

ETHICAL DECISION MAKING IN THE INDIAN MEDIASCAPE:

REPORTERS AND THEIR STORIES

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Thesis Prepared for the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

UNIVERSITY OF NORTH TEXAS

May 2009

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Spencer, Patricia Elizabeth. Ethical Decision Making in the Indian Mediascape: Reporters and Their Stories. Master of Arts (Journalism), May 2009, 75 pp., references, 64 titles.

Hundreds of reporters gather and interpret news for four English-language newspapers in India's second-largest urban area Kolkata, West Bengal's state capital, which is home to over 4 million people. Journalists from *The Statesman*, *The Telegraph-Kolkata*, *The Hindustan Times* and *The Times of India* discuss how they collect their stories in Bengali, Hindi, Urdu, and many other languages and write them in English targeting a small but emerging middle-class audience. Whether these articles focus on people-centric urban planning, armed vigilantes in community disputes, dowry death cases, or celebrity culture, all of the reporting involves cultural and ethical challenges. Using semi-structured interviewing and qualitative theme analysis, this study explores how gender, class, and religion affect the decision-making practices of 21 journalists working in Kolkata.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Professor Amit Ghosh from the University of Texas at El Paso for providing guidance and assisting me with the contacts in Kolkata, India, that made this thesis materialize. I am grateful to the University of North Texas Mayborn Graduate School of Journalism and my thesis committee members: Dr. Jacqueline Lambiase, for her constant direction and advice, Dr. Mitchell Land, for his full support and encouragement, and for Dr. James Mueller's interest and desire to serve on my committee.

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INTRODUCTION

In the Indian state of West Bengal and the capital of Kolkata, hundreds of reporters gather and interpret the news for *The Statesman*, *The Telegraph-Kolkata*, *The Hindustan Times* and *The Times of India* in India's second largest city. Their reporting covers corporate finance, local and regional politics, entertainment, cultural and community issues in far-off districts. The stories, verbally communicated in Hindi, Bengali and Urdu, are written into English narratives. The reporters are observers, fact finders and evaluators who listen to complex stories relating to everything in a city of over 4 million people with an extended population of 13.2 million inhabitants from armed vigilantes involved in communal disputes to dowry death cases and people-centric urban planning. They mainly target India's emerging middle-class audience. This study qualitatively explores the impact of gender, class and religion on media ethics in the daily reporting activities of 21 of these journalists in West Bengal.

Familiarization with India's history and diverse culture established reciprocity during the interview process and resulted in a high-quality and robust qualitative line of inquiry to capture the journalists' role as Indian reporters within their newspaper organizations and the public they serve. I examined their operating ethical principles and their newsgathering applications through my multi-perspective Western view and applied cultural sensitivity throughout this research process.

This study revealed how Indian print reporters make sense of the complexities in their diverse environment and how they view and write about the world, acting as moral information gatherers and upholding the ethical principles that guide their conduct.

BACKGROUND AND LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review illuminates the impact of gender, class and religion on the ethical applications in Indian-English print media reporting. It follows a historical conceptualization and an overview into the development of print media in India, the functions of the media and how well these functions serve the public.

This study was conducted where newspapers have evolved as India's most dominant medium and among the oldest and freest in South Asia (de Beer & Merrill, 2004). James Augustus Hickey, an ex-employee of the East India Company, introduced the first English newspaper to India in January 1780. The *Bengal Gazette* was described as a public gossip publication (Khandekar, 2006). Classified advertisements ran on the front pages. In the colonial period, the British-owned newspapers had white editors and supported the colonial regime. This group classified the Indian-owned newspapers as the "native press" while the Indian newspapers referred to their British-owned rivals as "Anglo-Indian contemporaries," according to Bhaskar (as cited in Rajan, 2005, p. 19). The nascent stages of print media evolved in Kolkata because it was seat of government until 1911, when New Delhi became the capital of India.

India is one of the oldest civilizations in the world, where the inhabitants of the Indus Valley developed an urban culture based on commerce and agriculture. It is one of the largest democracies in the world. Its people have been able to survive colonialism while supporting a democratic political system in spite of certain factors that would otherwise place it at the bottom of the economic scale with other nations. This study was conducted exclusively in West Bengal, which has the longest democratically elected communist state government in the world. It is regarded as the intellectual capital of the country. The majority of the people of Kolkata follow

the practices of the Hindu religion. Islam, Christianity, Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism are also practiced.

The Indian Nobel Prize-winning economist Amartya Sen (as cited in Meredith, 2007, p. 126) noted that, “The frustrating thing about India, is that whatever you can rightly say about India, the opposite is also true.” Meredith (2007) explained that the nation simply does not give in easily to generalizations. There exist ironies, complexities, and contradictions about the country’s customs, politics and religions that researchers continuously evaluate to gain a greater understanding of this diverse country.

Ethics

Rajan (2005) calls for high quality journalism in India rooted in well-defined principles that are ethically and professionally sound, but stressed that journalism and business practices go hand-in-hand with the changing needs of society. The practice of communitarianism seeks a balance between social autonomy and social responsibility. Gandhi’s axiological principles anchored in social responsibility focus on truth telling in the face of power to promote enlightenment (Starosta and Shi, 2007).

Truth telling engenders journalists to reflect on the application of teleology that has two basic forms: ethical egoism and utilitarianism (Lambeth, 1986). Journalists face ethical egoism and utilitarianism on a daily basis regardless of where they live and what they write. Journalists, acting as ethical egoists, seek what is best for them. The utilitarian seeks to promote what is best for the greatest number, which Mahatma Gandhi rejected. His theory called for social justice grounded in fairness to the individual, with priority given to disadvantaged people (Walz & Ritchie, 2000). He espoused freedom in India, but also wanted Indians to be free of exploitation and inequality among themselves. From these principles, Gandhian journalism may be seen as

the journalism of communitarianism and humanitarianism. While modern-day media owners look to profit and prestige Gandhi's perspective promoted service to the people by its media institutions, leading to the integration of social service and social action. Gandhi (as cited by the Press Council of India, 2008) spoke about self-regulation and argued:

The sole aim of a journalist should be service. The newspaper press is a great power, but just as unchained torrent of water submerges the whole countryside and crops, even so an uncontrolled pen serves but to destroy. If the control is from without, it proves more poisonous than want of control. It can be profitable only when exercised from within. (p. 1-2)

Within Gandhi's concerns, truth, justice, stewardship, humaneness and liberty are the same principles and values that may be seen in communitarianism. Land and Hornaday (2006) contended that critical approaches are necessary for a particular community and most beneficial when broadly shared within a participatory framework. Gandhi viewed the world in holistic terms. When he evaluated the world he viewed humankind using connectivity to function equally with one other to promote positive acts. Gandhi could be viewed as developing this type of communitarianism perspective for his emerging nation. Ahimsa (non-violence) is a blending of Hindu, Jainist, Buddhist, and Christianity which seeks understanding of others. Gandhi expatiated on this principle to give attention to those who are marginalized and disenfranchised (Walz and Ritchie, 2000). This understanding challenges reporters to adhere to a checklist of moral ethical decision making while engaging in their news gathering practices. Ray (2006) called upon the Indian media to be cognizant to the sensitizing of the public they serve to the values of service and sacrifice to lift the weak from poverty, promote literacy and empower those who seek the betterment of their communities.

Gandhi experimented with truth at the turn of the 20th century and was embedded in a non-Western culture. Scholars have questioned whether his ideas are applicable to our times and with issues associated with redistribution of power. Walz and Ritchie (2000) stated that there is

evidence to show that global economic developments are neocolonial. They further stated that violence and terrorism are associated with this redistribution of power from the political to the economic sector. Environmental degradation is also linked to societies' economic development advances. If so, then Gandhian principles rooted in "cooperation over competition, interdependence over rugged individualism, compassion for others over pursuit of self interest, and social justice over individual achievement" could be incorporated into existing models delineating principles for communitarian ethics (Walz & Ritchie, 2000, p. 215). These principles will enhance journalists' social exchange process within their local and global villages and stimulate civic consciousness.

Vilanilam (2005) reflected on the big difference between the reporting practices of journalists during the time of Gandhi and modern-day journalists. Gandhi considered journalism to be a service to society. Gandhi used journalism to write about issues and to explain facts about religion, ethics, morality, politics and economics. Today, publishers focus more upon their duties as a capitalistic enterprise within the social exchange process culminating in the daily reaping of profits, economic advantage and social prestige. Gandhi was known for the position he took when given the choice between a government without the press and a press without government. His choice for a press without a government coincides with Jeffersonian and Nehruvian views (Vilanilam, 2005).

Ray (2006) discussed sustainable development in today's society and the importance of human values that contribute to the growth of humankind that seeks to transcend political and religious barriers. The willingness of journalists to raise questions, report from all sides and in all environments increases the level of confidence the public places in news organizations.

Jeremy Bentham's philosophy encompasses the "greatest happiness for the greatest number." Lambeth (1986) discussed broader outlines of Bentham's philosophy which includes an economic approach that advocates free competition in the economy that would maximize happiness.

Those who follow John Stuart Mill's philosophy may follow the need for the quality of happiness rather than quantity in the sense of utilitarianism. Pluralists reject the belief that only pleasure is worthy of pursuit. Lambeth (1986) pointed to a more modern version of utilitarianism, one that focuses on acts and one that has rules that oversee and fulfill ethical obligations. How do Indian reporters for an Indian-English newspaper act as moral information gatherers during the process of decision-making to ensure that the rules he or she follows maximizes the good for all? Rules can provide direction; in the long term, truth telling is what all journalists must strive for. It is reflected in what Lambeth described as "the purity of their morals but also the prescience and power of their minds," (Lambeth, 1996, p. 15).

The 21st century is challenging journalists to take media ethics to a higher order. With ongoing discourse, critical thinking and ethical exchange practices, working journalists can undertake pragmatic approaches to their craft by following ethical guidelines. Christians (2008) suggested that rather than developing rules for experts, media ethics needs to be preoccupied with the moral dimension of everyday life (p. 7.) According to Lambeth (1986), journalists serve the public but work for editors who look to their publications as businesses driven by advertising and profit making. He described journalists as moral agents and pointed out that for them to achieve that title they must perfect their talents in critical observations, retain what they see and hear and avoid biases.

A survey by Sanjay conducted on news media education media professionals– including

teachers in print, electronic, radio, television and public relations—listed accuracy, fact-checking and ethics for print journalism as required skills demanding the highest emphasis (as cited in Sahay, 2006, p. 33). The Center for Media Studies (2007) revealed that a shortage of trained media professionals is restraining the growth of the news media in India. Educational support was cited as a “missing link” in expanding the potential of newspapers in the country (p. 31). In the examination of academic programs it was found that courses and the concerns related to them are either outdated or inadequate.

In 1999, Indian journalists operating in the largest democracy in the world gathered together in India at the International Media Forum sponsored by The Freedom Forum Foundation. This Washington, D.C.-based group suggested that religion, new media and lax ethics would be the most critical challenges for reporters at the millennium (Freedom Forum Foundation, 1999). These three concerns are exactly what media professionals are dealing with today, as India circulates 2,100 daily publications read by 225 million readers (Easwaran, 2008). Out of the top 20 newspapers, only two are English language having multiple editions. In 2007, 14 out of the top 100 dailies, by readership, are English. It is reported that English dailies are read by less than 4% of adults (Center for Media Studies, 2007). West Bengal is one of six states in India’s 28-state union that has the highest circulation of newspapers (Vilani, 2005).

Raju Narisetti, a former editor for Europe of the *Wall Street Journal* and now the managing editor of *Mint*, commented in an interview that the media in India has grown dramatically, but “it had come at the cost of professionalism and a laxly enforced code of professional ethics,” (Easwaran, 2008). Brown stated that this is a concern for journalists who have witnessed the “dumbing down” of the Indian press. Many once saw the Indian print media

traditionally rooted in a media landscape that was bold and constructive, promoting awareness and social justice and strengthening democracy (as cited in Rajan, 2005, p. 244).

Defining news and reporting standards is an integral part of why a code of ethics is established. Chairman of the Press Council of India, P.B. Sawant, clearly acknowledged that misuse of media freedom by manipulation and distortion erodes the credibility of the media as social institutions. Sawant advocates the need for ethics in journalism (Sawant, 2003). Social institutions cannot contribute to the betterment of society without ethical standards. The Press Council of India was established on July 4, 1966, as an autonomous, statutory, quasi-judicial body to address complaints about the press made by the people, to ensure that the freedom of the press is preserved, and to maintain its own standards. This council has 28 members who come from various scholarly, business and journalism backgrounds. The Press Council Act of 1965 (Press Council of India, History, 2008, para.10,) follows these stipulations to further their objectives as an accountability system:

- 1) To help newspapers to maintain their independence
- 2) To build up a code of conduct for newspapers and journalists in accordance with high professional standards
- 3) To insure on the part of newspapers and journalists the maintenance of a high standard of public taste and foster a due sense of both the rights and responsibilities of citizenship
- 4) To encourage the growth of a sense of responsibility and public service among all those engaged in the profession of journalism
- 5) To keep under review any development likely to restrict the supply and dissemination of news of public interest and importance

- 6) To keep under review such cases of assistance received by any newspaper or news agency in India.

In 1981, the National Union of Journalists (India) met in Agra, India, to write and adopt a declaration outlining the rights for journalists to operate in a democratic environment and to collect and publish facts with professional integrity and dignity. They realized that their calling to serve the public interest by publishing news and comments in a free and fair manner required that they do not suppress essential facts and that fair play be observed by all. The declaration prohibits censorship and defends the fundamental rights of the people and safeguards the public interest.

Journalists acknowledged that they should not allow themselves to be exploited, nor will they exploit others for personal gain. Accepting bribes is considered a serious ethical violation. Evaluating privacy issues and differentiating between public interest and public curiosity ensures the respect the public expects regarding their personal rights and feelings that are attached to certain events that the media seek to make public and sensationalize.

The importance of exercising self-restraint and discretion in dealing with incidents of “communal frenzy” (National Union of Journalists, India, 2008, p. 2) and other social tensions without prejudice plays an important part in the everyday reporting activities of Indian journalists, whether they work for vernacular or English-language newspapers. The Press Council of India (Norms, 2008, sec. 20) addresses the norms of journalistic standards and principles of ethics and stated the following for covering communal disputes and clashes:

News, views or comments relating to communal or religious disputes/clashes shall be published after proper verification of facts and presented with due caution and restraint in a manner which is conducive to the creation of an atmosphere congenial to communal harmony, amity and peace. Sensational, provocative and alarming headlines are to be avoided. Acts of communal violence or vandalism shall be reported in a manner as may not undermine the people's confidence in the law and order machinery of the State.

Giving community-wise figures of the victims of communal riot, or writing about the incident in a style which is likely to inflame passions, aggravate the tension, or accentuate the strained relations between the communities/religious groups concerned, or which has a potential to exacerbate the trouble, shall be avoided. (Sec. 20, i)

The Press Council of India (2008) emphasized the responsibilities that journalists and columnists owe to India in promoting communal peace and how they practice objectivity and fairness in their reporting practices. It also reminds journalists that they should strive to be troubleshooters and not troublemakers and that the media has a greater moral responsibility to ameliorate national solidarity and mentions the noble role played by journalists in pre-independence days. Verified and accurate facts serve to ensure that disharmony between castes, communities and races do not occur, according to the Press Council of India (Norms, 2008, sec. 20).

Ray (2006) emphasized that journalists are expected to carry a degree of courage, conviction, and commitment that contributes to the growth of society. He listed the values of media ethics that enable the pursuit of a responsible press. The values of truth, justice, freedom, integrity, impartiality, and fair play should be an integral part a free and democratic press. Journalists should seek truth and make accurate interpretations about the facts they obtain.

The functions of the media as cited by Bertrand (2000) should include the elements that place the journalist in both front and the back rows where he or she watches the environment and ensures social communication to provide an image of the world. The media also transmits culture for the purpose of entertaining and selling its content. It is accepted that media houses must make a profit, but in doing so they are expected to maintain social responsibility to those they serve.

Callahan described media ethics as a component of a profession dedicated to truth and the common good. He wrote that it a moral enterprise that involves a cross-cultural application (as

cited in Rao & Lee, 2005, p. 99). Callahan called journalism both an art and science. Journalists communicate effectively in engaging conversations and develop creative ideas to attract readers, but as Callahan (2003) pointed out there is good journalism and bad journalism and argued:

Bad journalism, like bad art, can be trite, precious, sentimental, and exploitative and subjectively self-indulgent—sometimes stories are so concerned with the egotistical journalists’ sensibilities that there is little room for actual content. (p. 4)

Bera defined a “serious newspaper” as one that has influence, has impact and is economically vibrant (S. Bera, personal interview, December 5, 2008). The journalist is the foot soldier on the beat that engages those who provide the necessary information to deliver a breaking news story, shape a feature article or a personality profile that grabs attention. They must also deal with the constraints of those who purchase advertising and those who wield power at all levels of government and in the corporate world.

Herrscher (2000) proposed a list of principles for a universal code of ethics that includes:

the reporting of truth, the completeness of information, the exposure of conflict of interest among journalists with businesses and their sources, the definition of news, the right of the public to know if the news they are receiving is based on honest practices, respect for privacy, and the fair and equal treatment of ethnic groups and minorities. (p. 279-281)

Herrscher (2000) believed that these principles constitute a core list that can be adopted internationally and that can be upheld under all circumstances. In the process of reporting there is also the need for reporters to be receptive to learning and understanding the religion and customs of those who they are interviewing. This requires that they become aware of their own prejudices and stereotyping and that they fully engage and teach themselves about people, things and issues they do not fully understand to foster knowledge and understanding (Dreher, 2006).

There are 845 languages spoken in India, of which 18 are official languages. Bengali is the primary language of West Bengal. The Muslim population speaks Urdu. Forty-five percent of Indians list Hindi as their mother tongue (Ramanathan, 2008). Hindi is the main language of

10 Indian states: Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Delhi, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Uttaranchal and Uttar Pradesh. It is estimated that while 500 million Indians can understand Hindi, some states still face a high illiteracy rate. Women comprise the majority in that group. Research shows that the combined population of Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Jharkhand is about 200 million, but the circulation of newspapers is under 10 million. English is written and spoken in India and widely used in education, business and government. Less than 5% of the population of India claim English as their mother tongue (Vilani, 2005). There exists a level of illiteracy existing in 35% of the population (Meredith, 2007). Literacy is defined as the ability to sign one's name and only a small percentage can read about the issues newspaper reporters write about (Khandekar, 2006).

Celebrity Journalism

Infotainment, a combination of information and entertainment, stratifies the consumer's desire for amusement rather than communicating what the citizens need to make accurate evaluations and informed decisions about issues that affect their lives and the lives of others as a whole. Callahan (2003) pointed to the dangers of entertainment for the sake of profit and news sources becoming like tabloid press.

In a country where poverty stretches across the sub-continent, the underprivileged continue to be overlooked due to marketing, technology and illiteracy. Their plights are not being reported and are printed in the inner pages as six-line stories, while celebrities, fads and fashions on the front pages snap up the attention from the growing middle class. Padgaonkar expressed his concern about the large number of people who would not fall within the reach of the press in 1999, but still supported the shift from hard news to soft news (as cited in Freedom Forum Foundation, 1999, p. 2).

Today, Indian media are targeting a growing middle class with feel-good infotainment journalism that delivers celebrity-driven stories, sensationalism, society gossip, and the latest fashion trends. Public relations are also merging with news making. As a result, public affairs reporting is becoming less important as Indian journalists report less on poverty, hunger and illiteracy, as illustrated when Fashion Week got more coverage in 2006 than the ongoing crisis of the suicides of farmers who subsist on less than two dollars per day (W. Thornton & S. Thornton, 2006). Pratap emphasized the reporting of health and education that directly impacts the Indian population. If the Indian middle class demands coverage on lifestyles and softer news, how will the rest of the 200 million Indians who do not have clean drinking water and face the daily shortages of a decent food supply, clothing, housing, health care, sanitation and education get their plight published through the media (as cited in Freedom Forum Foundation, 1999. p. 2 & Thornton, 2006)? The majority of the Indian population, absent from the middle class, cannot empower themselves to influence their local government through a democratic process if they do not possess the skills to evaluate information and form opinions. Thörlind (2000) pointed to an education model called Enlightened Understanding, which Blomkbist and Dahl explained, is a process, that allows poor people to exercise effective participation through literacy (as cited in Thorlind, 2000, p. 40).

An example of celebrity-driven stories was pointed out by Brown (as cited in Rajan, 2005, p. 253) who stated he observed a tantalizing headline on the front page of *The Telegraph-Kolkata* in 2003: What are Liv Tyler and Kate Moss doing in Scotland? Brown wondered what interest the readers in Kolkata have in Stella McCartney's star-studded wedding. Liv Tyler was splashed on the master head and the story was a below standard feature, which in Brown's assessment, would have disappointed a discriminating reader. This story reflects blab language

as a “semantics blank” where nothing significant comes through. Sometimes journalists use a high degree of “blab” language that communicates unimportant information with little substance (Levinson, 2007, p. 259). Vittal stated (as cited in Press Council of India, Chairman Speeches, para. 5) that *Page 3* culture, which originates from entertainment news and highlights parties and gossip, is widely read while the rest of the paper is discarded. Although *Page 3* may be an insert, it makes an appearance on the front page as well. According to Vittal, news journalists are following the orders from the corporate owners who push the agendas of businesses.

Sahay (2006) emphasized that the news writing style of newspapers today dazzles their readers with “film stars, celebrities, and models in skimpy clothes,” (p. xviii) with prime news regulated to the back pages. In a letter to the editor, Dutta (*The Telegraph*, 2008) commented on the lack of serious news stories when the front-page story carried an article about an actress who won the best actress category at the IIFA Awards ceremony in Bangkok.

Minister of Information and Broadcasting, Priya Ranjan Dasmunsi, stated on National Press Day in India that “While Indian media has its right to freedom of expression enshrined in law, the industry has, on its own, been practicing censorship to follow the line of the media barons of management” (New Delhi News.net, 2007). Although self-censorship has been widely practiced for decades by many reporters in many countries, reporters continue to complain about it afterwards, according to Agrawal (as cited in Cooper, 1989, p. 157). Reporters stated they experienced pressures from editors and feared losing their jobs. Indian reporters cite that better wages would make them less vulnerable and more accountable. This is expressed in The Agra Declaration of Journalists that states that journalists will work collectively to secure higher wages and better working conditions (National Union of Journalists, 2008).

Class and Unequal Distributions of Rewards and Resources

For the purpose of this study, class is defined as a social category in India defined by the division resulting from the unequal distribution of rewards and resources such as wealth, power and prestige within their culture. Although the caste system is codified in the Hindu religion and is commonly associated with India, it can be found in other societies. The caste system was officially banned in India in 1949; however, the discrimination and marginalization of some groups still occurs. For example, despite the government's attempts to improve their status, discrimination against the people known as the Dalits (formerly called the untouchables) who are in the lowest caste, is still prevalent. Bahyl (2004) explained that India today is a class divided-dynamic society and is not the same caste-divided society as it was 3,000 years ago. He stated that many people in India, inclusive of scholars and policy makers, use the term caste in different contexts in different regions and different rural and urban areas.

Literature explains the effects of economic and cultural changes on the growing middle class in India and Derné (2008) stated that the improvement of middle class status in India has reached relatively few Indians. He reported that only 14% of India's population earns more than Rs 8,000 per month, which is equivalent to approximately \$164. He also stated that 24 people in 1,000 have personal computers and fewer than three in 1,000 have a broadband connection. Aydair pointed out that the access to electricity by many poor and rural Indians remains high at 40% (as cited in Derné, p. 213).

Caste and class status was poignantly illustrated during the coverage of the fisher folk, who are regarded as a backward class and are stereotyped as dirty, smelly and prone to crime (Anand, 2005). An emphasis is placed on a reporter's ability to relate to people from other socio-economic backgrounds. If reporters do not come from the fishing community, or any

community separated by class or caste, and there is no attempt to understand the social problems of the lower classes within a certain community, then it will be marginalized. Such was the case in the aftermath reporting of the tsunami in that region, when the fisher folk were all depicted as poor beggars. Anand (as cited in Rajan, 2005, p. 185-186) emphasized how the reporting of stories on Dalits whose distressed socio-economic situations, crime-related or sensationalized communal events generate media interest. One example was the lynching of five Dalits in Jhajjar, Haryana, in 2002 for the alleged slaughtering of a cow. Anand declared that the English-speaking intellectuals and other elite groups have come to believe that caste does not exist among them (as cited in Rajan, 2005, p. 191) and in the newsroom where caste is overlooked and reporters target the emerging Indian middle-class.

Anand (as cited in Rajan, 2005) investigated the coverage of Dalits in Indian media. He reported the caste composition of the media is relevant to the reporting of caste issues. In Indian-language newspapers, Dalit reporters are not adequately represented. Anand also noted that the Brahmins who occupy a higher caste than the Dalits hold 60% of reporting and editorial jobs in the English-language media (as cited in Rajan, 2005). He also stated since the print media are run by the private sector and does not come under the state the Press Council of India, Dalits are absent from the public sphere.

Chandra Bhan Prasad, who is a Dalit writing a weekly column in a mainstream English-language newspaper, wrote this about Indian reconstructing its society after 1950 and the role of Dalits:

...where the state was directed to end the age-old system of exclusion, and reconstruct society along democratic lines. Bound by the verdict of the Constitution, the state has given some space in institutions under its direct control. But society by and large, has been refusing to internalize that verdict to the hilt, and therefore Dalits remain excluded from institutions outside the command of the state (as cited in Rajan, 2005, p. 180).

Brown (as cited in Rajan, 2005) asserted that journalism has failed because journalists have stopped talking to ordinary people and that labor and agricultural beats are extinct.

According to Brown 70% of the population fail to make the news (as cited in Rajan, 2005).

Another example of media insensitivity by journalists was exhibited in which a magazine photographer, having already been warned that children in a government-run orphanage were scared of the sea, persisted in having the children pose for a photo with the sea as a backdrop (Anand, 2005). When he was denied taking the picture he instead took a picture of them in front of the orphanage that misrepresented their “plight” as being orphans.

Media create an environment in which individuals can internalize shared sets of beliefs and values. If minority reporters are not equally represented in the media they cannot be watch dogs in the mainstream media. The component of completeness in the reporting of issues affecting marginalized populations begins with editors, extends to reporters, and is controlled by the media outlets that employ them (Heider, 1996). Completeness cannot be achieved without understanding the ethnic backgrounds and cultural beliefs of reporters and where they come from.

Gender

The study of gender in India within any discipline poses a challenge because India is a multi-cultural diverse country with diverse religions and languages and class stratification systems that affect every aspect of Indian life. My study enabled me to take a glimpse into the contemporary problems facing the reporting of gender issues in Kolkata. Purkayastha, Subramaniam, Desai and Bose (2003) explicated the interaction of class, gender, caste and religion. They asserted that issues that impact gender in India are multifaceted and complex and therefore may require the applications of various qualitative and quantitative methods that may

be interpreted differently by the researcher and the researched. Since the media adjust rapidly to the interpretation of current events, stories and ethical dilemmas, the interpretations evolve differently based on cultural factors existing in the regions in which they occur. For example, a story on a male Bollywood actor and whom he will be marrying may gain high media coverage in a positive way as viewed by the middle-classes. But the female who enters into a non-arranged marriage with a male from a different cultural and religious background may be scrutinized publicly in the paper and may suffer the negative effects from her community. In either case, the reporters in this study mentioned that sensitivity must be employed while covering gender issues.

The topic of gender is also the focus in entertainment reporting. Gender spans the roles and responsibilities of men, the impact of patriarchy on women in India and in all relationships. Joseph explained that “Who Makes the News?” is a comprehensive report of the most extensive international research into gender in news media to date. According to the report, the absence of a gender angle in women’s issues in India is evident and only part of the story is being covered. (as cited in Rajan, 2007, p. 40-41).

The importance of empowering women is critical in the equity and accuracy of covering women’s issues in far-off districts. Devi and Kannan (as cited in Ganesamurthy, 2008, p. 31-54) emphasized equality and access to education for women for them to become agents of change. Literacy of women and technical empowerment enable women to have a voice in the media – both in covering the news and getting their stories out to reporters.

Culture and Religion

The press in India deals with complex and diverse issues pertaining to the social institution of religion that is integrated with India’s social structure. Existing literature profiles

India's dualistic conflict in which the modern (etic) confronts the cultural (emic). Cultural communication ethics has evolved in India over thousands of years and there still remains the task of finding a single communication ethic that could be widely accepted in every Indian state and region (Cooper, 1989). But what remains constant is the daily activity of discovering and recognizing truth. Oliver (1971) claimed "an individual can have no other destiny than to align himself with the absolute truth" (p.76). By asserting this, he explained that ethics and rhetoric become one.

In relation to Gautama Buddha's beliefs, it is posited that whatever is said by the speaker and is heard by the receiver has consequences for both (Oliver, 1971). Buddha's view was "that utterance is its own monitor. Truth must be the object of discourse, for what is true governs what we are and what will be" (as cited in Oliver, 1971, p. 77). These words are basic to the reporter's code of ethics in his role of social responsibility and in the reporting of all issues including religion that is a very big part of Indian life.

Individualism and autonomy in Indian society must also be addressed when observing the daily activities of Indian journalists. Mines (1988) discussed the effects of India's hierarchical structure in their society. Indians engage in psychological and behavioral adjustments in their daily lives to comply with those demands that are inherently accepted in their culture and require compliance. In a democratic country where the state of West Bengal has the world's longest-running democratically elected communist state government, the government's role in promoting and sustaining a free press and the journalist's emerging role in the global community are challenges going into the 21st century. The case for researching media ethics and these challenges was made by Rao and Johal (2006) who have interviewed senior Indian editors and journalists at forums, universities and workshops. Their goal was to bring

journalists together to afford them the opportunity to discuss media ethics. According to Rao and Johal (2006) little research has been done on the ethical issues Indian journalists face in their day-to-day decision making and no ethnographic research exists. However, in one ethnographic study of Hindi journalists in Lucknow by a Swedish anthropologist, research revealed that scholars who study people and their professions in their respective environments learn about their work ethics through dialogue and interaction (Ståhlberg, 2006). Through this communication process, major cultural differences and similarities were revealed during one scholar's study in which he compared Hindi journalists with Swedish journalists. This study revealed that journalists, regardless of their background, operate under some sort of media ethical guidelines during their reporting and interpreting of events.

Technology

This literature review and background section acknowledged the effects of new technology and Western influence on India's rapidly growing middle-class, as well as the media's failure to report on issues affecting the population not growing within the middle class. Both the middle class and lower classes in India find themselves in a complex web of social relationships within a highly stratified population with linguistic, religious and cultural diversities. This affects the journalists' dissemination of market-driven information and their application of media ethics across 28 Indian states, in a country that has the second-largest circulation of newspapers after China (Center for Media Studies, 2007, p. 2).

The use of technology in the media landscape has had a profound impact on media ethics. Jayaran asserted that the profession must be cognizant of the dangers of identifying the role of the journalist with that of a technician (as cited in Rajan, 2005). Communication plays a central role in media ethics. Technology operates on the basis of expediency and maximized utility that

may compromise accuracy in reporting practices. Vilanilam (2005) claimed that print media is moving away from labor-intensive reporting and has become electronic industries that operate with technological expediency that maximizes benefits and minimize costs. Hamilton (2000) pointed out that within this process of expediency journalists might be developing their own ethical codes as they conduct their reporting (p. 20). Indian journalists operate under the pressures of 24-hour competition that leads to sensationalism, according to Sardesai; this manipulates the minds of television audiences and with the increasing advances in video and online reporting, sensationalism is ubiquitous (as cited in Sahay, 2006, p. 171).

For the journalist, he or she uses technology to disseminate stories, but the question remains whether completeness is also being achieved and at what cost. Klaidman and Beaucamp (1987) defined completeness as the saturation point when the reasonable reader is satisfied that he has received the information he wanted. Sanjay pointed out that *The Times of India*, responding to opportunities of globalism, began offering readers what they liked rather than following traditional definitions of news, which resulted in consumer product marketing (as cited in Sahay, 2006, p. 16).

The unprecedented access to information in our global society and the fast-paced 24/7 churning of news overwhelm the in-depth thoughtfulness, fact-finding and accuracy of journalists who seek to reinvigorate their mission as truth-tellers. White (2005) wrote that the poor performance of many media outlets undermines the traditional watchdog role of the media and weakens the credibility of journalism (p. 7). Research shows that fact checking in print media was more predominant before the advent of online reporting. Today's multi-media are following agendas that contribute to cut-throat competitiveness for news that sells.

What needs to be fully explored is how ethics is taught in journalism courses in higher education and how that knowledge is pragmatically applied in the real world of reporting. Roa (2006) pointed out his concern for the disconnect between ethics as an area of academic research, the writing of ethical codes and course curriculums that are not based on the actual practice of journalism in India. This study seeks to understand ethics as it is practiced by working journalists, in order to address part of Roa's concerns.

Therefore, based on the literature review and the environment in which I conducted my study, I addressed the following research questions:

1. In what ways does tradition (especially Gandhian principles) affect Indian journalists' decision-making processes in reporting?
2. In what ways does modernism (especially global and capitalistic principles) inform journalists' decisions about ethics?
3. How do Indian journalists make ethical choices and articulate them?
4. How are ethics expressed through the reporting styles and methods of these journalists?

RESEARCH AND METHOD

This study focused on developing a corpus of narratives collected from Indian reporters in Kolkata, West Bengal, and analyzed through the lens of the social exchange theory as applied in media ethics. A social-interactionist perspective was instrumental in examining the ethical dilemmas confronted by journalists at *The Statesman*, *The Telegraph-Kolkata*, *The Hindustan Times* and *The Times of India*. The journalists from these newspapers discussed how they used the communication of language, community-mindedness, education, experience, and cultural sensitivity to face challenges during their daily reporting activities with the Kolkatans and other citizens living outside the city and state of West Bengal. I used a present-day discovery-application during my research and explored how class, gender and religion played a role in the way ethical decisions are made during reporting activities.

The purpose of the study was delineated according to the rules of the University of North Texas Institutional Review board and was approved in 2007. In 2008 a revision was made to include other newspapers in Kolkata. At the end of 2008, 21 interviews were completed. All of the preliminary contacts were made by phone or by correspondence via the Internet and mail and resulted in face-to-face interviews. Email was used was to confirm appointments or to clarify information. The abbreviations and spelling of colloquial language were retained in responses. Journalists used colloquial language such as chap (a man), journo (journalist), and media houses (media businesses, newspaper corporations) that was retained in transcriptions of their conversations.

All editors were receptive in providing access to their newspaper offices and journalists. One editor initially stated that due to the complexities of my topic (class, gender and religion) only three journalists would be made available for interviews, but upon arrival at the newspaper

office that restriction was never employed. There were no obstacles in gaining accessibility to journalists for interviews in 2007 and 2008. What emerged, as dominant themes during interviews in 2007 and 2008 were the class and political issues at Nandigram, the overall concern of practicing sensitivity during the coverage of cultural and religious issues in general and the importance of fact checking and accurate reporting. Also, as a researcher, I learned that spending more time with my subjects in their environment provided more leads and the development of information surrounding customs and political matters that were pertinent to my research.

One third of the interviewees were female. Some interviewees were selected by managing editors and some volunteered. Every editor agreed to allow journalists from different sections of the paper to participate if they were available.

In December of 2007 and December 2008, in-depth interviews were all conducted at *The Statesman*, *The Telegraph-Kolkata*, *The Hindustan Times* and *The Times of India* during the journalists work hours. All of the interviews were conducted after 3 p.m. The journalists read and signed the consent forms and were randomly assigned a number to provide them anonymity. The initial reaction to signing the consent forms was described by some interviewees as being “very formal.” Also, a prevailing question that was asked during some interviews was why I selected India to do my study [I explained that India’s print media history rooted in West Bengal and India’s status as the largest democracy in the world influenced my thesis topic selection. My exposure to the Indian culture and the similarities I found between the Indian culture and my Mexican heritage was also a contributing factor]. All of the journalists were quite open about what they thought about their profession, the manner in which they handled their reporting and the operating procedures of their employers. The interchange was informal yet professional.

Some journalists wanted assurances that their comments would remain confidential. More females than males expressed this concern as well as those whose religious affiliation was one other than Hinduism. Also, some journalists who had information on regional government corruption issues requested anonymity. To comply with the confidentiality request the journalists are all identified using a masculine pronoun.

During the interview process the interviewees gave an overview of their background and journalism experience. The average age of the interviewees was 33. One third of the journalists were female. All interviewees had college degrees, with the majority of them having master's degrees in English or journalism. Three had bachelor degrees in English and one in economics. All of the journalists were multi-lingual. Some had more than 12 years experience. The majority of the interviewees were Hindu.

To establish a free-flowing interchange, a tape recorder was not used at the onset of the interviews conducted in 2007. Although a topic guide was constructed with specified line of inquiries, most of the interviews became highly individualized and followed a semi-structured interview process. The journalists responded to questions, made comments and began to talk about their personal experiences covering stories ranging from government corruption to entertainment. Their revelations about their roles as listeners, fact-checkers and writers gave me an insight into their philosophical beliefs and how they viewed themselves as ethical journalists.

The topic guide included the following questions:

- What were the contributing factors that made you decide to pursue a career in journalism?
- How has education influenced your career?
- How much college education do you have?

- What is your age and religious background?
- Has gender, class or religion contributed to your career advancement?
- How does diversity in your country affect the way you develop and write stories?
- How does your editor influence your work ethics? Who assigns stories to you? For example, does your editor operate from a standard operating procedure?
- How do your day-to-day reporting activities differ from those of journalists who work for smaller vernacular papers?
- In February 1999, The Freedom Forum Foundation held an India Media Forum for Indian journalists. One reporter said that English-language newspapers are viewed as the news outlets that influence the decision-makers in society and government. Is that an accurate statement? How does this affect media ethics?
- How has the Press Council of India affected media ethics in your day-to-day reporting activities and at your paper?
- How has globalization affected the reporting of news and entertainment in India?
- Can you discuss the impact new technology has had on media ethics?
- Can you discuss your reporting procedures and compare them to the reporting procedures in the United States? For example, what takes precedence in reporting issues that affect your community? Do you concentrate more on local or regional issues?
- In terms of importance, where do politics rank in your coverage?

The topic posing the greatest concern and interest to journalists during the interviews was the coverage of the state government's plan to set up a chemical hub in Nandigram, the site of a fertile block of farm land located 93 miles south of Kolkata in the rural district of Purba Medinipur of West Bengal. Some journalists had been the targets of violence by citizens and

government public servants while reporting the unfolding protests and violence in Nandigram. It was discovered that a reporter from one of Kolkata's newspapers conducted a study into the Nandigram clash and interviewed journalists who may have been some of my interviewees. Because of the political and communal precariousness of this particular incident, and in addition to other journalists in my study having knowledge of police corruption and misappropriation of government funds, extra measures were taken to ensure that the journalists participating in this study were not linked or otherwise mentioned specifically in relation to their media house affiliation. It was obvious at times during the interviews that the interviewees knew one another from past professional associations.

FINDINGS

During the interviews with journalists I created a meaning-making partnership with my interviewees with trust, care and mutuality at its core to make sense of their lived experiences as journalists. This partnership provided the necessary dynamics to gain knowledge of how media ethics is applied in Kolkata, West Bengal, where the majority of the people do not have access to the economic benefits the middle-class enjoy.

The most predominant theme revealed in this study were the ethical challenges faced in the reporting of the proposed Special Economic Zone land acquisition affecting India's lower class in the rural area of Nandigram and the struggle with the CPI (M) and the opposition party members who attempted to block media coverage of the clashes. The next theme was the overall concern of practicing sensitivity during the coverage of cultural and religious issues in general. Fact-checking and accurate reporting followed as main themes related to ethical practices. The interviewees gave their perspectives on the media ethics in training, application and importance. These interpretations of social life and their impacts are discussed within their respective categories, however they were also discussed holistically because they were interconnected with the whole of what comprises the Indian culture and its relationship to the fact-finding mission of the journalists. Class, gender and religious issues were all approached with sensitivity as articulated through the stories told by journalists in this study.

Politics, Economics and Class

During this study, journalists often spoke about the growing middle class and their lifestyle in Kolkata, often referring to them as yuppies aspiring to get ahead and to elevate their standard of living. According to Vilanilam (2005) the top 10% of Indian society enjoys more than 75 percent of the nation's wealth. What is defined as the middle class is made up of salaried

employees representing 15% of the wealth. That leaves 10% of the remaining wealth shared by almost 90% of the people (Vilani, 2005). It is reported that 70% of the Indian population lives in the countryside. An estimated 110 million Indians tied to the land as farmers are in the ranks of those who have no place in the capitalist agri-business that the World Trade Organization touts as a positive movement in India's future according to Thornton and Thornton (2006). The journalists in this study discussed the plights of the marginalized, lost, and forgotten population from the lower classes although their newspapers did not do extensive coverage on these groups as a norm.

The issue that was addressed most frequently and discussed was the media coverage of the state government's plan to start a mega industrial project under a Special Economic Zone (SEZ) in the village of Nandigram. Nine out of 21 journalists spoke poignantly about it, because they had actually covered the clash, or it was related to another story they were covering, or because they had some personal views about it. In this unfolding scenario that began in 2006, journalists were witnesses to the oppressive and violent roles of the agents of government, police officers and administration officials, the courts, political parties, the governor and civil groups who were all from different class structures. Roy and Datta (2008) described the event as a "turning point in the contemporary history of West Bengal that posed a challenge to the integrity, credibility and efficiency of mass media" (p. 69). They addressed this unprecedented clash over land that challenged journalists in their day-to-day efforts to uphold media ethics. The clash created a gridlock that prevented media from getting to the truth because of physical and ideological obstacles thrown up by farmers and politicians. The media covered the land war between farmers and politicians, but the media also came under scrutiny about their coverage. The principal ruling party and the opposition party accused media houses (newspapers and

television stations) of being biased and disseminating misinformation. It was reported that the media were involved in hate campaigns, giving selective coverage to violence and the suffering resulting from the clashes (Roy & Datta, 2008).

Journalist 1 described the proposed land acquisition dispute. This dispute has been a leading story among citizens and journalists in this region and has been covered by many news outlets at the regional, national and international level and later investigated by the Indian government, human rights organizations, media organizations and press clubs. Nandigram was the issue Journalist 1 spoke most passionately about:

Recently in the state of Bengal there have been land acquisitions problems in the village of Nandigram. The villagers were resisting the acquisition, which led to clashes, deaths and investigations. Who did the blueprint of the attack to regain the ground? People don't want to talk to outsiders because the issue is so sensitive. They fear retaliation. In the shadow of terror no one wants to open up. For them, it is protection that matters. The state wants to set up an economic zone and wanted to use force.

The journalist pointed out that he had set up a four-hour interview with a person who had information on the Nandigram ordeal. In order to build trust it was important for the reporter to have an in-depth interview and chose not to inform his interviewee that their conversation was being tape recorded. In the reporter's view it was a matter of being able to cross check facts later and wanting to have a "clear reflection of the land." The conversation was vital because the man was responsible for the organization leading to the resistance to the state. In this case, the journalist said, he was an outsider interviewing an insider. The journalist emphasized, "Even if you breathe the air, you are not part of the village. I didn't live there, I am from Kolkata" (meaning that there was difficulty in getting information during the conflict).

Journalist 1 stated he didn't use a laptop during his interviews and found it difficult to get the man to speak. This journalist stated, "If you look at the genesis of the problem, mistrust is widespread." In this case, using a laptop may have impeded the communication process.

Journalist 1 stated his editor wanted to peg the Nandigram story for the people. His newspaper is aimed at the middle and upper middle class, people who have aspirations to advance in society and who contribute to the gross domestic product of the country. He sees his primary job as reporting the news. He advocates conflict resolution and stressed how people at any level in society can resolve their conflicts.

In a subsequent email communication, when questioned about the International Federation of Journalists (2007) deploring the intimidation of the media in West Bengal's Nandigram area, Journalist 1 wrote the following:

Nandigram's problem of land acquisition is not a problem restricted to a small hamlet in India's West Bengal. I guess the problem with what that area has witnessed is characteristic of all such resistances across the globe where the land owners refuse to hand over their plots to the state. I am told land acquisition in the UK takes over five years; such is the sensitive nature of the problem. I say all this simply to inform you that it would be wrong to go by any sweeping generalizations and jump to conclusions either on free press freedom (your subject) or about the state of affairs in West Bengal. I did read the IFJ article. It's not about West Bengal govt being communist and India, the biggest democracy in the world. The face of the resistance has no colour world over when it comes to standing up against any move to acquire your nest and leave you on the road. There is no denying, at Nandigram journos did face problems covering the land issue. But it was not just the Marxists alone. Even the right-wing members had resisted the media when the land was in their bastion till the colours changed and the Communists won over the land's political rights.

In Nandigram, if the Marxists failed to drive home the necessity of having a Special Economic Zone in the area to the villages, the Rightists succeeded in stroking enough passion to unite residents under a political platform and resist the move. Result: What was about acquisition and development turned out to be a pure political battle with each group trying to feed news in their way and trying to seek mileage just the way they want. Unless you have the right perspective, chances are you may get swayed by these acts of resistance.

Journalist 12 explained his experience in Nandigram from his perspective as a journalist who faced political and physical obstacles that challenged the integrity and efficiency of the media and pointed out:

Nandigram has recently been talked about a lot. The Save the Farmland issue in West Bengal is about the very fertile land. The first rule I follow is that I am there to report. I

am to perceive and recall what I see. I don't believe in analyzation. You report what is right and wrong and stick to the basics and authenticate to do the best you can under the circumstances. When you write about human issues you go to the micro level. I have written about those who are the most vulnerable, women and children. Men will fight or flee; women and children are left behind and try to hold their position.

There is large-scale violence over here. It is confusing. The day the aggression happened, in March and November (2007), I had been there the night the violence broke out. It was not accessible because of the Communist Party of India (Marxist) (CPI-M). Fifteen to 20 journalists came by car and bus, some had their cameras taken away by the left wing. The CPI-M is the dominant party.

I felt terrible and frustrated. I asked my fellow journos to ask the chief minister, under what authority young men, not police, were conducting "searches?"

This journalist was asked about the involvement of the Press Council of India.

Journalist 12 retorted, "They are in Delhi," meaning that the Press Council of India was far removed from the realities of what was occurring 680 miles away in West Bengal.

Journalist 12 pointed out that the reporters represent the angst of young men of Nandigram. He also stated that India should learn through this and used the 2008 United States presidential election as an example: "Much like the American election when McCain was running against Obama and had made his concession speech he said to move on and unite. We can fight, but then we should put our differences aside."

Journalist 12 elaborated more on the Save the Farmland issue, emphasizing that the conditions in Nandigram had been rough. Nandigram was described as a block of land that was very large with journalists staying in nearby Tamluk to have access to internet connections. The modes of transportation to this block were crude and took 4 hours to get there and 6 hours to return depending on road conditions. There was nothing to eat and there had been power cuts to the area. Journalists were constantly searching for cyber-cafes to get their information out. Journalist 12 claimed, "The ones you can't reach are the victims and the ones stepping on you are the bullies."

According to Journalist 12 media outlets were taking sides, except for three media

houses. He found himself using the phrase, “the rape of democracy.” He then said the reporting from Nandigram was editorialized. This thought came to him when he was watching TV; although he said he did it subtly the others did it blatantly. He described it as extremely polarized.

The focus of Journalist 18’s interview was the communal issue at Nandigram. This journalist is Hindu and thoughtfully stated the following about interviewing Hindus and Muslims:

From my personal experience I can tell you that I have been to Hindu and Muslim dominated places. When I go to places to interview Hindus I find it easy, while going to places where there are Muslims, it is hard for them to open up in Nandigram.

I was there for 3 to 4 days and it was difficult to move round. There was violence and bombings. It made my job difficult. Making people to talk was hard. They were unwilling to believe anyone, the ruling party, journalists, or anyone else. Some were willing to open up to Muslim journalists.

Media reporting was fractured. We couldn’t go to the Muslim areas or the ruling party areas. We couldn’t get to the areas because people were armed. Roads were dug up and no journalists were allowed. They were even asking for our names, our religion and our ID cards. The villagers were doing this.

Every district has one reporter. I did the primary leg work. We used journalists who were Muslim and who knew the area. Seventy-five percent of the population are Muslim and don’t speak English. We even dressed more casual to look like the town fellow. Some have never seen an urbanite. We made sure that English wasn’t spoken among us and we ate at the roadside teahouses. They didn’t want to talk to outsiders. We had to convince them we were one of their own and it was easier for the Muslims to do this because they could develop their confidence.

Although Journalist 6 didn’t delve into the Nandigram issue as much as other journalists, he did compare the coverage of stories targeted at the upper-mobile middle class who wanted to read something they could relate to. According to Journalist 6, his paper doesn’t run stories from far-off districts unless it is a touching story. Nandigram was important and was the exception.

Journalist 14 also made reference to Nandigram and the class divide between Indian farmers and the government. He stated that he had made many trips to Nandigram and that

journalists were threatened, heckled and prevented from entering the village. He elaborated:

In Nandigram we had to make the best use of the opportunities to do our work. When party members from the Communist Party of India, as well as its opponent, the Krishi Jami Raksha Committee, stopped us we withdrew from the place and tried again later. Sometimes we could not reach Nandigram. We operated from the nearest district town, Tamluk, and depended on the telephone. We also tried to reason with the leaders of political parties, though often, without success.

In another interview a journalist gave his view about the tensions of communal disputes and the business owners using their influence to have the press sway public opinion.

Journalist 21 discussed the division of labor between the government, the large corporations in India and the lower class farm workers:

I will tell you – Tata (The Tata Group) wanted to start a Nano plant – a car place. Many newspapers took an anti-Tata stance. If you write against them you lose out. Tata blamed the opposition on the Trinamul Party. Farmers and environmentalists said the land was very fertile – it is in an alluvial plane –it is the best land for rice – how can this (land) be given up? Tata PR asked for an explanation. There were editors who became angry but they stood their ground. There is also the Birla group (that is influential). It is a very big industry group –they have cement, furniture, sugar and media businesses.

One journalist was very passionate about the land acquisition conflict that has been covered extensively. Journalist 11 emphasized the importance of journalists looking beyond the incident being reported and analyzing information they came away with after covering official briefings. Journalist 11's concerns at this junction was the reporter's objectivity. Journalist 11 gave an in-depth account of the Nandigram communal dispute and viewed it not only as a story that was simply assigned from his chair, but as an issue that necessitated a microscopic analysis that went beyond the initial dispatch. In Nandigram he said Muslims and Hindus came together with no political leader. They reportedly stopped the administration from entering the village by digging up the roads coming into the town.

The journalist focused on the problems the journalists had while covering the conflict and facing the Communist Party of India (Marxist) (CPI-M) and said this:

We send people who cover crime or beats with similar incidents. Then political journalists were sent to get human-interest stories. There were risks. There were also some stretches of time when the CPI-M didn't let them go into the town. Journalists got beaten up and threatened and were told not to come back. My instructions were: to show courage and not to get killed, but to get the story. To do this you had to get there before the sun came up. Journalists moved around accordingly. The question is, when a person gets killed then what happens after that? Journalists are to write beyond the incident. They have to have the facts right. These days it is a prized commodity. We want people to put it in the right perspective.

Journalist 7 mentioned Nandigram by giving a historical background on the Left Front and its effects on the citizens of West Bengal. In this response, Journalist 7 discussed the Communist Party of India (Marxist) (CPI-M) and the Trinamul Congress and their influence over the lower classes (specifically calling attention to the Muslim minority) outside Kolkata.

Journalist 7 stated:

It's been a little over 30 years, since we have had the Left Front (communist party alliance where CPI-M is the party head) government. As a matter of fact, in these thirty years I've seen next to little growth in any sphere in the state of WB (West Bengal). As per the Sanchar Committee report (a report regarding the socio-economic development of the minority; minority meaning Muslims) the socio-economic development of the minority, ranked the lowest when it came to granting education. The irony being that it's the minority who has seen the government sail through the most turbulent times.

Despite the inability of the government to cater to the need of the common man, irrespective of it belonging to the majority or minority vote bank, it has managed to win the elections time and again. Until the late eighties, the only rival that CPI-M alliance had was the Indian National Congress (INC). But with Congress losing interest in WB, and the party itself splitting into the Trinamul Congress, led by Mamata Banerjee and the parent party INC, the Left front became the unchallenged party of Bengal. The people themselves want a different government, but the million-dollar question that needs to be answered is "Does Bengal have a good opposition party?" Well, no, unfortunately the Trinamul Congress is the only party that can give the Left some competition. But the antics of its leader, Mamta Banerjee, makes people wary of casting their valuable vote in her favour because of her excessive temperament. That apart, in West Bengal, the votes are primarily divided into two zones: the Calcutta zone and the rural zone. The opposition does get their votes in the city but in the villages it's the Red rule that prevails. I have heard, that most of the booths in rural Bengal are rigged; people are killed if they decide to vote against the Left. (The Nandigram incident shows that the CPI-M cadres have weapons equivalent to those used by police). They had warred against peasants wanting to defy the CPI-M and this pressure ultimately led to the Bhumi Ucched party, that is backed by the Trinamul Congress, to lead a civil war kind of a situation (while

sorry was all that the Chief Minister had to say). Under such condition or scenario the common (population) is left with no alternative but the Left front regime.

However, with so many goof-ups made by the government of late (Singur, Nandigram, etc.) there are chances for the opposition to make a come back. But if they don't manage this time, a change in the government will never happen.

Journalist 19 emphasized that his newspaper is known for its printing of heavy text while others (he named them specifically) are more interested in splashing photos on their front pages.

Unlike the other papers, Journalist 19 stated that his paper's approach to entertainers was different because it focused on what the celebrities do for the people rather than focusing on what the entertainer does for himself.

He explained how media covers celebrities and artists who make contributions for the betterment of society through their artistic and creative abilities. A particular reference was made to a theater presentation and the overall approach taken by different media on the coverage of a famous musician who performed in West Bengal. The theater presentation was regarded for providing a platform for marginalized populations from various Indian states to voice their political and social plights and used Nandigram as a backdrop.

Sensitivity

Journalist 4 did a serious piece on child trafficking in a northern city in India and the placement agencies taking children in large numbers. Organizations were trying to locate the children and get them safely back to their families. During the course of doing these series of stories, there were delays in the publication up to three to four weeks and issues with the space availability. This journalist went into detail about his feelings handling stories. He related the following facts (the name of the victim and the location of the investigation has been changed).

Amita became personal for a number of reasons. The most obvious of these is that I had spent quite a bit of time on the issue of trafficking, and had over the years, met quite a few survivors. This was the first time, however, that I was doing what is best described as an investigative campaign about the phenomenon. So I invested quite a bit of time in

my work traveling to Mumbai to actually meet some people who were accused of trafficking. It was something of a personal milestone (and thus a personal one as well, if that makes sense).

I have often interviewed children who have survived challenging circumstances, and there are a few who haven't moved me. Still, Amita was different. She was exceptionally bright, but also exceptionally withdrawn. It took time to draw her out, but she did seem to open up to me. There was a connection, however tenuous. She stayed in my thoughts long after I left her village.

To receive tragic news that she had taken her own life so soon after our meeting was a blow. I feel the paper let me tell the truth about this incident.

There was no effort to sensationalize it. I feel the greatest respect for ethics often arises not from rules and policy, but from sensitivity. Perhaps this makes more sense in perspective. In India, I fear too many people and papers don't pay attention to the death of a nobody. Tragedy is too rampant, too everyday. But Amita mattered.

Journalist 9 reflected on media ethics and whether there had been any changes in general in the Indian journalists' work ethic in the past eight years. He stated:

I do not think adhering to media ethics has become any harder in the last eight years. I have never compromised on what I have had to say or been asked to do.

At my paper, I am fortunate to work with strong personalities who stood by reports and journalists even if they tend to harm the commercial interest of the newspaper as a business house. I am sure, they could have not acted without the chief editor.

I strongly reject the notion that commitment is being replaced by commerce, not really, all I can say is that there is no single truth. There are many truths and the journalist may choose to portray one of those and that may not be the best or the fittest according to the judgment of someone else. You may always present it in a pungent and virulent manner, but rather subtle, but nonetheless in an effective manner.

Adhering to media ethics within the context of media operations was addressed and

Journalist 10 reflected on his personal view regarding this and the extent of his media training in media ethics. He stated:

There has been virtually no media ethics "training" as such. "Ethics" I think is a very personal thing and how a person applies it depends on an individual's innate sense of scrupulousness. I think that a conscientious journalist is aware that the profession demands a high degree of meticulousness as far as fact checking is concerned. Maybe a person's family/educational background—that is, the values that he/she grew up with, etc.—plays an important role. Personally, I have had the fortune to be aware of what constitutes ethical journalism. For instance, the perils of plagiarism, the importance of being precise when it comes to fact checking, etc., from a young age because my father was a well-respected journalist, broadcaster and author. Many of his friends too, who

were journalists, authors, etc. came to our house and there were discussions, debates, interactions. I was in on the ways of the journalist.

Some journalists reflected over their principal motivations to enter the field of journalism. Journalist 7 spoke passionately about the people in Kolkata being informed about the issues that affect them and their daily living. In his view, the media has the responsibility to the public to report concisely and informatively and stated:

I came in with illusions about journalism. I was seeing corruption, illiteracy, poverty and unemployment. It made me realize that I wanted to make people aware. There is no communication between diplomats and the common people. If these issues aren't focused on, then the people won't know.

He posed an example about journalists interpreting laws and writing about the laws as a service to educate the public:

There are many laws in the constitution that allows for changes, but aren't pursued. Some news stories can be elaborated. For example, if a law is passed, take that law, examine it and detail it from different perspectives so people can understand the issues. This can be accomplished through health, career oriented and special features.

Journalist 4 described the readers of his paper being 16-32 years of age, very urban and aspirational yuppies. This journalist described his feelings when he first entered his profession in journalism and stated, "At the beginning I was very idealistic. I wanted to do development issues starting with what I was writing about. I found myself tailoring my stories to what the paper wanted. I embraced the commercialism of the newspaper."

Bertrand (2000) asserted that to know oneself and to master one's field raises awareness that enables journalists to serve the people by reporting credible news through accuracy and fairness. Journalist 7 correlates his journalistic thinking to this assertion. He argued that lack of knowledge predisposes investigative journalists to focus on the negative aspects of what is seen in India such as giving more attention to garbage dumps rather than the Jain deity, Mahavir.

In another journalist's view, fact checking ensures accuracy in reporting. One journalist expressed his concern over hiring practices and qualifications journalists should have. Journalist 8 was very emphatic about a journalist's qualifications to conduct his or her job and how journalists acquire their experience. Fact checking was cited as extremely important and is a procedure that should always be applied in the field. It is a distinctive quality of a good Journalist. Journalist 8 stated that the seniors (editors) were consulted when facts could not be established. Journalist 8 stated, "We know our media ethics." His views are similar with those of Lambeth (1986) who stated, "that there is an intimate relationship between competence and a journalist's capacity as a moral agent (p. 25). More specifically, Journalist 8 stated:

Before a media outlet hires journalists they must check their corresponding degrees. Some get in because they have connections. The media house must check if the employee is prepared to do his job and what to expect. One can be picking up things on the job or they can be briefed. People usually know what is right and wrong and learn this themselves. There is a borderline.

Journalist 8 stated that journalists should ascribe importance to learning their craft and familiarizing themselves with rules and concepts. He also stated journalists who do not have degrees may learn what is right and wrong based on what they learn themselves and not what they have been taught.

Journalist 8 extensively discussed the editor's role in fact checking and how they decide what to cut from stories. He said he has had dilemmas over what quote he should use to get the correct message over to the reader and fears that sometimes readers get lost trying to figure out what a quote means. He questioned the decision-making processes of editors and stated editors can edit grammar and everything else but how do they decide what to keep and what to cut when they have not been to the site where the story was obtained.

He emphasized that stories were never made up and if there were not enough facts to substantiate a story then it should not be printed. He stated that most of the journalists where he

works were hired because of their good academic backgrounds. In addition to this, the importance of proper grammar and the use of pronouns were cited as something that reflects the quality of a newspaper. In an age where everyone has access to the same information, the quality of print media stands out, according to Journalist 8.

Journalist 20 related that he never aspired to be a reporter. He spoke about his duties and the ethical practices he follows. He acknowledged that training in media ethics helps and although journalists in India go to journalism school, without proper training, “it can get ugly.” He explained day-to-day decision-making in this way:

We follow a stylebook and what our seniors have taught us. When rape cases come in we never print names. We also look for this in stories that come off the wire. In political stories I have to be careful and not change the angle of the story. I also have to be careful about legal issues. We also have stories coming from Orissa. The people live in a remote area and it is hard to contact journalists there. We have to use our own judgment when we read their copy.

When asked how the media business adhered to media principles, he replied: “It depends on the media house. There are some who never follow ethics and create their own. Each house has their own.”

The approach and placement of articles and photographs was also discussed. Journalist 19 pointed out that photographs of French chefs are shown on the lower part of the pages and Miss World is on the side. The readers of his newspaper are people who are working and 30 years of age and above. These groups were classified as “those who are interested in reading.” Journalist 19 also pointed out, “If the news doesn’t affect the public at large, we don’t write about it.”

He also discussed the reactions of females having their pictures taken in public and how the older Chinese population in Kolkata react to having their photos taken in general:

We have problems with females because they are skeptical about what will be published. Changes were made for event information in some papers after photos showed women in

a bad light. That started eight to nine years ago. In clubs, men and females don't want pictures taken of them. We need permission to take pictures of them. We also have a strong Chinese population. When we interview the Chinese, they—the older generation—don't want their pictures taken.

The distressing outcome from one story that Journalist 4 wrote pointed to the feelings of hypocrisy he felt while covering a story in which a non-government organization (NGO) and a famous star collaborated to do a program for sick children. The star was three hours late for the program. He said it was a feel-good piece for sick kids and it seemed hypocritical but did the story anyway.

Handling ethical dilemmas during day-to-day reporting included the privacy issues surrounding the marginalization of AIDS victims. Journalist 21 mentioned a story he had written about a 14-year-old boy who had picked up the AIDS virus as a result of a blood transfusion in a state hospital. It is standard policy at his media house to change the name of the victim in these cases. The Press Council of India addresses AIDS and the media and cautions the press that they should bear in mind that “the public interest which may justify publication of a matter within the preserve of personal privacy must be a legitimate interest and not prurient or morbid curiosity” (Press Council of India, History, p. 22).

Journalist 16 discussed privacy issues regarding the publication of the names of rape victims and AIDS victims. He pointed out that there had been cases in which the name of a rape victim's father was used in the articles and the victim was consequently identified.

In another case he mentioned a story about a man who contracted AIDS in Mumbai and whose name had been released to the public and upon his return to his village he was prohibited from using the community water tap and a pond 30 km away. This illustrates how the unethical release of the name of a person infected with AIDS can adversely affect his day-to-day survival as an AIDS victim.

Interview 17 discussed the role of the Press Council of India and how certain procedures must be followed, for example not printing the name of a rape victim and not naming sources.

Journalist 6 stated that he faces ethical dilemmas on a day-to-day basis that amounts to the on going process of on-the-job training. He stated the following about sensitivity:

One time I did a story on a jobless woman who committed suicide. I went to the scene and to the hospital. Her head was smashed, so her picture was not shown. But the television outlets went with the picture. I finished the story without her name. It was a grief issue. I just got the basic details. In another example there had been a rash of traffic accidents. I spoke to mothers and asked them what were the victim's likes and dislikes and so on.

According to Journalist 6, some television journalists disregard media ethics and do more sensationalizing than print media. In one report a mob stripped a woman in public and the television crew filmed the whole incident.

When asked about sensationalism, Journalist 9 replied that sensationalism is more prevalent in the national media and English TV and gave this example:

A thief was caught by the general people. The police got a hold of the thief and tied a rope around his neck. He was dragged by the police and everything was shot or caught by the TV media.

In another example a guy stabbed a girl. He took out a knife and followed the girl and this was shot by the TV. There are two issues faced by a journalist. This is the issue. As a journalist do I grab that boy or do I just film it? It's great footage to have. Do I remain emotionless and capture it because it will be a great story? Then there is the same thing with the boy who is stabbing a girl who jilted him. If I have it on film it will enable prosecution.

In the other story, the police are dragging the suspect- do I stop the police, or do I stay as a journalist?

There was another story in *Times Now* which has a girl and a boy pulling a plough, you can argue that it is child labor, and it is bad and a human rights violation. You have cultivation being done by oxen and machines - then you have the girl or boy pulling a plough. The temptation is so large; you have to decide if you want to do the story or react as a normal human being.

For some papers it is a question of community. It counts and has power even if it doesn't in the world.

Religion—An Insider and Outsider Perspective

During the course of obtaining information and making sense of the world, all journalists find themselves in situations in which they must practice empathy with those from various religious backgrounds. The religions practiced by the majority of Indians are Hinduism followed by Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism.

Journalist 2 spoke about mainstream parties that are known to play with the sentiment of religion. He stated the following in countering this problem:

We are never going to hurt religious sentiment and if we know it will happen, we will not print it. We are cautious. There are mainstream parties who know how to play with the sentiment. When they try to play with these shenanigans we attack them (meaning we confront them).

In one high profile article, one journalist pointed out the sensitive nature of dealing with Muslims and Hindus and arranged marriages. He recounted the details of the investigation into the death of a young Muslim computer expert who married a Hindu woman who was the daughter of a wealthy father from a high caste. The woman's father used politicians to get the woman back and the husband was later found dead. This led to an investigation by the CBI (Central Bureau of Investigation in India) into the death. Journalist 5 stated:

The police said it was a suicide. The commissioner was sacked because of the pressure we put on him. We converted it into a public campaign and we took the readers with us. The media did not do it alone. There was a candlelight campaign on Saint Xavier St. The people were demanding justice. The case is still going on. It was a sensitive issue because of the tension between Hindus and Muslims. If we went full blast against the father we might drive a wedge and cause communal tension or we can justify what the case we made was that the couple married by mutual consent. Both families used (our paper) to voice their views.

Sometime in December the woman writes a letter to the mother-in-law and it was printed. My view is that there should have been a line drawn because it was a personal issue and should not have been placed in a public domain. Once we created public upheaval, we should have reported facts and not pry into private lives.

Journalist 2 mentioned how people's last names reveal what geographic location they

come from in India. He discussed the reporting of stories involving the Muslim population. He stated that sending journalists out to get stories who are familiar with the religious backgrounds of the public helps in “striking up a deal.” He made a comparison to the information flow within the CIA and referred to it as a type of specialization.

While some journalists say there are formal and informal codes of ethics, one Journalist stated there really aren't any codes and discussed how sensitivity was an integral part of the assignments he covered in Orissa, a state on the Eastern coast of India, which has been the site of violence against minority Christian groups. Journalist 10 gave the following account:

I think there are certain determinative factors for each story and the approaches are very personal. I have my own method. If I am handling religious issues I have to be culturally aware. I have to be culturally aware of whatever it is, religion, gender or class. I have to be sensitive.

This is when your own code evolves. One time I had to do a couple of stories and interviewed men and women from the gay community. Since I am not from that community, I had to be careful not to put up a barrier. I had to make sure I did not say “you, them and us.”

I think the degree of sensitivity that I employ depends on the subject matter I am dealing with. When I say “employ” however, I don't mean it's something that I switch on or off, but it's an internal sense of judgment I think that comes into play.

One of my recent assignments took me to Orissa to cover the violence against the minority Christian community in the state's Khandamal district. I think your ability to report sensitively on what you see depends entirely on your ability to bridge the “distance” between you and your subject, but in some cases, when reporting on the helpless suffering, the challenge becomes to retain journalistic distance! This was one such incident. I think that the “sensitivity” with which I look at and what is happening does not come from any sense of journalistic ethics or from any political correctness or even from a sense of justice but from empathy.

Journalist 13 discussed operational procedures and media ethics and said this about a reporter's day-to-day reporting activities:

What I should say, there is no formal training of journalists. It is expected that people joining an English newspaper are trained and know basic media ethics. There is a scope of interpretation, that is why you have to be careful when an issue is sensitive. There are issues such as administrative reporting when the government officials do not give political connotations and just give an obvious

comment. This is when you move on with your senior officials and you have to get the background story. This is relevant to terrorism and religious strife. In Orissa there have been assaults on Christians regarding conversion. The right wing Hindu faction has been trying to portray this as a natural protest against those who lure poor people with education and food. Hindus are spreading fear that they are under threat from Muslims. How do I react? Am I a party to this or am I unbiased? In West Bengal religious issues do not factor in because it maintains a secular government due to the left dominance. But biases slip into the newspaper, and what we are doing is asking for quotes from both sides after speaking to officials. If there is a change, talk to those who are attached and others so you can have all sides. If you don't have anything written you go by convention.

Journalist 17 addressed the coverage of sensitive issues that included religion. He stated that he had to be very cautious when casually using one or two words and emphasized the following:

If there is a riot it is your duty not to cause conflict and not to spread rumors. There must be objectivity and you crosscheck information. For example, in 1996 Hindus in Uttar Pradesh demolished a Muslim mosque. There were riots all over. About 20 Muslims got killed and 20 Hindus were burned. There are people who want to destabilize the situation. In reporting you must be very objective.

In another example, Journalist 7 described a story he wrote from his perspective about a Muslim woman and Islam. The reporter mentioned that his religious affiliation helped him in handling this story. This interview occurred in Kolkata where the municipal government wanted to make marriage registration mandatory. This proposed ordinance had created controversy. For the Muslim woman, marriage registration was not important. According to Muslim belief a contract is signed by the bride and groom. The contract need not be legally registered. The imams contrast their marital contract and proof with the Hindus who do not follow this practice and as the journalist pointed out: "The Hindus do this ritually going around a fire."

As the interview progressed, Journalist 7 outlined the ethical principles he followed:

I follow the principles that if the story is good and justified, then I go ahead with the story without ruffling feathers. I have to be convinced that there is a story. I must tell you that at times we are prejudiced. Prejudice comes out due to lack of knowledge.

The Roles of Journalists Reporting Gender Issues

Journalist 11 described his experience working with female journalists and evaluated their ability to obtain information because of their gender. Even the journalists' socio-economic status was compared to their perceived work ethic:

My experience in working in television where I had 30 journalists, 20 of which were women, revealed that women were more aggressive, more competent and more conscientious. They have less distraction. They are very obedient and sincere.

For example, police don't open up (to journalists) and here they (women) have an advantage. Even in these days some women regard their job as not important.

Some women just don't care. But I checked their backgrounds and I found that these women come from rich and well-off backgrounds. In television if I needed a story they would go out and get it. However, I would not send them out to the outskirts (dangerous remote places).

Another journalist gave an example regarding the difficulty women faced trying to cross religious and cultural barriers in the neighborhoods of Kolkata. Journalist 7 cited an example in which a female colleague had considerable difficulty in obtaining a story on Kolkatans who are animal trainers and use monkeys to entertain people for a living. The people who are typically engaged in this business are Muslim, live in impoverished neighborhoods and are reluctant to speak to non-Muslims. Although the journalist seeking this story idea was able to get the required information for her story, she still had to take a male colleague along for follow-up interviews.

Journalist 18 spoke about the class divide pertaining to the coverage on women living in the city compared to those living in the villages outside Kolkata and pointed out:

In our reporting when women are raped in Kolkata or 30 km from the interior district we will only have four lines. English papers focus on urbanites and the English-educated population.

More women issues have come to the front pages since the late 90s. Over the past 4 to 5 years women have become involved with Non-Government Organizations. Reporting on gender issues were not being adequately done. We are just covering issues in urban areas,

gender issues in schools, the family nucleus and work. We also have journalists who cover human rights.

Journalist 18 added this about the media's fair and accurate coverage of class, race and religion:

Media ethics has improved over five years. Sometimes we are irresponsible and we are not covering all aspects of class, race and religion. When we cover urban and agrarian issues, we are biased. Hopefully we will be able to make up for what we have not been able to do.

Journalist 17 pointed out the differences in media coverage regarding the violence on women in rural and urban areas:

Violence on women is increasing and very touchy. In rural areas when a woman is tortured it is not reported because the woman fears shame. In urban areas there are more educated women and it is different. Rural women have no degrees. In urban areas women work in offices. Approach to life is different. Women are becoming economically dependent and when filing for divorce they have more standing and support.

In the rural areas there is no support and in some cases retaliation. There are organizations being set up to help them.

Philipose (as cited in Rajan, 2005) discussed the status of women in India and how it is linked to caste, community and class. She stated that it would be difficult for a majority of women in India to advance in the media profession. She does not attribute this to lack of political and economic resources but attributes it to the media's focus on power. Profit-making along with the influence of globalization results in low priority given to the reporting of serious women's issues while infotainment is given higher priority.

One journalist covered entertainment and explained his experience with a movie director who was instrumental in getting him connected with a famous Bollywood movie actor whose wife was a member of the government and whose son was rumored to be married. To illustrate the dilemma, the journalist spoke about his decision whether to ask the mother a pointed question about her son's possible marriage. The journalist had access to the mother through a director

while other media access was blocked. The journalist knew that he shouldn't ask the mother directly who her son was marrying but did it anyway. Journalist 3 stated:

I started chatting with the mother and about her son marrying the lady. I could not pop the question about whether they would marry. Later, I did. The next day the story came out. It was a tongue-in-cheek copy. The director was upset and the mother was upset with the headline. There was no reason for her to react the way she did. She was upset with the wording in the headline. The director had complete trust in me. I was asked to write the copy and I was told it would be tongue-in-cheek.

I was troubled because of breaking up my relationship with the director and breaching his trust.

The newsworthiness of women's issues and making the news is one thing, but as illustrated in this example, the manner in which the stories and their angles are ethically obtained and printed is intrinsic to the reporting process. Later, the journalist explained that other rival newspapers were tailing the mother and wanted to get a story on a film she was doing. There were other developing stories on how the same director allegedly lifted scenes from another film. The director ended up calling the journalist asking him to do a positive story on him and he refused.

Journalist 10 emphasized that taking a proper approach in reporting gay issues is critical and personal. He related his interactions with the gay community:

In terms of gender I do not have to be too careful with women. While doing another story on a movie about a lesbian relationship among girlfriends I wanted to know how true to life it was. My sources, who were from a Kolkata-based lesbian activist group, explained how the movie did not depict their reality. I had to track a founder of a gay organization for the story. I had to be careful not to offend her and she asked me not to use her name. She appreciated me doing the story.

DISCUSSION

This study focused on developing a corpus of narratives collected from journalists working for Indian-English newspapers in Kolkata and was analyzed through the lens of the social exchange theory as applied to media ethics. The values of truth, justice, freedom, integrity, impartiality and fair play enter into the social exchange process simply because human beings apply those values in daily life. I asserted that John Thibaut and Harold Kelly's theory of interdependence, also referred to as the social exchange theory, applies to Indian media practitioners at all levels throughout their relationships (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959). They voluntarily enter and stay in media relationships only as long as it is adequately satisfactory in terms of their rewards and whether the assigned values attached to the rewards are profitable. These relationships ultimately impact ethical media practices. This can also be applied to the person giving information to journalists and those who will ultimately read the printed stories. Sabatelli and Shehan, (as cited in West & Turner, 2000, p. 181) noted in their research that, "The social exchange approach views relationships through the metaphor of the marketplace, where each person acts out of a self-oriented goal of profit taking." Exploration into the social exchange theories that pertains to media interrelationships was undertaken to further explore this application, particularly to build upon Roloff's research on how self-interest does not have to be a negative thing, but rather as Roloff (1981) explained, when self-interest is recognized, it should actually enhance a relationship. Chadwick-Jones (1976) suggested that relations are joint products of their interdependent actions. If media relationships and the effects of social exchange between editors and Journalists, journalists and the public and the institutions they belong to are studied as a whole, we can determine how self-interest can operate in an ethically rewarding

action in the sense that what is ethical is better and can be controlled by the individual in a positive manner.

Cole, Schaninger, and Harris (2002) discussed diverse theories on social exchange. They suggested that exchange could be viewed dyadically or systematically. Within the media exchange system this could support individualistic or collectivist goals and exchange can evolve through reciprocity in complex and varied exchanges (Cole, et al., 2002). This is precisely illustrated in the Indian journalist's reactions and reporting in issues related to class, gender and religious issues. Blau (as cited in Boss, Doherty, LaRossa, Schumm, & Stienmetz, 1993, p. 391) also pointed to the alternative potential relationships humans select by ranking alternatives based on the best, actual or expected experiences. During the exchange process, participants compete and impress each other to obtain valuable rewards. Blau lists rewards in the general classes of money, social approval, esteem or respect, and compliance. It is in the collectivist tradition that Blau recognizes the influence of social norms on the exchange process. This concept is applicable to the social and economic exchange processes in the Indian-English print media and the political relationship they have with their government.

Publishers and editors have self-oriented goals of profit taking that directly influence journalists. All media workers basically operate within the framework of behaviorism and basic economics described by Boss et al. (1993) with controlling factors that mediate its formation, maintenance, breakdown, and dynamics that characterize it. These relationships impact the day-to-day activities of Indian journalists who are the information gatherers for market-driven media institutions whose jobs could not be supported without the revenue generated from advertising.

Granovetter (as cited in Butt, 1997, p. 11) also discussed factors that are related to the social and cultural life of the economy. These factors are relevant to the media industry and the

businesses they have social and economic exchanges with. He claimed:

- All economic transactions are ‘embedded’ in a complex web of social relationships;
- Economic action is undertaken for both economic and non-economic reasons; and
- Institutions constraining economic interaction are socially constructed.

This is illustrated in an example given by Journalist 2 when he recounted how he faced ethical dilemmas a number of times. He explained how he dealt with it in the business world:

There is always a time when businesses are trying to pass off information. Corporations want to be politically correct and there is always this game of masking. There is much competition. Everyone is trying to get something in the business and corporate world. But when the news source is restricted the source becomes selective and he decides what to release and to whom. It is new level in the playing field. My understanding is, if something good is happening, then it should be reported, but there is news and there is government. There are people who say ‘Please, please, print this!’ We have meetings and we decide which stories to take and which to spike. You have to justify your salary.

Other studies revealed that the relationship between democracy and press pluralism is both positive and reciprocal (Woods, 2007). Both the laws and principles of India’s democracy, essential for free and diverse expression, contribute to the safeguarding and improvement of the conditions in the democratically elected communist government of West Bengal. Although agents from the ruling party and the opposition party of West Bengal restricted the free-flow of information during the Nandigram clash, journalists still obtained and disseminated the information to the public, enabling them to scrutinize their public officials that eventually resulted in change and a victory for the Trinamul Congress during the 2009 elections in the Nandigram district.

The social exchange process is a voluntary action and transference of resources from one person to another. It occurs under environmental conditions that make a situation rewarding and can involve social exchanges as well as economic exchanges. Foa and Foa (as cited in Roloff, 1981, p. 17-18) examined the setting in which the exchange takes place and focused their

attention on the objects being exchanged. The important concept in the exchange process involves resources. Foa and Foa explained that resources could be commodities, material or symbolic, which can be transferred through interpersonal behavior that is a shared meaning (as cited in Roloff, 1981). The six types of resources are: love, status, services, goods, information and money. Information and methods of obtaining information along with money would be the biggest resources for print media because information makes the money and money runs the business.

However, Roloff (1981) makes a distinction between the types of resources and places them within the dimensions of particularism and concreteness. Particularism represents the degree of value associated with a resource with the person it is coming from. Love has the greatest value in this category and is the communication of affection, warmth and comfort. Expressions of affection from an attractive partner will be more valued than those similar expressions received from an unattractive person. This example of particularism can be applied to readers and the stories they are drawn to and how much value they place on what they are seeing and reading. Affection could be re-defined as the value of reflection or perception assessed by the reader. What is defined as an attractive partner can be re-defined as a popular person who is the focus of a transferal image within a communication process. During the communication process the reader may get feelings of warmth and comfort from a “feel-good” piece of journalism that becomes a shared meaning.

The example provided by Journalist 19 illustrated how the media industry does not print stories showing unattractive people when he discussed how feature stories on rural people are not usually done because the people “are not that great looking” (although he said that his newspaper did not follow that line of thinking). If readers pay for celebrity type coverage that they find

appealing and desirable in terms of photos that stimulate positive reception and stories that entertain, then the exchange process can be categorized as particularistic. In another comparison a reporter can view a person as a valuable source of information that the reporter needs in order to write a high profile story, hence the value of the resource is elevated in this sense. The source increases in value economically as the story becomes more popular. What begins as a series of articles, such as the series on child trafficking that took a tragic turn when the child returned home and committed suicide, can increase in value if the story ultimately was in contention for a press award. In this theoretical application the reader becomes informed about child trafficking and its negative effect on society, but may influence the reader to become an advocate against child trafficking prompting a change for the betterment of society. The reporter receives accolades from his or her editor and the newspaper that printed the article is recognized resulting in a positive impact on its reputation and circulation.

Information is classified as more particularistic than money, but less so than services, status and love, according to Roloff (1981). In this example, information holds a great deal of value for the reporter, but advertising and the exchange of money are considered more concrete because the exchange can be observed. Roloff (1981) suggested that concreteness refers to the specific form the resource takes in exchange (p. 22). Information would be the least concrete because it is more abstract. But in some cases, it can become concrete based on the social exchange processes and the rewards that are reaped. Services are more concrete because they are easy to observe in an exchange.

Journalists do not buy information (although some media houses have reportedly engaged in this practice today) but they seek it, develop it and print it in forms of news, entertainment and advertising that shapes opinions, markets commodities and inform the public. Roloff's value

monitor can access the newsworthiness of a story and although it is not completely measurable and concrete, such as money is, it still reflects a value for a reporter who gauges the information and makes ethical decisions about how he or she proceeds to obtain it and presents it to their readers. The social exchange process occurs between reporters and editors and reporters and information sources and the values they place on ethical principles makes the social exchanges rewarding.

Politics and government are ubiquitous in ongoing social exchange processes in the media business. In one case editors illustrated the effects of political influence through the writing and placement of headlines. The prevalence of rewriting stories was mentioned and how the practice is unfair to the journalists. Journalist 20 mentioned two specific media outlets who engaged in this practice, one of which he was employed by and subsequently left because he was against and uncomfortable with this practice. This journalist regarded the rewriting of stories unethical and chose to leave his place of employment than to follow this practice.

Journalist 17 stated there is a global shift in the lack of investigative pieces and how media ethics change in certain environments. He stated:

We try to cater to the community because of our duty to give out information. When I joined in 1978 there was more investigative reporting and watching of the government. Reporters get their information from officials. If they shut their mouths then their source is shut. Ethics change from time to time. Honesty lies with the individual. Editors cross check for genuine content. People are more concerned about each other than they were 20 years ago.

I am a very positive person, whether it is a sensational media or a happy media, on the whole, it is moving forward and those stories that are positive should not be ignored.

The environments where resources are exchanged are shifting within the social structures of class, gender and religion over periods of time, within institutions and at local, regional and international levels. Rewards come in the form of accolades from peers and editors for well-written stories, from human-rights activists who encourage exposing corrupt and oppressive

officials and from regular citizens who just want to tell a story that may contribute to a positive social change that will impact their community. The reciprocated rewards can be protracted into complex networks and come in the form of indirect exchanges over time according to Turner (as cited in Boss et al. 1993). The media economic and social exchange processes within the operating organizational structure of media houses in India is interchangeably working and constantly dependent upon the people and the institutions they belong to. Ultimately, all parties will reap the benefits from their daily exchanges based on how well they ethically conduct themselves. That will affect the final product of good journalism.

The degree in which editors and reporters enhanced their relationships with the public by adhering to a code of media ethics in India's diverse cultural environment was reflected in this study. Although scholars have stated that the central concepts of the social exchange theory are not clearly defined and therefore, the theory is not testable, Roloff (1981) argued that some work has been done to create lists of rewards in advance by simply observing what people do and labeling that as rewarding because people are doing it. If the actions Indian reporters engage in are ethical and become rewarding, the question is whether Indian reporter's relationships within their community are enhanced and recognized within the media institution and in the public's view. This would contribute to their credibility and social responsibility. The following narratives obtained from the interviewees illustrated what reporters observed, did and experienced. As abstract as they may be, they are relevant to the ethical principles they retain and illuminate Roloff's social exchange concepts.

Journalist 7's reflected on what kind of journalist he wanted to be. He clearly stated that if his job demanded the invasion of privacy of a convicted rapist's family during the "rarest of rarest of cases" this was not the type of activity that reflected the type of journalist he envisioned

himself to be. In his view, if the rapist committed the crime then the questions pertaining to the crime should be addressed to the convicted rapist on death row and not to his immediate family. Journalist 7 upholds his ethical code individually by deciding not to invade the privacy of the people he interviews in certain cases. However, if his editor asks him to pursue a story which may involve invading someone's privacy he may not find this practice rewarding within media company practices.

This reporter's experiences reflect what Bertrand (2000) described as media ethics that are those developed rules that are projected from a body of moral principles. The thoughts and actions presented by Journalist 7 corresponded to Bertrand's assertions that "A given person subscribes to certain principles because they correspond to the vision he/she has of fellow human beings and of the universe" (Bertrand, 2000, p. 29).

Several journalists in this study pointed to the organizational structures of their employers. Editors and reporters perform media functions within their organizations and their roles determine their views and shape their orientations during their day-to-day reporting activities. While some said that their managing editors or seniors were supportive and encouraged the coverage of high profile stories, others recounted how stories casting an unfavorable image on certain businesses are hardly covered on the authority of their seniors. In one example, Journalist 16 stated that there was a lockout by jute (fiber) employees that caused the closure of approximately 46 out of the 56 jute facilities in West Bengal because the laborers were protesting low wages and wanted a pay hike. Journalists did not cover the story because it would cast a bad light on the jute industry and its owner, the Birla Group. The decision for the media outlet not to exchange information between the laborers and Birla and putting it out to the public is complex because the media outlet decided not to cover the story extensively to preserve

their relationship with Birla which has more status than the laborers. The media house ascribes more value to Birla than the laborers although the laborers are not enjoying the economic status of the Birla group and would probably benefit from having their story told to the community.

The challenges faced during the coverage of the communal violence and reporters getting to sources of information were illustrated during the Nandigram clash. Not only were journalists trying to get the truth, they had to get to the location where the truth was. Whether they were within the safe confines of a police station or inside tea houses, the challenge was to listen to the citizens of Nandigram, the representatives from the ruling and opposition parties and to get the information while they were hampered by lack of internet connections and power outages. In this case the social exchanges were complex but the value of the information was high, for reasons of journalism integrity and profit for media owners.

Many reporters risked their lives to get their stories out to the public. There was the restriction of freedom of the press but what followed was the media educating the public and the media world as a whole on the events that occurred. Reporters are the public's trustees to report fully and truthfully in all matters. Roy and Datta (2008) reported on the integrity, credibility and efficiency of the mass media in his survey among journalists. Documentation was made during the cycles of the capture and recapture, resistance and liberation of Nandigram and on the challenges faced by 34 reporters who were threatened, intimidated and attacked from hostile members belonging to the principle ruling party, the Communist Party of India (Marxist) (CPI-M), and the opposition party, the Trinamul Congress-led Bhumi Uchched Pratirodh Committee (BUPC) activists. Reporting the truth is intrinsic to accuracy. Incorporating different information-gathering techniques and piecing together evidence from various sources ensures validity. Roy and Datta (2008) explained that the harassment from the CPI-M was viewed "as

systematic, while the hostilities from the BUPC were sporadic” (p.71). One Trinamul leader reportedly entered a police station and told a local correspondent if he reported his findings he would not be able to leave the station and the CPI-M representatives could not save him. Later, someone in the crowd outside the station yelled, “Come out from the police station. We have acid for you. You won’t have to go back with your face intact,” (Roy & Datta, 2008, p. 71).

Herrscher (2002) outlined a list of principles encompassing a universal code of ethics for journalists. This includes telling the truth about events. Truth telling is at the core of journalism ethics. It is the universal goal of all journalists to be objective, but there are those who say that objectivity is unattainable. Every journalist has the individual responsibility to evaluate information and insure that what he or she presents to the public is complete, grounded in honesty and without conflict of interest. Journalists must ensure that all of those who are the subject of their newsgathering are treated with equality and fairness regardless of their race, class, gender and religion. Chuck Trapkus wrote (as cited in Atkins, 2002) that journalists eventually establish their identity and follow through with their resolutions of problems which for reporters in India could include such dilemmas as privacy issues pertaining to AID’s victims, corporate bribery, undercover reporting of child trafficking, and conflicts of interest with big business, celebrities and politicians.

This study revealed that the majority of the reporters averted socially divisive practices such as the marginalization of at-risk populations. Sensitivity and truth telling was practiced in most if not all circumstances. However, this does not imply that all the media outlets and their policies are in line with what the journalists believed. The media outlets’ ideology and capitalist quest for profit making influence and control the individual reporters’ social responses to the

stories they cover. Lull (2000) wrote that the elite that wields a socio-economic advantage could influence society with their preferred ideological agenda, which is illustrated in this case.

The ruling party, which is the Communist Party of India (Marxist), wields the greatest power and is a persuasive force as an “information elite” as defined by Lull (2000, p. 14). The opposition group, The Trinamul Congress that won the district election in Nandigram in 2009 was successful in winning votes from the farmers after the Nandigram clash. Lull asserted that the expressions “capitalist ideology” and “socialist ideology” call attention to two contrasting, often competing, political-economic-cultural systems (Lull, 2000, p. 15). Roy and Datta (2008) stated that the journalists they interviewed felt that the media houses were divided along political lines when it came to the media’s fairness and objective reporting on Nandigram. Biased reporting was attributed to Bengal media’s division along political lines, but most journalists said it was also attributed to the business strategies of media houses, restrictive access to the area, and keeping certain media houses from circulating newspapers and making telecasts (p. 80).

Many of the reporters stated that they were catering to the tastes and opinions of Kolkatans and others in specific age groups who were classified as aspiring yuppies, urbanites, and those who contribute India’s GDP. According to Vilanilam (2005) the Indian media are owned by the affluent and are managed by those who are focused on the profits of advertising and the urbanites who contribute to their profitability. Journalist 11 supported this assertion and cited credibility as one of the reasons a newspaper grows and attracts readers, but the owners of the paper look to profitability. He explained how the spending habits of the emerging middle class has changed the landscape of Kolkata and stated: “Kolkata has changed...restaurants are full...night clubs even more. You wouldn’t even think it was India. Lifestyle reporting has

become very important. People have become adverse to politicians. Globalization as been part of it.”

Journalist 5 spoke about Kolkata’s desire to change its image. In spite of the Marxist government that has been in power for three decades, the bourgeoisie culture has remained. He stated that the city had grown organically and lacked urban planning. He explained while cities such as Bangalore are addressing urban development that contributes to the economy, Kolkata started out late in planning and urban development. He pointed out that the people of Kolkata have to identify with their city and love it to improve its image. This journalist said there was a lack of belonging and the lack of public will which are necessary components to make things happen. He stated, “If you are dependent on the political heads – it won’t happen. People say there is no political world.”

Journalist 7 conducted an investigation on a rape suspect who committed what the journalist referred to as the “rarest of cases.” The suspect received the death penalty and was to be hung for his crime. The media sensationalized the case. Although this was a newsworthy story that had a great deal of value, Journalist 7 thought that the coverage was contrary to journalism ethical principles because of the handling of privacy issues. He stated:

The coverage of this story stirred fierce competition among the media. One television station interviewed the suspect’s sister who was howling and crying. One newspaper reported what the crook was eating and what FM channel he was listening to. There is no need for the media to report on this. This is not responsible journalism. A protocol has to be followed.

Feature articles that transmit culture through entertainment were part of some of the journalists’ day-to-day reporting and were discussed. Articles included critiques of movies portraying the relationships of lesbians in the community, music relating to communal issues and stories about popular Indian movie actors. In the case where one journalist wrote an article about the realities of lesbian relationships, the reporter and a prominent member of the gay community

had a positive social exchange of resources that resulted in a story that appealed to the gay community and met the readership needs of a minority group.

The application of the social exchange process pertaining to the definition of the unethical practice of accepting gifts is determined by the journalist's cultural setting in which it develops and takes place, however accepting anything of value is strictly prohibited. One reporter mentioned that his media house requires entry-level reporters to sign an agreement that they will not accept bribes. It is straightforward and if reporters violate the policy they are disciplined. Journalist 16 discussed his newspaper's standard media ethics policy and how it was followed:

No, unfortunately, my newspaper does not have a written code, but we have general ethics like: Do not accept bribes. Do not accept money. Do not write stories for money. Do not do anything wrong. Do not be part of anything that is wrong. Try to take an ethical stand. These kinds of generalized things are there, but they are not written. Some of the newspapers do have them. You know, you get to know them gradually.

According to Journalist 8 there could be circumstances in which refusing a gift could be perceived as a sign of rudeness and equated to not being polite. When asked to share an example of this he stated:

We cover a lot of fashion boutiques. An example would be if one of the owners called me and asked me to come over and pick something I like. We aren't doing this to get stories and it would spoil good journalism. It always helps to know right from wrong. I know there are case studies and these studies back this up. I know that I am the type of person who goes by the book.

One journalist stated that people have never offered him money for stories, although he stated gifts are offered, but he did not view this as journalists conniving with business owners to write good stories. He emphatically stated he had never been faced with an exchange of money for a positive story. Journalist 9 stated a good story, a positive story, is one that people will talk about, one that will make an impact or a breaking story. Everything else is second to a good story.

The topic of the jute (fiber) industry came up and Journalist 2 mentioned the exchange he had with one businessman:

There was a jute guy who wanted a more positive image. I was not asked specifics. But there were little nuggets here and there and implications on how I would receive money. I told him to his face I would not mention him in my story. He told me he wasn't that type of a guy. I was taken back by this.

This chap and I speak the same language. I come from the state of Rajasthan and so does this chap. He knew we spoke the same language and we came from the same place. That is why he opened up.

Language was seen as helpful to bridge cultural difference. Journalist 6 who speaks English, Bengali, Punjabi, Hindi and Urdu believed multilingualism helps reporters and stated, "Language ability helps communication."

Journalist 21 discussed the profitability of health and education reporting. In his view journalists are expected to "take care" of these stories because of the media house policies and their economic exchange relationships. "If a reporter is faced with this dilemma, what can be done about it?" He asked. This example is reflective of the principle of utility. Profit making is the goal of big business and writing detrimental stories about Birla is not the policy at Journalist 21's media house. His challenge was to avoid writing articles that would harm this business and the media house relations. Generalizing the news about nursing homes was his solution. He emphasized that he and his co-workers serve the company's interest or they face termination. This correlates with research done by Tehranian (2002) who stated that historical evidence suggested "the media are neither all-powerful nor all-powerless" (p. 76). The media plays a significant role only when they are tied to institutions such as government, business, education and civil society organizations, and when this occurs those institutions direct media messages and a loss of credibility is the result (Tehranian, 2002).

Throughout this study the issue of governance, influence and power arose. Journalist 2

discussed the ruling party's actions of sending out investor friendly signals. He stated they see the importance of investment and how this is trickling down to the grass root level. The Communist Party of India (Marxist) recently marked its 30th anniversary as the longest democratically elected communist state government in the world and his discussion on the media and government followed in this manner:

The government is communist. Our state has a history of militant trade unions. For example, with a militant trade union story, the government tries to play it down when they are called for a reaction. They tell us not to blow it out of proportion. They want the outside to know that all is hunky-dory.

Journalist 14 discussed the problem journalists face when they write about matters concerning powerful political entities and how those entities are covered. He stated:

Yes, in our city there are parties that have a lot of political power. I think it is a common experience of reporters that stories which highlight the activities of these parties and their lines of thought appear more frequently while stories relating to their opponents are often spiked. Readers see what appear in the newspapers, they don't know what is spiked.

The discussion of ethics entered into every interview that was conducted and was interconnected with observations, actions and beliefs that the interviewees discussed about their reporting activities.

Journalist 15 had extensive journalism experience. Initially, he wanted to have a civil service job, possibly in the field of law enforcement, but that did not materialize so he became a journalist. He ascribed a great deal of importance to in-depth investigative reporting and accuracy. He simply stated that there are good people and there are bad people and as Westerners say, "There are the good guys and the bad guys." He stated he knows exactly what to do regarding media ethics, that he doesn't have to think about it, nor does he ask himself questions and operates by instinct. He gets to the underlying information and knows how to react, making reference to stories that exposed evil. These stories required accuracy and in-depth

investigation into characters that did not retain high moral standards. One story focused on a “corrupt villain” who was a police officer. He pointed out that the person he was targeting was close to him. The officer eventually confronted the reporter on why he had done the story on him. The reporter replied stating: “Because something was going wrong with the taxpayer’s money.” The reporter’s friend expected that the journalist would have valued their relationship more than the story he chose to write.

In another case, Journalist 15 stated that during his investigations into the governmental matters of West Bengal, files and the “nitty gritty” were not accessible for inspection. The difficulty in obtaining records sometimes prompted in-depth reporting into government corruption and in some cases major corporations who were involved.

This reporter stated that he didn’t think any paper had a written code of ethics and emphasized, “There is no written code of ethics—it is unwritten—we just learn it on the job. We are just told to write the truth.”

The results from the information gathered from 21 Indian reporters revealed that religion is very much a part of contemporary life and affects social exchanges in Kolkata within their social structures and media institutions. Once private issues enter the public sphere, most reporters stated that they practice caution and discretion to avoid insensitivity. However, as one reporter pointed out, there are uncontrollable circumstances that surface once a story has been printed. This was illustrated in the story about the Hindu woman and the Muslim man who married without their parents’ consent that resulted in a tragic death of the husband. This was also revealed in the article about Muslims, who traditionally hold jobs as animal trainers and are suspicious of others who do not belong or work in their social-economic environments and are not from the same religious background.

The completeness of information was exhibited through the investigative efforts done by reporters that resulted in the exposure of the state's misapplication of funds. Those dealing with Birla industries and the jute manufacturers gave examples of the conflict of interests that arise between journalists, businesses and their resources. The definition of news, the right of the public to know if the news they are receiving is based on honest practices, respect for privacy and the fair and equal treatment of ethnic groups and minorities were explained and followed by the reporters covering crime, judicial practices, the courts and gay issues. These operating ethical principles constitute a core list that can be adopted regionally as well as internationally and can be upheld under all circumstances.

The second part to Roy and Datta's (2008) Nandigram study will not be available until Spring 2009. This would have provided the public's perspective on Nandigram and a wider analysis. This study focused on debates on media objectivity, editorial policies versus journalist's freedom and corporate control versus government control over journalists. These concerns are only a few that are facing Indian journalists in the 21st century.

A recent report by the Center for Media Studies (2007) made to the Press Council of India revealed that the threats to press freedom are not isolated to the areas of Assam, Jammu and Kashmir or to militancy or terrorism. The opposing political factions and leaders' intolerance of press freedom are reportedly becoming areas of concern for reporters and all who rely on the media for fair and accurate reporting. It was also reported that print media journalists suffer more job related attacks than television journalists. The report also highlighted that the Right to Information Act of 2005 has encouraged reporters to conduct the necessary investigative journalism to adequately report on Indian public affairs.

IMPLICATIONS, LIMITATIONS AND RECOMENDATIONS

India's rich and diverse culture and history enabled me to capture the individual interpretations and applications of media ethics in the world of Indian reporters reporting for English-language newspapers in Kolkata, West Bengal. Their ethical upbringing, the communication strategies they employed, the extension of their multi-lingual attributes and ethical on-the-job training illuminated the broad experience of veteran journalists and the aspirations of the novice reporters. Interviewing reporters face-to-face in their offices provided richness to the qualitative method of inquiry in media ethics research. This could have been enhanced only if I had been able to shadow the reporters during their day-to-day reporting activities in the neighborhoods of Kolkata to witness and document their social and economic exchanges. But as illustrated in this study, even native Kolkatans had difficulty crossing gender, religious and social-economic barriers in their city, West Bengal and other Indian states.

It is recommended that a triangulation research method be undertaken within an extended time frame that would include descriptive and analytical surveys. Allocating more time for research would allow for more in-depth evaluations and observations. A critical ethnographic study should be undertaken in the rural areas of West Bengal where Western researchers can observe the practices of Indian reporters. Journalism students from the University of Kolkata should be included to expose them to real-life pragmatic approaches to their ethical training and to exchange ideas with Western researchers. Their involvement could result in a comparative study to explore the ethical challenges Indian reporters face in rural areas versus the urban areas in West Bengal. It is also recommended that more female reporters be included as well as male and female readers who can give their views on what they perceive to be fair and accurate reporting practices.

More research is recommended on the teaching of media ethics in higher education and in-service training in Indian newspaper organizations. My study revealed that Indian journalists working at Indian-English newspapers face ethical decisions during their daily reporting activities while conducting social and economic exchanges and are compelled to make social and cultural adjustments while dealing with class, gender and religious issues. While scholars and philosophers recognize that humans adhere to basic universal moral principles, finding a general application of media ethics in a diverse country such as India still remains a challenge because the media industry is constantly changing and continues to deal with social and economic inequities.

CONCLUSION

India is a place with vast complexities. It is a nation that struggled culturally and politically with the British during colonization. Much like our own American heritage, India built its country's foundation amid a landscape of controversies. People from all classes and religions reaped benefits and losses at the onset of their contribution to their nation building within communitarian and utilitarian philosophical media frameworks.

The corpus of this study analyzed through the lens of the social exchange theory as applied in media ethics revealed that Indian reporters working for English newspapers were part of a social and economic exchange network influenced by class, gender and religion. After obtaining additional interviews in 2008, saturation was achieved.

The journalists sought ethical applications for positive and rewarding outcomes based on their ethical principles. They discussed the constraints and challenges faced during their reporting activities and how they overcame obstacles. They are engaged with individuals within the marketplace and networks that economically sustain their newspaper organizations. The social and economic applications undertaken by the journalists required communication strategies necessary for positive exchanges as exhibited through their use of language, religious affiliations and gender commonalities.

Each reporter developing and writing a story knew that institutions and editors influence and control their environment, but explained how persistence, courage and strength enabled them to make sense of the people and events in their community to better serve them.

They discussed the voluntary action and transference of resources during their daily social exchange processes and revealed what type of ethical behavior they believed they should employ. The journalists in this study will continue to be called upon to develop stories from

every angle where class, gender and religion finds itself in the lives of 14 million people. They holistically operate with moral insight in relation to their cultural environment and believed that basic moral principles and values guide their ethical decisions during their reporting. Some journalists acknowledged that ethics was something they learned on the job or learned over time. For a few journalists ethics had been learned in communication classes in university settings or in seminars, but agreed that more training in ethics was necessary.

The coverage of Nandigram proved to be an ethical dilemma in which the norm of reciprocity and the norm of fairness were most challenged. Nine out of the 21 reporters spoke about their journalistic duties and their responses to the obstruction of press freedom while attempting to reveal the truth during this event. Sensitivity towards the marginalized and respect for those from various religious backgrounds and classes was followed and employed in spite of the hostile environment. The imbalances of exchanges affecting truth, accuracy, fact checking and sensitivity between the lower classes and the upper classes in rural and urban areas were discussed and emerged as themes. The value of resources and the power exercised over those resources controlled the outcomes in some cases and determined the positive rewards and negative results. After the clashes in Nandigram the citizens of Nandigram subsequently voted for change in their district leadership that resulted in a victory for Trinamul Congress candidate, Firoza Bibi, over the Communist Party candidate, Paramananda Bharati. The media coverage, whether balanced or not, did provide information to the public and influenced their support or lack of support for the Communist Party of India (Marxist) and the Trinamul Congress and resulted in investigations by the government and human rights organizations into the wrongdoings of the parties involved.

As journalists continue to report on the sidewalk dweller asleep under a tattered piece of

plastic in Kolkata, the grieving mother of a child fallen to the child trafficker in Mumbai and the movie actors turned politicians, they will face media ethics decision making during social exchange processes. Media ethics training at universities and in-service training provided by newspaper offices can provide philosophical frameworks to guide them, however there still remains the struggle between modern-day media owners who look to profit and prestige and journalists who chose to follow principles of Gandhian journalism which is rooted in communitarianism and looks to journalism as a service to society.

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