

**JOURNALISM IN AN EMERGING POWER:  
HOW THE ROLES OF JOURNALISTS ARE EVOLVING IN INDIA**

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at the University of Missouri-Columbia School of Journalism

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by

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## **Chapter One: Introduction**

After interning for an Indian newspaper in Mumbai between May and August 2013, it was important for me to understand how my colleagues and other experienced journalists were navigating the emergence and sustenance of India's democracy. Because we often take for granted the ethics and the rules of journalistic trade in the West, I wanted to hear the stories of the ones who are still exploring a different model of journalism and doing so with an admirable passion and intense struggle.

During my internship in India, I realized that the approaches and ethical practices I was taught in the U.S., at the Missouri School of Journalism, were difficult to apply in the Indian context. In comparison to the value system associated with data collection and presentation largely accepted in the U.S., reporting in India has veered toward obtaining information at any cost and through any source. The reasons? On one hand, Indian journalists have seen their profession become a very competitive business where the ends are more important than the means. With the commercialization of the media, sensationalism and irresponsibility have crept into Indian journalism and often overtake ethicality. On the other hand, Indian journalists have experienced direct and indirect sources of pressure against free press. In the process of uncovering scams and abuses or simply criticizing the government's failure to translate popular support into effective policies, Indian journalists have been gagged and threatened by politicians and powerful businesspeople.

My internship in India allowed me to meet many brilliant journalists, explore the environment in which they work, and ask them questions about their struggles and

aspirations. This exposure to Indian journalism not only made me feel confident about what I had learned in school but also reinforced my value system. As opportunities were offered to me, I also visited a few journalism schools and interacted with students during panel discussions. These exchanges were valuable to me as a young journalist and encouraged me to ask more questions about the evolution of Indian journalism.

For this, I interviewed seven Indian journalists about how they perceive their role in India's current political and economic climate, what challenges they face and what purpose they think journalism needs to serve in the emerging democracy. You can read my conclusion in Chapter Five.

But before you go on, I wanted to tell you why I really care about this project.

Conversing with these journalists was a way for me to reflect on why I care so much about news and why I am getting ready to commit my life to journalism. I strongly believe that knowing what is happening around us is the first step to solve the big and wicked problems of this world. I am also confident that if journalists are able to reflect on the key issues behind these problems and engage people around them, changes will happen. I know it's going to be a long and hard road to connect with under-privileged and under-informed communities, but if a set of people care to know what's happening in the world, I think we are on the good path.

My generation speaks different languages, is better connected to the rest of the world and aspires to make the world a better place. At my level and as a journalist, I want to help the next generation to acquire the necessary knowledge and develop the adequate skills to better understand the realities and mechanisms of our societies. In fact, in the

future, there will be an even greater need to build connections and communities around the world and commit to social issues. We, journalists, can assure the circulation of the information across the world, raise awareness about existing problems, shed light on key issues for the future and narrow the gaps between geographies, opportunities and outcomes.

This is why I want to become a journalist.

This is what the Indian journalists I interviewed want to accomplish in their country.

## **Chapter Two: Weekly Field Notes**

I could not have imagined a better internship to finish my formal education.

Every day was a new challenge, but it was a challenge that an entire newsroom was ready to overcome together. I spent 14 weeks, between January 16 and May 25, 2014, working with the producers and correspondents of Al Jazeera America's flagship show America Tonight. I have witnessed how these journalists have been fighting for their stories because they truly believe in what they do and know the importance of it. I felt blessed to be around such experienced professionals who, at the end of the day, contribute to make this place a little better.

Initially, I was assigned to work with the senior executive producers in researching and developing long-form stories for the show. After a month, I took on more responsibilities and assisted the pre- and post-production of stories I had pitched. As I became more familiar with the work environment, I was sent in the field with the TV crew, often spending hours out to get the perfect shot. Later in the internship, I offered to write articles for the Web to broaden my experience with the digital world.

It was such an interesting time to be at Al Jazeera America, which was launched in August 2013. During my internship, I saw how the managers have been shaping the channel's identity; I celebrated the program's first awards; and I experienced the network's first layoff.

Although my internship took much of my time, I also dedicated several hours of my week to interview the Indian journalists I wanted to feature in my master's project. Because of the time difference with India, I would often do these interviews after a 10-



hour shift through 3 a.m. To be honest, I often wanted to give up because of the exhaustion. And yet, every time I would listen to the stories of these journalists who have already greatly contributed to this world, I felt even more determined to pursue my project.

In addition to my internship and master's project, I attended a series of 10 conferences organized on Fridays by onsite Prof. Barbara Cochran. Guest speakers varied from media lawyer to press secretary and journalists to lobbyists. It was a great introduction to the city of Washington, D.C., and a good opportunity to network within the worlds of media and politics.

Below are my weekly field notes detailing my experiences, surprises and frustrations throughout the semester.

Thank you for reading!

## **Field Note – Week 1 (January 27, 2014)**

### Goals:

- Settle down in Washington, D.C.
- Become familiar with my new work environment and establish contact with Al Jazeera producers and reporters
- Name and create bios for top Indian journalists (prospective interviewees)
- Write questions for upcoming interviews and send them to Prof. Banaszynski

### In order to meet this week's goals, I did the following:

- Established a schedule with my different shifts at Al Jazeera America
- Met with my newsroom supervisor and worked under his instructions
- Researched Indian journalists and got their contact information
- Read about interviewing methods and drafted a series of questions

### Fieldwork: My first week at Al Jazeera America (AJAM)

“Are you our new fellow?” said Kim Bondy, the senior executive producer for Al Jazeera America, before taking a picture of her office packed with producers and reporters awaiting the afternoon editorial meeting. “Please, jump in.” (The photo was posted on Twitter. I am the guy standing in the back.)

The day after I arrived in D.C., AJAM program coordinator asked me to be in the newsroom. I thought there would be an orientation session for interns, but I was thrown to the lions on my first day. Very jetlagged, I was asked to assist the six executive producers, as they needed someone to conduct research and think through story ideas. I was showed my desk and given my badge when Jay LaMonica, one of the executive

producers, gave me my first assignment. He wanted me to create a planner for AJAM where one could easily see what national and global events were coming up. A former intern from UC Berkeley had done one during the fall semester, he said, which helped producers assign stories to correspondents.

Throughout that day, I met with reporters, producers, assistant producers, interview assistants, IT and tech people. Coming from all around the world, no less than 40 people work for ‘America Tonight’, the channel’s flagship program. The show is a nightly in-depth program that focuses on stories across the U.S. as well as globally. It doesn’t do breaking news but go in-depth by focusing on character-driven stories to get at larger issues that face people in the country today.

To give you an example, during my first day, which was the day when Oscars nominees were announced, AJAM interviewed the screenwriter of “12 Years a Slave”, which features Solomon Northup, a free black man who is abducted and sold into slavery. They also invited Northup’s great-great-great grandson Clayton J. Adams and had the two meet for the first time. Although it was a bit sensational to me, I found the moment quite historical.

My shift started at 3 p.m. and ended at 10 p.m. At 7 p.m., I was in the studio while they were doing the show. From 8 p.m. to 9 p.m., I followed producers as they put together and edited the show. At 9 p.m., I watched the show as it aired.

The following days, I was trying to get a sense of who was in charge of what and whom I could help. To be honest, I have felt quite unsettled not only because I don’t know broadcast journalism but also because this is not a usual show. I have learned from

previous internships not to hesitate to ask questions, but this time it has been more difficult because everyone is so busy and under pressure. The other day, they didn't have a guest until the last minute. How can one work like that? I understand the sense of emergency in the world of journalism, but this was overwhelming.

On my third day, I pitched two story ideas: one deals with a new therapy used to treat patients with rape-related PTSD, and the second is about the task force formed in Florida to attack the tax-fraud 'epidemic'. So far, I have interviewed Dr. Foa, the psychologist who conducted all the research behind the new therapy, and I am trying to get in touch with her patients. She just sent me an email, asking me to promise that I will write the story — this is for Web — before she exposes her patients. I am now waiting to talk with my supervisor to know how I could answer such a request.

I will not go into more details, but I wanted to show that I am "jumping in" though I have felt quite lost in my new work environment. I am well aware that I will benefit from my internship depending on the efforts and time I put in it. My goal is to acquire strong production skills whether it is researching story ideas for TV or assisting correspondents in their reporting, but I also want to write and report. Sadly, I will not be able to go in the field because there are liability issues involved, they said.

I am taking on all the challenges.

My official schedule is as followed: Monday: 3 p.m. – 10 p.m.; Tuesday: 3 p.m. – 10 p.m.; Wednesday: 10 a.m. – 6 p.m.; Thursday: 3 p.m. – 10 p.m.; Friday: Optional

Project: **Selecting and researching prospective interviewees**

Over the winter break, I read extensively about Indian journalism — from the rape allegations against *Tehelka* editors to the mission statement of *The Caravan*, India's only narrative journalism magazine. I also read about the upcoming general elections and what is at stake for India and its people. I felt I needed to learn more about the Indian context to be able to interview Indian journalists about their job, as we will probably talk about what is happening in the country.

In doing so, I came across the names of journalists with interesting background and work. I am still writing one-page biography for each of them so that I will have my homework done if they agree to talk to me. I also wrote down a series of questions for my interviewees and submitted it to Prof. Banaszynski for approval. I have attached the document with the questions to the email.

It is difficult to work intensively on the project right now because my beginning in the newsroom is quite intense. I am working hard though to have everything ready to start interviewing by the first week of February.

Work planned for next week:

- Requesting more feedback from the producers I work with
- Working on my stories and pitching new ones
- Continuing to create bios for prospective interviewees
- Sending my first batch of emails to Indian journalists
- Getting my questions approved by Prof. Banaszynski
- Reading more about Indian journalism

## **Field Note – Week 2 (February 3, 2014)**

In order to meet this week's goals, I did the following:

- Convinced and showed producers and correspondents that I could help them with their daily or longer projects
- Researched Indian journalists and got their contact information
- Read more about Indian journalism

Fieldwork:

Last Monday, I came in the newsroom telling myself, “It’s OK if you don’t know how to do something because you are here to learn.” With this new mindset, I went around the newsroom and asked every single correspondent and producer to give me work. I visited the senior executive producer’s office and told her I wanted to help with the coverage of the State of the Union (SOTU). I told my supervisor that I wanted to pitch more stories. I asked assistant producers to show me how to produce. As a result, I had a very stressful yet amazing and rewarding week.

- Doing homework for correspondents

Sheila MacVicar, a veteran correspondent who worked for ABC, CNN and CBS News, asked me to do research about a tuition-free, unconventional school that opened last year in Paris. She wanted background information on Xavier Neil — the founder of the school and a French entrepreneur active in the telecommunication industry — and a report on the state of higher education in France. It was an interesting experience to conduct research in English and French, and find ways to explain simply aspects of my

culture so that the journalist could use the information once in the country. Funny enough, I learned later that MacVicar is married to a Frenchman and speaks French.

If I had typed her name on Google, I would have immediately understood who she was. On the a side note: Because I didn't grow up in this country and am not familiar with the broadcast culture, I might appear as a total newbie to most people in this newsroom. "I hope you're not going to tell me that you grew up watching me on TV," said Adam May, anchor and national correspondent for Al Jazeera America, during our first encounters. "Have you *googled* me?" another correspondent asked me last week. Although I understand that it is important that you get to know your colleagues, I found it a bit unhealthy that people expect that you know about them, especially in the field of journalism.

- Pitching a story

Everyday, my supervisor, Jay LaMonica, presents correspondents' and freelancers' stories ideas to the rest of the team before they vote and assign the stories for the upcoming days. Last Monday, he told me he liked my pitch on the new rape-related PTSD treatment and will see what he would do with it. Just for reminder, last weekend, I interviewed the psychologist from the University of Pennsylvania who researched whether the exposure therapy — a successful therapy used in VA hospitals with veterans who experienced PTSD — would help female adolescent rape victims to overcome PTSD. During the interview and with the follow-up email, I had secured access to her patients. I learned Tuesday that my supervisor, Jay LaMonica, pitched my story to the other executive producers and producers and that they accepted it. I am still not sure why I was not invited to the meeting; I would have loved to participate in the discussion.

“Congrats, you sold your first story,” LaMonica told me on Wednesday. From what I understood, they rarely take interns’ story ideas so I had my moment of pride.

However, I am not going to report on the story. My story was given to a correspondent who will go in the field to shoot and put a TV package together. I am pretty frustrated about it so I asked whether I could come along and write an article for the Web. LaMonica said that if they were driving to Philadelphia, he would let me go otherwise I wouldn’t be able to join the team. “There are liability issues and Al Jazeera wouldn’t pay for your airline tickets,” he said. I think that even if they take the plane to Philadelphia, I will jump in a bus and meet them there. I just cannot let the story go without me. Plus, Lori Jane Gliha, the correspondent who was assigned the story, has done impressive work with AJAM so far so I am sure I could learn a lot with her. Besides, the digital editor, Azmat Khan, said she would be interested in the story for the Web. “We have two very different audiences between TV and the website,” she added.

- Covering SOTU

On Tuesday, it was SOTU. I did well asking to help with the coverage because it was a great experience to be in the newsroom that day. For the occasion, we had a midnight show in addition to the evening show. Basically, we had two production sessions in one day, which required correspondents from the New York bureau to come help us. There was a first meeting in the senior executive producer’s office at 5:30 p.m. to assign stories and another one three hours later to see how everyone was doing. The newsroom experienced high levels of stress. I was literally running from a correspondent’s desk to another. I knew I had to be in until 1 a.m. so I tried to manage



my energy, but when you see 40 people running, making calls and typing frenetically on keyboards, you can't help it — you embrace the stress.

My assignment for SOTU was to edit the speech if President Obama deviated from the original script and note specific times for each section. The point of doing this was to have the speech ready immediately after it ended so we could start cut it into pieces for each segment of the show. In the earliest meeting, we discussed about what we will cover and decided to illustrate each part of the speech — immigration, economics, foreign policy, etc. — with previous reports done by Al Jazeera America. Each correspondent was assigned one segment of the SOTU show and had to be ready by midnight. The ones who went on the air were running with suits and high heels while making the last phone calls and grabbing a sandwich from the buffet table. The technical director was new to the control room — that was interestingly stressful. I probably burnt one kilo that night between the back-and-forth movements and the stress.

At 1 a.m., the senior executive producers asked me what I thought of the night, and I couldn't be more honest: "I need a day off to recover." We laughed, and I promised I'd be in the newsroom no later than 11 a.m. the following day.

- Being a producer assistant

On Tuesday, before the SOTU craziness started, one of the producers, Grant Clark from South Africa, asked me to help him with his story on the death penalty drug controversy. Over the past few months, Al Jazeera America has aired two in-depth reports on pentobarbital shortage and the legal questions raised in states' acquisition of substitute drug cocktails as they've impacted recent cases. On Feb. 5, a death row

prisoner called Christopher Sepulvado is scheduled to be executed in Louisiana. Earlier last week, his lawyers were trying to get a stay of execution on the basis that the state has not disclosed what drugs they would be using to execute him via lethal injection and where they would be getting the drugs from. A federal judge ruled that a defendant has the right to know this information. The question was also raised in Missouri regarding the execution of death row inmate Herbert Smulls last Wednesday. When Louisiana announced that it has two-drug cocktail in stock for the upcoming execution, it created a bigger controversy because it is the same cocktail used in the latest Ohio execution. Two weeks earlier, inmate Dennis McGuire appeared to writhe in pain during his execution, leading his family to file suit.

Of course, I did not go in the field with Clark but was in office coordinating his interviews, establishing contacts with people across the U.S. and collecting elements he would need for his package. I worked with him throughout the week. One day, he would call me from Louisiana, the other day he would be in office and the following day he would be in Ohio. I really enjoyed having these responsibilities, but at the same time, I was not sure whether he knew I had never done this before and wasn't familiar with any procedures. I asked help around and informed my supervisor about the assignment I was taking on. "That's challenging," he said, "but you'll learn." That's for sure!

I bargained the price down for footage of a press conference with ABC and CBS News. I hunted down pictures of the death row inmates. I requested court documents and made myself familiar with PACER. I read hundreds of articles about the issues and sent summaries and updates to Clark as he needed them. I scheduled and cancelled and rescheduled interviews with doctors, lawyers and professors as he was traveling.

I can't wait to see the final product and learn even more about production. I have realized that some of the assistant producers weren't happy that I was doing their job. It seems that there is a constant competition in the newsroom because the show is six months old and they are trying to prove themselves. During my first week, a correspondent was fired for missing two deadlines. Friday, a freelance assistant producer said bye to the newsroom because they didn't renew her contract.

**Project: Selecting and researching prospective interviewees**

As you can imagine I didn't have time to work on my master's project last week so I am going to dedicate more time to it this week. I am writing emails to three journalists today and want to send the others by the end of the week. I know it's important that I line up interviews as soon as possible so I am making it my priority this week. I am also getting in touch with Vidisha Priyanka, an Indian producer at Poynter. One of the AJAM correspondents told me to contact her because she worked for the largest media outlets in India and could be helpful.

I have also met an Indian fellow from the World Bank whose father is a correspondent for *Mint*, the second-largest business newspaper published in India and an affiliate of *The Wall Street Journal*. He had interesting opinions on the state of press freedom in his country and explained to me that nepotism rules the media and ruins journalism ethics and standards. He pointed out how important it is for me to understand who the media leaders are to understand how journalism works in India. So I went back and read more about the controversial change that occurred last October in top management of the English daily *The Hindu*. The members of the board unanimously

adopted a resolution to remove Arun Anant as chief executive, a decision that was followed by the resignation of paper's editor Siddharth Varadarajan. "With the Hindu's owners deciding to revert to being a family run and edited newspaper, I am resigning from *The Hindu* with immediate effect," Varadarajan posted on Twitter. He complained about "recurrent violations ... on the business side" and defiance of ... the mandatory code of editorial values..." After talking to the Indian fellow, it all made more sense to me.

Although I have not contacted the journalists yet, I have read some cases of press freedom violations in India and listened to the interview of Congress vice-president and poll campaign chief Rahul Gandhi.

\*\*\* As Paris-based media watchdog Reporters Without Borders reported, working as journalist is tough in India. The country is ranked 140<sup>th</sup> out of 179 countries in the 2013 press freedom index and is one of the world's deadliest countries for media personnel. Earlier in January, an editor with the regional Oriya-language daily published a picture of the Prophet Mohammed, which led to his arrest. The newspaper did not take responsibility for publishing the picture and even gave the police the journalist's name. Media Unity for Freedom of Press, a forum fighting for the rights of journalists, staged a silent demonstration demanding the journalist's immediate release. As of now, I have been unable to find more information regarding his case.

\*\*\* Rahul Gandhi opened up to a sit down interview with Times Now editor-in-chief Arnab Goswami. For the first time after his political debut in 2004, Gandhi took direct questions on wide range of subjects. I found the interview fascinating because

Goswami asked the questions everyone wanted responses for. Is Rahul Gandhi scared of a political face off against Prime Ministerial candidate Narendra Modi? What are his views of the 1984 Sikh riots? Was a reluctant politician? What are his views on multiple scams that various states in India were affected by?

Work planned for next week:

- Sending my first batch of emails to Indian journalists (This is imperative!)
- Researching Indian journalists and getting their contact information
- Creating bios for prospective interviewees
- Completing research on the tax-refund fraud and writing the pitch
- Working with correspondent on the PTSD story

**Field Note – Week 3 (February 13, 2014)**

Goals:

- Sending my first batch of emails to Indian journalists – action plan changed
- Researching Indian journalists and getting their contact information
- Creating bios for prospective interviewees
- Completing research on the tax-refund fraud and writing the pitch
- Working with correspondent on the PTSD story – delayed

In order to meet this week's goals, I did the following:

- Pitched and got my tax fraud story approved
- Conducted research on potential stories

- Went in the field for a shooting in Washington, D.C.
- Read more about Indian journalism

Fieldwork:

Last week was another great week. I gained confidence after working closely with the producers and seeing the final result. The piece on lethal drug aired on Tuesday night, and it felt great to see my little contribution on TV. Because I was part of the whole process, I saw a mistake in the package and told the executive producers prior airtime. I know I got some bonus point for that. But most importantly, I felt I was useful. OK — enough for the flowers to myself.

On Tuesday, Jay LaMonica asked that I turned in my pitch on tax-return fraud by Wednesday as he wanted to review it before the executive producers meet on Thursday afternoon to establish the calendar and assign new stories. To be honest, I was struggling with that pitch. As you might remember, I started working on it two weeks ago. I spent a lot of time reading lawsuits and newspaper articles to understand what the issue was. I had to put it on hold as I was working on other stories. There has been so much written on ID theft and fraud that I couldn't find what angle "America Tonight" could take on. Plus, all my sources were important lawyers and criminals in jail so I felt shy and wasn't working quickly and efficiently.

On Tuesday night, I told him that we should focus on Tampa and its task force. Research shows that the city has reached the highest rate of tax fraud in the country, but since the special unit has stepped in to tackle the issue in 2012, the number of arrests and convictions has tremendously increased to the extent that Tampa has lost tax fraud crown

to Miami in a recent federal audit. I made several phone calls and talked to lawyers about cases. I asked if we could interview their clients who were either victims of tax frauds or criminals in jail. I turned in my pitch an hour before the meeting, which was not the best move on my part, but I could not do otherwise as they sent me in the field most of the day on Wednesday. The pitch was accepted, and the story assigned to a correspondent.

When I inquired whether I could go to Florida to work on the story with the correspondent, I was said that AJAM would not pay for my expenditures nor cover me if something happens. This is quite upsetting. I really enjoy researching, finding the sources, booking guests and preparing all the fieldwork, but I cannot let the story on without me. My desk is lovely and well furnished, but I want/need to be in the field. They all know it because I was clear about it when I arrived. They said I had done great job so far so they sent me in the field on Wednesday to work on someone else's story as an assistant producer. It was fun, and I learned a lot, but what about the stories I have pitched?

This weekend I was in New York where I met with several journalists and friends. One told me: "If you start as a producer and want to be a reporter, you will often be frustrated because you will find yourself stuck in production." I am not at this point as I have so much to learn regarding production, but I would really appreciate to be on both front. I am still waiting for the correspondent to start working on the therapy story. It doesn't seem to be her priority though I have already established contact with everyone, and they are waiting for her/us to come interview them. If it was me, I would take the bus to Philadelphia over the weekend and do it all on my own. Oh well.

I should tell you about my experience in the field. One of the associate producers — who got this job right after graduating from UC Berkeley — wanted to do a story on the reenactment of the Beatles' first North-American show. The concert was held in Washington, D.C., on February 11, 1964, and on the occasion of its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary, some 3,000 people will return to the Coliseum, the famous venue where the British band played. The angle he chose for the story is very different from all the stories written about the event. He found people who have lived in the neighborhood for more than 50 years and went to the concert in 1964. He found the photographer who took pictures of the concert that night. He also addressed the issue of the segregation in the neighborhood and how it has evolved until now. One of the resident said she was the only African American present at the concert in 1964. It was fun to be parachuted and this shooting. The associate producer who pitched the story was actually not in the field as he was in charge of the show that day and couldn't be away from the newsroom. He sent another associate producer.

Once again, I felt a bit frustrated as I thought she conducted the interview pretty poorly. I know she works for TV so it is very different, but there was 1) no follow-up questions 2) no continuity in the interview 3) the interviewees were obviously bored. It's very difficult for me to know whether I could jump in because, as I mention it in my second field note, people don't really like if they feel/see you're taking on their job. As a result, I asked to transcribe the interviews and be part of the editing and montage.

I am slowly learning the ways and tricks. I am having a blast. This week, I already have a lot of work planned. I am working on two other pitches. One is about the Uzbek



terror suspect Jamshid Muhtorov and the other about the wrestling Schultz brothers as a new movie recounting their story and the murder of one of them is coming out.

Project:

I have changed a little bit my plan of action. I got in touch with one of the journalists I wanted to interview because I would like to try my questions out with him before going further in the project. He said he has to figure out how to install Skype on his computer, but we should be able to talk soon. He was one of the senior editors I worked with at the newspaper. He is also a professor and has great thoughts on Indian journalism.

I have not heard from the Poynter fellow I contacted so I will have to follow up with her. This weekend in New York, I met with an AJAM fellow from the NY office, and she said she would put me in touch with the AFP correspondent she knows. He is born and brought up in India and has worked for several Indian media outlets before getting involved with the AFP. I feel he would be a great person to talk and will probably be able to connect me with other journalists. The fellow also told me to interview a Kashmiri journalist because he/she would give another great perspective on what it means to be a journalist in India. She said also to talk to a journalist involved with community radio, as this is the only medium that reaches the most isolated and poorest villages of India. I found her inputs very interesting so I will keep them in mind.

Regarding my weekly readings, I have essentially read about the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP). “Media are weighing the chances of the APP making a lasting impact on the national political scene in India and are reporting on its initiative to contest elections

against politicians it accuses of corruption,” said a recent article from *The Hindu*. The party was born out of an anti-corruption movement and now heads the government in Delhi after the assembly elections in December. It is an interesting movement because it shows the failure on the part of the MPs for taking responsibility in front of the people they were elected to serve. Although the party is not necessarily viable because it focuses only on its fight against corruption, it opens a great debate in pre-election India.

Work planned for next week:

- Getting my interview questions approved by Prof. Banaszynski
- Booking first interviews. First interview this weekend?
- Read about community radio and journalism in India’s separatist regions.
- Working with the correspondents on the two stories I pitched
- Working on new pitches

**Field Note – Week 4 (February 17, 2014)**

In order to meet this week’s goals, I did the following:

- Pitched two new story ideas
- Helped producers in their daily tasks
- Sat down with the correspondent who was assigned the story on tax fraud
- Booked and was ready for my first interview, but...
- Read more about Indian journalism

## Fieldwork:

This week was mostly dedicated to researching and writing new pitches.

I sat down with Nicole Grether, the correspondent who got assigned my story on tax fraud. She was really happy with my work and told me to keep talking to lawyers, victims and criminals. She wants me to schedule interviews so the team could go to Florida at the beginning of March to shoot the story. One of the lawyers I was talking to send a request for an interview in prison, but her client refused. I am writing her a letter, explaining why it is important that we get her side of the story. It would be too easy to portray her as a criminal behind bars whereas there is a reality behind her acts. In the meantime, I am running after lawyers to talk about various cases, which requires hours and hours. I am becoming an expert in finding, reading and understanding court documents. The U.S. judicial system is more complicated than what I thought so I am learning every day.

Regarding my new pitches, I have been looking at the cases of several terror suspects — Mohamed Mohamud, Jamshid Muhtorov and others — who have faced evidence derived from warrantless wiretapping before their trial. When Mohamud's attorney was notified about the search last November, he filed a motion in order to disrupt plans to sentence Mohamud the following month. I will not get into more details, but I am basically looking at the limits of the FISA Amendments Act of 2008 — the law that authorizes the National Security Agency's warrantless wiretapping — through these cases that challenge the Department of Justice and might end up before the Supreme Court. I wrote the pitch, and the executive producers are currently discussing it. Caroline

Cooper, a Mizzou alumna and AJAM reporter, is interested in the story and said she would like to work him.

I have also been working on a happy story. There is this mad musical scientist named Trimpin who does some amazing work and develop music technology in Seattle. Recipient of the MacArthur Genius Award in the 1990s, he has one of his room-sized installations showcased at the Experience Music Project Museum after Paul Allen bought it. The artist does not answer emails nor have a phone; he says he cannot waste his time because he has a lot of work. I think it could be a great portrait as well as an interesting conversation about the commercialization of art.

Finally, I am looking at the way mental illness is treated in prisons as many inmates suffer from mental disorders and do not receive appropriate treatment. A county in Oregon just received a significant grant to develop a new mental health program for its inmates. I would like to work with correspondent Aaron Ernst, who produced an amazing feature on schizophrenia last week.

This week was also my first evaluation. Prof. Cochran visited the newsroom and met with my supervisor, Jay LaMonica. It was a good way to go through what I have accomplished throughout my first month at AJAM and what I needed to work on for the remaining time of the internship. I was also able to tell both of them how I have experienced my first assignments and what I would like to work on. It was a very positive meeting. LaMonica told Prof Cochran that he really needed someone who researches story ideas because producers and correspondents, who are the ones supposed to do it, do not have time. He will never ask someone to stay in office when there is a story to cover.

He added that he would do his best to send me in the field when it is possible, meaning when there is no flight involved. I am still trying to convince him to send me to Florida and now Washington.

Project:

Last week, Prof. Banaszynski and I worked on the questions I would ask to Indian journalists. I rehearsed the interview and was ready for it this morning (Monday).

Without stereotyping, Indian people have a different approach to communication and time management than people who live in the West. I called Yogesh Pawar on his call phone to know what was happening, and he said he got caught with work and was not able to talk to me this morning. I guess, after living three months in India, I should have expected this. We postponed the interview to tomorrow morning, but I am scared this is going to be the reality of my project. This being said, I am aware I have to reach out to more people because I cannot waste my time like this.

Although I wanted to try out the questions with Pawar, I am going to send emails to four other journalists: Sreenivasan Jain, a political reporter and managing editor at NDTV, Sucheta Dalal, a business reporter and managing editor at MoneyLife, Sunita Aron, an editor at *The Hindustan Times*, and Parvaiz Bukhari, an independent Kashmir-based journalist whose work appear in major Indian newspapers and the AFP. I am still trying to get in touch with the Poynter fellow, but I have heard she might currently be in India.

I will probably wait till next week's field note to share with you what I have learned on press freedom in Kashmir as my friend from Al Jazeera has just sent me some

new articles. However, in the news coming from India, *Tehelka* former editor Tarun Tejpal has been charged with the rape of a female colleague. BBC reporter Sanjoy Majumder wrote: “the Tarun Tejpal case is the most high-profile investigation into allegations of rape after new sex crime laws were introduced last year. What sets it apart is that he is accused of sexually assaulting a female colleague in the workplace and abusing his position of power — both of which the Indian legal system has rarely recognized in the past.” The police interviewed more than 150 witnesses in the process, which shows how carefully they are approaching the case. Tejpal is an influential journalist with a reputation for taking on the powerful, and his *Tehelka* magazine is India’s leading investigative title.

### Conference

I have failed at filing my notes about our Fridays’ conferences. So here are a few remarks on our discussion with Donna Leinwand, the *USA Today* reporter who covers disaster and wars. She told us a lot about her experience in covering the Indonesian tsunami and the earthquake in Haiti:

- War reporters use the same basic journalism skills as any other journalists, but they 1) “see a bathroom, use a bathroom.” 2) are on top of their vaccinations 3) know how to camp, and 4) are resourceful as well as technically sufficient.
- She explained how being in touch with the U.S. army got her to Indonesia fairly quickly so she could be first in the field.
- She bought donuts to bribe people and get access to secured zones. Uh, is this ethical?

- Journalism in war or disaster zones are more about logistics than journalism. “You have to think through quickly and ask a lot of questions.”
- She is a human being before being a journalist: “You have to be empathetic, compassionate and kind. As a journalist, you should be one of the most caring people in the world. But you will see horrific things so you need the stomach and mindset for it.”
- When she arrived in Haiti seven hours after the earthquake, there was no painkiller, and hospitals were evacuating the patients because the building structures were unstable. She learned what gangrene smells like and how to recognize whether someone needed an amputation.
- “I am really thankful for having what I have. I have acquired a sense of humility. I never make the stories about me. I get to walk out of these situations, but the people I talk to don’t. My job is to tell their stories.” Amen.

Work planned for next week:

- Sending emails to Indian journalists and scheduling interviews
- Working on the tax fraud story, scheduling interviews for the trip to Florida at the beginning of March, thinking visually
- Following up with the two new pitches

**Field Note – Week 5 (February 24, 2014)**

In order to meet this week’s goals, I did the following:

- Pitched the story on Trimpin > approved!

- Pitched the story on warrantless searches > approved!
- Research new story ideas; worked on the tax fraud story
- Helped producers in their daily tasks
- Conducted my first interview
- Sent interview request to Indian journalists
- Read more about Indian journalism

### Fieldwork:

After working with most AJAM correspondents and producers, I find myself comfortable in the newsroom. It is great to feel that I belong to a team.

“Here’s the T-shirt from the launch,” said Justin LaRocca as he gave me a navy blue T-shirt with the Al Jazeera logo on it. “You’re our biggest fan, so I figured you’d have the last one.”

Let me tell you that I was proud to wear it (indoors) this weekend.

Joke part, this week was busy and fun with two new pitches in and approved. Senior producer and MU alumna Caroline Cooper got assigned the story on Trimpin, an artist who builds sound installations, and should fly to Seattle around mid-March. I really wish I could go shoot the story with her, but you know, it is always the same issue. I understand that they really need me in the newsroom to come up with all these pitches and research packages, but I feel like that they take my baby from my arms every time they assign my story to someone else.

On the positive side, I got a new assignment this week. The digital team asked me to turn one of the TV scripts into a Web story. To be honest, I found it a bit challenging



to take somebody's story and write it in a narrative voice. I felt I was lacking details, and since the footage was not even ready for viewing, I had to 'interview' the producer who was in charge of the story. They said I did a good job, but I am not really convinced by the method. It was an interesting exercise though.

I am still working on the tax fraud story, but I have not been able to secure any interviews yet. The more I do research and talk to people, the more I think we should do the story earlier than mid-April. I have shared my arguments with the executive producers, but I am not sure they are willing to hear them. The IRS is going through hell with all these tax-refund frauds, and I believe that we really need to expose the situation now and not when we reach the tax deadline.

The correspondent who was assigned my first story on PTSD treatment finally established contact with the psychiatrist I interviewed in... January. She said she would be happy to have me in the field when she goes shoot the story. So let's see how this goes, too.

As you can see, I have a lot of opportunities to learn and challenge myself. Every day, I am thrilled to go to work and spend hours doing research and finding the best sources for stories that I — and AJAM — strongly believe in.

This week, we are airing a special series on aging in America. It is heartbreaking to hear these seniors share their experience of struggling with isolation or illness. They could be my grandparents. I am also preparing a new pitch on how law enforcers deal with mentally ill individuals. This also strangely feels like home, as I have had to deal with friends with bipolar disorder. While I am analyzing all these cases of fatal shooting

of mentally ill persons, the immediate question that comes to mind is: How would my friends react during a psychotic episode to a violent and intrusive police officer?

Project:

During my first in-depth interview, Yogesh Pawar also said how he often identifies with his sources and find meanings in the stories he writes.

As a former social worker deployed in remote villages of India, he has developed a deep empathy for people. It is this same emotion that brought him to convert to journalism 20 years ago. He said that he could not witness the atrocities occurring in India and write lengthy reports about them.

In one report, he explained how women are molested by forest guards when they go pick up woods. In an other, he wrote that because there is no road to go to school and boy need to get naked to cross the river, women are not allowed to get an education. He felt he could raise awareness about these issues if he could reach to a larger audience; if he embraced a career in journalism. So after an argument with his boss, he quit, crossed the road and went straight to the office of the *Indian Express* editor.

Pawar does not want to describe himself as an activist, but he conducts his investigations as if he was, often redrawing the ethical boundary. “At the end of the day, journalism is an –ism...” he said. “It’s not just a job, a profession... It’s a mission.”

I am currently transcribing the three hours of interview. It is unbelievable how this journalist was articulated and thorough in his argumentation. He was one of my editors in India, and I remember well talking to him for hours. His inputs will contribute

greatly to the project, and I will use some of our discussion as background information with my other interviewees.

I have sent interview requests to Sucheta Dalal, Sunita Aron, Sreenivasan Jain and Parvaiz Bukhari and should follow up with them this week. Bukhari said he would be interested in talking to me about the challenges journalists encounter in Kashmir, but I am not sure whether I will be able to use him as he obtained his journalism degree from Columbia University. Pawar put me in touch with the DNA correspondent in Kashmir, so I might have a backup plan.

I am beyond excited after this first interview. My goal is now to make the time to keep working on the project.

Conference: We didn't have a conference last Friday since Prof. Cochran was in Missouri.

Work planned for next week:

- Pitch story on law enforcement and mental health
- Keep working on the tax fraud story
- Do more research on 1) the security around the GPS 2) Dennis Tito's Mars program
- Follow up with Indian journalists and schedule at least a second interview
- Transcribe Pawar's interview

## **Field Note – Week 6 (March 3, 2014)**

In order to meet this week's goals, I did the following:

- Story on law enforcement and mental health approved
- Impromptu story on 2014 Medal of Honor recipients approved
- Research on GPS and Tito's Mars program completed and sent
- Second interview done. Third scheduled for upcoming Friday.
- Painfully transcribing hours of interviews.

Fieldwork:

I dedicated every day of this past week to do research and prepare story pitches for the Thursday editorial meeting that looks at future stories. (My supervisor, Jay Lamonica, is the Futures Executive Producer.)

I have realized that, after almost two months at AJAM, I have developed good research skills and learned new ways to find accurate information quickly. My research skills now include PACER, an online portal to U.S. appellate, district and bankruptcy court records, and the (in)famous Lexis-Nexis, a computer-assisted legal research service. Not to mention that I am becoming more familiar with social media, a great tool to find sources.

This week, I have also reconnected with my science background. I probably spent six hours reading reports on spatial exploration and two listening the hearing on a potential mission to Mars. I found it even more interesting to read about the lack of security within the Global Positioning System, also known as the GPS, and the growing

fear around its failure. My assignment was to aggregate information and find potential sources in case we decide to do a story on one or the other topics.

The story on states' failure to train their police officers to deal with mentally ill individuals was approved this week. I am already working with the correspondent on it. He said he would like to have me come along when he goes to North Carolina. He is already planning on renting a car instead of flying there. Exciting perspective.

A little more than a week ago, President Obama announced that he would award 24 U.S. Army veterans with the Medal of Honor in March. It took 12 years to the Department of Defense to find the veterans who were discriminated against because of their skin color or religion at the time of their heroic achievements. Only three are still living, and we will feature them in an upcoming TV segment.

Finally, I am working very aggressively on the tax-fraud story, hunting down attorneys and criminals. The reporter has given me a lot of freedom in conducting the investigation, and I have been able to get in touch with sources who would make a great piece if they accepted to share their stories with us. I will not get into details as I am currently discussing the details with them.

Here is the story that I contributed to:

<http://america.aljazeera.com/watch/shows/america-tonight/america-tonight-blog/2014/2/26/seniors-helping-seniors.html>

In another development, I have asked my supervisor to sit down with me and talk about employment opportunities at Al Jazeera. We set up a meeting date to next week.

Project:

I have been very active in contacting journalists in the past two weeks. After my interview with Yogesh Pawar from *Daily News and Analysis*, Sunita Aron from the *Hindustan Times* agreed to participate in the project.

Although it is only the second interview, I have found interesting parallels between the two interviewees' experience.

Aron explained that she is often invited to talk to journalism students about her career, and every time, she has been introduced as a journalist, author and... an activist. She said that she did not know nor expect that people saw her as an activist but quickly accepted the title.

To her, journalism is about writing and raising awareness about issues related to social justice. When asked whether she takes sides on these issues, she said that whatever she does and says is through columns and writing.

She said she would not take to the street in person but would encourage people to do so. "We are part of the same society," she said. "... The government is insensitive to our issues. If you write again and again about these issues, you raise awareness and encourage people to take action. That type of activism... There is no harm."

What she pointed out here is that the failure of Indian institutions has created an obligation for journalists to assure the social cohesion and be fearless watchdog.

Along with that mission, she said that she has felt very strong about women's rights. When Aron started as a reporter more than 30 years ago, her colleagues would not

let her go in the field. It was not a job for a woman, they said. “How can you be a wife and mother if you work?” they asked her. She challenged every single of them and created a controversy in the male-dominated newsroom. One day, she was asked to have a kitchen talk with the wife of the state governor. Instead, she turned in a political piece to her editor, who published her. The following day, everyone was talking about the article. She knew she had proven *them* she could do it.

Soon, she wrote stories about the brothel, child labor, forced marriage, tribal wars and political scams. Despite death threats, she became the HT editor of the newspaper’s bureau in Uttar Pradesh, the most populated state of India also known for its influence in Indian politics. Today, journalists say that she is the first woman editor in Northern India.

My third interview will also be with a woman editor working for HT but based in New Delhi. Colleen Braganza was the national editor at DNA before she resigned and accepted a position at HT last September. She wanted to be in Delhi for the upcoming general election.

My fourth and fifth interviewees are taking a bit long to confirm the interview. One said he cannot do an-hour interview but would happily answer my questions via email. The other said he has to ask his editor to know whether he is allowed to talk to me. The sixth and seventh interviewees are two journalists from Kashmir, but I have not got any confirmation either. Only one journalist has not got back to me so far. My goal is to schedule my fourth and fifth interviews as soon as possible and reach out to a few more journalists this week.

Conference

This week's conference was with Bridget Serchak, the chief of public affairs for the Inspector General of the Department of Defense, and David Barnes, the public affairs liaison for the Treasury Inspector General for Tax Administration. It was an interesting discussion about the work of inspectors general and the role they hold as government watchdogs. The two speakers detailed how we, journalists, could use information from their reports. Of course, the discussion also dealt with the limit of their role as watchdog as well as the protection of whistleblowers within the U.S. administration. I was particularly interested in any information related to the IRS as I am working on the tax fraud story. Barnes is actually one of the sources we have been using for the story.

Work planned for next week:

- Work on the tax fraud story
- Work on the Seattle-based artist story
- Prepare and conduct third interview
- Schedule new interviews
- TRANSCRIBE!!!

**Field Note – Week 7 (March 10, 2014)**

*Oral Defense: 11 a.m. on Monday, April 28, in the Global Programs conference room*

In order to meet this week's goals, I did the following:

- Tax fraud story: Infamous inmate Rashia Wilson agreed to talk to us
- Seattle-based artist story: Got postponed because producer is too busy



- Third interview conducted with Colleen Braganza
- Two interviews conducted via email with Sreenivasan Jain and Meena Menon
- Booking three other interviewees for the upcoming week

#### Fieldwork:

Last week was rather calm. My supervisor was on vacation, and the producer, who came down from New York to replace him, did not really know what to do with me. I took the initiative to help producers in their daily newsgathering tasks from finding good video clips to booking guests. That being said, last Monday, I worked from home since it was a snow day, and on Wednesday, I attended the National Press Foundation Award dinner.

#### The highlights of the week:

- Dealing with stress

Last Tuesday, I had a little confrontation with one of the producers. As you may remember, I had pitched a story on the Medal of Honor awardees, and one of the producers I had worked with in the past got the assignment. He did not seem really interested in the story, but of course, he had to accept it. After I briefed him about my findings, he said he would let me know how I could help him.

Three days passed, and when I came in the office on Tuesday, I asked if he needed help with the story and when he was planning on going to Florida and/or Texas to meet with the veterans. (The story is supposed to air next week.) He was obviously very upset because he hadn't booked anyone yet and obviously failed at having the exclusivity on the story.

I figured that he was overwhelmed with the coverage of the Ukrainian crisis so I offered to reach out to the veterans and book them for him. Soon, I learned from officials that one veteran had dementia, the other one was traveling, and the third said he was tired and didn't want to talk to the media anymore. The producer asked me to find another angle for the story in case we were not able to convince one of the veterans to talk. The other idea was to find military historians and talk to them about the research process — these veterans should have received the Medal of Honor decades ago but were discriminated against because of their ethnical background at the time — and to what extent they thought the event was more political than anything else.

I kept the producer updated on whatever decision I was making. That is kind of the rule for me since I am not officially an employee. When you talk directly with the Pentagon and the Army's media relation officers, you don't want to make a mistake on behalf of Al Jazeera. (FYI, the name Al Jazeera is still very much associated to terrorism, so some sources refuse to talk to us.) When I told the producer that no official was willing to give us a direct contact to reach out to these veterans, he got very angry for no reason. He basically said that I was incompetent and didn't know how to handle PR people. Still now, I do not think I made any mistake in the process and thought he was really aggressive for no reason. He thought I was giving up. Hell, never.

It was very stressful to work with this producer because he couldn't manage his own stress. He surely wanted something booked very quickly so he could fly out to Florida the following day, but at the same time, he didn't have time to reach out to people and only had an incompetent graduate student working for him. When I faced his reaction — which was loud and intimidating, I wanted to tell him what I thought of the way he

had been handling the story since the beginning and should not blame me. Instead, I listened patiently and left. When I got back to my desk, I was even more motivated to prove him wrong. I worked another two hours and got what I needed. Before I left the newsroom around 9 p.m., I went to his desk, gave him a post-it on which I had written down the contact information of the veteran and left.

The following day, he gave me a high five and thanked me. He did not apologize for the way he treated me in front of everyone, but he meant it. I worked another eight hours for him that day, booking more interviewees, gathering background information, etc., so he could fly out in the evening with everything he needed. It was a great day.

What I am trying to say with this (long) summary is that I didn't enjoy my interaction with him, but at the same time, I felt it was a great exercise for me. Working under pressure and stress has never really been an issue for me, but when I saw that this producer, who was acting as my superior on this assignment, lost control of the situation, I felt I needed to calm down and focus so I could be more effective and more responsive.

- **Getting access**

As you know, I have been working closely with another producer on the tax fraud story. A few weeks ago, I got a great lead to establish contact with an inmate, Rashia Wilson, who was condemned for stealing millions of dollars through tax-return fraud. We have been aggressively trying to get access to the inmate as well as the federal prison where she is based.

For two weeks, I harassed Wilson's defense attorney. He would not pick up my calls nor answer my emails. One day, I told him he had to allow me 5 minutes. It is only

when he said he was not representing Wilson anymore and wished he could help us more because he loves Al Jazeera. Go figure. He gave me the name of an appeal law firm, which is currently in charge of the case. It raised a question: Why would an appeal law firm deal with Wilson case since the woman had pleaded guilty and was currently serving her time in a federal prison? I decided to call the firm to ask them about the matter. After putting me on hold for 20 minutes, the attorney said he would get back to me... via email. It sounded fishy.

Later in the day, I received an email stating that they will not comment until the Court's ruling. Court ruling? It became more interesting. I immediately told everything to the field producer, who was probably as excited as me. She followed up with them and asked to talk to the attorney again. Two days later, they accepted to do a phone interview. The attorney said that they wanted to appeal the decision and were currently working on their proposal. We asked if we could talk to Wilson in person, and the attorney said he would do his best to get us access. We were literally jumping of happiness in the newsroom. Last Tuesday, the attorney told us that Wilson had accepted to meet with us. We are now working our way through the access request. The Florida Department of Correction media policies are pretty straight forward, [as explained here](#), and the trick is to prove why it is important to do the interview with this specific inmate. More to come.

- **Future stories**

My supervisor, Jay Lamonica, is coming back this week, so I will talk to him about a new pitch I am working on. It is about early education in the U.S. The topic is pretty timely with the new federal budget announced and an obvious desire from the Obama's administration to develop pre-schools around the country. I have been reading

some reports that say how beneficial early education is not only for the individual but also for the society. Several programs have been implemented around the country, so we could easily send a team to see how they are doing.

I am also looking at the issue of “medical marijuana refugee”. Several people have moved to pot-legal states because they needed medical marijuana to treat severe disorders, such as epilepsy.

Project:

Let’s be very practical. Here is the list of Indian journalists I have interviewed and contacted:

- Yogesh Pawar (*DNA*): Interview done
- Sunita Aron (*Hindustan Times*): Interview done
- Colleen Braganza (*Hindustan Times*): Interview done
- Meena Menon (*The Hindu*): Email interview done
- Sreenivasan Jain (NDTV): Email interview pending
- Abhinay Dey (*The Times of India*): Email interview pending
- Sandeep Pai (*Hindustan Times*): Planning interview
- Sucheta Dalal (MoneyLife): Interview request sent
- Aditya Sinha (Former editor-in-chief of *DNA*): Interview request sent
- Madhu Trehan (*India Today*): Interview request sent
- Siddhart Varadarajan (Former editor-in-chief of *The Hindu*): Interview request sent

The three interviews I have conducted via Skype were terrific.

As an editor, Braganza told me about the internal workings of the *Hindustan Times*. Some of this information will have to remain off-the-record if my article is published not to expose her. She talked about how the owner of the newspaper has a say on every editorial decision made by editors; how newspapers are more and more compliant with whoever is in power because of business interests — the government buys a lot of space in Indian newspaper; and how her former editor-in-chief at *DNA* was sacrificed as part of a deal between the group's owner and the government in a political scam.

Meena Menon, who is the *HT* correspondent in Pakistan and has worked for more than 30 years as a journalist, told me a similar story about Siddhart Varadarajan. The latter resigned from *The Hindu* last October, citing a change in policy by the owners of the newspaper to go back to being a family run and edited newspaper. I have reached out to Varadarajan, but I doubt he will get back to me. He is currently making the headlines after he received death threats for expressing his opinions about Narendra Modi. Last week, an article read: “In the run-up to the elections, India’s newly discovered lack of acceptance and complete intolerance of divergent views is reaching astronomical proportions.” This is what the recent report published by the Committee Protect Journalist stated in the aftermath of similar attacks and the ban of books.

Here is an extract from the report: “Journalist Shivam Vij recently wrote about how some big names in Indian media have come under pressure. Sagarika Ghose, the host of ‘Face the Nation’ on CNN-IBN and deputy editor of the English-language news channel, has received orders from Network 18, which owns the channel, to not post critical tweets on Modi, according to Vij. Management has also pressured Nikhil Wagle,

editor of IBN Lokmat, Network 18's Marathi-language channel, to refrain from critical comments on Modi, according to Vij.”

In the light of India’s press freedom under greater threat, I believe that my project is even more relevant.

Braganza said that she sees herself as a facilitator. “I am one of the people the news passes through to get into the paper. We choose headlines and the way we shape the paper. There are ways to push in things that are important. It is never unconsciously that I do it. I will always go to the stories that are more important — not for the ones that would get the more clicks.”

When asked how she envisioned her impact on society when she started as a journalist, Menon confessed that she didn’t have with noble ideal.

“A lot of my work evolved due to my exposure to a number of people — some in my work environment and others outside it,” she said “Looking back, I think it is important for journalists to write on what is not written about, and for me, I like to do stories that reflect the interests of the not-so powerful. In fact, I started reporting on the movement against the Narmada Valley Dams in 1988 and followed it up for nearly two decades because I thought that it was a significant movement. That set off a whole debate about activist journalist, and even my colleagues in the profession used to joke that I wrote about nothing else, which was far from the truth.”

My goal is to have a few more interviews by early next week. I am very behind with the transcription of the interviews so I will probably pay someone to transcribe for me. Ideally, I will send you a few transcripts next week so you can get an idea of what I

have. I would like by the end of the month to send the equivalent of a story pitch for the analysis component, so I can work on it early April and turn in a first draft by mid-April.

One thing I have realized is that the people I have talked to are mostly print journalists. I do not think it really matters because Pawar, who worked for 10 years as a TV reporter, said that the challenges in Indian journalism are similar regardless of the medium. That being said, I am still hoping to get Jain of NDTV to talk to me.

### Conference

Last Wednesday, at the National Press Foundation Awards dinner, I established contact with Lara Setrakian, the co-founder and executive director of Syria Deeply. Her outlet has done some amazing work on the Syrian conflict and is expected to extend its coverage to Afghanistan soon.

Last Friday, we met with Anna Palmer of Politico. As a senior correspondent covering lobbying, politics and money, she seemed a bit disconnected from the real world to me. When I asked her why she went into journalism for, she said she likes to learn everyday, enjoys its entrepreneurial essence and has always been confrontational to power. When I asked her how she could write human-interest stories considering her beat, she said that there are a lot of personalities in her sources. Let's say she did not convince me. However, she did share interesting insight about Washington, D.C., "a relationship town", and how to navigate the lobbying world.

Yesterday, we went to NBC to watch Meet the Press. It was an interesting experience to be in the studio and see the interactions between the guests. I do not usually watch Sunday shows, and I was surprised how little time the guests were given to speak.



Also, I am not sure the guests reveal anything new during the show. However, I read this morning that, speaking on Fox News Sunday, former Secretary of Defense Robert Gates said, “There really aren’t any direct military options that we have.” Of the sanctions he considered he said, “frankly I don’t believe are going to be any deterrent for Putin.” I would have rather liked to hear this than an official giving a PR speech similar to the ones from the Cold War era.

Work planned for next week:

- Work on the new pitches
- Follow up with correspondents and their stories
- Conduct more interviews and have them transcribed
- Start aggregating everything I need to write my final report

**Field Note – Week 8 (March 17, 2014)**

In order to meet this week’s goals, I did the following:

- Followed up on tax fraud story
- Created package on airplane radar system and other airplane crash cases
- Pitched story on early education
- Conducted interview with Sandeep Pai with Colleen Braganza
- Reviewed Abhinay Dey’s and Aditya Sinha’s email interviews

Fieldwork:

It has been a long week between the daily developments in Crimea and Malaysia, my new pitches and the daily help I provide producers with. The highlights of the week:

- **Assisting AJAM transportation correspondent**

Last Monday, I received an email from my supervisor, asking whether I could do some research for one of our correspondents. Of course, I said yes.

When I arrived at the office, the correspondent called me and gave me around 10 issue questions to resolve within three hours, as she was getting ready to go on air and deliver the latest updates on the Malaysian plane. I took notes of what she needed, hung up and looked at the list of questions. Honestly, I did not believe I could make it. Questions ranged from details on various airplane crashes that occurred in the past, precise information on the airplane radar system around the world, an overview of how pilots communicate when they fly over the Atlantic and the depth of various points in the Indian Ocean. To make it short: I know all about it now.

It was stressful because the correspondent was not in the office so I couldn't ask her questions or update her. It was 3 p.m.; she was arriving in the studio around 6:30 p.m.; and the show started at 7 p.m. I was with my computer, my phone and myself. I am sure the amount of stress I had helped me type frenetically on the keyboard and work faster, but holy cow. When she arrived in the studio, I walked with her, making sure she had understood all my notes and clarifying a few points.

As I was in the studio, behind the cameras, I was excited to see her answer the questions of the host and elaborate on what was happening in the other side of the world. Although she forgot one date, she made it through, and the package turned out to be a

good one. Three hours of work were needed to answer five questions in five minutes on air.

It was one of these moments when the correspondent thanks you, and you smile shyly.

- **Writing a pitch and defending it**

As you may remember, I suggested that AJAM looks at the debate around early education in the light of the new federal budget. I have realized that I had never showed you the pitches I have been working on, so here is the latest one:

*BACKGROUND: The education portion of the 2015 federal budget includes \$1.3 billion (plus another \$75 billion during the next 10 years) to implement universal preschool programs for all 4-year-olds. Is it a good idea?*

*It is certainly a huge investment, but there is evidence that pre-school makes big differences. Both the Perry Pre-School Project, an experiment conducted in Ypsilanti, Michigan, in the early 1960s, and the Abecedarian experiment performed in North Carolina in the early 1970s, showed that early education develops a child's "soft skills" and can have a profound effect on adult potential, especially for disadvantaged kids. Recently, those studies have been re-analyzed and confirmed to be accurate and correct. A team led by economist James Heckman even estimates that the return on investment for Perry's pre-school program is from 7 to 12 percent.*

*Despite stunning results, some experts and conservatives have said that it is a huge mistake to assume that a pilot program can be rolled out on a large scale, highlighting that 1) a universal program will be much more expensive than a program targeted to the*

20 percent of kids who are poor; 2) in a given pilot program, it's more likely that the results will be random chance rather than a real effect.

*FOCUS: Interesting enough, some Republican representatives from Oklahoma have showed strong support of preschool programs in their state, which now leads the way for early-childhood education. Oklahoma began a pilot prekindergarten program in 1980, and, in 1998, it passed a law providing for free access to prekindergarten for all 4-year-olds. Families don't have to send their children, but 74 percent of all 4-year-olds are enrolled in a pre-K program.*

*In addition, the state provides more limited support -- access to full-day, year-round nursery school, coaching sessions for parents on reading and talking more to their children -- for needy children 3 and under. The aim is to break the cycle of poverty, which is about so much more than a lack of money. This initiative is a reflection of the influence of George B. Kaiser, a Tulsa billionaire who, searching for charitable causes with the same rigor as if he were looking at financial investments, has helped develop Educare schools, a network of state-of-the-art, full-day, year-round schools, funded mostly by existing public dollars and serving at-risk children.*

*WE TELL THIS STORY BY:*

*- Visiting a Tulsa public preschool to show what has made the reputation of Oklahoma's early education programs. Ideally, we would follow a low-income family who see preschool as an opportunity for their children to get a better future.*

*- Visiting the first Educare school, which opened in Chicago, to look at how it serves approximately 150 at-risk infants, toddlers and preschoolers in Chicago's Grand*

*Boulevard neighborhood. The Educare model developed in Chicago has inspired the creation of other Educare School all over the country.*

*- Meeting with economists (James Heckman), early education experts (Craig Ramey) and opponents to this reform (Andrew J. Coulson) to discuss the advantages and limits of universal early preschool programs. Usually, with each pitch goes a full research package including background information, potential sources and their contact information. My packages are always more thorough than expected because I am still shy when it comes to defend my story idea in front of all the executive producers. A better grasp on the issue helps me answer their questions and provide more contextual fact. It has only been a few weeks that I am allowed to attend the pitch meeting. It is scary, but they usually welcome my ideas well and end up providing me with great feedback.*

I submitted this pitch last week, but I will not defend it before Thursday as we have had too many stories last week.

- **Following up on immigration issues**

Last week, I was asked to keep an eye on the groups of migrants crossing the border between Tijuana and San Diego as almost 200 people went through the checkpoint to be arrested and inquire about asylum. These people are the dreamer immigrants who have been deported to Mexico as Congress continues to debate the immigration reform, also known as the Dream Act. Most of these people have their immediate family in the U.S. where they have lived part of their lives.

I was also asked to follow up on the hunger strike happening in Washington State as a large group of inmates refused to eat to protest the immigration law. Some lawyers

said the authorities did not want to come to the negotiation table and used the strike as an excuse to perpetuate retaliations, whether it was to send the inmate to solitary confinement or forced-feeding.

I thought these two stories were powerful and illustrative of what was happening in the U.S. when it comes to immigration. Unfortunately, we did not have enough staff to fly over and do a package. I am still in touch with several people to see what we could do this week.

- **Future story**

I am currently writing a pitch on the rights of people with disability as the Achieving A Better Life Experience Act, also known as the ABLE Act, is currently being discussed. It would allow families in the United States to open tax-free accounts similar to college savings accounts, health savings accounts, and individual retirement accounts in order to provide for their child's future needs. Money saved through an ABLE account would not count against an individual's eligibility for federal benefits, allowing individuals with disabilities to earn an income and save money towards their future without losing the benefits necessary for daily living. This is not possible as of today: People with disability under Medicare/Medicaid are not allowed to earn more than a few hundreds dollars nor have money on their saving account. Basically, if you are disabled and are under Medicare/Medicaid — which provides caretakers just to mention one “benefit”, you are not allowed to earn an income.

This is an issue I have worked on in the past when I co-directed and co-produced a short documentary on Max Lewis, a Columbia-based lawyer with quadriplegia. I

mentioned the story idea to my supervisor, and I got his support to have the package ready by Wednesday. It is an issue that matters, and I think, AJAM should look at it.

Project:

Here is an updated list of Indian journalists I have interviewed and contacted:

- Yogesh Pawar (*DNA*): Interview done; transcription in the process
- Sunita Aron (*Hindustan Times*): Interview done; transcription in the process
- Colleen Braganza (*Hindustan Times*): Interview done; transcription in the process
- Sandeep Pai (*Hindustan Times*): Interview done; transcription in the process
- Meena Menon (*The Hindu*): Email interview done; review done; followed up done
- Aditya Sinha (Former editor-in-chief of *DNA*): Email interview done; review done
- Abhinay Dey (*The Times of India*): Email interview done; review done
- Madhu Trehan (*India Today*): Interview request sent
- Sucheta Dalal (MoneyLife): Interview request sent
- Sreenivasan Jain (NDTV): Email interview pending
- Siddhart Varadarajan (Former editor-in-chief of *The Hindu*): Interview request sent

I really need to review all the interviews to evaluate how much more I need to do in terms of interviewing. I believe that I have an interesting range of information regarding each one's role perception as well as great historical and current background information on the challenges journalism has been facing in India.

Again, here is what I want to do by the end of the month:

- Finish transcribing — I have been very good at it this weekend;

- Evaluating how much I need to do to complete the project — I would actually like to get a few more people to talk to me, especially the ones whose interview requests are pending. Two of them have the questions and agreed to answer them.
- Having a pitch ready by the end of the month

### Conference

Last week, we met with Terry Bracy and Jim Brown, partners in the government relations firm, who talked to us about the role and challenges of lobbying in the U.S. To be honest, I am quite unfamiliar with this world because in France lobbying isn't something we see and talk about openly. The lobbying culture is pretty widespread and known in this country, which made the conversation even more interesting to me. Bracy and Brown gave us some insight on the different (successful) project they have worked on and what were the tricks they used to resolve issues around municipal construction projects in St. Louis or other cities in the South.

They insisted that their job was to sell expertise and knowledge (and contacts). When there is an issue that a mayor cannot resolve at his/her level, they are most likely to ask a lobbying group to do the legwork in Washington, D.C., and come up with a solution. They also explained that they are not a big company, making the headlines every other day, and would rather remain in the shadow. When asked about their ethical line, they strongly affirm that they never take on issues that are in direct conflict with their beliefs.

Although it sounded somehow well polished, this discussion allowed us to put a face on one of the influential lobbying firms of Washington, D.C. I have also learned



that, most of the time, lobbyists are the ones who write bills and amendments, and we, as journalists, do not necessarily/immediately think about them when it comes to getting information because their name is not written in front of the report. I will surely remember this.

Work planned for next week:

- See details above on my plan of action to get my master's project done
- Defend pitch on early education
- Write and submit pitch on ABLE Act
- Follow up with correspondents who are working on the stories I pitched in the past (mentally ill individuals facing untrained police officers; tax fraud story; etc.)
- Apply for jobs

**Field Note – Week 9 (March 24, 2014)**

In order to meet this week's goals, I did the following:

- Reviewed half of the interviews; still have some to go through.
- Got confirmation that I will receive two more sets of answers via email
- Unsure on the status of my story pitch on early education
- Postponed new pitches
- Followed up and worked on stories with several producers
- Applied to 12 job positions

Fieldwork:

It has been a very stressful and exhausting week and weekend.

Monday and Tuesday, I helped the producer with who I have been working on the police training in dealing on mental illness. Our initial contact did not respond to our interview request because CNN reportedly had him promise the exclusivity. Since I have been working on the story for the past two weeks, I was asked to find a back-up plan. Honestly, I am getting used to managing crisis situation like this one that it has become enjoyable. It is like I get a kick out of extra stress.

I was also asked to TRANSCRIBE an hour of interview, which literally killed me. I do not know if you remember, but I had spent several hours doing that over the weekend for my own project. The request came from the same producer who asked me to accompany a cameraman for a shooting at the congressional office building on Wednesday.

Wednesday was definitely an interesting day since I worked my way through congresspersons' offices. The producers had assumed that we would be able to follow the veteran we were featuring and get him on camera as he met congresspersons throughout the day. For your information, cameras are not allowed in the corridors of the building unless a congressman accompanies the cameraman. Cameras are not allowed either in congresspersons' offices unless a media request was filed ahead of time. The challenge — and I did not know it until I met with the cameraman that Wednesday morning — was to visit congresspersons' offices before the veteran's appointment.

I had never talked to congresspersons' media officers before so I improvised on the spot. Their reactions were very different, from "Oh, you media people!" to

“Absolutely!” Just imagine me running through the corridors’ building, catching my breath right in front the office’s door, introducing myself to the assistant and trying to convince the media officer to let us film a few minutes of the meeting without any permission. All that in a French accent, of course.

It was a great experience to have, and I was quite happy with the access we have gotten at the end of the day. However, I have learned that I will never want to be journalist, working on Capitol Hill. It is pretty depressing.

The second highlight of my week came on Thursday. As you may know by now, Thursday is when my supervisor holds the weekly editorial meeting and talks about the future stories we will be doing. That day, the senior executive producers, Kim Bondy, decided that we will host a panel discussion on Monday with a group of young, healthy people to talk about the Affordable Care Act. She assigned the producer I have been working with on the tax-fraud story to organize and produce the panel discussion... and she asked me to be the co-producer. Although that meant that my weekend was sacrificed, I was really happy to be trusted and part of this project.

Since Friday, Nicole Grether and I have been on the phone and on our computers trying to organize the event at a local coffee shop and get the best panelists we could find in town. I actually had to hunt some people down on Sunday afternoon, as we were short on panelists. In parallel, we started writing the script as well as pulling out videos for the TV segment.

I am exhausted but excited to see how this is going to turn out tomorrow. We have worked hard so we are hoping for the best. As the weeks go, I really feel included in

the AJAM team and enjoy every assignment I have been given. It is such a rewarding experience to be working with all these amazing journalists.

Project:

Here is an updated list of Indian journalists I have interviewed and contacted:

- Yogesh Pawar (*DNA*): Interview done; transcription in the process
- Sunita Aron (*Hindustan Times*): Interview done; transcription in the process
- Colleen Braganza (*Hindustan Times*): Interview done; transcription in the process
- Sandeep Pai (*Hindustan Times*): Interview done; transcription in the process
- Meena Menon (*The Hindu*): Email interview done; review done; followed up done
- Aditya Sinha (Former editor-in-chief of *DNA*): Email interview done; review done
- Abhinay Dey (*The Times of India*): Email interview done; review done
- Madhu Trehan (*India Today*): Email interview sent; awaiting reply
- Sreenivasan Jain (NDTV): Email interview sent; awaiting reply

I have attached three of the email interviews I have conducted to give you a sense of how the conversation is going. With the four interviews I still have to transcribe and two pending, I think I have reached the point where I have enough material to write a piece with various voices and opinions. What I am thinking is to illustrate and built transitions between the different parts with reports I have found and read in the past. I think it is important to back up what every journalist has shared with me, and there is a lot of good material to use out there.

Again, here is what I want to do in the next two weeks:

- Finish transcribing;

- Draft a story pitch for next week's field note
- Get it approved and edited right away
- Turn in my master's project by mid-April

### Conference

Last Friday, we met with Mike McCurry, press secretary to President Bill Clinton. The man was quite impressive as he recounted stories from the time he held a variety of leadership roles in Washington, D.C.

He talked about political communication strategies and how he worked with journalists as a spokesperson. He confessed that he finds President Obama's administration quite close and secretive, and he said how much he disapproves anonymity. Finally, he told us about the challenges he went through during the Lewinsky scandal.

In that matter, I enjoyed the part when he said how he refused to answer questions from journalists even though they were important and legitimate. "The press corps respected my position, but I have received a lot of criticism," he said. I am wondering how one can accept to hide the truth and lie because it is part of job. It might be quite unsettling to violate our personal belief.

### Work planned for next week:

- Monday: Panel discussion on Obamacare
- Tuesday: Second evaluation with Prof. Cochran and Jay LaMonica
- Wednesday: Submit pitch on early education
- Thursday: I am going to ask the day off so I can work on my master's project

- Friday-Sunday: Master's project

### **Field Note – Week 10 (March 31, 2014)**

In order to meet this week's goals, I did the following:

- Produced roundtable
- Wrote and published Web story
- Pitched and got new story approved
- Transcribed and started writing my project

Field work:

Monday was a lot of fun. We all met at the coffee shop where we hosted the roundtable. In the first two hours of the morning, I helped set the stage with three cameras, sound system and lighting. Settings the three cameras and choosing the perfect angles to shoot was the tricky part. I somehow learned how to do that with the cameraman who asked me to comment everything I was doing as we were setting the stage. I really appreciated the time he took to do that. At the same time, I was assisting the producer who learned at 8 a.m. that one of our guests wouldn't be able to make it. The guest said that she was scared to miss her afternoon flight if she commuted in and out of the District for the roundtable. It was interesting to see how the producer managed the situation. Because we are a television network, we were able to send her a car to Virginia. The car dropped her off at the coffee shop and waited for her for two hours so she would be able to make it back home on time. Although we managed that situation, there was still the fear that one of our four guests wouldn't make it. From 8 a.m. to 10

a.m., we were waiting and hoping. They slowly came in, which helped us calm down a little bit. When the correspondent arrived, we told him about the guests, the set and what we were thinking to do with the roundtable. I was amazed by how quickly he felt confident to interact with the panelists. When everyone arrived, we finalized the settings, checked the angles and made the guests feel at ease. For the next 40 minutes, we were filming. It's amazing what we had to think about all along — from the waiters who might come in too close and disturb the set to the way the sugar was positioned on the table. It's not what I would call journalism, but it definitely contributed to building our report. Behind the word production, there is so much more. Producers play a key role in the making of broadcast journalism. I believe it is very useful to learn some of these skills; I can now better see how to prepare field reporting and be good at problem solving.

Tuesday, Prof. Cochran visited the newsroom for the second time. I received a positive evaluation from my supervisor who highlighted my performances. We also talked about employment. Although I wasn't promised anything, I felt recognized for the work I have been doing. In the second part of the afternoon, I wrote my second piece for the Web, which was published today. I saw that the editor added two typos to my piece, so I will have to ask them to copyedit again. Here is the link:

<http://america.aljazeera.com/watch/shows/america-tonight/articles/2014/3/28/slideshow-forgottenspanishmasonsatilestransformedamericaascities.html>

Wednesday, I was sent in the field again. The son of saxophonist Coltrane donated his father's instrument to the National Museum of American History. This took place during the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration of his album, which also launched the Smithsonian's jazz appreciation month. With the producer and the French cameraman

(yes, we are everywhere!), we were supposed to get some b-roll of the opening ceremony and then sit down with a couple of guests for in-person interviews. Ten minutes before the ceremony started, we learned that Coltrane's son couldn't make it to the ceremony. It called it a fail. We got some shots in case we would be able to schedule a future interview with him and left. I just made it on time to the office to revise my pitch on early education. I had learned that the executive producers were confused on what I was suggesting we could shoot. I spent an hour preparing myself for the meeting. "You're called to the shark tank," Jay LaMonica said. People in the office are terrified by that expression because it means we are going to spend 15 intense minutes in front of the executive producers answering their questions and concerns. Until now, my pitches were easily accepted. For some reason, this one was a difficult one to defend. After briefing the room on why I thought we should do a story on early education, I quickly provided them with detailed and technical information. I was backed up by a few of the attendees who recounted previous experiences. I was able to directly talk to the senior executive producer who challenged me on several points. At the end, my story was accepted. I knew I was ready for this, but I sweated a little bit. My supervisor was really happy and congratulated me.

I was off for the rest of the week, as I wanted to work on my master's project and needed to rest after two very intense weeks and no weekend.

### Project:

I have put the project together and listed what I have to do to complete it in the next two weeks. Here is my list:



- Write an introduction to the project
- Complete my field notes for the remaining 3 weeks
- Write about my experience and evaluate myself
- Aggregate new physical evidences of my work at AJAM
- Write professional analysis article
- Finish transcribing
- Obtain supervisor's evaluation

Here are my questions for you:

- What do you expect from a self-evaluation? What do you want to hear that isn't already in my field notes?
- As you know, I have not been writing a lot at AJAM. Although I will have a few Web pieces to show, how do you want me to show proof? I think I could ask the different producers I have worked with to write up an evaluation of my work. I could also include DVDs of the stories I have worked on. Please, advise.
- I will send an outline of my professional analysis article by Friday. With four lengthy interviews, three email interviews and my research, I am confident that I will be able to articulate an answer to my project's questions. I would be grateful if you could provide me with some guidance.

I have transcribed a total of 7 hours of interviews so far. You can read five of the interviews as I have attached a transcript of each to my email. I still have two more hours to transcribe so I will finish this as I outline my analysis article this week.

Here is the final list of Indian journalists I interviewed:

- Yogesh Pawar (*DNA*)
- Sunita Aron (*Hindustan Times*)
- Colleen Braganza (*Hindustan Times*)
- Sandeep Pai (*Hindustan Times*)
- Meena Menon (*The Hindu*)
- Aditya Sinha (Former editor-in-chief of *DNA*)
- Abhinay Dey (*The Times of India*)

The two additional email interviews I was hoping to receive have not arrived yet. If I receive them in the next two weeks, I will include them; otherwise, I will do without them. I do have more people I could interview, but I can't take more to transcribe or analyze. I would like to concentrate the two upcoming weeks on writing and editing. What I might do, however, is follow up with my interviewees if I need to clarify a point or a quote. Indian English is interesting to work with.

Conference: We didn't have a conference last Friday.

Work planned for next week:

- Follow up on tax-fraud story. We must go shoot this week as the deadline is approaching;
- Write Web piece on French photographer based in Egypt
- Write pitch on disability and finance
- Start post-production for story on police training in dealing with the mentally ill.  
We are shooting this week.
- Finish transcribing

- Outline analysis article

### **Field Note – Week 11 (April 6, 2014)**

In order to meet this week's goals, I did the following:

- Booked interviews for tax story; unsure whether we will make it to the deadline; lots of barriers from the U.S. administration
- Drafted online piece; deadline this week
- Wrote and submitted story pitch on ABLE Act
- Started writing the analysis component of the master's project

Field work:

This week was mostly focused on the tax fraud story. The producer was supposed to go in the field and shoot at least part of the story, but she didn't make it. All the federal and local agencies we've contacted have refused to give on-camera interviews. The federal prison where we had located one very famous tax-fraud criminal refused us access after two months of discussion. They cannot allow a camera inside the prison; they suggested that we go with a pen and a notebook. Even the people who could benefit from talking to us — the IRS on the efforts to reducing tax fraud, the detectives on the recent series of arrests, etc. — denied access and refused interview requests. The producer was about to give up when we decided to sit down and actually go through the possibilities we had left. After refocusing the story and talking to the executive producers, we decided to give it another try by contacting new people, visiting new places. The executive

producers want the story by April 15, which is now a very tight deadline to go shoot, edit and produce, but we will try till the end.

This is when I know why I love newspapers and magazines so much. All the people I contacted would have given an interview to a paper or offered a statement at least. Also, because one TV segment requires sending three people in the field — the producer, the cameraperson and the correspondent — for several days and at different locations, I can see all the barriers and limitations TV journalism faces. This is crazy; this is too expensive. Anyhow, I found the experience of failing at respecting the deadline and discussing whether we should kill the story quite interesting. It is obvious that many don't want that story to be told, but especially because they don't want it out, it is an emergency to share it with our audience. What's actually happening within the IRS is unacceptable and shows the failure of a federal institution at dealing with a critical situation.

Over the week, I also started working on my new online piece and submitted my pitch on ABLE Act. There's been a lot of miscommunication between the executive producers and the producers so it felt like quite messy at the office this week. Remaining focus and getting work done is, however, my goal.

Project:

Here is what I am working on:

- Write acknowledgment: *Written*
- Write an introduction to the project: *Drafting introduction*
- Complete my field notes for the remaining 2 weeks: *Here is one*

- Write about my experience and evaluate myself: *Drafting summary*
- Aggregate new physical evidences of my work at AJAM: *Aggregating*
- Write professional analysis article: *Drafting the article*
- Finish transcribing: *Polishing transcript*
- Obtain supervisor's evaluation: *Requesting evaluation this week.*

To write the professional analysis article, I have been extracting the best quotes I got from my interviews and organizing them throughout the piece. The way I am dividing the piece is pretty simple and appeared to be the logical structure after completion of the interviews.

The project aims at understanding how Indian journalists perceive their role in India's current political and economic climate, what challenges these practitioners face and what purpose they think journalism needs to serve in the emerging democracy.

**Indian journalism at risk:** In this first section, I talk about where Indian journalism stands today, what challenges it is facing and why it is an interesting case to look at. I will try to add some historical context from what I researched and collected with my interviews.

**The roles of journalists:** In this second section, I explain that journalists have been defining their roles and adapting their journalistic practices in reaction to India's social, political and economic (chaotic) situation. Because journalism and activism seem to intertwine more than flirtatiously, I share how Indian journalists have addressed ethical questions raised by their practices.

**Reforming Indian journalism:** In this third section, I look at the different solutions brought up by Indian journalists to ‘repair’ the Indian journalism, “to bring it back on the right path.” Aware than without a stronger code of ethics, better technical and editorial training and an effort in developing media literacy, Indian journalists will not be able to serve the fundamental purpose of their profession — advancing democracy.

**Is there hope?** In this last section, I aim at raising questions as well as drawing parallels between the West and East.

I might twist this structure a little bit as I continue analyzing the transcript and writing the analysis, but this is the general conclusion that I got out of my research.

### Conference

This week we spoke with media lawyers Stephen Weiswasser, Jeff Kosseff, Katharine Goodloe and Stephen Kiehl from Covington & Burling. In two hours, they addressed most of the questions related to communication law that I discussed in my Communication Law seminar throughout last semester. We talked about First Amendment cases, newsgathering techniques and copyright issues.

Until this semester, during which I am confronted to all these questions, I hadn’t realized the importance of knowing or at least being aware of communication laws. It is very much at the heart of our journalistic practices. At several instances, I had to refer to Al Jazeera America’s lawyers to make sure I wasn’t doing something wrong or simply to get advice on how to go about in a specific situation. The latest instances when we needed help were for the use of videos distributed online by the government and federal prison access rights.

One of the best tools I have been using in the past two years to get legal assistance has been the website of Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press. I was happy to hear that the media lawyers recommended that we read the field guides published by the committee.

What I also found interesting is that most of these lawyers have a significant knowledge and practice of journalism. They were reporters before they went to law school and still use their journalistic sense and skills as lawyers.

We talked for a little while about the shield law as the firm represents a group of journalists and media houses that is trying to introduce a new definition of the reporters' privileges.

Work planned for next week:

- Follow up on tax-fraud story; am scared the story is going to get killed
- Write and submit online piece on French photographer based in Egypt
- Defend pitch on ABLE Act on Thursday
- Write professional analysis article
- Submit first draft of master's project by April 13

### **Chapter Three: Evaluation and Lessons Learned**

I learned to be interested in television journalism, a domain that I never would have been drawn to on my own. Until recently, I thought television was only for good-looking people, who would get ahead because they knew how to talk in front of a camera. I didn't have much respect for or interest in this domain of journalism. After 14 weeks spent in a television newsroom, I can say that, though broadcast journalism relies in some aspects on blustering, it is another powerful way of telling stories and engaging people when compared to print journalism.

I was familiar with the saying, "an image can speak a thousand words," but I didn't imagine what it entailed. With a background in print journalism and a passion for photography, I knew how to describe scenes and include visual elements in a story. But it was not visual enough for TV. At the beginning of my internship at Al Jazeera America, my supervisor would constantly repeat, "Think visually, Kevin." The journalists I worked with helped me understand what visual journalism really is. To give you an example, I pitched a story on the employment restrictions imposed on people who receive disability benefits. I found out that people with disability cannot save more than \$2,000 in assets nor earn more than \$700 a month without losing their benefits. And this is true even if they want and are able to work. I knew it was not visual at all; it was about finance and the law.

To pass muster, I had to find a way to tell the story visually. I suggested that the TV crew meet and spend time with one or two people with disabilities to see how they manage to make ends meet despite the restrictions. My main character was a woman with



Down syndrome who works two jobs and is really involved in her community. She would like to earn more, go to college, have her own house and live independently, but because of these restrictions, she cannot. So by filming her working at a law firm, spending time with her family and raising awareness about disability issue within her community, we can show that this woman contributes to the society. And yet, the system has limited her rights because she has Down syndrome. Contrary to print journalism where most things can be written, explained and put in perspective, broadcast journalism only works if the words speak to the pictures and if these pictures are compelling.

During the three months I have worked at Al Jazeera America, I researched, pitched and developed a dozen of stories about ‘the underdogs’ of our society. They varied from daily reports about discrimination in the military to the debate around the Affordable Care Act, to longer-term projects about rape-related PTSD treatments to the controversy around tax fraud in Florida and the benefits of early education in the U.S.

At the beginning of my internship, I had no idea how to produce TV segments — again, I had some experience in online and radio production but was a novice in the broadcast world. However, with the feedback I received from executive producers, producers and even online readers, I knew I had adapted myself well to the new environment and to the expectations of my managers. I felt part of the team and helped as much as I could when I was given the opportunity to contribute.

Regardless of whether I will pursue a broadcast journalism career, this experience occurred at an important stage of my young career as a journalist and motivated me to become a better storyteller. Most of all, I know that I love a great story — in any

medium. I provide more detailed information about my experience throughout my weekly field notes.

While I was interning, I also did a project on Indian journalism. I interviewed seven Indian journalists about how they perceive their role in India's current political and economic climate, what challenges they face and what purpose they think journalism needs to serve in the emerging democracy.

The Indian journalists I spoke with said their journalistic practices have changed since media barons applied a business model based on advertising across the news industry in the 1980s. Now strangled by corporate interests and government control, they believe that the application of that model has undermined the basic objective of journalism itself. These practitioners have engaged in a more activist approach to journalism while trying to establish an ethical line for themselves and looking at Western journalistic standards.

After I interned for an Indian newspaper in Mumbai between May and August 2013, it was important to me to understand how my colleagues and other experienced journalists were navigating the bedlam that is India. Because we often take for granted the ethics and the rules of journalistic trade in the West, I wanted to hear the stories of the ones who are still exploring a different model of journalism and doing so with an admirable passion and intense struggle.

Although I wish I were able to do my master's project in India itself instead of conducting interviews remotely, I am confident that the lessons I have learned from these professionals will help me grow as a journalist and inspire others.

“Onward” was definitely the motto of this semester. I was constantly reminded that it would be difficult to complete my master’s project on time if I was not prioritizing well. I have not enjoyed D.C. as much as I wish I had, but I am glad I fulfilled my goal to remain focused and on task. This will serve me for the rest of my life.

I will always remember my first journalism internship — which lasted two weeks — at a local TV station in Nice, France. I was just 15 years old at the time and already asking journalists why they were doing their jobs. My supervising reporter said that journalism was the best job ever and warned me that I would have to be ready to get out of my comfort zone.

I think that’s what I have been trying to do for the past eight years. When I was 18, I moved to Paris to enter the Institute of Political Studies where I learned more about the world. Two years later, I chose to study at the Missouri School of Journalism to expose myself to journalism after a successful three-month internship at a local newspaper. When I realized the assets of the “Missouri method” of teaching, I decided to apply to the school’s graduate program in magazine writing and international journalism. In the midst of my curriculum, I took on a new challenge to explore India and learn about other journalistic practices. Today, I am a very happy young man ready embrace the world, with the aim to broaden the understanding of others using the tools journalism has given me.

As one of my interviewees said, journalism is a crusade. So onward!

April 13, 2014

Al Jazeera America, "America Tonight"

The Newseum

555 Pennsylvania Ave. NW

Washington, D.C. 20001



Subject: Kevin Dubouis evaluation

Kevin was a full-time intern at Al Jazeera America's nightly magazine program, "America Tonight" during spring semester 2014.

His primary role was evaluating and developing story ideas and pitches to see whether they were suitable to pursue as segments for the program. He performed this task admirably; in addition to the stories he was asked to assess and develop into television pieces he came up with a number of original story concepts that were also produced and broadcast on the program.

Kevin worked closely with the digital team authoring a number of articles that he has not yet given to me for review. He went into the field with America Tonight production crews on a number of occasions. Several times he was asked to assemble briefing materials for our anchor and correspondents who were quite impressed with the results.

All in all, he proved himself to be a willing and valued member of our team in a short time and made an excellent impression on his colleagues. I have no doubt he will make an important contribution to whatever facet of journalism he decides to pursue

Jay LaMonica

Executive Producer, Futures

Al Jazeera America, America Tonight

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## Chapter Four: Physical Evidence

This chapter includes three stories I wrote for the Web and a series of pitches I submitted for TV. The two first stories have double bylines; they are inspired from a TV segment that aired on Al Jazeera. It is common practice to use a script written by a producer (hence the second name) and turn it into an online story by doing additional reporting and appropriately laying out the story for the Web. The third story was supposed to be a TV segment but never made it because officials refused to go on camera. Nicole Grether was the producer working with me on the story; this is why her name is on the Web piece too.

The pitches that follow are the results of hours, and often days, of research and digging. On average, I submitted one every week to the executive producers who then invited me to defend my ideas in front of a group of producers. The meetings were held in the senior executive producer's office and were known to be intense. During that weekly hour dedicated to pitching long-form stories, the office was called the "shark tank."

**Paying It Forward, Seniors Help Older Seniors**

**By Amy Walters, Kevin Dubouis**

**Link: <http://america.aljazeera.com/watch/shows/america-tonight/america-tonight-blog/2014/2/26/seniors-helping-seniors.html>**

Ann Pliska lives in a cabin built by her father in the mountains of New Hampshire. But she can hardly keep the wood-burning stove fed, or the snow shoveled.

“It’s been tough getting older because things start happening,” said the 63-year-old, who broke her collarbone five years ago. “I felt myself not able to do everything I used to be able to do.”

Pliska isn’t sick or disabled; she’s simply aging. And the winters here show no mercy to the elderly. For Pliska, simple tasks like keeping the pipes from freezing are overwhelming.

“I have no water in the winter, and the heat is primarily a wood stove,” she said. “Having these guys come over to stack it has been a godsend.”

“These guys” aren’t a couple of college kids on winter break. They’re seniors, or almost seniors, themselves. All of them belong to a “village,” a new type of old-age community, where they help each other stay in their own homes for longer. This village is called Monadnock at Home, and it serves seven different towns surrounding Mount Monadnock in western New Hampshire.

With the recent cold wave, Dwight Schenk, 67, gathers up extra wood to ensure that Pliska stays warm.

Schenk grew up in the shadow of Mount Monadnock before moving to Boston for work. When the time to retire arrived, he decided to move back. He loves this state, even the winters. But he feels the effects of getting older too.

“I used to downhill-ski a lot as a kid,” he said. “I don’t do that as much (anymore).”

He's happy to snow-blow and shovel snow, but Schenk knows that not long from now, he'll be on the receiving end.

'When I'm 65'

"Sixty-five is the day everything changes," said Susan McWhinney-Morse, who founded the concept of senior villages in Boston's Beacon Hill neighborhood 12 years ago.

"Suddenly, one day, you're old," she said. "You didn't know it the day before, but at 65, you're old. I hated turning 65."

McWhinney-Morse teamed up with friends who shared the same vision. They wanted to stay connected to their community, and she recognized that everyone needed a little help — and that eventually some of us will need a lot of it.

It helps that seniors are often retired, with time to kill. Around 10,000 Americans are turning 65 every day, and that number will continue for the better part of two decades. That's a lot of able-bodied people slowly dropping out of the workforce.

"Work stops at 65, and you have 30 more years to go," said McWhinney-Morse, now in her 80s. "You better make sure you have a lifestyle in those 30 years. Thirty years is a long time to play golf and nothing else."

Younger seniors are also less likely to be condescending, she pointed out.

"All of us are afraid of being pandered to, of being dumbed down," she said. "I hate people who come and take my elbow and try to help me across the street because I have white hair. I want to say, 'Sonny, cut that out!'"

An uphill battle

At 53, Larry Davis is the youngster of the group, and enjoys it. He knows more about snowdrifts on Mount Monadnock than he does about old age, and he's always got a story about a picture he's taken or the last mountain he climbed.

“This last snowstorm, it carved some really, really cool-looking stuff,” he said. “I found a snowdrift that was in the shape of like the snowboarders’ halfpipe, and it aimed right at the sun.”

When asked who might take care of him when he gets older, Davis avoids the conversation. He never thought he'd make it this far, he admitted. He’s shared some close relationships with fast motorcycles and stiff drinks.

“I have been on borrowed time for most of my life,” he said.

Single with no kids, Davis said thoughts of his future do creep up on him, despite his best efforts. Climbing Mount Monadnock helps him convince himself he’s pushed off old age a little longer. He hiked up the mountain every day, 2,850 days in a row, in ice storms, rain and shine, until a bout of pneumonia stopped him.

“When I went to see the doctor, he said another hike could have killed me,” he remembered. “I was determined to come back and prove to myself that I could do this, that I wasn’t getting old.”

He wants to be the oldest person to reach the top.

Learning to grow old

The younger seniors benefit, too, from an intimate lesson in what awaits them.

Schenk’s rounds occasionally take him to the home of Tuck Gilbert, a former minister, and his wife, Bobby. During a recent snowstorm, he brought their snow tires up from the basement. And in between these household tasks, they often talk life and death.

“Sometimes people don’t want to talk about death,” Tuck Gilbert said. “Well, why the heck not? It’s there; it’s going to happen. So it isn’t a subject we tend to avoid.”

“We’ve also said recently, we haven’t grown old before,” Bobby Gilbert added. “We have a lot to learn.”



Her husband agrees: "We're beginners at this."

Hoping to help other novices to the aging game, Bobby Gilbert created a booklet on how to arrange affairs after a loved one dies. And she's giving her husband cooking lessons in case she's the one who goes first.

"I never liked cooking; I was never very good at it," he said. "Bobby takes special efforts to help me learn how to cook if I'm alone or she's in a hospital or nursing home."

Schenk loves being part of people's lives and being able to help, but there are drawbacks to the work. He assisted a woman with computer issues for a while. Sometimes they would just chat. And then one day she suddenly died.

"I think that hit me as hard as anything recently," he said.

The emotional attachment isn't in the job description. But being part of that woman's life, and being part of this community, he said, has made it all worth it.

## **How Forgotten Spanish Masons' Tiles Transformed American Cities**

*Throughout New York City and beyond, the largely forgotten Guastavinos built some of America's greatest public spaces*

**By Kevin Dubouis & Ryan Loughlin**

Link: <http://america.aljazeera.com/watch/shows/america-tonight/articles/2014/3/28/slideshow-forgottenspanishmasonsatiletransformedamericaascities.html>

Have you ever noticed the vaulted tile ceilings of the Oyster Bar inside the Grand Central Terminal? Have you ever walked under the polychrome tile arches and vaults of the Elephant House of the Bronx Zoo?

The Museum of the City of New York is revealing a secret kept for decades behind many iconic American public buildings.

At least 200 of New York's most prominent Beaux-Arts landmarks were built more than a century ago by a father-son team of masons from Spain.

Not only did Rafael Guastavino Sr. and his son (also named Rafael) help build some of the nation's most iconic structures between 1881 and 1962, they also revolutionized American architectural design and construction with their tile-vaulting system.

Once you identify some of their architectural chef-d'oeuvres, you'll start seeing them all over.

Their ceilings grace landmarks around the country from the Nebraska State Capitol to the dome of the Smithsonian's Natural History Museum in Washington, D.C. They even ornament ordinary buildings. One of them is the Engine No. 3, a small brick firehouse built in 1916 not far from the U.S. Capitol.

Although they helped build more than 1,000 buildings in 11 countries, the name Guastavino remained largely unknown.

Guastavino tiles seen inside the Holy Trinity Roman Catholic Church on West 82nd Street in Manhattan. Michael Freeman

In an effort to shed light on the story of these avant-gardist architects, the Museum of the City of New York has just opened the exhibition “Palaces for the People: Guastavino and America’s Great Public Spaces,” running through Sept. 7.

Originally curated by John Ochsendorf, a 2008 MacArthur Fellow and professor in architecture at MIT, the exhibition first opened in 2012 in Boston. It was the result of a seven-year cooperation between Ochsendorf’s team and the city’s public library. Last year, the exhibition moved to the National Building Museum in Washington.

The latest exhibit is substantially expanded to highlight some 20 key Guastavino spaces in New York’s five boroughs.

### **The forgotten masons**

In his 2010 book "Guastavino Vaulting," Ochsendorf tells the story of “the unnamed, talented, master craftsmen, who haven’t really been celebrated.”

“It’s almost as if they were dropped here from the 14th century into early 20th century U.S., building some of the greatest buildings our country has ever known,” he said.

In 1881, the Guastavino family emigrated from Barcelona, bringing with them an Old World masonry technique that was embraced by some of the top architects, including Charles McKim, John Carrère and Thomas Hastings.

They used thin ceramic tiles that they set in cement mortar and layered on top of each other.

“The Guastavino construction method was absolutely revolutionary in its day for three big reasons,” Ochsendorf said. “It was fireproof; it was incredibly strong; and it could be

built with no support from below during construction, almost like magic.”

At the time, there was a building boom in America, and massive fires – like 1871’s Great Fire of Chicago that destroyed 19,000 buildings – were gutting cities made of wood.

“So you could imagine that if your city could go up with a match, there was a lot of interest in how can we find a way to make buildings that won't burn down?” Ochsendorf said.

As the Guastavino Fireproof Construction Company established its name in the industry, demand for the family’s work soared.

“The key is getting the geometry right. And they were masters at getting geometries that were very strong,” Ochsendorf said.

To reveal the precision and craftsmanship of the Guastavino work, masons from the International Masonry Institute and students from MIT created a half-scale replica of the fireproof vaulted ceiling the Guastavinos did in 1889 at the Boston Public Library.

Their designs weren't just strong; they were also beautiful. One classic example is the Guastavino's City Hall subway station hidden in downtown Manhattan, often referred to as the Mona Lisa of subway terminals.

“When it was first opened, it was called an underground cathedral,” Ochsendorf says.

“The subway had skylights, chandeliers, beautiful color tile, and sadly it's been closed to the public for about 60 years.”

The station closed because it couldn’t accommodate newer, longer trains.

“It's a kind of mystery space under the streets of New York today, but it's really one of their masterpieces,” according to Ochsendorf.

## Architectural heritage

Creating grand buildings became fashionable, but with the tile process being labor-intensive and pricey, the Guastavino Company experienced a gradual decline as the Great Depression began. The architectural styles also slowly changed: the use of reinforced concrete grew along with the rise of the angular International Style of architecture.

“When that movement died out and the sleek, straight lines of modernism became to rise in the ‘30s and ‘40s, that really kind of helped to phase out Guastavino,” Ochsendorf said.

While at least 650 of their buildings still stand in about 40 states and several countries, the Guastavino name is still largely unknown.

Ochsendorf first learned about Guastavino in 2000 as a Fulbright scholar in Madrid. He was working in an architectural office where staffers were assembling an exhibit on Guastavino. Today, he and his students at MIT are hoping the Guastavinos can get their moment in the spotlight.

“We are trying to document their works, to raise awareness about them and to try to help prevent them from being damaged or torn down,” Ochsendorf said. “I realized their buildings were all around me.

“My passion for the subject just grew over time, and it's kind of an infectious disease,” Ochsendorf said. “I call it *Guastavino-itis*.”

Ochsendorf says that more and more people are on the hunt for Guastavino sites, which are hidden in every nook and cranny of the country. He also created an interactive map to keep track of the latest discoveries.

“We don't know all their projects,” said Ochsendorf who sees his project as a lifelong

activity. “In fact, we discover about one building a week right now... I recently got a phone call about an auditorium in Topeka, Kan.”

**THE FLAGSHIP | AMERICA TONIGHT | APRIL 15**

## **Refund Rip-Off: IRS Losing Billions on Tax Day**

*Tax-Day fraud is now one of the fastest-growing crimes in America, and the IRS can't keep up*

**By Kevin Dubouis & Nicole Grether**

**Link: <http://america.aljazeera.com/watch/shows/america-tonight/articles/2014/4/15/the-irs-gives-awaybillionsinrefundstothewrongpeople.html>**

Nina Parton didn't know why a couple guys would kill her father on his daily mail route. Bruce Parton had been doing the same route for 10 years, and knew everyone in the Miami suburb. Then, in December 2010, he was shot twice and died on the spot. Only when the police arrested the murderers four months later did Nina Parton learn that the attack was part of a plot. The two young guys had been cruising the neighborhood looking for a mailman, hoping to steal a mailbox master key, and then use the residents' identities to file tax returns in their names.

"It would be less expensive for them that way," Nina Parton told America Tonight. "My dad was 60 years old and something like 5-foot-5," she added — easy prey.

Identity theft is America's fastest-growing crime, and tax-return fraud has become one of its most dynamic subsets. Criminals are leaving street corners for living rooms, and trading drugs for laptops, lured by the promise of more money for less hustle. According to the IRS, indictments and sentencing for tax-return fraud doubled last year, and the agency has described identity theft as the number one tax scam of 2014.

Prospective tax thieves need just three things: your name, Social Security number and birth date. (Those personal records are cheaply available on the black market.) They can then electronically file thousands of false tax returns with made-up numbers for your income and deductions. Within a couple of weeks, your refund is in the swindler's pocket -- possibly spent on cars and other luxury items, before you even file your taxes.

The IRS does not have third-party information to effectively verify your income when tax returns are processed. So when a thief gets a fraudulent refund, the burden is on the victims to prove to the IRS that they are the legitimate taxpayers.

To collect the stolen tax returns, thieves often use prepaid debit cards, which can be bought in regular corner stores, require no bank account and allow money to be laundered quickly and easily. That way, they don't have to bother with banks or check-cashing stores that may become suspicious when one person brings in several tax-refund checks. Several detectives have reported pulling over drivers and finding stacks of prepaid cards, along with stolen identity data.

### **The Mecca of identity theft**

Florida has the highest rate of tax return fraud in the country, according to the Treasury Inspector General for Tax Administration (TIGTA), and Miami and Tampa are the scam capitals. Last week, the Tampa field office conducted seven indictments or arrests in tax return fraud cases, while the Miami office led 23. In 2012, the most recent year data is available, around 38,000 potential fraudulent tax returns were filed in Miami alone, totaling nearly \$150 million in refunds.

But who's doing this? In a statement released ahead of the April 15 tax filing deadline, Attorney General Eric Holder said the scams "are carried out by a variety of actors, from greedy tax return preparers to identity brokers who profit from the sale of personal information to gangs and drug rings looking for easy access to cash."

As of September 2013, the IRS had identified more than 2.5 million cases of identity theft, according to a February report from TIGTA. Even Holder isn't immune. Last year, two men pleaded guilty in Georgia to trying to get a tax refund by using his personal information.

Since 2011, the agency said it has stopped 15 million suspicious returns and avoided sending out \$50 billion in bogus refunds. But, despite control measures, the IRS has refunded \$4 billion to identity thieves for the 2012 fiscal year, according to The Associated Press.



### **An overwhelmed IRS**

The IRS is amping up efforts to control the problem. The agency assigned more than 3,000 employees to work solely on fraud and help victims and it's training more than 35,000 workers to help taxpayers spot red flags.

And there are some concrete results. The IRS said it initiated more than 1,500 criminal investigations related to identity theft in fiscal year 2013, a 66 percent increase from the previous year. And it's more than halved the case resolution timeframe from 312 days to 120.

"We certainly understand this is still frustrating for the victim," the IRS said in a statement to America Tonight, "but these are among our most complex cases, and we need to make sure we confirm the identity of the correct taxpayer."

Another indication of the scope of problem: the IRS has given more than one million taxpayers an identity protection PIN number to be submit with their tax returns. All these taxpayers have previously been the targets of identity theft.

He got the Social Security Number of a guy who was mentally challenged and made \$12,000 with it.

In 2012, Wifredo Ferrer, U.S. attorney for the Southern District of Florida, formed a special task force to attack the tax-fraud "epidemic." The Tampa Bay Identity Theft Alliance includes Tampa Bay federal, state and local law enforcers who have stepped up to investigate identity theft and fraud. The program had a victory in November 2013, when a federal audit showed that Miami replaced Tampa as the IRS-duping capital.

Although initiatives such as the Tampa Bay ID Theft Alliance are helping to soften criticism of the IRS, the Treasury Inspector General for Tax Administration reports that the impact of identity theft on tax administration continues to be significantly greater than the amount the IRS detects and prevents.

### **A cash cow for prisoners**

While tax-return fraud has skyrocketed across the country, its growth has been particularly explosive in prisons. TIGTA reports that the number of fraudulent tax returns filed from prisons increased from more than 18,000 tax returns in 2004 to more than 186,000 tax returns in 2011 – a tenfold leap. The refunds claimed on these tax returns increased from \$68 million to \$3.7 billion.

Gilbert Rodriguez, 62, served about 20 years in state prison for a long list of fraud and theft charges. He admitted to America Tonight that he’s “no saint” when it comes to the law, but he’s frustrated with the IRS. He said he’s witnessed how inmates are making money by filing fraudulent tax returns.

“He got the Social Security Number of a guy who was mentally challenged and made \$12,000 with it,” Rodriguez remembered. “He turned around and gave the kid \$10. When I found out about it, it pissed me off. So I decided to go look at it further.”

Rodriguez said tax fraud was rampant in the state prisons where he served his sentence, and he tried for years to tell the federal government what was going on. He knew how the criminals were getting away with tax fraud and how the IRS could prevent the scams. And at the time, he hoped authorities would give him credit and an earlier release for the information. But now ending prisoner tax fraud has become a personal campaign for Rodriguez, and point of honor.

Inmates file for fraudulent returns using each other’s Social Security numbers and information from family members and friends, he said. They usually know an inmate at the prison library who can make photocopies, seal mail for them and send them out. The refunds help the inmates, most of whom are serving life sentences, improve their living conditions in prison. If they’re caught, they were moved to a different facility, explained Rodriguez, where before long, they’d do it again.

“Something could have been done long ago,” he said. “[The authorities] could stop it, but they don’t want to stop it. They want the media to think they’re working on it, but they are not to this day.”

Rodriguez said he never participated in a fraud but offered his Social Security number to another inmate before notifying the IRS. He thought they would be able to track his number and understand the scheme. But the IRS, he said, never got back to him.

### **Forgiving a broken system**

Nina Parton didn't attend the trial of her father's assailants. She said she didn't think she could make it to the end. The two men were sent to federal prison: Pikerson Mentor was sentenced to life in January 2013. Saubnet Politesse, his accomplice, got 21 years behind bars.

Parton is still grieving the loss. She said her father never lived to fulfill his retirement plan of moving back to a quiet life in the Catskill Mountains of New York.

"I know that part of what we are asked to do is to forgive," she said. "Someday, I feel forgiveness, but other days, it's more difficult."

When she was given the opportunity to talk to Mentor and Politesse before they were sent to prison, she told them about her father and how he will be missed.

"There's so much opportunity in this neighborhood," she said. "Their families have given up a lot to be able to be here. They could have had such a different life."

She added: "But what can we do once you go down the wrong path? It's a waste of my father's life; it's a waste of these young lives."

**PITCH: Exposure Therapy**

Dr. Edna Foa and her team at the Center of the Treatment and Study of Anxiety (UPenn) came up with a new treatment known as prolonged exposure therapy (PET) to treat teens experiencing rape-related PTSD. Although this therapy has worked well in adults (with veterans, for example) in the past, this is the first time it is studied in adolescents.

Female adolescents, victims of sexual assaults who are between the ages of 13 and 18, are asked to tell their stories repeatedly and visit places that remind them of the trauma they experienced. In doing so, they confront their fears and gain a better understanding of the impact these fears have in their lives. Out of 61 patients, 31 went through PET while the others did regular counseling. The therapists were not familiar with PET but were offered a 4-day workshop to familiarize them with the protocol.

Dr. Foa can talk in-depth about the different steps of the therapy but also what it would take to disseminate and implement the therapy. She mentioned that in the past 20 years, PET has become a successful treatment in VA hospitals with more than 200 therapists conducting PET. Some therapists disagree with the practice of PET because it puts the patients through a great deal of stress. Dr. Foa's answer: "Sometimes you need to suffer for a short period of time to feel better after." In fact, adolescent girls with rape-related PTSD experienced greater benefit from PET than from supportive counseling. Dr. Foa said she could put us in touch with her patients so we could get their side of the story.

### **PITCH: Portrait of Trimpin**

Trimpin, a German-born, Seattle-based composer/inventor/mad musical scientist, is known as the pioneer in music technology for interfacing computer with traditional instruments. Recipient of the MacArthur “Genius” Award in 1997, he shies away from the limelight and art galleries, preferring to devote every waking minute to inventing new contraptions in his studio. He has built a six-story high xylophone and invented ways to playing everything from giant marimbas to a 60-foot stack of guitars. More than 500 musical instruments and 30 computers were used to create “If VI was IX”, a sound sculpture showcased at the EMP Museum in Seattle.

When he ran out of storage, Trimpin decided to move some of his installations to Tieton, a Central Washington town which has become an incubator for artisan businesses. Ed Marquand, a Seattle-based book publisher, created the Mighty Tieton banner to attract creative individuals who need space to work far from the hustle and bustle of the city. Trimpin chose to settle in one of the available cold fruit storages for its great acoustic. The space is now known as the Mighty Tieton Sound Space and will be the ground for composers workshops in the future. As of now, three installations reside in Tieton, including “Pffft!” and Klompen. He has yet to inaugurate the Percussion Orchestra, an installation that he inherited from deceased artist Conlon Nancarrow.

When he is not in his studio, Trimpin teaches at the University of Southern of California in LA, where he was sponsored to give a lecture and performance. As a sound artist-in-residence, he works directly with students in developing, creating and performing on their constructed instruments.

#### Visual elements available:

- 1) Interview of Trimpin in his studio, in LA or in Tieton.
- 2) The Mighty Tieton Sound Space has three of Trimpin's installations. [Here is a video](#) of one of them. I also pictures of the installations.
- 3) Ed Marquand is hosting a potluck dinner at the Sound Space on March, 8. The community of Tieton is invited to (re-)discover Trimpin’s work.
- 4) Interview with Ed Marquand. He is very eloquent and knows a lot about Trimpin. He published a book on Trimpin.

- 5) Trimpin teaching in USC in LA. I have read that Veronika Krausas, one of the USC music professors, knows Trimpin's work very well.
- 6) Extracts of the documentary about Trimpin. The filmmaker, Peter Esmonde, is sending a copy of the documentary.
- 7) Interview of the filmmaker as he spent a lot of time with Trimpin.
- 8) The "IF VI WAS IX" installation at the EMP Museum or any other installations available in public spaces.

**PITCH: Tax Fraud**

Besieged by identity theft, Florida has faced a fast-spreading form of fraud so simple and lucrative that some violent criminals have traded their guns for laptops. With personal data in hand, criminals have electronically filed thousands of false tax returns to receive billions of dollars in wrongful tax refunds.

To tackle the issue, the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) opened the 2014 filing season on Jan. 31 launching a new pilot program -- the Identity Protection PIN -- to verify that the tax returns are legitimate. A special task-force, the Tampa Bay ID Theft Alliance, formed in July 2012 and including 20 Tampa Bay federal, state and local law enforcement agencies and prosecutors, has stepped up to investigate ID theft and fraud. In November 2013, a federal audit showed that Miami replaced Tampa as America's IRS-duping capital.

Yet ID theft-related fraud is a reality for many. In 2011, Jay and Christine Gordon filed a lawsuit against the U.S. government on behalf of a growing number of Florida residents who are having trouble getting their tax refunds because someone else filed tax returns to obtain fraudulent refunds in their names. Their attorney, James A. Staack, explained that IRS has treated victims as if they participated in the fraud, making it very difficult for them to get their refunds. Staack is currently representing four victims who have yet to receive their refunds.

Rashia Wilson, the self-described queen of tax fraud, got sentenced to a 21-year jail term last July. But ID thefts have several faces. Pikerson Mentor has made the headlines since 2011 after he murdered Bruce Parton, a postal worker, to steal his U.S Postal master key. Mentor was sentenced to a life in prison in Jan. 26. In another development, Jakiel Bazart and Denetria Barnes, both employed in local health centers, got arrested for stealing patient identities for cash. After an undercover investigation was conducted, Barnes was arrested and sentenced to three years in prison.

## **PITCH: The Deadly Mix of Police and the Mentally Ill**

(Written with Aaron Ernst)

Background: When police respond to disturbances caused by someone experiencing mental illness, the results are often tragic. Statistics show that an estimated fifty percent of the five hundred people shot and killed by police every year have a mental illness, and that the mentally ill are four times more likely to die during a confrontation with law enforcement. Some recent examples include a wheelchair-bound double amputee in Houston shot by police after wielding a pen mistaken for a weapon, a schizophrenic man in Portland who refused to drop a small folding knife, and an 18-year old teenager with schizophrenia shot and killed in North Carolina last month after lashing out at officers with a screwdriver while handcuffed.

But statistics also show that when officers are given specialized training on how to respond to a situation with someone experiencing a mental health crisis, confrontations end with less tragedy. Officers that receive crisis intervention training (CIT) have been found less likely to use force when responding to a mental health call, 58% fewer arrests of the mentally ill occur, and officer injuries drop by 80% across the board. Yet while 45 states offer crisis intervention training programs, this proven method for preventing tragedy among both law enforcement and those they are sworn to protect has not been widely adopted.

Pitch: This 8-10 minute package will examine the case of Keith Vidal, an 18-year old from Boiling Springs Lake, North Carolina who was shot dead by police in January after his parents called 911 for help in dealing with their son's schizophrenic episode. Mark Ryan Wilsey, step-brother of Keith, posted a video saying "My brother just needed help, and now he is dead." The officer has since been charged with manslaughter, and this tragedy will be used to show what not to do when confronting the mentally ill.

We will also highlight the story of Michael Woody, former police officer in Ohio who became a strong advocate of CIT (he is now president of CIT International) after a 27-year old mentally ill individual threatened his wife and later committed suicide. He lobbied successfully to increase mental health training for officers in Ohio and has dedicated his life to spreading CIT techniques. We will also visit Denver and ride along with one of the 7,000 Colorado peace officers who have completed CIT training. The



training was established by the mayor in 2004 after police officers shot and killed a developmentally disabled 15-year old who refused to put down a knife. Finally, to get inside of the mind of what it's like to experience a psychotic break while confronting police, we will meet Carmelo Valone. Now a writer in Los Angeles, Carmelo barely escaped being shot by Boston police when he experienced a mental health crisis after being evicted from his apartment. This interview has already been filmed.

News Peg: The manslaughter trial of the officer who shot the North Carolina teen is scheduled to begin in April.

### **PITCH: Early Education**

Background: The education portion of the 2015 federal budget includes \$1.3 billion (plus another \$75 billion during the next 10 years) to implement universal preschool programs for all 4-year-olds. Is it a good idea?

It is certainly a huge investment, but there is evidence that pre-school makes big differences. Both the Perry Pre-School Project, an experiment conducted in Ypsilanti, Michigan, in the early 1960s, and the Abecedarian experiment performed in North Carolina in the early 1970s, showed that early education develops a child's "soft skills" and can have a profound effect on adult potential, especially for disadvantaged kids. Recently, those studies have been re-analyzed and confirmed to be accurate and correct. A team led by economist James Heckman even estimates that the return on investment for Perry's pre-school program is from 7 to 12 percent.

Despite stunning results, some experts and conservatives have said that it is a huge mistake to assume that a pilot program can be rolled out on a large scale, highlighting that 1) a universal program will be much more expensive than a program targeted to the 20 percent of kids who are poor; 2) in a given pilot program, it's more likely that the results will be random chance rather than a real effect.

Focus: Interesting enough, some Republican representatives from Oklahoma have showed strong support of preschool programs in their state, which now leads the way for early-childhood education. Oklahoma began a pilot prekindergarten program in 1980, and, in 1998, it passed a law providing for free access to prekindergarten for all 4-year-olds. Families don't have to send their children, but 74 percent of all 4-year-olds are enrolled in a pre-K program.

In addition, the state provides more limited support -- access to full-day, year-round nursery school, coaching sessions for parents on reading and talking more to their children -- for needy children 3 and under. The aim is to break the cycle of poverty, which is about so much more than a lack of money. This initiative is a reflection of the influence of George B. Kaiser, a Tulsa billionaire who, searching for charitable causes with the same rigor as if he were looking at financial investments, has helped develop Educare schools, a network of state-of-the-art, full-day, year-round schools, funded mostly by existing public dollars and serving at-risk children.

We tell the story by:

- Visiting a Tulsa public preschool to show what has made the reputation of Oklahoma's early education programs. Ideally, we would follow a low-income family who see preschool as an opportunity for their children to get a better future.
- Visiting the first Educare school, which opened in Chicago, to look at how it serves approximately 150 at-risk infants, toddlers and preschoolers in Chicago's Grand Boulevard neighborhood. The Educare model developed in Chicago has inspired the creation of other Educare School all over the country.
- Meeting with economists (James Heckman), early education experts (Craig Ramey) and opponents to this reform (Andrew J. Coulson) to discuss the advantages and limits of universal early preschool programs.

**PITCH: ABLE Act**

Like millions of other people with disabilities, Sara Wolff, a 31-year-old woman with Down syndrome, receives Supplemental Security Income (SSI) to help pay her daily expenses while she lives with her parents. In order to meet SSI eligibility requirements, she cannot exceed the designated income threshold without losing her monthly benefit. Despite this restriction, she works two part-time jobs, one as a law clerk in Scranton, Pa., and one as an advocate in a community based residential program that serves children and adults with developmental disabilities.

People with disability cannot save more than \$2,000 in assets and earn more than \$700 a month. Although that limitation has allowed them to qualify for federal benefits, it has been a complete disincentive to employment and work. As a board member of the National Down Syndrome Society, Wolff has come forward and launched a petition on Change.org to support the Achieving a Better Life Experience Act (ABLE Act).

The ABLE Act would allow families of children with disabilities to open tax-free accounts, similar to college or health savings accounts, in order to provide their child's future needs. With bipartisan support, Rep. Ander Crenshaw (R-FL) in the U.S. House of Representatives and Sen. Robert Casey (D-PA) in the U.S. Senate reintroduced the ABLE Act in 2013 (as H.R. 647 and S. 313, respectively).

The legislation would amend Section 529 of the Internal Revenue Code, which was designed to encourage saving for the future higher education expenses of a designated beneficiary. For now, the act is stuck in the Ways and Means committee because of how it is scored. The lost tax revenue over a 10-year period is expected to be about \$1.3 billion. The Ways and Means committee is waiting for the results from another score conducted by the Congressional Budget Office to go forward.

Saving through an ABLE account would not count against an individual's eligibility for federal benefits but would allow an individual with disability to afford long-term, qualified expenses that Medicaid and SSI don't cover, including education, housing, health prevention and wellness. Many individuals with disability have turned down promotions or raises because they are so afraid of going over that \$2,000 limit on their assets. More than 13 percent of them are unemployed. Around 28 percent of them live below the poverty line.

Because of this reality, Traci Lambert, an NDSS ambassador and the mother of an eight-year-old with Down syndrome, wants to start saving for her daughter. In February, she made the trip from Michigan to Washington to talk with congressional leaders about the Act and expressed her desire to see her daughter live independently, have her own place and get a job.

To tell that story, we meet with Wolff and the Lambert family as they continue to fight for the passage of the Act. When she's not at work, Wolff raises awareness about disability issues within her community or at the national level like during the NDSS 28<sup>th</sup> Annual Gala & Action held at the beginning of the year. Traci Lambert tries to raise her daughter Katie as independent as possible so she will be able to make a life for herself.

## Chapter Five: Professional Analysis Article

In most developed countries, traditional media organizations are experiencing a decline in advertising revenues and audiences, face fierce competition from new online media, and as a consequence, are striving to redefine, change and improve their models.

India, which has a population of 1.2 billion, is one of the few places in the world where newspapers have been thriving.

Since the liberalization of its economy in 1991, the country has seen its media landscape expand prodigiously thanks to rises in literacy — about 20 million more Indians become literate each year — and income across the country. There are an estimated 80,000 newspapers and magazines, about 85 percent of which are printed in one of India's 22 official regional languages. The circulation of English-language newspapers is growing by about 1.5 percent annually and draws 70 percent of the available ad dollars with its upscale readership.

The sustainability of this growth can be explained simply. First, there is no digital competition because less than 10 percent of the population has access to the Internet. Second, papers cost no more than 10 cents daily and can be even cheaper if the readers recycle them at the end of the month. (Recycling programs, commonly known as *raddi*, pay 10 cents per pound of newspapers.) Another reason is that the entire industry has adopted a business model essentially based on advertising.

Bennett, Coleman & Co. Ltd., the publisher of *The Times of India*, was the first company to base its media business model on advertising revenue.

“We don’t go by the traditional way of doing business,” said Vineet Jain, the managing editor of *The Times of India*, in an interview with Ken Auletta of *The New Yorker* in October 2012. “We are not in the newspaper business; we are in the advertising business.”

Using “innovative” and “integrated” marketing strategies, the company has let advertisers place articles on certain pages in the paper without them being labeled as such for readers. In fact, staff reporters would write advertorials themselves.

**That practice has blurred the traditional line between advertising and editorial content.**

In addition, the company has a program, commonly known as private treaties, that offers to at least 350 companies a certain amount of advertising space in exchange for shares of stock in these companies.

While there are prescribed norms of journalistic conduct that require journalists to disclose any interest that they may have in a company about which they are reporting, there are no equivalent requirements in the case of media companies holding a stake in the company which is being reported or covered.

In addition to these private treaties, media have also come to accept compensations for favorable coverage, also known as ‘paid news.’

**These practices have brought different corporates interests in the media organizations.**

This is how companies, which are only given advertising space in theory, obtain favorable news coverage in practice. This is also why it is not uncommon for stories in the Indian news media to be held back because of pressure from advertisers.

Today, B.C.C.L. generates more than \$1 billion in annual revenue, and 90 percent of the revenue comes from advertising. As one of its entities, *The Times of India* is now the world's largest selling English-language newspaper with a daily circulation of 4.3 million.

**All leading media conglomerates in India have applied the same business model.**

In 2012, a report by a subcommittee of India's Press Council, an organization that governs the conduct of the print media, examined the model and called corruption in the media industry "pervasive, structured and highly organized."

While newspaper businesses have become profitable, they have granted too much power to advertisers, and sold journalism's independence and credibility to marketers. Corporate practices skew newspapers' coverage and shield advertisers from scrutiny.

**For the country, and for the sake of its public life and democracy, it is deeply worrisome.**

Today, journalism in India "is run by big business for its own partisan ends and not for society's larger requirements," says Aditya Sinha, a veteran journalist. Sinha left the news industry 16 months ago after his company's executives tried to associate him with an extortion scandal they were involved in.



To better understand journalism in the Indian context, I interviewed seven Indian journalists from different cultural and professional backgrounds to discuss how they perceive their role in India's current political and economic climate, what challenges they face and what purpose they think journalism needs to serve in the emerging democracy.

While the commercialization of the news has limited their mission to tell the truth and engage communities around difficult issues, the Indian society itself isn't the best soil for developing good journalism either.

- First, there's no legal framework to protect the media in India. Not only the word "press" isn't mention in the constitution, but also the government has increasingly monitored and controlled the media.
- Second, though Indian newspaper sales jump with rising literacy rate, most Indians aren't educated to critically read the news. If they were, they would be in position to challenge the media biases in coverage and call for higher standards of journalism.
- Third, only a little percentage of journalists have received a proper education in journalism or even followed editorial trainings. Most have learned journalistic practices in the field, often skipping the ethical discourse for journalism, as it exists in the West.

In this context, some journalists are guilty of nothing more than working for greedy, corrupt owners who use their editorial platform to highlight or ignore issues to suit their interests, but the professionals I spoke with care about the job they do and do it the best they can. They take the risks to expose scams and corrupted officials, travel to

the most remote villages of India to raise awareness about hunger and poverty, and challenge social norms to talk about child marriage, female infanticide and acid attacks.

To prove their commitment to the ordinary people and the basic objective of the profession itself, Sinha and the others have adapted their journalistic practices to the realities of India's bedlam. Not only they have a more activist approach to journalism and believe in watchdog journalism, but also they are interested in strengthening their ethical stance and having better technical and editorial trainings. While they are unsure how to create a system more favorable to good journalism, they fight to serve the purpose of the profession — advancing democracy.

This article aims to understand where Indian journalism currently stands, and more importantly, where it is heading.

### **Corporate-Commercial News Media at Risk**

*The Times of India* has corrupted the entire face of Indian journalism, says Yogesh Pawar, a newspaper reporter and assistant editor at *Daily News and Analysis*. Launched in 2005, *dna* is an English-language newspaper with a target audience of young readers. Pawar's seen how *dna* has followed the *Times*' advertising-based business model to establish itself in the news market.

With such a business model, "different corporates' interests are brought in the media organization," says Pawar. "So then, you can understand how journalism has found itself caught in all the problems."

Because the advertising yields have a direct correlation to readership and circulation, editors are preoccupied with what they think readers want to know and what advertisers want (or don't want) to see in the paper. As a result, there's less international news and less reporting on the many dire threats that India faces.

Throughout his career, Pawar has had several of his stories killed because they would go against corporate interests.

In 2003, he received a call from a labor activist who told him about a group of workers demonstrating in front of headquarters of the Tata Group, one of the largest Indian multinational conglomerate companies. Two contract workers doused themselves with kerosene and set themselves on fire outside the building; they were protesting the illegal termination of their contract.

"I felt it had a lot of potential to open a discussion on labor rights," says Pawar, who, at the time, was a TV correspondent for NDTV, a national television outlet.

He knew he had to meet the management of the Tata Group to get their version of the facts. "They spent a lot of time trying to convince me to drop the story," Pawar says. "So much that one of them, who had looked at my past, saw that I had studied at their institute and benefited from their scholarship."

They told him how ungrateful he was to tarnish their reputation, but he didn't give up under the pressure.

By the time Pawar edited the package, he learned that the Tata Group had called his editors, who killed the story to protect the company's access to the Tata's.

Sinha, who has 27 years of experience in journalism, says he “could fill volumes” with similar examples.

In 2012, he even resigned from his leading position at *dna* after he refused to support Zee TV<sup>1</sup> (part of the same group as *dna*), which was “caught trying to extort a billion rupees from an industrial house that had illegally obtained contracts from coal mining.”

Colleen Braganza, an editor at the *Hindustan Times (HT)*, also knows how deep the rot is. Hindustan being a historical name for India, *HT* is a national English-language daily newspaper, published since 1924 with roots in the country’s independence movement. Before she joined her current position, she served almost two and a half years as national news editor at *dna* where she worked under Sinha.

“The CEO of the group would tell [me] what he thought people would like to read, but he was marketing,” Braganza says. “The devil is that there are commercial interests that have taken over. They dictate the editorial tone and the stance we take.”

The managers even asked her to turn the Sunday magazine, of which she was the editor for eight months, into a tabloid supplement with the latest news from Bollywood.

“The magazine didn’t need to tone down because it had a niche audience,” says Braganza, who still remembers how even the marketing team would come into the newsroom to ask her to change the style of the magazine. “The kind of compromise I did was to include some ‘fluff type’ things in [it].”

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.dnaindia.com/analysis/column-a-trial-by-rival-media-1772295>

At the *Hindustan Times*, because she doesn't have a senior position, she's not been directly exposed to the pressure coming from the top.

Shobhana Bhartia, the owner of the HT Media Ltd., the parent company of the *Hindustan Times*, has always supervised the editorial line of the newspaper, though. In an interview with Madhu Trehan's News Laundry<sup>2</sup>, a compelling media-watcher, Bhartia says that she signs off page one everyday instead of the editor-in-chief.

"A collective decision is taken by the resident editors along with the editor-in-chief and all the stakeholders," Bhartia says. "Then, that's sent to me at 8 o'clock, and then we go through that list.

"If I have any comments, that's the time when I position them," she says. "Either we agree to disagree or they convince me or I convince them."

Unlike in the West, it's usual for owners to inquire about the news of the day and what is on the front page, Braganza says.

"The *dna* editor-in-chief used to talk to the owner every day about the page one line-up," she says about Sinha. "He did it kicking and screaming but finally did it."

Sunita Aron, a senior resident editor at the *Hindustan Times* in Lucknow, says the government has also been made one of the minders, supervisors and shareholders of the media. Because there's no legal framework to media in India — the word "press" isn't even mentioned in the constitution, the government has increasingly monitored and controlled the media, according to a report published by Freedom House, a U.S.-based

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<sup>2</sup> [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eFs09C3gz\\_w](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eFs09C3gz_w)

nongovernmental organization that conducts research on democracy, political freedom and human rights.

“If you’re not friends with the government, the government can make your life very difficult, especially when [the owner] has businesses,” explains Braganza of the *Hindustan Times*.

For instance, she thinks that many journalists have been rather nice in their coverage of Hindu nationalist Narendra Modi, because they know he is the favorite candidate in India’s ongoing parliamentary election. They don’t want to get on the candidate’s bad side, she says, though he has been accused of initiating and condoning the communal violence in 2002, when thousands of Muslims were murdered by Hindu nationalists in Gujarat.

Aware of these pressures from the government and the corporates, Aron of the *Hindustan Times* has learned to focus on issues instead of individuals. Her reporters know that picking on a specific politician or businessperson would initiate problems; whereas, highlighting a larger issue would always have a greater outcome and prevent the journalists from being sued at the drop of a hat.

Because there’s still a desire to do good journalism, many journalists are learning how to navigate the bedlam that is India, says Pawar of *Daily News and Analysis*.

### **Adaptive Evolution of Journalistic Roles and Practices**

Since India gained independence from the British Empire in 1947, successive governments have struggled to promote socioeconomic development across the country and accommodate conflicting interests within its multicultural and multi-religious society.

With the economic boom of 1991 when India began dismantling socialist-era restraints, the regimes have gained confidence in the fate and destiny of the country. In the other hand, journalists and experts have been more skeptical as they have reported that the growth have only benefited a small portion of the population. In their latest book “An Uncertain Glory: India and Its Contradictions,” economists Amartya Sen and Jean Drèze, two of the world’s most perceptive and intelligent India-watchers today, wrote:

“There has been an extraordinary tolerance of inequalities, stratification and caste divisions... There has been the silent resignation of Indian women. There has been patient endurance of the lack of accountability and the proliferation of corruption. And — of course — there has been adaptive submission by the underdogs of society to continuing misery, exploitation and indignity.”

The Indian journalists I spoke with agree that the failure of Indian institutions — in promoting women’s rights or addressing poverty issues, for example — has created an obligation for them to preserve the social cohesion and religious amity within India. They have all taken on an activist role to better guide the power and serve ordinary people, who often don’t have a voice because they belong to lower casts.

As a former social worker deployed in rural areas, Pawar witnessed the misery of his country. The Family Planning Association of India would send him to remote villages

as a sexual and family planning counselor and would expect a report on the communities he visited. He was in the field as a counselor, but he wasn't able to go back to a village and make sure that authorities tackled the problems he had uncovered.

During the monsoon of 1995, his boss told him not to bother the authorities about a guinea worm that had contaminated the water of a village. He was angry that he couldn't do anything, so he quit. The ire led him to the next building where the offices of the *Indian Express* were. Because he knew he wanted to inspire change more directly, he convinced the paper's editor-in-chief to hire him to report on the atrocities happening in rural India.

"The *Indian Express* is a paper with a solid anti-establishment line, which has always rattled the authorities and stood up for minorities," Pawar says.

After a few months at the *Indian Express*, he was sent to India's rural heartland to expose issues related to hunger, malnutrition, tribal exploitation and displacement. Some problems could be easily solved, he says, but because of the corruption of officials and the apathy of people, nothing was done.

"I felt that unless the system was shaken up, [it] did not work," Pawar says. "It's not going and creating a battle against the system; it is pointing out what exists [already] within the system."

To make changes happen, he would not only write stories but also call on politicians himself.



“[Journalists] have told me that I don’t know how to control my engagement with such issues,” Pawar says. “I don’t know how to clearly make a demarcated line, dividing the activist side from the journalism side.”

During a field trip in Thane, a city in the state of Maharashtra, Pawar found a village separated from the road by a riverbank, six miles into the forest. There, children were starving.

“They were puking their bile,” says Pawar, who remembers the children dying in the arms of their parents.

The *Indian Express* carried<sup>3</sup> the story with the headline: “1, 2, 3, 4... Yashoda saw her kids die of hunger.” The piece was converted into a court case, which went to the Bombay High Court. There were elections coming up, so the government ordered the construction of a bridge over the river to facilitate access and provide the people with food and medical assistance.

Pawar still remembers these children and regularly visits their parents whenever he’s in the area.

“The family had a daughter,” he says. “[The father] walked through the forest, hitched a ride on a truck, took an auto rickshaw, came to the station and commuted more than an hour on the local train to come to my house and invite me for the naming ceremony of the child.

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<sup>3</sup> <http://expressindia.indianexpress.com/ie/daily/19990611/ige11052.html>

“When I went there, they placed the baby on my lap and told me to name her,” he says. “I named her Aasha, which means hope.”

With his pen, Pawar was not only able to raise awareness about the issue of hunger in this rural community but also make a difference in the lives of these families. And bringing change is what matters to Pawar.

“At the end of the day, let’s not lose sight that journalism is an –ism, like Marxism and communism,” Pawar says. “It’s not just a job... It’s a mission.”

Aron of the *Hindustan Times* is also often called an activist during conferences and symposiums. At first, she says she was surprised but quickly accepted her title. To her, journalism is also about raising awareness.

“My newspaper editor used to get a lot of complaints because of me, especially from political parties,” says Aron about her stories on politics. “I remember him telling me that’s a proof that your writing is not tilted.”

In the 80s, it was rare for a woman to be in the news business. It took time for Aron’s colleagues to recognize her as one of them. They would often ask her how she could be a wife and mother and work.

It’s only when she received the support of her first editors at the *Hindustan Times* that she “did a lot of investigations to uncover issues.” She wrote daily stories and longer pieces about sexual exploitation, child labor, forced marriage, tribal wars and political scams. “That was great. I knew that I couldn’t do anything else but this.”

Because the politicians do not act together to solve these issues, the opposition is playing politics and NGOs aren't being heard, she felt journalists should get even more involved and inspire changes. She would not demonstrate in the street, but with her pen, she would encourage people to do so.

“We are part of the same society; we have to do something,” she says. If not the journalists, no one else will take action, she says.

To her, journalism is about writing again and again about the same issue until somebody does something. It's not exactly the Five Ws taught in journalism school; she says, “it's beyond that.”

A correspondent for *The Hindu* in Islamabad, Meena Menon says that she's focused on a few specific issues throughout her career. Launched in 1878, *The Hindu* is one of the top three English-language newspapers in India (after *The Times of India* and *Hindustan Times*) and was the first Indian newspaper to offer an online edition in 1995.

“I think it's important for journalists to write on what is not written about, and for me, I like to do stories that reflect the interests of the not-so powerful,” she says. “I started reporting on the movement against the Narmada Valley dams and followed it up for nearly two decades.”

The construction of dams along the Narmada River was a controversial project in the '80s and '90s. Opponents, with whom Menon identified, said that it would displace more than 200,000 people and damage the fragile ecology of the region.

Her interest in the subject raised questions among her colleagues about whether she was an activist or a journalist, she says. But to her, she thought it was important to tell the public about the consequences such a project would have on the environment.

Not only did Menon write about environmental issues but also about women's rights and rural development. She says that editors tend to think that readers don't like such serious topics.

It's "utter rubbish," she says. "The journalists have to think ahead for the reader and not give the reader what he or she wants."

Like Menon, Braganza, the *Hindustan Times* editor, has often stood up for stories that she thought were important to the public but not necessarily the most 'clickable'.

But often, the determination of a journalist to reveal the truth isn't enough compared to the influence of corporate interests. In an environment that is hostile to journalism, what seems to work are tactful compromises.

"I accepted to lose a battle to carry on with the war," says Pawar about his story on the self-immolation of the Tata workers that never made it to the public. "Again, it's like a waltz. Two steps forward; one step backward."

### **Reforming Indian Journalism**

Although the publishers have unsurprisingly experimented with new business models, they have taken shortcuts to profits and put journalism at risk. Specifically,

Pawar thinks journalistic practices have eroded because the news has become a simple product.

Today, his question is, “How can we keep journalism meaningful and viable at the same time?” And his answer is, “It needs a multipronged intervention strategy — the preventive, promotional and curative are equally important here.”

Pawar and the others know that they need to uphold their own freedom to function in the face of a controlling government, enforce more rigorous professional standards, and respond to the urgency for more serious reporting on governance issues.

In March 2014, in the run-up to India’s parliamentary elections, the Committee to Protect Journalist, a U.S. nonprofit organization that promotes press freedom around the world, published a report<sup>4</sup> on free press in the country.

“India’s newly discovered lack of acceptance and complete intolerance of divergent views is reaching astronomical proportions,” read the report, which refers to instances of press freedom violation, like the death threats against Siddharth Varadarajan, a journalist who openly criticized prime ministerial candidate Narendra Modi and his hardline ideology on Hindu nationalism.

Conversely, the media have come to accept compensations for favorable coverage, also known as ‘paid news.’ In 2012, a report by a subcommittee of India’s Press Council, an organization that governs the conduct of the print media, examined the phenomenon and called corruption in the media industry “pervasive, structured and

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.cpj.org/blog/2014/03/modis-rise-does-not-bode-well-for-indian-press-fre.php>

highly organized.” The council specifically pointed out that the *Times* had spurred the epidemic among newspapers and some of the more than 500 television channels.

Media organizations can create a better professional environment if they become less dependent on advertisement — meaning the government and the corporate world aren’t responsible anymore for the sustainability of the outlet.

A logical way to accomplish this would be to increase the cover price and subscription rates, Braganza says. “Things will change when people are ready to pay for the news,” she explains. “The printing cost is around 12 to 15 rupees a paper. Who's going to pay that?” Today, a newspaper costs less than 10 cents and would cost around 20 cents if readers were to pay its actual cost.

Following Sinha’s opinion to “change the business model,” Braganza sees *The Guardian*<sup>5</sup> as an alternative to India’s media business model.

The Guardian Media Group, one of the UK’s leading media organizations, is owned by the Scott Trust, which was established in 1936 to secure the ongoing financial and editorial independence of the paper. The shareholders of the Trust take no dividend from the business, and all the profits are reinvested to support the company. The editor-in-chief of *The Guardian* is appointed by and reports directly to the Scott Trust — and not the board of the GMG — which assures the editorial independence from the commercial entity.

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<sup>5</sup> [http://www.cjr.org/the\\_audit/the\\_trust-fund\\_newspaper.php](http://www.cjr.org/the_audit/the_trust-fund_newspaper.php)

If a stronger independence of the media could lead to ethical journalistic practices, more training to upgrade technical and editorial skills could raise awareness about the forces controlling journalists.

“There’s a serious problem as far as journalists and sources because a lot of time the journalists are more spokespersons for the sources,” Braganza says. “They are used by their sources.”

During the 2012 New Delhi gang rape case when a 23-year-old woman was beaten and gang raped in a private bus, papers spread the news that the juvenile involved in the rape was the most brutal of the six accused.

Braganza says that journalists believed what police officers told them without verifying the information.

“It became embedded in the popular narrative,” she says. The consequence was that when the minor was tried separately in a juvenile tribunal, many asked that he be transferred to a regular court, where the death sentence could apply.

Human-right activists blamed Indian media for revealing the identity of the juvenile assailant. Anant Kumar Asthana, a child rights activist and a lawyer in the Delhi High Court, petitioned the National Commission for Protection of Child Rights about the media violations.

“His name, location, parents, religion, school — everything was revealed by media,” he says. “Journalists reported from his house, and from his school, with incorrect and exaggerated reports.”

The commission in charge of the case issued a directive to the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting to ensure that media did not further identify the juvenile.

“What we witnessed was a frenzy in which every news channel was competing to have the most sensational reporting [on the case],” said Asthana to the *The Epoch Times*.

Last year, the teenager, who was found no more brutal than the others, was tried by a special juvenile court and given the maximum sentence of three years in a reform home. The parents of the woman who was raped were not satisfied with the punishment and asked the Supreme Court to reconsider the sentence even though the rapist was 17 years old. The Court refused.

Abhinay Dey, a senior assistant editor at *The Times of India*, says he learned in his early years in journalism school the importance of questioning “the credibility of a source and his/her motivation behind providing information.”

With the same idea, Aron of *HT* says that she always tells her reporters to be friendly with their sources, but they should never entertain them.

“Your sources aren’t your friends,” she says. “You don’t socialize with them [nor] go to their homes; otherwise, it becomes very difficult.”

They should never accept gifts from them either, she says. “Feed your family with the money you own,” she tells her reporters. “Any other stuff that you would get would not help you.”



To cope with a lack of consistent professional standards, the evolution of news media in India has come with a demand for graduates educated in top journalism programs and greater access to quality training for media professionals.

“I admire the rigorous practice of fact checking [in the West], which I sometimes find is not as strictly enforced in our Indian publications,” says *Times* editor Dey.

While journalism schools — such as the Xavier Institute of Communications in Mumbai, the Asian College of Journalism in Chennai, the Indian Institute of Journalism and New Media in Bangalore and the Indian Institute of Mass Communications in New Delhi — have built their reputation in India, they have also borrowed from the West.

“Their courses are very much based on the Columbia Journalism School,” says Sandeep Pai, a 27-year-old investigative journalist at the *Hindustan Times*, who did a one-year program in print and investigative journalism at the Indian Institute of Journalism and New Media.

Western journalists also offer professional trainings around India.

In 2012, the U.S.-based Knight Foundation sponsored a start-up journalism school, the World Media Academy, in New Delhi and a 10-month training program “to promote best standards in journalism.” The BBC World Service has also organized workshops to teach journalists from the eastern state of Orissa how to better cover tobacco-related issues whether they deal with tobacco industries, public health or child labor.

Because of the state of news media in India, the journalists I spoke with said that they are looking at how journalism is done in the West. Their challenge is to adapt the Western standards to the growing multicultural democracy rooted in an ancient, traditional culture and come up with their own standards. For instance, hard-hitting investigative journalism needs to be developed in India.

“There’s no sustained investigative journalism in India,” says Sinha. “Even those examples from the past, like *The Indian Express* of the 1980s, seem fairly politically partisan in hindsight.”

Journalists at *The Indian Express* and *The Hindu* investigated major corruption scandals in the past, like the Bofors scandal that took place in Sweden and India in the 1980s and 1990s. Swedish arms manufacturer Bofors paid kickbacks to top Indian politicians, including the then-Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, for selling artillery guns to the Indian Army. After the corruption was exposed, the party involved was voted out of power.

By contrast, the coverage of the 2008 Mumbai terrorist attacks — which left 164 dead after 12 coordinated shooting and bombing attacks paralyzed the city for four days — has showed the irresponsibility present in Indian journalism. Not only the attack fueled already existing concerns about India’s counterterrorism policies and capabilities, but it has also exposed the inability for Indian journalists to do their own investigations when authorities were unsuccessful. To date, Indians do not exactly know what happened, which reveals that investigative journalism still has a long way to go in India.

To fill the void, Sinha created in 2011 a small investigative team within *dna*. Pai was hired and directly trained by Sinha to uncover corporate corruption and government's abuses of power.

“One of the parameters of their work was extensive use of a legislation that came into being during the past decade, the Right to Information Act,” Sinha says. The Right to Information Act (RTI) not only requires state and federal agencies to computerize their records for wide dissemination but also mandates response to citizen requests for government information within 30 days.

To train and remain on task with his team, Sinha held weekly meetings with the journalists, discussed progress with ongoing stories and supervised information requests through RTI.

Pai said he learned a lot under Sinha, from sticking to the dictum of not taking sides to rigorously pursuing the facts.

From the time he moved from *dna* to the *Hindustan Times* in 2013, Pai's become “an RTI-activist,” says Braganza, who now works with him in the New Delhi office of the *Hindustan Times*.

On one hand, Pai believes that RTI is a good tool to eradicate the controversial and constant use of anonymity in Indian journalism.

“With RTI, you can carry on your investigation and crosscheck the information you get from your sources,” says Pai, who hopes to see more journalists use the tool in

their reporting. “I can bet you that no more than 10 journalists are using this act. I don’t understand the reluctance.”

On the other hand, he believes that RTI can help journalists in their pursuit to control the governmental practices.

“If you write more substantially, attribute your quotes, do good stories, then we can have a better future,” Pai says.

### **Is There Hope?**

At the 15<sup>th</sup> International Symposium on Online Journalism, a program of the Knight Center for Journalism in the Americas at the University of Texas-Austin, Martin Baron, the executive editor of *The Washington Post*, says that journalists cannot inspire change if they’re not optimistic. “Our profession and our business face many problems, many pressures,” he says. “Only through optimism can I have faith that our important journalistic mission will be sustained.”

Despite the environment they evolve in, the journalists I interviewed believe that raising awareness about what is happening in their society is the first step to bringing change. While most young Indians remain “clueless” and think “poverty is some distant thing when it’s right in [their] backyard,” the journalists I talked to believe they can inform and equip the new generation for the upcoming years of turmoil and inspire them to want changes.

Economists and sociologists have said that the news industry is partly responsible for the lack of engagement from the Indian. With the economic boom, media barons rushed to gain directly from the economic liberalization and saw the emerging middle class as their only target audience. By doing so, they focused on less than 25 percent of India's population and ignored all the other fringes of society.

The Index on Censorship, an international organization that promotes and defends the right to freedom of expression, says in a report<sup>6</sup>: "As it became an active partner in promoting a consensus on economic liberalization, the media shaped the image of a new middle class as atomized and individualistic consumers united only by their disdain for state intervention and their aspirations towards international patterns of consumerism."

That way, the potential opportunities created through the economic liberalization for the Indian have-nots have remained unfulfilled, simply because there was no understanding of these people's deprivation and marginalization.

While this can change, as more Indians are able to read and get access to the news, the next step is to educate Indians about the media, says Braganza of the *Hindustan Times*.

"I think that given the kind of media we have in India, there's too little awareness," says Braganza, who plans on quitting journalism in the next to years to teach media literacy to college students. She wants to help Indians develop an informed and critical understanding of the nature of mass media, the techniques used by them and the impact of these techniques. More specifically, media literacy is education that aims to

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<sup>6</sup> <http://www.indexoncensorship.org/2013/07/news-in-monochrome-journalism-in-india/>

increase the audience's understanding of how the media work, how they produce meaning, how they are organized and how they construct reality. With this knowledge, the readers and viewers should be able to question what they read in the papers and hear on TV. By doing so, they will also keep journalists and their editors accountable for their practices.

Although a better understanding of the media can help its audience make the distinction between quality journalism and "paid news," only a free media can bring a sense of responsibility to its practitioners. So here is what could create a better environment for Indian journalism:

- India has been ranked 140<sup>th</sup> in the list of 180 countries in the 2014 World Press Freedom Index. Eight journalists were killed in 2013; more have been abandoned by the judicial system and forced to censor themselves because of the lack of laws protecting them. The freedom of press should be paramount.
- Journalists should be required to either earn a degree in journalism or at least follow editorial and technical trainings to acquire professional skills and become familiar with a code of ethics that standardized journalistic standards across the industry. India has several journalism schools, most of which are led by Western journalists or followed a Western curriculum.
- Journalists can look at Western journalism practices to put them in perspective with what is done in India. When the BBC World Service held workshops to teach journalists from the eastern state of Orissa how to better cover tobacco-related, they brought Western journalism standards to the local journalists while respecting the realities of the field.

- Along the same line, Sinha wants “to mentor younger colleagues so that their reporting instincts are uncluttered and their objectivity unaffected and their hunger for news unabated..

Unless all journalists react more aggressively toward the power wielded by advertisers and become more receptive to the kinds of ethical questions often posed in the West, it is difficult to imagine that Indian journalism will become more independent on the short term. Let’s not forget that India’s digital platform will soon enter the bedlam, shape new journalistic standards and bring new pressures on journalists.

Meanwhile, remember, as Menon says, “journalism is a crusade.”

**Appendices:**

- Appendix A: Project Proposal.....p. 125-159
- Appendix B: Interview Transcripts.....p. 160-302



## APPENDIX A

**JOURNALISM IN AN EMERGING POWER:**  
**HOW THE ROLES OF JOURNALISTS ARE EVOLVING IN INDIA**

Master's project proposal

Presented to the faculty of the Graduate School at the University of Missouri-Columbia

By Kevin Dubouis

Professor Jacqui Banaszynski, Committee Chair

Professor Barbara Cochran

Professor Fritz Cropp

Professor Tim Vos

December 2013

*“Journalism seems to be undergoing an acid test in India where it is expected to prove its commitment to the ordinary people and to the basic objective of the profession itself. While one group is critical about the profession citing [the] dilution of the very ethical principles by the practitioners, the other group sees more outside control of the media in the name of business. There is yet another group that believes the professionals in the field require more training to upgrade their skills — both technical and editorial—which in turn would help journalism become more effective in terms of serving ordinary people and guiding the power as well.”*

**— Basudev Mahapatra, Editor-in-Chief at Naxatra News**

*“It is shocking that some of the board members should want to run a media institution like a company producing plastic buckets with purely commercial considerations and unethical practices overwhelming editorial interests and values, thereby damaging the credibility of the newspaper.”*

**— N. Ravi in his resignation letter after serving 20 years as editor of The Hindu**

*“In India’s ultra-competitive journalism world, the lobbyists are gatekeepers to getting interviews with industrialists. The quid pro quo seems to be that the lobbyist will interviews with the big industrialists to the journalist, who is then able to do them a good turn by conveying the lobbyist’s needs to ruling party leaders. In the process, it’s the journalists that are getting compromised and the Indian public that therefore suffers.”*

**— Manoj Mitta, a founding member of India’s Foundation for Media Professionals**

## **JOURNALISM IN AN EMERGING POWER:**

### **HOW THE ROLES OF JOURNALISTS ARE EVOLVING IN INDIA**

#### **I. INTRODUCTION**

In most developed countries, traditional media organizations are experiencing a decline in advertising revenues and audiences, face fierce competition from new online media, and as a consequence, are striving to redefine, change and improve their models. While many journalists have understood the importance of working across platforms to survive in the new media era, others have looked enviously at developing countries — these so-called laboratories for new forms of journalism — for answers and inspiration. Embracing political, social and economic changes, these countries have been redefining the way journalism should and will be practiced. India, for example, has won global attention in the past two decades with an economic boom that has caused unprecedented changes in the lifestyle and culture of its traditional society. Buoyed by rises in literacy and income across the country, the Indian media landscape is expanding prodigiously with more than 80,000 newspapers and magazines, 500 television news channels and a growing use of social media (Gayatri Rangachari Shah, 2013).

Curious about how Indian journalists work in newsrooms and fascinated by the effervescence of Indian cities, I applied for internships in India during the summer of 2013. Selected by the English-language newspaper *Daily News and Analysis* for a two-

month internship in Mumbai, I packed my bags and moved to India. During my first week, I was sent on assignments and had to learn the tricks of being a journalist in India.

It was interesting to see that the approaches and ethical practices I was taught in the U.S., at the Missouri School of Journalism, were difficult to apply in the Indian context:

- In comparison to the value system associated with data collection and presentation largely accepted in the U.S., reporting in India today is veering more toward obtaining information at any cost and through any source.
- The competition among journalists in India has encouraged a trend where the ends are becoming more important than the means, and this is true in all streams of journalism.
- Sensationalism and irresponsibility have crept into Indian journalism and often overtake ethicality.
- Commercialization of journalism has contributed considerably to this growing trend.

In other words, journalistic standards, if any, were not the same in India as in the U.S.

However, my internship there was a mind-opening experience in the sense that I exposed myself to different practices of and perspectives on journalism. I was not only able to challenge what I had learned in school and on the field but also strengthen what I believed to be right and in accordance with my own values. My trip to India also allowed me to meet many journalists, witness the environment in which they work and ask them

questions about their struggles and aspirations. As opportunities were offered to me, I visited a few journalism schools and interacted with the students during panel discussions. These exchanges were valuable to me as a young journalist but also necessary to shape and conduct my project on the evolution of Indian journalism.

The world witnessed the astonishing growth and potential of Indian media when India dominated international headlines with the 2008 terrorist attacks in Mumbai. As Kanishk Tharoor, the associate editor at openDemocracy, wrote for *Foreign Policy* (2009):

“The attack was designed for the consumption of India’s media, now nearly as sprawling and varied as the country itself. A calculating, vicious assault of the scale of Mumbai’s ‘26/11’ would no doubt shake any country to its core. That it could so transfix a nation of such size and diversity is a testament to India’s changing media landscape — to how information in a blizzard of languages and forms is increasingly available to the billion-plus people who live in the world’s largest democracy.”

The coverage of the 26/11 Mumbai terrorist attacks has also illustrated the component of irresponsibility present in Indian journalism. While most Indians considered that journalists presented the news and information ethically, some critics pointed out the lack of follow-up and investigation. No journalist questioned the investigations conducted by the police and leaders to find out exactly what happened. To date, Indians do not have specifics, which reveals that investigative journalism still has a long way to go in India.

The spotlight on India was intense again in 2012 when a woman was gang-raped in New Delhi, and more recently, when a photojournalist trainee was sexually assaulted while on assignment. Indians have shown their ability to use social media for initiating debates on the rape culture and calling on officials to take more immediate action. However, human-right activists blamed Indian media for revealing the identity of one of the attackers, who was a juvenile. Anant Kumar Asthana, a child rights activist and a lawyer in the Delhi High Court, petitioned the National Commission for Protection of Child Rights about the media violations, saying, “his name, location, parents, religion, school — everything was revealed by media. Journalists reported from his house, and from his school, with incorrect and exaggerated reports.” The commission in charge of the case issued a directive to the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting to ensure that media did not further identify the juvenile. “What we witnessed was a frenzy in which every news channel was competing to have the most sensational reporting [on the case],” said Asthana to the *The Epoch Times*.

Gayatri Rangachari Shah, a contributor for *The New York Times* and various Indian newspapers, pointed out another growing issue in Indian journalism. In a recent *New York Times* article, she wrote, “One problem that has come up in recent years is ‘paid news,’ in which the media are compensated for favorable coverage.” In 2010, the Press Council of India, an organization that governs the conduct of the print media, had examined the phenomenon and called corruption in the media industry “pervasive, structured and highly organized.” The report also highlighted:

“The phenomenon acquired a new and even more destructive dimension by redefining political ‘news’ or ‘reporting’ on candidates standing for election —

many such ‘news reports’ would be published or broadcast perhaps only after financial transactions had taken place, almost always in a clandestine manner. It is widely believed that many media companies ... were ‘selling’ news space after arriving at an ‘understanding’ with politicians and representatives of corporate entities that were advertisers. Space in publications and airtime were occupied by advertisements that were disguised as ‘news’.”

To cope with a lack of consistent professional standards, the emergence of news media outlets has come with a great demand for graduates educated in top journalism programs and greater access to quality training for media professionals. In addition to reputable journalism schools, such as the Xavier Institute of Communications in Mumbai, the Asian College of Journalism in Chennai and the Indian Institute of Mass Communications in New Delhi, new institutes have opened their doors in the capital and Mumbai. The Knight Foundation has financed a start-up journalism school, the World Media Academy, in New Delhi. The BBC World Service organized a workshop to teach journalists from the eastern state of Orissa how to (better) cover tobacco-related issues whether it deals with tobacco industries, public health or child labor.

**The purpose of this project is to interview six to eight working Indian journalists about their perceptions of their roles in India’s fast-changing society. Through those interviews, I want to understand if journalistic practices are changing with advances in Indian democracy, or conversely, if the journalists believe better journalism can help advance that democracy.**



## II. PROFESSIONAL SKILLS COMPONENT

### Background

I was awarded the White House Correspondents' Association scholarship to strengthen my journalistic skills at a news organization in Washington D.C. I want to bring together my passion for global affairs and my passion for reporting at the place where political and international journalisms are done best.

I recently secured an internship with Al Jazeera America as a production assistant for their primetime flagship show "America Tonight". The internship duties range from general office work to day-to-day newsgathering activities. I am expected to conduct extensive research, pre-interview and book guests, assist producers with stories and other production needs. I will be able to pitch stories and work on them if senior producers approve them. It's a great opportunity to improve my practical journalism skills while experiencing the inner workings of a nightly news show. My contract says the internship should take place from Jan. 20 to May 3 in professional settings Monday-Thursday for at least 30 hours a week. On Fridays, I will attend seminars to broaden my understanding of Washington and the media. I'll send my master's committee weekly field reports, detailing my work at Al Jazeera and the progress of my professional analysis.

I have both academic and professional qualifications to pursue this project. At the age of 18, I entered the Paris Institute of Political Studies where I focused on international affairs with a specific interest in the economic and democratic transitions of countries in Eastern Europe, Asia and South America. One of my favorite and most

challenging projects dealt with the role of India and Pakistan in the democratization of Afghanistan. As part of that project, I interviewed the French senator who contributed to drafting the new Afghan constitution, met with Dr. Abdullah Abdullah, the political opponent of current Afghan president Hamid Karzai, and learned from various experts of the region.

Also intrigued by the struggle and self-expression of minority groups in the Middle East, I travelled to Syria in January 2011 with the intent of visiting the Armenian community of Aleppo. As I crossed the country, I reconnected with my family's Armenian roots, now spread across many regions around the world. When I left Syria, tanks were on standby, announcing the ongoing civil war. In June, I went to Greece where thousands took to the streets of Athens and assembled in front of their Parliament to reject economic austerity measures. A month later, while I was in Beirut, the Special Tribunal for Lebanon had just released an indictment accusing Hezbollah members of being involved in the 2005 assassination of former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri.

I understand how lucky I was to witness firsthand these historic changes, especially since my dream has always been to become a journalist. I have always felt the need to broaden my horizons before I could embrace a career in international journalism and tell authentic stories. During my third year of college, I decided to move to America to explore the field of journalism and build friendships with people from different cultures. My year of exchange took place at the Missouri School of Journalism where reporting seminars introduced me to the concepts of ethical and credible journalism. After a few months working for the Columbia Missourian, and being mentored and challenged by both working professionals and aspiring student journalists, embracing a

career in journalism became a clear goal. I applied for the school's graduate program in international reporting and magazine writing and was admitted. After more than two years in the U.S., I have realized that my American experience pushed me to the brink of my mental and emotional ability and helped me discover my full potential.

### **Field trip in India**

During my internship in India last summer, I took on a new challenge. The first week there, I was assigned to write about the apathy of Mumbaikars<sup>7</sup> after a series of murders in broad daylight. The skills I learned at the Missouri School of Journalism gave me the confidence to seek out the witnesses of these murders and ask questions that other journalists were not asking. One specific incident was particularly shocking: a madman stabbed two young tailors as four coworkers watched without stepping forward to help them. When I saw the video of the incident on the Internet, I asked the city editor if I could find and interview these four men to understand what happened from their perspective. She approved the idea and challenged me to find someone who would guide me through the Muslim neighborhood and translate my questions from English to Marathi, the local language of the state of Maharashtra. I convinced one of the crime reporters on staff to come along and was later sitting with these four men in the tailoring workshop where the murder had happened. On the way to the spot, I gave the reporter a list of questions and asked her to translate the answers so I could reformulate my questions if necessary. After talking to psychiatrists and law enforcers who said there was a growing apathy in the city, I needed to figure out whether these men were paralyzed

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<sup>7</sup> <http://www.dnaindia.com/mumbai/report-where-are-all-the-heroes-of-mumbai-1845583>

due to fear or merely did not care for their coworkers or feel it was their responsibility to intervene. My Indian colleague had 10 years of experience as a journalist; yet she followed my request and later said she learned from the way I conducted the interview. She asked me how much I had prepared in advance and what was improvisation; she was interested in how I worked on the flow of the interview despite I was not the main interviewer; and she noticed how I tried to empower the subjects though I did not know much about them.

Later in my internship, I delved into an investigation of the taboo surrounding mental illness in India<sup>8</sup>. During an editorial meeting, a feature writer suggested we published a “funny piece” on depression after the suicide of a famous Bollywood star shocked the country. When it was my turn to pitch story ideas, I asked what was funny about depression and mental illness in general. Noticing that my editor nodded in approval, I went on and suggested that we look at the state of mental health care in India. Disappointed, the reporter did not react and finally agreed to work on the article with me. She interviewed some experts and asked for statistics on mental health in India; I interviewed people with depression to reveal the existence of a taboo around the matter. Google News ultimately picked up the story for its wire search.

My two-month immersion in India helped me grow on both a personal and professional level. It gave me the confidence to pursue a journalism career. Although I still have a long way to go, I do believe that this exposure has made me a more thoughtful and courageous journalist with a more holistic view of people, culture and events. While I

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<sup>8</sup> <http://www.dnaindia.com/health/report-finally-a-national-survey-on-mental-health-disorders-in-india-1848694>

am able to draw this conclusion from my Indian experience, I still struggle to define the kind of journalist I strive to be. Surrounding myself with working journalists has always helped me position myself; therefore, I am particularly interested in understanding how Indian journalists perceive their own roles in a fast-changing society, which is increasingly defined by the chasm between its moneyed elite and the 320 million poor.

### **Understanding India**

Some journalists I talked to said that the country's growing global importance and ambitions have had a detrimental impact on free speech, devalued the profession of journalism and created a discourse that drowns out diversity in the media. The Index on Censorship, an international organization that promotes and defends the right to freedom of expression, provided context:

“[The country's growth] has been shaped primarily by two processes — economic liberalization, which began in 1991, and the nuclearisation of India, in particular the five nuclear tests India conducted in 1998. The former has propelled the country, along with China and East Asian countries, into the role of a future growth engine of the world economy. And the latter has fed its aspiration to be recognized as a legitimate nuclear power.”

Witnessing the economic boom, media owners stood to gain directly from economic liberalization and the new class of consumers it created. With an increase of readers with disposable incomes, advertising revenue would also be augmented. The non-profit organization continued:

“This led to an increasingly insular focus on the emerging middle class, which represents less than 25 percent of India’s population. As it became an active partner in promoting a consensus on economic liberalization, the media shaped the image of a new middle class as atomized and individualistic consumers united only by their disdain for state intervention and their aspirations towards international patterns of consumerism.”

Experts worldwide have also been skeptical about India’s economic boom saying the state has failed to redistribute the increasing incomes more equitably and provide essential public services. Giving way to a more nuanced understanding of the difficulties that still lie ahead in India, the economists Amartya Sen and Jean Drèze, two of the world’s most perceptive and intelligent India-watchers writing today, shared this quote in their new book on the Indian economy, *An Uncertain Glory*:

“India has seen a lot of this alleged virtue. There has been an extraordinary tolerance of inequalities, stratification and caste divisions... There has been the silent resignation of Indian women. There has been patient endurance of the lack of accountability and the proliferation of corruption. And — of course — there has been adaptive submission by the underdogs of society to continuing misery, exploitation and indignity.”

In a recent article, Indian writer and journalist Aravind Aviga wrote that the greatest danger to India’s future was actually overconfidence. As Sen and Drèze pointed out in their book, democratic politics does offer opportunities for the Indian have-nots to demand “a rapid and definitive removal of their extraordinary deprivation.” However,

what is also vital is “a clear-headed understanding of the extensive reach and peculiar nature of deprivation and inequality in India. This is surely one of the principal challenges facing India today.”

With this understanding of the Indian context as well as my experience in the field, I am confident I can do this project.

### **III. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: Role, journalistic roles and role perceptions**

While the literature review will look at the abundance of research on journalists' role perceptions, this section analyzes the literature on role theory, which provides an essential and informative background to understand role perceptions. Role theory has developed through several decades of theoretical and empirical research.

Coming from the field of sociology, the structural-functionalist approach — which focuses on the social structures that shape society as a whole — describes roles' function as expected behaviors that are collectively created and understood by society. By upholding these roles, social actors occupy the positions relevant to these roles (Parsons, 1966; Goffman, 1959; Biddle & Thomas, 1966). Goffman (1959) suggests that the society into which we are born introduces us to a series of roles, which are patterns of behavior, routines and responses. Jones (1966, p. 171-179) explains that these patterns define what is appropriate and acceptable behavior in a given society.

The point here is that journalists are offered a range of functions to perform. In their pursuit of newsgathering and news production, journalists are, for example, expected to investigate issues without fear or favor, write stories to inform a specific audience and protect sources of information. These roles are intrinsic to journalists and not necessarily expected of a carpenter, for instance.

As it will be further discussed, studies of journalists' roles in Western societies have also highlighted norms and values such as objectivity as a reporting method,



independence from faction, accuracy and a watchdog stance as being essential to the practice of journalism in a democratic society. These define the roles that journalists act out or perform in society (Deuze, 2001, p. 4-17; Goffman, 1959; Parsons, 1966). In other words, in a society in which these kinds of functions are understood to be part of journalists' roles, anyone observed fulfilling these roles and performing these activities would be identified as a journalist.

Although the functionalist approach presents roles as being rigid and inflexible, interactionism — another sociological approach that studies how individuals act within society — describes roles as being in interaction with one another, such as when a journalist and an editor work together (Goffman, 1981). Not necessarily tied to occupational positions, roles can also be transitory or semi-permanent as when a journalism student embraces a career in journalism or a journalist takes on the role of a professor at another time (Parsons, 1966; Goffman, 1981).

Part of another school of thought, interactionists believe that roles are constantly negotiated between individuals and within groups. Defining role takes place after moments of uncertainty, plurality, conflict and even negotiation. As discussed previously in this proposal, there is an intense discussion in the Indian society about strengthening journalists' roles and even redefining them.

Dealing on a daily basis with corruption, many Indian journalists seem to struggle with performing traditional roles associated with their occupation. These roles are, however, defined by the West and not necessarily compatible with Indian culture and society. This conflict existing in Indian journalism forces journalists to aspire for Western

journalistic standards while still exploring their appropriate functions in a growing multicultural democracy rooted in an ancient, traditional culture. Another practice that has exploded in India — along with “paid news” — is that of hidden cameras for newsgathering by newspapers and television networks. It is a good example to show that journalism ethics worldwide are informed by Western codes but not necessarily well-implemented elsewhere. Western journalists typically go to hidden cameras as a last resort, but in India they are often used for television programs and newspapers that attempt to expose corruption — when they are not themselves involved with it. The weekly magazine *Tehelka* was actually the first to adopt the hidden-camera strategy, airing video footage on its website that exposed professional cricket-players accepting bribes and fixing matches. If some journalists and the public support that hidden camera practices have encouraged more accountability in India’s corrupted system, others say that TV stations and newspapers do not have a sense of public responsibility. These critics argue that the hidden camera practices are not really exposing important corruption but just chasing sensational stories.

Journalism was once highly regarded in India. “The history of journalism in India is closely linked to the history of our freedom struggle,” said Indian President Pranab Mukherjee during a speech at the Kerala Union of Working Journalists in August. Asking media professional to continue to uphold the glorious trend set by their predecessors, he pointed out that many of the national leaders were journalists such as, for example, Mahatma Gandhi, the preeminent leader of Indian nationalism in British-ruled India, or Bal Gangadhar Tilak, the first popular leader of the Indian Independence Movement. “The journalists, who supported the freedom struggle did not spare the leaders once India

became independent, and the leaders became part of the government,” said President Mukherjee, calling upon the media to work with conscience, commitment and conviction.

The state of India’s press is now at a crossroads. While the sector has grown rapidly following economic liberalization, it is also struggling with unique constraints on its freedom. Although India’s constitution does not explicitly mention the word “press,” it provides for “the right to freedom of speech and expression” in the article 19. However, this right is subject to restrictions for a variety of reasons, including “sovereignty and integrity of India,” “friendly relations with foreign states” and ”preserving decency.” Since the beginning of this century, the government has increasingly monitored and controlled the digital media sector, according to report published by the U.S.-based Freedom House. In April 2011, the government even amended the Information Technology Act of 2000, allowing officials to intercept, monitor and block websites.

There is great hope from the journalism students, who have learned from the older generations of journalists but are also western-educated and exposed to Western culture, media and values to a greater extent than their predecessors. In other words, they are expected to find the balance between two traditions of journalism.

It is important to restate that roles are normative, in so far as they regulate behavior (Vos, 2002). While roles can be said to reflect collective behavioral patterns (functionalist approach), individuals must still embody roles in order for those roles to come to life (interactionist approach). As Coyne argues (1984, p. 260), “a role is not just a repeated format, but a format to-be-followed, a guide. To enact a role is, wittingly or unwittingly, to invite expectations of further conformity.”

That being said, journalists must form some understanding of what their role is. This role perception will then guide behavior. The journalists' behavior is the enactment of their role conception, and the role enactment is the moment when a journalist reports and writes a story. Therefore, it can be posited that journalists' role perceptions refer to the expected types of behavior and norms they think they are supposed to exhibit (Biddle and Thomas, 1966). The actual work of the journalists is expected to provide evidence of whether these perceptions are carried over into the workplace (Deuze, 2001, p. 4-17; Drew, 1972, p. 165-173). Journalistic roles are what regulate and constitute the creation of professional, occupational and even more broadly institutional journalistic identities.

With this context in mind, we can turn to what the early research on journalists' role perceptions have found.

#### **IV. LITERATURE REVIEW: Research on journalists' role perceptions**

There is an abundance of research on journalists' role perceptions, which provides a viable starting-point for this project, in so far as it is aimed at exploring journalists' self-definitions with regard to the social, political and economic context of India. The project does not intend to use previous definitions since most role studies have been done of U.S. journalists. The definitions explored through the literature review constitute background information but would be too limiting for an accurate and precise understanding of Indian journalism.

##### **The traditional definitions of journalists' role perceptions**

Most studies on journalists' role perceptions have been modeled on four major surveys conducted in 1971 (Johnstone, Slawski, & Bowman, 1976); 1982-1983 (Weaver & Wilhoit, 1986); 1992 (Weaver & Wilhoit, 1996); and 2002 (Weaver, Beam, Brownlee, Voakes, & Wilhoit, 2007). Weaver and Wilhoit (1996) is probably the most comprehensive and representative study of the demographic and educational backgrounds, working conditions, and professional and ethical values of U.S. print and broadcast journalists working in the 1990s. Their work distinguishes among four types of roles — the interpretative/investigative, the disseminator, the adversarial and the populist mobilizer, with the interpretive and disseminator functions being the most popular roles. Defining professional roles as the “core belief systems” of journalists, the study became the standard reference on U.S. journalism for years. Many more scholars have since led

research on the journalists' role perceptions, which have offered a better understanding on the diversity of journalistic cultures around the world.

Following this tradition of explicating the roles of the journalists, Christians and Glasser (2009) have also identified four roles. They explain that the journalist is a monitor of events in the world, a facilitator of democratic decision-making, a radical communicator that challenges authority and promotes reform, and a collaborator with those in power. Although they investigated not only what journalism is but also what it ought to be in democratic societies, the research remains limited to the West.

With a different approach, Hanitzsch (2011) has mapped journalism cultures across nations. He compared the role perceptions, epistemological orientations and ethical views of journalists from different countries. His findings show how western journalistic standards are received elsewhere:

- “Traditional western ideals of detachment and being a watchdog of the government flourish among the standards accepted by journalists around the world” (p. 280).
- “A global importance of impartiality and neutrality as well as factualness and reliability of information” is also recognized (p. 282).
- Journalists “obey universal principles regardless of situation and context. They also agree on the importance of avoiding questionable methods of reporting, even if this means not getting the story” (p. 284).

Although most practitioners of journalism recognize these standards, they do not perceive them uniformly across countries. According to Hanitzsch (2011), journalists in

the West adhere more to universal principles in their ethical decisions and refuse active promotion of particular political values and social change. Journalists from non-western contexts tend to be more interventionist in their role perceptions and more flexible in their ethical views. Although Hanitzsch made a point in establishing these differences, his research makes the western definitions the norm to which variables should be compared.

### **A necessity to broaden the definitions**

In recent years, scholars have expanded comparative research on journalistic roles, which have shown a number of similarities but also important differences. For example, Weaver and Willnat published in 2012 an edited version of *The Global Journalist in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, a study that presents journalistic competencies or skills from surveys of more than 29,000 journalists working in 31 countries or territories.

Ramaprasad (2009) cautions journalism scholars and readers who want to understand how international journalists perceive their roles around the world. She looked critically at international studies of journalists' roles, especially the ones modeled after Weaver and Wilhoit's American journalist surveys, and points out the existence of roles that derive from the cultural and historical circumstances in which the journalists work and evolve. These roles are called "indigenous roles." She invites scholars to drop their cultural filters and open themselves to the diversity that exists in the practices of journalism.

The purpose of Ramaprasad's comparative research is to show that the understanding international journalists have of their own roles might overlap, extend or

possibly contradict the roles considered intuitive in the West, particularly in the United States.



## V. PROFESSIONAL ANALYSIS QUESTIONS

The goal of this project is to touch on Ramaprasad's "indigenous roles" that characterize Indian journalists through interviews of a handful of working journalists. The project will not focus on one specific field of journalism, such as print or broadcast, because every journalist, whatever platform he or she uses, is expected to embrace professional values.

With consideration for the definitions of these concepts, the professional analysis questions, which lead this project, are:

Q#1: How do established Indian journalists describe their roles?

Q#2: What, if any, aspects of journalists' roles in Indian society are changing?

- Understanding where journalism is now.
- Understanding where journalism might go.

## VI. METHODS

These professional analysis questions will be explored through semi-structured, in-depth interviews with Indian journalists working in India. These subjects will be chosen based on their ability to use their own experiences to talk about the practice of journalism (Gubrium & Holstein, 2001, p. 496). Working journalists are expected to:

- Be born and brought up in India;
- Be reporters or content editors/producers;
- Have had at least 5 years of journalistic experience in India.

Ten years of practice should be sufficient for a journalist to understand at least the outlet for which he or she works, if not the industry as a whole. This third requirement ties well with Johnson's and Weller's rule that subjects have at least a full year of experience (p. 497). If the journalist has worked abroad, he/she will not be able to count these years toward the requirement. An international experience will not be disqualifying as long as the journalist has worked long enough in India. However, the interview would have to take the source's international experience into account so that the influence of experience on the role perceptions can be evaluated.

The selection of the interview subjects began through contacting different media outlets that produce content for print (newspaper and magazine) or broadcast (radio and TV) during a field trip in India in the summer 2013. Each subject will be thoroughly researched before the interview. Although only English-speaking journalists will be selected for this project, it is not restricted to English-language journalism. Here is a non-

exhaustive list of the main media outlets where working journalists can be contacted  
(source: Indian Readership Survey):

- Top 10 English dailies: *The Times of India, Hindustan Times, The Hindu, The Telegraph, Deccan Chronicle, Daily News and Analysis, Mumbai Mirror, The Economic Times, The Tribune, The New Indian Express.*
- Top 10 dailies: *Dainik Jagran (Hindi), Dainik Bhaskar (Hindi), Hindustan (Hindi), Malayala Manorama (Malayalam), Amar Ujala (Hindi), Daily Thanthi (Tamil), Lokmat (Marathi), Rajasthan Patrika (Hindi), Mathrubhumi (Malayalam), Eenadu (Telugu).*
- Top 10 English magazines: India Today, Readers Digest, General Knowledge Today, Competition Success Review, Outlook, Wisdom, Filmfare, Stardust, Business Today.
- Top 10 Hindi magazines: Saras Salil, Pratiyogita Darpan, India Today, Meri Saheli, Grih Shobha, Grehlakshmi, Cricket Samrat, Champak, Nirogdham, Vanitha.
- TV stations: NDTV 24/7 (English), NDTV India (Hindi), Star News (English), Aaj Tak (Hindi), CNNIBN (English), Zee News (Hindi). The industry is divided between private and governmental TV stations.
- Radio stations: AIR FM Gold (Tamil, English), AIR FM Rainbow (Hindi, English), All India Radio (Hindi), Deccan Radio (Hindi), Fever 104 FM (Bengali, Hindi).

With the concern of completing this professional project in a matter of 14 weeks, I would attempt to conduct interviews with six to eight established Indian journalists. I

reserve the possibility to interview more working journalists if time allows. When I was in India, I followed and read about several eminent journalists, who have showed their commitment to journalism through many years of experience in the field and in command of different newsrooms. This first selection includes journalists who have worked across various platforms, covering issues ranging from business to politics to environment and minority.

- Sreenivasan Jain, political reporter and managing editor at NDTV
- Sucheta Dalal, business reporter and managing editor at MoneyLife
- Palagummi Sainath, photojournalist and rural affairs editor at *The Hindu*
- Teesta Setalvad, Indian civil rights activist and freelance journalist
- Kumar Ketkar, editor-in-chief at *Dainik Divya Marathi*
- Yogesh Pawar, assistant editor at *DNA*
- Sunita Aron, editor at *The Hindustan Times*

The interviews will be conducted in a qualitative, in-depth, semi-structured format. This method allows eliciting the experiences and thoughts of the sources while incorporating some basic structure (see the interview guide below). With this adaptable structure, I can more easily draw comparisons and extract themes than if an open-ended interview technique were used (Gubrium, Holstein, 2002, p. 499).

I will record the interviews and take notes. Each interview will begin with basic questions on the background of the source and how he or she got into journalism. These first questions help build a rapport with the source (Gubrium, Holstein, 2002, p. 497). After establishing a level of comfort and trust, I will start exploring the source's understanding of his or her roles as journalist.

Using part of the interview guide Kanyegirire wrote for his study on journalists' role and identity perceptions (2007, p. 305-307), I could pose the following questions to working Indian journalists:

- (1) What inspired you to go into journalism?
- (2) Is journalism comparable to any other career?
- (3) What other careers are/were you drawn to?
- (4) Why does India need journalists?
- (5) How necessary are journalists in assuring Indian society functions?
- (6) What would you say is the ideal role of a journalist? Why?
- (7) What qualities make a good journalist?
- (8) Could you give examples of quality journalism in India?
- (9) What do you regard as practices of good journalism in other countries? Why?
- (10) Are any topic taboos? If so, how do Indian journalists circumvent those topics in order to report them?
- (11) Is there any outside force that influences journalism/the newsroom? How do you feel about them?
- (12) Does the Indian journalism industry ever exert pressure on parts of society?

The immediate next step for me is to transcribe as much of the interview as possible. This is a crucial step in the project. The analysis part of this project will take shape in a narrative story with the hope to engage a discussion between practitioners.

## **VII. POTENTIAL PUBLICATIONS**

I believe that this project will not only target an Indian audience: by learning about Indian journalism, Western journalists are giving the opportunity to challenge their own practices. In an effort to track the ongoing evolution of the media industry, this project aims to pursue the conversation about Indian journalism with any journalist who shares a commitment to high reporting standards around the world. I am considering the Columbia Journalism Review as a possible publication.

## VIII. CONCLUSION

This project should accurately portray the courage and passion of journalists who work in a country where political and economic changes make their jobs challenging. It aims at explaining how Indian journalists view their roles in these evolving times.

I will be guided by Jyotika Ramaprasad's wisdom and openness. Indeed, the project must strive to embrace the specific realities and cultural contexts within which Indian journalists work and further advance free and ethical media in India. Including the Indian perspective in the discourse on Indian journalism is the aim of this project. Being open to other concepts and realities than the ones from the Western culture is my goal.

The limitations of this proposed project involve the sample of interview subjects. Some might object that the small number of subjects is not adequate to draw conclusions about-Indian journalism culture. Others might point out my lack of long-term experience in the field. Also, sources will mostly be established in large cities, such as Mumbai and New Delhi, and will be required to speak English fluently, a choice that neglects local journalists who do not speak English.

A future project that addresses these limitations could focus on local journalism in India considering that most Indians do not live in big cities but remote zones. A survey, instead of interviews, would be the best method to establish contact with local journalists and explore their roles and identity perceptions.

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## APPENDIX B

**YOGESH PAWAR (46, Daily News and Analysis, Mumbai)**

**Where were you born and raised?**

I was born in Andheri here in Bombay, and I was raised in a town, which is outside, about 5 hours from Mumbai. I grew up in a boarding school, so a large part of my childhood, about 11 years, was spent in boarding school. It was in Panchgani, a school called St. Peters.

**Did you go to a journalism school?**

Yes, I did go to journalism school, but I went only for a part-time course, which was at the end of my post-graduation since I was working. I did my graduation in social work actually, so by training I am a social worker. Later on I realized that I needed some amount of professional training to pick up the basics of journalism that's why I went to do this part-time course.

**Can you take me through what you did?**

I had dreams of becoming either a doctor or an engineer, but somewhere down the line it's too tough and difficult for me. So I quit, and I pursued a graduation in literature and psychology. My graduation was in that. And then, I went ahead and applied to Tata Institute of Social Sciences, which is one of the leading social work schools in the world. I applied there, and got selected. I pursued a post-graduation in medical and psychiatric social work. The first job I did was related to that. I was a sexual counselor. Along with that, I pursued a part time course in journalism. I wanted to do something a little more activist, a little more engaging with issues as opposed to being in a room with one client

and counseling them. I wanted to be in touch with communities and issues, which my job was not allowing. I felt journalism would be a better way to reach out to a lot more people.

**Was there any specialty when you took these part-time courses?**

It was a holistic kind of course, but largely, example of... By the way, this was long back in 1994-95. That's when you only had state television. You did not have such a huge presence of private television; expect NDTV -- which used to be Star News then -- in English and Hindi. Otherwise, there was no private channel. There was no television journalism, you know... There in the course, there was absolutely nothing to do with television apart from a few lectures on how to do voice overs. Announcement Broadcasting & Compering course. Otherwise, there was nothing much.

**So what did you study?**

There was reporting. Then, there was looking at page-making and aggregation and production. Along with that, there was feature writing, just feature writing. As far as I remember, there was a class on journalism and public opinion. So we studied Chomsky (Noam) and Lippman (Walter) and things like that, which helped us understand some of the ethics and values. We didn't have proper lectures only on ethics in journalism.

Largely most of these lectures were from practicing journalists, very very well known top journalists, feature writers, writers and authors, who would come to class and talk with the students. It was a small class. These courses really helped me. Some of the stuff that they told me have stayed with me throughout.

**Where was these courses given?**

The course was at St. Xavier College. It is the college where I did my graduation, then I went to Tate Institute of Social Sciences for post-graduation. And I came back in 1994 with the urge to get into something a little more happening. They had the Xavier's Institute of Communications (XIC). That's where I pursued this course. Now, we do not have the part-time course. Around 2000, there was a thing among the people in the management of the institute: Having a part-time course is not enough; we need to have much more. This is why they started a course that is full-time. I am very lucky that they had a part-time course because I could not afford not to work. But if I had to quit my job to take the course, I don't think I would have been a journalist.

**How long did you work as a social worker?**

I passed in 1993, and from 1993 to 95, I was a marital and sexual counselor. Apart from that, I went to rural India. Really, really interior. I have gone to remote villages. You know I have gone on camel back. I have got to go to these places because I was giving a 5-day training program on sexual family planning counseling in small villages. Those trips actually increased my urge to do something about the huge disparity that I saw in what was happening in rural areas, particularly with the marginalized there. So that was actually drove me... As a counselor, I didn't have time to work with these communities and their issues. That's how I was brought into journalism

**How long have you been working as a journalist?**

I have been working as a journalist since 1995, and I mean, that should be about... 19 years. Math is not really my strong point. From September of 95.

**Can you tell where you started working?**

It is a very funny episode of how I become a journalist. I had an argument with my immediate boss because there was a village where I had gone where there was a guinea worm problem. Now, it is something if you have a small wound, and you put your feet into water, the parasite releases larvae. This contaminated water when consumed allows the parasites to find new hosts and creates all kinds of health issues. It's a terrible issue. If not treated, it ends up becoming very serious, and almost fatal complications. It's very painful and expensive to treat especially for people who do not have access to healthcare. I said I have been to this village where I gave this training on family planning and sexual counseling. I wanted to make sure that the problem was addressed. It was not happening. My boss said you can at the most write a letter, but we do not get into conflict with authorities. Our mission is not that. He said, especially when the government of India is funding our trips to go there, you can't criticize the government. So I got into an argument. I was young, and I thought I knew better. I said I quit the job, and I didn't need this. When I came out of the building at Nariman Point, which is the business district in Mumbai, I had to go out to the right to get the bus. Because of my anger, I didn't realize that I had taken the wrong direction and started walking toward the sea face. After walking 20 steps, I realized I could go no further. So I turned back. I was very angry with myself for being so foolish. I walked back, and I came to the office of The Indian Express. The Indian Express is a paper which kind of has solidly been anti-establishment, has always rattled the authorities, stood up for minorities. I don't know if you believe in destiny, but I just walked up there. Obviously, I was allowed to meet with the editor on the basis that I will give him something (a scoop) or ask for publicity for some event. The secretary thought of that, so she let me in. I told the editor, I want to work with you. He



was quite taken aback. He said you're joking, and I said, no, I want to work with you.

What have you done? he said. When I told him, he said, you're over-qualified and have a completely different set of skills. He spent about 45 mins talking to me and saying that I should not be getting into journalism. I told him about all these horrors in the village. He saw that I was still persistent. He said, OK, you can join.

### **So you got the job right away?**

Yes, he said, you can come tomorrow. I went there, I was given a letter that said I was put on probation for about six months. Initially, I was just attached to a desk; I was not sent out to report. I had never sat at a computer and typed one word ever. So this was an era when you had these black screen computers with the green colored font. It seemed that everything was written on water, and it was floating up and down. So I had a secretary at Family Planning Association of India who would come, take dictation in shorthand and type out the letter when I needed to write a letter. But here, I was expected to sit at a computer and write myself. I remember that was the most difficult thing I thought I was doing there. But I was sorting copies. I did everything from taking printouts to the artiste to paste so that bromides could be created, to making coffee for the chief sub-editor. ... Literally, it was sitting at somebody's feet, getting knocked around and learning in the process. So I learned far far more from what people learn in journalism schools. And because it was such cutting age journalism in terms of exposing scams, in terms of bringing up development issues from rural areas, which were not being written about. They used to have a development desk by the way. Really, really serious journalists were hired here. They really helped me a lot. Then I began writing. At one point, there was a change of guard at the India Express. It has been my destiny to always

work, get comfortable and see a change of guard, and suddenly, a change of relations. ... I lived in Kalyan, which is a suburb of Mumbai in the Thane district. Thane is a large district, and while it has a urban area pretty densely populated with many corporations, but it has an entirely rural area, which is mostly tribal. So I would go getting reports from there, and I would write about civic issues from that area. These communities and their issues are largely neglected. ... I would write about those and the scams and corruption that were happening there. This was helping the circulation of the paper in that area. They asked me to stay there. So I was told not to come in the office everyday but to file from there. This was a time when there was no Internet. So most journalists would handwrite their story and go to the post office, and fax their stories. The fax would be taken up whenever the typist got free, and he would retype this into the system. At that time, I remember I spent all my savings and borrowed some from my parents to spend about 54,000 rupees, which is a fantastic amount of money, even now. to buy a computer. This was in the year 1997. And I bought a computer for the first time; there was no Internet. You might wonder why I bought one. I found out that, as tech challenged I am, it was possible to use the telephone line to send data. So there was something called TELIX (a telecommunications program originally written for MS-DOS by Colin Sampaleanu and released in 1986). I would pick up the phone and call that fellow and say, hello, this Yogesh, I am sending copy. He would say, OK, put the phone down. ... Then, I would click on the button, and the file would go. The fellow would confirm that he got the file. I discovered that in 1997. It made life completely different. ... I didn't have to go to the office if the fax went down. I would be able to send my copies from home.

I did some really really exciting work. Some people there still remember me because of my work on the Indian Express. I exposed hunger, malnutrition, tribal exploitation, displacement. These kinds of issues. And trust me, I had no budget to travel so I would hitch hike on trucks and take whatever transportation. Often walking miles and miles in the forest just to reach places and report from there. Luckily, I had a photographer who was based in Kalyan where I was staying, and kudos to him, for everything. I would say, this is too far, let's go back, I can't do this anymore, he would say, no, no, let's go. I have gone and done so many stories. Some of the stories that I really remember is that there was this village which you could only reach by walking about 10 kms into the forest. Going down that deep gorge, where there was a road, a terrible road, that ended up in a riverbank. We crossed the other side, and we figured out that children had died. The mother said that they had nothing to eat, and they were puking their bile. So we took them out, and we waited for them to die. [Sentence in Hindi] Their names, I still have in my mind. And The Indian Express carried the story, with the headline: One, two, three, four, she saw her children dying. The story went to the Bombay High Court. The news story was converted by the court into a court case. There were elections coming up in the middle of monsoon. And because every vote was going to count, the government built a bridge, not because of the hunger issue, but because the elections were coming up. Nevertheless, Indian Express liked to think that it helped build the bridge. At that young age, I was really proud to claim that I am not going to change the world, but I am making these small changes.

**What or who inspired you to go into journalism?**

Basically, I was going to villages, I would see that the low castes were not being allowed access to drinking water. They would have to go pick up the water from the river where the cattle would drink. Or for example, women told me that they would be molested or sexually harassed by forest guards when they went pick up firewood for cooking. Or for example, the fact that there was no road in many places, so men would strip, put their belongings into a plastic bag to cross the river, then wear their clothes and go to work or school. Because it requires stripping in a public place, girls were simply not allowed to go to school. Issues like that, which I thought were under the mandate of social work. Now, I understand why my bosses at FPAI had an issue with me, picking up an argument with the authorities and wanting them to do something about this. This wasn't our mandate. Our mandate was strictly family planning and sexual counseling. In fact, I remember that argument that I had with my boss was because he said that I needed to understand our approach to solving these issues. We need to cut down on population and ask people to have fewer children and maybe they will be able to have enough for everybody. I found a huge problem with the politics of what he was saying, and that led to the sharp argument that made me leave. I felt it is very wrong for us to tell people who have no health care to have lesser children... You know in India, we don't have a concept of social security. For the poor and underprivileged, children are their only social security. The children will support them. So they feel the more hand we have, the better it will be. More than that, when you go to a tribal village, when they have a child, there is no guarantee that the child would reach 6 years of age: 90 percent of the chances are that the child will die of sickness or hunger. So even without formal education, these people are far more literate in that sense in understanding the world around. They feel they want

to improve their chances. They would say, I will have five children, and at the end, only two will survive and be there for my old age. So that's why they are having so many children. So I feel that people sitting here in the city, in urban India, or funding organizations seem to look at these problems without context. India has far too many people, so let's cut these numbers. Or the minorities are getting too far in the number, let's cut the number. It's that kind of eugenic approach in a sense. And that's because there's a huge political problem. How can you say things like that because they come from a lower social economic caste? That was my biggest problem when I came out of social work. Now, I have learned better.

**How did you envision the role you were taking on as a journalist?**

As a journalist, I wanted to go and write about issues, which affected people... I realized that without being in the government myself that these are problems that aren't insurmountable. They were small problems and needed to get a hand to fix them. As simple as that, but that was not happening. I realize that it was apathy, corruption, and a mix of both that was responsible for that. And I felt that unless the system was shaken up, and sometimes you needed to rub its nose in a little bit, until then the system did not work. I was very clear about that part. Maybe because I came in with a background in social work, where there was an emphasis on mobilizing people and getting them to become aware of what is rightfully theirs... You know, it's not going and creating a battle against the system; it is to point out what exists within the system. I pay taxes, I am a citizen of this country, so this country needs to take care of me. And if it is not, I will sit at your step till you wake up and do something about it. I have gained from that kind of approach. But for me, just simply, writing one letter and forgetting about it, was not my

approach. It has led to problems, though. People in journalism have told me that I don't know how to control my engagement with an issue. I have often been that it is far too activist of an approach. I don't know how to really divide the two. Maybe, it is a shortcoming on my side. I don't know. I don't know how to clearly make a demarcated line, dividing the activist side with the journalist side. You cannot just simply write one story and say, OK I have got a story on page one. That, I do not believe is not a really good approach to have. I believe that you need to engage, and every time I write about an issue, I feel the need to go back to the village and sit down with a cup of chai with the people and talk to them about what is happening and how things have changed. The family that saw their children die, later on had a daughter. This man walked through the forest, hitched a ride on a truck, took an auto rickshaw, came to the station and travelled more than an hour on the local train to come to my house because I had told him where I lived. He came to tell me that he wanted to invite for the naming ceremony of the child. Can you believe what I am saying? They don't have phone; they don't have anything. He simply came there. And my parents, I was not there at home, my parents called me on my landline and told me that someone had come. I said, please, make him sit, and I explained the situation. He was waiting in the house that I came back from work. And then, I told him to stay in the night and go in the morning. He said, you have to come to the naming ceremony. When I went there, they placed the baby on my lap and said you name her. And I named her Aasha, which means hope.

Even if now Aasha is a grown up kid and she's going to school, for me, it's not like ended, it's OK that story is done... If I am going pass that road, I will always feel the urge to go there, talk to them. This is journalism to me.

**Do you describe yourself as an activist?**

I don't know. That's the thing. I just feel that you need to listen to your heart, and you need to relate to the issues that matters to you as a human being. And you know, that's where I feel the whole idea of empathy that one brings along from social work as a value is something that I feel should be at the origin of everything that I do, especially as a journalist. And I increasingly see a disengagement: People don't want empathize enough; they are all going to report about them.

**Are you talking about journalists?**

Yes, journalists should empathize; they should write about stories like that. You need to feel that; you need to understand it; you need to eat the food they eat, sit with them, look at the sights, the smell. Let it feel inside you. Then, when you come back and write, you will bring the flavors of exactly what's happening there. You will bring to your viewers, to your readers. That's what makes compelling stories.

**This is fascinating. It's very inspiring. So you talked about being a social worker, but you were exposed to journalism before you were a social worker, was there something coming from the journalism you were exposed to that gave you an idea of what it means to be a journalist?**

I come from a family where my father is hugely right-wing. The establishment in this country has been the Congress, and the right-wing has always been unhappy with the Congress party. They have seen most problems in this country as related to the Nehru-Gandhi family. This is why The Times of India, one of the oldest newspapers in South Asia, never came to my house because my dad saw that this newspaper was a slave to the

establishment. He would say they lick the boots of the establishment. So we would never get that newspaper. And because The Indian Express was a newspaper that constantly knock the establishment, we would get that. In those days, the government controlled the news print, and obviously, The Indian Express would not get any. So The Indian Express would be printed on this terrible Indian-made paper with this horrible color -- dirty brown. I remember I was really unhappy to get this newspaper whereas everybody else would get this smart-looking Times of India. I used to be very unhappy because the comics would look very bad on that paper. But you know, there was not always the luxury of going and borrowing the neighbor's newspaper because people saw value in keeping The Times of India, which had -- even now -- 60 to 80 pages with many ads, for packaging or even reselling because it gives them money. They would not want to keep the paper away. That's how I started reading The Indian Express. After some time, I began to realize that some of the issues there, even by the time I reached my 9th grade in school, I was able to see some sense of what they were saying. I didn't understand everything because I was too young and unexposed to understand it fully. But by the time I finished my school and I came to the +2 level, I understood these issues and was filled with a lot of anger with all what I saw around me. I began to understand where I was coming from, that I had better access because I spoke English, that I was able to read, etc. One of the journalist whom I read early in age was Arun Shourie [once editor of the Indian Express and The Times of India], who is right-wing radical person and whom I don't like anymore because of his politics. But at the same time, let me tell you that he's done some fine journalism. When some politicians refused to believe that there was human trafficking, he went and bought a woman for 70 rupees, took her and presented



her to a press conference. There's a movie made out of that story; it's called Kamla. You must watch this movie; it's available online. You know, he did that kind of work.

Unconsciously, I was inspired by all this. When I finally went into social work, you know, my lectures would be Wednesday to Saturday, and Monday and Tuesday, two days, would be fieldwork, going and working in communities, in hospitals, in psychiatric wards. Every three months, the settings would change. Home for juvenile delinquents, these kinds of institutions. Working there has only made me want to engage with issues. I feel that if I may not be able to solve the problems of an entire regions or entire community, but in the process of my engagement, I am able to raise awareness about one family and start mobilizing people, I think that's something. That's good work, actually.

**Why do you do this? Why do you care about helping people, raising awareness about issues?**

I know you're asking me about the helper's high. It's not about that. If you've noticed, most of my initiatives I have tried to do have not aimed at emotional reporting, which will ensure that people start sending funds to the office so we could help the people. That is not what I want to do. I believe that there are a lot of funds coming from the Central government, from Dehli and Mumbai, into these villages. Money is being sent to those villages, but it is not reaching down to these people. So I need to go and shake up the system so the money starts trickling out. That is my idea of help. It is true that I have gone reporting on some issues that people have said that if a surgery is needed, we will fund the surgery. People have sent cheques and money. But I think that's the bonus. The actual part that needs to be done is raising awareness and telling people that this is your country and you have as much rights as I do. Just because I occasionally eat pizza and

drink coke, I am not a privileged citizen and you a second-class citizen. That's bullshit. That cannot work.

**So inequality drives you.**

Yes, completely. The inequality and the injustice. You know about white rage? You almost want to tear your hair when you see that a problem could be solved very quickly but the official is sitting there and doing nothing. Sometimes, you go there and scream your lungs out, but that I think is part of a whole process.

**So what's the process like when you're a journalist-activist, if I may use that term?**

**You write your article, you talk to your sources... What else?**

It is also, you know, you may find it very strange, it is also a very deep look inward, as to trying to understand where you are placed in this whole socio-economic, psycho-social metrics. I like to understand, and then, as I place myself vis-a-vis the system, these disparities hit me much harder. That's the fuel that keep you driving. There are times I reported on some issues, and my editor wouldn't give it as much display as I wanted, or sometimes the story doesn't have the kind of impact that I wished, there are times when I felt completely frustrated. That inward looking process helps me see what's around me. I think that keep me going on.

**After 19 years in the profession, how do you now portray yourself? Because you describe very clearly the transition between being a social worker to a journalist, but who is the Yogesh with 19 years of experience?**

This person has learned that negotiation is important. Two steps forward, one step backward. Nineteen years ago I was a little naive, and I would scream at officials and captains. (Laugh) I would call on people and say, look at this baby, if it was your child, what would you do? I have realized that sometimes just being confrontational may not bring you as many changes as being tactful. So sometimes, it can also help not to expose all the corruption and use it to encourage an individual involved in it to act. I am not saying this is what we do all the time, but I have realized that it is not always necessary. There are several officials who have been suspended because of the stories that I have done, and there was a time that I thought that there were enemies of the system, and I needed to see that they were squashed. But at the end, I have realized that the system is as much at fault and sometimes, at a certain level, these officials are victims of it. I need to look at the larger issue. This may sound very cliché, but it is true that sometimes you don't need to hate the enemy but the wrong that is in him. I recently met an official who had been suspended because he stole funds that were meant for an orphanage. When he saw me, he made a big face. I went after him and asked if he remembered him. I said to him that it was never personal. It was about these children. I had nothing against him per se. It needed to be done, but now, I also wondered why this person did that. Is he paid enough? Is the system being just and fair to him? I am not justifying what he did, and I will still go and expose them. But we need to look at these issues. If you put combustible material and flames near each other, and then start complaining every time there is a fire, then we need to look at how we are storing these things together. Now, I always try to get NGOs involved in my story so we have better chance to solve the problem.

**How do you draw the very fine line of ethics?**

I can't say that this is a line that I used across my entire approach. It varies. I used to have this boss at the Indian Express, she told me once that just because these people are underdogs, I conveniently don't look at the other side. I realized that sometimes I may have crossed the line. For example, if there is a housing colony in Mumbai with a water problem and a similar problem happens in a village in Thane, the village catches much more my attention. It is very subjective, and I have realized it can be ethically an issue. But otherwise, when it comes to protecting my sources, I have always stood by that. By the way, I have been attacked, stolen. That's the same kind of ethics for the ones who go collect data as social workers. I see the same kind of ethics coming into play. You will find out information, but you will also protect your sources.

**So can you tell me more about how you wouldn't look at the different angles of a story because you would feel more drawn by the victim's side?**

Obviously, the boss will not accept a story unless you go and get the other sides. But, what you and I know, you get the other side obligatorily. It would be there. But I use techniques of making the emotional side of the story even in the way I write or make my camera person shoot -- I spent eight years as a TV journalist also -- so from the way I will open visually the story... Then you can have the minister say what he has to say. I will let these people have a say, but the fact that I have positioned the story in such a way that it has begun with this child who was clearly malnourished, it sets the tone for the story. Most of my writing ends up being feature-ish... One of my journalism schoolteachers who taught me reporting used to tell me that most of what I write is to appeal to the heart. He said that I needed to graduate to appeal to the head as well. And I'm still trying to get there. The transition can be quite traumatic sometimes.

### **What do you mean?**

I believe that it is difficult not to engage with the humane element in any story. In any story, the human element can take over. It's just the kind of person I am. A friend of mine says that people like me can be sent to a happening happy party to report, and instead of looking at all the celebrities and what they wear, I would start speaking to the waiters, who is serving all the starter, and ask him where he comes from, whether he's eaten, if he knows what the food is... Personally, I come from a working class family. I cannot let go that side of me.

I reported on a riot that had happened in South Maharashtra. A 70-year-old Muslim man had been attacked by the right-wing youth and charred to death. They couldn't find the body. But listen to what happened before the attack. His 6-year-old granddaughter, who he had, after dinner, taken on his shoulders and was walking around outside his house. There had been communal tension in the air, but he said it was alright because he knew these boys. When these same boys arrived, they kept the girl down. She ran back into the house.; they didn't kill her. I had reached the village two days after the incident. The police wouldn't let us in. When I was finally able to get there, I talked to the mother, this girl's mother. The girl put her head on her mother's arm. Her nose had been pierced some four days ago. It had formed a small wound. As the mother started describing what had happened, I saw that the girl was plucking at her nose ring.

### **Why would she do that?**

She was 6 years old, and that was her defense mechanism. She is trying to pluck her nose and making that pain help her forget the pain of the memory of her grandfather being pushed into the flames.

It has been many many years since I have been to that region. But that memory of Razia will never go away. I can see her face now. I can see her pulling her nose ring. You know something like that... I began my story writing with her. I don't know how you call what I did. My professor says that I want to appeal to the heart and not to the head. Maybe I should just put up my hand and say guilty as charged. I don't know how to go and neutrally report when I witness something like this.

**But you don't only write these kinds of stories?**

I realized long back that if I write only these kinds of stories, I will not last in journalism because there is so much to feel angry, sorrowful and disgusted within India that I need to accept other assignments. I don't have the luxury of taking a break or going jobless if I needed to. So I needed to find ways to find a break from the grief for myself and my sanity too. I found a way out by going reporting on another space that interested me -- everything that is social culture from music, art, dance, etc. I write a lot about that. I go and profile these artists. I talk about trends that are happening there. This is a soft topic, but even there, it is also about trying to humanize these artists and tell people about their struggles as human beings. I don't say he is a genius, he is a maestro, he is this and that. Instead, I will say that this maestro at a point of time he was going to people's houses and asking for leftover food and surviving on that before being famous. I just feel that I can take what I do with hardcore stories into my reporting on the arts. That's what makes me

engage with artists. I looked at the future of traditional theatre, for example, whether it is going to die or not. Yes, because they are issues that I usually enjoy reporting on, dance, fine arts and all, it offers me some time to relax so I charge my batteries and I go back on reporting on hardcore issues.

**You mention a lot of these stories, but could you tell me about one story that you've done and you feel that best served your audience?**

I mentioned that story that led to the construction of a bridge. The people from the village don't have to cross the river anymore, and the kids don't get mauled by leopards when they walked through the forest on their way back from school. That bridge helps them. That is one of my biggest achievements. No, but really, can you imagine a woman in labor being laid down on a blanket and carried by four men through the forest because the baby is caught and the woman needs to go to the hospital. She is screaming, and they are running through the forest. Well, now they have the bridge that gives them a more direct access. I am not saying it's perfect; I would have been happy if an ambulance could reach them. We will at some point get there also. For me, those people don't know a word of English, but my story made a big big big difference to their lives.

**Can you site a specific example of Indian journalism that represents what you consider a standard-bearer for quality or public service?**

Sukanya Shantha (Shetty)... When I see her byline, I don't even bother to read the headline. I will look at her work. She is chasing the kind of work I look at. She is with the Indian Express. And then, you have a journalist called Madhavi Rajadhyaksha. They engage with urban and rural issues that are under covered. They do regional journalism.

There is a lot of really good journalism done by regional media far more than the English media. The English media is slowly abdicating.

**How so?**

The four areas of reporting are politics, crime, glamour and cricket. I wouldn't even say sports.

**That is consuming English-language newspapers?**

Yes. For flavor, they put a bit of crime and civic issues. Just for flavor. It's like you're sauce with your sandwich. That's all you get to see. Oh and yeah, when I say politics, I mean party politics -- which party is doing what and who is going to win which election.

**Can you tell me a little about the two people you mentioned earlier and kind of work they do?**

I have two more names for you. They are both television journalists: Sutapa Deb and Shikha Trivedi. They do amazing work; they exclusively look at these issues.

**What issues?**

Development issues -- hunger, poverty, tribal and cast right, minority and women rights. That domain. And then, there is Radhika Bordia. She looks at these issues and cultural ones. She likes to borrow from traditions and mythology, and use those as paradigms to report on hardcore issues. The grammar is very easily accessible to people even if English isn't their primary language. And she borrows paradigms from our cultural and religious traditions to report on these issues. It immediately strikes a cord with the audience. It's a beautiful way to do this, you know. Instead of following the Western



template to look at issue, she goes and create a completely refreshing one, which uses the grammar that is available in India.

**What do you mean by Western template?**

Western template would largely look at problem/solution and solution/problem. In nearly two decades as a journalist, I have realized that real issues are more complex than that.

What I've seen is that any of these foreign journalists who come here have the parachute approach. Because they are there for such a short period of time, they have to rely on what others tell them. Their engagement is not there. They want to simplify that their audience at home will get. This is the problem; this is the solution; and if this is done, it can be solved. That's limited. In India, nothing is simple as that. You have caste. You have hierarchy. You have age. You have traditions and customs. You have religions. Everything has its own pull and push. Contextualizing the issue is very important. And unless you don't get that, you often bark up the wrong tree.

**What do you regard as practices of good journalism in the West?**

In the West, I really like... Two words: Edward Snowden. I am just saying that when the media can have that kind of freedom, to go and report... You see, I am not going and troubling too many large interests; I focus on attacking the appetite of corrupted politicians. Very often they find me irritable, but it's OK. If I wanted to take on the government, there would be other kinds of pressures.

**What are the forces that have influenced your work? You talked about the corruption; you talked about your editors who would put barriers in front of you; but are there any form of forced?**

It works in two ways. In physics, they tell you that the centripetal and the centrifugal both work against each other. Here, you might have noticed that from without, you have the corruption, and from within, you have editors encouraging certain kinds of stories, commissioning certain kinds of stories and not commissioning some. So sometimes, it can be from within, sometimes it can be from without. It works both ways.

**Can you give me an example?**

I can give you two examples. One is about the Tata group. They have their headquarters in South Bombay. They had some workers who were working with them for nearly eight years, and they had not been made permanent workers. They were still on-contract labor. The company suddenly decided to sack them. But because they were on contract, they couldn't do anything. The labor asked for compensation though they knew their contract was hire-fire. When they were fighting for their demands, the owners didn't want to talk to them. There were demonstrations outside Tata's headquarter building. I was the only journalist covering that. Why? Because one of the activists who was leading the demonstration was someone I knew from my social work time. As I was covering that, there were five workers who set themselves ablaze. They put kerosene and torched themselves. Three of them died on the spot and two went to the hospital and died later after long struggles. When I did that story, I came back to the office, and I was very angry. I felt it had a lot of potential to open a discussion on labor rights. I was surprised the leadership refused to run it.

**Why?**

Obviously, when I was doing the story, I had to go talk to the management. When I went there, they asked me if I had the footage. I said, of course. They were very worried; they spent a lot of time trying to convince me to drop the story. So much, that one of them looked at my past and said that I had studied at their Institute and benefitted from their scholarship. They had dug up my past so much. They said that I looked ungrateful and all. I said that I will go on with the story. I was harassed by their communication people and lawyers. When I came in to office, I told my editor what had happened. He said great, start scripting the story. I logged in, wrote my story and edited it. When I was editing my story, I was told that my story would not go on air.

**Do you know what happened?**

NDTV has a business channel -- NDTV Profit. So the head of that channel told my boss that the Tatas said that the NDTV journalists will not be welcomed to the Tatas if the story goes. When the ownership of the channel heard that, the story was dropped. I have had very very bad experiences with journalism.

After I exposed a scam involving one of India's top politicians, the bureau chief, who was very close to the politician, refused to take my story. I sent it directly to the editor in chief. When I sent it to him, he said that the story was very good and will be carried page one. But the story didn't appear for one whole month. I started getting frantic so I called him. He asked me why I was always calling him about that story and not writing any other story. I was told that the story will never be published. In disgust, I left that job.

**Wait, how long did you stay with them?**

Two and a half months. Because I had said very terrible things to the editor, his ego hurt. He made phone calls and said I must apologize to him without which no newspaper would hire me. So I had to freelance and be jobless for nearly two years. Till this television job came up, and I joined NDTV, where I did the story on the workers torching themselves.

I have learned my lesson. I cannot afford to get up and leave this job. By then, I was married, had a monthly installment on my home. I had monthly bills to pay. I made my peace with that. I accepted to lose a battle to carry on with the war.

Again, it's like waltz. Two steps forward, one step backward. I have realized I cannot fake an idealist view of journalism anymore.

Have I seen issues when I wanted to report on and said no? They have been, yes.

Sometimes I passed on these stories to other people. There is a scam that I got to know of recently and nobody wanted to take on here because it involves too many figures. You know what I did? I gave it to a Pakistani journalist who is a friend of mine. His editor was excited to carry the story, not only because it is a great piece of journalism for them, but also because they will be able to show India in poor light. When they did it, the Indian media had to pick it up and write follow-up stories on that. In the process, my issue got highlighted. You realize? For me, it was important. It's a war tactic. Sometimes you do these things. Then, you will ask me, is this an ethical thing to do? I would say this is a huge grey area. I don't know or think this is a very correct thing to do. But what was my option? My option was to let the story die or let the story be reported. So I picked up the phone and told my friend to get it printed.

### **What happened to the politician?**

There was an inquiry, and he faced suspension. But the importance is that the issue was highlighted. I am not saying there will be a result because in India very few things get resolved.

### **Can you tell me again about the story you wrote on gay people being attacked by police officers?**

I was with NDTV at the time. Homosexuality was a crime and called “unnatural sex.” Because they had this article 377, the police would often use that -- because when it is taboo, people cannot go and look for sex openly. People would go and look for furtive and quick encounters in dark public places like railway stations for example. This is where they got trapped by police officers who would tell them that they will expose them to the rest of the world and take them to prison. This thing goes on, and there was one particular station known by the gay community. The officer assigned to that area will catch them and take them to the ATM so they would withdraw large amounts of their savings. One of them came out and talked about what was happening. I told my boss, and she said that we needed to do something. We went to do a hidden camera operation. We got them on camera. We knew we had to go and confront the police and ask them what they had to say. Right? So when I met with the officer, he broke down and told me: You know where I live, you know what I pay, you know how many hours I work. He gave me his side of the story, and I felt very conflicted. I know that what he's done was wrong, but the system hasn't done too good to him either. So I went and told my boss, and she said

that if I felt so conflicted about it, I should drop it. I kept the tape with me and got caught with other stories. This got sidetracked; I forgot about it.

More recently, there was new violent series of attacks by cops. Very vicious, violent attacks against homosexuals in Mumbai. My boss, Colleen Braganza asked me to do a story on why do cops hate gays? Whichever cop I approached to speak to on camera, on record, say nice things like, no, police don't do this, we respect everybody, we are very human. They will make it sound they are the most nobles of preachers. I didn't know what to do. Colleen kept reminding me about my deadline. One day, I was waiting for the train, and I remembered that it was the same station where attacks on gays had happened. I immediately knew what I was going to do. I went and met this policeman, who, of course, recognized me. I said, I want you to talk to me. He said no. I said that I still had all of it on record and that I could still use it. He said, no please don't. I said, all I'm asking is that, anonymously, I am not going to use your name, you talk to me. How difficult is that? Then, we met. He spoke about his own childhood and own gay encounter he had had. I wrote a first-person story as he was talking, with his voice. That's how I did that story.

So now, you may ask me, if it was a very good thing to do. Yes, it seemed like it was the thing to do.

### **How did you know it was the right thing to do?**

I was starring at a deadline, number one. I was desperate to break the story. I knew it was happening. This was real, and that so many people are being persecuted. All that was true. I know many people in the community who told me about it. The second thing is

that I knew no one would talk to me unless I forced them a bit. Would I have used his name and published the tape? No. The tape is very much with me and will stay on my possession. Would I use it again? Of course, not.

**What was the reaction to the story?**

The gay community was very happy with the story. They saw in me a huge sign of support. They are very very very happy that there is someone who looks at issues from their perspective. The self-piteous kind of voice, you know... Whenever people write about them, their issues, the tone is very self-righteous, pitying them for what they are. So they feel that for once they were portrayed accurately. I was recognized.

**Can you tell me what the other taboos in the Indian society are?**

There are taboos like... For example, a woman who is widowed is seen as a very very unlucky thing. If the woman is widowed, she is not allowed to go to any religious functions; she's not allowed to be part of a wedding ceremony because there's the feeling that because she's unhappy about the fact she is widowed, it would bring bad luck to the wedding. To an extent, though it is not enforced, it has been socialized to an extent where women tell themselves that they have to stay out. It's reached that level.

The other thing... Women face a lot of discrimination. When they menstruate, they are seen as impure. They would not be able to worship; they would not be able to come to the altar; they would sit in a corner and nobody would touch them, especially in rural areas. In urban areas, where you have nuclear families, it's different. They will still cook and sweep the floor, but they would not be able to go worship. Women themselves have

believed that the Gods would get angry and lead to all kind of misfortune. So women practice that, even the most educated highest officers.

**So do you write about that?**

I do write about these women. I will write about them, but if I take it on as sort of a campaign, I know it would rabble houses with the right wing. The right wing would not be very happy with what I do. It is true that... how should I say that... You have to pick your battle. In a way, we all pick up... We decide on what we maximize, focus on and where we can actually help. I pick up my battle accordingly now.

**What's your battle now?**

Right now, the government, on the phase of the election, got the president to sign a bill, which basically allows some landlords to chase the landless people who lived on subsidized lands so they can buy them themselves. The landlords would make money from the sell, but the fellow who lived on that land for decades wouldn't get anything. And the government doesn't have a say on this.

**Timeline?**

1995-2001 (6 years): Indian Express

2001-2003 (freelancing): HT, Rediff.com, Midday and glamour magazine like Elle. For Elle, I was able to write in the black and white section about a grandmother of 39 years old. For Rediff, I wrote the story on Razia, the nose ring story.



2002: started teaching. Began ChandiBai College. Because that institutions is linked to KC College, I started teaching at KC College too. Other colleges approached me. Khalsa College.

March 2003 – March 2010 (7 years): Approached by Star News... programs in English and Hindi (origins of bilingual journalism). Rupert Murdoch would fund Star News and they would generate content. But because of their coverage of the Gujarat riots, they used their connection in the U.S. to put pressure on Murdoch so he would have some say in editorial content. He would not only give money but also say what's wrong. Star News said no no no. They close down and open again. Two channels: NDTV 24x7 (English) and NDTV India (Hindi). One of the reasons I was hired was because I had experienced as a journalist but also because I was bilingual. It was a traumatic transition. It's a very different way to write. I needed to get rid of my print style. I needed to write visually, write conversationally, write in one sentence. I have come to believe that everybody should spend 2/3 years in TV journalism. Everything is conversational and lyrical. In 2010, I quit because television was going in a direction that I didn't want. I did really good work there, but I realized that they lost the plot. They were chasing the model as Times of India. Some model had committed suicide, go interview all her ex boyfriends, they would say. I didn't know what I was doing, so I had to leave.

2010 - September 2010: When I quit, I thought I would take a break and think. I spent 20 days at home. My ex boss from the Indian Express who was at the head of Mumbai Mirror called me: I am short on people, come and help me coordinate some copies. I first said no, and then she said to come for 4/5 hours a day. Soon, I was spending 12/14 hours

a day there. It was another kind of beast. It required a screaming headline and exclusive story on page day. This was playing with my mental health so I left.

September 2010 - present: I found that DNA was looking for people. DNA asked me to do coordination. I am not made for man management. It's not my scene. When I asked to quit, they asked me what I wanted to do. They gave me a news feature position right away.

### **Can you talk about the corporatization of the media in India?**

In the West, the corporatization of the media is more settled. In the West, people are more aware of the issue. And because of that exposure, it's more shameful.

In India, people are unhappy with what's happening, but the awareness of what's happening is not as much. Even journalism schools don't talk about it to a great extent.

### **Really?**

They would talk about when you read a little bit of Lippmann and Chomsky and authors like that. But that's about it. There is no concerted effort. I believe this cannot part of one course. You cannot teach one course on the corporatization of the media. But it should be brought it at every point and time when you bring in any other issues. This is one of the reasons why there is less awareness.

In fact, the day before yesterday, Arvind Kejriwal, the AAP leader, had an open meeting. So many media organization bought up by Ambani, one of the world's infamous millionaires... [Kejriwal] said that because these media organization are bought over by

Ambani, he is not covered or covered in a negative way only. He said they are not going to remain quiet even if they are blanked out.

Right after Kejriwal said this, editors from various organizations met and said that this was very unfortunate and took a very strong stance against what he said. You know, it is not right for somebody to generalize, but at the same time, the editors would do better if they were able to set their own houses. The point is nobody would point figure at you unless there is something, which is fundamentally done. You need to introspect and find out what is wrong within your own system. Maybe what Kejriwal said was a bit too much; maybe it was an exaggeration, as most politicians tend to do. This has played on the mind of people. By exaggerating, he hurt the media but hopefully for the best. I remember a time when people would believe everything written in the paper. They don't do so anymore. People mock journalists; they don't believe what's written anymore. They blame the not-so ethical line that they take on. People begin to see through. That keeps on denting the credibility. It has reached such level that unless we don't do something quickly, it will be done forever.

### **What do you think should be done?**

We need to go back and keep the commercial side of media organization completely, completely removed from the editorial side. The Times of India set the revenue model we have today. They felt that they needed to bring in the ads business within the media organization. They thought they would do better at making decisions instead of the editors. That model spread everywhere, including DNA. These people now decide who would get hired, what direction the paper would take, what one will write. This is doing a

lot of damages to good journalism. It doesn't mean that there is no good journalism happening at all. I would say good journalism is happening in spite of this model. Can you imagine if we are able to do good journalism in this situation? What would be possible without that kind of pressure being brought upon journalists?

**Can you elaborate on the Times of India model?**

Editorially speaking, the Times has always been pleasing the master, whoever is in power. When the British were here, they carried strong pieces against the freedom movement. I would quickly tell you of a small episode related to the freedom movement. Freedom fighters told the British they had to leave India in 1942. When they did that, some Indian navy personnel decided to join the freedom fighters. When they joined them, it was called mutiny by the British masters. The next day, the Times run a page-one headline saying, "They bite the hands that feed them."

**That was a headline?**

Page-one headline. Of course, this didn't go unchallenged. The young navy man was very unhappy came in front of the Times building and said bring down your building and apologize. All the other newspapers covered that story and The Times of India apologized. This isn't the only example. In 1977, Indira Gandhi, the original Mrs. Gandhi, came in and declared the emergency when she realized her party was going through a political crisis. People were tired of the way she was running the government. People were rebelling. Instead of setting her own house in order, she declared a state of emergency. It was a suspension of the Constitution and the fundamental rights. Anybody could be picked up. People started disappearing. This is one of the biggest blots on our

democracy. The Times, at the time when she said she would not accept any criticism from the media, began to crawl. Not bend, but crawl. It was only The Indian Express that relentlessly pursued her and wrote stories against her; so much that censors would be sent to go to the Indian Express and check all pages before release. The paper would come out at 11 a.m. It ended up giving time for the compliant Time of India to build its monopoly, on which it has been living on for so many years. The Times thought it was doing some great job. They didn't realize that people were thinking differently. They would say: We read the propaganda, now we will read the news. Indian Express encouraged the idea of asking uncomfortable questions and exposing corrupted politicians. Most of the best journalists in India have some links with the Indian Express. The paper has trained some of the best minds. What happened was that the Times bought those people over. They would see that a journalist is doing some spectacular job; they would approach him; and they would offer a 200 percent raise in his salary. Now, obviously, that sounds attractive. So Kevin goes there. Then, Kevin wants to do the stories he used to do at the Indian Express. But they wouldn't let him. The Times of India has now 85+ reporters. How many of their bylines have not appeared for months? There is a joke going around that says that the Times will start nailing chairs on the walls because there is no space anymore in the newsroom. They are hiring people not to write.

### **Why?**

They want to get the best possible brains, the best investigative reporters. They get all of them. Then you don't let them write about what they used to write. What will they do? They either get frustrated and quit journalism -- many of them have done that -- or they tell themselves this is the best that can happen so they resign to their faith -- they are

getting a good salary -- and continue with the Times. Do you realize? You are getting paid to not work. Not, not work. Not work on the kinds of stories that you are cut out to do. That came from the Times of India. By the way, you should check out their magazine called Outlook. Every year, they have a special end-of-year issue. In that special issue, they a media special. There was an interview with the head of Times. He said: "For me the Times of India is a product, which essentially sells advertisement. News is incidental."

### **Really?**

Yes. He said this on record. Obviously, it is working because the people keep buying the paper. The revenue model is successful. You see what I am saying? He answered the questions. He spoke freely about it. You see... The sure, the braveness that has come out of it. It says a lot about the gangrene in the profession. Now, you either need to do some quick amputation or it will consume you completely. Because all newspapers follow that model now. They thought that was the way to go. Even the Indian Express. When NDTV launched, for the longest time, it was a monopoly. It was doing some really good journalism, hard hitting, hard journalism. There weren't considering crime, politics, glamour, cricket... They were looking at the real, hardcore issues. But soon NDTV started following the Times model. Now, they don't carry stories anymore; every issue is a studio debate now. It's that kind of high decibel kind of debate. It comes around 9-10 p.m. when most families sit down for dinner. People are not watching this to engage with issues; they are watching this because how vocally someone can talk or pound on the table. People are watching for the drama, and it's working. Now, it's all about making crores. They are making a lot of money. What's this failure of Indian journalism? How

can we keep journalism meaningful and viable at the same time? Why do meaningful and viable exclusive words?

The new revenue model started in the 70/80s. From there, it spread. Let me give you some additional details. Do you know how much does the Times of India sell for?

**Almost nothing.**

Yes. Most homes get the Times of India not to read it but to resell it and get money out of it.

**How do you know that?**

There were studies. When you speak to diwalas, the people who gather the used newspapers, they tell you that they sell it back to the manufacturers that make newspapers. The statistics are there. Sometimes, newspapers come out of the press to go straight to the recycling. They print a lot more papers than they could sell. It's how it works. If you are known to have a large circulation so many more people come to advertise with you. It's all part of the game. Anyhow, I am not making revenue by selling newspapers. Am I?

**No.**

If I sell a paper for 5 or 6 rupees, and it is about 60-70 copies, what kind of money am I making? I am not making any money. If I sell it out of the press straight to the recyclers, I will continue to make money from the raw product, and then I will keep telling people, today, I printed that many copies. The demand of the paper is increasing. All the

newspaper owners are part of this game. Inflating the circulation figure is part of the game.

Now, the other part. Kevin comes to me the paper to sell an ad. I say, I will give you a small cut to place this ad even if my rates are sky high. But I will give you a small cut to insert your ad in my paper. But you have to sign for that... You have to sign a document stating that you will not give this ad to anyone else. Now, Kevin agrees. He is getting an ad in the hundred thousands copies of the Times. In addition, I will give him a transitional rate to place the ad in other publications of the company, like the Marathi paper, the Hindi paper, the financial paper, the tabloid. Kevin signs the contract. In the process, you are not only monopolizing your business, but you are strangling the competition. You realize what I am telling you, right?

**Yes.**

This is how you corporatization the media. Advertising has become the only focus for the owner of the papers. Because of that, different corporates' interests are brought in the media organization. So then you can understand how journalism has found itself caught in all the problems.

**What about DNA?**

Wherever you publish this, am I going to loose my job?

**I don't know how much you can talk about this.**

Kevin, I can talk about anything to you. But if you think that something is too damaging... (pause) At DNA, things aren't too different to what's happening in other



papers. The DNA is one of the biggest challenges to the Times of India. For the Times, which is nearly 75 years old, with a circulation of 8,5 lakhs (850,000), to have a newspaper that is only 6 years old as competitor, with 600,000 circulation, is a big deal. It's like a puppy climbing at the monster and slapping its face. It's like David taking on Goliath. In the process of taking upon, taking on Goliath, there is also this whole fear of how quickly David is becoming Goliath itself. So sometimes, I am just saying, oh I don't like right-wing politics; so I am going to take on communism, and then you go to extremism, and you, yourself, start using weapons and this and that. You're taking an extreme step. When you move to an extreme, before you realize, you've actually join the other side that you had actually began to fight with.

**So is it what's happening?**

It is exactly what's happening around.

**Can you tell me what happened at DNA over last summer when the senior editors left?**

There was an allegation by an MP, who was one of India's largest corporate names by the way, Jindal. Manufacturing company. Family owned business. They had gotten into politics. There was an allegation from him that television journalist from Zee had gone and pressurized him to give some ads to the channel without which they do unflattering coverage of him. The MP fought them on camera. The company denied all along that this happened. It became kind of a marquis affair, especially with Zee constantly going after the Congress. It is known that the owner of Zee, who is also the owner of DNA, is seen as closer to the BJP. When that was clayed out, there was obviously some kind of pressure

on the editor of DNA to show support to Zee. Aditya Sinha, the editor in chief, wanted to simply report as it were. At the same time, The Times of India was giving maximum plea in a one-sided way because Zee is a competitor. The Indian Express and other papers did the same but with both sides of the story. When the pressure was felt, the DNA editor felt he needed to do the same. He carried a page-one editorial saying that there was a lot going on and it was not right and both sides there could be problems and it needed to be investigated. He insisted that at DNA, we believed that it needed to be investigated. He put a sentence, saying that, “while DNA is owned by the same owner, DNA is a separate entity as compared to Z.” He wanted to protect DNA, to dissociate it from what was going on. When he did that, it came as “time for him to go.”

**I don't think I have met Aditya Sinha.**

No, when you were here, it was already Ravi Joshi.

**Right.**

**You know, I would like to read you something an American journalist told me the other day.**

Sure.

**Donna Leinwand covers disaster and wars for USA Today, and I met her last week.**

**I asked her what makes a good journalist. She said: “You have to be empathetic, compassionate and kind. As a journalist, you should be one of the most caring people in the world. But you will see horrific things so you need the stomach and mindset for it.” She also said that she has never made stories about her**

I completely agree. We spoke about this. At the end of the day,... I know it's been muddled a lot, sullied a lot, but at the end of the day, let's not lose sight that journalism is an -ism, like Marxism, communism. It's not just a job; it's not a profession in that sense. In journalism school, they say it's a mission. While that sounded very bombastic, very idealistic, at the end of the day, it is what it is. But today, I am a content writer.

**Is it how you see yourself?**

There are so many people who are content writers for a living. Can you imagine? There are people who work for food blogs. They just go and review places and things like that. Someone gave me a card the other day, and it said, content writer.

**Wait, I am not getting you here.**

What I am saying is that in the process of commercialization and corporatization, we've gone so far that it has become everything but journalism. It has stopped being journalism itself.

**OK, OK. Now, I got you.**

**COLLEEN BRAGANZA (36, *Hindustan Times*, New Delhi)**

**Where were you born/raised?**

I was raised in New Delhi, but I grew in so many different places. My father was in the Army.

**Did you go to journalism school?**

No.

**Did you do any journalism classes?**

No.

**How long have you been a journalist?**

13 years.

**Can you tell me about your educational background?**

I went to Delhi University, and I did a bachelor's and master's both in English literature. During my second year of master's, I felt that I had too much time on my hands, I then applied for an internship in a newspaper. I applied to many newspapers. The first people who offered me the job, I took it.

**Where was that?**

That was the Asian Age in New Delhi.

**So that's how your career in journalism started?**

Yes. One of the reasons I studied English. Obviously, I enjoyed English a lot, but you do English, you think what the various careers open to you are. One of them was the journalism. I can't say that I spent my childhood telling myself that I wanted to be a journalist because that's not true.

**Can you tell me how you went from this internship to where you are now?**

I started with Asian Age. As an intern, I got to do a lot of things, starting from the bottom. I started there, but because it was a small newspaper, and because there was a lot of people who used to keep leaving. Actually, Asian Age was journalism school for me. I learned on the job. It's been journalism school for a lot of journalists in India because newspapers are so short staff and used to pay so little that only trainees used to end up there and used to get big responsibility really early on. From a trainee, I must have done the dog work for a couple of months, then I moved on to do the world page, then I moved on to the nation page, and within a year, not even a year, I was on page one.

**Really?**

Yeah. There were a lot of seniors there. They had been there for many years. The junior level was the one who kept leaving. This is why they had to keep hiring interns. So I was there for three years. In 2002, they sent me to Goathi, which is the Northeast of India, to launch an edition there. I was 23 years old. I was sent there. I was told that I needed to be there to help launch the edition for two weeks. Those weeks stretched to two months. I worked for two months non stop without a single day off. Then there was a bit of a power struggle between the franchisee holder and the editor. The editor was in Delhi; the franchisee was some MP in Assam. He wanted to exercise editorial control, and there was

this big tussle. I was caught in the middle. My editor used to give me orders, and then the MP used to talk to the editor and resolve things between themselves. I would get caught in the middle. I got really frustrated and demanded to be taken back, which is when the MP tried to make me stay by bribing me. Bribing me is the wrong word. He said he would make me resident editor. So I looked at him, and I told him, are you nut? I am 23 years old; I barely got two years in the profession, you know. So you guys, clearly don't know what you want. I didn't have a ticket back home, but I had an open ticket. One of my colleagues helped get my ticket back, and I came back to Delhi. After this, I was quite disillusioned with the Asian Age. Shortly after, I quit. I joined television with a channel called Headlines Today. It was just launching at that time in India. I think that was 2003. It belongs to the India Today group. So I went to Headlines Today mainly because they were launching, they were hiring a lot of people. But I can tell you that those nine months were the worse months of my life.

### **Why?**

I resigned on my third day because I hated my job. I don't think my job profile, and what I wanted to do matched. I think I was misled during the interview, or I misunderstood. I am not sure. I was very unhappy so I quit on my third day. Then my boss somehow convinced me to stay. The channel is just launching, we will allow you to do other things. So I stayed on. Yet Headlines Today was the worse experience of my life. I would never go back to television.

### **Why?**

It was a lot of fluff; it was a lot of noise. There was not a lot of depth to it. You know, good looking people make it to television, make it as anchors. You have to be a bluster. I just felt that non deserving people were getting ahead just because the way they could talk and network. In the meantime I applied to a couple newspapers, and Hindustan Times got back to me first. I had also applied to the Indian Express. Hindustan Times contacted me first, and I joined them immediately. The boss was very keen on having me. I guess because there was short staff as usual. Within a week of joining HT, Indian Express contacted me, saying that I could come and meet with the editor. By then, it was too late. I would have preferred the Indian Express because at that time, it was the most serious newspaper. But I had to turn it down because I felt it was not right... I had just accepted something, I couldn't turn it down. I was with HT from the beginning of 2004 till about mid-2005. HT was launching in Bombay. That's when my editor in chief had noticed... I was on page one again at HT... He was quite impressed by the quality of my rewriting as well as my headlines. So when they needed some people to help out with the launch of the Bombay edition, I was one of the names nominated to go there. When I reached there, again I was supposed to there for two weeks to help out. I ended up being there for two months, after which I was asked to stay on and take a transfer. I was enjoying my job at that time. It was a very good launch with a very good launch team, very energetic. We thought we'd change the world. So it was a really good experience; I learned a lot... at least in the first six months. The problem... The editor there, the one who hired me in Delhi, not the one who sent me to Bombay... He was made resident editor of Bombay, but within eight months, he quit, so a lot of us felt betrayed. About six of us had come from Delhi; we had moved to Bombay, a city where non of us had lived

in earlier. So we just felt very betrayed. Somebody who had brought us here jumped ship. Anyway, we had a couple of changes: I was still in news, again on page one. Then we had a new boss, and I got really fed up with what I was doing. I felt very... The news cycle can get very boring and very repetitive. So I felt trapped over there. Also, in Bombay, the kind of news they have is very different from the kind of news we have in Delhi. Bombay is not interested in politics; it's more interested in civic and local issues. I've always been interested in politics, so I felt bored. As an escape, I told myself I was going to try writing. At that point, there was a vacancy in Brunch, which is their Sunday magazine. So I spoke to the editor. She said why not, why don't you give it a try. I went to Brunch, and that's only when I started reporting. I mean it's not hardcore reporting, but I really came without any reporting experience. It taught me a lot. Some people would say that we were doing fluff reporting, but I have done some good stories in Brunch, trend stories and so on. It taught me a lot. It taught me how to speak to stakeholders, etc. In a way, I am not a very comfortable person... I am not the ideal journalist... reporter, I would say, because I am not comfortable going to strangers and asking them questions. I found it very difficult to do. Brunch broke those barriers for me because I knew I had to make it to the deadline. I had to do it. But predictably, I got bored of that, too, because there was only that much I could do with feature writing, being a news person. In the meantime, I thought about going abroad for studies. I wanted to do my master's abroad. I couldn't do it earlier because my parents couldn't afford it. I then decided to take a break, finish my second master's. I did my master's at the University of East Anglia in 2009.

**Where is that?**



It is in Norwich, in the U.K. I went to the school of development studies. Now, it's called the school of international development. I did my master's in media and international development there. So that year was an eye-opening year for me, too. The problem of education in India is that we are not taught to question anything. Whatever we are told by a teacher or a lecturer is a the gospel truth, and we have to just mug it up and vomit it out during the exam whereas in universities in the U.K. taught me to think. It's not like I didn't think earlier, but it taught me to think critically, to think differently and to be more acceptable to different points of views. It came quite late in my life since I was 30 years old when I did my second master's. Thirty, thirty-one or thirty-two. It was good, and I enjoyed the break, too. Then, when I came back... I had the option... The U.K. used to have what they called a post-work visa. A lot of people tend to stay on the U.K. after that. I was torn with the idea, but I decided to come back. Even if I started in journalism in the U.K., I would have to start again right at the bottom, and I wasn't ready to do that. I felt that I had established myself in India quite well... I mean, as a middle-level journalist. So why should I throw away these many years of work, of reputation, of goodwill, to start from scratch again. In the U.K., I wasn't familiar with the milieu. I think I know more English history than the English themselves, but you know... I know India, so I wanted to come back. I also wanted to try to do... At that point, I think I was a bit disillusioned with journalism, and I still am, so I did think that I would try to come back and get a role in media and development. But again, that meant that I would have had to start form scratch. As it happened, when I came back, within five days of landing in India from the U.K., one of my former bosses, the editor of Sunday HT, he called me up. He had been asked to join DNA in Bombay. I think through Facebook he saw that I was returning, and

he asked me if I wanted to come onboard. Initially, when he asked me, I said no because I wasn't sure I wanted to come back to journalism. But then when you're broke, and you have two loans on your head, and when you've been used to be independent without asking money to your parents, it's difficult to say no to a job that is landing on your laps. So I went to DNA Bombay, and I was there for about two and a half years. At the end of 2012, it started going down hill, when my boss was asked to leave, for whatever reason. The next six months, I was looking for an option, but still not sure what I wanted to do, and honestly, even now, I don't know if I want to be in journalism very long. I want to get out. I love what I do, but I don't know if I will be able to respect myself if I stay in this profession.

**Let me back up a little bit. You basically learned journalism at the Asian Age and at HT. You had different positions from editor to reporter to feature writer to national editor and Sunday editor. When did you do when you moved to DNA?**

I was national news editor, but toward the end, I was also Sunday editor. I was supposed to be relieve from my news job, but it didn't happen.

**Can you talk about this and explain what happened?**

I think my boss wanted... I think he felt that the Sunday team needed some enthusiasm... I think he felt it needed some freshness. He knew I have a writing background; he knew that I had worked with Brunch. So he did ask me if I wanted to take it over. He felt that the previous editor was very complaisant; he felt that he wasn't pushing his team hard enough. It was on autopilot basically. He had a conversation with in April whether I wanted to take over Sunday. I was very happy because I have realized that after 13 years

my forte is features. I am interested in news feature. It's the benefit of feature, but it's not fluff. It's about people; it's about human-interest stories; it's about things that matter.

Also, you have the time to do it. It's not a daily deadline. I was keen on getting into that. And as you may have seen, Sunday magazine allowed that kind of journalism. Plus, I was excited in getting to lead a team. As the national news editor, I had a lot of people reporting to me, but I couldn't call them my team exactly because you have to make pages at the end of the day. So I saw something different, and I was quite interested in it. So I agreed. It took forever coming. I was only formally made the Sunday editor in December, a week or two before Aditya, my former boss was asked to go. So when I took over, there was a great turmoil. I also felt that I would have benefitted more if Aditya was still there, not because of editing but because he was a great Sunday editor. There was nobody to guide me. Even the most senior journalists need somebody to look up to, who will criticize when you're doing badly, who would rip apart your edition when it's a bad edition, who would praise you when it's a good edition. Into six months, I got no feedback from anybody. So it was shooting blind. My friends might say that was a great edition, or whatever, but professionally, I got no feedback. I have mixed feelings about my six months there. I really enjoyed leading the team. There was a good bunch of people, and I feel really bad that that whole team has fallen apart. I mean they have all gone different ways. I really wished it had happened earlier, and I really wished that it happened when I had a proper boss and not just random person who had been designated editor whom I am supposed to report to.

**Who was that person?**

They had gotten this person, Ravi Joshi. He was actually my colleague at the Hindustan Times. He used to head the metro desk in Delhi. As much as he is good at deskwork and stuff, he's not really somebody I look up to. I found it very difficult to work with him. I am one of these people who need to be motivated. Some people are self-motivated; others need to get feedback to go on. If my boss tells me I did a crappy edition, I will ensure that the next one isn't, and I will find out why it was a crappy edition. I found pretty crippling not to have professional feedback. The CEO of the group would tell what he thought people would like to see, but he was marketing. He would say people would click on this, why don't you do a story on this. People want to read about celebrity and sex or whatever it is. In the end, I was trying to do stories that he had suggested; I was only the executor. I deteriorated a bit.

### **When did you leave?**

I quit in July, and my last day was sometime in August. In September, I went back to HT in Delhi. I didn't want to come back to journalism, but journalism jobs in India are really difficult right now, and I was desperate to get out of DNA. It had become really bad.

Again, I was ready to quit without a job at many points, but my former boss used to talk to me, telling me not to be stupid. Somehow my rationale mind prevailed, and I didn't quit. Sometime in April, I had come to Delhi to meet with the executive editor of Indian Express because I had written to them for a job, and they were willing to interview me. The interview went very well, and they offered me the job. But I didn't want to roll. It was a news position, and again, I wanted to do a news feature. I thought that if I looked some more I would find it. Two, three months later, I realized that I had to take whatever I would get because it was getting really bad at DNA. So I turned down the offer with the

Indian Express. My logic was if I am going to work with news, let me work with Hindustan Times because I was comfortable there. I was with HT for six years and all. The devil you know is better than the devil you don't.

### **Why is the journalism industry the devil?**

I think Indian media... Maybe, I am generalizing... I don't know... See, I am more a desk person than a reporter. Nobody accept somebody who hasn't been a reporter. They don't see my byline; they don't know if I'm a great reporter, a kickass political reporter. I don't have that kind of recognition in the media. Basically, I am dependent on my good will among the people I work with. That is one. The devil is that, in all the places I have worked in so far, there are commercial interests that have taken over. They dictate the editorial tone and the stances that we take. We have no choice but to give in. For example, at DNA, the CEO of Zee/DNA Group. He's coming to the newsroom every single day; he is asking you questions; he is telling you he'd like it done this way. He's giving you orders. So you can either fight him everyday or do what he is asking for. Or you can negotiate, which I used to do quite a bit. I would do something that he wanted and not do something else.

### **Can you give me an example?**

He wanted to turn the magazine into a tabloid. I thought it was a really bad idea. They eventually did it when I left. I thought it was a bad idea because we didn't have a lot of stuff so it would make the newspaper very thin. I thought we already a tabloid, or at least that kind of tabloid content, with After Hours. I thought the magazine didn't need to tone down because it had a niche audience. The kind of compromise I did was to include some

fluff type things in the magazine. I can't think of specifics, but this is one of them. I would tend to negotiate. If I think of something, I will let you know later.

**How would he express what he wanted?**

He would never demand, but there will always be an undercurrent of... How can I say it? He would walk in into my cabin and would start saying that this or this newspaper has done this, why can't we do this also. People would read it. You have to think of the youth. You have to think of the youth, he would repeat. People would click on it. Sometimes, he would even pressure you and send somebody from marketing to also come and lobby for him. What don't you do this for the youth? I think people would click. Sorry, I am being a bit vague here. There had been time when he would come to me and push the idea.

DNA and HT are very different organizations. DNA is very new; it's seven years old. It has almost no hierarchy. I mean it has hierarchy, but there aren't too many layers.

**What do you think about the ownership influences editorial decisions?**

It's a difficult question. I think, at one level only, the owners do feel entitle to a say because they are the ones who own it. I am not sure in the U.S. how journalism has been, but there is no... Almost everybody in Indian journalism who owns newspapers or even TV channels have different businesses on their own. They are into something or the other. Bennett Coleman, which is The Times of India Group, has huge interest in many other things. The Hindustan Times for example, the owner is married to a businessman who has interest in Goa, in Chhattisgarh where there is coalfields. Plus, the owner of the HT was once upon a time a member of Parliament with the Congress party. I think the HT has been looked at as a Congress paper. It's very common to say that the HT is a

Congress paper. It was funded during the independence struggle and the owner's family have had a long association with the Congress party. It is seen as a Congress paper. A lot of owners would be scared... Yes, the thing is you need to be friends with the government, right? If you're not friend with the government, the government can make your life very difficult, especially when you got businesses. With this current political climate in India, with the elections coming up, a lot of people have almost handed victory to Narendra Modi. They do feel the BJP is coming to power. A lot of people have started shifting their allegiances, or they are trying not to piss them off basically. You turn down maybe negative coverage. In small small ways, it's being done, but nobody wants to piss off Narendra Modi. His rallies get a lot of coverage. His rallies get coverage because he speaks better than Rahul Gandhi. That could be also another reason. But sometimes you would carry for no reason a rally on the front... I might be speculating, but this is what I have felt in the past months.

**If you say HT is more affiliated to The Congress, how has HT covered the upcoming election? What's their position?**

I think it has changed. HT has been affiliated with The Congress, but even as a reader of the paper -- forget about as an employee -- you can make out it is not so favorable anymore to The Congress. We are carrying critical news criticizing their policies and so on. HT has shifted. It's not pro-BJP, no way, but it has moved from its pro-Congress stance.

**Does HT cover the BJP more now?**

I don't think we're covering him more. But I do think we may be giving... Like I said, the Modi story gets played up a little more. I wouldn't say it's because we'd want to be friendly with the BJP, but I would say because Modi is a controversial figure. You would have the choice between a controversial figure and a non-controversial figure, you choose the controversial one. By default, you end up taking Modi. Same for Arvind Kejriwal. He says a lot of controversial things so he gets a lot of front page too.

**That's very interesting. So what's the HT strategy for the coverage of the elections?**

I am probably the wrong person to ask that because I am not involved with that strategy. My job at HT is to manage the desk. The planning part is done by my bosses. I think we've been pretty fair from whatever I could see. We do cover all the rallies. We sent an embed correspondent with Kejriwal when he went to Gujarat recently. We've covered that quite a lot because it's seen as a middle class party, and our readership is middle class.

**You're talking about the AAP?**

Yes. Kejriwal's party.

**OK.**

I think it's a middle class movement so we want to give our readers the information they want.

**When you started in journalism, did you have an idea of ethics and what it meant?**

Ethics?



**Yes.**

See, ethics is something we all learn as a part of our upbringing. I don't know whether I was taught it, but I am sure I was aware of it. For example, we used to do a lot of food reviews. We didn't pay anything for the food. It's probably the boss's consolation for the bad salaries we are being paid. We were sent for a lot of food reviews. At the end of it, we would tend to say that we were invited. I am not sure whether it was the company's policy, but we would do it. We would make it there in the story that it was an invitation by this or that hotel. I think ethics wasn't out in the open in the sense it wasn't a major, important part of my early life in journalism. Nobody really talk about it. It's one of those things that is understood. There are things you would just not do.

**Can you give me example of those things you would not do?**

For example, I went on a junket once because I needed to get out of the office. There were other journalists, and one had actually brought his mother with him.

**What's a junket?**

Those paid trips for journalists. They go and write about the trip.

**OK.**

So when we saw that the journalist, we were surprised. We were all like that's so unethical. It's one thing to go as a representative of the office, and it's another to take your parents to go along and expect the agency to pay also. What else?

**What about the relationship between sources and journalists?**

From my experience, I've not been a reporter for many years, at least not a hard news reporter. There's a serious problem as far as journalists and sources because a lot of time the journalists are more spokespersons for the sources in the sense they are used by the sources. Somehow, they are so friendly with them for whatever reason. I don't what the reason is... Maybe it's symbiotic relationship at one level. I feel they do not question what the sources give them often enough. I know you're going to ask me for an example.

**Maybe you've edited a story and you saw that...**

I gave you a simple example. Police sources. When I was at DNA, there was a reporter who used to come up with an exclusive every Sunday. It was too good to be true. Some big announcements or confessions from a gangster. After a couple of Sundays, I got a bit skeptical and I realized that the man didn't write anything the whole week. So why would he give an exclusive on Sundays? The reason is because the boss, who would scrutinize the list and probably scrap the story, wasn't here that day. There were only the juniors like me who would make the decisions. So he thought that if he says it's an exclusive and it's a senior reporter, you would take him at his word and use it as a front page. I realized all this. He used to write all these stories about gangster. It's very difficult to double check if the gangster say one thing or another. A lot of interrogations report, police report... If somebody gets arrested, police would give a lot of information on what the person has done and what he has confessed. There is no way to confirm because the person is in custody. So a lot of damage can be done. I can actually give an example for this case. You remember the Delhi gang rape?

**Yes.**

Soon after that the cops, and I think the papers helped propagating that story a lot, had fed the news that the juvenile was the most violent in the rape. The public opinion was that he should be tried as an adult. But the law is that he shouldn't. The cops fed the journalists saying that he was the most violent, the one who raped her the most... They just painted a picture of him as being the most brutal. So it became embedded in the popular narrative that this juvenile was the most brutal whereas later on, after it went to the court, etc., etc., it came out that he was no more brutal than anybody else. Nobody question it, you know. A lot of journalist would just take the info and publish it. Even somebody pretty senior would do that. They have their sources, but sometimes, you need to be skeptical about what your sources are feeding you. I feel that this isn't happening so much. Sometimes journalists are used by political sources in a chess game whose result you would only know if you move down the line. I am sounding very cryptic, but you understand what I am saying?

**Yes, I understood. Can you tell me about a story or stories you've worked on that you think best serve your audience? I am interested in your editor's point of view.**

(Long silence) I think it says a lot that I have to think so long. When is the last time I have read a good story? I don't know really. I haven't been impressed by Indian journalism. I am just thinking... not only on the Hindustan Times but elsewhere too. Are you talking about the newspapers I worked for?

**Well, yes, because you would be editing those stories.**

OK.

**I mean if you have stories in mind that are worth mentioning, stories you've used as example, stories you were impressed with...**

See, in HT, this guy used to be at DNA earlier. His name is Sandeep Pai. He's a very dedicated journalist; he still believes in journalism. He is also an RTI activist in the sense that he believes not only in source-based journalism, but in RTI-based journalism. He files a lot of RTI applications and based on what he gets he writes his stories. Recently, he's done a lot of stories... Well at DNA, he did these stories against Reliance whose a really big player to take on.

**Wait, what's his name?**

Sandeep Pai.

**I will look him up on the Internet. I am wondering if I've met him when I was at DNA.**

He's great. I see hope for journalism when I see reporter like him. He's fighting a very frustrating battle. A lot of his stories... The thing is good investigative stories, good journalism, is going to piss somebody off. Usually good journalism is going to piss very important people off. The problem today in India is that nobody wants to take that risk. The other day, he was telling me about a story he'd been working on. He said all the editors were really excited about it, but when it finally got published it went inside the paper and not on the front page. I called up everybody. It had facts. Anyone who was accused of anything, I got their responses. It was solidly back by everything. Despite all of that, it was put in a corner of the nation's page.

**How do you explain that?**

I could explain that off the record. You know Kevin, I don't when your paper is going to get published, but I am sure that day somebody is going to get fired.

**No.**

I think I've said too much already.

**Can I know that off-the-record? I need to understand exactly what happened.**

It was a story on Reliance. The editor in chief spoke to the owner, and she wasn't... OK the thing is the owner has family's relations with the Ambanis. Her son has married the daughter of Mukesh Ambani's sister.

**OK.**

Got it?

**Yes.**

They are tied by marriage. So we do tend to be careful with Reliance stories. We have a new editor. His name is Nick Doss. He is very excited about good journalism; he is from South Africa. He commissioned a lot of these good stories, but in the end, forces are larger than him and his enthusiasm, so the stories don't get published or whatever. You should talk to Sandeep. The other day, he was telling me that so many of his stories that everyone thinks are good aren't published.

**Does he know what's happening at the top of the hierarchy?**

Yes, he's always aware. He's not very happy about it. I told him: What's the option? Even for me... What's the option? Where do I go from here?

**It sounds a little bit tricky. So do you think you could me in touch with him?**

He's going to be really helpful. He's experienced this stonewalling firsthand.

**Can you summarize a little bit what the main challenges for Indian journalism are today? So far you've talked about the corporatization of the media, the lack of ethics... You didn't talk too much about corruption. Have you experienced any cases when police officers would interfere...**

I don't have any example that comes to mind. And if I have, it's probably because it's public. But let's say, I've probably been blissfully unaware.

**So what do you think should be done to put Indian journalism back on the right track?**

We need to have independent funding. As long as our salaries are dependent on people with interests across industries, you cannot have good journalism. The government doesn't mind small criticism such as the roads are bad and this is bad too, but when it comes to private entities, it's difficult. I mean even against the government -- I am contradicting myself here. They don't mind small small criticism, but if you talk about massive corruption, it gets a bit difficult. You can see that in the past journalism in India has exposed a lot of corruption. We had the Coalgate scam for example. MPs got to jail and so on. At one level, there is a bit of contradiction. I have not thought deeply about it. When news hits the headlines, through a gag report for example, and not thanks to an

individual investigation, it's easy to shoot from their shoulders. The blame is not on you because the gag is a government body. So when the government is caught, let's just report on that. It was not a newspaper who had revealed the corruption case, it was the government who had enticed the government. So it was easier for us to play up than carrying and defending an investigation.

**You said that before Indian journalism was good at carrying investigation and fighting corruption. What happened between that time and today?**

I don't think in the past there were big investigative stories. India has, except for The Hindu and Indian Express, we don't have a big tradition of investigative journalism. I am sure some people would think differently, but this is what I have noticed. The Times of India and the Hindustan Times are the two main players in our country, but listen to what Bhaskar Das from the Times of India said: "Journalism is advertising." This is blasphemous. As long as the business model... Wait, the business model is you get ads to subsidize the paper. It's not the reader who is paying for the paper who is actually paying for the production cost. Once you know this, you have an answer to all your questions. How would things change? Things will change when people are ready to pay for the news. Right now, they are not. Everybody is so used to have a paper for 3 or 5 bucks. The printing cost is around 12 to 15 rupees a paper. Who's going to pay that? That's one of the problem. I think independence is essential. For example, The Guardian, there is a big trust behind. There's not one businessman who is paying everybody's salaries. They have amazing investigative journalism. I don't see that happening in India at all. Our kind of investigative journalism... I wouldn't want to disown investigate journalism but I can't of any recent of good work. The only one paper that use to do good job was the Indian

Express. They do a lot of defense-related and scam-related stories. They've been doing a pretty good job, but they've lost a lot of credibility after a story they did two years ago.

They said there was possible coup happening in Delhi. It seems that the information came from somebody in the government who wanted to get even with somebody else. So it didn't seem like a very credible story. They got a lot of flack in the social media for it.

We still don't know whether that story is true or not. Recently, they carried another story saying that a higher official confirmed that this had actually happened. But there's still a lot of skepticism. It was done by the editor in chief who is Shekhar Gupta.

**When did all this happen?**

I think it was in 2012. Just check it out on Google: Indian Express and coup. You'll find the story.

**OK... So I would like to get back to *The Guardian*. Do you think it could be an example for Indian journalism?**

I think The Guardian is a good example. I think the Internet and social media is helping a lot in India because you do have websites that are trying to do different stories, the stories that the mainstream media isn't doing. I wouldn't say there are investigative stories, but I am sure they would get to that at some point, at some stage. They are doing stories that mainstream journalists feel.. You know a lot of times, mainstream journalism would do stories that the middle class would want to read. It's about them, their schools, colleges, roads... The rest of India is ignored in that space. There are one or two websites that try to give you the other side.

**Which websites?**



There's one website called Scroll.in that just opened. It's run by Naresh Fernandez. It's trying to be a combination of an alternative plus mainstream website. It doesn't really do hardcore, investigative journalism at all, but they carry different stories. Then, we've had a couple of alternative websites for a long time. Kafila... You might have heard of Kafila. They do different stories about environment, human rights, etc., subjects that mainstream media find boring. The truth is mainstream media does a lot of stories that they feel people like us want to read. Nobody wants to read about hardcore stories, about how some villages is going to be destroyed because some agreements have been given. The patience of the middle class is very little for these kinds of hard stories. I can say this that sometimes we tend to kill those stories because we feel they're boring. The middle class wouldn't want to read it.

**Rural India... People in the cities don't care about it?**

No.

**How do you feel about that?**

I think that's a problem. Have you heard about the me syndrome... or something like that. You only surround yourself by what you're interested in. You live in this little cocoon. I think the mainstream media tend to do that. We also have a big problem with ad space. Because there would be so many ads... DNA used to have a ad ratio of 60/40 whereas here, I have overheard the other day, it's not even 50/50 sometime. That's how you end up carrying only routine stories -- car accident here, someone was murdered there. There's no space, and the problem is that investigative journalism requires space. There's no

space for that. If you look at the Indian newspapers, especially the daily papers, where's the space?

**What do you think about *Tehelka* and *Caravan*?**

*Tehelka* is almost... Does it still exist?

**That's the thing. I don't exactly know what's happening right now.**

I think *Caravan* is doing a good job. I am not a regular reader of *Caravan*, but I think, whatever few stories I have read there, it is an alternative. It is an alternative, definitely. But the circulation must be what? It must pretty limited. It's doing a good job. There are a lot of independent journalists on Twitter that I read about. I don't think there are many platforms though.

**You know... The me syndrome... Nicolas Kristoff of the NYT actually talked about it in an op-ed.**

It's very dangerous. One of the things I have heard since I joined journalism is, does the reader want this? I mean sometimes I do want to publish an environment story, but there's no reader interest. It also reflects the quality of our journalism. We do not know how to make stories engaging. We do not know how to make stories accessible. To improve journalism, you need training. A lot of people, like me, have joined journalism without training. I don't think journalism schools are the solutions either because there are a lot of people who come out of journalism school who are actually quite clueless. I don't know what they've learned there, but it's a bit difficult to work with them. Sometimes it's easier to shape a blank, somebody who's not been taught anything, than somebody who's

learned something and has to unlearn to learn something new. Sandeep Pai is a graduate of a journalism school. I think there are some schools that are training very capable journalists, but from some of the test papers I have corrected recently, some of them are totally clueless.

**Interesting. I have one more question for you. When I talked to the other journalist, I asked them how they perceived their roles. Until now, most of them told me they were journalists as well as activists. Or at least what they were doing was a form of activism. How would you describe yourself?**

How would I describe my role? Hmm, my role is one of facilitator. How can I put this? I was thinking of this the other day. There are ways to push things in when I think they are important issues. It's never unconsciously. If someone is asking me to choose between two stories, instead of going for the one that I think everyone is going to read, I'd go for the one that I think is more important. Something on the environment for example, which doesn't get much space in mainstream media. I do think that sometimes I am insidiously... I am using my role... Well, I am not using it as much as I would like to do it, honestly... But yes, I mostly myself as a facilitator, somebody... See I am one of the persons through who news passes to reach the paper. That way, there's a lot of power, not only in my hands but also in the hands of my colleagues, in the way we frame the news, the headlines that we gave. I do see it as a powerful role though it's got its own limitations.

**Facilitator... That's interesting. Do you have an example of a time when you had to choose between two stories?**

I do remember when I was at DNA. There was this protest over Jaitapur at the nuclear plant. I got really excited about it. I used my persuasion skills to convince the editor to have a full page on that, explaining the issues that were there. Even in my current job, I am there when page one is being decided. So sometimes, I do tend to say, this is a rubbish story. They may or may not listen to me, but I've said it. I do feel at a certain level... Of course, my editor would sometimes say, what rubbish, you're totally wrong. We can have these arguments. But sometimes I win. This happens on a daily basis. It's a routine.

**Actually, I wanted to ask you about a story Yogesh did. Do you remember when you send Yogesh report on the violence against gay people?**

Yes.

**Do you remember how you brought that story to the paper?**

I think Yogesh had come to me to tell me what had happened. My memory is really bad. I do think he came and told me about it. I thought this was total misuse of police force; this was trampling on human rights; this is ridiculous. It just sounded so absurd that we had to do a story on it. I don't remember when we published that story, but I am pretty sure I wasn't the only one who decided to take that story on page one. I am quite certain that the decision was taken because it was about gay men. There's that element of voyeurism in India that newspapers try to satisfy. This story would be a so-called clicked stories. In fact, one of the constant things I have been hearing recently is: We should take this story because it would be clicked on. Why don't we take a naked woman then? Naked woman get clicked on all the time. I'm saying that because that logic doesn't work. If you think

you should select something because the readers would click, then there are so many things that the readers would click on. You just give them what they want. Why are you there then? Any idiot could do your job then. Why is the editor there? Yes, those are the conversation we have on a daily basis.

**That's really interesting. I think to a certain extent we have the same conversation here. The pressure is certainly different, but it's still a reality in the West.**

I think it's very important that you list all the newspapers in India and who owns them and what else they own. I could tell you:

Hindu: owned by a family -- Kasturi & Sons. Sacked the editor.

Times of India: owned by a family -- Bennett Coleman. Whole range of business interest. They sell many ads which gives them shares in many big companies.

HT: owned by political family -- Shobhana Bhartia. She's the daughter of Krishna Kumar Birla, former member of the Rajya Sabha, the upper house of the Parliament of India. Her husband is big businessman who gets interest in the sugar industry and coal industry.

Indian Express: Reliance group is probably giving them money. In the past two or three, everybody wonders how come they have more money.

DNA: Zee Group, big interest in land, real estate, infrastructure.

CNN-IBN: owned by Reliance.

There's such so much conflict of interest. For example, at DNA, we were told to dump the stories on the protest against toll tax on the highway because the chairman had

interest in that. He's the one building the road, and he is the one collecting the tolls. You're looking so shocked, but this is normal. It is part of journalism here. It's just insane. Another conflict of interest. Both DNA and HT don't pay rent to Indiabulls, the company that owns the building where they have their offices. It's part of the system. They have come to agree not to write anything about Indiabulls in Mumbai or anywhere else. They are a real estate company with interest probably all over India. There's just too much conflict of interest at a lot of different levels. Once the business editor at DNA told that he was instructed to knock YES Bank, who financed money for the Zee Group, because they weren't cooperating with the owner. When that story came out, the chairman called him and said: I told you to knock them but not to get them so upset. I think they got so angry with the story that they refused to meet the representative of Zee Group because it was such harsh story about them. I was much higher up in the hierarchy so I witnessed all of this.

**Can you talk a little bit about incomes? How much are journalists paid in India?**

It varies in a quite a big way. Have you heard of the wage board recommendations?

**No.**

Many years ago, journalists used to be on a wage board, which is a government recommendation on how much journalists should be paid. They were unions and all. The Times of India was one of the first to break the union, just like Rupert Murdoch did in England in the early 1990s. So Times of India did that around the same time. Times of India didn't print for about three months because of that. The fallout of that was that journalists were put on two contracts of three years each as opposed to being on the rose.

It has a lot to do with benefits. So when your three-year contract ends and your company doesn't want you anymore, they can ask you to go and they owe you nothing whereas with the wage board, it's very difficult to sack you if they don't like you or you're not doing the job well. A lot of people who move from wage board to contracts were initially quite badly paid. I was quite badly paid when I joined. I think it defers. There's really no standards. Somebody at my level would probably be getting way higher or way lower in another place. It all depends on personal negotiation. My friend who has worked at HT for 10 years is probably paid lower than me because she didn't leave HT. I left HT and went here and there. Each time you change job, you can ask for a hike. Editors are paid in crores, like I know for a fact that my former editor at DNA was paid 1.1 crores/year, and the new editor is probably paid 1.5 crores. You know how much is crore? One crore is about 10 millions. Recently, there was a dispute in court about some recommendations on the Majithia wage board. The Supreme Court has ruled that newspapers have to go by the recommendations. Media houses have been pleading that they're going to be ruined if they had to go by these recommendations because there are some people... There's one guy in my old office who's paid lower than a trainee because he's been there for so long. Trainees get 25-30,000 rupees a month. It's just depends where you start then. If you start in a poor newspapers, your salary remain low unless you're jumping a lot. It's not standard. Even for highly paid journalists, they are actually less paid than corporate counterparts. If I was working for a corporate house, I would be making much more. I thought about joining the corporate world. Here is my logic: Journalism was something we got into because we felt were doing some greater public good. Right? You feel that you're doing something that no other profession does. So you didn't mind about the late

hours, the low salaries; you just felt good about the change you were bringing. But then, when even that is not there and you're selling yourself for money, why do journalism? Start your own business, join a corporate business. You know what I mean? The little satisfaction we got by saying we were journalist and we were going to change the world, I don't think it exist for us anymore. As a result of it, I don't see myself in journalism in the next five years. Not even five, probably in the next two or three years because where's the next for me? A senior position. I'd not like to take a lot of shit from the owner. I have my respect. I am not going to take shit. There's only that much shit I can take without loosing my self-respect. For me it's easy because I don't have kids, I don't have a mortgage. But a lot of other people don't have that luxury. My next step is getting out of journalism.

**We would need to have a conversation in two years to see what you're doing and what I am doing. That should be interesting.**

I am interested in the media literacy. I am thinking of consulting with schools and colleges.

**To teach about media?**

Not only media but media literacy. I think given the kind of media we have in India, there's little awareness about the media. Being journalist, we know that Reliance owns CNN-IBN and so and so owns this or this paper, but it's not common knowledge. That kind of knowledge needs to be taught to view media critically. I think that's lacking in India.

**Let's see in two years from now.**



**SUNITA ARON (59, Hindustan Times, Lucknow)**

**Where were you born and raised?**

I was born in Bagdad, but I only remember Delhi, where I was raised.

**Did you go to journalism school?**

Not a proper journalism school. But after doing my post graduation, I went to a school for journalism in Delhi. I was a diploma course.

**How long was this program?**

It was a one-year program.

**What did you specialize in when you took this one-year course?**

There wasn't any specialization. We learned ABCD of journalism.

**How long have you been working as a journalist?**

I started in 1981, so 33 years.

**What organizations have you been reported for?**

Only two. One is the National Herald, and the other one is the Hindustan Times. I joined HT in April 1, 1992.

**Now you're based in Lucknow, which is UP. Can you talk a little bit about the specificities of the state?**

UP is a very very politically important state. It has an unexploited infrastructure, poor development. It has a very rich culture and civilization. It's a country, you know. You have subcultures, languages. It's a vast state, huge state. 80 members of the Parliament are from UP. All political parties focus on it. It is also a politically crucial state because eight Prime Minister of the country are from UP since Nehru.

**Now you're an editor. Do you have a beat that you cover as an editor?**

Well, I don't do any writing or reporting as an editor, but I am a reporting editor. I grew from a reporter to editor. I love reporting so I do it on the side.

**So do you cover any issues in specific?**

Politics used to be my forte, but now, I enjoy doing more social issues, women issues. That is what interests me more than politics.

**What and who inspired you to go into journalism?**

Basically, I think I drifted. I got married and came to Lucknow. I was interested in writing; I had done a course in journalism; but I didn't know till I went to a newspaper that I wanted to be a journalist. Until that, I didn't know. I needed to try my hand on it. Once I entered a newspaper office, I felt that was the space where I wanted to be. I have no regrets about it.

**Can you describe that moment when you realized you wanted to be a journalist?**

I was writing a television review for Northern India Patrika. Because I was a woman, they thought I could only review programs. They said I couldn't do any serious stuff. They told me they didn't have a job for a married woman, especially because I was going

to have children and all that. They told me I couldn't be a journalist because it was a difficult job. So I asked them to give one assignment so I could prove them wrong. They asked me to meet the governor's daughter and do a kitchen talk with her. They didn't expect any political copy from me. I went there; I met the governor's daughter. I wrote a political copy, which they printed. Next day, I created a lot of controversies, and I was removed. My column was taken away from me because I created problem to the paper. At that time, I told myself that was very interesting that this happened. If I could create such news and be honest to everybody... I rattled everybody because they were wrong. My pen... This was something, which I wanted to hold. I knew it would be difficult for me to get a job in the state of UP where there were very few women in journalism, but I decided to pursue.

**So what happened after that?**

I applied for the National Herald. Again, I had a fight with my colleagues there because they didn't want me to do reporting. They thought it was a male job and not for girls. I wanted to do serious, political coverage or social coverage. And then, I went and I did some good reporting. It created a controversy in office, but this time, my editor stood by me. He told everyone that I was going to be a reporter. His name is Hari Jaisingh. He went to the Tribune after.

**When you started, how did you envision your role as a journalist?**

I told you about the challenges I faced as a woman. The impact was going to be immense, not only in my office, but outside too. They asked me to do some civil survey about drinking water, electricity. Usually, even senior reporters don't do these surveys very

seriously, but I and a colleague of mine did this very seriously. We went around and met people. I highlighted problems, and during the course of that series, we went to a Red Light area where women were being pushed into prostitution. We didn't know what we were doing, but we spoke to these girls. We also saw where they were kept. They were hidden and kept as slaves. At that time, we did this story. I was very tired, and I went home without realizing the importance of the story and that it was a bombshell. My editor called me and said that I had to write more because it was a national story. After that day, I got a lot of threats and thefts moved around our office. I couldn't write the copy I remember; I didn't know where to start and where to end. My editor helped me write the copy. Then, I became what I am today.

**So that was this specific story on the Red Light District that launched your career?**

Yes. Then, we did a lot of hardcore stories. We did one on blood donation for which I went as a relative of a patient. I did a lot of investigations to uncover issues. That was great. I knew that I couldn't do anything else but this.

**Prior to all this, what was your idea of journalism?**

I was only reading the headline when I was a kid. Nothing else. My father used to tell me to pick up the papers and read the headlines. Until I went to do this one-year program, I didn't know much about journalism. There, I learned how to write, edit and send stories to print.

**What newspapers did you get at home when you were a child?**

I was very fond of the Indian Express from the beginning. We never got the Hindustan Times. I think it was the Indian Express or Times of India. My father used to decide which newspapers we would get.

**So which one did he like?**

He liked the Indian Express.

**Considering the kind of work they've done, do you think being familiar with that newspaper influenced you saw journalism?**

Yes. If you come to investigative reporting, the Indian Express is one of the best.

**Can you elaborate on that?**

Most of the corruption cases have been highlighted by them. It has been very independent in its reporting. They have very well-researched reports. And they give lots of space to their reports. They don't restrict their reports to 200 or 300 words, which is the frame for other newspapers. They have done very good stories; they always had a human touch to the stories.

**Is it the way you think stories should be?**

Yes. After so many years in this profession, I have realized that people read stories, which, in some ways, interest them, impact them. They wouldn't read a story in which they cannot see themselves. There has to be that connection between a report and the reader. There has to be a connection, a deep connection; otherwise, they would just flip through the pages. They don't read in details; they just read the headlines. So every story has to have a human touch. There has to have an emotion. It has to be full of emotions if

you want the readers to read it and also you want them to feel it. That way they will remember it.

**Now, after 33 years in the profession, how would you describe your role as a journalist in the Indian society?**

I don't like to talk about myself. But I think I have done my job very sincerely. And somewhere, when I used to do political writing, my newspaper editor used to get a lot of complaints because of me, especially from political parties. I remember him telling me that's a proof that your writing is not tilted. I know that as a reporter, I did my job. People knew that if I were writing on a particular subject, there would be truth and accuracy in it. After I became an editor, I got the freedom to do a lot of things. I opened up columns for issues like... city-centric issues... How we can improve our city. Today, I can claim that it has taken me 11 years to convince people that we are the people that we are responsible for our city. We have done campaign on roads for example. If you talk about social issues, we were the first newspaper starting a campaign on women issues. We are doing our fourth edition this year. We did a series on infant mortality. For that, we found a woman who had saved 400 infants without any medical support -- just because of her dedication. Today, I do lots and lots of these things. We have become the voice of the state. We provide platform to people. We go to them, and they come to us. Today, I can brag about all this because my newspaper's edition is especially known for that.

**So if you have to use an adjective to describe your role as a journalist within your community, what would it be?**

Recently, I have been participating in several panel discussions on right to information and all. In some events where I was a guest speaker, I was called an activist. I was surprised when I was introduced as writer, editor and as an activist. I don't mind that. I think I have been able to play an activist role within journalism, even though you are not supposed to do that.

**Can you elaborate on that? What is an activist for you?**

An activist fights and crusades for the right cause. It's as simple as that. Women empowerment is not only speech. It has to go further. If women decide to unite, then no political parties would ignore them. There is no way they could ignore women and their issues. I think activism goes through your writing, through your work, and as editor, it goes through conferences. You keep raising awareness about the issues.

**Sorry... Is the activist or the journalist who does that?**

It's journalism also. But not the way, it is taught to you when you are supposed to use the 5Ws. It's beyond that. You have to... There was a time when one report used to make a lot of difference. In my state, it used to go to a chief minister and he will take actions. And the public used to respond immediately. Today, when we give a notice announcing that we have a column on this or that, it takes us seven days to get public's response. And perhaps, it takes seven months to take the government's response, which hardly comes. They don't care anymore because there is so much of criticism. So a little bit of activism in journalism isn't wrong. I am not talking about joining demonstration and all. That's not my job.

**How do you draw that line that would be too far into activism?**

It's not difficult to draw a line because whatever you have to do, you have to do it through your columns and your editorial work. You can't be standing in the street. Look, we've done a few campaigns, like "My city My Pride". We went to school and spoke to teachers, and we had principals coming in the streets and cleaning them. But they did the cleaning part, and we reported. We motivated them, and we reported. The action part is with them. You can only motivate and report and write about the good people. It encourages them to do more. Your pen has to be active, and you have to write the right things and not be on the streets.

**So as a journalist, it is OK to encourage people to take action?**

Yes, you have to. You have to because your political system is down. We are part of the same society; we have to do something. You can't see people suffering. Supposing, you have a cold wave. People were dying because of the cold. The government is insensitive to the problems. Then, you have to take action. You write once and twice, and somewhere they'd start feeling the criticism part. That type of activism... I think there's no harm. We are just giving solace to people. There's no harm in that. If we don't do, who else would do? Tell me? The government isn't doing. The opposition is playing politics. The NGOs are trying to do, but either they're not being heard or they're not doing the good work. If we don't do, who else will do? Where would these poor people and children go? We have to do it for them again and again. Activism is that you don't do it once but again and again. You write again and again until there is action. Follow up on your reports.



**Can you elaborate on your actions for women's rights? Can you talk from a journalist's and a woman's points of view?**

I would like to first mention the national campaign HT is doing on acid victims. In UP, we are also doing it at our level. We have been doing stories one after another. We did a spot sale of acid. My reporter went down and found out that it is easily available. I don't even remember how many stories we've done. But that's when the placement of the stories become important, too. We've placed them on page one, at the top of the page. Recently, we've called acid victims over in our office. We've asked them not to talk about their pain but about their dreams. I was sitting with them and asked them what they wanted to do. OK, they have a face like this, but they must be having some dreams. One of them said she wanted to dance. The other one said she wanted to work in a boutique because she enjoyed stitching. The other one was a singer. We are going to have, as I mentioned earlier, the fourth edition of HT Women's Awards, and we will invite them on stage to perform. These acid victims, for the first time, will be performing there. One would be doing the dance... I think that's one thing I can do, you know, encouraging them. We started the HT Women Award to recognize women from any field. When we started, there were only ladies from urban areas doing some social work in the city. Then, we started looking for women in rural areas. My reporters would go look for women who don't read newspaper and don't have access to information. We wanted to nominate them for the award. Now, I have a huge range of role model women who have done amazing work in their communities. They are working against child marriages; one is working to have toilet in rural areas; a lady is working with sexually assaulted women; that lady

whom I mentioned earlier is working on infant mortality. This year, we have good entries.

**How does the nomination work?**

I only organize it; I don't decide. The judges check everything and choose the awardees.

**This is very interesting. Do you do this as a journalist or do you do this as a woman?**

Both. Both. In fact, I raised a lot of feminist issues so my reporters sometimes look at me. I told them, you have a women editor so you have to do all this. I do it both as a woman and as an editor. Because I am an editor, I have a say and I can get things done. So I use my position as a woman editor to highlight these issues.

**Why is that important to you?**

Because there is so much discrimination against women. I have never felt so at HT, but before I became an editor I did. When I became an editor, I was told that in Northern India, there had never been a woman editor before. I told you when I started they told me I was a married woman and was supposed to have children. Being a married woman or being a mother, as long as I don't bring my home in office, that shouldn't matter. It's not only discriminations... Women should be treated as human beings. Once I went to the U.S., and we were discussing about domestic violence. I hadn't seen domestic violence in my home, in my family... So I told them there wasn't. Everybody laughed at me. When I said that, I was so naive. When I returned, I started looking. Every third house has this problem. So I think women's contribution to society is huge. It can be bigger. Whatever they want to be. If they want to be housewife, don't look down on them. They are still

working; they are working at home. There is a message for women also. Wherever I go, I tell all girls: Don't ask for concession because you are a woman. If you're asking for your rights, don't ask for concessions. That's your problem as you manage things. But don't ask your editor or boss, my child is sick, I have to stay home. The day you do that, then you are not treated as professional.

**Fascinating. I want to ask you about ethics. What did you learn about ethics?**

Ethics is that, as I have been saying, nothing but truth must prevail. We have to be honest as much as possible. There should be no compromise with discipline. In fact, I tell my reporters today to be careful with corruption. Journalists aren't pay so well in India. They often accept gifts, etc. Whatever you have, feed your family with the money you own. Any other stuff that you would get would not help you. That is for sure. So don't run after this and that. Do your job honestly. Believe me when I started, we had nothing. Both my husband and I were struggling. Bu God's grace, I am satisfied. Ethics is to remain honest with yourself and your people. That's what ethics is about. I always tell that to my reporters.

**Where does this value and strong belief in honesty come from?**

From my father. I have seen my father... He was in the government of India. He was coming home with many gifts, and even some sweets used to come. I remember we used to jump on them. But he would school us on that. This is going back, he would say, we are not going to keep it home. I saw him the way he worked hard, the way he remained honest. And also, when I got married, he was with a minister. I wanted a car for a day. He refused. He said no, you go by bus. So both of us, myself and my husband, we wanted to

go. We told him, it's a small thing, just give us a car for a day. He said no, travel by bus. From there, I picked it up. It has remained in me.

**In the same line, can you talk about your relationship with sources?**

On the face of it, you have to be very friendly. When I started as a journalist, it was very difficult to cultivate sources as a woman. Men don't talk to women. Generally, men don't befriend a woman. If suppose, four of us have gone to meet with a source. The three boys are there, the source would not talk to me. You have to be friendly, to network. You have to be very observant. You have to be friendly; otherwise, nobody would share information with you. Where you draw a line is when you don't entertain them at home. Your sources aren't your friends. You don't socialize with them. You don't go to their home. Otherwise it becomes very difficult.

Because I have been in this city for so many years, and I have grown from reporter to editor, I know the field and the people. Supposing my reporter is doing a story on the corruption of supply of medicine, that reporter is going to want a quote from the director of the hospital. If that director knows me, he won't answer hard questions. He basically says to the reporter not to ask hard questions because I am his friend. I have to build the confidence of my reporter because we cannot accept this. Not only I won't take the call of the director, but I will also tell my reporter to try again. I know that the director will call me again and said that the reporter was annoying. But we will publish the story at the end. What matters is that I defend my reporter. In UP, you have to have sources, especially among mafia. You need to cultivate relations with criminals. You don't socialize; of course, you work along the thin line.

### **Who do you consider your audience?**

The paper is Hindustan Times. Its edition is coming out from different parts of the country. UP is one of them. I write for all the issues, and I also write for UP. I also write blog posts because we have a large audience online. As for the first book that I wrote, it was about UP Chief Minister -- the youngest the Chief Minister we've had in the state. I wrote on him and I agreed to write a book because I was given a great expense. It is called Winds of Change; it's a 600-pages long. It covers a recite, account of politics I have seen over the years. I have covered the entire family, its personal life and its politics. The second that I have agreed to write is on the making of UP. As you know, UP is my adopted state -- I belong to New Delhi and I came here -- because there is something good about this state, and especially when you go around. It has a rich culture, a long heritage. Unfortunately, people have not been able to exploit its potential. I agreed to write a book about all this. I think it's going to be a little difficult for me because I don't want to go into history so much. History is something that is already available. I will have to touch a little bit on history and make it forward. It will be a biography of the state. There are a few books that I have in my mind, but I will have to find money for that. I market them and sell them to the publishers. But you know, Indian politics is fascinating. How people come together and all that... I want to write about the politics of alliance. I don't think it's been written about. And the other one is on silent Hindus. I think that the silent Hindu is not at all fanatic, and there is a movement of Hinduization going on.

**I read about the book... How long did it take you to write it? Can you talk a little bit about the process?**

I felt sick because I used to write it over night. It took me about 10 months. I submitted my manuscript to them after 10 months. They wanted to do a thick book -- 1.20 lakhs pages. After my office, I will sit on my laptop until 4 or 5 a.m. Then I would sleep for few hours and go back to office. My back started to hurt; I hard strained my back very badly. I was bed-ridden for 20 days because I pushed it too far.

**Really?**

Yes, because I couldn't compromise with my office. That was something I didn't want to do. But at the same time, I wanted to put everything into my book. It was my first book so lack of experience here. I was not noting down the references somewhere... It's only when I edited it that I realize that. It was a very interesting and satisfying experience.

**So can you tell me about this Chief Minister?**

The current Chief Minister has only been active in politics for the past 10 years. So I told them that we would have to cover his father's politics. His father comes from a very backward area of UP. So I needed to write about the father's politics to build a context. The family agreed that I write a book on them. Then I started to do my work.

**What about the challenges?**

They weren't forthcoming; they didn't want to discuss private life so I had to collect information from various sources. That was a challenge because how to get information from what happened before the 1980s when it was very difficult to get information on what happened. There is no book on UP politics, and the people who lived through these years are now old. So I had to investigate everything.

**What does this book mean to your career?**

Well, I have become an author. I have been a reporter, an editor, an anchor person, now I am an author. It feels so nice; it gives me a lot of satisfaction. I think any writer, any reporter, that's their ultimate dream. There has been a lot of appreciation though some people thought it was too early to write an autobiography because he hasn't performed enough in politics. There were so many questions I have been asked. He failed on some actions he's taken so people think I should write another chapter. He's been elected for five years; I will wait for five years and see how he performs. Then, I might ask the publisher to add one chapter.

**So this is a biography, and I am wondering about the title you gave to it. It's a pretty positive title. Does it imply you stand behind this politician? Does it show an affiliation between you and him?**

No, no.

**How do you justify this title then?**

Winds of Change is also about how a new generation is taking place in UP. When you use that expression, it means that a new generation has entered the politics. He seems to be a leader for that. However, when the book came out, there was the Muzaffarnagar riots, and the Chief Minister was very controversial. I deferred the launch of the book. I told the Chief Minister that he was a villain, and I didn't want the book to be seen as a support of his actions. I will not the launch the book in UP -- we haven't launched it yet -- because then it'd become a party function. I am an author; I've done my work. If you read

it, you will see that I narrate. It's a narration of what's happened. I talk about the controversies he was subject to.

**So the book isn't launched in UP?**

We've not done a formal launch the book. I supposed there was a demand for some Hindi translation. It has been translated in Hindi. But I am not very keen on formal launches.

Got it. It's interesting how you've been on all fronts. I am trying to understand...

(Laugh) Yes, and I was even an anchor. I might have done hundreds of TV programs.

**Really?**

At that time, there wasn't private channel. I worked for a government-owned channel called Doordarshan. I used to do some talk shows in which people used to come and give replies to various questions. So I used to do that twice a week. Then, I stopped doing that because people started seeing me. You remember what you see more than what you read. So people started believing that I was employed by the government. There was a conflict there so I stopped doing that.

**But when did you do that?**

It was after I worked for the National Herald, so when I started with HT. When private TV channels arrived, I thought about moving from print to TV because it sounded exciting to do. But I decided to stay and thought I could go online to explore something new.



**So if we look at your 30+ year career, is there one story that you remember and think best serve your audience?**

That's a difficult one.

**It's fine if you have several stories in mind.**

Well, I would say the stories that I have done right when I started my career. Prostitution, blood donation and child marriages. Recently, I was in Rajasthan, and I wrote on cultures and traditions. I went where no one has ever gone.

**I understand that you have written many important stories, but is there one that changed you...**

I do remember the child marriage story. I had been to a school where children were being married. I wanted to talk to the married children, but the principal refused me access. I had difficulties to get authorization, but I waited all day at the school. It was about to close when the principal told me to come in and meet the children. I have so many stories like that. Hundreds, maybe thousands. If you're talking about my more recent stories, there is the one from Rajasthan where there is a tribal belt in Kota, on the border with Gujarat. Even today, they are living in isolation. They have an old way of settling dispute, killing each other so that I don't know how many villages have been abandoned. The revenge is going. There is no police system. And they are very very poor people. So it was very interesting to go there. When I was in Bombay, I went to Gujarat and did a story on diamonds. Some underground couriers, called the Angarias, carry the diamonds in the pockets of their vest. It's a traditional style of carrying diamonds. There are many other stories like that.

**Can we just talk a little bit more about the Rajasthan story? How did you find the story?**

When I was sent to Rajasthan, I remembered a story I wanted to do a story back in 2008. Someone had told me about that school where children were married. I remembered, and I decided that was the time to do that story. When I went there, I asked them if they were married. They said yes. At the age of 10, he had the responsibility of a wife. I asked him if he were happy. He said, I am very happy. I asked why. He said because he was married. She said the same and showed me her new dress. I asked if they weren't scared of cops. He said no because his father gave the cops 2,000 rupees and they went away. So imagine, the impact on a young man. He has the responsibility of a wife at 10 years old. I found this very interesting so I wanted to write about it.

**So they're not allowed to get married?**

No, child marriages were banned in India decades back. Still because there are society pressures, so it's a social thing, and there are casts involved in. Politicians have a blind eye to what's happening. There are laws, but there aren't being implemented. It's not even a political issue in our country. It's happening more in the northern state like UP, Rajasthan and Andhra Pradesh. I think if the government wants, they could stop it in one day. It's nothing. Because they are under pressure of certain communities, they don't want to rub them on the wrong side. Laws are there; very important laws are there.

**Did you have any difficulties in having that story published?**

As the editor of the paper, I decide what gets published. (Laugh)

### **Yes, but I mean...**

Of course, I have faced some problems. I must mention some judiciary issues I have had in the past. This was about subordinate judicial service. There were some women who were appointed. They started working. A court cancelled their appointment. About 8 or ten of them, one day, came to my place and told me what happened. One was an officer; somebody was a banker. Another one said she was in a court, and no she is nothing. We have become a subject of ridicule, they said. They asked if I could a subject on them. I said OK. The court took notice of it. They filed a complaint against me. I was the writer; I was the editor. We fought the case. The judge knew me and fought I should have spoken to him before bringing the case to the court. I couldn't have spoken to him because if I had I couldn't have filed the story. I faced the content. I remember that the judge asked me if I wanted to talk to him, to say something. I was very rude and said that I didn't want to say anything because the moment I would open my mouth I would invite another content. So he smiled and told me that I would have to give an unconditional apology. I was very unhappy. They would drop the case as soon as I apologize. When I left the court, the judge called me. He saw that I was very unhappy. At the end, they dropped the apology part also. Believe me, the matter went to the Supreme Court. The women won the case. I feel very nice about it. My report was perfect. And whatever I did was only writing.

### **What was the name of the story?**

I did that story in 2003/4 when I was in Bombay. I don't keep my clippings.

### **Can I find it online?**

I don't know if we were online at that time. Instead, you could read the story that I did on the prime minister of the country. He had come to UP on a regular visit. I wrote a copy on his broken promises, which were 50 percent of the promises he had made to his constituents. He got very angry, and he called the owner of the paper. They called me and asked me why I did a story like this. Because I knew the Prime Minister well, I said that I would speak to him. I was actually really happy that the PM called up. That's what a journalist wants.

**You have just mentioned that pressure coming from the government. Can you talk about the potential forces you have encountered as a journalist?**

I learned something from my chairman. He told me once that if I look at issues and not at individuals, I would never be in trouble. I think that issues are more important than individuals. That's why I have always told my reporters to focus on issues. The moment your stories revolves around one individual, then it becomes an issue. If you're writing one particular issue, and you're slamming ten people also, then there is no problem. As for the government, yes, we've had problems with them. As an editor, it's always a step forward, half step backward; two steps forward, one step backward. You also have to know that the government is a source of revenue and that newspapers need advertisement. It's a hot and cold war that is going on. It's OK. They only react and retaliate when there are constant attacks, there is a design of attack against them. If you are doing something honestly and writing about them, it's OK. They are so many criminals. You get threatening calls; it happened so many times. But we handle them. We handle them. We can handle these people.

### **Can you give me an example of a threat you received?**

Once, I got a threat from a former official. He had some nexus with criminals. I had done a report, and he called up. Initially, he said something to my husband and went to my child's school. When I came back, he called up. He said that I didn't know who he was and all that. That time, I wasn't an editor; I was just the head of the bureau. Delhi took it very seriously. Sometimes, I had to carry security and all that. But had I been editor, I would have handled it a little differently. It happened with one of my reporters who had gone report in the east part of the state. My editor wrote about a minister who was a criminal. I saw the copy; I found it a little weak. I moved a few paragraphs up where he was pointing at another criminal whom he was trying to protect himself from. The other person was also a minister in the same government. So he called up; he threatened me several times and said that I didn't know him and all that stuff. I told him I knew him very well. He said that I didn't know his connection. The conversation lasted over an hour. I remember everybody surrounding me at that time. Then he said that he would take me to the court. I was happy he said that because all eyes would be on him to prove himself innocent. We had enough material to prove what type of criminal he was. Then, within 10 mins, his tone changed. He called me sister and asked that I tried to understand his problems. He said that he was a bigger criminal than what I was thinking and that he would kill me. These keep on happening. I had once a mother of a mafia don coming to me asking me something, and I didn't agree to it. He wanted me to stop the stories we were doing. I said I couldn't do that. She said she comes from a feudal family and that she wasn't supposed to meet journalist like me. But I am a mother, too, so I told her I could help her as a mother. But as an editor, I couldn't help her. Then she said her son

would come and meet me. And I said I would go and meet him in jail. If you're honest with your pen, then people know you don't have anything wrong with your intentions. You manage things more easily that way. Kevin, you have to be very very sharp in your writing. When you are talking, you have to be very polite. That's it.

**So have you ever felt that once the threat was too bad that you had to stop or compromise on your work?**

Yes. There were a few times when we stopped stories we were doing. The reason wasn't because of fear from the person per se, but because we didn't have enough documents to prove our story in a court of law. In most of the corruption cases, it's very difficult to gather papers, documents. If someone files a case against you, it becomes very very difficult to prove that. The person who is giving you information doesn't give you the entire information. You need actual documents. So there had been times when we stopped copies. We would send them to our legal department, and they told us we weren't very strong. But otherwise so far, we have been doing well. Sometimes I tell my reporters, if they have an issue building a story, the management will see. Then, I tell them to wait for a day so they can gather some more information. It's more a strategy. You know so many newspapers are closing down. Newspapers... So they can carry on their mission, you have to keep newspapers alive; otherwise, even their mission would die along. They have to be a business model for the newspaper.

**I have read a lot about the corporatization of the media. What's the situation for HT?**

HT played an important role in the freedom movement, but KK Birla was an industrialist. Today, the paper is owned by his daughter, who is also an industrialist. But believe me, I have been an editor since 2001. Not even twice, she has called up to tell me not to publish an article. She doesn't. When I wrote against the Prime Minister, the only thing she said: You keep slapping everybody, why the Prime Minister also? She didn't ask why I did it and remove me. She didn't sack me; she told me that I had to handle him. That was it. She told me to talk to him and explain him why I did the story and what my intentions were. I had told my chairman about the story before publishing it, and the only thing he had to say was that it was the Prime Minister's birthday when we did the story. So he said that I could have spared him on that day.

**You're saying that you don't have a lot of pressure coming from the top of the ownership?**

No, I don't think so. Even when they have any business issues, they haven't called me up to tell me not to run a story. There had been times when the factories were close for days, and they were handling it at their level. I think that was the only kind of influence in the 30 years of my career when the owner informed us that there was a case going on. An officer was visiting the newsroom, so she called me to check whether he was there. She told me about what was going on. That's it. That's it in 30 years. She kept us out of it, but just let us know about the case.

**As we are talking about the kinds of pressure some Indian journalists face in India, can you tell me what are the specificities of Indian journalism?**

I think, journalism is everywhere the same. If I asked you what is specific about Western journalism, what would you tell me? How is it different from India? You have five days working?

**Well, you might have to be in office five days a week, but it's more a 24-hour job.**

Then, what's specific about Western journalism?

**Right now, in the West, journalism is looking at innovation. They look at multimedia...**

That's also what we are trying to do in India. HT is trying to focus on its online operations. We are still in a very nascent stage because we are planning on expanding our online operations. I think everywhere... Channels are going online. They are using the multimedia. They are using the different platforms. There are innovative. Design. I remembered the time when nobody bothered how newspapers look. Today, how they look is as important as the content, sometimes, perhaps more. You have designers sitting and making your pages, which wasn't the case earlier. I think here also challenge is huge before publication. Also, something that might be specific to India is that readers want everything to be in their newspapers. They would want entertainment; they would want cookery; they would want something to do with health and fitness; they would want also something to do with news. That becomes a challenge. What else? As of innovation, we need to do much more. What we are sacrificing is the length of our reports. When I look at newspapers abroad, the stories are more than 200 words. Here, because of space constraint and the cost of newsprint, we finish our stories in 200 words. We have sacrificed and compromised on that. But we are growing so it might change.



**So how did you envision these changes in journalism? And how do you place yourself in these changes?**

I have to be tech-savvy; otherwise, I wouldn't survive. It's as simple as that. You can't be working for one platform. You have to work for multiplatform. You have to evolve your style of writing also because it's changing everyday. Readers are also losing patient. They get bored by the same style and same stories. They are looking for something different. There was a time politics used to interest them. Today, they want to read more about health, fitness, technology, what's happening in the west. I think we have to keep on evolving everyday. The way we get our reports, what we get, what we focus on, how we write and how we publish. That has to be a continuous process; otherwise, we lose. In fact, to survive, I have evolved. We don't want to disappear.

**How many more years, you think you will be doing this work?**

Till I die.

**So every morning, this is what you want to do?**

I will retire, but even after retirement, I will continue writing. There is no way a journalist can completely stop. You can retire from a position, but you don't retire from writing. So I think I will continue till I die. Kevin will be editor somewhere someday, and I will call him so he could take my stories.

**That would be amazing. You know, I don't see journalism as a profession but more as a lifestyle. What do you think?**

I think it's a passion.

**How so?**

Yes, I think it's very addictive. A journalist can only remain a journalist. I don't think you can adopt any other profession. You only thing I can do, which I enjoy doing is, going to colleges and giving some sort of lectures on what journalism is. I go to IMs and IMTs where I interact with management graduates or forest officials who have already been working for 20 years. The session lasted about three hours, and that was exciting. It always has to be related to journalism.

**What about your activism?**

This is journalism. What would I do otherwise? What would I do? I would be standing on the street and raising slogans. I don't want to do that type of activism. It has to be done through journalism. I am not the person who stands and walks in demonstration. I would like to use my pen for activism also. I am serving social causes with my pen.

**SANDEEP PAI (27, Hindustan Times, New Delhi)**

**Where were you born/raised?**

I was born and raised in undivided Bihar, in a city called Jamshedpur.

**If and where you went to journalism school? Specialty studied?**

I went to the Indian Institute of Journalism and Media, 25 kms from Bangalore. It was a 1-year program in print journalism. It wasn't really theoretical. We talked about what journalism was, of course. But we were sent out on the first week to get news, to come back and edit, to create a layout. It really helped because when we started out we didn't know what news was. Still, we were sent out. They told us go and get something. We came back, now that I think, with very stupid ideas. But that helped us grow. That is one part. Part two is that we had very good professors. While we are doing some stories on garbage and toilets and going out in the city, at the same time we got very good perspectives from these professors. They taught us how to connect these issues to larger issues. At the end of my curriculum, I knew what news was; I knew what ethics in journalism was; I knew about attribution, attributing quotes. I ended up with 20-25 stories, general stories. At least, 10 of them could get published in today's newspapers. In the second semester, I took a class on investigative journalism so that also helped. We interviewed a lot of big people and ended up getting really good response from various editors. For the investigative journalism course, we had to take one or two stories, and we have to work on that story for 5-6 months on them. Then, we have to present our findings. That's how it worked. And we used the Right of Information Act to get information. That's why today I concentrate on the RTI in a very big way.

**Are investigative courses usually taught in India?**

Not really. I have not heard... Even at my school, the investigative journalism course is an elective available in the second semester. I have not heard about any investigative course in India. I am not aware of it.

**I see... Can you tell me a little about the school per se?**

It opened around the year 2000. Their course is very much based on the Columbia Journalism School. They are seeing that they have taken the curriculum from there and their approach is very similar to Columbia. They say that practical way to learn is the best way. For example, in the second semester, we were sent to villages on our own. They would make group of five people, and then, they would send us for 15 days. We would have to come out with 2-3 topics, and we would have a mentor who would decide what the best topic is. And then we will go back for 15 days. You don't get any help from any faculty in terms of logistic, in terms anything. You are just sent to the India's interior. You don't even know how to go; you don't even know what to do there. At that point, we are not aware about a lot of things. Lots of people discovered their country. And everything looked like a story for us. But in the end, lots of things are already known. Everything aspect of these courses is about giving practical training to students.

**Yes. My school has similar expectations. I talked to students in India, and a lot of them told me they were studying theory more than anything else.**

In my school, we had theory for 5 days maybe at the beginning, and then, we were sent out. Initially, we used to have weekly bulletin, weekly newspapers, then it became daily,

and then when I took magazine, it was a monthly magazine. Finally you have rural reporting and other courses. And all that in a beautiful place.

**Yes? I have never been to Bangalore. I've heard it's beautiful.**

It's around 25 kms from Bangalore city. It's very beautiful.

**How old were you when you were there?**

I went there when I was 23.

**So you had just got out of college?**

Yes, I had done engineering.

**Really?**

Yes. I finished that, but I wasn't really interested in that, so I entered the journalism school.

**How did you change path like that?**

So I wasn't interested. I finished my course, and I was sure it wasn't what I wanted to do. I was really interested in politics, media and all that. A friend of mine who graduated from Indian Institute of Journalism and Media told me, you must try, it's a very good school. Then, I randomly apply, and I got through. The courses got me very interested in journalism.

**That's really interesting! How's the application process like?**

Anyone can apply. Any graduate can apply. And also, along with the graduation course, there's a diploma course. So after 12 months, students can also apply.

**Interesting. And so you were 23 and you graduated when you were 24, I assume?**

Yes.

**How long have you been a journalist then?**

Three and a half years.

**So tell me from when you graduated till now, what happened? Where did you work?**

I started out with Business to Business magazine. I didn't get a chance in a mainstream newspaper. That year, the placement rate was very low. Very few students got placement into mainstream newspaper. So I entered B&B magazine, where I was enjoying myself. The only thing is that they were allowing me to travel and see the business side of the country. Obviously, I was writing a lot of PR stuff. That was my first year. I think in 2010, I got an offer from DNA. There, the editor was Aditya Sinha. He started an investigation team. Two people were hired. I was there with a colleague. We were told to come up with fresh ideas. We started out, and one by one, we started up with some scams. Then, we did some stories on coal. DNA was encouraging us to travel and get stories and do whatever we wanted to do. We had all the freedom; we had great privilege to work under Aditya Sinha, who allowed us to do everything that we wanted. Most importantly, he taught us a lot -- attributing quotes and etc.

**I am curious. Usually, investigations are assigned to senior journalists, right?**

Yes.

**How did you actually get this placement? I am not saying that you were not competent, but I am...**

No, no, no. He was the kind of editor who would always do something that wasn't conventional. Conventional would be to send someone with 10-15 years of experience. He said he wanted to give a chance to the young journalists who wanted to do something. And he thought he could push this. They have energy; they have fresh ideas. As a journalist, I've realized that you constantly have to update yourself. The kind of reporting that used to happen 10 years ago is very different from what is happening now. The kind of reporting that is will happen in one year will be very different from today. What he was looking for was fresh ideas, fresh ways of looking at things. In India, people are doing the same kind of work, over and over again. People who cover beat, they would do the same kinds of stories. Stories would change, but the approach would be the same. Investigative journalism is very confined certain sectors and areas.

**What do you mean?**

We never have a planning to do big stories, carry on investigations. We were looking for new sectors to investigate, unseen topics and areas. You look at defense; you go to villages. It's very conventional. Our editor was looking for fresh ideas.

**So what did you know about investigative journalism at that time?**

As I told you, I had done this course for six months so we knew the basics.

**But what are the basics you're talking about?**

Before I joined DNA, I knew that I always need to get documents to back up my investigations. Whatever I would write, I would need something to back it up. You have to get some proof, so you can get use the RTI. There are so many tools to get information, to get companies records. There are so many websites. Ten years back in India, government and agencies websites were not operational. Today, you get information on a lot of things online. And I can bet one this that 95% of journalists in India don't look at the Internet. They were taught that they could get information through online resources. I'd give you an example. In AP, the National Institute of Rural Development (NIRD) operates through a specific MIS. Every evening, you can find updated information from every small quarter of the country. Very few journalists use that tool; and yet, everyday you could get a story out of it. Things have changed. Those are examples. Online resources, data journalism, RIT... These things are there. I didn't have so much clarity when I joined DNA, but maybe after six months or one year, as we started getting our stories published, I started realizing the ideas became stronger. I was looking at the areas and sectors that people usually don't look at. And go from down to top. Indian journalism often look from top to bottom. They would go to the ministry, talk to the minister, ask for a comment, write the story. Rather than doing this, we should look at certain government departments, which are never in the news. For example, we looked at the ministry of rural development. What journalists generally would do is to go to the minister and try to get something, but what is interesting is to go to these specific departments and explore their functioning. By doing that, you can find what the issues are. Also, one of my editors used to say you are not a beat reporter but a topic reporter.

**How come?**



If you get anything on a given scam, you go and report on that topic and draw several conclusions, instead of covering one specific beat such as crime.

**I am not sure I am following you here.**

For example, in India, in 2012, the coal scam broke. The government lost a lot of money over the scam. That's a topic compared to covering everything related to coal mining. If you are writing about the coal scam, you are going to write about how the scam was originated, how different allegations happened, then what happened, what happened to the case, somebody filed a PIL (Public-Interest Litigation), what happened, etc. That's a topic. Similarly, if you cover KGBC (Kanpur-Gandhinagar-Bangalore-Calcutta), the scams and issues there, that's a topic. If you cover a beat, then you will cover violence as a beat.

**OK, I got it. I guess in the U.S., you have the same differentiation. You have beat reporters, and then you have correspondents who cover everything.**

Three years back when I joined, it was very beat-oriented. People would get angry if you were writing something related to their beat. When I shifted to daily, I have realized that in every newspaper, they also have 4-5 people who do story on various beats.

**So do you cover a beat now?**

No, I am part of the investigation team.

**Got it. How many people are in the investigation team?**

Just two.

**OK.**

I report to my editor. She's leading the team. And what we do is that for some stories, we take help from other reporters in the bureaus, the political bureau, etc.

**I guess I have to go back to the question what inspired you to go into journalism because you mentioned that you wanted to give it a try but you went to school, spent a year learning about it and all. Any exposure to journalism earlier in age that inspire you to go into journalism?**

When I studied engineering in Kerala, I saw what was happening around me, in my society. I used to be very interested in political issues, social issues. I used to get inspired by lots of people who were doing very good work in different parts of the country. People who work on hunger, farmers suicide, etc. These things were encouraging me. One thing I was sure I was not interested was engineering. That was getting clearer by the day. By the time, I completed my fourth year; I wanted to finish the course. I am happy I passed. The idea was to finish and look for something. Then, when I finished, I went back home. One day, I was chatting with a friend and I told her I was very confused, and I didn't know what to do. I was definitely interested in politics. Media inspired me. I wanted to do something in one of these two fields. She told me I should try to apply to the journalism school. I applied and I got it. I convinced my parents to let me go there. Once, I went there, in a span of three months, I got so inspired and encourage. When I started finding stories, writing good stories, etc.

**You said you had to convince your parents?**

Yes. When I was in 12th grade, I wasn't aware of what I wanted to do. I was very confused. And the place where I was studying, there most of the students go into medicine, engineering, etc. So I followed the crowd. I finished my engineering and had some placement also, but though I got offered, I didn't know when they wanted me to start, so I told my parents the news was not coming, so let me do a different course.

**What did you parents think about you being a journalist? What kind of image they have about journalists?**

My parents were not happy, at all. My parents are from a small place. My father has seen a lot of journalists there. He used to say that they come and take money. For my parents, they are also the least paid people; they are never paid well. Those were their concerns.

**What does your father do?**

He works for Coal India, which is a public coal mining company.

**And you did your story on coal also?**

Yes.

**Is there a link between all this?**

No, no, no.

**OK. OK. So you got into journalism; you enjoyed the kind of work you were doing.**

**How did you envision the impact you could have on the society?**

Initially, my goal was to do really good stories and bringing out stories that nobody else was doing. And then, editors told us that by the time we do really good stories, people

will start recognizing us and the kind of work we would do. If you keep doing good work, you get recognition. Do four really good stories instead of doing 15 stories and make them substantive.

**Let me ask you the question again: How did you imagine that these stories would impact the people you're writing about, the people who read these stories and the society as a whole?**

Nowadays, editors tend to think and are more concerned about what readers want to read than writing what is actually happening in the society. As journalists, it's our duty to write about what is not written about and write it in a very interesting way so our audience is also interested. Also, make the government responsible about what's happening. I think we should write about what matter. What matter, but also, write what is right. We can't restrict ourselves to writing things that would excite the readers who sit in the metro.

**So you do draw a line between what the readers want to read and what is actually happening around you?**

Yes. What I am saying is that nobody knows what readers want. We have assumptions about what the readers would like or not like. Nobody knows about the readers' behaviors. As a journalist, we must write about what is really happening?

**Because to you a journalist is more capable of seeing what is happening, what matters?**

Exactly. Exactly. As a journalist, you know what should be written about. Rather than writing things which would have a larger audience, there are some things that you have to tell people.

**What's that thing that allows journalists to see what should be written about?**

You have to be pushy and passionate about your work. See, if I compare journalism to engineering, engineers are earning at least double of what I am earning. But I am not sure how many of them are satisfied with their work. A good story, a solid story would give you so much kick that you would be very happy about the work you do. If you see that your story has come impact on the society; if you see that somebody is benefitting from your story, you earn tremendously. For that, you need to be passionate, extremely hard working, then you have to update yourself to the changing world. You can't report the same way as reporting was done five years ago. Explore your resources. Lots of journalists are dependent on their sources. I think you should become your own source. Let's say you're doing ten stories, four stories you might get from your sources. Out of that, you would get leads. A bureaucrat would tell you about a scam happening in a specific department. Then, you must have the ability to double check the information and get the documents. In the next two cases, your sources might give you these documents. You take the documents. There should be two, three more cases where you learn extra information. Then, you use this into a new story. What I am saying is that you must develop your own skills to get stories on your own and tie them together. Suppose there's an activist who works in a certain sector. He specializes in one specific area. He gives you information. Then use RTI and the online resources to find more information. As days go by, you find more and more information.

**Is this something HT value in you? The fact you're tech-savvy, you use online resources and know how to file an RTI request?**

My editors are very happy.

**Are they other journalists in your newsroom who do similar work?**

I don't see any people doing that. Initially, when I was talking all these things, they had a lot of suspicions. They told me this wouldn't work. Number one. Number two, because they do conventional journalism, they used to look down upon me, I would say. They didn't believe in me. Now, people approach me to write RTI applications for them. The more and more people are asking for help with their data. They are senior people. The best way to prove yourself is to do your stories. Once you do your stories, you get recognition. When I joined HT, I was said that HT is a very conservative paper so they wouldn't publish my work. If you keep pushing your stories, I am sure 8 out 10 will be published. You pick your battle and you keep pushing.

**What keeps you motivated?**

Just the kick of seeing the good stories getting published. Just the kick of writing stories on unknown issues. Journalism is a brilliant profession where you meet all kinds of people, from a beggar to a CEO. Also, new resources excite me. I love digging and finding new records. It excites me.

**Is it your scientific background that is coming back?**

I don't know. My scientific background has helped me think critically. One thing I have learned from engineering is thinking critically.

**How do you see yourself in 10 years?**

I am not sure what will happen after 10 years.

**Let's say 5. It's fine.**

Even 5 is not a short period. Anyway. What I would like to see is small changes in the way journalism is being done. For example, I don't trust stories where I see anonymous sources. Even if it comes from a very good reporter, your bases cannot be anonymous. It must be attributed. Your tree cannot be anonymous sources; the branches can be, but not the tree. If you look at 100 stories in India, I can bet you that 85 percent are completely based on anonymous sources. This should go away from Indian journalism. I really want to help or maybe motivate some people to get stories where you can attribute your reports. I am also learning so we will see. I think with anonymous sources, you can write any shit.

**That's true. On the side note, you also learn in the U.S. to attribute sources. They tell you, unless there is a death threat, you cannot give a sources without give a name.**

Yes. We would never publish the name of source that fear for their lives. What I am trying to say, you would have a scope for attribution. The RTI can really help you do that.

**Can you talk a little bit about RTI? I know about it, but I have heard about its limits too.**

It's like the Freedom of Information in the U.S. It's an act with which you can access document, records from any government agencies. You can file an application, and the

PIO has to answer within 30 days. With this you can also ask for an inspection of the record by filing the same application. You go and see all the records. I can bet you on this that no more than 10 journalists are using this act.

**Really?**

Out of the 10, only 5 would be using it regularly. Nobody has... Think about it as an outsider. Such an act is very big control on the government. But journalists don't use it to find stories. It's not that it's difficult. You just file it. That's it. You sign and go and give it or post it. Some departments even have online request.

**It's like in the U.S.**

I don't understand the reluctance.

**Isn't part of the culture? It seems that people aren't familiar with it. They don't know how to use this act. If you teach them, maybe they will use it.**

Let's see. (Laugh)

**You said you want to change the way journalism is done in India, and you pointed out the limits of using anonymous sources. What else would you like to change?**

You must write stories that are important. I have seen journalists just to see their bylines, they write 5-6 stories a day. When you do that, your creativity is gone. You're just writing something for the sake of it. Then you can't think of attribution. You just want to finish your story so you can go to the next story. If you're doing one or two stories a week, quality stories, that should be enough. You can think about the way you write; you can go talk to several people; you can get the documents you need. I think the main problems in



today's Indian journalism is one the lack of attribution in your story. That is diluting your story. Because of this lack of attribution, what's happening is... OK, for example, now the elections are going. Suppose you're covering the BJP. You will see that one day X candidate is contesting from Delhi; next day you will see that the same candidate is contesting Bombay. Nothing is happening. You are not substantiating your story. In reporting on the sector of defense, a very sensitive topic, you may use anonymous sources. But in areas such rural development, poverty, environment, politics, you must attribute your quotes to people.

**So you're saying that the main problems in Indian journalism are the lack of attribution and the lack of quality? OK two problem, and...**

One more... More and more, Indian journalists are getting into what the readers want without caring of what is actually happening. Let's say 5 people are dying in a remote village. Editors would question, not all, but some would ask, how does this matter to our readers in Delhi or in Bombay? In Bombay, for example, people only care about what is happening Maharashtra. And when I say Maharashtra, it's only Bombay that matters, not the rest of the state. Of course, they have nation pages, but the city page will never reflect what is happening in the other cities of the state. In South India, there's a state page, so readers in Bangalore will also know what is happening in other cities of their states. In Northern India, there's no state page. You would have front page, city pages, then the nation page and sport pages.

**How come?**

I don't know. I've asked some editors about it, but nobody has a clue. It's a trend. I've seen in the South India that they have state pages. Maybe the mindset is that our readers only want to know about the city, then they want to know about the big stories happening in the nation, and then stories on sport and abroad. They don't care about what's happening in the district. Unless it becomes a national story.

**So you've addressed three issues. What would be your actions to raise awareness and try to find a solution to these issues?**

I keep talking about these issues to everyone around me. That's one thing I do at the individual level. Then, I ever become an editor; I would like to see changes. I would like to convince the reporters, to show them how things can be done. I believe that journalism can play a larger role in India. If you write more substantially, attribute your quotes, do good stories, then we can have a better future. When I had joined the HT, it was a huge step up. But there, nobody took me seriously. Now that I am doing good stories that have made it to the FrontPage, that I am doing good stories in their beat, then I am seeing now only that they respect me. It's a very slow process. One thing I can say is that I've worked hard to see these stories published. 98% of them are in-depth report, very substantiated. I don't remember any stories in which I have not substantiated through documents, through quotes.

**How much your editor at DNA actually taught you all this? Because you had just come out of school at the time.**

He used to really encourage us. Initially when I had joined DNA, supposed I got a scam - illegal contracts. I get some reports that prove that there's something fishy. I talk to

people who give me extra information. I take their versions of the facts, and I have to attribute this information to them or other sources who go on record. My editor overview all this and made sure we would have all the documents to back up our report. He wasn't doing any stories, but he was guiding us through all this.

**He was writing columns though, right?**

Yes, right.

**Was he an investigative journalist?**

I think so, yes.

**Let's talk about ethics. You mentioned several ethical issues earlier. I would like to know what is ethics to you.**

When you meet someone [as a journalist], you have a very different relationship. People would come to me, knowing that I could do a good story. I worked a lot with different whistleblowers who had a lot of good information and worked in different organizations. They are mines of information. They are willing to give documents. They are interested in exposing scams. Most of them have suffered in their careers. Their interest is that if they get the scam exposed... Some people are genuinely interested in exposing scams. That's one fact. You will start developing trust with them. You slowly become friends with them. Initially, you are skeptical of everyone. Right? Then, you have someone who gives you brilliant information, but you cannot trust him because he may be using you. So you have to be skeptical and question him for everything. Suppose he gives a document, you have to ask him: Why? How did you get this? Are you giving it to me

genuinely? You ask all the basic questions. Also, I never rely on one informant. I must get several documents and look at the differences between one another. Then you do a background check on the informants. Nowadays, it's easier because if you just Google their names, you get something on them. You even go on their Facebook page, LinkedIn, Twitter. You do a brief background check to see what kind of a person he is. Slowly, you develop that relationship. If you work on a longer term with that person, you will see that he's genuine and is giving information to help. Still, you always need to crosscheck the information that he is giving you. At least, you have to confirm the documents. Over a period, you become really good friend with him.

### **Friends?**

Yes. Not with all of them, but some. Some sources become really good sources, others become good sources, and some others would give you and others also. But very good sources would only give the information to you.

### **When you say you become friends with your sources, what does it mean? Would you go to their home?**

Yes, but only with very good sources.

### **I see.**

All I am saying is that genuine people can become friends. You must realize whom you are dealing with and then you build the trust. But always remember that you can only rely on yourself and research. With RTI, you can carry on your investigation and crosscheck the information you get from your sources. Also, one thing I have learned in my

journalism school, for one topic, there will be 20-30 people who know about it. For ego issues, they don't know each other and work with each other. So as a journalist, you have to take some from one, some from the other, and write a very story out of it. If you take coal, there are so many aspects of the coal industry you can look at. One is labor issue; one is environmental issue, etc. So many people work on these issues, but often don't work together. As a journalist, you go and talk to everyone.

**That's a smart way to gather information. So can we talk about your story on the insurance company that created a huge controversy?**

I was sure you were going to ask me.

**Of course. Can you take me through the process of the investigation? From how you came up with the story and what happened after publication?**

My editor called my colleague and me. He said there was something fishy; he had gotten a mail from a whistleblower. There was a scam. He forwarded us the email, and we called the number to talk to the whistleblower. We met him two, three, four times. He had lots of documents. I would be honest; he had 85% of the documents with him. We crosschecked everything and put them in a chronological order. We also had to understand the sector because the sector was new to us. We researched everything and identified all the characters involved. We did a background check on the whistleblower. Then we approached the company. We were sure about the scam by then. The company didn't bother to respond for so many days. Finally, when they realized the story was going to come out, they asked us to meet. The entire team of the insurance company was there with the legal guy too. They were trying to convince us of not carrying the story.

They knew who the whistleblower was and tried to blackmail him. All this is wrong. We are a very ethical company. Blablabla. One thing -- and sorry to digress -- you should be very nice and polite to people even if you are writing against them. One mistake journalists often make is that they become really aggressive. You have to give these people time to speak. You have to be very nice. It would help because even if they are against you, they would not try to harm. Despite writing about so many scams, I have never got into any trouble, except some legal notices. I have written about the biggest corrupted politicians and corporations, but I have not faced any trouble because I have always been very nice to them. I wished them, and they wished back. They knew I was doing my job. Ironically enough, you might even get stories from them in the end because they know you would be professional.

**So you met with them, and they tried to convince you not to carry the story.**

Yes. They never offered anything. They were just saying this is wrong. They said a lot of things. Finally, we had written a three-part story. The two first parts were published, but the third never made it to publication. Our editor really pushed for it, but because of management issues, the third part wasn't published. But the damage was already done. After that, the whistleblower was sacked. Anyways, he wanted to leave the company. He didn't have to lose. After that, an investigation was opened and said that everything we had written was correct. Some ministries recovered the money from the company. But the worse part, the IRDA has not taken any strict action against the corporation. My contribution at the end of the story would be that now companies would be more controlled. They could still do what they do, but it would be more controlled.

**What was the management issue that the story didn't get published?**

I am not very sure about what happened. One thing I know is that my editor really pushed it.

**Who did he have to convince and argue with?**

I think it came from the management.

**Like the CEO?**

CEO and the owner.

**You cannot talk about it?**

I don't exactly what happened. I know that the CEO of the company had come to the editor after the first story. We still published the second part. The third part was the interview of the whistleblower. It was a comprehensive interview. The message was out.

**So the third part was never published?**

No. But my colleague published on a blog, and we promoted it.

**So the story was published but not by DNA?**

Yes. We published on our own blog.

**I have heard that DNA asked the insurance company to buy ads in the paper if they wanted the story to be killed.**

The government gives subsidies to poor people via insurance companies. The company was enrolling fake people or their own employees to get that money. We exposed that scam.

**I see. But my question is about what happened between the management of DNA and the insurance company. What kind of arrangement was offered when the insurance company wanted to kill the story? I have heard that the insurance company was asked to buy ads in the paper.**

See, I don't know. I don't have proof to substantiate. I have no idea. We are in the editorial department; we don't deal with ads and all. It could have happened or not.

**What I do not understand is how the story was killed and you accepted the fact without reason?**

We didn't ask for a reason because we knew that our editor had tried everything, and he was under pressure.

**How did you feel when you were put under pressure too?**

In India, this is what happens all the time.

**But how do you feel about it?**

That's bad, of course. What can we do? Media is owned by corporate. That's why Twitter and other mechanisms are better. If your stories are not published, there are 2-3 ways to publish it. One, you use social media. Second, you can give it to a competing paper.

**Can you do that?**



You give it to your friend, and then a commission comes out. Then maybe your paper will ask you to do a follow-up of your own story published in another paper. Sometimes it happens.

**Can you tell me a little bit about that corporatization of the media in India?**

Every newspaper in India these days are owned by businesses. They have interests that you can't touch. They have their own friends whom you can't touch. So you have restrictions. So the best way to approach this system is this. Let's say you have 100 issues, and you can't write about 20 issues, then you concentrate on the 80 other issues. When you write about one of these 80 issues may include an issue that you can't write about. Then you're doing a good job. As journalists, we always have to push in our stories, but if it's not going anywhere, it's really hard. Then you find a way to spread the information via social media, a friend, a blog post.

**Did you know about the system before you came into journalism?**

We knew about it, and we were told that it was terrible. I think it's not as bad as what was taught to us.

**What's the difference then? What were you taught and what actually did you learn in the field?**

We were said that nothing would go. We were taught that it is very hard to push for your stories. There would be senior journalists who would kill your stories. Maybe, we were trained in such a way that we would be prepared for the field. But it's not that bad. If you keep pushing your stuff and have patience, most of the things work out. 90% of my

stories were published, even the most controversial ones. You can always re-plug the stories that weren't published later. For example, stories that weren't published at DNA might get published at HT. So you have to wait. These are the methods I used: patience, hard work and passion. One of my faculties used to say that we should keep pushing. Often journalists think their editors won't carry the story so they self-censored themselves. But if they push their stories because they're convinced by the importance of the story, then their editors might push for it even more. Also sometimes what happens is that the owner has a good friend, but right now they are not in good terms. At that point the owner might want to publish a story that he wouldn't have let in before. It's funny how all this is working. The timing of the story is also very important.

**You just described something that in the West would be impossible, outrageous.**

Why? For example, if you and I own two different companies. I own a company X, and you own a company Y. Suppose, we have a joint venture, and we have invested in a coal mine. We are very good friends of course that's why we've been working together. Now, you create some problem in a board meeting. I fear that you're taking away some of the interests of the coal mine. Then I ask my guys to write a story or if my guys come up with a story, I'd let it go. The equation keep changing. It's the same with politicians. If a politician doesn't talk to you, he might want to talk to you if you're writing against his opponent.

**The trick for journalists is to resolve the equation basically?**

Well, no. We don't know. I am just telling you that these things happen. These things are luck. Sometimes things will go; sometimes they won't. But say the idea is don't leave the

story. It may not go down, but it may go after 6 months. As a journalist, if you think the story is important, you must try to get the story out in some ways. Good journalists, professional journalists would always get respect for doing that.

**So when you talk about the management blocking a story, have you experienced that before? I know we talked about the story on the insurance company, but have there been any other cases?**

No. I've only been at HT for 6-7 months.

**When did you start at HT again?**

July 2013.

**You keep referring to whistleblowers. Is it also common in India, or has been become more popular with the Snowden case/**

Whistleblowers are just the people who would give you information that you need. In most cases, you wouldn't be allowed to use his name.

**I am asking because you're the first Indian journalist I know who used that word.**

I have worked with a lot of them.

**Yes?**

I have worked with more than 12 of them in three years.

**How do you get them?**

I am desperate to get them, and they are also desperate themselves to find good journalists. They keep researching. Sometimes they contact you, sometimes someone else contacts you and then you have to approach the person.

**OK, I have one more question. You're a young journalist. What would be the adjective you'd use to describe your role? Some have said they see themselves as activist; Colleen said she sees herself as a facilitator. What would be the adjective that would describe your role and the kind of work you do?**

I am a journalist who wants to expose and bring out stuff that is generally not covered. I really don't want to do conventional journalism. Indian journalism is too conventional. I am not sure I have been clear on how conventional it is, but trust me it is very conventional. You go in office, write, go home. And next day, it's the same. Once in a while of course, you do very good stories. What I am saying is that I am trying to think out of the box. In the end, that's how you would get innovation of ideas. For example now, elections are going on. Nobody approaches the elections freshly. We cover the campaigns, the candidates. Maybe we are missing on beautiful stories. I am also not getting them right now. But I am trying. Also, Indian journalism is very limited. In the U.S., you get some experience and then you go back to school to study some more about data journalism for example. This isn't happening in India.

**In regard of what you just say, is there an adjective you would use to describe yourself?**

Passionate. Passionate about stories.

**Yes. Is there anything I have not touched on and I should know?**

You've asked a lot of good questions.

**I am passionate, too.**

**MEENA MENON (51, *The Hindu*, Islamabad)**

**Where were you born/raised?**

I was born in Calcutta (now known as Kolkata). I spent most of my life in Hyderabad and Mumbai where I have lived the longest since 1975.

**If and where you went to journalism school?**

In 1983 when I graduated from St Xavier's College in Mumbai there were two or three journalism schools- I did join one at Bhavan's college but dropped out after a month – one --it was boring listening to lectures on journalism and secondly I got a job as a copywriter which I needed.

**How long have you been working as a journalist?**

I started out in August 1984 so that's around 30 years

**What are the organizations you've reported for?**

My first job as trainee was with Bombay Magazine, part of the India Today group. It has since closed. Then I worked for the United News of India as a sub editor but I also wrote and reported stories. Then in 1988 I joined Mid-day a tabloid for a year before joining The Times of India where I worked from 1989 to 1995 as a staff reporter. I briefly worked for a TV channel and then edited an alternative magazine called *Humanscape*. From 1996 to 2004 I freelanced for various publications and worked on some fellowships on prostitution, trafficking, development and other issues. I joined The Hindu in April 2004 and went on to become the Mumbai chief of bureau till August 2013 when I was posted to Pakistan.

**Where are you based now?**

Islamabad

**Can you talk about the specificities of the environment you are working in?**

Well, its very different working here but in some ways the same. So far I have been able to work well and do the stories I want to do here mostly, though of course I cannot travel out of the capital.

**What beat do you cover?**

There is no beat as such. As a correspondent I do the important news stories, current news and developments, important court cases, I attend the parliament and courts, official briefings, and also do special stories, op-eds, news analysis, features and interviews.

**What or who inspired you to go into journalism?**

Like most people of my generation I grew up with books and newspapers --that was a primary source of inspiration. I studied English and French literature and I fancied myself as a writer but I since I also needed a job, this was the best option for me I felt. I also liked the informality of the profession you had no fixed hours, didn't have to dress formally and go to the same place every day. Newspapers in those days provided information and comment and analysis not infotainment-- that ugly word. I realized much later that most of my information came from newspapers and books and its difficult to keep up that proportion now. But I was inspired by some journalists — the late Anil Agarwal of the Centre for Science and Environment whose focus on news which was not

related to politicians or accidents was for me exciting and revolutionary, Darryl d' Monte who later became my resident editor at The Times of India and some others . I had decided not to write on politicians and stars early though much later I did cover politics. Later Kunda and Kanak Dixit from Nepal, and Robert Fisk whose work Pity the Nation is for me an outstanding and inspiring work.

**How did you envision your role or impact on society when you started your profession?**

Well, I didn't start out with such noble ideals really- and a lot of my work evolved due to my exposure to a number of people, some in my work environment and others outside it. A lot of it was impulsive and spur of the moment stuff to cover or report issues. But looking back I think it is important for journalists to write on what is not written about and for me I like to do stories which reflect the interests of the not so powerful. In fact I started reporting on the movement against the Narmada dams in 1988 and followed it up for nearly two decades because I thought that it was a significant movement. But that set off a whole debate about activist journalist and even my colleagues in the profession used to joke that I wrote about nothing else, which was far from the truth.

**Where was this idea of journalism coming from?**

The great thing was when I started out in 1984 there were no mobiles, computers or TV with million channels flashing breaking news. So news was what you actually went and found out about or got to know through sources or through press conferences and briefings. NDTV came much later, though BBC radio was around. So this pressure to dog TV news was nonexistent. And I think that was important in writing about issues,



which mattered since we didn't have to follow children being stuck in bore wells or star weddings. That was a time when I used to think even writing magazine features was not journalism. Also the battle was to fight for space for news, which was considered soft — for instance, environment, women, health agriculture, and rural development. My editor in Mid-day Anil Dharker gave us a free run and even in The Times of India Darryl D' Monte supported a lot of the work I did which was encouraging.

**Now, after 30 years in the profession, how would you describe your core role in society?**

I think the print media, I give up on TV though it's a powerful medium if used well, has a very important role to play in a world where people don't read more than 140 characters. There is a role for journalists to present issues and facts for the reader- I think the job of the journalist is to educate the people about things they may not know but need to- the journalist has to think ahead for the reader and not give the reader what he or she wants. I think a lot of planning and anticipation is necessary for this and instead of breaking stories we need more background and analysis and investigation. We need to focus on the past as well since the current generation seems to have grown up in a vacuum. I used to give lectures in journalism and I find aspiring media trainees are clueless because they don't read enough. Also the content of news has changed largely and many young people think poverty is some distant thing when its right your backyard. There is no understanding of the socio economic inequalities thanks to the flood of sunshine stories, which are linked to advertisements. So a solar power project that will "empower" a handful of people will get space but not a serious analysis on power or the lack of it. I don't see myself always doing stories which have a deep rooted analysis but I think it's

important to highlight trends in society, inequalities, rights, oppression, discrimination, and voices of the poor and marginalized because I think that's what journalism is for- it has to have a purpose linked to social justice and equality and change for the better. It has to expose the shortcomings in society and the political structure. There is a serious purpose involved here which has been lost in the name of keeping readers entertained or hooked. There is an argument that readers don't like hard news or serious stuff, which is utter rubbish. Newspapers which have informed content will be read and respected for what they stand for. Also the new practice of engaging with the readers as some papers do boils down to giving readers what they want to read or focus on. While this may be a good strategy it cannot be the only one. You may have to give the reader what he or she doesn't know or care about because it is important in a larger scheme of things.

**What were you taught about ethics in journalism? More specifically, about the journalist's relationship with sources?**

I have to narrate an incident here where my ethics were questioned. I was doing a story on the practice of sex selective abortions, which, were rampant and still go on despite laws. When I did the story there was no law and I posed as a pregnant woman wanting to do a test. I got a letter of recommendation to a top doctor who was illegally doing them and filed the story. I didn't tell the doctor who I was --a reporter for Mid-day at that time and she was very upset. But the fact of the matter is that she was doing these tests illegally and she was on a government committee to supervise these illegalities. I think while I was justified in this case in not revealing my identity, I have not tried this again and I do say who I am, even if it means losing the story. I think sources are very important and one must be careful about plants and plugs, though I find one may have to

first earn the confidence of the source and this is tricky. I think a source has to be protected at all costs because that person is risking something to give you information not available to you in the normal course.

**Are your source relationships any different from what you expected?**

Well, yes and no. Sometimes sources try to give wrong information and one has to be cautious. But by and large they've been good to me. The things they try to plant I don't write about which can end the flow of information but that's a risk one has to take.

**Who do you consider your audience?**

Anyone who cares to read what I am writing- and from some of the responses I get for my stories I find there is a large enough audience from different backgrounds. I don't believe I am writing for any specific group of people, I think if people like what I am writing or don't like it as well- since I get hate mail-- they will read it no matter who or where they are and with the internet that audience has expanded greatly.

**Tell me about a story or stories you've done that you think best serve that audience.**

Since I have been writing for The Hindu, I think it's a very exacting and sensitive readership and my work is mostly on rights, health, politics, development, all of which are read seriously.

**Can you site a specific example of Indian journalism that represents what you consider a standard-bearer for quality or public service?**

I think the reporting on communal violence by most of the press is a positive sign. There are many publications and people who take things through and don't allow these issues to die down.

**What do you regard as practices of good journalism in the West? Why?**

I think the practice of paying for everything and not going on junkets is a good thing. That way you keep your independence as a professional, I am not sure this is the case for all organizations though. There is also a fact checking system and help with research and rewriting which is valuable. Also journalists are allowed to spend longer time researching stories and some of the stuff generated specially on the war in Iraq, the CIA torture camps, etc., are outstanding examples of having the sources and the time and the research to be able to do such stories.

**Have you experienced or seen examples of outside forces, such as government or business, trying to influence journalists?**

Yes, this is an ongoing thing — it happens subtly sometimes and openly in other cases.

**How have you reacted to these forces?**

Well, I don't toe the line unless there is a very good reason and I don't get support from the editorial decision makers.

**What is/are the primary challenge(s) journalism is facing in today's Indian society?**

The primary challenge comes from social media, which is fast tracking news in digestible pellets. So unless people really want to learn about something and read up, you are not going to have an engaged readership. Secondly when you say Indian society — that

society comprises of people who read more in non-English languages — and this is where the challenge lies — these newspapers are unfortunately emulating the infotainment trend in English and some of them lack serious content or analysis. So the question then is the newspaper a mere piece of paper or does it have any value. In India newspapers are growing unlike in the west and with growing literacy there is a demand to read. Not many have access to Internet in India and often the newspaper and more so radio and TV are the sought after sources of information and entertainment. I still think newspapers in any language have a tough task ahead in the light of a changing media environment and changing readership with low attention span. The question is how does one engage readers then with serious news and analysis and keep the flag flying.

Journalism is a crusade and unless you can create change even if it's slow, there is no point in it. It is an important basis for decisions by people, by policy makers and to know is to understand and act. Also crucially the corporatization of the media and the pressure of business interests is growing and warping news content. That is a huge challenge for the media, which relies on ads for revenue. Many corporates with big business interests also try and stop stories from being published specially if its related to their projects and in states where the media is not strong, journalists are often bribed not to write about discomfiting things. Some have even been killed in places like Chattisgarh. For journalists working in certain places, life is both dangerous and difficult in terms of writing the truth. That's also challenging for the media as a community.

**ABHINAY DEY (36, *The Times of India*, Mumbai)**

**Where were you born/raised?**

I was born and brought up in Varanasi in the state of Uttar Pradesh

**If and where you went to journalism school?**

I did bachelors in journalism and mass communication from Benaras Hindu University, Varanasi followed by a PG diploma with specialization in New Media journalism from Asian College of Journalism, Chennai

**How long have you been working as a journalist?**

For 13 years.

**What are the organizations you've reported for?**

I began with *The New Indian Express* in Hyderabad, then moved to *The Telegraph* in Kolkata, followed by a very short stint at *Indian Express*, Kolkata and then the *Times of India* also in Kolkata. Moved to New Delhi in 2007 to join *Mail Today*, a joint venture between the *India Today* Group and the *Daily Mail* of UK. Finally, I moved to Mumbai in 2013 to join *The Times of India* after six years in *Mail Today*.

**What are the main characteristics of their editorial line?**

*The New Indian Express* was indeed new then back in 2001 having broken away from the parent *Indian Express* Group so its line was kind of fuzzy. It catered to the south Indian market with focus on developments down south but I saw it largely as pro-establishment at least in the Hyderabad edition where I worked. *The Telegraph* in Kolkata is a

prestigious publication known for its progressive stand on social issues and often-independent stand on politics and government. The *Indian Express* is known for its anti-establishment investigative stories focusing on socio-political issues. *The Times of India* is the country's largest circulated daily with a conservative pro business-industry stance. It has the power to set socio-political agendas and takes its responsibility as opinion-maker seriously and its not afraid to take a stand on pressing issues like corruption.

**Where are you based now?**

I am based in Mumbai

**What beat do you cover?**

As a senior assistant editor with the front-page team, my job involves selection and editing of stories for page 1.

**What or who inspired you to go into journalism?**

My mother was the primary inspiration. Being an educated woman of her generation in the sixties when college education for women was almost a rarity in India she had a certain fascination for journalism, which she instilled in me. However, I always thought I did not have it in me to be in this exalted profession. Coming from a small town in the Hindi heartland, I was in awe of senior journalists like Shekhar Gupta, Prannoy Roy, Vinod Dua, M J Akbar, Saeed Naqvi, Sankarshan Thakur, Chitra Subramaniam to name just a few. It was after I completed my bachelors in Economics that a friend of mine literally forced me to apply for the journalism degree saying it will be a waste of your grasp of politics and current affairs as well as your English language skills if you don't

become a journalist. And that's how I finally took the plunge in first completing another bachelors degree in journalism and then a PG diploma to specialize in New Media.

Though it's the biggest irony of my career that I never got a chance to work in a New Media or web setup despite doing a mid-career fellowship in multimedia journalism from International Institute of Journalism, Berlin.

**How did you envision your role or impact on society when you started your profession?**

Yes, in the beginning there was a certain amount of idealism involved knowing the impact newspapers have and can have on society. So I certainly expected to contribute in my own little way as a journalist.

**Where was this idea of journalism coming from?**

I was an avid reader of Indian Express. And one of the issues that I often saw highlighted in the newspaper was the feeling of alienation in the people of the troubled Northeast region and how the central government and even the media neglected the region and its people. The coverage affected me. If the idea behind Indian Express's coverage was to create awareness about the region, it succeeded, at least in getting me interested in the region and so much so that I wanted to do my journalism dissertation on the topic “Media blackout of Northeast”. And later when I joined the profession I remembered to at least try to correct the perception that mainstream/mainland media ignores the Northeast.

Though I realized over the years that it's easier said than done!

**Now, after that many years in the profession, how would you describe your core role in society?**



To be honest after 13 years in the profession a certain amount of skepticism, cynicism has crept in about my role as a journalist in society. I do a job now with as much efficiency as I am capable of choosing/suggesting stories that may make a difference and hope that somewhere I am making a contribution that is worthwhile.

**As an editor, what were you taught about ethics in journalism? More specifically, about the journalist's relationship with sources?**

In journalism school there was ample focus and much debate on ethics in journalism. With regard to sources and their relationship with the journalist, we were always reminded of the golden rule that sources are sacrosanct. The journalist may never reveal his sources. However, we were also told to be careful about the credibility of a source and his/her motivation behind providing information.

**Are your source relationships (or the ones between your reporters and their sources) any different from what you expected?**

Well, again to be honest, what you are taught in journalism schools is the ideal approach and which you may not always be able to apply fully in real life. So as an editor I have seen favors being given and taken by reporters vis-a-vis sources sometimes. But I have also seen journalists who have refused to compromise. However, we have to keep in mind that the media space is highly competitive and news is big business which affects all kinds of relationships and dynamics including the journalist-source relationship.

**Who do you consider your audience?**

In India the audience is considered to be largely young, especially for the English language media.

**Tell me about a story or stories you've done/edited that you think best serve that audience. (If possible, provide a link to the story.)**

There are many stories that I have edited which indeed served the target audience but I would like to cite a couple of stories that I had done myself some years ago that would illustrate the example best. This investigative story I had done for The Telegraph in Kolkata back in 2005. Link:

[http://www.telegraphindia.com/1051023/asp/opinion/story\\_5389302.asp](http://www.telegraphindia.com/1051023/asp/opinion/story_5389302.asp). The idea for the story came from the plight of a young girl who fell prey to the growing fetish for cosmetic surgery especially among young women which have often resulted in botched surgeries. I was thanked by very many affected people and also one person who said my article helped him persuade his daughter not to go for a cosmetic procedure that she could have done without. Apart from this I used to write a weekly column on free educational resources on the web for which I used to receive many letters and emails from teachers and students alike thanking me. In both these instances I felt personally satisfied that my work reached its intended audience and was of some help.

**Can you site a specific example of Indian journalism that represents what you consider a standard-bearer for quality or public service? (If possible, provide a link to the story.)**

Yes, of course. There's a lot of public interest and quality work going on that I can site from print as well as television media. For instance, the Times of India Mumbai edition is

currently running a campaign series called Mumbai Patrol which highlights civic problems being faced by people and TOI also organizes face-to-face interactions with civic officials and people to sort out their problems ranging from traffic issues to safety for women. The television news channel NDTV runs campaigns most notably its series on wildlife conservation and save the girl child considering the age-old problem of female infanticide in India. Links to both these examples are easily available on the web.

**What do you regard as practices of good journalism in the West? Why?**

I am a regular reader of *The Guardian* in UK, *The New York Times*, *Washington Post*, and I love the long format articles in *The New Yorker*, and I love reading *The Atlantic* as well as the Huffington Post and Salon. In all these, the best thing is of course the pleasure of reading a well-written article. And as a journalist I admire the rigorous practice of fact checking which I sometimes find is not as strictly enforced in our Indian publications.

**Are there traits that distinguish Indian journalism from Western journalism, and can you provide an example?**

Well, one thing that I have often felt is there are no Holy Cows in the West. No one is beyond reproach. This I feel is not the case in India as much as one would want it to be. Freedom of speech is not as rigorously practiced here as in the West though I must say things are changing lately. To give an example, the media criticizing the political high offices, the higher judiciary and the armed forces is not as prevalent or accepted as it should be in a democracy, where as I find in the West presidents, prime ministers, the judiciary and the armed forces coming under scathing media criticism.

**Have you experienced or seen examples of outside forces, such as government or business, trying to influence journalists?**

Yes, I have been a witness to such incidents in one of my previous jobs. It was related to the now infamous Delhi gang rape case known globally as the Nirbhaya case.

**How have you reacted to these forces?**

I was in a position then to spot that a senior police officer was trying to plant a negative story about the case, which could have weakened it. I opposed the story and got it killed.

**ADITYA SINHA (49, Veteran journalist, New Delhi)**

**Where were you born/raised?**

Born in India, raised in the U.K. and the U.S.

**If and where you went to journalism school?**

No journalism education.

**How long have you been working as a journalist?**

27 years and counting...

**What are the organizations you've reported for?**

*The Times of India* 1987-1989

*Business and Political Observer* 1990-1991

*The Pioneer* 1991-1997

*Hindustan Times* 1997-1998

*Hindustan Times* 2002-2007

*The New Indian Express* 2007-2011

*Daily News and Analysis* 2011-2012

**What are the main characteristics of their editorial line?**

ToI : pro-big business, status-quo-ist, not tethered to a specific political party

BPO : mouthpiece of the Reliance Group, opposed to then prime minister, VP Singh

Pioneer: liberal, contrarian, hipster

HT : pro-establishment, pro-congress party

TNIE : right-wing

DNA: mouthpiece of industrialist Subhash Chandra; inclined to right but reluctant to annoy whoever is in power.

**What are you currently working on?**

Helping a former bureaucrat with a memoir.

**What or who inspired you to go into journalism?**

I actually wanted to only write novels. This profession was suggested as a stopgap arrangement by my granduncle who was a retired journalist, having worked at the anti-establishment Indian express the last two decades of his career. Once I got started, I just got sucked into the job and though I tried to leave twice, I got sucked right back in.

**How did you envision your role or impact on society when you started your profession?**

When I started, the only thing I wanted to do was do a mind-blowing investigation and to become one of those writers who could predict the future.

**Where was this idea of journalism coming from?**

When I was about ten, and I had newly arrived in the U.S., Watergate broke. Nixon resigned. So Bernstein and Woodward seemed like superheroes. At the same time, when leaving India or making return visits, I would stay with my granduncle who was a bachelor and with other journalist bachelors would have evening alcohol-fuelled arguments about Indira Gandhi and chairman Mao. Their passion impressed me.

**Now, after that many years in the profession, how would you describe your core role in society?**

I have to uphold values by providing a moral compass. I have to maintain the integrity of the language while at the same time allowing it to evolve and grow. I have to mentor younger colleagues so that their reporting instincts are uncluttered and their objectivity unaffected and their hunger for news unabated.

**I am very interested in the investigative team you created and led at DNA: What was its mission? How did you manage the team? What were the challenges encountered?**

I started by hiring a youngster who was a colleague at my previous paper, and then another of his classmates who is an engineer by training. I had also hired a bureau chief in Delhi who was of a similar bent of mind. One of the parameters of their work was extensive use of a legislation that came into being during the past decade, the Right to Information Act. There is an art to using it. I managed it by holding weekly meetings, discussing progress with ongoing stories, making suggestions for new avenues of inquiries, and when the story was done, doing a rigorous edit myself, with a fair amount of back and forth. I also encouraged other colleagues, on regular city or national or business trips, to

follow their example. It was a success. Our only challenge was the might of big business, and the fact that our promoter himself was big business.

**More generally, what is the status of investigative journalism in India?**

Firstly, there is no sustained investigative journalism in India. Even those examples from the past, like the *Indian Express* of the 1980s, seem fairly politically partisan in hindsight. Even the Indian express is just a mouthpiece now for vested interests. There is no documented history of investigative journalism, but it probably has its roots in the independence newspapers of the British era.

**As an editor, what were you taught about ethics in journalism?**

I learned on the job; practice made perfect.

**Are your source relationships (or the ones between your reporters and their sources) any different from what you expected?**

I never had preconceived notions so they evolved naturally. I basically stick to the dictum of not taking sides and rigorously pursuing the facts.

**Tell me about a story or stories you've done/edited that you think best serve your audience. (If possible, provide a link to the story.)**

The first story I ever reported, in 1987, was about a woman whose husband poured whiskey on her and set her on fire. She died. It was jarring to middle-class readers who took dowry crimes for granted. A story I reported, as an editor-in-chief, was about Rahul Gandhi's fudged educational qualifications. Most voters in India have now come to realize that he is not intellectually equipped for the job of prime minister.



**Can you site a specific example of Indian journalism that represents what you consider a standard-bearer for quality or public service? (If possible, provide a link to the story.)**

When I was at the Express, my reporter Javed Iqbal did a series of child malnutrition stories in those very areas that the government has labeled Maoist-afflicted.

**What do you regard as practices of good journalism in the West?**

Their ability to travel to distant lands and reports on human tragedy.

**Why?**

Because India does not appear wealthy enough to spend that kind of money on roving reporters.

**Are there traits that distinguish Indian journalism from Western journalism, and can you provide an example?**

Indians know their own society better, so when it comes to reporting on India they see shades of gray, which westerners don't, or are too quick to caricature. Similarly Americans know their own society best and report on it the best.

**Have you experienced or seen examples of outside forces, such as government or business, trying to influence journalists?**

Are you kidding me? I could fill volumes.

**How have you reacted to these forces?**

By not obliging them, and in cases of attempted arm-twisting, by writing about it so that the world sees such forces for what they are.

**What led to your resignation from DNA?**

My desire not to get involved in a Zee TV (part of the same group as DNA) controversy after it was caught trying to extort a billion rupees from an industrial house that had illegally obtained contracts for coal mining.

**To summarize, what are the primary challenges journalism is facing in today's Indian society?**

It is run by big business for its own partisan ends, and not for society's larger requirements.

**What should be done to tackle these challenges?**

Change the business model.