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Study finds many gaps in journalism education

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

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

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

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

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

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Too much knowledge can be a dangerous thing

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

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

Trends in Newsrooms 2015, the annual report published by the World Editors Forum, lists ‘source protection erosion’ as the rising threat to investigative journalism. It used to be possible to

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

It was quite by coincidence that I chanced upon a report in the PressGazette, UK, stating that parents in the UK would rather their daughter marry a banker, marketer or teacher than a journalist. The article by William Turvill refers to a Yougov Survey which found that 3 per cent of 1756 UK adults would like their prospective son-in-law to be a journalist. Women journalists (as prospective daughters-in-law) fared slightly better, with a 4 per cent score. However, the rankings fell way short of other professions. The most popular son-in-law profession was doctor (38 per cent), followed by lawyer (24 per cent) and architect (23 per cent). Even teacher (15 per cent), entrepreneur (11 per cent), banker,

musician (both 6 per cent), and nurse, soldier, athlete (all 5 per cent) ranked higher. Doctor was also the most popular choice of profession for daughters-in-law (35 per cent), followed by teacher (26 per cent), lawyer (24 per cent), nurse (16 per cent) and architect (14 per cent). So, is there a story here? Is it because journalists are losing jobs and are considered rolling stones, because journalism has become dangerous, or because people are slowly losing trust in the media? Perhaps it’s a combination of all this and more.

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

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

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and Research Initiative (UKIERI)-funded project titled 'Faculty development programme - To support research and innovation in media institutions in India and the United Kingdom'. The project envisions faculty development as the mode to develop quality standards and standardisations in the sector, on the basis of the view that faculty are key for enabling research culture and innovation. The programme will address emerging developmental needs of educators from the media sector in India with a special focus on News Media Education. For the assessment, interviews were conducted with media graduates, faculty and heads of institutes in New Delhi, Mumbai,

Chennai, Bangalore, Bhopal, Kolkata, Guwahati, Chandigarh, Shillong and Tezpur between April and June 2014. Journalists from print, television and digital media organisations were also interviewed.

Key findings

Journalism education in India is still developing and though it has grown in size and importance, it is still not treated on par with other traditional disciplines. The discipline is striving for an identity and unfortunately, there have not been adequate efforts by academia, industry or policy makers to improve the situation. Issues facing media education in India relate to theory versus practice, the quality of faculty, updating

curriculum and syllabus to keep pace with advancements in media technology, lack of research in media institutes and departments, paucity of reference books, and modules not relevant to Indian contexts.

It was found that faculty teaching journalism and media-related courses included both academia and practitioners who had opted for full-time teaching. Around 10 faculty members had industry experience of not less than five years. However, most of those (21) interviewed had no practical experience of working in the media sector. The study found that research conducted on Journalism in India is still at the infant stage, particularly in electronic and new media. One reason is the paucity



Illustration: Arun Ramkumar

of specialised faculty available in media institutions.

Most of those interviewed mentioned that research and research methodology needed to be included in any faculty development programme. A managing editor of a regional TV news channel who is a visiting faculty at media departments, observed that the assignment, projects or dissertation that the students conduct are very theoretical and generally they do not learn anything from it.

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

The subjects of the interview revealed that they used a combination of methodologies to teach their classes. These include:

- Theory - Notes, PowerPoint presentation, book reviews, film screening, discussions,
- Practice campus newspaper, short / documentary films, field visits

Besides, internships, field training, case studies, projects in community and use of mock newsroom, reporting, etc are also used for teaching various journalism courses. Some of the alumni of various institutes who were interviewed remembered some impact-filled teaching methodologies, including

- Analysis of newspapers - headlines, focus of the story, etc
- Public speaking training
- Sample news website pages

The study brought out the fact that various institutes and the

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

The study found that there is no uniform curriculum followed for the various media courses offered in the variety of institutes and university departments. The University Grants Commission (UGC) that regulates and funds universities does have a model curriculum drafted in 2001. A few follow or have adapted the UNESCO model curriculum (2007). However, most courses have designed their own curriculum. Colleges affiliated to various universities also adopted the university curriculum and systems related to enrolment and examination. A wide variety of courses were available in these departments/institutes. Some of the courses include:

- Conflict reporting
- Lifestyle/ Fashion/ Entertainment/ Film journalism
- Business Journalism
- Social media
- Media freedom
- Citizen journalism
- Graphic design and animation
- Data Journalism
- Global journalism
- Sports Journalism

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

training which can be achieved by involving industry professionals in journalism classrooms on a regular basis and having field visits with practicing journalists."

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

Faculty - industry interaction

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

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

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

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

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

Most of the faculty interviewed had not attended any UGC-supported orientation and

refresher courses for teachers. They felt that orientation or capacity building programmes were a must at least once a year. The few who had attended such programmes felt they were quite general, and should be made more relevant to requirements, and include aspects such as technological advancement in electronic media, convergent journalism, citizen journalism, new media, etc. "With the widening and deepening of this sector, the teachers also need to broaden their horizons and learn from others in industry and academia across the country and abroad. I recall attending workshops by BBC and they really made a difference in how good training can influence teachers," said a veteran academician. "I think we should have more formal systems of interactions both within academia and also with the industry – these could be either

annual conferences or even online platforms," suggested a young participant. (To be concluded) ■

(The Centre for Media Studies is a resource centre for media, visual communication, theatre and film, which attempts to study communication tools, society and visual culture in an effort to initiate and inspire radical changes in academia and society and ensure a quality-oriented approach to education in the field. The 'Needs assessment of Indian news media faculty' study was conducted by the CMS Academy, New Delhi, with grant from UKIERI. P.N. Vasanti was the project head; she was supported by Indira Akoijam and Prabhakar. The team likes to acknowledge the guidance of B.P. Sanjay, Shravan Garg, Nalini Rajan and Ashok Ogra. This is the first of a two-part series presenting the salient findings of the assessment.)

ACJ institutes investigative reporting award

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

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

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

Delivering the Lawrence Dana Pinkham Memorial Lecture, 2015, titled The Secret Room in the Newsroom, Raj Kamal Jha, editor-in-chief of *The Indian Express* said: "Journalists should have an ear to listen to anyone who knocked on their door, and stand up to bullies and loudmouths. Learn to appreciate works of others. A good journalist should be able to admire other people. There will always be someone more successful than you or a better writer than you, but know that there is no one who is you." On the day, 167 students received their diplomas. ■