,” Sashi Kumar said. The jury of the award comprises Justice Leila Seth, veteran journalists T.J.S. George and Mrinal Pande, and Mukul Kesavan, scholar-journalist and historian.

Speaking at the convocation, N. Murali, co-chairman, Kasturi & Sons and Trustee of the Media Development Foundation, said that media houses in the country should take lessons from the print media in developed countries. “After 10 to 15 years of grappling with different technologies, media houses in the West are only now seeing a sliver of profitability in the digital minefield,” he said, adding that media houses in India should be able to cater to consumers who are always on the move, and be able to deliver tailor-made content on different platforms.

Delivering the Lawrence Dana Pinkham Memorial Lecture, 2015, titled The Secret Room in the Newsroom, Raj Kamal Jha, editor-in-chief of The Indian Express said: “Journalists should have an ear to listen to anyone who knocked on their door, and stand up to bullies and loudmouths. Learn to appreciate works of others. A good journalist should be able to admire other people. There will always be someone more successful than you or a better writer than you, but know that there is no one who is you.” On the day, 167 students received their diplomas.
When an ad is ‘not an ad’

Having a watchdog council and a complaints committee is perhaps not sufficient to prevent unethical advertising. We also need public involvement in monitoring spiels, and assisting the watchdog in its work, says Sakuntala Narasimhan

2015 marks the 30th anniversary of the setting up of the Advertising Standards Council of India (ASCI) for monitoring advertisements and ensuring fairness and ethics in promotional tactics. ASCI’s Consumers’ Complaints Council (CCC) has, over the years, looked into a variety of complaints from the public regarding misleading or otherwise objectionable ads, and issued cease-and-desist orders to advertisers. In some cases, ASCI has even ordered that corrective ads (conceding that the original ad made tall claims) be issued, in the same media where the original ads had been carried, so that the public can know about the ASCI’s ruling.

Whether it was the earlier Drug and Magic Remedies (objectionable ads) Act of 1954, or the Monopolies and Restrictive Practices (MRTP) Act of 1969 (with an amendment in 1984), the focus was on protecting the public from being misled or lured. The more comprehensive Consumer Protection Act (CPA) of 1986, likewise, offered remedies against false representations and claims.

What then, does one make of a full, first-page ad, which appeared in the issue of Saturday April 4, 2015 of a leading daily in Bangalore, which says, in very large lettering...
against a red background, that “This is not an advertisement”? Of course, it is an advertisement, and one which cost a bomb too, with its premium placement as a full page ad complete with the paper’s masthead and logo. It was an ad – and it declared it was “not an ad”. Taking the concept of ‘misleading’ to newer heights? It’s probably the same story with many other newspapers.

It was a two-page ad, with the reverse of the first page given over fully to promoting a jewellery shop in Bengaluru, with mobile contact numbers in a number of other cities (Chennai, Trichy, Madurai, Puduchery, Kumbakonam – with outlets “soon to open in Coimbatore and Tirupathi”) claiming that their prices were lower than those of other shops (that’s a lot of potential customers, to take for a ride!) – with a codicil, of course, in very small print, saying that prices are ‘subject to fluctuations’ and were only “indicative”. Which makes a mockery of the numbers splashed across the page, listing price per carat, etc.

I have already, in an earlier piece, pointed out that the ad (put out by this jeweller) flouts several ethical norms, like claiming that “other” jewellers charged more (Which others? Who did the survey? When? Covering what territory? Such vague claims are prohibited under the ASCI codes.) This time, the “This is not an ad” ad also says (in very small print that hardly hits the eye, of course) that their claim of “No making charges” (indicated with a large zero in their chart) is “not applicable for nose pins and navaratna rings”. Given the small size of the typeface for the disclaimer, it does not hit the eye.

Psychologists will tell you that once a prospective customer comes to the store, lured by the “0 making charges” spiel, he/she will most likely end up making a purchase (having made the effort to go to the store), even if the disclaimer clause had not been noticed initially. The advertiser gains, by luring the public. But, to cap it all, to claim that it was “not an ad” was the ultimate in ‘misleading spiels’. It was an ad, no two opinions about it, and to say it was not, was a lie, no less. Perhaps the first time that the ASCI was called upon to adjudicate on an ad that claimed not to be one.

I also notice that clause 6 of chapter 1 of the ASCI Code, says “Obvious untruths or exaggerations intended to amuse or to catch the eye of the consumer are permissible provided that they are clearly to be seen as humorous or hyperbolic, and not likely to be understood as making literal or misleading claims for the advertised product.” So who decides what is hyperbole, exaggeration or amusing? Is claiming that an ad is “not an ad” humorous?

I sent off an online complaint to the ASCI, using their website, and though there was some trouble with submitting the complaint (I had to click repeatedly) I did receive a ‘registration number’ promptly on my mobile, with no indication on what I was supposed to do with it (there was no facility for using it in the complaints submission form). As of this writing, there has been no response so far, on action taken, if any. Most readers of the ad would not even bother about registering a complaint about the misleading wording of the ad, which means the advertiser reaps the benefits of pervasive public apathy.

(The writer is a former vice-president of the Consumer Guidance Society of India, Mumbai, winner of two national awards for consumer protection, and the author of Advertisements: The Hidden Persuaders published by CERC, Ahmedabad, in 1992.)

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**Hamburg to host Publishing Expo 2015**

WAN-IFRA’s World Publishing Expo 2015, which will return to Hamburg from 5 to 7 October, takes the motto, Learn. Lead. Launch, and will reflect the needs of the news media industry in times of change. The Expo, the world’s largest trade exhibition for the news publishing industry, brings together the best solution providers and suppliers to the industry with news media companies that are launching new projects and exploring new revenue streams.

The World Publishing Expo, organised by the World Association of Newspapers and News Publishers (WAN-IFRA), attracts increasing numbers of digital visitors and suppliers every year as well as production technology innovators. This year’s event will feature a new Expo App to provide easy communication before, during and after the show. Guided tours on specific topics will connect visitors and exhibitors easily. Public workshops -- in the form of two Media Port open stages, will offer a world of learning experience on a variety of subjects, featuring case studies from successful media companies. Topics include programmatic advertising, monetising mobile, big data, inkjet printing and more. Specialised workshops on color print quality and wearable devices will also be offered.

Full details of the Expo and all associated events, which will include a Newsroom Summit (5 October), a Mobile News Summit (6 October) and the World Printers Forum (7 October), can be found at www.worldpublishingexpo.com.
Indian media and reporting of her neighbours

Among the deficiencies characterising the Indian media, not the least is indifference to informed and in-depth coverage – combined with ignorance – of foreign affairs, especially the neighbourhood, Shastri Ramachandaran points out. The media’s failure to aid, enable and advance peace, democracy, equitable development and cross-national understanding between peoples is all too evident in the everyday content of newspapers, television channels and the online output, he says.

My brief for this chapter (name of the book cited at the end of the article) was to write on: Indian media and reporting of her neighbours, taking off from my ex-perience in China (where I worked for the most part of 2009 and 2010) but stretching it to include South Asia as well, particularly in view of my experience in reporting and writing on Nepal and Sri Lanka, but also Pakistan. Does our reporting of events in such countries promote peace or tensions? Why is there this distance between India and its neighbours? Why is the Indian media so indifferent to foreign reporting in depth? These were but a few of the many questions posed by the editor of this volume for me to answer in this chapter.

I am not a pundit. Nor am I a scholar who has researched at length to find answers to these questions. I am a work-a-day journalist who happened to be in the right place and got the right breaks to closely follow: happenings in Sri Lanka from the early 1980s which saw the rise of Tamil separatist forces and sowing of the seeds of civil war in the island republic; events in Nepal beginning with the movement for democracy in the late 1980s, thanks to The Times of India sending me out on assignment; developments in China, a country which I first glimpsed when The Tribune assigned me to cover Prime Minister Manmohan Singh’s summit meeting with Premier Wen Jiabao in 2008, and where I worked in Beijing with China Daily and the Global Times. Working as a journalist in China, I learned a lot, especially the need to de-condition myself and unlearn a lot of what I had learned from the very media which I served in India.

The two countries I have chosen for this exercise are China and Nepal; China because India is obsessed with it, and not in a good way; and, India is troubled by Nepal, which many feel should conduct itself as a little brother. China, the world’s most populous nation and fastest growing economy is a rising power. Only the US economy is larger than China’s. At the other extreme is Nepal, one of the world’s poorest countries where political parties have failed to deliver on economic development or sustain a stable democratic period for any length of time. India’s relations with both China and Nepal are marked by irritants. The Indian media is openly hostile to China and, though indulgent to Nepal at times, the media has hardly helped Nepal in its journey from a constitutional monarchy to a new republic.

India-China relations

Media’s coverage of the India-China stand-off in Ladakh in April-May 2013, the visit of Foreign Minister Salman Khurshid in early May 2013 and Premier Li Keqiang choosing India for his first foreign visit after taking office in the decadal power shift are still fresh in public memory. Even random recall is instructive on how the media acquitted itself.

The External Publicity Division of the Ministry of External Affairs had scheduled Khurshid’s press conference on a Saturday afternoon. The choice of Saturday (being weekend) was unusual but not rare. It may well be that the foreign minister wanted to meet the press soon after his return given the ‘crisis’ manufactured by the media based on the standoff.

The coverage of Khurshid’s Beijing visit as much as his press conference was extraordinary for reporting what was not said and what did not happen: That Khurshid did not ask them why they had violated the Line of Actual Control; that the Chinese did not regret (not even “express regret”) or apologise; and, so on. At least one media house and its print and television representatives were not interested in what the minister did or talked while in China and what responses he elicited from the Chinese. Khurshid showed this section of the media that two
can play at the game by adding for good measure that he liked China, liked a lot of what he saw there and would like to live in Beijing though, not as External Affairs minister. The prejudiced media rose to the bait and the paper’s report next day portrayed him as a person (least actuated by “national interest” as defined by this newspaper’s reporters) who was talking of how he would like to live in Beijing when China had just pulled back from a “dangerous game of brinkmanship”. What such a section of the media led by the ‘leader’ was seeking to drive home was that China is an enemy; it ought to have been shown its place; beaten back if necessary; or, at least subjected to a flexing of our military muscle; that neither the minister nor the ministry was up to the job of defending “national interest”; that the MEA cannot be trusted to do its job because it was covering up for the Chinese, glossing over their military transgressions and actually being obstructive of the Indian defence forces and standing in the way of what the Ministry of Defence would like to do.

One achievement – if it may be called that – of Manmohan Singh as prime minister is the strengthening of the India-China relationship, capitalising on the long period of peace and tranquility on the border. His extraordinary rapport with Premier Wen Jiabao has worked economic wonders for bilateral ties including an unprecedented boom in trade and investment. It is paradoxical that the Prime Minister, and National Security Advisor Shivshankar Menon, who was earlier foreign secretary and ambassador to China, should be “disliked” if not “distrusted” for that reason by a media which is driven more by oblique “market values” than public or national interest.

Most of the mediapersons accompanying Manmohan Singh for his summit meeting with Premier Wen in January 2008 lost interest in the mission the moment it became known that the boundary issue was not “on the agenda”. Far from looking at what was important about the visit, why it was important for the two leaders and...
their delegations to meet, what were the issues they dealt with and how it would affect bilateral relations and reporting on these, most of those assigned to cover the summit kept repeating that the border issue did not figure in the talks. This they could have ‘reported’ by staying back at their desks.

In October 2012, at a function to release a series of five titles on China edited by the distinguished diplomat K. Raghunath, who had retired as foreign secretary and served as ambassador to China, NSA (national security advisor) Shivshankar Menon had a dig at the India media. He referred to how the media in China had treated the 50th anniversary of the 1962 India-China war and compared it with the “outpouring” in the Indian media in India; and, far from providing any clarity of the issues involved, the “outpouring” blurred the boundaries between facts, history and fiction, between conjecture and scholarship and between reporting and opinion, making one wonder what motives drive the Indian media in its “coverage” of China and India-China relations.

During the recent Ladakh stand-off, there was no dearth of online comments smacking of visceral hatred of China, the Chinese and anyone in India who did not hate the China as much as these “nationalist” netizens. In one comment, the phrase “the Mandarin-speaking” prefixed to NSA Menon was infused with such venom as to make it appear an abuse. Readers who interpreted this comment to mean that learning Mandarin was betrayal of India’s national and security interests may be forgiven.

What triggered the stand-off is no longer a secret. More pertinent here is: Why did the media, now as on past occasions, ratchet up tensions on the border issue with China? Why are the media pushing for conflict, if not a military confrontation? What interests motivate, if not dictate, such media involvement? Is the media’s aggressiveness a cover for its ignorance, indifference and inability to provide fair, accurate, informed and credible coverage? These are just a few of the many questions that arise.

Nepal as seen in India
Reams can be written about Indian media’s sins of omission and commission when it comes to Nepal. When in Nepal to cover the first multi-party parliamentary elections of 1991 overseen by the interim (coalition) government of the Nepali Congress and Communist Party of Nepal (CPN), the surge of democratic aspirations was overwhelming. Nepal, particularly Kathmandu and its neighbourhood as I witnessed, was throbbing with a new political vibrancy. The air in the valley had a distinct smell. “It is the scent of freedom”, an activist had commented. There was a festive expectancy in the surcharged atmosphere of those heady days.

After months of protest, frustrating the monarchy’s attempts to hold on to the autocratic panchayat system by rejecting proposals floated by successive prime ministers and ministers, the popular movement had wrested a new constitution and ensured that the elections would not be stalled. Until a few days before polling, there were few Indian journalists. At the time, only one English daily had a full-time correspondent in Nepal’s capital. The others were content to make do with stringers or “victimised” journalists whom editors posted to Kathmandu as a ploy to make them quit the newspaper.

All India Radio, of course, had a regular correspondent. Months before the popular movement for democracy erupted, there were political conclaves held in Kathmandu and attended by well-regarded Indian political leaders such as the Janata Party’s Chandra Shekhar and CPI(M)’s Harkishen Singh Surjeet. Their presence and participation in political meetings in Nepal provided a boost to pro-democracy forces and factors, and it was no secret that sooner rather than later the simmering protest would explode on the streets. Delhi-based newspaper correspondents who had gone there with Indian political leaders were no less aware of the rising tide of democratic protests, and the media knew that Nepal was the next big thing.

Regardless of these signs of a new awakening in the Himalayan kingdom, few media outlets posted full-time or permanent journalists in Kathmandu. So much so that at any given occasion or event during the unceasing march of democracy in those months, there were more foreign, than Indian or South Asian, journalists covering Nepal. The fact that in those days the Nepalese avidly read Indian newspapers more than any foreign or Nepalese publications did not motivate media to assign as many journalists as may be expected to cover the winds of change sweeping this nascent democracy.

However, the media’s parajumpers, as is their wont, landed a couple of days before polling. As I read some of their despatches on the front page of leading Indian dailies, I could understand why many of the younger hotheads in the movement for democracy detested India as an unhelpful big brother preoccupied with itself when at issue was the fate of Nepal as a constitutional monarchy.

Anti-Indian rhetoric to the fore, fear of violence haunts Nepal, Violence may mar elections, Anti-India forces have field day – these were a few of the themes that visiting Indian journalists flogged with glee and relish. It was a pathetic re-tread of the kind of armchair reports they would turn out on the eve of elections in India. Some of the journalists were staying in the then far-away, posh Soaltee Hotel. They filed reports from their air-conditioned suites – on the basis of telephone talks with
lesser members of their fraternity who were toiling or embassy officials ready to feed them a line — without so much as a fleeting acquaintance with the heat and dust of electioneering in Kathmandu. “We have seen elections long before it came to Nepal; and, on a bigger scale with more violence, rigging and every electoral dirty trick imaginable. What is there to see and report? It is only words, and can be written without dragging yourself all over Kathmandu”. These were words of a senior journalist who had flown in and called me from the comfort of his hotel room.

That the whole of Nepal had awakened and was resonating with calls for democracy (at least, so it felt in Kathmandu Valley), charged with a new political energy and on the threshold a great change amidst rumours of a palace coup or a military crackdown and other unvoiced fears, seemed to find no place in the Indian media preoccupied with how India figured in the electioneering.

Anti-Indian feelings run high in Nepal — this is a permanent theme of reporting, without pausing to consider why such sentiments are there, among which sections are they to be found and whether they are real and deep or merely rhetoric for public consumption and political play. During the movement for democracy, speaking to a cross section of informed Nepalese, it emerged that they were not ignorant of India’s role, including behind the scenes, vis-à-vis Nepalese people’s stirrings for democracy.

**India-Nepal relations — the dark side**

This is an inglorious chapter in India’s political history; and, the Indian media never made public the full facts and the truth about many Indian actions that hurt Nepal’s democratic forces and hindered their advance. In fact, many in Nepal feel if Indian media had faithfully reported these events and focused public interest on the Congress Party Government’s betrayal of Nepalese fighting for democracy, the movement might have succeeded earlier. At least, it would have gained more and wider support in India.

Nepal was not on anyone’s radar and then, when it hit the headlines again, it was as a victim of Indian “high-handedness”. Rajiv Gandhi, far from making amends and rebuilding the relationship with the political forces (and the monarchy) in Nepal had further alienated them. Many of his aides made openly contemptuous remarks about the Nepalese people, politicians and members of the royal household — some of them being unprintable and, therefore, never reported even when uttered to a half full of journalists.

The crunch came when the government closed the trade and transit points across the India-Nepal border and Nepal saw this as an attempt by New Delhi to squeeze it into submission. The Indian media reported the Rajiv Gandhi administration’s tough approach to Nepal and how this was necessitated by the expiry of the trade and transit treaty; and, the problem could be resolved only with renewal of the treaty. The inhumanity of it, as felt by the ordinary Nepalese, never featured in reports in Indian media. In fact, the media rationalised the squeeze, and more often than not, pointed to how Nepal had invited this upon itself. The media was almost completely led by the government in this matter.

Soon after, the electoral triumph of V P Singh in 1989 led to renewed support to democratic forces in Nepal and this proved to be critical in turning the political tide against the authoritarian the monarchy. Many such developments have not been reported or written about in perspective in Indian media, and these are chapters of bilateral relations replete with lessons for those in government, media, academics and policymaking. However, the media refuses to be “distracted” by such news, perhaps, because it does not fit in with its market orientation.

**Endnote**

Clearly, the neighbourhood, unless it is bad news, is unfashionable for Indian media. It is hardly surprising then that there is not a single country in the region which India can count upon as friend or ally, or where it enjoys the people’s goodwill; not even in Bangladesh, which owes its birth and existence to India and Indira Gandhi. Such a thought only brings to mind yet another glaring omission by Indian media: that it has never enlightened its audience on why India arouses such negative feelings among every one of its neighbours.

As a result, Indian media does not inform and educate the Indian public about our neighbours and India’s relations with them. It has little or no influence on public policy in India or its neighbourhood. It is not interested in enabling and strengthening cross-border understanding for pursuit of common interests. Indian media, like the visa and other restrictive regimes of India and its neighbours, is just another wall that keeps people of the region distanced from other. Thereby, Indian media serves the objective of these states to deter people-to-people relations and understanding.

(This article is excerpted from the Prem Bhatia Memorial Book. The author, a print, radio, TV and online journalist and former editor of Sunday Mail, is an independent political and foreign affairs commentator. He has worked with leading Indian dailies including The Times of India, The Tribune, Indian Express and Deccan Herald. As a foreign affairs writer, his areas of special interest include Nepal, Sri Lanka and China.)
Will it always be a losing battle for social justice?

In these trying times, when a deadly combination of draconian laws, corporate greed, an active land mafia and market fundamentalism is trampling on the dignity and survival prospects of the toiling poor, it is time to build solidarity with individuals and organisations fighting for social justice, says Vibhuti Patel.

First they came for the Socialists, and I did not speak out—
Because I was not a Socialist.
Then they came for the Trade Unionists, and I did not speak out—
Because I was not a Trade Unionist.
Then they came for the Jews, and I did not speak out—
Because I was not a Jew.
Then they came for Me—and there was no one left to speak for Me.
(Martin Niemöller, a German anti-Nazi theologian and Lutheran pastor)

The state inaction in response to the brutal murders of Satish Shetty (five years ago), Dr Narendra Dabholkar (nearly two years ago) and Govind Pansare (over three months ago) has generated a lot of discontent among democratic-minded citizens of Maharashtra. Hum Azaadiyon Ke Haq Mein, a collective of NGOs and individuals in Mumbai, has started a campaign titled Who is Shielding the Guilty? in response to the antipathy shown by the criminal justice system. The NGO amplifies the voices of resistance and supports the legal battle and protests led by the victims' families.

The late Satish Shetty had used the Right to Information Act to expose massive land scams by the construction lobby in Pune from 2005 to 2010. Due to his efforts, multi-crore projects of IRB Infrastructure had to be shelved. Infuriated persons started threatening Satish and he asked for police protection. However, this was not granted. On the morning of January 13, 2010, he was attacked in Talegaon.

The whistle-blower social activist was posthumously given the Sajag Nagrik Award. It was received by his brother Sandeep at a function held in Pune. The National Right to Information Forum has initiated the Satish Shetty RTI Gallantry Award. Another recognition, also posthumous, was the 2011 Unsung Hero of the Year Award by the NDTV (LIC) Indian of the Year.

After four years of investigation, CBI recommended that the Satish Shetty murder case file be closed due to 'lack of evidence'. For the past five years, Sandeep Shetty has been fighting a lone battle with police, courts and the CBI. Sandeep is exhausted trying to best the corrupt system that is coming in the way of genuine investigation.

For more than four decades, the late Dr Narendra Dabholkar had been at the forefront of the anti-superstition movement and had exposed several 'god-men' who fleeced poor people in the name of witchcraft and inflicted barbaric violence on innocent victims. He was campaigning to get the Maharashtra Prevention and Eradication of Human Sacrifices and other Inhuman, Evil and Aghori Practices and Black Magic Bill passed in the state assembly. He was shot dead by two motorcycle-borne assailants while he was out for a morning walk in Pune on August 20, 2013. His daughter, Mukta Dabholkar, has been running from pillar to post to bring his murderers to book.

Massive protest demonstrations, rallies and sit-ins have been organised by democratic-minded citizens' organisations throughout the state, expressing solidarity with the Dabholkar family. Except for enacting a much watered-down and toothless version of the bill Dr Dabholkar had been fighting for, the state has not done anything. The government has not put details of the investigation of the case in public domain.

Govind Pansare was active in the working class movement for more than 50 years. He supported riot victims in Kolhapur. Pansare had campaigned against a temple being built for the assassin of Mahatma Gandhi. He was threatened several times. Pansare (82) and his wife Uma (67) were gunned down at...
a point-blank range. He lost his life and she was seriously injured. "We repeatedly told the police to investigate this angle, and yet they chose instead to inquire whether he was involved in property disputes or industrial disputes," says Prof Megha Pansare, his daughter-in-law.

Social activist Ketan Tirodkar has filed a public interest litigation, seeking transfer of the probe to CBI. Pansare’s daughter Smita and daughter-in-law Megha have filed an application seeking permission to intervene in the PIL. They have asked for a SIT probe monitored by the high court. Prof Megha accused the state government of lacking the political will to nab the killers since there has not been much progress in the case.

Consistent coverage by the media and the integrity of purpose shown by relatives has kept the issues of these three whistleblowers alive. There are innumerable more who are being silenced by an unjust system. This is indeed a trying time for people’s movements, as a deadly combination of draconian laws, corporate greed, an active land mafia and market fundamentalism has trampled upon the dignity and survival prospects of the toiling poor. What happened to Satish Shetty, Dr Dabholkar and Pansare can happen to any of us who believe in secular humanism and distributive justice. It is time to build solidarity with individuals and organisations fighting for social justice. Inaction will only strengthen the evil forces.

(The writer is director, Centre for Study of Social Exclusion & Inclusive Policy, and heads the Department of Economics, SNDT Women’s University, Mumbai.)

Govind Pansare (centre) was an activist for more than 50 years.

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(The writer is director, Centre for Study of Social Exclusion & Inclusive Policy, and heads the Department of Economics, SNDT Women’s University, Mumbai.)
The transformation of a leading women's magazine

Till October 1984, Sakuntala Narasimhan was assistant editor, Femina, and acting editor during the absences of the editor Vimla Patil, planning cover photos, lead stories and contents. Three decades later, the changes she notices in the magazine raises some wide-ranging issues – about the role of the media, whether a publication should mould social perspectives especially towards gender equity and awareness or merely cater to what the targeted readership wants, and the specific modern dilemma of balancing profit considerations against ethical-social goals.

During the 1970s and 80s, Femina was a leader in raising feminist consciousness. To be sure, we had fashion features and also the annual beauty contest for the Miss India crown, but there were lots more. I was fiction editor and we always had at least one short story in each issue (often with a feminist slant, by eminent, award-winning writers, sometimes translated from regional languages). I was also in charge of Femina’s consumer protection page (the first magazine to initiate this feature) and we carried articles regularly about buyers’ rights and how not to get cheated. In addition, we helped readers file complaints regarding substandard goods and services, and got their grievances resolved. When dowry death reports began to hit the headlines in the early 1980s, we carried a lot of features on women’s legal rights and social movements for gender sensitisation.

Today, there is no fiction, and no consumer interest features, not because no good stories are being written and there are no grievances among consumers, but because the focus has shifted from ‘empowering’ the average Indian woman to helping her access a more meaningful — and enriching — role in society, to ‘niche’ marketing with the super rich, Westernised woman as the target readership.

In the choice of cover photos 30 years ago, the focus was on a concept of beauty that did not alienate the average middle-class reader, whether it was a teenage student, a middle-class homemaker or a high achiever professional woman. The image was ‘clean’, in the sense that no one could complain of vulgarity or unacceptable sexism. In fact, we were against sexism and our choice of features reflected this, while there was also the mandatory recipe pages and plenty of information on where to turn for help, in distress, or for career or legal guidance, enrichment courses, balancing professional and family commitments etc).

The cheekiest we went for, was when the editor suggested putting on the cover Nasiruddin Shah (then at the peak of his acting career) with his shirt off, and once carrying a small box-item extract from a bestselling author, describing a fictional incident where a mother tries to initiate her adolescent son in sex (which drew angry protests from outraged readers threatening to cancel their subscriptions). Today, the cover of the May 5 issue, for example, has a model with armpit and cleavage generously exposed, with the tag line “let decadence, extravagance and indulgence take over”. Come again? Decadence? Wasn’t that an undesirable state to aim for? Extravagance? — in a country that has millions of disadvantaged women struggling to get two meals a day, a country that needs a social awareness campaign especially among the super rich, to tackle rising inequalities?

The June 16 issue cover has one model in what is not much more than a bra while two others sport lacy see-through, body-hugging clothes that reveal underwear and thigh. Does ‘baring’ constitute ‘empowerment’? How many (of the 200 odd million urban educated Indian women) would opt for such clothes? If the magazine’s present avatar is meant only for the upper economic crust (and has a market)
what does it say about social trends in the world’s largest democracy?

A random look at the ads reveals one for a watch costing Rs 2.3 lakh, sunglasses priced Rs 22875, and sandals at Rs 60500, imported brand skin enriching oil costing Rs 2350 for 30 ml, leather belt Rs 16000, short silk top (Rs 98667). Any one of these luxury purchases could feed an indigent family more than adequately for months, or help tackle pervasive malnourishment among children that India is known infamously for. It is now widely conceded that in the long term, islands of opulence cannot survive in a sea of misery. Remember Marie Antoinette?

Rich or poor, real and meaningful empowerment consists of awareness of pros and cons and the capability to make intelligent and safe choices. When skin lightening concoctions are known to cause malignancies, what is the message from ads for instant skin lightening products with endorsement from a ‘leading dermatologist’?

Does catering only to the high-income bracket have to mean that only the 3 Fs (food, fashion and films) are of interest? Does only frivolity interest the super rich? Is it infra dig to show concern for social inequalities and inequities? Three decades ago, too, there was pressure on editors to maximize ads, to raise profits, but the contrast between the kind of ads carried then and now, is eloquent. Miss India 2015 is quoted as saying that she “wants to be the voice of India”. Which India? Or do those who cannot afford “Bahamas as a wedding destination” or copy the advice to ‘streak your hair with peach and bluish pink”, or women who are not interested in ‘looking hot’, not count as ‘Indian’?

In one issue, 17 glossy ads appear before the editor’s letter at the beginning of the magazine. If advertisers are shelling out money for such space, obviously it is profitable to promote diamonds and imported cosmetic costing a bomb. And most of the editorial content is advertorial, some not even marked as such, but woven into the editorial matter in a way that makes a mockery of editorial/ad separation. Every beauty tip and recipe mentions brand name. A dentist giving ‘advice’ on medical issues is also the director of a commercial institute which he advises readers to turn to (and the page facing his advice is a full page ad for that same institute.)

The other issue is that of ‘naughtiness’ equated with ‘high society life’. ‘How to lie about marriage’ (how is that laudable?), the ‘art of flirting’ and ‘take that cute secretary for a holiday in Mauritius’. I am not being puritanical – three decades ago too, we had cover girls in ‘daring, off-shoulder dresses, and featured women who were known for having affairs but they were not featured as role models. Ethics and morals have taken a beating, as ‘irrelevant’, ‘old fashioned’. Is this the face of the new, ‘empowered’ woman? East or west, north or south, tradition-bound or modern, encouraging destruction of the social fabric has never been ‘in’. Because it has widespread repercussions, psychological, moral and even economic. Can a magazine with a long track record of six decades prioritise profits over everything else?

From the perspective of the owner, the publication may be ‘doing well’, raking in profits through a proliferation of ads, all glossy, for expensive multinational brand products, but the larger question is: What is the role of a magazine for women?

The answer was very clear during Vimla Patil’s time. She was a pioneer in broadening the average middle-class woman’s horizons, urging her to question socio-cultural handicaps that thwarted women, even educated women, from venturing beyond the hearth-and-home-and-family circles. Does moving up the economic ladder mean frivolity and unbridled spending (at a time when even the latest State of the World Report, from a non-partisan, highly respected global think tank, urges reining in and reducing runaway consumerist lifestyles, to avoid global disaster caused by unsustainable lifestyles, and underscores the necessity for weaving social and ethical concerns into plans for economic progress)?

Many years ago, Femina refused to carry an ad for panties that was in poor taste. Since then, the media and the Advertising Standards Council of India (ASCI) have said lots about avoiding sexism in ads – and here is a magazine (targeting the ‘empowered’ woman) carrying ads for a line of furniture, showing a woman in a figure-hugging black sheath dress with her breasts thrust forward and her bum thrust back. An ad for kitchen towels says “we guard you from high cholesterol, diabetes, obesity, hypertension and heart problems”. That’s one way (the copywriter’s way) of looking at a product that even the West is trying to wean people away from, because of the ecological destruction that the manufacture of kitchen towels involves, but do we need to promote lifestyles that are being frowned upon and discarded abroad? The ad also says kitchen towels “maintain kitchen hygiene with use-and-throw advantage, eliminating hard to maintain dishcloths”. Are rich readers of the magazine expected to opt out of awareness of the implications of a use-and-throw lifestyle that is now not only unfashionable but unacceptable? By the way, women who can afford a watch priced Rs 2.3 lakh and sunglasses costing Rs 22875 don’t need to bother with “maintaining wash-and-reuse dishcloths,” they have domestic help, right? Baby, are we confused, just a wee bit?

(The writer, based in Bengaluru, was a recipient of the Media Foundation’s Chameli Devi Award for Outstanding Woman Journalist in 1983.)
A writer recalls her innings with Screen

As the iconic film magazine changes hands after 64 years, Shoma A. Chatterji, its senior-most freelance contributor, looks back with affection at the publication so closely intertwined with her journey as a film journalist.

Screen, the cinema trade weekly, finally bid goodbye to its parent group, the Indian Express, after 64 years. As a cinema magazine – national, regional and international – surviving without selling out to market demands such as gossip and shades of yellow, Screen stood high above its peers. In terms of format and style, the magazine began as a black-and-white broadsheet with a beautiful logo. The letters were imaginatively designed like an unfolding of a film scroll. Many years later, it became a tabloid in colour for a short while, but went back to its broadsheet format soon after, though this time in glossy colour printed on art paper. It went back to its tabloid version again and remained so till its last issue on March 22, 2015.

Other similar cinema broadsheets came and went, but Screen continued to dominate the arena. (I was once pleasantly surprised to find issues of Screen at a London magazine shop at Southall, the Punjabi owner of which informed me that it sold like hot cakes!) The initial printed price, if my memory serves me right, was 25 paisa. In 2015, it was priced at Rs 12 for 64 pages of assorted news, views, comments and perspectives, extremely reasonable by current standards.

The editorial policy kept gossip out. With time, the paper became more star-centric, glamorous and lavishly mounted like the films it wrote about. It drew handsome funding through full-page colour ads from the industry. With the introduction of the annual Screen Awards in 1994, there was a clear shift in the editorial policy that devoted special issues to the pre-awards, awards and post-awards events and personalities, a move that detracted from its main focus – serious writing on cinema.

Yet, till the very end, Screen remained the only trade weekly on cinema targeted at a mass readership that offered excellent education, information and entertainment in long interviews, profiles, first looks, curtain raisers, reviews, previews, critiques, location coverage, nostalgia pieces and tributes. The topics were not only related to cinema but also covered allied arts and media such as television, theatre, music in cinema and beyond, rapid changes in technology in cinema, television and the transition from print to online in the digital age. Contributors included veterans, scholars and experts in their respective fields. Many stories, features and interviews considered important were picked up by the Express group’s Hindi daily Jansatta, while reviews were often carried in the flagship Indian Express.

I cut my teeth in professional film journalism with Screen. In 1980, I was allotted the Indian Express Group, then located at Express Towers, Nariman Point, for internship. I subbed financial reports and features for The Financial Express. Though my news editor was a friendly guide and mentor, I did not like the nature of the stories. B.K. Karanjia, then editor of Screen, sat in his cabin right next to my table. One morning, I pushed myself through the spring door. He was warm and straightforward and asked me to submit whatever I wished to, provided it was on cinema. I submitted my piece within two days. It was published the following week without edits. My long journey as a professional film journalist had begun.

Those were the days when the computer had not arrived; there was no e-mail and no Internet. We did not send briefs. We just wrote out the story and either sent it by post as a ‘blind’ story or took it personally to the editor or sectional editor. The courier did not exist for individual pieces of communication. Personal visits were more fruitful and desirable. My relationship with Screen, through its five editors and dozens of news editors, has been a learning experience, teaching me to engage in serious research demanded of a journalist. I have witnessed five editors bringing their experience and style to bear on the editorial content.

Karanjia handed over the editorial reins to Udaya Tara Nayar after ten long years. By then, I was a regular freelance contributor. Dilip Kumar was and still is Nayar’s rakhi brother. She was close to and respected by many actors of the time, such as Rajesh Khanna, a heritage which has passed on to one of her successors, Bhawana Somaiya.
After Udaya left, Rauf Ahmed, previously with Filmfare, took on the mantle. He was doing a fine job when Screen turned into a tabloid. Bhawana Somaiya replaced him for several years, and after her came Priyanka Sinha-Jha, the youngest editor to date. Screen was sold to Star-India in March this year.

To go back over the years, during the first few weeks, Sanjit Narwekar, the then news editor, and I became good friends. Peter Martis became news editor after Narwekar left. Ali, famed for his ‘Ali’s Column’, had a permanent table no one dared occupy. In his columns, Screen permitted a little gossip. His column often embarrassed the glitterati he wrote about, but complaints were rare. One major freelance contributor was Hameeduddin Mahmood who wrote enlightening articles. One article I recall was on the representation of the Muslim identity in Hindi cinema. Ram Aurangabadkar was the regular photographer for Screen and remained so till age caught up with him; his brother Shyam then took over.

When Screen was bought over by Star India, I happened to be the senior-most freelance contributor, having contributed an article almost every week for 35 years, barring the special issues. Screen gave me the platform to write serious, full-page and in-depth articles such as Prostitution in Indian Cinema, Women Directors in Indian Films, An Actress Called Shabana Azmi and so on, all of which later found place in the books I began to write.

I could almost feel the pain of separation when Priyanka, followed by my regional editor Namita Niwas, once my student and now my mentor, called me up to inform me about the switch in ownership. One hears that Star India, the new owners, has given an assurance that the magazine will resume in its digital edition from July. Till then, parting remains sweet sorrow.

(The writer is a freelance journalist, author and film scholar based in Kolkata. She writes widely on cinema, gender issues, media and human rights for print and online media. She has won the national award for Best Writing on Cinema twice, the Bengal Film Journalists Association Award, and a Lifetime Achievement Award from Laadly-UNFPA in 2010.)
The feminisation of urban poverty

The feminisation of poverty is not only a consequence of lack of income but is also the result of the deprivation of opportunities and gender bias present in society, labour market and governance, says Vibhuti Patel. Public health measures to provide safe environment and reduce women's drudgery should be taken up on a war footing and the state must take responsibility for public health, education and safe drinking water for the poor, she adds.

According to the C Rangarajan Committee, 26.4 per cent of people living in urban India are below the poverty line. Their per capita expenditure was Rs 47 per day or Rs 1407 per month in 2011-12. Even among the urban poor, women have always experienced more poverty than men, as the majority of them are poorly paid and in irregular jobs. In all rounds of the National Sample Survey, the incidence of poverty among women has been marginally higher than among men in urban areas. The percentage of women living in poor households was 34 per cent in 1993-94 and 25 per cent in 2013-14 in urban areas. As much as 25 per cent of urban women are in the poverty groups as per NSS 68th round. There has been lot of debate on inadequacy of income criteria as an indicator of poverty.

Even the focus on per capita income / expenditure is based on a false premise of a household as
a unit where each member’s needs are taken care of judiciously and equally. This measure of gender poverty ignores intra-household inequalities in consumption. There are other dimensions of poverty such as food insecurity, malnutrition and health which also show higher vulnerability of urban women in comparison to men. Urban poor women do the cooking, cleaning, caring, collection of water, procurement of food items and cooking fuel as well as holding down full-time or part-time jobs. National Family Health Surveys have revealed inequality in income and consumption levels between women and men has been accentuated in recent times due to reduction in social sector spending by the state.

Women-headed households

In India, lack of access to family property and assets, and deficient micro-credit facilities contribute to the poor economic condition of female-headed households. According to the 2011 Census, 27 million households, constituting 11 per cent of total households in the country, are headed by women. Several studies have pointed out that intra-household discrimination in education against girls, which results in girls possessing less skill than boys, contributes to fewer economic opportunities for women, resulting in higher poverty rates among female-headed households.

The combined effect on these households of price rise, reduced quotas for PDS, reductions in healthcare facilities and educational facilities, is deplorable. Nearly 40 per cent of women-headed households (WHHs) did not have permanent shelter, around 45 per cent of female-headed households live in one-room premises and 29 per cent of female-headed households do not possess assets like radio / TV / telephone / bicycle / scooter. In spite of multi-tasking they don’t get adequate resources to meet their basic needs. The WHHs are the poorest of the poor households and are socially most excluded and vulnerable.

Migration

Due to shrinking job opportunities in rural areas, poor women have been migrating to urban areas with or without their family members. Here, their skills in agriculture, horticulture, fisheries, forest-based occupations and artisans become either redundant or rated as lowly. Occupations where poor women are employed have been dead-end jobs – domestic work, care of children, elderly and terminally ill people, scavenging, vending and informal sector manufacturing jobs. They get home-based piece-rate work in garment-making, assembling electronic items, food processing and finishing of plastic products and artificial jewelry-making. These tasks are irregular, casual in nature and not very remunerative. They are treated as unskilled workers.

In the urban world, the unpaid labour that women perform in taking care of family members and other household chores is considered of far less worth (at least economically) than positions that require formal education or training. Poor women’s jobs away-from-home are more likely to be in small and tiny unregistered enterprises and are not protected by government regulation. Market segmentation associates them with specific kinds of work, in a way extension of housework, such as teaching, caring for children and the elderly, domestic service, etc.

These kinds of jobs lack stability and security and the possibility of working at higher salaries. Due to lack of opportunities to upgrade skills and education, they are subjected to inequalities in wages and benefits as revealed by the Dr Arjun Sengupta Committee Report, 2006. It is a shocking reality that 79 per cent of nearly eight crore home-based women workers in the unorganised labour sector don’t get minimum wages stipulated by the Government. They also don’t get property rights and are prone to occupational hazards and harassment at the workplace.

The feminisation of poverty is not only a consequence of lack of income but is also the result of the deprivation of opportunities and gender bias present in society, labour market and governance. The burden of supporting the family is increasingly falling on women as poor men are becoming involuntarily or voluntarily unemployed in a fast-changing and technologically advancing economy.

Service sector work

Marked features of women’s employment in the service sector are discrimination at the entry point and gender wage differentials once they get work. Due to a burgeoning middle-class and a thriving upper class that have enjoyed the fruits of iniquitous economic growth unleashed by policies of liberalisation, privatisation and globalisation, the demand for paid domestic workers has been on the rise. Among women and girls migrant workers, paid domestic workers are the most disadvantaged group of women who spend a significantly higher portion of the day on unpaid care work and degrading paid work as domestic help. The expansion of service sector employment among women can be considered as the extension of unpaid care work into the market.

Deplorable quality of life

With regard to food, nutrition, health and education of poor women, social policy has been piecemeal and haphazard. Moreover, in the post-liberalisation period, there has been a withdrawal of state in terms of expenditure on social services. The private sector charges exorbitant ‘user fees’ for education and health facilities. The absence of social protection
has resulted in emergence of care deficits in their households with attendant implications for the nutrition, health, education, and wellbeing of the members of their household.

The 2011 Census shows 20 per cent of urban women are illiterate. Lack of access to health care, nutrition and poor environmental conditions all contribute to high infant and child mortality in slums. Poor water and sanitation contributes to a higher prevalence of morbidity in slums. Less than half of the urban poor have access to toilets. This results in reproductive morbidity among women and girls and also enhanced vulnerability to sexual assaults. Mumbai-based studies on intra-household distribution of resources reveal that among the poorer households with gross malnutrition and nutritional deficiency, the deficiency among girls and women was 25 per cent more than among men.

Women in informal sector

For women and girls from economically weaker sections, the daily grind is taxing. In export-oriented industries, and in the production of leather goods, toys, food-products, garments, diamond and jewelry, piece-rate female labour is employed. Here, women work in sweatshops or from home or from stigmatized labour markets in Dharavi, Behrampada, Andheri-Kurla, Jogeshwari or Mohammed Ali Road in Mumbai or in industrial areas in various states. Economic globalisation is riding on the backs of millions of poor urban women and child workers at the margin of the economy.

Economic reforms have reinforced the trend of informalisation of the female workforce as a ‘flexible’ labour force ready for multi-tasking is its key concept. A shift from a stable / organised labour force to a flexible workforce has meant hiring women on a part-time basis and the substitution of highly paid male labour by cheap female labour. The state government of Tamil Nadu proactively inducts young girls as workers for manufacturing units of SEZs in the name of the Sumangali Scheme, in which they are treated as little more than bonded labour. Home-based work by women and girls is easily legitimised in the context of increasing violence and insecurity in community life, unsafe streets and workplaces, riots and massive displacement and relocation.

In 2000, the National Alliance of Street Vendors in India organised a study of seven cities. It revealed that most female street-vendors belong to households in which male members were once employed in better-paid and secure jobs in the organised and formal sector. They became unemployed due to closure, lockout of their units or retrenchment. Male unemployment forced wives, daughters and sisters to take to street vending to make ends meet. These women constitute 30 per cent of the total female population in the informal sector. Women vendors operate on a small scale due to limited access to credit, extension services and input subsidies. They are not unionised.

Waste recycling workers

Urban areas are adding thousands of tonnes of solid and liquid waste. The growing affluence of urban centre increases the volume of waste. In Mumbai, there are 50000-60000 street and dumpsite rag-pickers, among whom 60 per cent are women and 20 per cent children, both boys and girls. Even among 100000 door-to-door waste collectors and recyclers in Greater Mumbai, 50 per cent are women. Pune’s profile is more or less the same.

Elderly women in poverty groups

Elderly women comprise 8.4 per cent of the total population, while men constitute 7.7 per cent (Census of 2011). According to India’s Institute of Public Administration’s working paper titled ‘Chronic poverty among Indian elderly’ (2009), the most vulnerable group consists of elderly women in urban areas; 64 per cent of them are dependent on others for food, clothing and healthcare. This is one of the reasons why the poor elderly women to continue to work despite poor health. Women also tend to benefit less from pension schemes and social security, which were built to reflect formal wage labour and may not reflect household labour or activity in the informal economy, where a higher proportion of women than men are employed.

Occupational health and safety

Multinational corporations operating in free trade zones, special economic zones and export processing zones in India employ urban girls in their production units or hire them on a piece-rate basis for home-based work. High production quotas create mental and physical stress among workers. Chemical hazards, improper ventilation and lack of health and safety provision in these units make the women victims of respiratory ailments, burns, ulcers and deteriorating eyesight.

Young unmarried girls are of primary interest to the MNCs, for they will not fight for their rights because of family pressure to earn money. Corporate houses follow the same practice. Many of them have closed down their large units in industrial towns and cities and are using home-based workers on a piece-rate basis.

The recent spate of attacks and murders of women workers and employees has brought the issue of their safety center-stage. The state must ensure that employers recognise sexual harassment as a serious offence and accept that it is the responsibility of the company / factory / workplace to prevent and deal with sexual harassment.
Not quite a healthy scenario, isn't it?

In the book *Who Cares? Socio-economic Conditions of Nurses in Mumbai*, author Aarti Prasad has dealt with the link between health and development: health increases productivity which leads to poverty reduction and increased access to health care services and this in turn leads to higher capability of the workforce. Some of the key findings of the study she conducted in the municipal and private hospitals as well as nursing homes in two wards of the Mumbai Municipal Corporation are pertinent:

1. There is a predominance of nurses in the age group of 17-35 years among the respondents; most of them are women
2. Christian nurses from Kerala are predominant in private hospitals and Hindu nurses from Maharashtra in municipal hospitals
3. Parents of unmarried nurses mostly in the 17-24 year age group are less qualified than the spouses of the married nurses
4. Most of the nurses employed in nursing homes and several employed in private hospitals were not qualified and therefore not registered with nursing councils. They were not member of the union either.

She also focused on the employment conditions and economic profiles of those working in municipal hospitals and found:

a. Poor working conditions and heavy workload are the main causes of attrition
b. While most nurses employed in the municipal corporation were ‘confirmed’, many working in private hospitals or nursing homes were on employed on an ‘ad hoc’ basis
c. Remuneration of those attached to the municipal corporation was higher than those in private hospitals, which could be as low as Rs 1000 per month in a nursing home
d. Increments and allowances like HRA were consistent in municipal corporation hospitals, but mostly lacking in private hospitals
e. Other facilities and services such as food allowances, uniform allowances, medical services and interest free loans were inconsistent
f. Leave was available for confirmed staff, but difficult to avail of by those not yet confirmed, particularly in private hospitals. The option of light duties was available for pregnant women in both municipal and private hospitals
g. Restrooms, crèche and transport facilities were not available in any hospital, nor were entertainment facilities
h. Except for large private hospitals there was no induction process in place
i. Grievance redress systems seem to be thin, particularly in the municipal corporation, and issue-specific in private hospital

Prasad recommends improvement in budget allocation for nursing education, regulation of nursing education, improved working conditions both in municipal and private hospitals, and better remuneration, allowances, workload, social security, welfare measures, etc. Also, uniform application of rules and availability of facilities in all municipal hospitals in the city, and greater participation of nurses in decision-making. The advocacy strategy, she points out, has to be realigned at three levels: at the government level, at the private hospital level, and at the level of nurses, themselves.

*(Dr Dhruv Mankad, who sent this piece, is managing trustee, Anusandhan Trust, and director, Swadesh Foundation, Mumbai, and Vachan, Nashik.*)
The changing face of India’s disinherited daughters

Tanika Sarkar and Sumit Sarkar are eminent historians of modern India. The former is professor of History at the Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, and the latter is a retired professor of History, University of Delhi. In this conversation with Pamela Philipose, they trace the early history of gender reform in India.

Most studies of the 19th Century and pre-19th Century make two general assumptions about Indian women. First, the language of women having lost their rights is invariably used while looking at the limits of social reform of those times. The presumption is that women had definite rights that they lost because of reformist interventions. Second, there is a complete underestimation of the power of orthodoxy in society.

So, when reformers are talked about, they are taken to be conservatives because they were not thinking of women in the way that we feminists now perceive them. They were in favour of the family, in favour of chastity, monogamy, and so on, and we take that to be a mark of their conservatism, forgetting that the society of that era – whether Hindu, Muslim or any other – was dominantly ruled by orthodoxy. Orthodoxy, in fact, was hegemonic and still is. So if we bring orthodoxy back into the picture, then what the reformers were trying to do and say makes a lot more of sense.

Let us start with Raja Rammohun Roy. There are different critiques of Roy, including one that maintains that he infantilised the way of the “willing satis”. Another saw him as a Westernised, de-racinated person who stigmatised Indian tradition, scripture and religion as something anti-modern and that this was western reason speaking through a pseudo-Indian. But what is forgotten is that the colonial government had promised – and by and large that pledge was kept – to give complete autonomy to religious traditions of all communities. This meant that any attempt to articulate the need for a change in gender relations had to be spoken about in the language of the scriptures. Therefore, if Roy had wanted an abolition of sati, he had to prove somehow that sati was non-scriptural.

If we look at the orthodox discourse, whether it was to do with the education of women, sati, widow re-marriage or the age of consent, we come across a whole host of scriptural sanctions and prohibitions, especially for upper caste and shariif (high-born) women. Here, one could note that poor, lower-caste women had some mobility and a certain amount of economic independence that was denied to their upper caste counterparts, primarily because they had to go out of the home to earn a living. The scriptural argument for sati was that the woman wanted to commit sati in order to gain heaven for her husband for three million years. Seven generations of ancestors – maternal, paternal and matrimonial – would also immediately be freed from all sins and they too will gain heaven. This was believed in very firmly, and the ritual promise created an incentive for sati. In testimonies of satis collected by the colonial state, the common claim the women made was that they were going to heaven and that they cannot live without their husbands. Interestingly, this argument was also an argument against widow remarriage. The view of marriage was that it was a sacrament. Once performed it was indissoluble – even with the death of the husband. This meant that no woman could have more than one husband. Even if her husband died, even if the marriage had remained unconsummated, even if the husband had abandoned her at the inception of the marriage, the woman was still considered attached to him and could not enter into any other relationship even after his death because that would constitute adultery.

We need to also remember that marriage was monogamous for women but not for men. By the early 19th Century, men could, and did, have innumerable wives – and all their wives were burnt as satis in the process. The traditional argument for child marriage was that the best kind of marriage was the pre-pubertal union, preferably before the girl turned eight. However, there was no limit to the bridegroom’s age. A man of 90 could, and very often did, marry a child of a few years.

Scriptures did not have to give reasons - they just laid down the law. All this made for a regime of extremely severe injunctions against women. Mobility was not just frowned upon, it was absolutely
proscribed. Sometimes education – a kind of oral education – was imparted. But as historian Uma Chakravarti pointed out in Whatever Happened To The Vedic Dasi?, if women became too involved in the quest for knowledge, they would invite a backlash. Maitreyi was killed because of her curiosity as a thinking, questioning woman. The woman had to follow her husband and look after his domestic life and the ‘good woman’ was to be worshipped. This perspective remained more or less intact throughout the 19th and well into the 20th Centuries.

The first questioning of this treatment of women began in the early 19th Century, largely because of the new technologies of communication. Literature, newspapers, the spread of education – in particular, the spread of vernacular education – and translations of the scriptures, all resulted in the unleashing of questions over what was the more authentic spiritual perspective, especially with regard to women.

What we find striking about the reformers was their great sense of diffidence, even guilt. There is a Rammohun Roy saying, “When did you test the intelligence of women that you call them foolish?” We have Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar asking why women were born at all in this land. Whether it is Mahadev Govind Ranade in western India or Kandukuri Virasalingam Pantulu of southern India, the reformers were talking about the problems women faced if they wanted to be ‘good women’. In the process, these reformers – always in a minority - had to face severe lampooning, ostracism and social boycott. Although it was true that sati had been legally abolished, Rammohun had to find some scriptural argument for its abolition. Vidyasagar also managed to present some material extracted from the Parashara Smriti and interpreted it as a “must for Kali Yuga”.

Because they had to speak the language of the scriptures, the reformers often ended up tying themselves into knots. Rammohun stated, for example, that since sati was not mentioned by the Manu Smriti, this meant that Manu Smriti did not approve of it, and, therefore, sati was not valid. But when Vidyasagar wanted to legalise widow re-marriage, he was in a quandary because the Manu Smriti was absolutely against widow remarriage. So Vidyasagar had to very strenuously argue that in Kali Yuga, Parashara was the great authority. But that undermined the argument for the age of consent issue, since Parashara certainly recommended infant marriage for women.

First you invent tradition and, when you cannot do this, you defend tradition. For instance, in the years of nationalism there was a kind of glorification of tradition, with early nationalists like Bal Gangadhar Tilak stoutly maintaining that Indian social conditions were wonderful in an earlier era. But with all their contradictions, reformers did set into motion a process of change because they at least problematised the condition of women and made it the dominant public issue. If we are saying that for the first time these issues were not restricted to pandits and mullahs but became general topics of discussion, then it was also true that gender – beginning with sati – was the theme of the first public discussions in India.

If we look at the orthodox discourse, whether it was to do with the education of women, sati, widow re-marriage or the age of consent, there were a whole host of scriptural sanctions and prohibitions, especially for upper-caste women.

(Courtesy: Women’s Feature Service. Pamela Philipose was director, Women’s Feature Service, senior associate editor with The Indian Express. She has been awarded the Chameli Devi Jain Award for Outstanding Woman Journalist.)
‘Most Indian women have no voice, little choice’

The World Before Her, a documentary film by Nisha Pahuja, traces the journey of two women following two extreme lifestyles in contemporary India. The film tries to spread awareness on women’s rights issues, especially gender violence, and bring about a positive change. Mehru Jaffer says the documentary suggests that most Indian women continue to languish on the margins of society at the mercy of very male ideas of beauty, love and the good life.

Ruhi Singh, 19, from Jaipur wants to get away from a dull and drab lifestyle in the provincial capital and seek fame and fortune in Mumbai, the home of Bollywood. As a beauty pageant aspirant, she goes through the drill - both empowering and insulting - that promises to bring her closer to her dream. Ruhi’s glamorous sojourn at the beauty and grooming camp seems to be in complete contrast to the indoctrination that Prachi Trivedi, 20, of Aurangabad, a small town in Maharashtra, is undergoing at a training organised by a right-wing nationalist organisation. But that’s only at first glance. Eventually, both these seemingly diverse worlds - modern and conservative, respectively - collide and crash under the continuing commands of patriarchy.

This is the story of The World Before Her, a documentary film by Nisha Pahuja, which traces the journey of two women following two extreme lifestyles in contemporary India. Whereas it was officially released in 10 cities last year with the support of producer and filmmaker Anurag Kashyap, today, it is being screened in various colleges, universities and rural communities across Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Punjab and Maharashtra, in order to spread awareness on women’s rights issues, especially gender violence, and “build a dialogue that will bring about a positive change”.

The film gives the feeling that women like Ruhi and Prachi do not really have a choice yet to lead the kind of life they would ideally like to live and it seems to suggest that most Indian women continue to languish on the margins of society at the mercy of very male ideas of beauty, love and the good life. According Pahuja, who divides her time between Toronto and Mumbai, “The idea is not to judge either Ruhi or Prachi but to simply set people thinking. I want to create a space where issues like violence against women can be talked about openly and fairly so that such a discussion will eventually lead to a shift in the mindset, which is anyway the first step towards ushering in any kind of social transformation.”

When The World Before Her was recently shown at a college on the outskirts of Lucknow, the state capital of Uttar Pradesh, there was pin-drop silence in the hall all the while the 90-minute documentary was going on. The young boys and girls in the audience sat in rapt attention as the dramatic narrative based on the lives of their contemporaries unfolded before them. Once the lights came on, the filmmaker and her India campaign team, headed by Dhawalika Singh, invited them to start up a conversation on what they had seen and how it all connected with
larger gender concerns such as violence, female foeticide, equality, and so on.

Recalls Singh, who is responsible for a countrywide screening of the film, “Not surprisingly, it was mostly the men, both conservative and liberal, who spoke up. Some loudly protested while others were more understanding. However, what came as a shock were the aggressive statements of some of their female teachers. Many asked us outright: ‘Are you trying to prevent Indian girls from following our traditions and culture? Are you discouraging them from getting married?’”

During their eight-day tour of Uttar Pradesh, the film was seen by hundreds of youngsters and whereas the India campaign team was thrilled to be witness to the different manifestations of women’s empowerment at the grassroots, “like the time when we saw a woman riding a bike in a village where women are forced to stay behind a ghoonghat (veil),” what has truly been memorable and useful is the variety of reactions their film has garnered. “I remember one instance when a girl had shyly remarked that she was ‘forced to close her eyes when young women were parading in bikinis’ even as a young boy vociferously pointed out that ‘what we have seen in the film is not Indian culture!’” says Singh.

“But how do you define Indian culture? And what about adivasi (tribal) culture or dalit culture?” questions Madhavi Kuckreja, founder and CEO of Sanatkada, a Lucknow-based non-government organisation and one of the three sponsors that hosted the screening of The World Before Her in UP, a state, which, incidentally, has the highest number of human rights violation cases in the country. The routine abuse of women here is often pinned on the prevalent rigid and very feudal social structures.

As someone who has spent a long time working to uplift impoverished women, especially those from the lower castes and the minority community, Kuckreja has observed that “most Indian women have no voice and little choice. And those who do speak up are bullied and silenced”. Earlier, this well-known feminist activist was stationed in Chitrakoot and Banda districts, often called the lap of feudal violence, and now she runs Sanatkada that tries to empower girls from conservative Muslim families by exposing them to new media.

Conservative politics in the state has only increased the vulnerability of women as all violence against them is treated lightly by authorities responsible for enforcing the law. Often, the police and local officials also lack awareness of legal safeguards to protect women. That is why there is a need to make concerted efforts at changing the way people respond to violence and injustice.

In a sense, The World Before Her has been able to stimulate young minds and push them to break the silence – and the India campaign team finds that extremely encouraging. For instance, after the documentary was shown to a bunch of youngsters in a suburban school in the city the ensuing interaction had almost been one-sided, as the girls conspicuously remained silent. Yet, later, when Singh went to the restroom they surrounded her and questioned her endlessly. “It was evident that they had been tongue-tied in front of their fellow male students and dominating female teachers. Feeling more at ease in a ladies’ toilet they told us that they were aware of the inequality that exists between women and men and the injustices in society but they didn’t know how they could alter the status quo. However, watching Neera Chopra, Femina Miss India Pooja Chopra’s mother stand up for her daughters got them thinking,” elaborates Singh.

In The World Before Her, Neera Chopra narrates how her husband had made her life miserable because she had given birth to two girls. Then, in 1986, when Pooja was just a few months old, she had walked out of her marital home with her daughters in tow and found a job as a hotelier. When the girls sitting in the audience see how this courageous mother built her life and career and even supported her daughters to do so, they realise that if Neera can do it anyone of them can.

(Courtesy: Women’s Feature Service)
A matrilineal state worries about rape

Did the public outrage that followed the gang-rape of a Delhi student on a private bus (December, 2012) actually bring down the level crimes against women, not just in the capital but in the rest of India? There is no straight answer to this question. Experts, government officials and activists seem as uncertain about the answer as ordinary people, given the explosion of such cases in the wake of the December attack, says Linda Chhakchhuak

In Meghalaya, Theilin Phanbuh, chairperson of the State Women’s Commission (MSWC), was even constrained to observe that the rising number of rape cases could be the result of “criminals taking the crackdown as a challenge to demonstrate their power even more, and going on a spree”. On the other hand, she felt that it could also be the case that the survivors of such crimes were getting more confident after the Criminal Law (Amendment) Act, 2013, and were increasingly more aware about their rights of redressal. Said Phanbuh, “As awareness campaigns proliferate, more people are getting encouraged to speak about such crimes and even file FIRs in police stations.”

One of the groups that has been galvanised into action is the dorbar (traditional village authority) of Umpling, a locality in the outskirts of Shillong, the capital of Meghalaya. The village elders here have formed a Joint Action Committee on Crimes Against Women. At a rally in May 2013 – incidentally the first to be held by a village authority in the state against the spate of rape and other crimes against women – the rangbah shnong or headman, Sanwat Pyngrope, stated that the reportage in the dailies has struck horror across the community. “It’s become so common that we have woken up to the fact that this is not a woman’s issue alone but an issue that involves us men too. Therefore, as village elders we decided we have to come out to fight against these attacks on women,” he said.

Pyngrope, along with the additional superintendent of police (Crime), V. Syiem, put the major blame for the rise in such criminal behaviour on alcohol consumption and the spread of Internet porn, which can now be accessed on the ubiquitous mobile phone. Many men rapists who were apprehended by the police blamed their intoxicated state for their crimes. But Syiem touched a chord when he linked rising incidents of rape to a “patriarchal mind set” – it’s not often police officials are heard making this point. The fact is, as he put it, despite being a largely matrilineal society that holds women in high esteem, “a patriarchal mindset still dominates Meghalaya”. The widespread impression is that men can do what they want and escape the consequences of their behaviour.

According to Syiem, such people need to be taught a lesson. He urged his audience to inform the police immediately when such incidents occur. “Victims don’t need sympathy, they need empathy and support from the family and society at large to be able to file an FIR. It does not end in filing an FIR and arresting the culprit. That’s only the beginning. The witness has to come forward and not disappear, and the evidence should be saved and not destroyed,” he remarked.

The “rapist mindset”, Syiem pointed out, begins with eve-
teasing. It then progresses to molestation and, finally, if unchecked by society, could lead to incidents of rape. He went on to say that while patriarchal society at large may wink at eve-teasing and molestation, the law deems them as crimes. Women need to be aware of these laws and use them instead of taking such crimes lightly or as part of the occupational hazard of being women, he argued.

Another important piece of information passed on at the rally was that when it comes to reporting the crime, “time does not matter”. Said Syiem, “Many children or women cannot come forward immediately to talk about what they have suffered. They may have suffered in silence for a month or for years, but if they want to register that crime they can come forward at any time, and the police will have to take action.”

Of course, in cases where police officers are themselves the perpetrators it becomes that much tougher for victims to speak out. Recently, a non-bailable warrant was issued against a sub inspector of police, Narul Islam, for allegedly raping two minors who he had escorted into his thana (police station) at Ampati in Garo Hills District. In fact, on June 4, 2013, some police officers, including a deputy superintendent of police (DSP), were suspended for protecting the officer.

The fact is that many women still shy away from making such crimes public – and according to Phanbuh, the dismal conviction rate in rape cases is certainly not an encouraging sign. She recently compiled statistics from different courts in Meghalaya to get an idea of the number of pending cases of violence against women. For instance, there are 60 pending cases in the fast track court in Nongstoin, West Khasi Hills, while Ri Bhoi District registered 43 cases – seven of which were in the juvenile court. According to her findings, cases pending investigation until 2012 numbered 160, while 402 were pending trial.

The MSWC had also compiled a similar list involving the district council court (Khasi Hills), which reported 163 cases under trial, 99 of which involved minors – some of them pending for as many as six years. Whether this data is part of the overall state figures or not is a question that remains unanswered, given the ongoing turf war between the council courts, which were set up under the Sixth Schedule, and the general courts. When asked why crimes under Section 376 series were sent to council courts, the reply from a senior police official, who did not want to be named, was that cases in which both parties are tribals are handled by the council courts, which functions basically as a court for implementing customary laws and practices.

This, in itself, is a serious miscarriage of the law, since it seems to imply that rapes, including rapes of minors, are a customary practice that can only be adjudicated by special courts. Agnes Kharshiing, the president of the Shillong-based Civil Society Women’s Organisation, has raised the issue and demanded that rape cases pending before council courts be brought under the state’s fast track courts.

Meanwhile, given the rapid rise in the number of rape incidents across the state, the government has added another court – the judicial magistrate first class in Tura, West Garo Hills District – to adjudicate on both old as well as new cases involving crimes against women. But, as Phanbuh put it, it is not the number of courts but the number of convictions that is important, otherwise local vigilantes may be tempted to take law into their hands when verdicts get delayed for years together.

(Courtesy: Women’s Feature Service. The writer is based in Shillong.)

And now, Catch – yet another digital platform

Catch is a new multi-media digital platform about the ideas and events shaping our world. It aims to provide news-on-the-run for an impatient new generation. But it will also offer context and insight for the deeper consumer of news. It also has some innovative new forms – from short, bulleted explainers or three-minute videos to flip-cards called X-packs, and deep-dive devices called Decks.

In the short week since it was launched, Catch has had definitive pieces on issues as varied as the Narendra Modi Government, the militancy in Manipur-Myanmar-Kashmir, the railways revamp, the new SEBI stock exchange, to the Ganga, Delhi waste crisis, cricket, sexuality, arranged marriages, migratory birds, superstar biscuits and how algorithms are replacing journalists.

Part of the Rajasthan Patrika Group, and led by senior journalist Shoma Chaudhury as editor-in-chief, Catch quite simply hopes to curate a space -- a voice -- you will grow to like and trust. Its senior journalists team includes Bharat Bhushan, the editor, Payal Puri and Kunal Mazumdar. Vinny Ganju will be the chief operating officer.

(Courtesy: exchange4media.com)
Strengthening their voice, and participation as well

There still exist social hierarchies along the lines of caste, class and other oppressions that inhibit women from negotiating fair representation and equal participation on community radio. This is especially true in gender-mixed stations. While gender-specific programming that challenges gender stereotypes and promotes attitude and behaviour change is imperative, it is also important to incorporate women’s perspective into all content, no matter what issue is covered, say Kanchan K. Malik and Daniela Bandelli

Community radio (CR) is a relatively young sector in India. The CR policy that enables not-for-profit organisations to apply for licence was not enacted by the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting (MIB) until 2006. Across India, several CR stations are now tapping the potential of women for their programming and also involving them in decision-making roles. Many NGOs – such as Deccan Development Society, Telangana; Kutch Mahila Vikas Sangathan, Gujarat; Self Employment Women’s Association, Gujarat; and Mann Deshi Foundation, Maharashtra; have set up CR stations that are run exclusively by women.

Even in the case of mixed-gender CR stations, women’s participation is recognised as a significant dimension in almost all the initiatives launched by development organisations within India. Most of the organisations have set up CR with the intention to deploy communication technologies for social change in general and empowerment of women in particular. For a great deal of them, CR provides a means to recover women’s silenced voices; is a platform to involve women as ‘partners’ in development; and enables inclusion of a gender perspective in their approach and programming. How adequately this intention manifests itself on the ground, depends greatly on the approach and ideology of the organisation and the local realities.

Research by the authors in selected CR stations in India over the years has shown that community radio has helped in amplifying the voice of marginalised rural women, and many women caught up within feudal social structures are beginning, albeit slowly, to find a voice of their own. Certain studies have also indicated that new information enables women to acquire awareness on their rights, and on the conditions of other women, make informative choices, develop imaginative capacity about their future life, and plan group action. Through CR, women acquire new skills, such as computer literacy, ICTs and reporting techniques, and establish new interpersonal relations.

As articulated by a community radio reporter whom the authors had interviewed, women are happy that their voice is being recognised: “One major difference that has come about is that if radio wasn’t there, women wouldn’t go about telling people what they know, their knowledge wouldn’t be recognised. But now, they have got a voice. We also have the knowledge of older people now, who might be gone. But we have recorded their knowledge, which is a priceless asset.”

By engaging in media activity made accessible through a CR station, women endeavour to challenge gender roles and reverse the cultural discourse. Women’s position is enhanced within the family as long as relatives understand the value of their work and within the community their role as an agent of change is gradually being recognised.

Also, as a result of improved knowledge of social texture and dialogue with the community, women develop the desire to work as agents of change and promote different forms of solidarity and civic engagement. Thus, CR provides to women an autonomous space for discursive interaction, deliberations and negotiations leading gradually to political participation and collective action.

This is especially true in the case of women reporters, who talk about how engaging in media-making has brought about a change in their lives: a) it has enhanced their self-perception; b) they have become
confident about venturing out of the house to work; c) they are more confident in public speaking, interacting with male officials, and in discussing their problems in public meetings. Women have also progressively endeavoured to challenge traditional norms such as the social un-acceptance of women riding a bicycle or unveiling their face. Most of them are at ease in operating the computer, do scripting and editing, and operating all radio production equipment.

However, there still exist social hierarchies along the lines of caste, class and other oppressions that inhibit women to negotiate fair representations and equal participation in CR. This is especially true in gender-mixed stations. If one looks at the practices of participatory communication initiatives such as CR, pre-existing power structures hinder an equal involvement to all members within the community, and also impede full interaction between the producers and receivers of messages.

There are three areas in which women’s involvement is still unsatisfactory are: a) women do not listen as much or as attentively as men; b) their participation in programme production as well as decision-making is minimal; and, c) women’s issues are not covered adequately in the programmes. If more women in the villages are trained in radio production, they could in turn be instrumental in involving other women of their villages in radio production. Convening women-only listening sessions, encouraging listener’s groups through narrowcasting, and doing recordings in the villages could also make women participate more in radio.

From some of the qualitative studies on CR, it emerges that causes of women’s exclusion mostly pertain to discriminatory socio-cultural norms and rigid gender roles, which put them in a subordinate position, hinder their freedom of movement and relegate them to the private sphere. The everyday possibilities for women to freely engage in programme production is affected first of all by the fact that women are discriminated against even as listeners because radio devices are monopolised by men whereas women are expected to be busy with domestic duties and children.

Participation is hindered also by the submission to parents and in-laws, by the fact that it is not culturally acceptable for women to stay out late at night and interact with male outsiders such as reporters. Being a women radio reporter is per se a challenge to the cultural belief that technologies are man’s domain, and to traditional gender norms, these are not fully questioned by reporters themselves. Also, younger radio volunteers seem to accept that they, once married and relocated to the husband’s village, might have to renounce their wish to continue working as activists and as media professionals because of the opposition of their in-laws.

Recommendations to enhance inclusion
There is no doubt that CR is an effective means for women to access information which is relevant to their lives and situations, and in most cases is normally denied or unavailable. Also, CR constitutes an opportunity for women to acquire a voice, which otherwise remains unheard. There is a need to advocate for and promote the involvement of women in CR as agents of social change and to create concrete opportunities for women to get information and produce communicative acts that are relevant to their lives. However, in order to ensure women’s progressive involvement in all elements and stages of a CR station with a view to strengthen its empowerment potential, the authors outline below, the several challenges that need to be addressed.

Women as listeners: The ownership and control of a radio set (now mobile phones that receive FM) clearly rests in the hands of men or children and women seldom have direct or uninterrupted access to radio receivers. Also, women, who are busy with household chores and domestic duties, do not listen as much or as attentively to radio programmes as men. AMARC (international NGO serving the community radio movement) gender policy recommends that women’s access to the airwaves must be enhanced “by ensuring a supportive, secure environment in and around the station to produce programmes.” Indeed, one possible way to enlarge the listeners’ base among women could be to encourage them to make their own programmes on the radio, especially those that deal with their issues and their perspectives on issues. Special listening sessions exclusively for women could also go a long way in redressing the listenership imbalance, and allow women to discuss issues as well as to network with other women. Having more women CR reporters who engage in mobilising women to participate would also be a step forward in this direction.

Women as producers of content: Through specialised, context-specific training efforts, the capacities of women to produce radio programmes must be enhanced so that they acquire the technical skills and confidence to control their communications. Indeed, any CR training is not just about skills, but about sharing and confidence building. It may be difficult to expect that women, who have been deprived of opportunities to voice their concerns for ages, would swiftly start expressing their views without hesitation and faltering. Only when the women would be sure that their point of view is respected, their voice has a value and a major role to play in any initiative, would they
gradually come out and participate and exercise their freedom of expression. Also, the training as well as the radio programme production must accommodate a woman’s daily agenda and provide spaces where they may leave their children safely when they are busy in the studios.

**Women as decision-makers:**
It must be the mandate of the CR stations to facilitate women’s involvement at all stages of decision-making. The AMARC gender policy endorses that there must be women’s representation at all levels of station management, particularly in areas of decision-making and technical skills. “In order for women to be meaningfully represented at all levels of the community radio station, quotas for participation need to be set for ownership, management and production, including women’s participation in technical management.”

**Portrayal of women on air:** While gender-specific programming that challenges gender stereotypes and promotes attitude and behaviour change is imperative, it is also important to incorporate women’s perspective into all content, no matter what issue is covered. Having women as experts, transmitting messages around women’s rights and gender justice, and having a no-tolerance policy for objectification of men/women are some steps that could be adopted to encourage fair and balanced representation of women on air.

(Kanchan K. Malik is an associate professor in the Department of Communication, University of Hyderabad, and a faculty fellow with the UNESCO Chair on Community Media. Daniela Bandelli is a PhD scholar at the University of Queensland, School of Journalism and Communication. This article summarises key observations from the conference paper, Community Radio and Gender: Towards an Inclusive Public Sphere, presented by the authors at the India Media Symposium: Public Spheres, the Media & Social Change organised by University of Queensland, Brisbane.)

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**The Peace Gong launches a Braille edition**

The Peace Gong, the children’s newspaper launched its Braille edition in Hindi and English on June 6, in association with Arushi. The Peace Gong reaches out to children across India and even abroad. It is a media literacy initiative of the Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore Foundation, New Delhi.

Kanupriya Gupta, a Class 11 student of Carmel Convent School, BHEL, Bhopal, the editor, says the Braille edition of the newspaper provides children with disability a platform. “The articles and reports in the newspaper were written by children with visual impairment from across Madhya Pradesh. This first issue focuses on Environment. A major highlight of this Braille edition is many general students learnt Braille and worked with visually challenged young reporters. Like the print edition, the Braille edition will also be quarterly.”

The Peace Gong is not just a platform for children to write on social concerns but is also a vehicle to promote child participation for community building, to promote child rights issues. “Student reporters of many of our bureaus in different are taking up causes of their community. These include working with children with disability, creating awareness on the concerns of child labour and child trafficking, environment, etc. It is a platform to develop the communication skills of children, develop their abilities to initiate their own programmes and projects, develop leadership and team building abilities,” explains Kanupriya.
When radio proved to be a lifeline

In the 21st Century, when the majority of people around the world cold-shoulder the radio, the almost century-old communication technology helped Kashmiri people stay in touch when floods played havoc with the northern-most Indian State. John K. Babu explains how

After five days of continuous heavy downpour due to multiple cloudbursts, the Jhelum River suddenly swelled in the first week of September 2014. In the worst flooding that Jammu & Kashmir witnessed in 60 years, Srinagar was virtually submerged. Communication links snapped, villages were washed away, crops were destroyed, and thousands were left homeless. Even when it finally stopped raining, reports of death and destruction poured in from across the state. The Srinagar-Jammu highway was closed.

In such a scenario, the radio became a lifeline for people isolated by the floodwaters. Public broadcaster Radio Kashmir started a massive, interactive and live programme called Helpline that connected people across the state. It emerged as a major source of instant information, it reached various locations in and outside Srinagar City, and people were given information about safe routes. To do this, Radio Kashmir used the high power transmitter in Narbal, a major flood-affected area in the periphery of the city. The transmitter was operated on a diesel generator that consumed over 100 liters of diesel an hour.

The main office of Radio Kashmir in Srinagar (FM and MW) was submerged in about 10 feet of water and engineers and programme executives had to leave in a hurry. The floodwater started gushing into the city and Radio Kashmir had to ultimately go off air. Taking prompt action, AIR restored the signal in Srinagar through the FM transmitter at Shankaracharya Hills and Radio Kashmir started running services from a makeshift camp on September 11th. But this snapped after short while too.

AIR personnel, however, stuck to their commitment, and restored programmes on weather, safety advisories, utility messages, helpline numbers and also psychological succor, using satellite communication technology, among other means. They interviewed government ministers and officials too. The informative programmes were interspersed with suitable music, soothing recitations, and voicing of the people’s feelings and expectations and sentiments.

Able teamwork of the then station director Rukhsana Jabeen and chief engineer Deeraj Goyal, producer Humayun Qaisar, and presenters like Talha Jehangir, Shakeel Bakhshi, Javed Sofi, Sakina Rather, Chasfeeda Khan, Mohammad Hussain Zaffar, Ishfaq Lone and Rashid Nizami made the radio programmes a success. Jehangir told a local magazine, Kashmir Life, “The programme received around a thousand telephone calls a day and...
on a daily basis we interacted with 20 officials. We were live for more than 60 hours. We received 2500 mails and countless SMSes. It was a huge coordination effort between our engineers and the broadcasters; we have a huge team of assistants working outside the studio too”.

In Srinagar, army choppers on aerial operations were unable to evacuate hundreds of people trapped in flooded areas such as Rajbagh, Shivpora, Bemina and Jawaharnagar. People were waiting for rescue on terraces and rooftops and they had lost contact with their families because the phone lines were down. At the time, Radio Kashmir played a pivotal role in rescuing people, by airing thousands of messages every day. Many testimonies were given, saying that after days of anxious and painful waiting, it was only via the radio that people came to know that their relatives who were caught in the floods were safe. The radio was also the means of reuniting families who had been separated by the flood waters.

All India Radio sister stations were established in Jammu on December 1, 1947 and Kashmir on July 1, 1975. They have been serving the people in the state and whoever tunes in across the border and Line of Control (LOC) for the past six-and-a-half decades. The twin stations mount regular programmes to disseminate vital information.

(The writer is assistant professor, Department of Convergent Journalism, Central University of Kashmir, Srinagar.)

Floods created havoc in the Kashmir Valley. This picture shows to what extent residents must have suffered.

Call to protect role of newspapers’ functions

The essential role of the media was stressed at a meeting in Chennai recently to observe the centenary of a doyen of the industry, Rangaswami Parthasarathy. N. Ram, chairman, Kasturi and Sons, called for protecting the roles of functions of newspapers, including that of providing credible information and performing the role of public educators. Speaking at the event organised for the centenary celebrations of Rangaswami Parthasarathy, former news editor of The Hindu, he said that journalism in India was still largely serious business and newspapers were in the business of informing people, educating them, helping build a worthwhile public agenda. “In this context, we have got to protect these roles of functions and the values on which they are founded,” he added.

Ram said India had a tradition of over 200 years of serious “newspapering” and to inculcate this spirit of history, the history should be taught to students of Journalism and also be a part of orientation in every newspaper. In fact, taking it a bit further, he said it could also be included in the school curriculum. He presented the first Rangaswami Parthasarathy Memorial Award to veteran journalist Shekhar Gupta.

Accepting the award, Gupta said that he had donned the hats of editor and CEO at the Indian Express and had been able to preserve editorial integrity. “Being marketing-friendly does not mean giving up the editorial dharma,” he said. He also announced an annual scholarship for a tribal student from the Northeast at the Asian College of Journalism. The family of Parthasarathy announced five scholarships worth Rs one lakh each to students at the college. Educationist (Mrs) Y.G. Parthasarathy recalled how she worked under Partha, as he was known, for a year. He was a very helpful and kind person and would encourage everyone, she said.

Rangaswami Parthasarathy (1915-2003) began his career in journalism in The Mail as sub-editor and later joined The Hindu. After his retirement, Mail Parthasarathy as he was also known, wrote a series of books on journalism including one on its history. He also authored the book Hundred years of The Hindu.

(Courtesy: exchange4media.com)
Linking folk musicians to new opportunities

An enterprising movement in Rajasthan seeks to foster dying folk art, artistes and artisans by linking the traditional with modern needs and opportunities. Bharat Dogra has more

While livelihood issues are most crucial for social activists, there is an increasingly felt need for integrating cultural concerns, particularly the protection of folk arts and music. This concern is well expressed in Barefoot College’s Khamayati Project, a promising endeavor to protect and propagate Rajasthan’s extremely rich and colourful (but nevertheless threatened) folk music and songs.

Under the overall guidance of social activist Aruna Roy and with the close involvement of communities of folk musicians and singers, the project aims to preserve and protect the invaluable heritage of folk music in various ways while at the same time opening new avenues for the progress of folk musicians and singers, including by efforts to link the new generation with the rich heritage.

Carol Barker, a British writer and illustrator who has been closely involved with the conceptualisation and implementation of the project, says, “It is equally important that highly skilled artisans who make folk music instruments should be helped to continue their intricate craft and pass on their skills to the next generation; otherwise some of these instruments will also be endangered.”

Carol makes a very important point when she asserts, “When some of the great folk musicians are asked where they first learnt their music, they reply that their first lessons were from their mothers. So it is important to bring out the contribution of women to great musical traditions. Songs relating to various festivals and the cycle of life are sung by women as a part of daily life. These songs also need to be preserved for posterity.”

Carol says she simply “fell in love with India” on her very first visit to the country in 1977. She developed a special affection for Barefoot College and for the folk music of Rajasthan, and was keen to do something that would help folk musicians. Her desire became more intense when she heard about the increasing hardships faced by singers and musicians. Recently, when she went back home to London, she approached her son Julian Dunkerton, who contributed a financial base for the programme christened Khamayati.

Aruna Roy says: “Look at folk music forms like the Marwari Khayal which is so powerful but nevertheless faces a crisis of survival. So something really needs to be done on a continuing basis to protect this rich heritage, or else much that is invaluable will be lost.”

Ramniwas of Barefoot College, who has been closely involved in this work, adds, “We went to remote parts of Barmer, Jaisalmer and Jodhpur and collected information about the skills of about 300 folk musician families, as well as the problems faced by them. We’ve held several workshops with them. Part of our effort is to make audio-visual recordings of the work of various great musicians and singers, particularly the elderly among them, so that this can be preserved for posterity.” ShvetaRao, another activist, adds, “We’ve created a website on these folk singers - www.khamayati.org - so that folk activists can be contacted directly and they don’t have to depend on middlemen.”

Already, rich documentation is available, particularly on Langa and Maangniyar folk singers and musicians from Western Rajasthan. However, several other very poor and marginalised communities also have rich traditions of folk arts. For example, the Kalbeliya Community has a vibrant repertoire of music relating to snake-charmers while the Kanjar Community is well known for its Chakri Dance. “These communities, some of whom have led a nomadic or semi-nomadic existence, need wider welfare measures as well as more specific steps for the protection of their music and arts,” says Aruna Roy. “These should be integrated with the wider welfare steps for these communities.”

Ramnivas adds, “One aspect of this work is to visit villages of folk artistes to learn about their achievements and problems, as without this base knowledge, no further planning can take place.” A visit to LalSonitownship in Dausa District revealed that community support for rural folk arts has continued despite adverse conditions. An annual festival of Hela is organised here with the support of the local community. In this folk art form, groups of 30 to 40 people singing long songs accompanied by traditional instruments like huge nagaras and ranbheris. Though
the songs traditionally revolve around mythological themes, Hela artistes have now increasingly taken up contemporary themes and made an important contribution to spreading the message of RTI (Right to Information).

A Khamayti team also visited Chakri dancers from the Kanjar Community and learnt about several continuing problems, including the social stigma surrounding the community. It was apparent to the team that efforts to revive the dance form need to be linked to wider measures for socio-economic improvement in the community.

Khamayti has a special interest in conserving folk arts linked to day-to-day rural life. For example, the songs sung while grinding grain in chakkis have a beautiful rhythm echoing the jingling of bangles juxtaposed with the turning of the grinding wheel. These songs were compiled in such a way that there would be pauses to coincide with the time when grain has to be fed into the grinder. Other threatened art forms include various acrobatic skills (including those involving ropes and bamboos), the work of bahurupiyas (or artistes who remain costumed for various different roles for a long time) and string puppets.

Rajasthan is widely known for its traditional puppeteers who used the dolls mainly to tell stories of kings and queens. Now, the puppeteers are being offered opportunities to use their art to impart messages of social and developmental significance.

Manipulating the puppets is a hard-won skill, and it is also practical to explore other, easier-to-handle formats which are also more cost-effective and can reach out to a larger audience than traditional methods. This was the challenge before the communication team at Barefoot College.

In the initial years, the puppets team included members of traditional puppeteer communities as well as younger communicators who had experimented with puppets on their own. They were all keen to evolve a new idiom of puppets more relevant to the needs of conveying present-day, socially relevant messages.

Instead of persisting with wood puppets manipulated by thread, Barefoot College started making glove puppets using papier-mâché (in turn made from old newspapers and ‘unsolicited reports sent by international agencies’) and sponge. They are manipulated by moving the thumb and two fingers on which the gloves are worn. Rod puppets, and bigger bamboo puppets, as well as masks were introduced to the traditional artistes too.

Glove and rod puppets were used in innovative ways to convey messages concerning health, education, other development issues and social reform to villagers on a regular basis. On an average about 120 performances are given in a year. A puppet performance is never an isolated event; it is accompanied by songs, street plays and a dialogue/discussion with villagers.

One aspect of the puppets which has greatly increased the effectiveness of the communication effort is the creation of special characters which are a hit with the audience. Jokhim Chacha is one such character, an elderly man of wisdom and wit (and hence entitled to advice and admonish). Soon, there was a demand for a similar, female character as the Barefoot College’s work targets women in particular. So Dhanno Bua was born. Positioned as the paternal aunt who feels free to speak her mind, she is a favourite with the local people.

Then there is Moofat, or Mr. Outspoken, who is what his name implies. These characters help social activists more easily raise controversial and difficult issues relating to social reform/change. The feedback from direct interaction with villagers is very important, and sometimes important changes are made in the programmes based on these inputs.

The puppeteers with a message have also made significant contribution to several important movements of national importance such as the RTI campaign and NREGA (National Rural Employment Guarantee Act). In dozens of yatras (journeys) and dharnas (protests) for these and other movements, the puppets have played an important communication role. In fact, Moofat became one of the most recognisable and endearing faces of the RTI and NREGA campaigns.

(The writer, based in New Delhi, dwells on social development issues.)
Indian cinema and transformation in technology

The advent of modern technology, especially the shift from film to digital, has brought about corresponding changes in filmmaking, in feature films, documentary films and commercials. Cinema in India has been specially impacted due to what is seen as a shorter and cheaper way to make films on the one hand and to make distribution and exhibition more mobile and flexible on the other. The future has never looked more exciting for filmmakers in developing countries like India, says Shoma A. Chatterji.

Change has played the most significant role in shaping and moulding Indian cinema, mainly in terms of technology that has impacted the processes of production, distribution and significance. Today, there are not only different genres of films but also films displaying versatility of technique, innovative and imaginative use of tools and equipment, new projection, dubbing and recording processes.

Exhibition venues too are not confined to multiplexes and single-screen theatres anymore. It is now possible to view entire films on YouTube and other cinema sites for free, store classics and modern films on DVDs and CDs to watch later, and catch screenings on television, iPads, Blackberrys and even cell phones. One can also watch films on 700mm-wide screens, in three-dimension projects, with surround sound and Dolby sound systems.

The manner of projecting films has transcended the age-old celluloid print system to reach digitalised projections through new techniques. Qube, a comparatively new technology, dispenses with the need for a projector and produces better picture and sound quality than many other types. It lends itself to the projection of 3D stereoscopic films and makes more releases within short time spans. For the producer, it reduces cost and protects against piracy. Every print is a perfect copy and there is no fear of loss of resolution in subsequent ‘prints’, as there is nothing like a ‘print’. Better colour grading is possible and so is going directly from DI to digital release without going to film.

The first digital cinema rolled out in the country in 2003. Mukta-Adlabs, a joint venture between Subhash Ghai’s Mukta Arts and Manmohan Shetty’s Adlabs (now part of Reliance), seeded more than 50 theatres with Rs 10 lakh worth of equipment each. This was primarily a server and a projector, the two key pieces of hardware. This was done in exchange for advertising rights, revenue share or a flat fee. The whole project fizzled out albeit after revealing the promise of digital cinema. At over 5600 screens in all, Real Image and UFO Moviez have digitised more than half the total single screen market in India. Both are making operating profits and Real Image has actually broken even. For both the companies and for the Rs 14,000 crore Indian film industry, it is size that will determine the leader in the world’s largest film-producing and ticket-buying but least profitable country.

The total revenues of the film business have more than doubled in the six years since the first major digital cinema roll-out began in 2005. Of these, box-office revenues have grown fastest, thanks to multiplexes and digital single screens. The latter now bring in more than half of the total box-office revenues. Yet, for digital cinema to fully realize its potential, it has to prove to advertisers that “cinema is no longer a fringe medium”, as Arvind Ranganathan, CEO, Real Image puts it.

“Sahib Biwi Aur Gangster was the first Hindi film to be shot on Alexa. The biggest advantage to my mind is the ability of a digital camera to reproduce dark and very low-lit images without any grain or under exposed quality. Good digital cameras give you very good shadow detail, which gives me as a cinematographer the ability to experiment with very dark moody images. Convenience is also an advantage. The fact that there is no more dependence on a photochemical process and you are assured of clean images that will be true to the exposure you set,” says Aseem Mishra, cinematographer of Tigmangshu Dhulia’s wonderful film Paan Singh Tomar (2012).

Cinematography has pushed its boundaries. RED digital cinema enables high-resolution file-based cinematography with cameras that capture images with more than four times the resolution of the best HD cameras. RED dispenses with the need for raw stock and the sophisticated movie camera can decode light by itself. Then there is Blu-ray, also known as Blu-ray Disc (BD), a new optical disc format jointly developed by the Blu-ray Disc Association (BDA), a group of the world’s leading consumer electronics, personal computer and media manufacturers. The format was developed to enable
recording, rewriting and playback of high-definition video (HD), as well as storing of large amounts of data. The format offers more than five times the storage capacity of traditional DVDs and can hold up to 25GB on a single-layer disc and 50GB on a dual-layer disc.

No longer does a filmmaker need to shoot on grainy 16mm film that would then have to be transferred to magnetic tape, losing a few generations of visual quality on the way to telecast. No longer does a documentary filmmaker have to acquire raw stock, deal with expensive laboratories and submit his film to paperwork, including the Censor Board. He or she can shoot, edit and submit the finished film as entries to film festivals abroad. It is relatively inexpensive, a far greater number of people can have access to it, and it can be updated and re-edited at any point in time. It is as if a writer has suddenly discovered that he does not need a publisher to be in print. The documentary film movement in India received a major thrust with the digital revolution.

Shooting on video delivers results immediately and time is saved. Granted that some veterans in the business still believe that film or tape give a superior image, but then one must constantly worry about the amount of stock consumed. Video editing has become a universal practice today. Film equipment is cumbersome and therefore causes problems of transportation, is expensive and difficult to handle. If there are differences in the end product of a work captured on film and a work captured on video, the audience can hardly make them out.

Choice of technique is truly a creative and technical option today’s filmmaker has at his disposal. There have been instances of a film having been originally shot on analogue Betacam video and then transferred in finished form to 35 mm for theatrical release with very good results. Some filmmakers have shot originally in a variety of video formats and then transferred to 35 mm with excellent results. With the proliferation of camcorders and desktop non-linear editing, one can now learn filmmaking more easily and rapidly and also at low cost. Many Indian filmmakers today have their own editorial console and though the initial investment may be high, the returns are worth it, in terms of time, money, quality of the final product and the possibility of functioning without interference of any kind.
Social media – a ‘democratic movement’

The ongoing battle of wits between Internet users and various Internet service providers, compounded by the Central Government’s non-committal pronouncements, have left netizens a confused lot. Most affected are those who use the Internet largely to access social media formats such as Twitter, Facebook, MySpace, Netflix and Hulu, says Som Nath Sapru

Technology is changing so rapidly that many industries, including corporations and news media, can barely keep pace. In the traditional world, newspapers, corporations, government agencies and other types of organisations merely had to give out information, and people would consume it by reading or looking at it. But this seemingly tried-and-tested method has started to change — simply because the information available is not enough for today’s public. Audiences today like to choose what they read and many believe they should be able to contribute content and opinions, too.

This remarkable shift has already turned into a sort of revolution — but will not culminate in the demise of journalism in any form, be it print or electronic media. Rather, let us describe it as the birth of a democratic movement that emphasises some key factors of journalism — transparency, honesty, and giving a voice to the person who doesn’t have one. Many traditional and non-traditional media outlets report and comment on how the Internet and social media have begun to seriously affect newspapers and news organisations and how they operate. Undoubtedly, newspapers currently face a challenge – of making news consumable for readers. And social networking sites like Twitter and Facebook have begun to spur a change in news organisations, for better or worse.

The social media ‘revolution’ will continue to change journalism and news organisations. To understand social media and its effects, one has to understand the news gathering methods and methodology of reporting of various newspapers and news organisations, the existing working norms and state of traditional media, the definitions and background information on what social media and social journalism are, and the social media tools professionals use and why they choose them. What will be the future of print media, which may evolve as an offshoot of social media? How will newspapers and news organisations be influenced by social media in the long run?

Such questions have no clear-cut answers but can nevertheless be diligently explored. Has public opinion on the mainstream media helped spawn and accelerate the birth of the social media revolution? The answers point to three areas within journalism that social media has significantly touched: the public’s trust of news media in relation to social media; the relationship between local news organisations and social media; and how news is and will be covered using social media tools.

Let us understand the relationship between journalism (print-media or electronic-media) and social media. The approach to dissemination of news is undergoing a sea change, as the consumer is demanding accurate details of any event as he watches live telecasts of happenings. Newspapers and news organisations have to understand how audiences consume their news and what they think about the news presentation business as it stands. It is universally understood that the professionals involved in newspapers and news organisations relating to both print and electronic media have benefited by interactive social media. Besides, it has also provided a platform for individuals to speak to the world. Social media has empowered individuals and has forced the idea of news media to morph.

Content creators must learn how to leverage the power of social media — develop audiences, build trust relationships and resonate with the audience. They need to be knowledgeable about social media tools and technologies. Social media practitioners are basically PR and communication professionals, journalists and educators who are interested in interacting with government spokespersons, senior bureaucrats, political appointees, ministers, etc.

Now the million dollar question is, will social media thrive in India in the absence of independent Internet facilitation and in the face of the Centre’s mysterious silence on the issue, because without tools and applications like Twitter, Netflix, Hulu and Facebook or the search engine Google, social media as we know it simply would not exist. Many professionals have joined netizens to demand net neutrality, which is about ensuring
that Internet Service Providers (ISPs) don’t end up harming universal access to Internet. Fettering the Internet would simply kill the progress and innovations in social media.

Facebook, Twitter and WhatsApp are becoming more important than ever, and part of their popularity stems from the ability to easily create one’s own apps. The public and journalists alike have found many uses for Twitter and WhatsApp. Today, the news breaks first on Twitter really. Newspapers will no doubt change their presentation style and perhaps format too – tabloid-size publications with minimum daily reporting and a stress on social reporting and detailed human interest stories, rather than political and analytical stories could become the preferred mode. But it may take time, leaving more dependence on social media-released stories. We are already seeing journalism becoming more digitised and mobile-dependent. Mobile phones are likely to become the primary networking ‘hub’.

Then there is also the aspect of a blog, for example, drawing visitors and enticing them to stay a while. The comments feature offers such visitors (or to any online site for that matter) a platform as well as incentive to respond to stories and communicate with writers. The result is a robust community of readers and contributors.

Newspapers and news agencies cannot offer this sort of interaction.

(The writer has a master’s degree in Print Technology & Management. He served 33 years with the United States Information Service at the American Embassy in New Delhi as chief of Publications. He is now with Pramod Engineering, part of the Delhi Press Group, as general manager.)
Internet opens up a whole new world for a tribe

The Internet has revolutionised the lives of young Gaddis, a semi-nomadic tribe living in the remote areas of Himachal Pradesh. It has inspired in them a desire to be part of the world order. However, their aspirations are limited by infrastructure hurdles, according to a recent study, which M. Rabindranath and Sujay Kapil explain.

The 21st Century has witnessed the seamless integration of technology into the daily life of an average Indian. The policy of liberalisation and globalisation which began in the early 1990s led to a technology boom in India. The intersection of technology and tradition is experienced in different ways in different geo-political and socio-economic conditions. A lot of research has been done on the impact of digital technology on youth in the West. But Western researchers often tend to ignore the digital youth cultures of the developing countries.

Against this background, an attempt was made to explore the understanding of Indian youth, especially those belonging to the Scheduled Tribes, of new media technologies. To determine the nature and impact of digital culture among youth in remote and socially backward areas, the Gaddis, a scheduled tribe found in the northern State of Himachal Pradesh, was chosen. According to Census 2011, Himachal has a population of 6864602 with a sex ratio of 972 females per 1000 males. Tribal population is 392126, out of which 178130 are Gaddis. Often termed gypsies, Gaddis are a nomadic tribe living in the higher pastures along with their flocks of sheep and goats.

Gaddis are found mostly in Bharmour of Chamba District. They reside in an area between the Dhauladhar and Pir Panjal ranges. Their villages mostly lie 7000 to 10000 feet above sea level. They used to spend six months wandering in search of fodder for their cattle and six months in their villages, sowing and harvesting their crops. But now, many have left their traditional occupations and are living settled lives in places such as Palampur, Dharamshala and Baijanth.

The word Gaddi resembles the Sanskrit word gaadar meaning goat. Gaddis believe that shepherding is their dharma, a duty entrusted to them by none other than Lord Shiva. They take pride in it, and consider their flocks a symbol of prestige, or dhan (wealth).

Bharmour is the traditional hilly home of the Gaddis. Nestling between River Ravi and the Chenab Valley, the beautiful town is situated at an altitude of around 7000 feet. There are numerous stunning temples in Bharmour which date back to the 10th Century AD. Most of the temples are dedicated to Lord Shiva. Gaddis speak Bharmouri or Gadi and their script, tankari, is a dying one, known only to a few old people.

Interviews were conducted in Vidyanagar, Dharamshala and Chamba. Participants were aged...
between 18 and 30 years. Most were college students while some were school dropouts. Some were shepherds while others came from shepherd families. By closely examining the responses obtained from the focus group interviews and through the application of grounded theory, three major factors that shape the digital culture of young Gaddis were identified – play, work and aspirations; power and control; and lack of infrastructure.

The common response across all the three focus groups was that new media (computer and Internet) were associated with work and information. However, they all agreed that they played games on their computers and mobile phones at some point of time. Even the youth who still practice a nomadic lifestyle play games on their mobile phones. Students use the Internet as a tool to help in their studies and be aware of global trends.

Digital technologies give power to youth, but parental and societal norms do have an influence on their use of technology. They displayed a fear of being victims of online fraud, pornography and health hazards. The study showed that Gaddi youth struck a fine balance between obedience to and defiance of parents and society. They avoided doing things that were against parental decrees when it came to the use of new media technologies.

The study demonstrated that the advent of the Internet stimulated in the tribal youth of Bharmour a desire to be a part of the global network. But their attempts were marred by infrastructural limitations. Signal fluctuations made access to technology difficult. The weather often played spoilsport too, with electricity remaining off for days together due to problems caused by rain and other forces of nature.
Can we truly censor reality?

The other day, Fatima Siddiqui’s colleague was furiously censuring the kind of lyrics being written today. The reason for the outbreak was her five-year-old son whom she caught singing a certain song about getting drunk and partying the night away. She then kept on talking about how she was worried about the impact such songs were having on today’s generation and exclaimed that she would prefer if there was a censor board for music. This immediately got Fatima wondering… should music lyrics be restricted? Or should we give the artist some space to express himself?

Where words fail, music speaks. - Hans Christian Andersen

Music is an integral part of our life, especially in India. Willingly or unwillingly, music touches our ears while we are travelling in a cab, passing a shop, changing channels, watching a movie or simply listening to the radio. So why, then, anyone would want to censor something that touches everyone everyday? Let’s consider the arguments in favour of music censorship, beginning with the obvious ones – explicit narration about drugs, sex and violence in songs becoming common which each passing day, which in turn is making the younger generation think that it is cool to try out these things for themselves. It is necessary, to realise that the freedom of speech and expression does not justify the glorification of violence, and to understand that a seemingly innocent remark about, say a community or a woman, may in fact be racist or sexist.

But, can we ever truly censor reality? How far is it possible to edit and remove things which we
don’t like? Can we really exist in a world where everything is to our liking? Personally, I don’t believe in censorship because the world, I think, is not always black and white. It has multiple shades of grey in between and there is no way for us to shield ourselves from the things we don’t like. Isn’t that what life is all about...learning to differentiate between the right and wrong? Figuring out what is good and what’s not?

As for young minds getting violated by music, I believe there are worse things in the world. Even if you ban all the explicit content, there is no way you can stop your child from learning the same at school and college (unless you home-school your children and don’t let them get out of the house). In situations like these, you can always talk to your child and make them understand the importance of speaking politely and point out how using such words is offensive. Parental guidance and restriction is necessary in every walk of life, even music.

I don’t use swear words at home while conversing or addressing someone but I know quite a few of them. How? No, my parents did not teach me those. I heard them while using public transport. The taxi drivers use them explicitly but I did not pick them up. So, you always have a choice. You are taught from the beginning about what’s right and what’s not, then why not use the wisdom while listening to songs. If you don’t like a certain song, pick up the remote and change the channel.

Music, like poetry and all other forms of art, is a spontaneous expression of feelings. It is, I believe, wrong to create an impression of giving the freedom of speech and limiting an individual’s need of expression at the same time. Censorship can lead to politicising of art and it stands opposed to everything that our leaders ever fought for. I do understand the need for creating a better society by improving our socio-cultural interactions but there are other ways to achieve it. Instead of simply banning a song, it would be better if we were to provide ratings or certificates explaining the content of the song. Music is a way to express your innermost feelings, like love and anger. Is it really possible for someone to write about anger without using an angry word here or there? Why write a song about anger, you ask? Because, as Vidot Hugo said: “Music expresses that which can not be said and on which it is impossible to be silent.”

(A research scholar of Literature in English at the University of Lucknow, an avid reader, observer and introspector, the writer says she is compelled to put words on paper when something truly moves her.)

Support for independent media

Denmark has announced the allocation of 14 million Danish Kroner (1.9 million Euros) to launch an initiative to be carried out together with the World Association of Newspapers and News Publishers (WAN-IFRA) to support the development of free and independent media in developing countries and fragile states. The allocation, announced on 30th April in connection with the Global Media Freedom Conference in Copenhagen, is dedicated to initiatives that focus on capacity development of independent media, including the improvement of security for journalists.

"It is very concerning that the freedom of the press is under pressure in many parts of the world. A free and critical press is crucial to give insight into the decisions of those in power and thereby to hold them responsible. In the context of development, press freedom is a prerequisite to encourage democracy and good governance," said Mogen Jensen, the Danish minister for Trade and Development Cooperation. More than 100 editors and journalists from all over the world were gathered in Copenhagen for the Global Media Freedom Conference, organised by the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs and WAN-IFRA.

With the new allocation, WAN-IFRA will provide support and training to more than 60 media houses from 12 countries in Africa, West Asia, Asia and Latin America. Among other things, the project will focus on digital development, professional training for women editors and executives, as well as better legislative protection of media. "Denmark is known for its commitment to freedom of the press as an essential condition of good governance, democracy and development, and this new partnership will deeply enhance media development and press freedom initiatives where they are most needed," said Larry Kilman, secretary-general of WAN-IFRA. "This is support on a large scale that will help us strengthen independent news media around the world."

Denmark also announced it would make an allocation to International Media Support, in cooperation with global associations like the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) and the European Federation of Journalists (EFJ), to create a global forum for development and exchange of best practices in relation to the security and protection of journalists.
Sadly, science gets little focus in the media these days

Very little attention is being paid by the media to Science and activities of scientific institutions, feels J.V. Vil‘anilam.

This is a period in India’s history where a great deal of hope is pinned on the use of mass communication for strengthening the country’s development as a front-runner among the comity of nations. India has made a lot of progress in various fields, particularly in physical and natural sciences, although much is left to be desired in the field of social sciences. Achievements in space, atomic science, oceanography and contributions to the natural sciences arena are indeed matters of great pride and satisfaction to the country. But how much of attention does the mass media -- newspapers, magazines and other print media and electronic media such as radio, television and film and the various new media such as the Internet and the e-mail -- devote to

a. Science -- its aims and achievements and its role in national development
b. Scientists and their contributions towards the improvement of

"You know it’s a bad sign when sun signs get more coverage than actual science!"
the environment and the life of the people as a whole

c. The promotion of scientific temper among the people

d. The removal of ignorance and superstitions, particularly among people in rural areas

e. Agriculture and its improvement throughout the nation

f. Provision of amenities essential for the huge number of people who are migrating and moving around in rural and urban areas

g. Projects for enhancing the availability of drinking water, etc.

What do the media highlight in matters relating to issues connected to the life of the ordinary people and the general improvement of the nation? Mass media has the following functions according to theorists and experts, not only of India but of the world:

1. To bring to the attention of the people the day’s news and other vital information

2. To enable people to understand the significance of the events reported, through suitable explanatory write-ups and editorials

3. To educate the readers, viewers and listeners about the nation’s or the region’s cultural heritage, norms and socialisation

4. To entertain through picture, cartoons, witty sayings and funny stories

5. To mobilise, motivate and create a national or regional cohesion among the people for worthy causes

Social scientists should collaborate with interested media users to ascertain whether these and other goals are met over a period in a sustained manner. Such studies will reveal whether what the media considers vital is really vital to the people. The study of science as reported in the media can look at the following aspects:

1. The proportion of science-related matter that appears in various media during a particular period – say, a week, month or year – in comparison with other news

2. The scientific topics that get media attention

3. What is said, and the quality of the information

4. The media’s goals in reporting science

5. How much of what is reported is factual and how much is speculation

6. The scientists’ own views about science reporting

Studies on science communication are few and far between. My analysis on various occasions - in 1973, 1979, 1986 and 2007 - of newspapers, most of them circulated in Kerala, plus a few national English dailies such as The Hindu, the Indian Express, the New Indian Express, Times of India, Hindustan Times and The Statesman and four international newspapers - The NewYork Times, Los Angeles Times Washington Post and Atlanta Constitution – revealed that there is very little attention being paid, especially in Kerala, to science or activities of scientific institutions.

There is a great need for the scientific community and communicators and media students to analyse the contents of various arms of the media. The electronic media, particularly television, has tremendous potential for organising science programmes in a very effective manner through audiovisual presentations, discussions by scientists and science communicators and presentations by scientific experts from the state, the nation and the world.

A properly planned scientific study of the audiovisual media’s role will help popularise science and the scientific spirit among the people. A national media content study organised with the help of the Department of Science and Technology is the need of the hour.

(The writer was vice-chancellor, University of Kerala, 1992-1996, and earlier headed its Department of Communication & Journalism.)

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**Youtube launches Newswire**

Google-owned Youtube has launched Newswire in partnership with social news group, Storyful. It has been launched with an aim to provide a curated feed of the most newsworthy eyewitness videos of the day. With Newswire, Youtube says it hopes to provide journalists with an invaluable resource to discover news video around major events, and to highlight eyewitness video that offers new perspectives on important news stories. The Newswire will feature global and regional feeds that surface the most relevant videos in different parts of the world.

Google has also announced two other projects alongside to improve online news verification – The First Draft Coalition and The Witness Media Lab. The First Draft Coalition will consist of experts from Eyewitness Media Hub, Storyful, Bellingcat, First Look Media’s Reported.ly, Meedan, Emergent, SAM Desk, and Verification Junkie. It will develop and program a new site for verification and ethics training, tools, research and case studies around the biggest news stories of the moment and focused on documenting human rights issues with citizen video.

The Witness Media Lab on the other hand, in collaboration with innovators in the technology, advocacy and journalism fields - will produce a series of in-depth projects that focus on human rights struggles as seen from the perspective of those who live, witness, and experience them.

(Courtesy: exchange4media.com)
Freedom concerns to the fore

The growing worldwide concern over increased threats to the functioning of a free and independent press found expression at the Global Media Freedoms Conference 2015 held in Copenhagen on April 29 and 30, says Shastri Ramachandaran.

Hosted by Denmark’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs in partnership with the World Association of Newspapers and News Publishers (WAN-IFRA), the two-day Global Media Freedoms Conference (GFMC) 2015 focused on key issues such as: threats to and the future of independent journalism; securing a future for news in the face of technological, commercial and security challenges; the critical role of media in the development of societies; and, how to deal with risks to independent journalism and journalists.

In his welcome remarks to the 100-plus journalists attending the GMFC, Danish minister of Trade and Development Mogens Jensen expressed the hope that the conference would find new ways of defending the working conditions of journalists and media by providing journalists a global forum for sharing experiences.

Eric Chinje, chief executive of the Nairobi-based African Media Initiative set the tone for intensive, wide-ranging deliberations on the Environment for Journalism, Securing a Future for News, Communicating with a Global Audience and Media & Public Trust. In his keynote address on 'Media freedom and the importance of a free press in the development of society', Chinje made a concise and forceful presentation on the African experience, but with “lessons that are universal and relevant to all societies that look to media to help make sense and master the changing realities of daily existence”.

After a masterly summary of the prevalent debate in Africa on the media’s role and responsibilities, Chinje touched on the strategies, initiatives and collective actions taken to ensure respect for ethics, strengthen technological adaptation, put media at the centre of national and regional development and agree on media’s role in governance. The last two, he said, have “sparked a defining debate on the role of media in Africa today”.

Chinje spelled out a seven-point agenda on what should be done to engage and implicate the media to make Africa’s economic emergence sustainable and achieve lasting peace and social cohesion. The agenda identifies the greatest, self-induced, challenges to media freedom: putting out content that has little regard for what audiences and readers want; disregarding the ethics of the profession; not maintaining high professional standards; and not paying adequate attention to the business dimension of the news business. He spoke of a continent-wide consensus on these points, which “constitute the elements of a programme of assistance to media in Africa as well as the common platform for action by the continent’s media industry actors”. Media leaders from Africa are already acting on the agenda, Chinje added. “They are finally telling Africa’s story, from an African perspective, to the African and the world”.

Another insightful presentation on developing countries, and of greater relevance to South Asia, was by Shirazuddin Siddiqi, BBC Media Action Country director for Afghanistan. In his paper on the role of media (in the development of society) in developing and fragile states, Siddiqi points out that Afghanistan is not only a fragile state but also has a fractured society. His focus is on how investment in media in fragile states falls short of ensuring plurality in social dialogue, promoting tolerance, enabling dialogue across fracture lines for people to negotiate differences and agree on principles towards building a shared culture and identity.

Talking of his experience in running ‘pen Jirga, Afghan’s national conversation multi-media programme, Siddiqi says that ordinary people from across sections are willing to embrace dialogue and debate to negotiate differences and debate issues. What is missing is the institutional resolve and resources to bring people together and create conditions to make them accommodate differences within a shared national identity.

Visit the website of the Press Institute of India

www.pressinstitute.in
Bangladesh war widows have reason to smile

The death sentence carried out on Muhammad Kamaruzzaman, a journalist-turned-Islamist politician found guilty of inhuman crimes during the Bangladesh Liberation War, brought some cheer to the hearts of the many women who were left widowed by actions carried out under his initiative. Nava Thakuria explains

“Finally justice is done. The butcher is hanged.” said Begum Bewa, a widow in the Sohagpur locality of north Bangladesh. She was reacting to television news reports that Muhammad Kamaruzzaman had been hanged. The sexagenarian was only one of the women who were cheered by the news of Kamaruzzaman’s execution on April 11, 2015 in Dhaka’s Central Jail for war crimes he had committed in July 1971 during the Bangladesh Liberation War.

Kamaruzzaman, a journalist-turned-Islamist political leader, had turned Sohagpur Village into a bidhaba palli (village of widows), when he led the Pakistan Army-backed Al-Badr militia forces to kill 164 unarmed villagers and rape many women. History records that Al-Badr was involved in genocide, killing, rape, looting and arson in other places too, including Greater Mymensingh, Jamalpur, Netrakona, Kishoreganj, Tangail and Sherpur.

The independent nation of Bangladesh was born on December 16, 1971 following the war with what was then known as West Pakistan. Kamaruzzaman was convicted and sentenced to death by a special international crimes tribunal in May 2013 for genocide, rape and arson he committed four decades ago against the liberation forces. The order was upheld by the country’s apex court in November last year. On April 6 last, the Supreme Court of Bangladesh rejected his final plea to revise the death sentence. He chose not to avail of the option of seeking a presidential pardon. Kamaruzzaman was buried the day after his execution in his ancestral village in Sherpur.

In 1971, Kamaruzzaman was a higher secondary level student and had links with the Islamic Students Organisation. He was also an organiser of the Pakistani army-sponsored Al-Badr group which worked against the Bangladesh liberation movement. Later, he took on the leadership of Jamaat-e-Islami Party, which supports reunification of Bangladesh with Pakistan and expulsion of minorities from the Muslim-dominated South Asian country.

A master’s degree holder in Journalism from Dhaka University, Kamaruzzaman kept up his career in Journalism while continuing to maintain ties with Bangladesh’s Jamaat-e-Islami party. He was at one time editor of the Bengali weekly Sonar Bangla (Golden Bangladesh) and Jamaat’s daily Sangram (Movement). His membership of the Bangladesh National Press Club was valid till 2013.

Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina set up the War Crimes Tribunal in 2010 amidst opposition from various quarters, including supporters of Jamaat-e-Islami, an erstwhile ally of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (led by Begum Khaleda Zia). They even alleged that the present Awami League-led government was seeking to gain political mileage with the war crimes trials. Besides Jamaat leaders, various international human rights groups criticised Kamaruzzaman’s execution, terming the trials as flawed (not in keeping with international standards). However, most Bangladeshi civil society groups and youths’ forums appreciated the step, as Kamaruzzaman had never shown repentance for his criminal acts.

In an editorial, The Daily Observer, a popular English daily newspaper from Dhaka, said: “We as a nation have made it clear to the outside world, to international organisations and individual governments, that it is not retribution we are pursuing but a simple call of moral conscience and the law. Those who have questioned and continue to question the fairness of the trial must take a look again at the entire process before rushing to judgment”.

The villagers of Sohagpur, especially its 32 war widows, now have a reason to smile. Many more in other Bangladeshi villages are waiting for the final punishment to be meted out to 12 other criminals who have been convicted by the Bangladesh War Crimes Tribunal.

(The writer is a senior journalist based in Assam. He is the secretary of the Guwahati Press Club.)
Melodies and memories from the Northeast

The literary tradition of India’s Northeast is still largely an unknown entity to the majority of readers. Thanks to the Writers Workshop in Kolkata, recent publications, beautifully bound to create an art-house production effect, open a window to a hitherto largely unknown world of words thriving in the hills and plains of the picturesque region. Ranjita Biswas has the story.

In the pan-Indian scenario of literature, works from the Northeast seldom get enough attention. Of late, few writers from Assam writing in English have made a mark with their novels getting published by well-known houses. Another introduction to the literature of the region for the readers has been through translations. Even here, compared to say, Bengali, the number of translations, or ‘trans-creations’ if you like, whether from Assamese or other local languages, are not very many. On the whole, the literary tradition of the region is still largely an unknown entity to the majority of readers.

Hence, it is laudatory that an old institution such as the Writers Workshop in Kolkata continues to support and offer an outlet to contemporary poets and writers of the Northeast Region. Books like River Poems by Mamang Dai of Arunachal Pradesh, Folklore from Mizoram by Margaret L. Pachauaa, poetry books Parallel Lines by Indrani Laskar and Winding Ways by Tapati Baruah Kashyap of Assam, Sister & Other Poems by Saratchand Thiyam of Manipur are some of the recent publications. Beautifully bound to create an art-house production effect, the books help the reader to explore a hitherto largely unknown world of words thriving in the hills and plains of picturesque Northeast.

“Why did we think it was trivial / that it would rain every summer / that nights would be still with sleep / and that the green fern would uncurl ceaselessly by the roadside,” writes Mamong Dai in her poem Remembrance in the collection, almost a requiem to nature when we witness consequences of taking things as trivial or for granted the bountifulness of nature. Dai is a powerful writer, recipient of the state’s Verrier Elwin Award for her book Arunachal Pradesh - The Hidden Land. Her poetry has a lyrical quality that resonates in sync with the sights and sounds of the land she belongs to.

Tapati B. Kashyap’s Winding Ways goes to Arunachal too, as a tribute to her departed father who had chosen to work as a doctor in the region when it was still known as NEFA. Commuting was a challenge in a region with almost no roads, and ropeways were common means of transport. Tracing her father’s footsteps she writes in Winding Ways to Walang: “Far away in that corner / In what was then called North East Frontier Agency…/ Six shops and a PCO, oh, really? / Then what was it like / Fifty years back?”

Indrani Laskar’s Parallel Lines is not on any particular theme but shows a rare sensitivity to her surroundings. Take for example, a poem built around the Ambubashi (fertility) festival at Assam’s famous Shakti Temple, Kamakhya: “From the temple come the chants for the Mother / Riding the elfin sounds of cymbals / Brooding, rising and intense, the sounds / Sautéed with the smell of the decaying city / And of the crusty earth”… and “Dreams filter in, whisper of desires / Drenched in faith… Hold hands.” The Melody of the Unknown Passersby echoes many a memory of lost years and a longing for days gone by that find kindred souls: “What do you sing of? / Do you lament over the rumbling of yesteryears / When freedom carried no price and violence was stillborn / Do you recall those bygone days?”

Saratchand Thiyam, a Sahitya Akademi Award winning poet, is from Manipur, home of talented writers, dramatists, sportspersons; at the same time, the state has witnessed conflicts and insurgency for a long time. The background to many of Thiyam’s poems, ably translated, however, are not confined to his immediate surrounding but go beyond. Hiroshima, Nagasaki come in, as does Athens of old (“In your lap, Athens / Where democracy’s seed was sown / I know that remembrance never fades”), as Pokhran Kargil Gaisal - in one of the poems. In Sister, you hear the voice of a society barricaded by fear and uncertainty, “Sister, I won’t allow you to go / Every road is reverberating / With the deafening utterance of boots.”

Apart from poetry in this bouquet of Northeast literature, is Folklore from Mizoram. Today, the...
Golden Pen of Freedom awarded to journalists killed in line of duty

The Golden Pen of Freedom, the annual press freedom award of the World Association of Newspapers and News Publishers (WAN-IFRA), has been dedicated in 2015 to all Journalists Killed in the Line of Duty. “Since 1992, more than 1100 journalists have been killed just because they brought the truth to light or manifested their points of view,” said World Editors Forum President, Marcelo Rech, in dedicating the award during the opening ceremony of the 67th World News Media Congress, 22nd World Editors Forum and 25th World Advertising Forum in Washington DC.

“The tragedy of this massacre is amplified by a staggering statistic: in nine out of 10 murders of journalists, the authors remain unpunished. Ultimately, this is the fuel that feeds the slaughter: impunity encourages new crimes, tarnishes the whole of society with blood, and denies the right every citizen has to a free press,” Rech said to an audience of more than 900 publishers, chief editors and other senior newspaper executives from around the world. WAN-IFRA has presented the Golden Pen of Freedom since 1961 to recognise the outstanding action, in writing or deed, of an individual, group or institution in the cause of press freedom.

An exceptional award made to honour fallen colleagues and focus the international spotlight on the issue of safety and impunity for journalists worldwide, the dedication of the 2015 Golden Pen of Freedom to Journalists Killed in the Line of Duty aims to send a powerful message to the perpetrators of crimes against the media, as well as to legislators and those with the power to enact better laws and enforce stronger protections for news-gatherers around the world.

Statistics from New York based Committee to Protect Journalists show that 87 per cent (approximately 980) of those who have died since 1992 were local journalists. Overlaid with the deadliest countries for journalists during the same period - among them Iraq (166 deaths since 1992), Syria (80), Somalia (56), Pakistan (56) and Mexico (32) - the message is clear: local journalists, likely less well trained, financed, and supported, are covering beats foreign journalists can either no longer access, or to which their news companies are no longer willing to send them. The moral responsibility to better protect colleagues, wherever they may be, is indisputable.

Conflict and war still account for a large proportion of the total number of recorded deaths. Where identifying as ‘Press’ might once have provided an element of protection, in the years since records began the dangers of doing so have become significant. Overall, 426 journalists have died covering war while an estimated 224 have lost their lives in combat or crossfire situations. A further 146 journalists were killed on dangerous assignments.

Of particular note for WAN-IFRA and its community, 51 per cent of all deaths recorded since 1992 have involved journalists working in print media. “There is no freedom without freedom of expression. And there is no freedom of expression without protection and safety for the practice of journalism,” said Rech. “That is why we are here today, to celebrate freedom, and to reaffirm our commitment to all those killed in the line of duty that we will not falter, we will not let their sacrifice be in vain. Our answer will be now and always, to strive for the highest ideals of journalism: to denounce all forms of injustice and thus to contribute to a more peaceful and to a free world.”

(The writer is a Kolkata-based journalist. She is also a short story and children’s fiction writer and prize-winning translator of fiction. She has six published books.)
A confused effort at portraying dark realities

Setting out to portray powerful issues like female infanticide and exploitation of women, feature film Kajariya is pretentious and unconvincing at many levels, says Shoma A. Chatterji. The film, she adds, reflects a tendency among many upcoming directors who want to piggy-back on the ever-popular issue of women’s rights to make pretentious and unconvincing films likely to be screened at international film festivals and qualify for an award or two.

Kajariya is a feature film that purportedly focuses on several powerful issues involving the exploitation and abuse of Indian women. It revolves around Kajariya, a fictitious child-bride. The film, directed by Madhureeta Anand, exposes several layers of abuse of women and juxtaposes the problems faced by a young urban journalist with the exploitation of Kajariya, seeking to demonstrate that when it comes down to the bone there is no difference between the city girl and the village woman, though abuse and exploitation might take different forms.

However, in reality, Kajariya, which premiered at the Dubai International Film Festival at the Indian side-bar in December 2013 and has been winning laurels at international film festivals ever since, falls short of expectations. According to Anand, “Kajariya is primarily a film about the force of circumstances and how they shape choices.” The film depicts how the child bride evolves into a woman manipulated by a strong male group to act as the incarnation of the avenging Goddess Kali.

However, the portrayal does not evoke audience sympathy for Kajariya. There is a blood-curdling scene showing a dug-up field, exposing dozens of skeletons of infant girls killed over the years, most of them by Kajariya. Further, her dialogue is flush with cuss words, her sexual encounters with the man who makes her do his bidding and turns her into a drug addict blur the line between rape and consensual sex and her proxy-motherhood via a little girl who follows her around everywhere is unconvincing.

Says Anand: “Kajariya is uneducated and lives in an Indian village. Meera is educated and lives in the city. She is a global citizen with all the pretences of freedom and emancipation. Kajariya has, over the years, been forced to confront the fact that she and those of her sex are better off dead. Meera, like all the other women in India, feels this hate at a subtle, indefinable level. Her body language, her responses, her viewpoint respond to this but consciously she is does not recognise it. Veiling her lack of confidence and nervousness with brash competitiveness, she ventures into the village and runs smack into Kajariya’s years of seething anger. As these opposing forces collide, something new is born.”

However, one does not see anything ‘new’ being born because the film lacks focus. It plays around with many issues, images and metaphors that fail to blend into a coherent logical statement about the central purpose. The reference to Goddess Kali is both geographically inappropriate because Kali is much more popular in Eastern India than in the north, where the film is set, and also visually unconvincing. The idol of Kali is a far cry from the familiar image of the dark-hued woman, with loose hair flying around her, frozen at the point where she has inadvertently stepped on the supine body of her husband, Lord.
Shiva, her tongue sticking out in embarrassment, red with the blood she has sucked from the bodies of the *asuras* (demons) whose heads hang in a garland around her neck. On the other hand, the Kali in Kajariya is almost beautiful, golden yellow in colour, with a beauteous smile on her face.

Another flaw in the film is the gross miscasting. Meenu Hooda as Kajariya unwittingly contributes to the pretentiousness of the film, which is clearly meant for an international film festival audience that knows nothing of Indian practices and is likely to be swayed emotionally by the conflicts depicted. Hooda looks urban and educated despite the make-up. She looks far older than her film character. Apart from the invectives and a bit of local dialect thrown in, her voice is cultured and sophisticated. If the title character is unconvincing from beginning to end, how can the film itself be convincing?

The film opens on a crazed crowd gathered on a field where Kajariya, dressed as the bloodthirsty Goddess Kali, tottering under the strong influence of drugs, is engaged in a fake religious ceremony of ‘blessing’ new born babies. If it is a male baby, she hands it back to the parents. If it is a girl, she kills it with her own hands. The implication is that her constant sexual, social, emotional and physical exploitation has conditioned her to become a conscious perpetrator of female infanticide and, after a point of time, she does not feel guilty and even begins to believe in the ‘power’ she does not actually have and never did.

At the other end of this spectrum of violence against women, overt and covert, stands Meera, a rookie television journalist based in Delhi, determined to do an in-depth investigative story on Kajariya and female infanticide. She has a live-in-relationship with her boyfriend who treats her like any masochistic man treats his wife, so the so-called liberation of the ‘live-in’ relationship is merely a pretence she likes to believe in. Her boss at the magazine she works for is looking for sensational bytes and not for an ‘investigative’ story that would expose unpleasant truths about India.

Riddhima Sood as Meera is slightly better in terms of appearance but not in terms of her performance. She looks unsure of her character. Most of the cast has been drawn from alumni of the National School of Drama. The screenplay is crowded with so many characters that things are just confusing. Another bane is the inordinate length of the film – it takes up two hours of viewing time. Kajariya fails either to raise pertinent questions or provide solutions – complex or simple.

Sadly, the film reflects a tendency among many upcoming and talented directors who want to piggy-back on the ever-popular issue of women’s rights to make highly pretentious and unconvincing films likely to be screened at international film festivals and qualify for an award or two.
The trauma displacement can bring

A film-screening as part of the Aman ki Asha movement brought home to the audience the fact that war isn’t a solution to problems, it is a problem in itself, and leaves behind residual issues that wreak havoc on the psyche of innocent people.

The India International Centre (IIC) New Delhi was recently the venue of an unusual film screening, attended by a cross-section of people ranging from intellectuals to displaced slum dwellers. A Walnut Tree, made by Pakistani documentary film-maker Ammar Azis, in association with Indian producer Rahul Roy, was an initiative of Aman ki Asha, a movement to rejuvenate Indo-Pak relations. Saba Dewan, noted film maker, Maya Krishna Rao, eminent theatre personality, and Arundhati Roy, well-known author, were among the celebrities who attended the screening, which was followed by an interactive session with the film’s director and producer.

A Walnut Tree chronicles the trauma, the pain and the alienation experienced by ordinary people displaced in the war between the Taliban and Pakistani militants. The protagonist, Baba, an aged school teacher, finds it impossible to adjust to the conditions at the camp despite living there for four years, and yearns for the life he has left behind in his homeland. Though his daughter-in-law tries to make him understand that there is nothing in his native village other than ruins and graves, Baba makes up his mind to return there, and leaves the camp at dawn one day.

The film touched a chord with the audience, who recalled a similar character, Dadi Ma, in the Indian film Garam Hawa. It brought home to them the fact that war cannot solve problems, it is itself a problem. And the displacement it brings with it ruins the lives, emotions and prosperity of people, besides causing depression and other psychological ailments.

Life in a camp for people displaced for any reason, including so-called developmental works, is fraught with fear, agony and alienation. This was revealed at the mixed media story-telling workshop conducted at Savda Ghevra, Delhi by Aseem Asha Usman Foundation in collaboration with the YMCA. Youngsters like Lakshmi and Priyanka, who were forced out of their native areas to make way for the Metro project and resettled elsewhere, shared their experiences.

Lakshmi had to struggle immensely to complete her studies, as the relocation came when her final examinations were round the corner, and she had to travel long distances, starting at 4.30 am to get to the exam venue on time. As for Priyanka, she found that being strangers in the new place, no one was willing to draw them into the Diwali celebrations. “Though it was the festival of lights there was only darkness in our lives, there was no one with whom we could share our joys and sorrows,” she said with regret.

(Inputs for this article are from Mushtaq Ali.)
Very readable, has lessons for journalists

S.K. Rau is one of those editors they talk about, and in a good way. That is important at a time when journalism is subsumed under media, and newspapers that remain committed to journalism are not ‘market leaders’. Understandably then, the editor today, generally, is another person at his job, known for his pay, perquisites and power connections. Often, he is not a journalist in the conventional sense, has little use for ‘journalism’ and may be even deficient in the language of the newspaper he edits. This is the age of the ‘successful editor’.

In contrast, Rau belongs to the time of the ‘good editor’, when journalism was a mission. Editors were titans in the eyes of the government, the politicians, the public, the readers, the newspaper staff and, sometimes, even the newspaper owners. Gone are those days.

What were those days like? Rau, who was news editor of The Pioneer in Lucknow and editor of The Searchlight in Patna, tells it like it was. His pen portraits of the newsmakers, movers and shakers of his time, based on what would be ‘qualitative research’ now, are engaging socio-political narratives.

The sketches of the characters in the book, brought out by his family, acquaint us with the milieu in which they functioned as much as their strengths, weaknesses, peccadilloes, eccentricities, politics and personal pursuits. Rau’s ringside view is candid and scrupulous; and keeps a distance from the subjects he, evidently, knew well. Given his long and prolific career, which took him from Madras to Karachi to Lucknow and Patna, it could not have been easy to compile a selection of his writings and categorise them.

Rau’s profiles of governors and politicians provide rare insights into politics as Uttar Pradesh’s most flourishing industry, which ruins the state’s universities and hospitals but remains central to national affairs before and after 1947. The governors in focus are Sarojini Naidu, industrialist H.P. Mody, K.M. Munshi and V.V. Giri. Governors then were not hatchets or pawns of the party at the Centre. Despite their foibles and fetishes, they conducted themselves with grace, dignity and, perhaps, charm, too.

The five politicians -- Sampurnanand, C.B. Gupta, Chaudhary Charan Singh, Ram Manohar Lohia and Raj Narain -- who figure here were men whose influence extended beyond Uttar Pradesh. Nehru could not walk over his party’s chief ministers and often deferred to them against his own judgment. For all his visceral opposition to Nehru, Lohia was Nehru’s political find. Without targeting Nehru, Lohia may not have captured the attention he enjoyed. Many details about these players may be news to politicians and journalists even today.

Rau, unlike some of his more eminent peers, was reputedly conversant with reporting, writing, editing, proofreading, layout and production; and wrote flawless English with precision in readable prose. His mastery of facts and figures could also be rarely questioned.

Like some of the all-time greats of journalism -- Kanduri Iswara Dutt, Khasa Subba Rau, Pothan Joseph, Rama Rao, M.V. Kamath, S.S. Vasan, ‘Kalki’ R. Krishnamurthy, M.S.M. Sharma and K. Gopalaswami (first Indian editor of The Times of India) -- Rau, who had worked under some of them, was a gift to the profession from southern India. The exception he writes about is A.A. Hayles, the celebrated editor of The Mail of Madras, whose longevity as editor is unrivalled till date.
The editors, regardless of whether they aligned with the proprietor or the staff, were made of sterner stuff; far from the supine, corporate versions thriving in today’s media. To most of them, journalism was a mission. They knew their facts were good at the craft and not cowed down by money or political power. The newspaper owners had reasons to respect their editors.

Amidst the ‘period pieces’ in the book are to be found priceless gems, such as the one on K. Gopalaswami, the first Indian editor of The Times of India, conveniently forgotten by its owners and editors. But for US historian Edwin Hirschmann’s authentic account, brought out in 2008, of the newspaper’s founder and first editor (Robert Knight), Rau writes, “Knight, too, would have remained unknown”. In his review of Hirschmann’s book, Dileep Padgaonkar, a former ToI editor, is quoted as writing: “No history of the paper, authorised or otherwise, has ever been published.” Rau wonders, “what the various editors of the ToI, Padgaonkar also included, did on this score!”

Rau’s reflections are rich in history, journalism and politics -- and the values and ethics inherent to these disciplines. It is a must-read for journalists, students and teachers of Journalism, Political Science and History. Politicians and governors, too, may benefit from reading it. However, it could be a waste of time for today’s ‘market’ editors.

(Shastri Ramachandaran who has reviewed the book is a senior editor who shuttles between New Delhi and Chennai.)

A new dimension to Tagore’s versatility

The vast repertoire of Rabindranath Tagore’s work has perhaps covered every conceivable aspect of human emotion and nature. Even almost three quarters of a century after his death, his writings – essays, fiction, poetry, plays – are constantly being evaluated by scholars and lovers of literature. His popularity has not waned, his Rabindrasangeet songs are the lifeblood of Bengali cultural life. Widely translated into many languages, at home and abroad, he continues to astonish readers with the range of work.

Scholar Malashri Lal in her edited book, Tagore and the Feminine: A Journey in Translations, has taken up a tricky subject – Tagore’s projection of the ‘feminine’ in different genres of his writings. As she says in the introduction, “Rabindranath Tagore’s negotiations with the feminine were deeply problematic for himself and his times, and continue to perplex his readers today... one tends to return repeatedly to those teasing and unforgettable portrayals in his fiction and poetry, song and philosophy.”

Lal’s anthology also attempts to understand Tagore’s projection and “engagement with the feminine from the perspective of the contemporary reader” for whom the conceptual line between the masculine and feminine has become somewhat blurred in recent times. A women studies’ scholar, Lal looks at Tagore’s work through the prism of feminist theory and gender studies selecting older translations as well as new ones. She feels that without going into much theoretical discourse, Tagore “evolved his own principles for portraying the feminine in a
marvellous range of expressions” and it is left to the reader to interpret them with contemporary sensibilities.

To illustrate, Lal divides the translations into sections: Memoirs, letters, from *Gitanjali*, poems, songs, epics and mythology, short stories, etc.

In his memoir *Chhelebela* (childhood), Tagore’s keen eye observed that their aristocratic household “was divided into two mahals, or two quarters. Men occupied the outer quarters, while the inner precincts were the space meant for women – the feudal style of the nawabs was still in practice.” Though the Tagores belonged to Bengal’s Brahmo Samaj Movement, following a more liberal religious philosophy doing away with Hindu rituals and heavily influenced by Western ideas of austerity in religious practices, the division in traditional gender space was as prevalent and he noticed it early.

The poem section includes works in many nuances. The ‘women in love’ portrayal has poems such as *Last Spring* (*Shesh Basanta*): “Daytime has gone in vain / I didn’t heed so long / In a flash in the evening light / I see in your eyes my time is gone.” (translation by Charu Chowdhury) from the collection *Purabi* dedicated to Victoria Ocampo, his lifelong friend from Argentina. He also wrote on ‘women most ordinary’, etching those unnamed women for whom Tagore felt compassion. Like the Santhal girl (*Saontal meye*; translation by Lal): “With shame I wonder / At this woman who is labouring for my house / With her body, her soul, her simple energy / Her womanly strength which could be better used.”

Referring to Tagore’s empathy towards women in short stories and novels, Lal makes an important observation that, “Combining ideals of female empowerment from Western learning with his lineage of reformist Hindu tradition, Rabindranath created a hybrid feminism which found expression most cogently in his fiction.”

The story, *Streer Patra* (*Wife’s Letter*) questions the social institution of marriage portraying three women caught in an oppressive family system. That Mrinal, the *mejo bau*, at last finds courage to question and defy the injustice, is reflection of Tagore’s own protest against unfairness treatment of women in society.

Lal rightly points out that Tagore “…reworked the old mythologies, investing them with new meaning, daring to play with some iconic tales.” Figures like Kunti and Gandhari from the *Mahabharata* and the divine dancer Urvashi – “Not a mother, not a daughter, not a bride / You are, beautiful and fair / O Urbashi, denizen of heaven!”

Lal also talks about the androgynous imagination of Tagore to create nuances to characters such as *Chitraganda* in the eponymous dance drama. In the *Mahabharata*, Arjun while in exile meets Chitraganda, warrior princess of Manipur, and falls in love with her. But Tagore moulds her character with the duality of male and female, the warrior (*kuroopa*) and the pretty female (*shuroopa*) and Arjun the ‘archetypal male’, had to accept both to become a true companion of Chitraganda.

Even in his poems in *Gitanjali*, the feminine aspect as a spiritual force is evident Lal observes. To illustrate, she has chosen six poems in the best of *bhakti* style. “Mother it is no gain, thy bondage of finery, if it keep one shut off from the healthful dust of the earth…” or “She who ever had remained in the depth of my being, in the twilight of gleams and of glimpses; she who never opened her veils in the morning light, will be my last gift to thee, my God, folded in my final song.”

In the continuing celebration of Tagore’s 150th birth centenary, the ever green writer’s works are being reexamined by the creative fraternity in different ways. This book is constructed, as the author-translator says, “…his views on the feminine along with issues of gender and sexuality deserve notice” within the framework of Tagore’s cosmopolitanism and intellectualism and adds a new dimension to scholarly discourse on Tagore’s versatility.

*(Ranjita Biswas, the reviewer, is a senior journalist based in Kolkata.)*
A ‘fearless comrade’, who was always pro-people

Senior journalist and social activist Praful Bidwai passed away in Amsterdam (The Netherlands) recently. He was only 66. Vibhuti Patel, who was closely associated with him over the years, says his untimely death has created an irreparable loss for the cause of social justice, secular humanism, human development and human rights.

I got to know Praful in 1974 in Mumbai in a meeting organised by the New Left Group of young revolutionaries to which he belonged, when Comrade Ernest Mandel, a noted Marxist economist visited India for a lecture series. At the time, all of us known as ‘the New Left’ believed that revolution was round the corner. Praful was intellectually versatile and spoke on any political issue with passion, backed by data, logic and aggression.

Though he came from the science and technology stream, Praful was strongly grounded in political economy. During the 1970s, he was a star of New Left Group called Magova (English meaning of this Marathi word is Road Map) and had a convincing style of speaking.

While studying at the Indian Institute of Technology, Praful and his friends got influenced by international youth radicalisation shaped by anti-Vietnam war struggles, liberation struggles in Africa and Latin America, and the youth movement in Sri Lanka. During 1975-1977, most of us met in informal study circles as the Emergency did not allow public gatherings.

In the New Millennium, after the nuclear testing in Pokhran, Praful, along with Comrade Achin Vanayak, founded the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament and Peace. Both of them also co-authored a book, South Asia on a Short Fuse - Nuclear Politics and the Future of Global Disarmament, for which they were awarded the Sean McBride International Peace Prize by the International Peace Bureau, in recognition of their work challenging the development of nuclear weapons in South Asia.

In 1977, when I moved to Mumbai and got active in the women’s movement and trade union movement, Praful had become prolific in his journalistic career and was always, always politically correct and wrote and spoke with unassuming courage of conviction. He wrote on a wide range of strategically important issues – industrialisation, human development, vested interests of sectarian forces, caste and communal conflicts, human rights, turmoil in Northeast India, environmental issues, climate change, nuclear policy, national politics and the arrest of a woman smuggler. He was never sensational or titillating in his writings.

Praful had a thorough understanding of the grammar of Indian classical music and regularly attended concerts. During 1977-1979, Praful, Gayatri Singh and this writer, the three of us homeless activists, used to attend several cultural events in Bombay together.

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In 1982, when his mother was detected with cancer, Praful was shaken. I got to meet his sisters who came from Nagpur with his ailing mother and got to see the sensitive aspect of his personality.

In his mother’s memory, he made a contribution to Medico Friends Circle in which my husband, Dr Amar Jesani, was active.

In 1986, as a full-timer at the Women’s Centre I was entrusted with responsibility of organising the Asian Conference on Women, Religion and Family Laws in which delegates from 14 Asian countries had registered to participate. Even after making several trips to various government offices in Delhi, I could not get visa clearance for most of the delegates. I was running from pillar to post to get visas for the delegates from Korea, Malaysia, Indonesia, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka without any success.

When I explained my difficulties to Praful who at that time was a
His untimely passing away was a major blow to the activists of social movements. The last time I met him was in May, 2014 at the Mumbai Press Club to discuss the book he was planning to write on the Indian Left for which he interviewed me at length. During the interview, he was calm, asking questions on the trade union movement, women’s movement, Left movement, Dalit and tribal struggles… He asked me about our common friends and co-travelers in the people’s movements since 1970s. Both of us were nostalgic about our revolutionary past. When I told him how much proud we all were of your writings, he cooly smiled.

Praful had a large fan following in Delhi, Kolkata, Chennai, Mumbai, Pune, Bangalore, Hyderabad, Agartala, Guwahati. Whenever he happened to be in these cities, he would invite his buddies to discuss with him volatile political issues. His untimely passing away has created an irreparable loss for the cause of social justice, secular humanism, human development and human rights.

(Vibhuti Patel has been an activist of the New Left Movement since 1970.)

Journalist killings in India condemned

The World Association of Newspapers and News Publishers (WAN-IFRA) and the World Editors Forum have condemned the vicious murders of two journalists in India and have called on the Indian authorities to act swiftly to bring the perpetrators to justice. WAN-IFRA has written to the authorities in Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh states to demand thorough investigations into the killings of Jogendra Singh and Sandeep Kothari, and to call for better protections for press freedom and the safety of journalists.

The brutal murder of Singh on 1 June in Shahjahanpur, Uttar Pradesh, reportedly involved six policemen - accompanied by a mob of 20 people - who beat the journalist before setting fire to him at his home in front of horrified witnesses. After suffering serious burns, Singh died on 8 June. In a declaration made before a judicial officer shortly before he passed away, the journalist identified his assailants and charged they had carried out the attack on behalf of Ramamurthy Varma, a local government minister.

According to local media reports, the journalist had exposed land grabbing, illegal mining operations and sexual assault on women in Shahjahanpur, and had said evidence pointed to involvement of the minister, local police officials, and criminal gangs. The attackers who poured kerosene oil over him and burned him reportedly said they were teaching him “an extreme lesson”.

State police reportedly allowed a story to circulate that Singh had committed suicide, while a witness who had confirmed Singh was in fact set ablaze subsequently changed her testimony following his death. Local reports also suggest there was immense pressure on medical and forensic experts to support the suicide theory, along with Singh’s family. “We urge you to hand over the investigation to an independent team and to ensure the state government takes harsh actions as prescribed under law against those found to be responsible for Singh’s murder, even – and especially – if the killers occupy high positions in the government,” said WAN-IFRA in a letter addressed to the chief minister of Uttar Pradesh. “There is also an urgent need for you, as the leader of the government of the most populous state in India, to send a strong message that there will be zero tolerance for those who intimidate and attack journalists.”

Addressing the chief minister of Madhya Pradesh regarding the murder of journalist Sandeep Kothari, WAN-IFRA called for a thorough and impartial investigation to determine the circumstances surrounding his death. Kothari was kidnapped from Balaghat in Madhya Pradesh before his body was discovered in the neighbouring state of Maharashtra on 21 June.

Kothari worked for the reputed Hindi-language newspaper Nai Duniya and was a freelance contributor to a number of publications at the time of his murder. Known for his investigations into the activities of the ‘mining mafia’, he had filed a variety of applications for sensitive government information under the Right to Information Act.

His journalistic work had reportedly antagonised a number of people inside and outside of the state government, and Kothari had faced a barrage of criminal complaints. According to his lawyer, the journalist had been acquitted in 19 of the 20 cases filed against him. Local media reports have suggested Kothari’s murder was a conspiracy hatched by the ‘mining mafia’ that had come under close scrutiny as a result of his journalistic work.
A FAREWELL FOR PRAFUL

Much mourned, gone far too soon

Senior journalist Pamela Philipose, who was at Praful Bidwai’s funeral, recalls the event

Friends, there was no video live-streaming or any of that for yesterday’s funeral. This is by no means a comprehensive account, and there may be much that has been inadvertently left out. It is just a brief recalling of that event using words in the old fashioned way, even as the memories of it are still fresh in one’s mind.

The electric crematorium at Lodhi Road, Delhi, is a dreary place at the best of times (and it sees mostly the worst of times). But it has this magnificent neem tree that is really very special. Its whorls of leaves give shade under a punishing sun and seem to embody solace for the grief-stricken and the promise of better days.

It was under that tree, on a pedestal decked with red rose petals and marigolds that Praful’s body was brought to rest awhile so that he could share for the last time a few moments with his closest friends as he had on innumerable occasions in the past. There was his family too -- his sister, Meera, and two nephews, Chaitanya and Nikhil -- as well as a congregation of those who valued what he stood for as a public intellectual, a communicator, and a human being. Meanwhile, playing in the background in a muted way was the classical Hindustani music that Praful had always loved. The powerful voices of Kumar Gandharva and Mallikarjun Mansur unleashed streams of beauty and pain, as if they were being struck down physically by the departure that was to take place.

Around 300 people had gathered who formed a tight knot around Praful’s figure framed by flowers, wreaths and a bowl of roses. He was wearing the shirt he used to wear on party occasions and his face had a certain air of tranquility and peace about it that was so greatly consoling for all those who were looking upon. It seemed as if he was just about to begin a conversation about governmental repression or trends in an election or why forest sinks are so valuable in an era of global warming or any of the innumerable topics that he could engage with endlessly during his famed morning telephonic conversations, or over some drinks and dinner (a conversation that may have also included an exposition on the finer points of Maharastrian cuisine as well!).

Sonia Jabbar, a close friend of Praful, stepped forward to read a brief statement on behalf of everyone gathered there. She began with the words, “We are stunned by Praful’s tragic death… our loss is at a personal level of course but also, very crucially, at a much larger social and political level.” She also dwelt on the one cause among the many that Praful so passionately espoused, that of Palestine, and read out a statement from the Embassy of the State of Palestine. Praful’s sister Meera Ganorkar was too distraught to speak but a statement was read out by her son, Chaitanya, in which the family thanked his friends for being like a family to him.

Among those who paid their tributes to him by placing a handful of petals at his feet were the chief minister of Delhi, Arvind Kejriwal, whose political progress Praful had been observing very closely and for whom he had had a store of advice (including ways to control motorised traffic in the city). Kejriwal probably did not know any of this, but he paused from a busy morning to come in and pay his respects, as did the minister of education, Manish Sisodia. Many representatives from the county’s Left political spectrum were at that gathering, including Prakash Karat, Brinda Karat, M.A. Baby and D. Raja.

Praful had engaged with them often and had mounted fierce critiques of their political positions on occasion. Social activists across the spectrum were also there, as were academics and representatives from the legal and cultural fraternity. Several journalists with whom Praful had
interacted on a daily basis and from whom he would draw insights and pass on perspectives, were there. It was amazing how many of the mourners, in private conversations with us, recalled that they had "just talked to / met up with Praful". All this was a testimony to his amazing sociability and engagement with friends.

As silence fell, music once again filled the air as the politically committed cultural couple, Shamsul Islam and Neelima Sharma, who were standing by Praful's side, broke into song: “Lal jhanda le kar comrade aage badhte jayenge….Tum nahi rahe, iska gham hain par, phir bhai hum ladte jayenge” (We will raise the red flag and go forward... Even though the grief of your death is with us, we will continue the struggle...)

All too soon it was time for the last lap of this journey. His bier, carrying the banners of Palestine and the Coalition for Nuclear Disarmament and Peace (CNDP) which he had helped to found, was carried by his comrades, men and women. Ritu Menon lent a shoulder to it as did Sonia. Some of us followed and soon the procession found itself in the dark smoky interiors of the electric crematorium.

Sorrow at the imminent parting gripped everyone gathered there, as Shebha Chhachhi and others raised revolutionary slogans in Praful’s memory, including the evergreen “Inquilab Zindabad” (long live revolution) and “Lal Salaam” (red salute) -- the origins of which he had just researched for his prospective book on the Indian Left. Amidst these voices of salutation, the body slipped into the cremation furnace.

Praful, much mourned, gone far too soon.

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**Data privacy, an issue for our time**

A new report from the World Association of Newspapers and News Publishers (WAN-IFRA) examines the vexing issue of data privacy and how news media companies can take ownership of diligent data privacy policies and practices. ‘Data Privacy: An issue for our time,’ presents best-practice recommendations from data privacy experts and publishers around the world, results of consumer and publisher surveys, and recent trends and regulations.

Researched and reported in cooperation with TRUSTe, the leading global data privacy management company, the report is available free to WAN-IFRA members and for sale to non-members. "Consumers are becoming more aware of the data they share about themselves by the day," said Cecilia Campbell, executive programmes editor and communicator at WAN-IFRA, who co-authored the report with Kris Vann, senior product marketing manager for TRUSTe. "Trusted news brands can only gain from engaging with their customers around data collection and data privacy, involving them and educating them about what they get in return. Data privacy may not be something most news publishers today consider core to their business, but at the rate the digital world is moving they need to," she said. "While interviewing publishers for the report I was at once fascinated by how relatively little awareness there is of privacy issues in the industry in general, while at the same time the most proactive publishers are turning data protection into a competitive advantage."

A recent survey shows that 90 per cent of consumers in the United States and the United Kingdom avoid companies they don’t believe protect their data privacy. The WAN-IFRA report says that publishers who allow advertisements to be served from anywhere other than their own ad servers — the vast majority — need to organise themselves to protect and leverage user data. It recommends that publishers only work with trusted partners, set clear rules on what is permissible, and be creative about how to monetize their own first-party data.

Essentials of a good privacy policy, according to the report, are: be clear and transparent with users; keep track of processes; keep track of third parties. The report also recommends appointing a data privacy lead staff member and data protection ‘champions’ across the organisation, and to establish privacy awareness among all staff.

The report is supported by WAN-IFRA’s technology partner, Centro, which develops digital advertising and media management software to help advertisers streamline and scale digital campaigns.

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**New HT Media Business head**

Amitava Bhattacharya has joined HT Media as Business head – East & Central Region. As part of HT Media’s ongoing strategy of maximising revenue opportunities presented by Tier II markets, Bhattacharya’s responsibilities would include managing the units at Kolkata, MP- CG and Rajasthan. He will be based out of Kolkata and as an additional responsibility, Bhattacharya would also have functional overview of the English print business coming out of Bihar, Jharkhand, UP markets. Bhattacharya has extensive media sales experience, which includes 22 years with The Times Group where he was part of TOI’s 2001 edition launch in Kolkata and Ei Samay in 2012.
P.A. Seshan is no more

P.A. Seshan, former Finance and Commercial editor, *The Hindu*, has died. He was 102. Seshan began his journalistic career in 1934 in Kolkata, and joined *The Hindu* in 1957. Known to his readers as ‘Leo’ because of his popular column, Leo’s News and Notes, Seshan continued his column till 1998, when he retired from the organisation. Even after his retirement, he continued to contribute articles for the Business Review page.

Known for his hard work and phenomenal memory power, Mr. Seshan was felicitated on completion of 100 years by the management of *The Hindu* at a function held in the office. Apart from his analytical views on the performance of corporates, he was advising several of them, including the TVS group, Ramco, Shriram Group, Sakthi Sugars, India Cements and Sanmar Group of companies on their growth plans.

Born on July 7, 1913, he completed his MA (Economics & Politics) at St. Joseph’s College, Tiruchirapalli, in 1933. He suffered loss of vision due to an eye disorder, ‘Retinitis pigmentosa’, which caused progressive vision loss.

After his retirement, Mr. Seshan was associated with a host of organisations, including those in culture and education. He was founder-president of the Mahakavi Sri Neelakanta Deekshithar Foundation, the Palamadai and Sri Kasi Viswanathan Mangaleswari Baktha Jana Sabha and the Palamadai Welfare Account. He is survived by his son, Ananthnarayanan, three grandsons, a grand daughter, five great grandsons and three great grand daughters.

(Courtesy: The Hindu)

Cartoonist Gopulu passes away

Noted cartoonist Gopulu, who captured the flavour of everyday life of his period in his illustrations for Tamil magazine *Ananda Vikatan*, died here on Wednesday. He was 91 and is survived by his son. “He was as serious artist and could draw on any subject, including political cartoons. His illustrations for novels such as *Thillana Mohanambal* and *Washingtoni Thirumanam* were received well,” said T.S. Sridhar, former joint-editor of *Ananda Vikatan* and a fellow cartoonist.

Sridhar, who knew Gopulu since his Kumbakonam days, said he always sported a smile on his face. On his retirement from the magazine after an over two-decade stint, he drew for other magazines and even ran an advertisement agency. A native of Thanjavur, Gopulu studied in Government Arts College in Kumbakonam before coming under the tutelage of Maali, who was in-charge of arts department of the magazine. It was he who changed his original name Gopalan as Gopulu.

“He was one of the great masters — Maniam, Shilpi, S. Rajam and Madhavan. I will call him the Bhishma among them,” said artist Maniam Selvan, whose father Maniam illustrated for Kalki’s *Ponniyin Selvan* and *Sivakamiyin Sabatham*.

Gopulu had observed and assimilated the work of American painter and illustrator Norman Rockwell and famous cartoonist David Low and one could trace the elements of these great artists in his works. He was counted among the greats in his profession – Maniam, Shilpi, S. Rajam and Madhavan included in that – for his range of illustrations which accompanied short stories and novels. The novels included the popular *Thillana Mohanambal* and *Washingtoni Thirumanam*.

After retirement, he freelanced and ran his own advertising agency. He was down after suffering a stroke but continued his work after recovery.

(Courtesy: The Hindu)

Release of jailed Ethiopian journalists demanded

The World Association of Newspapers and News Publishers (WAN-IFRA) and the World Editors Forum are calling for the release of all journalists still jailed in Ethiopia after a week in which six of their colleagues were freed. Reeyot Alemu, a newspaper columnist and secondary school English teacher who had spent almost 1500 days behind bars, was reportedly released on Thursday (9 July), a day after five other jailed Ethiopian journalists were set free. At least 11 journalists remain in Ethiopian prisons, including 2014 WAN-IFRA Golden Pen of Freedom laureate Eskinder Nega. In Africa, only Eritrea has more journalists in prison.

“While delighted by the release of the journalists, they and their colleagues still in prison should never have been jailed in the first place,” said a statement from WAN-IFRA. “Jailing journalists simply for doing their job is contrary to the best interests of the nation. We hope this week’s releases are more than simply gestures, that they signify a genuine turning point in the democratic future of Ethiopia. We call on the government to demonstrate its commitment by releasing those who remain behind bars. Criminalising journalism and punishing journalists must end. Let them all go free.”

Police seized Alemu on June 21, 2011, while she was teaching an English class, with no information given to her as to why she was being arrested. The government used her articles and recordings of a telephone call about a peaceful protest – a common
practice in Ethiopia as the government has created a full surveillance state – as proof of ‘crime’. She was sentenced to 14 years in prison, which was later commuted to five years. Her release came a day after five other jailed Ethiopian journalists, who had been accused under Ethiopia’s vague 2009 Anti-Terrorism Proclamation of incitement and terrorist activities, were set free and all charges against them dropped.

Among those still in prison is Eskinder Nega, who was arrested on 14 September 2011 and accused of colluding with the outlawed opposition party Ginbot 7 in an attempt to overthrow the regime – charges he has rejected on numerous occasions. Despite government claims that the prosecution of Nega and others charged under the Anti-Terrorism Proclamation is unrelated to their work as journalists, independent inquiries have found this to be far from reality. In April 2013, the United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention held that the imprisonment of Nega violated Ethiopia’s obligations under international law and requested his immediate release.

2015 proves to be a tragic year for journalists

The World Association of Newspapers and News Publishers (WAN-IFRA) and the World Editors Forum appealed for improved physical protections for journalists, an end to censorship and other pressures facing news media as 3 May, World Press Freedom Day, marked yet another tragic year for the profession and reveals growing threats to freedoms from new challenges worldwide. Nineteen journalists have been killed so far in 2015 in direct relation to their work, including eight in connection to the 7th January attack on the newsroom of French satirical weekly Charlie Hebdo. Those numbers follow at least 61 journalist deaths in 2014.

“WAN-IFRA uses the occasion of 3 May, World Press Freedom Day to repeat the call that ‘enough is enough’ when it comes to the killing of journalists and demands that more is done to better protect the profession,” said WAN-IFRA secretary general, Larry Kilman. “The Charlie Hebdo attack was a wake-up call to many that critical views even in democratic societies are under severe threat – already a fact, sadly, on a daily basis in many other parts of the world. But it is not simply through the horrendous criminal acts of fanatics that the press is silenced. We are witnessing an alarming rise in attempts to undermine the independence, financial stability and digital security of news organisations from multiple sources, which is something that should be of deep concern to us all. A critical press is more essential than ever in denouncing all forms of attack on freedom of expression in order to hold the powerful to account.”

While killings, physical attacks and jailing continue to dominate the headlines and provide the most shocking reminder of the fragility of the profession, more subtle and often overlooked forms of censorship are fast eroding media freedoms worldwide, often with equally devastating consequences for freedom of expression. On 3 May, World Press Freedom Day, WAN-IFRA invited media houses, editors and journalists to denounce one of the most sophisticated forms of interference in the media sector worldwide: indirect government censorship, or ‘soft censorship’.

Less visible than more traditional forms of harassment against media professionals, the term soft censorship refers to indirect or under-the-radar abuses of financial, regulatory and other government powers to punish critical reporting and reward favourable coverage. Where the financial leverage of governments and their cronies is used against media, it often leads to unbalanced reporting and promotes a culture of fear among media professionals, finally spiralling into self-censorship.

Launched on 3rd May, a new WAN-IFRA website www.softcensorship.org and accompanying twitter account @softcensorship / #SoftCensorship were created to help expose government interference with a free press. Through its new online platforms, WAN-IFRA aims to denounce cases of unfair official advertising allocation, biased distribution of subsidies, ‘paid news’, bribery and payments to journalists and editors, and other administrative pressures such as licenses, import restrictions, excessive tax bills and audit procedures that contribute to strangling a free press worldwide.

“While we must use every means available to prevent the killing of journalists and better protect those most at risk, equally, we cannot afford to ignore challenges to independent media from elsewhere,” said Kilman. “Left unchecked, these threats will grow to undermine the work of our colleagues who have sacrificed their lives in the name of freedom of expression. All attacks on a free press have the goal of silencing critical reporting, and we must be alert and ready to denounce them, wherever and however they arise.”

Together with the Open Society Foundations, the Washington D.C.-based Center for Media Assistance (CIMA) and in-country research partners, WAN-IFRA has analysed the use of soft censorship practices in Hungary, Serbia, Mexico and Malaysia. In addition, the first global review, collating examples of soft censorship practices worldwide - Soft Censorship, Hard Impact - reveals that, regardless of the levels of market development or political freedom, media around the world consider economic pressure to be a major challenge to editorial independence and financial survival.

WAN-IFRA will exceptionally award its 2015 Golden Pen of Freedom to ‘Journalists Killed in the
Brunegård re-elected president of WAN-IFRA

Tomas Brunegård, former chairman and CEO of the Stampen Media Group in Sweden, has been re-elected president of the World Association of Newspapers and News Publishers (WAN-IFRA) for a two-year term. Michael Golden, vice-chairman of The New York Times, was elected vice-president and is in line for the presidency when Brunegård’s term ends in June 2017. They were elected by WAN-IFRA members during the organization’s World Newspaper Congress, World Editors Forum and World Advertising Forum held recently in Washington, DC.

During his initial two-year term, Brunegård supported a host of new initiatives, including the organisation’s new Global Alliance for Media Innovation, increased cooperation with media industry stakeholders including advertisers, broadcasters, and digital players, development of services in growing markets, and strengthening WAN-IFRA’s role in Europe and in the Americas.

“The role of WAN-IFRA as a global, independent voice for press freedom is more important than ever,” said Brunegård. “In many countries around the world, media are facing threats not only from censorship, attacks and surveillance, but also to their basic business models as well. This restricts their ability to carry out their societal role. And, more and more, these challenges occur not only under repressive regimes, but in democratic societies as well.”

Ten new members were also elected to the Board of WAN-IFRA: José Roberto Dutriz, executive chairman of Grupo Dutriz in El Salvador; Ricardo Hepp, president of the Chilean Newspaper Publishers Association (ANP); Michele Leridon, Global News director for Agence France-Presse, representing the news agencies; Markus Mair, CEO of Styria Media in Austria; Jose Manuel Lozano, senior advisor to Heraldo de Aragón in Spain; Geert-Jan van der Snoek, chief executive officer of Telegraaf Media Group, representing NCP Nieuwsmedia in The Netherlands; Sture Bergman, president and CEO of Västerbottens-Kuriren Media in Sweden, Neo Momodu, head of Corporate Affairs, Media 24, South Africa, Miguel Henrique Otero, editor and publisher of El Nacional, and vice-president of the Venezuelan Publishers Association, and Gerald Grünberger, managing director of the Austrian Newspaper Association, representing Directors of Member Associations of WAN-IFRA.

Marcelo Rech is president, World Editors Forum

Marcelo Rech, the executive director of Journalism for the RBS Group in southern Brazil, has been elected president of the World Editors Forum, the organisation within the World Association of Newspapers and News Publishers (WAN-IFRA) for chief editors and other senior newsroom personnel. Rech, 55, succeeds Erik Bjerager, the editor-in-chief and managing director of Kristeligt Dagblad in Denmark, who will remain with WEF as a vice-president. Wolfgang Krach, the editor-in-chief of Germany’s Süddeutsche Zeitung, was also elected as a WEF vice-president.

The World Editors Forum, the organization within the World Association of Newspapers and News Publishers (WAN-IFRA) for chief editors and senior newsroom personnel, also elected five new Board members: Carlos Guyot, editor-in-chief of La Nación in Argentina; Toyosi Ogunseye, editor of Sunday Punch in Nigeria; Matti Kalliokoski, editorial page editor at Helsingin Sanomat in Finland; Javier Garza, a Knight International Journalism Fellow from Mexico who serves as a special advisor to the World Editors Forum on journalists’ safety; and Anders Nyland, editor-in-chief of Bergensavisen in Norway.

“The World Editors Forum has provided extraordinary support to editorial leaders around the world to deal with the changes that affect newsrooms and journalism itself,” said Rech, who was elected by WEF members during the World News Media Congress. “In addition to offering this support, and to joining all efforts for the protection and defense of journalists and freedom of expression, WEF will continue to act in favor of ethical, high quality and credible journalism as a matter of distinction to the public about the value of professional communication.”

Rech was a former reporter, specialised in internal and international conflicts. He covered five expeditions to Antarctica, the fall of the Soviet Union and the economic transition in Russia, the Gulf War, the war in the Balkans, the UN intervention in Mozambique, the crisis in Cuba and several coup d’états and military risings in Latin America, besides many investigative pieces and extensive stories in Brazil. He has held numerous positions at RBS, including managing editor of the flagship newspaper Zero Hora, and other newspapers in the group.

Trends in Newsrooms 2015 out

Changing practices in investigative journalism, the erosion of source protection, the rise of automated reporting, and the ‘gamification’ of news are a few of the developments included in Trends in Newsrooms 2015, the annual report just published by the World Editors Forum, the global organization for chief editors of newspapers.
editors and other senior newsroom personnel. Trends in Newsrooms 2015 examines the issues occupying the minds and work of editors all over the world. Among the issues included are:

- New Convergence: Where games, virtual reality and wearables meet news. There is a growing movement to combine two seemingly incompatible industries: gaming and the news. The "gamification" of news, where video game technology and practices are used in conjunction with traditional journalism methods, is attracting renewed interest from newsrooms around the world. Media organizations including the BBC, the Guardian and the New York Times have all created their own news games in recent years, while BuzzFeed recently announced the creation of a gaming team devoted to creating content for the site.

- Source Protection Erosion: the rising threat to investigative journalism. It used to be possible to promise confidentiality to sources -- guaranteeing the protection of their identities, even on pain of jail – in countries where legal source protection frameworks were robust. But these protections are being undercut by government surveillance and data retention policies, and it may no longer be ethically possible to promise confidentiality. These developments have an enormous impact on investigative journalism and are giving rise to increasing attention to risk assessment, self-protection and source education.

- The Rise of the Robots – welcome to your automated news future. The Associated Press has hired an Automation Editor, a first for the industry. Automated reports on routine economic news is becoming more common, and the AP has announced it will use automated reporting to cover thousands of college sports games that would otherwise not be covered.

- Journalism After Charlie – lessons learned as the shockwaves continue. The Charlie Hebdo attack in central Paris graphically demonstrated that journalists continue to be terrorism targets – at their desks as well as in war zones. It created a new set of safety crises for newsrooms, and it put press freedom on the front page internationally. But it also highlighted the need for culturally sensitive reporting; the disparity between coverage of terrorism attacks affecting the West and those that plague developing countries; the threat of government censorship as a counter-

**INCQC seeks new members**

The World Association of Newspapers and News Publishers (WAN-IFRA) has opened the competition for the 12th edition of its International Newspaper Color Quality Club, the only worldwide printing quality competition for newspapers. Newspapers that register by 7 October 2015 will benefit from a free preliminary test evaluation by WAN-IFRA.

Registration deadline for the 2016-2018 edition of the Club is December 2015. Full details can be found at www.colorqualityclub.org.

Newspapers that maintain rigorous printing standards are eligible for membership in the Club, a short list of the world’s best-printed color newspapers. Membership in the Color Quality Club can increase a newspaper’s prestige among readers, pride among staff members, and – perhaps most importantly – benefits when it comes to selling ad space to demanding customers. The goal of the International Newspaper Quality Club is to improve the quality of reproduction and printing in production, while also increasing competitiveness as well as training and motivating all personnel. The competition has been held every two years since 1994.

Successful newspapers are awarded membership for a two-year period in the exclusive club of top-quality titles. Multiple winners and participants in the WAN-IFRA certification project also have the prospect of being awarded membership of the WAN-IFRA Star Club.

Participation can be easily integrated into a newspaper’s normal production operations. Participants download a small ad-like test element and incorporate it into a page – no costly, time-consuming special print runs are required.

**Benefits of participating:**
- Demonstrate consistent and reliable printing in accordance with exacting worldwide standards;
- Promote certification and gain an edge in the competition for readers and advertisers;
- Counter customer complaints more confidently;
- Increase quality awareness and know-how within the workforce;
- Define goals for production personnel and motivate them to achieve those goals; and
- Optimise materials on the basis of detailed evaluations.

**Tutorials**

WAN-IFRA offers tutorials in which interested parties and participants in the Color Quality Club competition can familiarize themselves with the relevant ISO standards and Color Quality Club rules. Next tutorials are in Frankfurt, Germany on 15 June 2015 (German language) and in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia on 29–30 July 2015, Chennai on 9 July, and New Delhi on 14 July.
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**Rules for sending entries**

- Entries should be sent by 15 September 2015 and the results will be announced by November 2015.
- The article or photo should have been published in an Indian national or regional newspaper or magazine between April 2014 and March 2015.
- For all articles printed in regional languages, an exact English translation is mandatory.
- Only one entry per individual is permitted for either category. The participating candidate will have to produce the proof of his or her article or photo published in the respective newspaper or magazine.
- Relatives of members of the jury and organizers are not allowed to participate; the decision of the jury is final.
- Entries with complete details can be emailed to editorpiirind@gmail.com or sent to the Press Institute of India, IRIND Premises, Second Main Road, Taramani CPT Campus, Chennai - 600113.

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