



Becoming

a Journalist in Exile

T. P. Mishra

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Few Words

At this moment when the world is experiencing hasty changes in media sector, Bhutan, a landlocked peaceful Himalayan kingdom lying in Asia, still lazes more or less where it was. The question of state's guarantee to media freedom; respect and safeguard to public's right to speech and expression with a promotion and protection of citizen's right to information still remains unanswered despite the regime's claim that the country has already stepped into democratization process.

The citizen's right to information has been long-encroached by the state, though Bhutan is a member of United Nations, which guarantees such fundamental rights. The book in your hand is one of the first attempts from exiled Bhutanese journalist to inform you with balanced and credible information on the status of media—both inside the country and in exile.

One of this book's major objectives is to raise voice for the establishment of complete media freedom in Bhutan. Besides, it also guides new generation of media practitioners, whosoever, and existing exiled Bhutanese journalists towards standard and ethical journalism, which has been pushed behind.

The question of the dawn of peoples' democracy would remain at farce when there is no press freedom in the country. And, so is the accurate instance in the context of Bhutan. The so-claimed democracy is starved of free press, a-must-essential tool to drive the regime towards good governance.

Media sector has to operate in a free and fair atmosphere so that democracy would foster. The ongoing practices adopted by media houses inside Bhutan are not adequate in themselves. Besides, state's direct infringement in media sector, a sense of self-censorship still greatly exists in Bhutanese journalists.

Becoming a journalist in exile is one of the tools to encourage new generation of media practitioners towards "high ethical standards and accuracy for enhancing the credibility of a free press, which is vital for development of any nation."

The book is divided into four parts. The first part may be helpful not only to Bhutanese journalists but also to those who are practicing journalism without having a sound knowledge on this discipline, particularly involving journalists where media freedom is under threat. The second and third part reflects the state of Bhutanese media— both inside the country and in exile in Nepal.

The chapter 'Media in Exile' helps encourage new media practitioners, whosoever, towards their further commitment to continual work for safeguarding public's right to information despite hurdles. This chapter also serves as one of the best motivational tools for refugee communities or journalists in exile around the world towards becoming involved in media sector to highlight their plights.

Part four contains experiences of three skilled and well versed journalists. This may prove to be a driving force to others, as they share their story of success.

The book would not have come to this shape had I not been able to receive continued cooperation, suggestions, support and contribution from the co-

authors, who really deserve to be called the real 'authors' of this book. I cannot keep myself away without expressing words of gratitude to all the co-authors.

I would be doing injustice if I keep mum without honoring my brother, Vidhyapati, with a garland of thanks. Instead of my brother, I prefer to call him my second-father and first-teacher; a hero behind the curtain who brought me to this status. His cooperation and guidance, from the perspective of a blood mate, is always praiseworthy.

In particular, I would like to thank; Kazi Gautam, Hasta Bhattarai, R. P. Subba, S. Sital, Shubhranshu Choudhary, Sohel Manzur, Suman Bhattarai, Tulshi Nepal, Nanda Gautam, Padam Pokhrel, Avinash Shrestha, Lenin Banjade, Bigyan Sharma, J. N. Acharya, Rabin Pokhrel, Dhruv Mishra and Mathew Baker (Kathmandu Int'l Study Centre) for their invaluable cooperation and support for the accomplishment of my mission.

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The book would have been just limited to electronic copies had there been no financial support from well-wishers and volunteer contributors (mentioned in the book). I honestly extend thankfulness to them. Their invaluable contribution assisted the author to publish the book in hardcopy, which is expected to be helpful to many new generation media practitioners who do not have an easy access to internet facilities.

A number of books and other related materials were referred rigorously during the writing of this book (the bibliography is at the end of the book). Some of the chapters from those materials were conceptualized in Bhutanese context, thus, the writers who own copyright on all such materials deserve my special appreciation.

My heartfelt acknowledgements are also due to all helping hands, incase I have missed to mention them here, for rendering me with support and cooperation.

I am sorry for subdued tone of this book. There is no chance for Bhutan to escape this curse of media oppression, which has proved an obstacle for the growth of a healthy society for centuries.

Constructive comments and suggestions are always welcome.

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PART I

- **Basic concepts**
- **Canons of journalism**
- **Becoming a journalist**
- **Media and its role**

▶ BASIC CONCEPTS ◀

1.1 Journalism and news

Journalism is a vocation, not a job. It is one of the most important roles in society and not simply a career or a means to earn a living. To serve as a journalist is an honor and a privilege, because the dissemination of essential information — informing the public debate so that the audience can make educated choices — is one of the most important roles in a society.

Underpinning true journalism are certain rules that must be applied, no matter where the journalist is working. Journalists must:

- ▶ Seek the truth
- ▶ Inform the whole audience, regardless of age, race, religion, political affiliation sexual preference or financial status
- ▶ Deliver verified, sourced and attributed facts
- ▶ Remain independent of all issues they cover
- ▶ Must maintain their integrity by offering fair, balanced, impartial, objective and accurate coverage
- ▶ Always respect the rights and privacy of the audience

- ▶ Always have a ‘public interest’ reason for covering a story.

Journalism is the timely reporting of events at the local, provincial, national and international level.

An essential part of the job is gathering information through interview and research, and then turning the results into a fair and balanced piece of information for publication in print and online or broadcast for television or radio.

The key tool to test whether a journalist is doing his/her job in the way that matters is to test every story with the following criteria: “had it not been for you, the world would never know.”

But, journalism is not just for fact-finding. It also includes analysis, commentary, opinion pieces and other background material that help enhance the audience’s understanding of the issues being explored.

Some journalists remain reporters throughout their careers. Their role is to report on events as they happen. Others become investigative reporters, digging where others don’t and shading light on areas of society that would otherwise remain hidden. Some become editors, producers and sub editors and turn their skills to polishing the work of others to ensure that it is presented in a clear and concise way. All are journalists, but each area of journalism requires different skills.

The term journalism embraces all the forms, in which and through which, the news and the comments on the news reach the public. Anything that can be considered of interest to the public could, in turn, become the basic material for the journalist.

The formal status of journalism has varied historically and, still varies vastly from country to country. The modern state and hierarchical power structures in general have tended to see the unrestricted flow of information as a potential threat inimical to their own proper function. Journalists must always call the executive to account and aim to shade light on the areas that the present society aim to keep behind the curtain.

Journalism has four main objectives: to inform, to interpret, to guide and to entertain. It performs other important functions too. These include the circulation of advertisement and dissemination of vast mass of information and comment that doesn't fall under the category of news.

Principles of modern journalism

The main function of journalism is to shed light on issues and reflect how those issues impact on the lives of the public. Journalists need to be aware of their surroundings, know their audience, be able to assess issues intelligently and apply professional levels of observation and reasoning.

A journalist's job is to inform the public debate. A journalist who abuses one's position loses her/his integrity. Without integrity a journalist is worthless. While the freedom of the media needs to be guarded as a vital right of mankind, it must be subjected to rules and guidelines to ensure it serves the audience properly and timely.

There are certain principles of journalism which every journalist is duty-bound to observe:

Sincerity, truthfulness and accuracy

Good faith among the reader is the foundation of journalism. Journalists must seek the truth and deliver that information accurately by revealing sourced, verified and attributable facts.

Impartiality

Every news report should be free from personal opinion or bias of any kind. The emphasis should be given to disseminate impartial news.

Fairness

A journalist should not publish baseless allegations that could damage the reputation of an individual. They should always aim to seek both the sides of a story.

Taste and Decency

A journalist should only investigate stories if they are in the public interest and should use language and imagery that is unlikely to cause offence to the whole audience.

Privacy and Consent

A journalist must not invade a person's privacy unless there is a clear public interest for doing so. They must be able to justify their actions to their seniors and the audience.

Integrity

A journalist must never be bought by gifts, favors, position, intimidation, threats or promises. A journalist must be free from all external pressures and must also be open and honest about their own interests, in particular they must declare when such interests are likely to cause a damage to their objectivity.

Here is yet another piece of writing contributed by the UK-based Media Helping Media (MHM). This writing was initially published at its online version with the permission of The News Manual. It explains us about the role of a journalist.

What do journalists do?

Within these different media, there are special tasks for journalists. In large organizations, the journalists may specialize in only one task. In small organizations, each journalist may have to do many different tasks. Here are some of the jobs journalists do:

Reporters gather information and present it in a written or spoken form in news stories, feature articles or documentaries. Reporters may work on the staff of news organizations, but may also work freelance, writing stories for whoever pays them. General reporters cover all sorts of news stories, but some journalists specialize in certain areas such as reporting sport, politics or agriculture.

Sub-editors take the stories written by reporters and put them into a form which suits the special needs of their particular newspaper, magazine, bulletin or web page. Sub-editors do not usually gather information themselves. Their job is to concentrate on how the story can best be presented to their audience. They are often called subs. The person in-charge of them is called the chief sub-editor, usually shortened to chief sub.

Photojournalists use photographs to tell the news. They either cover events with a reporter, taking photographs to illustrate the written story, or attend news events on their own, presenting both the pictures and a story or caption.

The editor is usually the person who makes the final decision about what is included in the newspaper, magazine or news bulletins. He/she is responsible for all the content and all the journalists. Editors may have deputies and assistants to help them.

The news editor is the person in-charge of the news journalists. In small organizations, the news editor may make all the decisions about what stories to cover and who will do the work. In larger organizations, the news editor may have a deputy, often called the chief of staff, whose special job is to assign reporters to the stories selected.

Feature writers work for newspapers and magazines, writing longer stories which usually give background to the news. In small organizations the reporters themselves will write feature articles. The person in charge of features is usually called the features editor. Larger radio or television stations may have specialist staff producing current affairs programs - the broadcasting equivalent of the feature article. The person in-charge of producing a particular current affairs program is usually called the producer and the person in-charge of all the programs in that series is called the executive producer or EP.

Specialist writers may be employed to produce personal commentary columns or reviews of things such as books, films, art or performances. They are usually selected for their knowledge about certain subjects or their ability to write well. Again, small organizations may use general reporters for some or all of these tasks.

There are many other jobs which can be done by journalists. It is a career with many opportunities.

Why be a journalist?

People enter journalism for a variety of reasons but, money apart, there are four main motives:

The desire to write

Journalists are the major group of people in most developing countries who make their living from writing. Many young people who see themselves as future novelists choose journalism as a way of earning a living while developing their writing skills. Although writing for newspapers and books require different qualities, the aspiration to be a great writer is not one to be discouraged in a would-be journalist.

The desire to be known

Most people want their work to be recognized by others. This helps to give it value. Some people also want to be recognized themselves, so that they have status in the eyes of society. It is not a bad motive to wish to be famous, but this must never become your main reason for being a journalist. You will not be a good journalist if you care more for impressing your audience than for serving their needs.

The desire to influence for good

Knowing the power of the printed or spoken word or image, especially in rural areas, some people enter journalism for the power it will give them to influence people. In many countries, a large number of politicians have backgrounds as journalists. It is open to question whether they are journalists who moved into politics or natural politicians who used journalism as a stepping stone.

There is a strong belief that journalists control the mass media but the best journalists recognize their

role as servants of the people. They are the channels through which information flows and they are the interpreters of events. This recognition, paired with the desire to influence, can produce good campaigning journalists who see themselves as watchdogs for the ordinary man or woman. They are ready to champion the cause of the underdog and expose corruption and abuses of office. This is a vital role in any democratic process and should be equally valuable and welcome in countries where a non-democratic government guides or controls the press.

There is a difference between the desire to influence events for your own sake, and the desire to do it for other people. You should never use journalism for selfish ends, but you can use it to improve the life of other people - remembering that they may not always agree with you on what those improvements should be.

There is a strong tradition in western societies of the media being the so-called “Fourth Estate”. Traditionally the other three estates were the church, the aristocracy and the rest of society but now-a-days the idea of the four estates is often defined as government, courts, clergy and the media, with the media - the “Fourth Estate” - acting as a balance and an advocate for ordinary citizens against possible abuses from the power and authority of the other three estates. This idea of journalists defending the rights of ordinary people is a common reason for young people entering the profession.

The desire for knowledge

Curiosity is a natural part of most people’s characters and a vital ingredient for any journalist. Lots of young

men and women enter the profession with the desire to know more about the world about them without needing to specialize in limited fields of study. Many critics accuse journalists of being shallow when in fact journalism, by its very nature, attracts people who are inquisitive about everything. Most journalists tend to know a little bit about a lot of things, rather than a lot about one subject.

Knowledge has many uses. It can simply help to make you a fuller and more interesting person. It can also give you power over people, especially people who do not possess that particular knowledge. Always bear in mind that power can be used in a positive way, to improve people's lives, or in a selfish way to advance yourself.

To summarize, there are many reason for becoming a journalist and many type of journalists to become. It is a career with many challenges and rewards.

Journalists must:

Love language, have an alert and ordered mind, be able to approach and question people, be polite but persistent, be friendly and reliable.

News

In general sense, news means a report on recent events, or material reported in a newspaper, news periodicals, newscast or other means of mass communication provided it contains newsworthiness. The term 'news' covers wide ranges of subjects and disciplines.

News is always new information to both the reader and the listener. For instance, “when a dog bites a man, that’s not news; when a man bites a dog, now that’s news.” This is because it gives newness containing an issue that interests readers/viewers. The meaning of news can be further explained as:

- » Compilation of facts and events of current interest or importance to the readers of the newspaper
- » Any event, idea or opinion that is timely, that interests or affects a large number of people in a community
- » Anything and everything interesting about life and materials in all their manifestations

The news in its essence reveals a sort of sensation to people who read it. Therefore, news is always revealing instead of concealing. It is the imparting of new information irrespective of the geographical boundaries, ethnic diversity, climatic differences, and political boundaries.

A lot of events occur daily but they all are not news. An event alone is not the news although it is one of the components. Firstly, the events should be worthy of reporting and publishing. All other constituents of the news should be incorporated in the news. News must be communicated to the listener or the reader by means of the appropriate emphasis.

Emphasis occupies the second place. The news is designed and reported on the basis of the desires and interests of the readers, the impact it may leave on them. It is claimed that the news is determined by whatsoever the reporter writes and reports.

Components

It is already mentioned above that any sorts of event do not always become news. Even when you sort out an event that becomes news, there are certain components that need to be strictly followed during the time you prepare the news story for any media house.

The systematic placing of gathered information in accordance with the news components finally makes a good news story for publication.

The components of news stories are assets to help deliver news to the readers, listeners or viewers in an easily understandable way. By structure, we can determine the components of news as *headline, byline, dateline, lead, body, details, and background/additional information*.

A news story in alongside box here clearly defines the components of a news story in terms of its structure.

Inverted Pyramid

One of the globally practiced common structures for writing news stories is 'inverted pyramid'. A newspaper contains many stories. The inverted pyramid structure focuses on the most interesting and important information at the top of the story so that readers can get the information they need or want and then go on to another story if they choose.

Journalists intimidated — Headline

TBR/Ichha Poudel — **Byline**
Damak, December 20—

Dateline

[Three Bhutanese media organisations have said their deep attention was drawn towards escalating violence and subsequent intimidation upon journalists associated with Bhutan News Service — **Lead/Intro**].

In a joint press statement issued, APFA–Bhutan, TWMN–Bhutan Chapter and BPU said journalists working inside camps were receiving threats from local authorities after December 13 when a youth was shot by an unidentified armed group near Beldangi camp. The organizations also accused local authorities of clamping baseless accusation on journalists Arjun Pradhan and Jeetan Subba — **Details/Body**.

[Intimidations upon journalists have at once increased along with the division among exiled Bhutanese following the offer of third country resettlement — **Background/additional information**].

The most difficult task is to write headlines and leads as they have to describe what the story contains as succinctly and as interestingly as possible.

The lead, or first paragraph, is the focal point of the basic news story. It is a simple statement of point of the entire story. It should be written as simple as possible. It would be a supplementary advantage if the answers to five Ws are mentioned in the lead, though it is not a hard-and-fast rule.

The body of the inverted pyramid story adds detail to information that has been introduced in the lead and first two or three paragraphs. The body should provide more information, supporting evidence, context, among other necessary information in the form of more details, direct and indirect quotes, and other description.

The inverted pyramid helps to organize the information in such a way that the reader can be efficient. Not every reader will read all of every story in a newspaper. The inverted pyramid structure for news stories allows the readers to get as much of the most important information in that story as quickly as possible.

Five Ws and One H

A journalist gathering information or writing a story tries to answer six basic questions for the reader:

Who: Who are the important people related to the story? Is everyone included so that the story can be accurately and adequately told? Is everyone properly identified?

What: What is the major action or event of the story? What are the actions or events of lesser importance? A journalist ought to be able to state the major action of the story in one sentence, and this should be the theme of the story.

When: When did the event occur? Readers of news stories should have a clear idea of when the story takes place. The when element is rarely the best way to begin a story because it is not often the most important piece of the information a journalist has to tell a reader, but it should come early in the story and should be clearly stated.

Where: Where did the event occur? Journalists cannot assume that readers will know or be able to figure out where an event takes place. The location of the event or action should be clearly mentioned.

Why and How: The reader deserves explanations about events. If a story is about something bizarre or unusual, the writer should offer some explanation so that the questions the event raises in the reader's mind are answered. The writer also needs to set the events or actions in a story in the proper context. Reference should be made to previous events or actions if they help to explain things to the reader.

1.2 Writing for the mass media

Writing for the mass media differs from other forms of writing in several aspects;

Subject matter: Writers for the mass media must take on a wide variety of subjects, including news stories, feature stories, advertisements, letters, editorials and so on.

Purpose: Writing for the mass media has three major purposes: to inform, educate and persuade.

Audience: Mass media writing is often directed to wide audiences, and this fact dictates not only the subject matter but the way in which something is written.

Circumstances of the writing: Writing for the mass media often takes place in the presence of others who are doing the same thing. The writing is frequently done under deadline pressure. And many times several people will have a hand in writing and editing a particular item for the mass media.

1.3 Some tips to good journalistic writing

Good, tight journalistic writing demands that the writer and editor follow these guidelines

- ▶▶ *Keep paragraphs short.* Most paragraphs should be one or two sentences long. Quotations that form a complete sentence should usually get a paragraph of their own.
- ▶▶ *Keep sentences short.* Sentences should average about 16 words. Make sure that leads are short and uncomplicated. Vary sentence lengths and patterns to provide pacing and to avoid monotony and choppiness. Avoid the passive voice, which by its nature is wordy.
- ▶▶ *Use short, common words.* Short, simple, common words are the best for journalism. Avoid foreign expressions and jargon. Explain difficult or technical terms if you need to use them. Use adjectives and adverbs only when they are essential.
- ▶▶ *Be objective.* Particularly in hard-news stories, don't express your opinions. Don't use words that express a value judgment. Report only what you can prove to be true. Present all sides fairly.
- ▶▶ *Follow style rules.* Style rules, such as those established by The Associated Press, United Press

International or a particular newspaper, add consistency and therefore clarity. Use Webster's New World Dictionary or Webster's Third New International Dictionary to check the spelling those are not in the style book.

- ▶▶ *Know the journalism story formulas, how to use them and when to break them.* They help you know what must be included in a story of this type and in what order generally. That, in turn, helps you know what could be left out. In hard-news stories, use the inverted-pyramid formula- the most important news at the top, the least important at the bottom.

▶ **CANONS OF JOURNALISM** ◀

2.1 The international code of journalist

This code of journalist is one of the most-used benchmark for national codes of ethics. It is adopted by the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) at Bordeaux in 1954 (modified and updated since then). This is the norm for some 300,000 journalists world wide represented by more than 80 national unions affiliated with the IFJ.

This international Declaration is proclaimed as a standard of professional conduct for journalists engaged in the gathering, transmitting, disseminating and commenting on news and information and in describing events.

1. Respect for truth and for the right of the public to the truth is the first duty of the journalist.
2. In pursuance of this duty, the journalist shall at all times defend the principle of freedom in the honest collection and publication of news and of the right of fair comment and criticism.
3. The journalist shall report only in accordance with facts of which he or she knows the origin. The journalist shall not suppress the essential information and falsify documents.

4. The journalist shall use only fair methods to obtain news, photographs and documents.
5. The journalist shall do the utmost to rectify any published information, which is found to be harmfully inaccurate
6. The journalist shall observe professional secrecy regarding the source of information obtained in confidence
7. The journalist shall be aware of the danger of discrimination being furthered by the media and shall do the utmost to avoid to facilitating such discrimination based on, among other things, race, sex, sexual orientation, language, religion, political or other opinion, and national or social origins.
8. The journalist shall regard as grave professional offences the following
 - i. Plagiarism
 - ii. Malicious
 - iii. Misrepresentation
 - iv. Calumny, slander, libel, unfounded accusations. The acceptance of a bribe in any form in consideration of either publication or suppression.
9. Journalists worthy of what name shall deem it their duty to observe faithfully the principles stated above. Within the general law of each country, the journalist shall recognize in professional matters the jurisdiction of colleagues only, to the exclusion of every kind of interference by governments or others.

2.2 Code of ethics

The following is the code of ethics of the Society of Professional Journalists (Sigma Delta Chi, 1987):

The Society of Professional Journalists, Sigma Delta Chi believes the duty of journalists is to serve the truth.

We believe that agencies of mass communication are carriers of public discussion and information, acting on their Constitutional mandate and freedom to learn and report the facts.

We believe in public enlightenment as the forerunner of justice, and in our constitutional role to seek the truth as part of the public's right to know the truth.

We believe those responsibilities carry obligations that require journalists to perform with intelligence, objectivity, accuracy, and fairness.

To these ends, we declare acceptance of the standards of practice here set forth:

- I. RESPONSIBILITY:** The public's right to know of events of public importance and interest is the overriding mission of the mass media. The purpose of distributing news and enlightened opinion is to serve the general welfare. Journalists who use their professional status as representatives of the public for selfish or other unworthy motives violate a high trust.
- II. FREEDOM OF THE PRESS:** Freedom of the press is to be guarded as an inalienable right to discuss, question, and challenge actions and utterances of our government and of our public and private institutions. Journalists uphold the right to speak unpopular opinions and the privilege to agree with the majority.

III. ETHICS: Journalists must be free of obligation to any interest other than public's right to know the truth.

1. Gifts, favors, free travel, special treatment or privileges can compromise the integrity of journalists and their employers. Nothing of the value should be accepted.
2. Secondary employment, political involvement, holding public office, and service in community organizations should be avoided if it compromises the integrity of journalists and their employers. Journalists and their employers should conduct their personal lives in a manner which protects them from conflict interest, real or apparent. Their responsibilities to the public are paramount. That is the nature of their profession.
3. So-called news communications from private sources should not be published or broadcast without substantiation of their claims to news value.
4. Journalists will seek news that serves the public interest, despite the obstacles. They will make constant efforts to assure that the public's business is conducted in public and that public records are open to public inspection.
5. Journalists acknowledge the newsman's ethic of protecting confidential sources of information.
6. Plagiarism is dishonest and unacceptable.

IV. ACCURACY AND OBJECTIVITY: Good faith with the public is the foundation of all worthy journalism.

1. Truth is our ultimate goal
2. Objectivity in reporting the news is another goal, which serves as the mark of an experienced professional. It is a standard of performance towards which we strive. We honor those who achieve it.
3. There is no excuse for inaccuracies or lack of thoroughness.
4. Newspaper headlines should be fully warranted by the contents of the articles they accompany. Photographs and telecasts should give an accurate picture of an event and not highlight a minor incident out of context.
5. Sound practice makes clear distinction between news reports and expressions of opinion. News reports should be free of opinion bias and represent all sides of an issue.
6. Partisanship in editorial comment which knowingly departs from the truth violates the spirit of American Journalism.
7. Journalists recognize their responsibility for offering informed analysis, comment, and editorial opinion on public events and issues. They accept the obligation to present such material by individuals whose competence, experience, and judgment qualify them for it.
8. Special articles or presentations devoted to advocacy or writer's own conclusions and interpretations should be labeled as such.

V. FAIR PLAY: Journalists at all times show respect for the dignity, privacy, rights, and well-being of people encountered in the course of gathering and presenting the news.

1. The news media should not communicate unofficial charges affecting reputation or moral character without giving the accused a chance to reply.
2. The news media must guard against invading a person's right to privacy.
3. The media should not pander to morbid curiosity about details of vice and crime
4. It is the duty of news media to make prompt and complete correction of their errors.
5. Journalists should be accountable to the public for their reports and the public should be encouraged to voice its grievances against the media. Open dialogues with our readers, viewers and listeners should be fostered.

▶ BECOMING A JOURNALIST ◀

Journalism is about informing a target audience through print, radio, TV and online. It's about presenting sourced, verified and attributed facts without exaggeration, comment or spin. The journalism should be balanced, fair, objective, impartial and accurate.

Anyone who accepts those rules can be a journalist. The only need for academic input is in order to perfect and polish those skills, and to help in the search for employment.

However, a news sense cannot be taught in college or university; it is ingrained in a journalist. A writer can be taught what to look out for and how to produce copy telling a story, but the fundamental news sense that makes a journalist a seeker of the truth and a deliverer of information is instinctive.

With study and practice, anyone can become a better writer. There are steps that each of us can take to improve our writing, and this book will examine some of those steps and help you put them into practice.

Writing is a process. It requires discipline. Most people give up writing as soon as they can because it can be hard work. At times it is physically, mentally, and emotionally demanding. The person who commits to writing must assemble all of his or her resources for the task.

Good writing doesn't happen all at once. It is formed, word by word, sentence by sentence, thought by thought. The writing process is often slow, tedious, and frustrating. But the product of this process is worth the effort.

If you are interested in learning to write well, in any form, you should read as much as possible – newspapers, magazines, books, and anything else you can get your hands on.

In this chapter, David Brewer, a media strategy consultant and also Editor for the online version of the UK-based Media Helping Media writes about some of the basic rules that underpin quality journalism.

Journalism and News

I was honored when T.P. Mishra invited me to write a chapter for this book about journalism and news. We have never met and our lives couldn't be more different. He is working, unpaid, as a reporter, editor and publisher in the Bhutanese refugee camps in Nepal, committed to informing those starved of news. I have a comfortable lifestyle in the UK thanks to a career in journalism.

When I first read the email asking me to write the introduction chapter “because you are an experienced journalist and media activist,” it made me think.

If length of service equals experience, then I guess I qualify as an experienced journalist. I started as a reporter at my home town newspaper in the 70s, moved to radio, became a TV correspondent and then a political editor, before moving to online journalism. I have worked as a journalist and manager in print, broadcast and online. However, as far as certificates go, my walls are bare. I passed a few basic exams for shorthand,

typing and the essential law for journalists more than 30 years ago, but that's it.

I'd never thought of myself as a media activist. I have always considered an activist to be someone who pushes a cause without aiming to reflect an alternative view point. If that is the case, and if an activist makes no attempt to remain objective and impartial, how can they also be a journalist?

In my view, there is a danger in becoming emotionally and politically involved in any issue, and that danger is even starker for a journalist. It is they who are charged with delivering information to an audience eager for news. If that news delivery is tainted by human emotion and an element of taking sides, it can warp reporting to the point where it could be damaging in terms of informing the public debate.

So, from my Western perspective, I have never considered myself to be a media activist, but I think I understand what TP Mishra is referring to.

For the last eight years I have been working with journalists in transition and post-conflict countries, and countries where freedom of expression is under threat. I have been trying to help them establish strong, independent, high-quality media organisations. In those conditions, I can see the term activism being used in a different way by those who don't enjoy the levels of freedom of expression that I enjoy in the West.

However, it still raises the question of whether a journalist can be an activist for freedom of expression and still remain objective and impartial.

Perhaps the phrase media activist reflects the realities of what journalists in the majority world face day to day. I come from a society where journalists are

taken out and wined and dined by the powerful and influential, whereas many journalists in the majority world are simply taken out with bullets and bombs. In that atmosphere it is understandable to come across journalists who view themselves as activists.

If a journalist's role is to seek out truth, reflect the voices and opinions of those who don't usually have a say, and to represent the whole audience regardless of race, religion, political affiliation and social status, then perhaps a journalist is, essentially, an activist for freedom of expression.

Journalism basics

One dictionary definition of journalism is 'the profession of writing for newspapers, magazines, radio, TV and online'. Values and ethics are introduced by media organizations in an effort to preserve the integrity of the journalism they produce. Without robust, clearly-defined journalistic ethics, journalism can easily deteriorate into public relations (PR), or worse, a damaging, one-sided political push to distort the public debate

Journalism has to be accurate. It is all about clear, irrefutable facts that are well-sourced, verified, attributed and fully tested. All elements of the story need to be thoroughly tested to ensure that they are not misleading and that they don't magnify one side at the expense of another.

We should use clear, precise wording to tell the story and avoid comment and opinion that could add confusion. We need to be open about what we know, what we think we know and what we don't know.

Rumour and unfounded speculation should never be used. If the journalist feels that the very fact that

rumours are circulating is important to the story, then they need to make it clear that they are unfounded rumours, where they are coming from and where they are being circulated. As a rule they should not be used.

Journalism needs to be impartial, objective, balanced and fair. We must write and broadcast to inform the whole audience regardless of religion, race, political persuasion, sexual orientation and financial status. We need to be fair, open-minded, and reflect all significant opinions as we explore a wide range of disparate views.

If we decide not to use some views, we need to be clear why. What affect does that have on the piece? Does it help clarify issues, or does it confuse? If it confuses, what could be the consequences of that confusion and who is likely to gain from that?

Most important of all, we need to ensure that those consuming our journalism can do so knowing that it is not influenced by political, business, or personal gain. It all comes back to integrity. We need to be honest with ourselves about our motives and reasons for covering a story.

The key is to ask searching questions to all sides, particularly those who hold public office, and, in doing so, provide the basis for a healthy and robust public debate.

Of course, all journalists will have their own political points of view, but these must never creep into our journalism and they must not have any bearing on the choice of stories we cover or the way we cover them.

Early lessons

On my first day as a local newspaper reporter the editor took me aside and told me what was expected of me. What he said to me has stuck with me throughout my life as a journalist.

“It’s all about who, what, where, when, why and how, just give me verified and sourced facts. I want reports that are written in crisp, clean English. I don’t want waffle. I don’t want padding. I want sentences with a subject, verb and object. I want facts, facts and more facts. I don’t want your comments or opinions; your views don’t matter. Just go out there and get me facts – and be quick about it.”

I have always tried to follow that code over the past 30 years, mostly with some success, but also with some spectacular failures.

One of the most humiliating moments in my journalistic career came after I moved from newspapers to radio. I was sent to cover a fire in a large housing block. As I arrived I saw people running around, seemingly in panic. It appeared to me that they were trying to salvage whatever they could from their burning homes. I spoke to a fire officer, who told me that nobody had been injured, other than a few people who were suffering from smoke inhalation. I chatted to two local residents and obtained a couple of moving quotes about how they had lost all their possessions and how they didn’t know how they were going to cope.

I thought I had enough facts. I was working against a tight deadline. However, I didn’t have enough evidence on which to base my report other than what I could see, a few snatched conversations, and my assumptions. As a result, my report was totally inaccurate. The people I had seen running from their homes with possessions in their arms were not distressed residents, they were looters. The fire was arson. I had an incomplete picture. And I was wrong.

Of course we all make mistakes, but here was a reporter who was temporarily carried away by the

moment and who had forgotten the basic rules. Imagine how that report would have sounded if that journalist was an activist for a cause. Would it be a lot different, depending on their political point of view, or the cause they felt committed to pursue? Perhaps it would.

It's also too easy to be swept up in the language of the moment. As a young radio reporter in Liverpool in the 80s we read bulletin after bulletin containing news reports of factory closures. Many of our listeners were personally disadvantaged and suffering as a result of the closures. We were extremely close to our audience, perhaps too close. All the callers to our phone-in programs told desperate stories of struggling to pay bills and feed their families.

There didn't seem to be two sides to that story. It was extremely hard to remain emotionally balanced. We gave the factory owners and the government a hard time and were soft and sympathetic in all our dealings with those who had lost their jobs. Qualified objectivity, or sensitive handling of a complex story?

So why this dip back into history? Because it is important in trying to define what is journalism and what is news, and whether activism can be a part of that mix. To me, journalism is important in trying to differentiate between fact and emotion. Summed up simply, an activist is an advocate for a cause, whereas a journalist must be free to report on a situation objectively, clearly and independently.

We all know it is not as simple as that. Journalism can include all forms of reporting and it frequently does. There will be good and bad journalism. There will be objective journalism that offers context and analysis and there will be one-sided journalism that over-emphasises a particular point of view and mutes all others to try to achieve a desired result.

Complications and opportunities

News is now delivered much faster. The 24x7 rolling news mentality means that news can be reported as it happens. I was one of a small group who set up BBC News Online in 1997. One of our slogans was “updated every second of every day”. We were fast, we had a news ticker, we had news alerts, and we could get the story out much quicker than the scheduled TV news bulletins. With that ability to deliver immediate news comes a much greater responsibility to find two verifiable sources and get it right.

In the last ten years newsgathering has changed beyond recognition. Anyone can be a blogger and post in an instant. Social networking sites, instant messaging and email mean that information can spread around the globe in seconds. Not all is sourced and verified. Why should it be? Those posting in blogs and on social networking sites have probably made no commitment to be accurate. They are just telling it as they see it.

Much will be first hand reporting of what people have witnessed or what people think. When the earthquake hit China in May 2008, the first reports were posted on Twitter, a site where people can send short text messages from their mobile phones.

Bloggers were active, too. The story unfolded without the need for traditional mainstream media and the versions of the story that were told were raw, eye-witness accounts that would be extremely difficult for the old media newsgathering bosses based in London, Atlanta and Doha to verify.

Mainstream media is now monitoring the likes of Twitter, Flickr, and YouTube to get early indications of when stories break. They are using ordinary people, as

well as the traditional newsgathering sources of stringers, bureau staff and the wires to feed them information about important developments. They are sometimes getting round the need to source by attributing the comments to “according to comments posted on xxx”. In other words, they are embracing the new media journalists in a way that says “not really one of ours, but they may have information that we would look stupid if we ignored it.”

Could it be that one day a 140-character message on Twitter, which has not been verified, along with a 30 second clip of video on YouTube, will meet the two source requirement of the traditional media news gathers and make it okay to cover a story? If so, does that leave the mainstream media open to manipulation, or is it simply moving with the times and adjusting appropriately?

Activists are increasingly using the so-called viral marketing of social networking video sites to push their causes; so are big companies and politicians. During the Gaza conflict in early 2009 both sides set up social networking accounts on the main platforms to spread their own interpretation of events. The mainstream media, too, was in the social networking space, adding its version of events to the growing chatter and noise surrounding the unfolding events. Content that was never intended to be balanced, impartial, accurate and objective is now injected into an, is surrounding, the mainstream newsgathering process. Traditional media can't possibly check it all. However, the main news organisations will often use or refer to this material as they piece together the story and new developments.

This now places a greater responsibility on traditional journalists. Their duty is to deal only in verified and sourced facts. Their emotions and opinions

don't matter. Their reports must be accurate, balanced, objective, impartial and fair. They must seek to reflect the voices and opinions of all sides, particularly those who don't usually have a say. They must ensure they represent the whole audience regardless of race, religion, political affiliation and social status. They must aim to dig where others don't and challenge those in power.

Perhaps this is what TP Mishra meant when he described me as 'a media activist.' Perhaps he saw my work helping train journalists in the editorial ethics that underline all robust journalism as a form of activism focused on ensuring that journalists protect their independence and integrity. If so, yes count me in as a proud member of a global fellowship of journalists dedicated to protecting and promoting those values.

◀ MEDIA AND ITS ROLE ▶

Media mirrors society. Through free access to information and the exchange of opinions, media empowers citizens to make free choices. Societies depend on this flow of information to keep it moving in the right direction. We have seen how modern societies rely so much more on the media and how, in comparison, communities such as our's know so much less.

The following are some of the roles media should play in our community.

Media Role # 1 : Unleash the power of internet in shaping the future of our community.

The internet media is the fastest online means to interlink with others. Internet *media includes forums, blogs, podcasts, pictures and video, email, instant messaging, discussion boards, chat rooms, Google Groups, Wikipedia, and a host of social networking sites and tools including Myspace, Facebook, Youtube, Twitter etc.*

You do not need to be a journalist to be able to inform people via the internet. It is increasingly accessible and it helps connect people from different parts of the world at minimum expense. A few websites, which Bhutanese journalists in exile have launched, have proven this point. These websites are growing in popularity despite being new and young.

Our role is to use the power of internet to connect, inform and educate our audience. The internet will be a great instrument in threading our communities, especially as they settle in different parts of the world. Whether it is used as a vehicle of communication or as a platform for discovering each other, exchanging information or exploring our history, the internet stands out above any other form of mass communication. Internet forums can also be used for initiating, enabling dialogue and bringing together people of different political views to meet, discuss, and explore solutions.

Most importantly, the internet can bring together all sections of our community and serve as both a conduit for communication and a connector.

Media Role # 2 : Serve the community as a whole.

The concept of serving the community as a whole is appropriate because we are not a one spot, clustered community. Today, the southern Bhutanese community spreads from Bhutan to four other continents. Within those continents and countries the Bhutanese community is further scattered over many states, provinces and districts. To simplify we can group this community into two sections, those that live inside Bhutan and those who live outside - the extended Diaspora. The media stands in between. Its role will be truly significant if it can effectively connect these groups.

The idea of serving the community as a whole implies that the media address the hopes, aspirations and concerns of this fragmented audience. The role of the media here is to tear down the physical divide by connecting people culturally, emotionally and sentimentally. Our community inside Bhutan, and those living in the Diaspora probably like the same ingredients

in a news report. But they need to develop their own personalities and patrons in the community. Of course, inside the Diaspora, the desire to get a more holistic picture of the political and social developments within Bhutan will be no less profound. Therefore, work for the entire community and not just a part of it.

Media Role # 3 : Ventilate aspirations for change in Bhutan.

Another important role the media can play is to ventilate aspirations for change within Bhutan. Seen from a political perspective, this could be an extension of the unmet desires and hopes for political and democratic changes in Bhutan, that many of us have stood for. The scars left behind by State suppression and intimidation will not easily fade away. Whether we like it or not, such expressions will continue to erupt and we must let them. But beyond that, there is always something called the 'free man' inside every man, which will resurrect every time we think of Bhutan's despotic regime. The 'conscience of a free man' inherent within us looks for expansion outwards and will find avenues for supporting the cause for democracy in Bhutan.

Certainly the ventilations need to grow bigger and better. These ventilations should ensure the free passage of community messages across each other, without corrupting the content of the message in the process.

Media Role # 4 : Watchdog for democracy.

Democracy can never be guaranteed by politicians alone. A watchdog is necessary for the democratic institutions to function as they should. A free media can play the role of that watchdog. Professional and fearless journalists will always scrutinise the executive and ensure that those who represent the masses are

both accountable and, at times, called to account. Corruption is a cause as well as a consequence of weak governance. The journalist's role is to root it out. The media is crucial in determining a sound, transparent and an open system. Corruption is reportedly rampant in the corridors of Tashichhodzong as well as in the lanes of refugee camps. As an independent entity, our media groups can offer checks and balances by investigating leaders on both sides.

One way of working against corruption is through the promotion of sting journalism. Sting journalism is an information gathering exercise, when facts are not easily available under normal circumstances. Such facts could have been concealed, suppressed or distorted. Investigative work could involve undercover journalists, whistleblowers or even spying. One such example is the Tehelka.com exposure in India in 2001. Tehelka.com exposed big time corruption in weapons deals involving Indian politicians and army officers. Sting journalism is the need of the day.

Media Role # 5 : Opinion builder.

Media plays a central part in the life of any community. The role of media should not be limited to reporting and analysing specific events. Journalists working for media can provide analytical perspectives on specific issues and help build public opinion. A better understanding of issues can lead to improvements in the quality of legislation and other political decisions.

Bhutan's education system has been hailed as one of the best in South Asia. This writer has disputed this on the grounds that it failed to produce a conscious citizenry. The products of such an anachronistic education system would better be technocrats, but not 21st century leaders. This speaks for our own inability to run a proper newspaper or a radio program for years.

In exile, this gap seems to be narrowing to some extent as more and more of our young generation citizens come out of universities with degrees in journalism, political science and law etc. Having them in the movement obviously provides a great strength and a newer outlook. Together, we can create opinions that can construct our community in better ways. But the ultimate success in creating a mass opinion hinges on how much our educated Bhutanese are willing to share or write in online forums and discussions. Our habits, so far, suggest that we Bhutanese are least interested in reading or writing anything. This habit needs to change.

Media Role # 6 : *Cultivate a universal approach to freedom.*

We must see the role of media in the context of common challenges and themes locally, nationally and globally. In this sense, our own interest and freedom depends on the promotion of free media in our neighborhood and in other countries. Media is a tool that can grow and foster only in a free and open society. Unfortunately, our own history is a testimony to the fact that freedom itself can become a prisoner in the hands of unmindful tyrants.

An encroachment on the media in any part of the world is an encroachment on the fundamental rights of all human beings. It is not right to ignore cases where journalists are silenced by authoritarian regimes. The media is the embodiment of our most sacred freedom – freedom of speech and free expression. In it lies our own freedom and security. It is important to understand this nexus between freedom conditions in our own home ground and other media institutions in the region and internationally. This will avail us of opportunities to establish wider networks with them and extend our solidarity when their freedom is in peril. In the process,

our own voices will be heard stronger and louder. By voicing for their cause of freedom, we will find our own true voice in return.

Media Role # 7 : Promote clarity of concept.

Media groups have a wider outreach to the population as a whole. As such, the media can play a significant role in clarifying issues, that holds our community hostage. One such issue is the issue of 'identity'. The southern Bhutanese community has been entrusted with as many identities as there are our supporters, well wishers and critics. The confusion it has created potentially threatens to blur our identity.

Media not only informs people, it can transform people as well. A proper clarity of our identity will be the first step towards that transformation and it is due soon. When the community itself is confronted with identity issues, other services to it will only be half as useful. Each terminology imposed on us need to be pondered over looking at its strengths, weakness and political ramifications thereof. The way to go forward is to stop using some of those terms that we know, do not suit us for sure.

Media Role # 8 : Develop citizen reporters.

In the traditional sense, only professional journalists make up the core of any media environment. This view has evolved now with the advancement of newer technology such as the internet. The internet has generated possibilities for ordinary citizens to participate in creating and decentralizing information. Journalism today is not just providing hard news, it can also be about citizens writing about their own communities and distributing that information globally.

Our role is to develop every citizen into a citizen journalist, enabling them to be reporters and reader-

writers. Citizen journalists are a strong cushion against corruption and as such both the community and the institutions of democracy stand to benefit.

Media Role # 9 : Media and socialization.

How our own media groups should play their role in the community had been the subject of much debate. It is time to see how people at the receiving end should receive, act or react to media information. Understand that the media and the content of its messages are powerful socializing agents. Its significance can structure our relations and interaction with others – unifying or diversifying ‘us’ from ‘them’. Media can also help contextualize the social framework and make adjustments easy.

For our population in the Diaspora, the Bhutanese media groups alone are not the only source of information. They will be bombarded with information about every angle of life. The sudden access and exposure to free and unlimited media, and the inability to draw from them productively could very well derail the socialization process, as they transition into a new life in the countries of settlement. It will be in your own interest to carefully wade through this barrage of information. The entertainment media could be your greatest enticer. It will consume most of your online minutes - time which could have been purposefully used to articulate views and opinions in forum discussions. Remember, freedom is not absolutely free. If you do not know how to navigate using your own judgment, this freedom could cost you dearly. When it comes to this, you are your own role player. No one can possibly play that role for you.

Media Role # 10: Avoid pitfalls.

If the media can make a profound influence on society, the society too can make or unmake the media.

The greatest ammunition in the hands of media practitioners is the name, reputation, support and respect earned from the people. Your success depends not on your technology but on the good wishes and support of those, besides and around you. When media houses miss this lesson, too much of sensationalism, commercialization and media bias creeps in and the fundamentals of media ethics are in danger of being swept under the carpet, and neutrality and independence are sacrificed. Instead of informing people, media starts teaching people. Consequently, such tendencies come with a heavy price and may lead to premature abortion of the goals and missions of media institutes. Our journalists and media groups in exile would do well if they continue to avoid these pitfalls, as they have been doing so far.

This is the original photo taken by Laura Pohl where Chief Editor cum Publisher of TBR monthly, also author of "Becoming a journalist in Exile" is seen carrying 1,000 issues of TBR (June 2007 edition) from the printing press to his apartment in Kathmandu. The photo was initially published in US-based Global Journalist magazine.



PART II

Media inside Bhutan

- **General scenario**
- **Reporting inside the country**

◀ MEDIA INSIDE BHUTAN ▶

Changes are talked, but not reflected in the Bhutanese media industry that still operates under self-censorship

5.1 A general scenario

For the regime who wished to come out of the isolation with support from the government of India, dissemination of information and protecting the right to information of the citizens was not the issue. Rather, the initiative was taken by Nepali speakers from the southern districts: Bhim Bahadur Rai and Suk Man Rai.

In long run, the regime seized the power from the initial publishers, later to gradually constrict people's access to information. Additionally, this was the ban on press freedom and human rights, which reached its peak in early 1990.

The reason shown for restriction on access to information or entertainment was the cultural erosion of the ruling community. The cultural suppression upon other groups to adhere with the principles of Driglam Namza, the dress and code etiquette of the Ngalong tribe has been closely associated with the right to information and right to speech and expression.

In the name of not only preserving cultures but also forcing others to follow it, for years, television was banned. Even listening radio was cautiously observed in southern and eastern districts.

Today, the descendents of two Rai brothers face expulsion, termination of citizenship and restriction on education and government service, for their involvement in struggle for human rights and democracy.

Press freedom and freedom of speech and expression were never incorporated into national policies of Bhutan all through the ages. Fundamentally, freedom of expression and speech was termed anti national approach and access to media was regarded an attempt to destroy the long preserved culture of closed society. The Bhutanese rulers never accepted media to be a good partner to educate people and for the good governance.

In Bhutan's rapidly changing socio-economic, cultural and political scenario, information technology and media are already vital forces that touch all national priorities.

Democracy and the Media

Despite the democratization process, Bhutan is yet to regard media as the backbone to foster and promote the democratic system, values and principles though international community appreciated the steps that Bhutan took in recent years to change the absolute monarchy into constitutional, to adhere by the principles of rule of law. It finally became constitutional monarchy on July 18, 2008.

The sincerity of the Bhutanese rulers towards media has to be read between the lines. Like in the past, it is yet to trust that Bhutanese rulers will regard media in future as the best means to educate people and a good partner for good governance, rather feels it to be an instrument that exposes corruption, misconduct, unnecessary delay in the service delivery and under-table businesses.

B h u t a n ' s democracy is self-censored and so is the media. Since media freedom is an attached agenda of democracy, it is unwise to expect improvement in Bhutanese media scenario before B h u t a n practically transforms into a democratic nation.

Participants read the first copies of Bhutan Observer weekly during its launching ceremony. Photo: Kuensel



The laws and constitution have not adequately guaranteed the right to speech and expression while right to information is a far cry.

The statements government and political leaders make in favor of promoting media for the good of new democracy never been translated into practice. Traditional thoughts in the political leaders and the bureaucracy against the media also rule the new set up. First elections are over, an elected government has taken over the responsibilities, yet media really did not foster.

The media persons have not been well trained on values and principles of democracy, human rights and right to information. Unless this is done, fostering democracy and human rights will not be smooth. Instead, government initiates action against media and media persons for clear-cut errors. Fining Bhutan Broadcasting Service Corporation (BBSC) for criticizing Information Minister Nandalal Rai and interrogating

journalists from Kuensel for wiring against the fines imposed on BBSC are clear instances how the 'democratic' government treats media here.

The government policies have become liberal to some extent yet the political leadership and the bureaucracy regard media as a means to defame their name. Since the beginning of the electoral campaign early this year, foreign media have limited access, who otherwise had been purely restricted.

Right to Information

For general people, radio is the cheap and easily assessable media in Bhutan. BBS radio has continued its efforts to reach all Bhutanese – through FM relay stations in Bhutan and through online to Bhutanese Diaspora. Establishment of new private FM stations became additional source of news, information and entertainment for Bhutanese populace.

TV was banned for the public until 1999. The government recently revoked its decision to ban fewer TV channels which were on top of the demand list from the public. The government cites the eroding effect on Bhutanese culture as the reason to bar the transmission of such TV channels.

Journalists and reporters find it a tough task for them to collect information from the government offices than writing news. The private sector has also not opened up its door. The Right to Information Act was mulled for months, but ended up without any substantial outcome.

Tenzing Lamsang wrote in Kuensel, the government authority denied giving information on statistics of commercial companies of the country. "When Kuensel approached the ministry of economic affairs to verify

the top three companies of Bhutan, the ministry refused any information on the grounds that it was 'inappropriate'. Kuensel was refused information on the total number of licenses held by the three major companies of Bhutan by the ministry."

Officials have constructed barricades to make things difficult for reporters these days. One of them has been the appointment of ministry policy and planning division (PPD) heads. Reporters are not allowed from contacting officials directly, rather have to sought answers to their queries in written, taking a lengthier time.

Code of conduct issued by the Royal Civil Service Commission has been the boon for bureaucrats to abscond from talking to media persons or give them information they seek. Some officials believe that the freedoms may have gone too far, further arguing that Bhutanese reporters make factual errors, are poorly trained, biased and prone to defame institutions and individuals.

Bhutanese journalists feel that it is less the wording of the law than the spirit in which it is being interpreted that worries them.

Freedom of expression has been somewhat intoxicating in a conservative society where the government has long kept a tight rein over media.

In the age of information society, where citizens are entitled to get all information without approach to state authorities, denial of information on number of licenses issued measures the extent of right to information in the country.

Training of journalists for reporting on wide range of issues including politics, formation of media association, and operation of private media houses and

inception of online radio are some praise-worthy steps. However, peoples' accessibility to these media inside Bhutan is not worth mentioning.

Access to media

Not all Bhutanese residents have access to media. Low rate of literacy and ignorance of the importance of media are the major causes for not widening the public access to media. However, the urban population is growing conscious towards the media and its importance.

Indian and other foreign newspapers are also available in the market but they are limited to Paro, Thimphu, Phuentsholing and few other cities. Bhutan's low literacy rate, however, means that the majority of the population is not affected by the print media. Oral tradition is very strong, and radio broadcasts are relatively more widely listened to.

Positively, by the end of 2007, the situation changed somehow. Media agencies like Indo Asian News Service, British Broadcasting Corporation etc. produce reports on Bhutanese events frequently. Of all foreign media, IANS has been observed to have stronger hold in covering the Bhutanese issues.

Right to associations

Two media organizations exist inside Bhutan currently. Journalist Association of Bhutan (JAB) remains mum since its inception about a year ago. South Asian Free Media Association (SAFMA), that established its 12-member national chapter in Bhutan on August 5, 2007, remained silent over the media issues and press freedom advocacy. Lack of activism by SAFMA and JAB in favor of strengthening press freedom and freedom of expression or rights of the working journalists in Bhutan is embarrassing.

SAFMA, despite being a regional organization having credits of fighting for press freedom, failed to raise voices against anti-press freedom behaviors of Bhutan government.

Survival of the media

Bhutan Times reported the government's discouraging act against the media promotion – to bid for public advertisement.

A government circulation asked the media to 'procure advertisement through competitive bidding' where government would provide advertisement to that media having widest publicity or circulation.

Few weeks earlier to that, the government had announced incentives in the form of tax holidays and withdrawals of import and sales duties to support the country's growing print media. This was rebuffed.

Development

Not satisfactorily, the media outlets have increased and people's access to information has increased with the absolute regime changing its colors.

Kuzoo FM, a private radio station established in early 2007, came with another station on September 3, 2007. Two stations air programs on two different languages – Dzongkha and English – 24 hours a day. Listeners can hear all Dzongkha music and other programs from FM 104 MHz while the FM 105 MHz broadcast all programs in English.

Centennial Radio emerged into the media market on February 21, 2008, being third private radio station. It has two channels, 101 FM and Rigsar FM. The former, operated a month after the formal beginning of the FM station, offers current affairs, news, analysis of issues amongst others.

Radio Valley, at 99.9 MHz, owned by Gaseb Inc, was the first initiators of the radio privatization in the country. It was mulled that a private radio was the need of hour for the country as early as 2003. Serious works began in 2005 and formal operation came in April 12, 2007 (radiovalley.bt).

The BBS radio went online on February 21, 2008 making it easier for the Bhutan lovers to get in touch from overseas.

India, as usual, has been a forerunner in promoting media in Bhutan, as it is in other sectors. On August 10, 2007 Indian ambassador to Bhutan, Sudhir Vyas, and then minister of communications Leki Dorji, inaugurated the new 100 KW shortwave transmitter station of the BBS at Sangaygang, Thimphu strengthening the reach of the BBS radio in the country.

Early last year, Bhutan Times weekly started its mid-week publication as well. The first of the Wednesday issue hit the newsstands on January 2, 2008, with exclusive coverage on the National Council elections and results. In November, the nation got its first daily newspaper Bhutan Today. Two other newspapers Bhutan Observer and Kuensel are already there in the list.

Legal Provisions

The recently promulgated constitution of the kingdom, media act and other laws, in fact, seriously restrict the media freedom, right to speech and expression and right to information and in long run will have negative impact on strengthening democracy.

The constitution does not adequately incorporate the principles of press freedom and freedom of speech and expression such as:

Article 7 of the constitution has provisions of fundamental rights that include the right to information, speech and expression and freedom of the press as well.

Sub Article (2): A Bhutanese citizen shall have the right to freedom of speech, opinion and expression.

Sub Article (3): A Bhutanese citizen shall have the right to information

Sub Article (4): A Bhutanese citizen shall have the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. No person shall be compelled to belong to another faith by means of coercion or inducement.

Sub Article (5): There shall be freedom of press, radio and television and other forms dissemination of information, including electronic.

However, there are a number of clauses included in the constitution that restrict the complete freedom of the press, right to speech and expression and do not adequately guarantee the right to information.

Article 6 (3) (e) of the constitution restricts the citizens of right to speech and expression or right to information with many vague provisions such as termination of citizenship if found speaking against the king, country and the people. The government has not explained what it meant by speaking against the king, country and the people.

Article 7 (22) (e) of the constitution states that the government can impose restriction by law in case of 'the disclosure of information received in regard to the affairs of the State or in discharge of official duties'.

Article 10 (15) states, 'the Speaker or the Chairperson (of National Assembly and National Council respectively) may exclude the press and the public from all or any part of the proceedings if there is a compelling need to do so in the interests of public order, national security or any other situation, where publicity would seriously prejudice public interest'.

Article 10 (21) provides liberty to the Members of Parliament for opinion limited within the parliament proceedings.

The constitution also has objectionable provisions under Emergency section. Article 33 (7) gives power to the government to suspend rights conferred under sections 2, 4, 5, 14 and 18 of Article 7 during the period of emergency. This implies that not only the press freedom but all rights enjoyed by the citizens would be suspended during such periods. This will have negative impact on the citizens as they fail to have access with the situation of the country, their right to know what is happening in the country.

The constitution does not guarantee that license of the publication houses, radios or TV stations would not be seized by the state. The emergency power given to the government can force these media bodies to remain shut, permanently or temporarily.

Because the law does not guarantee 'no censorship' on the operation of media houses, the government may cite the reasons like speaking against the country and the people or security or sovereignty of the nation to impose censorship to publication or broadcast of certain news items.

The government ignored that media workers are the experts for media laws. Inability of the government to consult the Bhutanese journalists while drafting the Media Act 2006, enforced on July 5, 2006 is an instance that reflects government's ignorance towards the rights of the media workers.

Article 13 (3) empowers the information minister not to disclose any information if he or she 'assumes' that disclosure would have negative impact on national interest. Similarly Article 14 (1) states that in the event of emergency 'the minister may by notification take over for a limited period the control and management of media services or suspend its operation'. The Act has also empowered the ministry to cancel the license issued for operation of the media bodies. Article 15 sufficiently empowers the government to impose unlimited censorship on media contents.

The act does not guarantee the security of the working journalists and also does not speak about the perks and other facilities that journalists must get from media organization in return to the services provided.

5.2 News reporting inside the country

How does it sound when you hear that journalists will be evicted from their hometown for their dedication to balance and credible reporting while during the duty hour? This is hardly a believable logic, however, yet it applies to Bhutanese journalists and not to an exception, here is a piece by Nanda Gautam, that speaks of this fact.

When editors and reporters make choices about what stories to cover, and how to cover them, the decision comes out mostly from the media strategy and the national culture. The national culture emphasizes what is considered proper in their own definition, how to act towards strangers and what to express no matter whatever the truth is.

The sense of public insecurity began in Bhutan perhaps after the king enrolled in politics that was felt mainly by the Lhotshampas (southern residents of Bhutan) as direct interference to their private life and restrictions against their rights and freedoms. Drukpas on the other hand were made to feel falsely that Lhosthampas are the enemies of the nation (Ngolop), illegal immigrants trying to take over the country. People take criticism against the royal family and the government as personal attack.

After ten years in exile, I recall here the way I have worked and attempted to answer the above questions.

I am a passionate radio listener and very inquisitive to news. One day in 1991, I learnt from Mr. Ashok Rai, a part-time News Presenter of the Bhutan Broadcasting Service that the government may closedown broadcasting in Nepali-language due to the negligence of Bishnu Sharma, an employee responsible for this language department. I decided to change my career from teaching. I went to Bhutan Broadcasting Service

(BBS) Joint Director who forwarded me to the Ministry of Communication for the selection exams. I got the chance to discover for myself if I can be a voice for those unheard or silenced.

The Lhotshamp-kha/Nepali language unit of the BBS was attached to the News and Current Affairs Division. Journalism is practiced here as a career and must follow organizational values that in my case limited the options for personal performance.

The news aired by the BBS is prepared through censorship mechanism after the reporters and stringers submit it to the News Coordinator. He carefully selects the news items and uses proper words. The stories related to human rights, border issues, refugees and reports that are not palatable to the Indian government are assumed as 'sensitive' and often not selected. The reporters avoid reporting on events that are assumed as 'sensitive' because they don't want to take risk or invest extra energy to get sanction from the higher authorities. Thus, the stories are rarely people oriented. Keeping in mind of the organization culture, that has a brigade of elites, the news production therefore becomes elite oriented; focuses on their achievements and gives name to their opposition as evildoers.

I remember one story from Samchi district. A flash flood destroyed many hectares of crops. The news reported that although the crop was destroyed 'leaving many farmers with famine' it declared that compensation for the farmers was not necessary. This is because; I know that the farmers are Lhotshmpas. Later, same type of incident occurred in Chhuka district, but in that event the news says that the compensation is imminent. The farmers in this case are Ngalongs. Dogs stray all over Thimphu (capital city) streets. When asked by the westerners why not get rid

of them to prevent rabies epidemic, the answer given is that 'we are Buddhist and won't resort to killing'. We are sympathetic to all sentient beings'. Incidents from these places covered are one-sided cliché, biased and unchecked. Reporting in Bhutan is a challenge to break the bi-polar conflict between the assumptions 'us versus them' and find out what lies in between.

If the reporting in Bhutan were truth oriented, the media; Keunsel, BBS and other new establishments would expose untruth on all sides, uncover all cover-up and expose the truth. Unfortunately, it is not always encouraged due to the national culture. Very often the reporting has the tendency to help cover lies of the regime, dehumanize opposition, see the underdog as problem and wants to be reactive: waiting for violence before reporting. The reporting, in addition, doesn't focus on suffering of all, on women, children and disadvantaged population. Giving voice to voiceless is often taken as insult against the regime. This is because the underdog is distinctively an ethnic group Lhotshampa, who are discriminated by the state, based on their race, like in the age of apartheid Africa. I was nearly killed or imprisoned at best as a consequence of giving a voice to voiceless people.

It was beginning of 1996 the BBS management allowed me to join a team of producers going to Punakha district for the inauguration ceremony of Pho Chuu bridge. I had to make a topical program that focused in-depth reporting on a topic of current affairs. The inauguration was very elaborate. When it was time for lunch, a group of poorly dressed men, women and children appeared and they were violently chased towards backside of the tent by an officer.

I knew from their appearance that they are laborers conscripted from southern districts. I followed them.

One old Brahmin inquired if he can speak the truth. As a journalist my answer was 'yes.' His plight was that he was forced by the local officers in his village in Tshirang to join the National Work Force ten years ago. This was a labor force created by the home ministry to construct roads, bridges and government installations.

His main tragedy was that his land was confiscated by the government after the political demonstration in 1990. His house was also destroyed. In addition, his children were not allowed to attend the school although he was promised for such provisions earlier. He understood quite late that the promises the home ministry initially made such as the eligibility for extra land, housing and loan facilities after completion of ten years' tenure were false. He felt betrayed.

I spoke also with a couple. The man looked sick, feeble and was breathing heavily. His daughter perhaps three years old was half naked and malnourished. They are Tamang family from Sarpang district. The woman began speaking with me over her difficulties in work on the construction site. They always had to move from one place to another. Her husband got tuberculosis. He was never allowed to stay in the hospital for full treatment. They talked a lot about the cruelty meted by the employers and meager wages given.

The whole family was scared not knowing where they will be sent out since the work on the bridge was over. They had not visited their ancestral land in Sarpang but heard that resettled Western Bhutanese occupied their land. I recorded their voice and also noted their detail in my notebook. Then I went to the recruitment officer of the Home Ministry with questions surrounding the recruitment methods, compensations incase of disabilities, education and medical facilities etc. He claimed in the interview that everything had

Nanda Gautam interviewing a mask dancer in a local festival in Thimphu in mid 1996.

Photo: UNESCO Photo gallery.



been done properly, however he admitted that schooling for the laborer's children was not possible because they had to move from one construction site to another.

I produced 15 minutes long radio program with the mix-up of bridge inauguration ceremony and the plights of those laborers. The laborers expressed the truth on how the poor and innocents are misused. The interview with the home ministry officer, I thought, will serve as the arguments that the story is balanced, so I broadcasted it. My hope was that even if I were prosecuted the plights of the laborers would be highlighted. Also I thought the political parties and human rights organizations operating from Nepal and India would listen to it and campaign for the laborer's rights.

Few of my friends came to see me that night when I was back to my residence. They were worried that I would be prosecuted. The next day, as soon as I reached BBS, the director Sonam Tshong called me to his chamber. He had listened to my program twice and wanted to ask why I had produced that program, which concerned the laborers. I said the laborers were speaking about themselves. Their recruiter; the Home Ministry officer was also interviewed to contemplate their story. Therefore, I thought that was a nice job a media organization had to do to relieve other's sufferings. The director flew in rage and declared that

so far he had been protecting me from the wrath of the Home Ministry and since then he would not protect me. He accused me of not maintaining my profile low which he had told me to do. He recalled a case of a Burmese journalist who was a popular public icon but forgotten as soon as he was killed. He warned that same consequence would happen to me. He said, "you will be killed and thrown in a *nala* (sewage canal) and the whole story of Gautam will be closed for ever". He said that he personally would not do that but will forward to the Chairman, Yeshe Jimba to decide over my fate. He called his secretary to collect my recordings and notes that were soon brought to his table.

I started shivering and sweating chilly cold. I thought what he just said about the Burmese journalist would happen to me now. My days and hours were in count down. Soon after my joining to BBS, the local government forcibly evicted my parents, seized my house and land and wanted me also to leave the country. I remained working in Bhutan purely at the mercy of my director. When he started packing my stuff to take it to the Chairman, I wanted to speak my last words, and said; 'Sir, you have protected me so far although the home minister has sent several letters to expel me out of the country. I am very thankful to you for letting me work as a journalist. My last request to you now is kindly allow me to dig a graveyard in the BBS premises and throw my body in that, once I am killed. Anyway, I don't have any one left here to cremate my body according to my tradition. I don't want to go to heaven or hell. I shall grow up from that graveyard into something and avenge'. Hearing that, he came very close and stared at me. I stooped down. He then walked out leaving me in the room behind.

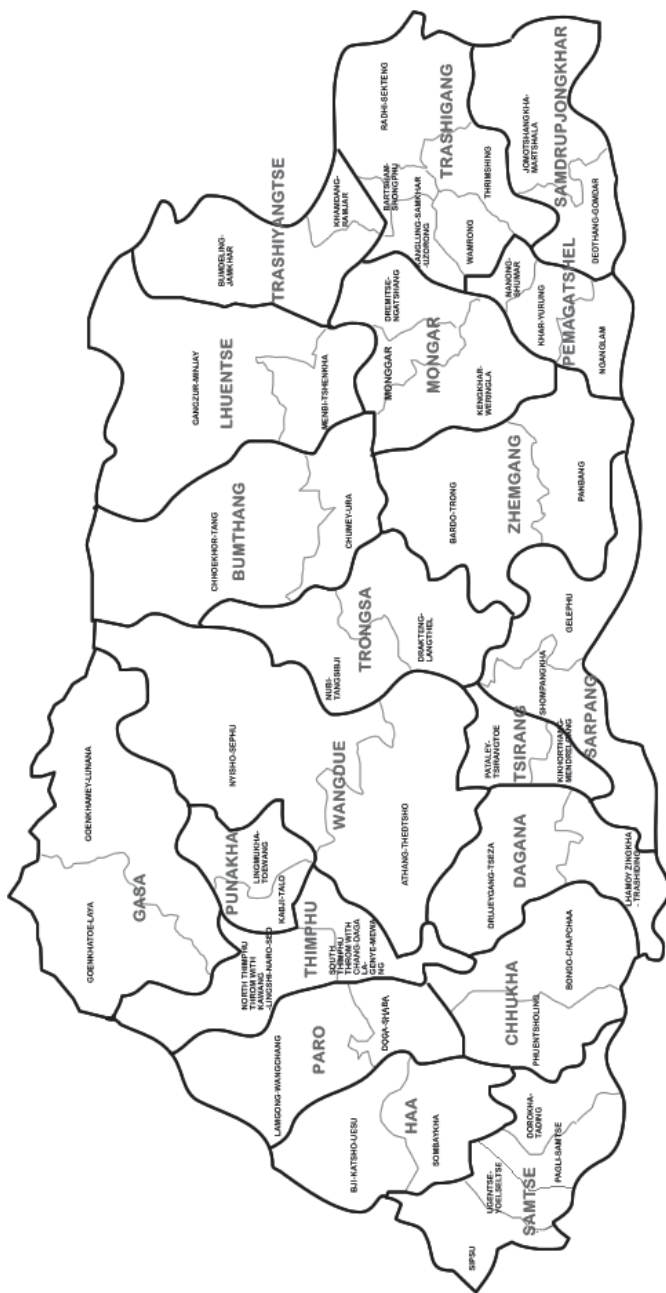
Every time a reporter reports the facts, it adds another layer to the collective understanding of how

they are likely to report similar facts in future. Bhutanese medias still maintain an archetypal standard of the past and are not changing to new novelty of thoughts because of the paradox that the reporters who are witnessing truth are compelled to meet the demands that they must follow up what news coordinators and directors want or see elsewhere. That is why the media's role remained fixed as commentator and not as communicator. Their approach is to seek simplicity and not explore the complexity and uncover the conflicting issues. Therefore, their stories do not promote dialogue, garner public participation and people are not consulted. Reporting in Bhutan is a dangerous challenge to break this vicious paradox.

The reality that emerges tomorrow in the society may bear a slight imprint of the news reported in the media today. I ask myself whether each individual journalist carries an unknowable share of the responsibility for what happens after his reporting. My reporting on those laborer's plights did not yield anything. I met the woman interviewee few months later on the way to Sunkosh. She stepped in the bus at Wakleytar. She was alone. As soon as she saw me she became morose. 'Where is your baby?', I asked. 'Died', she said. 'And your husband?', I enquired. 'He also died' she said, that shocked me heavily. She said that after the interview, the government officers (Dashos) made their life extremely difficult. She said that once Dasho told her husband to fetch a log from the jungle; she expressed by raising her hand to mean other side of the hill on the way to Gasa. "But," she said, "he never returned!". She told me that the Brahmin who was interviewed also disappeared.

These are the clandestine gory acts of the Bhutanese Buddhists who say in public that they are sympathetic to all sentient beings. I really feel sad for

what has happened to these innocent laborers and feel guilty for trying to pursue people oriented, explanatory representing all sides and participatory approach from Bhutan's traditional rigid journalism. According to Munich Charter 1971, Declaration of the Rights and Obligations of Journalists; the journalists' responsibility towards the public excels any other responsibility, particularly towards employers and authorities. This is what required most to do in being and becoming a journalist in Bhutan.



Constituency map of Bhutan. Photo: Election Commission of Bhutan

PART III

- **General scenario**
- **Covering news inside camps**
- **A bitter reality**
- **Major achievements**

MEDIA IN EXILE

6.1 General scenario

Exiled Bhutanese journalists currently in Nepal have sufficiently proven that the existence and expansion of the relevant media sector bears a direct correlation with the growth of the community. The strength and integrity of the work of Bhutanese journalists has surpassed all previous expectations. The operation of media houses by these journalists also serves as a clear illustration of the importance of having a media existence in all refugee communities. This type of media is particularly important to society, as it acts as a medium for raising awareness, gaining international assistance and also bringing to light the voices and circumstances of individuals affected.

It should be recognized that exiled Bhutanese journalists are presently using numerous means of mass communication for promoting the voice of refugees. These include - the print media (newspapers), broadcast media (radio) and also internet media (news portals/websites). Despite continuous financial hardship, publications operating inside the refugee camps have turned out to be a major source of inspiration to the media in Bhutan. The journalists work without regard to any censorship or restriction, with the key aim of safeguarding public's right to information. This clearly is an important and arduous task, highlighted by the lack of development in the area.

Initial struggle

Focused media, running integrally alongside the refugee community, evolved in the refugee camps as early as the 1990's when the camps were initially established. At first the lack of overall vision, and realization of the capabilities of a powerful media were inhibited in many cases due to a deficiency in skilled human resources.

Previously, publications from outside Bhutan attempted to promote the voice of dissidents who argued for an improvement in the general quality of life, and increased justice within the Bhutanese political and governmental structures. Often however, they carried only the voices of a small section of people. The early publications were coordinated by individuals, political parties, human rights groups or social organizations, and they were not edited by people with a comprehensive knowledge of journalism.

As many publications were printed from outside Bhutan, and without any financial assistance and skilled human resources, they failed to publish their work consistently for a prolonged period of time. At most, they were published regularly for up to a year before dissolving.

Some of the early publications produced from outside Bhutan include - Amar Bhutan, Mukti Aawaj, Bhutani Nawa Sandesh, The Bhutan Observer, The Bhutan Review, Bhutani Kopila, The Refugee Post, The SUB Bridges, The Dragon Times, The Struggle and Bhutan Today. Publications such as Bhutani Deepak and Sworna Deepak by S. N. Kafley originally conceived in Brindaban, India came to an abrupt end after one edition. Their work had not been wholly in vain as they had provided a great source of inspiration to new media practitioners to continue and build on the good work in their own publications.

In 1991, Hari Prasad Adhikari edited a report jointly prepared by the People's Forum for Human Rights – Bhutan (PFHR-B) and the Human Rights Organization of Bhutan (HUROB) at Dalle Aahal in Assam, India.

The Students Union of Bhutan (SUB) first published 'Bhutan Focus' from December 1, 1990. Published in both Nepali and English, the periodical was sporadically closed down in 1993 and also in 2001 due to financial constraints. A few issues were published in 2000 and 2001 but it never gained its original continuity. The SUB also published fortnightly report called SUB Bridges in between March and December 1996.



The Nepali fortnightly Bhutan Jagaran is being published by Nepali Bhasha Parisad Bhutan, (later renamed as Nepali Sahitya Parisad Bhutan) with the financial support of the Australian NGO- Austcare since November 2000.

The Shangri-La SANDESH monthly began publishing in January 2001 through a group of students called Rose Class with the support of British NGO PhotoVoice. The publication was closed down in May 2003 when PhotoVoice denied giving any further assistance citing that the paper carried explicit political bias.

A Nepali weekly Sandesh was inaugurated in December 2000 with support from the Lutheran World Federation and coordinated by the Association of Human Rights Activists (AHURA) – Bhutan. This publication was also forced to close prematurely, and was completely finished by the end of 2003.

A number of individuals and groups have attempted to publish other newspapers. Most unfortunately fall short due to the necessary requirement of financial independence or lack of funding from outside sources on which they rely. Some of the newspapers inside the refugee camps could not continue to produce their hardcopy prints even after the first edition. The Bhutan Press Union (BPU) was formed on April 14, 2002 by journalists associated with The Shangri-La SANDESH, Bhutan Jagaran and Sandesh Weekly. It quickly established itself as a common forum for those interested in becoming involved in the



field of journalism. Many young and dynamic youths were thereafter motivated towards the media sector in exile following a number of training

programs facilitated by local journalists, most of which were coordinated by the BPU.

Many young refugees, in particular children between 6-18 and those working with Bhutanese Refugee Children Forum were attracted towards journalism following the publication of 'The Child Creation' from September 2003 in a bi-monthly basis until June 2004.

Journalists associated with Bhutan News Service learning audio-editing at Nepal FM studio in Kathmandu. Photo: Author



Since then the same paper was published in a monthly basis until August 2007. A children-related monthly newspaper funded by the Lutheran World Federation, now it is replaced by a monthly wall bulletin. The Forum also actively launched several rounds of training programs and workshops on journalism.

Self-studying has had to serve as the major tool for allowing young enthusiastic journalists to follow their ambition. Even access to internet facilities has largely remained restricted due to its expensive nature. Low-priced books on journalism, short term training from local journalists – some of which even lack the adequate knowledge themselves, and local and national dailies among other things have to serve as supplementary instruments to broaden improving journalistic skills.

Since the first instances of these newspapers becoming published in exile, Bhutanese political and human rights leaders have viewed the whole process negatively as a threat. They would be directly in the



firing line if the emerging papers potentially highlighted their shortcomings and inability to lead the democratic movement. These Bhutanese political and human rights leaders have taken the support of the local authority,

specifically the Chief District Officer. This officer has repeatedly intimidated the Bhutanese refugee journalists, and has abused his power with the aim of pressurizing these publications into closing down immediately.

The foundations of the development of a free and independent media were added mainly after the formation of the Association of Press Freedom Activists (APFA) – Bhutan on May 3, 2004. A four-page monotone monthly newspaper, The Bhutan Reporter (TBR) has been published by the Bhutan Media Society (BMS) under APFA – Bhutan since October 2004. It has further attracted refugee youths towards work in the media sector inside camps in Nepal.

It was only after the formation of APFA – Bhutan, that there were more opportunities for budding journalists to join a high quality journalism training scheme. These opportunities were run by professionals and frequently occurred inside the refugee camps.

In the new environment created by the political changes in Nepal after the April 2006 uprising, (following the 12-point agreement of seven political parties with the Maoists), the Bhutanese refugees in Nepal have expanded their involvement in media sector even further. Increasing numbers of people have showed their interest in the growing media sector.

Current state

After the signing of 'Declaration de Exile' on October 20, 2007 by major press bodies in exile, the situation has improved for those

concerned in the area. The signatory press bodies of the declaration are now working for the Bhutan News Service (BNS) – which has been declared the common news agency by those organizations in the sector.



Now-a-days the BNS has gained huge momentum among Bhutanese and their well-wishers since its news portal, the largest specializing in Bhutanese affairs, is disseminating balanced and credible news on a regular basis. A group of volunteer media workers, particularly involving youths, update the news portal on an hourly basis - www.bhutannewsservice.com

Refugee relief-aid agencies are also largely dependent upon the news portal of BNS for fresh and up to date news stories relating to Bhutan and its refugees. A prime example was a feature story entitled 'A MOTHER'S LONG JOURNEY-II,' which initially appeared online on the news portal. It was translated into Nepali by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) office in Nepal, and was distributed widely in the camps for the purpose of disseminating information.



Currently, there are three major press bodies operating in exile. These include the Bhutan Chapter of Third World Media Network, the Association of Press Freedom Activists and the Bhutan Press Union. Media Network Bhutan and the Reporter's Forum are yet another two other small groups, mostly limited to operating within the refugee camps.

Now-a-days there are only a few newspapers that are being published for Bhutanese refugees, where they themselves are fundamentally involved in the whole

process. The hardcopy print of The Bhutan Reporter (TBR) monthly still continues. This English-language newspaper is the only newspaper which has been continuously published since its inception in October 2004. The electronic copy of TBR is also available at www.apfanews.com. A number of newspapers, however, could not continue printing due to financial constraints.

The Bhutan Jagaran fortnightly, which had previously halted its production, has now resumed the hardcopy prints. This is the most widely read newspaper circulated mainly inside refugee camps.

Nawlo Aawaz monthly is being published by the student wing of the Communist Party of Bhutan led by the Birat faction. The other faction of the same party led by Vikalp publishes Yug Aawaz and The Class Struggle on a bi-monthly basis. These newspapers, however, are seen as having a political inclination towards Communism.



The credibility of the any news story covered by these newspapers is always questionable, as they project themselves as a voice of the party. There is also irregularity in their printing schedule due to financial difficulties. Yet they still provide limited information to the refugee community.

Besides publishing newspapers, the BNS runs a 30-minute radio program called 'Saranarathi Sarokar'

(Refugee Concern). It is broadcast on Kathmandu-based Nepal FM 91.8. The program, which has already celebrated its second anniversary, is the first radio program run by exiled Bhutanese journalists themselves.

APFA – Bhutan has its own website, aimed at advocating for an increase in freedom in Bhutan, in particularly for complete freedom of press, right to information and full rights of expression. www.apfanews.com, which initially was a subsidiary news portal of BNS as well, is now being run independently. This is because the BNS has initiated a separate news portal, which primarily serves as the complete news giver.

Still many small clubs, groups and organizations inside camps publish wall papers called *hawaipatrika* (a brochure like bulletin containing predominantly literary information), and other publications that serve as a useful source of information to exiled Bhutanese community. All most all of these bulletins are published with the financial contribution by group members.

6.2 Covering news inside camps

Practicing journalism inside Bhutanese refugee camps poses great challenges and is certainly not an easy task. The most important point to remember when reporting on events from the refugee camps is that the community lacks an in-depth understanding of the media and its significance. This sometimes makes the process of gathering news more complicated.

We can get important sources for our news stories from individuals, groups, clubs, organizations etc.

There should be frequent contact maintained with the credible sources. Whether you need the contact

for news or any other business, you must try to establish a long-lasting relationship with all the sources. Remember that a good source is a source for life. A professional reporter makes solid public contacts at every possible opportunity.

Other sources of news include- hospitals (and its Basic Health Units), school administrations, Caritas-Nepal, all the relevant Bhutanese organizations (political and apolitical), the Camp Management Committee, the Refugee Coordination Unit, relief-aid agencies and other influential persons of the community.

Camp-based journalists should provide education or instruction in media practice when the situation calls for it. Sometimes it may be difficult to get reliable and accurate information from your source(s) in the course of reporting. Preconceptions of the nature of intent may lead the source to feel uncomfortable even when you ask for required information in a polite way. The subject may in some circumstances try to reprimand or even avoid you completely, for the very reason that you are seeking the information.

In such a case, it is also necessary to consider that the subject may lack knowledge on the role and significance of media in the community and the numerous benefits media coverage could bring. This may be another factor, which culminates in the subject perceiving you in a negative light. You should try and remedy the situation by explaining the importance of your work and how they are indirectly helping the community and themselves by co-operating.

It may be worthwhile reading around the subject. This will help your understanding evolve on theoretical concepts surrounding your work. If you don't have access

to such materials then you can take reference from – ‘Media and its role,’ by R. P. Subba further on in this book.

To conclude, covering news inside the refugee camps is an interesting and rewarding job. You quickly find yourself easily adjusted to the close-community. It is also relatively easy to establish quality public relations within a short period of time.

Major areas for news coverage

The content of news coverage can never be predicted since anything of pressing public interest should become a news story. However, if you focus especially on the specific areas mentioned below, ample ‘news’ reports can be prepared.

- ▶▶ The status of the deteriorating educational situation.
- ▶▶ Increasing frustration due to the prolonged refugee crisis.
- ▶▶ School Leaving Certificate performance and the long term effects this may have.
- ▶▶ The quality of aid agencies facilities.
- ▶▶ Abuse of children.
- ▶▶ Cases of drunken parents.
- ▶▶ Cases of single women
- ▶▶ Situation of disabled people in the camps.
- ▶▶ Increasing literacy and the end of Non Formal Education.
- ▶▶ Increasing incidents of sexual abuse.
- ▶▶ The trafficking of females.
- ▶▶ Health and general conditions in the camps.

Qualities of a camp based reporter/journalist

Besides possessing qualities essential for a general reporter, those making refugee camps as their base of reporting should demonstrate the following qualities.

- ▶ *An ability to convince people.* It is an extremely difficult task to cover news stories in areas where the public lacks adequate and accurate information on the significance and positive role of media in the community. This also applies to the Bhutanese refugee community in Nepal. Thus, reporters should have an ability to convince people, particularly in terms of educating them about the importance of media and its positive impact it could have on that particular society.
- ▶ *Ability to deal in Nepali-language.* The majority of refugees in the camps speak and understand Nepali well. It is always necessary to deal with sources inside refugee camps in Nepali language even if you are associated with the English language newspapers/media. Having sound knowledge of local dialects would be an additional quality which is valuable. For instance, if you come into contact with a subject who is a '*Tamang*' by cast, communicating in the Tamang language would make information gathering far easier as the subjects would automatically feel some sort of connection with you, making it easier for you to extract the requisite information.
- ▶ *An Ability to establish a good relationship with the public.* Establishing a good relationship with the public is always necessary on the part of a journalist since it makes the required information easily accessible. Journalists, who do not have good public relations, always fail in gathering the reliable information on

time. This may cause the media house to not publish the story on time, which if continues will eventually damage the credibility of the media organization itself. If a subject has a personal problem with the journalist then they will not want to help. The story itself will not be taken into consideration if the subjects do not want to participate in the process, however important it is.

- ▶ *Power of tolerance and patience.* Some communities do not give great respect to journalists especially when their exposure to previous media has been limited. Sometimes journalists in such communities are intentionally mistreated by individuals or groups even if they are not directly aware of it. Therefore, great tolerance and patience are necessary for refugee camp-based journalists.

Challenges and their possible solutions

The challenges of the Bhutanese refugee media workers in exile in Nepal are diverse. We face the challenges faced by journalists of any other country in addition to the unique challenges faced in a refugee situation. Some challenges originate from the fact that we are from Bhutan – a country where private media was banned until 2006 and where formation of political parties was considered anti-national. Some challenges are faced by virtue of being in asylum, and other challenges originate from lack of support from aid agencies and the Nepalese government. It is noteworthy to discuss here the various challenges faced by the Bhutanese refugee media workers in Nepal from legal, economic, political and technological perspectives. The main and the alternative solutions to each major challenge are discussed under the following topics.

Legal challenges

Newspapers in Nepal must be registered legally for publication. The newspapers we produce, whether in print, electronically or operated by the Bhutanese refugees in exile, are neither registered in Bhutan nor in Nepal. The unions and associations of the media workers are also not registered in their country of origin as well as in the country of asylum.

Private publications were prohibited while we were in Bhutan, and presently the government of Bhutan does not recognize the publications or media organizations established in exile. This means there is no way they can be registered in Bhutan before repatriation.

The Nepalese government does not have a provision to give recognition and register the publications or organizations established by the refugees. Unless such a policy is adopted by the Nepalese government, legalization of the Bhutanese publications seems impossible.

There are many inconveniences, restraints and difficulties faced by the media workers because of non-registration of the newspapers and organizations. It has been an inhibiting factor to the establishment, survival and growth of the publications, reporters and media-related organizations.

The moment a reader acknowledges that the newspaper in hand is not registered by any government, s/he tends to question not only the legality and strength of the newspaper but also the authenticity and reliability of the news contained in it. This contributes towards losing valued readers.

There have been many instances where security personnel deployed by the Nepalese government in the refugee camps have snatched the newspapers and prevented them from getting distributed, even among the refugee leaders. The Nepalese government officials even at the local level have prevented the media workers from disseminating news even in the course of organizing conferences, interactions and meetings in Jhapa and Morang districts of Nepal where refugees languish.

The police personnel in Kakarvitta (Nepal) and Panitanki (India) obstruct the media workers from time to time preventing them from carrying newspapers for distribution inside Bhutan. Had the newspapers been registered, there would be no problem in this regard.

The members of the camp management committee, relief aid agencies, and even the Nepal government officials, call for explanations from the reporters about writing news reports, and often try and pressurize them into closing the publications. They sometimes question why some incidents of their interest, fail to get reported.

Another big setback of non-registration of the paper, or media-related bodies is its effect on mobilizing funds. The funding organizations show willingness to fund only legally established institutions.

The Bhutanese editors and reporters face an identity crisis with the news sources. They mainly carry the identity cards issued by the media related organizations of the refugees. As neither the paper nor the organization issuing identity cards is registered, the cards have become less meaningful and the media persons carrying such cards find it extremely difficult to get access to the formal news sources.

All these problems originate mainly from the non-registration of the newspapers, publishing houses and organizations established by the media workers.

The key towards solving these problems lies in the hands of the Nepalese government. It must search out a way to grant registration to the newspapers published by the refugees. The Nepalese government can stipulate general operating guidelines for the refugee organizations and allow them to function within the legal framework of such guidelines. The newspapers and organizations can be registered in Jhapa or Morang district where the refugees reside. The Press Council of Nepal and Federation of Nepalese Journalists (FNJ) can create support and monitoring provisions to the media related organizations of the refugees in the long term.

Economic challenges

Firstly, Bhutanese media workers in Nepal are refugees. Working as journalists is their second identity. Specifically, we are economically paralyzed. Most of the refugees' properties were seized by the government of Bhutan at the time of eviction. Or, as many had fled overnight, they had not been able to carry any properties to Nepal.

As part of the refugee situation we face here in Nepal, we have no entitlement to own any property. Legally, the refugees are not allowed to go outside the camps and work. Even if we take risks and search for jobs outside, the "non-national" tag we undoubtedly bear bars us from getting well paid jobs, and most refugees are eventually exploited by some of the natives or caught and thrown back in the camp by security forces. Licenses are not issued to the Bhutanese refugees for running businesses either. So it is almost impossible to gain some direct and regular source of income.

All the refugee journalists work voluntarily and none of the publications pay any salary to the reporters. The media organizations publish papers through small grants by other organizations or through the contribution of members, friends and relatives. One cannot expect anything in return from the newspapers usually sold to the "refugees" – who are the prime target readers. So, there is virtually no pecuniary gain from the newspapers published.

The reporters have to collect and file the news and photographs at their own expense. The editors have to collect and edit the news also using their own expenses, and the publishing organizations have to bear the publishing and distributing costs through the fund mobilized from external or internal sources.

To add to these previous disadvantages, earning revenue through advertisement is not possible as the adverts contained in the refugee publications cannot be acknowledged by the governmental and non-governmental organizations. Also, receiving regular grants from the government is not relevant in the refugee situation. So the exiled media workers have a tough time trying to survive and grow with critical financial stringencies.

Solutions to the financial constraints are few and far between. In order to enable the refugees to gain a regular source of income, the Nepalese government has to provide legal work permits to the refugee youths. The UNHCR too can allocate some funding to provide financial support to at least one or two news publications of the refugees.

If the Nepalese government gives registration to the refugee news publications then the papers can be published for a broader audience and advertisement subscriptions may be received – through which some legal source of income may be taken. This may in turn help provide some remuneration to the media workers.

At this point of time the only feasible solution to the financial constrain of the media workers lies in the hands of the resettled journalists should they be able to mobilize funds from abroad.

Political challenges

Although media houses and workers can provide unbiased news and information without getting directly involved with any political group, a good political climate is a prerequisite for the establishment, protection, promotion and practice of press freedom and freedoms of speech and expression.

Before being evicted from Bhutan, we were not able to exercise complete freedom of press as private media was banned. Being in Nepal, and living under hard circumstances it has taken many years to promote the role of the media and begin to gather together resources for publishing newspapers.

The Bhutanese political parties operating from exile in Nepal initially felt that their newsletters could be better substitutes for newspapers, and ignored the efforts of media workers. Even now there is a large tendency of exiled Bhutanese political party leaders to undermine the Bhutanese press. The fact that Bhutanese political parties in exile, exclude in their press releases the Bhutanese press, but never fail to include the Nepali media, is testament to the fact that they are reluctant to give high regard to the former.

Sometimes the members of the factions of the exiled political parties intimidate the reporters for covering or not covering their events, or sometimes simply for just writing news articles. A few cadres of some political parties, particularly those claiming to be underground outfits, keep threatening the media workers for not giving coverage on the issues of their interest.

The media related organizations need to hold formal interactions with the political party leaders as well as with their cadres more frequently. They need to understand each other as complementing and supplementing partners and build concerted efforts to achieving complete democracy with which both the entities can survive and thrive.

The media workers must sustain their publications and gradually proceed towards turning the newspapers from monthly/fortnightly to weekly and daily, providing wider coverage to issues on repatriation and struggle for establishment of complete democracy in Bhutan.

Technological challenges

By technological challenges, here it means the problems and difficulties faced in adopting new ideas, skills, approaches, systems, tools, equipment and machines in the process of collecting, classifying, analyzing, storing, retrieving, publishing and disseminating information and news.

Not a single Bhutanese publication in exile has its own printing press. Not all such publications even own a personal computer or basic office equipment. Most of the reporters do not possess a single camera, dictaphone or any other recording machines. Hardly any media worker is a professional journalist. Many depend on the skills they received from short-term informal training. Despite profound wishes to utilize the skill and assistance of the latest technologies; the refugee situation has crippled the journalists making them succumb to their financial disabilities.

To overcome the technological challenges, the financial positions of the organizations publishing newspapers have to be improved. Also, the earning environment and the capacity of the media workers need to be improved significantly. Besides, aid agencies and other implementing

partners may manage a printing press which could also be used by the news publications. Such agencies and other press related international organizations should come forward in providing training, support equipment and fund.

Some tips to remember

- ▶▶ Never use English words and sentences if you feel the subject does not understand.
- ▶▶ Give preference to using the local and Nepali language.
- ▶▶ Use direct and simple language.
- ▶▶ If you find it difficult to obtain information from a subject while preparing a news story, you should first explain what the value of media is and try to appeal to their sense of community.
- ▶▶ When you are quoting anybody, never forget to take the permission from the particular person and ask whether or not they want their name to be published in the paper or full anonymity if they so chose.
- ▶▶ Make a habit of storing useful and personally relevant news reports from national and local dailies. This is to ensure that you write news reports in a professional template, and also as a reference point when you come across any problems while writing news articles.

6.3 A bitter reality

The Bhutanese authority has sentenced Shanti Ram Acharya, 20, who is a camp-based correspondent of The Bhutan Reporter, to seven-and-half years imprisonment simply for his entry into Bhutan.

The call for Acharya's release continues despite the Druk authority's attempt to conceal the facts regarding

the High Courts, one-sided-and-politically motivated-order to sentence him for such a long time without any genuine reason.

On January 23, 2009, International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) called for the leniency for Acharya, who was arrested by the Bhutanese security forces on January 16, 2007 at Tashilakha on charges of being a member of an underground outfit named the - Communist Party of Bhutan (MLM).

To note, the IFJ has also joined Association of Press Freedom Activists (APFA) Bhutan and other press freedom groups, in calling on authorities to make public



Acharya before getting arrested

Acharya's whereabouts, and the conditions in which he is being held. They are also urging a review which should result in Acharya gaining access to an independent lawyer. The Netherlands-based Global Human Rights Defense (GHRD) has also joined forces with APFA - Bhutan, for the call to review Acharya's release.

Ironically, none of the media organizations and houses inside the country covered the plight of Acharya. This shows a clear deficiency in the whole system as it should have received coverage. In fact, all private and government media in Bhutan have until now not changed their attitude to terming the dissident southern Bhutanese as anti-national or terrorists. This shows undoubtedly the continued influence of the inherent prejudice, which the government shows towards the media and the people they made refugees.

Interestingly, the Bhutan Chapter of South Asian Free Media Association (SAFMA) has remained mute as if to suggest there is complete press freedom in Bhutan and that Acharya is not a journalist. Before this revelation, this was one possible organization that we could have worked in conjunction with.

Acharya, who had been to Bhutan to meet his relatives, was charged with entering the country with the intention of carrying out terrorist activities. Arrested on January 16, 2007, Acharya was produced before the court for a preliminary hearing on March 16. It is obvious he faced tremendous and inhumane torture in order to make him confess to the charges. This demonstrates the veracity of Bhutan's weaknesses to respect and safeguard fundamental human rights and provide complete freedom of movement and assembly to all its citizens as was enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR).



The High Court's order reads, "The Court granted full opportunity and thoroughly considered the explanations made by the defendant concerning the guilty plea. He was given full opportunity to make all his submissions, which were given the utmost

consideration. The Court awards seven years and six months imprisonment term in total to the defendant Shanti Ram Acharya, resident of Beldangi II, Sector D/1, Hut No.85, Jhapa, Nepal in accordance with # 127, 134, 329 and 330 of the Penal Code and # 211 of the Civil and Criminal Procedure Code from the day he was arrested for the charges against him that have been proven."

It can be said that the basic norms of fair trial were not present in this instance. Acharya's relatives were not present, nor were they called by the authority, during the time of Acharya's hearing in court. Acharya failed to hire a lawyer for his defense for two reasons, and those led him to succumb to the Bhutanese regime. Bhutan does not have independent lawyers to be hired by individuals, and Acharya lacked any financial backup or even potential financial support as he was produced at the court without the knowledge of his relatives and family members.

There are no logical arguments that could lead anyone to term Acharya a Maoist militant. Even the Communist Party of Bhutan (CPB-MLM) issued a press statement after his arrest, strongly refuting his affiliation to their party.

Secondly, looking at his past history it appears that Acharya had a deep-rooted interest in journalism. He worked with TBR monthly for six months and was subsequently working at The Jagaran fortnightly. He is also the founding editor for Baal Aawaj (Voice of Children), a children-related wall newspaper which used to be published with the financial support from the Lutheran World Federation.

The court order also claims that laws and charge sheets were read in Nepali language. However, in the

Bhutanese court Nepali-language is never used in proceedings and there are no Nepali speaking attorneys. Most documents are prepared in Dzongkha, which many Nepali speaking Bhutanese do not understand. None of the evidence produced by the police suggests that Acharya had acted against Bhutan or the Bhutanese government. The only evidence that court relied upon was the forced statement by Acharya in police custody, and subsequently repeated it at the court proceedings.

The police charge sheet against Acharya, said he was arrested for taking photographs at an outpost of the Royal Bhutan Army with a digital camera. This does not substantiate enough evidence to prove he is guilty of acting against Bhutan.

It is a journalist's right to take photographs. Even though there are some restrictions on this principle in sensitive areas, the court's order to sentence him for such a long time simply for taking the photos, sounds illogical and appears to be clearly politically motivated.

6.4 Major achievements

Despite several hurdles, Bhutanese media sector in exile have made some major achievements both at national and international level. Firstly, the deteriorating media situation inside Bhutan would have remained unheard to the world communities had press freedom activists in exile remained hushed.

IFJ report

Association of Press Freedom Activists (APFA) Bhutan has successfully published three reports on its own beside participating in annual media report published by International Federation of Journalists (IFJ).

The 2005-6 report on Bhutan for IFJ traces the history of media in Bhutan and the situation thereof

while the report for 2006-7 includes details about the media incidences during that year and legal provisions that still hinder press freedom and right to information of the general people. In successive report, the IFJ denied including report on Bhutan saying the sponsor of the publication had put condition to do so for sponsorship.

International affiliation

Bangladesh-based Third World Media Network (TWMN), a watchdog of media freedom in least developed countries, approved for the affiliation of Bhutan Committee. The Bhutan Chapter of TWMN, launched in September 16, 2006, comprises only Bhutanese refugee journalists headed by the author/editor of this book.



This is an obvious indication of the fact that even international media bodies are conscious of the status of media situation inside Bhutan. As its upshot, the headquarters of TWMN took an intrepid decision to form its Bhutan Committee comprising only exiled journalists.

Interestingly, the launching of the Bhutan Chapter of The South Asian Free Media Association (SAFMA) take place only on August 5, 2007 though is quiescent, till the writing of this book, particularly in terms of raising voices for the guarantee of media freedom in the country.

The effort of exiled journalists to seek affiliation at TWMN, which appeared to be successful, is one of the greatest achievements.

Common voice

All exiled Bhutanese media organizations stood on a single platform after signing Declaration de Exile, a historical document unveiling their demands to the establishment of media freedom in

Bhutan, on October 20, 2007. This is yet another biggest achievement made by exiled Bhutanese journalists. The full content of the Declaration de Exile is under;

Journalists during the first joint media conference that adopted Declaration de Exile.

Photo: Author



Declaration de Exile

Jointly by

Bhutan Press Union

Third World Media Network Bhutan Chapter

Association of Press Freedom Activists Bhutan

On

Press Freedom and Freedom of Speech and
Expression in Bhutan

**FOCUS : Bhutan has not done enough for press
freedom**

Background

Press Freedom and freedom of speech and expression were never incorporated into national policies of Bhutan all through the ages. Fundamentally, freedom of expression and speech was termed anti national approach and access to media was regarded an attempt to destroy the long preserved culture of closed society. The Bhutanese rulers never prescribed that media would be the best means to educate people and a good partner for the good governance.

Despite it signed the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), the rights conferred by this international legal instrument, Article 19 we stress, were ignored by Bhutanese authorities.

TV was banned until 1999. All media outlets were strictly controlled and censored by the government until recently when it opened up way for private media as part of the king's efforts to democratize his regime.

When the struggle for human rights, democracy and equality began in early 1990s, the political parties formed at that time to lead the movement included press freedom in their demand list. Subsequently, the deployment of the military force in southern districts silenced the voices for freedom of speech and expression and freedom of the press.

Those supporting this justifiable demand were called anti nationals and were evicted. Thus led the strengthening of the fight for freedom of speech and express and the freedom of the press. Thus, we support, in broader sense, the demand for establishment of democracy and human rights in the country considering that press freedom is impossible in their absence.

In Bhutan's rapidly changing socio-economic, cultural and political scenario, information technology and media are already vital forces that touch all national priorities.

Access to media

Not all people have access to media. Low rate of literacy and ignorance of the importance of media are the major causes for not widening the public access to media. However, the urban population is growing conscious towards the media and its importance.

Indian and other foreign newspapers also are available in the market but they are limited to Paro, Thimphu, Phuentsholing and few other cities. Bhutan's low literacy rate, however, means that the majority of the population is not affected by the print media. Oral tradition is very strong, however, and radio broadcasts are relatively more widely listened to.

Foreign media organizations were not allowed to station their representative. Further, the government also restricted the nationals to work with the foreign media.

Positively, by the end of the last year, the situation changed somehow. Media agencies like Indo Asian News Service, British Broadcasting Corporation etc. produce reports on Bhutanese events frequently. Of all foreign media, IANS has been observed to have stronger hold in covering the Bhutanese issues. Visits by the foreign journalists have increased, but not satisfactorily.

Yet, the government still restricts the transmission of some foreign TV channels. The government cites the eroding effect on Bhutanese culture as the reason to bar the transmission of such TV channels. Few news channels like Aajtak, CNN-IBN, fashion TV, MTV, Zee Network and few other Indian channels have been censored.

Efforts in exile

There had been several publications since the beginning of the refugee issue solely intended for advocacy for democracy and human rights and right to return of the Bhutanese citizens evicted out of the country.

However, such publications merely acted as the mouth piece of the publishing organizations.

They, at large, could not include a wide range of advocacy campaigns collectively carried out by the Bhutanese organizations in exile.

The efforts for an injection of journalism in Bhutanese society in exile had begun as early as 2000. Initially, three papers appeared in refugee community: Shangrila Sandesh monthly, Sandesh weekly and Bhutan Jagaran fortnightly. Inability to generate enough financial and human resources, the publications such as Bhutan Times, Sandesh weekly, Shangrila Sandesh have closed. Yet a group of people continue to strive for fight for press freedom. This led to the formation of Bhutan Press Union followed by Association of Press Freedom Activists – Bhutan and Bhutan Chapter of the Third World Media Network.

Presently, Bhutan Jagaran and The Bhutan Reporter monthlies are published regularly. Another bulletin Vidhyarthi Pratirodh is also seen circulating having sympathetic nearness to communist followers.

In the beginning, the refugee media faced hurdles from within the community and the local administration in Jhapa and Morang districts in Nepal. However, in recent days, the political parties and other opposition groups have become liberal. Yet the increasing violence in the camps has posed serious threat to independent existence of the media in exile.

Inside Bhutan

The government repelled the restrictive policy on privatization of media granting permission to start private media houses. This led to beginning of Bhutan Times and Bhutan Observer weeklies on April 27 and June 2 2006 respectively. Similarly, the government has also licensed two private FM stations – Kuzoo FM 90 MHz and Valley FM 99.99 MHz – which have already begun their transmissions.

By law, restriction on TV has ended. The national TV station was established in 1999. No private channel has appeared. Even then, the government continues to ban the distribution of some of the foreign TV channels.

The Bhutan government has not been sincere to its commitments for press freedom. Recently the government blocked two websites, www.bhutantimes.com and www.bhutandaily.com. The authorities claimed they were forced to block the sites since there were posts threatening sovereignty of the kingdom. International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) and Reporters Sans Frontiers (RSF) expressed serious concern over the blockage. However, the South Asian Freed Media Association (SAFMA) which opened its chapter in Bhutan recently, remained mum in this issue.

One of the journalists working with newspapers in exile was arrested in Bhutan early this year. Shanti Ram Acharya, who worked with The Bhutan Reporter and Bhutan Jagaran, was alleged to have involvement with communist group, which the party has defied. His whereabouts has not been known yet.

Legal Provisions

Bhutan has formulated new media laws and regulations. Even now, the media act and constitution have little provisions that guarantee media freedom and right to information, speech and expression to the Bhutanese nationals.

Regulations and terms and conditions for operation of media houses have been developed. As a central monitoring body Bhutan Information Communication and Media Authority (BICMA) is being established.

The draft constitution does not adequately incorporate the principles of press freedom and freedom of speech and expression of the citizens and residents. Some of the provisions mentioned therein are:

Article 7 of the constitution has provisions of fundamental rights that include the right to information, speech and expression and freedom of the press as well.

Sub Article (2): A Bhutanese citizen shall have the right to freedom of speech, opinion and expression.

Sub Article (3): A Bhutanese citizen shall have the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. No person shall be compelled to belong to another faith by means of coercion or inducement.

Sub Article (4): There shall be freedom of press, radio and television and other forms dissemination of information, including electronic.

Sub Article (5): A Bhutanese citizen shall have the right to information.

However, there are a number of clauses included in the constitution that restrict the complete freedom of the press, right to speech and expression and further it does not adequately guarantee the right to information of the citizens.

Article 6 (3) (e) of the constitution restricts the citizens of right to speech and expression or right to information with many vague provisions such as termination of citizenship if found speaking against the king, country and the people. The government has not explained what it meant by speaking against the king, country and the people.

Article 7 (21) (e) of the constitution states that the government can impose restriction by law in case of 'the disclosure of information received in regard to the affairs of the state or in discharge of official duties'.

Article 10 (15) states, 'the Speaker or the Chairperson (of National Assembly and National Council respectively) may exclude the press and the public from all or any part of the proceedings if there is a compelling need to do so in the interests of public order, national security or any other situation, where publicity would seriously prejudice public interest'.

Article 10 (21) provides liberty to the Members of Parliament for opinion limited within the parliament proceedings.

The draft constitution also has objectionable provisions under Emergency section. Article 33 (7) gives power to the government to suspend rights conferred under sections 2, 4, 5, 14 and 18 of Article 7 during the period of emergency. This means not only the press freedom but all rights enjoyed by the citizens would be suspended during such periods. This will have negative impact on the citizens as they fail to have access with the situation of the country, their right to know what is happening in the country.

The constitution does not guarantee that license of the publications, radios or TV stations would not be seized by the state power. The emergency power given to the government can force these media bodies to remain shut, permanently or temporarily.

Because the law does not guarantee 'no censorship' on the operation of media houses, government may cite the reasons like speaking against the country and the people or security or sovereignty of the nation to impose censorship to publication or broadcast of certain news items.

The Media Act 2006, enforced on July 5, 2006, ignores consultation with media workers while formulating any laws, by-laws or regulations related to press freedom and working journalists. Article 13 (3) empowers the information minister not to disclose any information if he or she 'assumes' that disclosure would have negative impact on national interest.

Similarly Article 14 (1) states that in the event of emergency 'the minister may by notification take over for a limited period the control and management of media services or suspend its operation'. The Act has also empowered the ministry to cancel the license issued for operation of the media bodies.

Article 15 sufficiently empowers the government to impose unlimited censorship on media contents.

The act does not guarantee the security of the working journalists and also does not speak about the perks and other facilities that journalists must get from media organization in return to the services provided.

Article 3 (1.4) of the Newspaper Regulation states that any person who has been, under the laws of Bhutan, convicted of a criminal offence, will not be issued a publishing license.

Our Demands

We, the undersigned organizations jointly demand:

- Include provisions in the constitution and the laws that guarantee the right to speech and expression, right to information and freedom of the press in the national constitution and media laws.
- Explain adequately the vague provision in Article 6 (3) (e) of the constitution such as termination of citizenship if found speaking against the king, country and the people. Guarantee that mere criticism of a person would not be the cause of citizenship termination.
- Amend Article 7 (21) (e) of the constitution guaranteeing that citizens get every information of the state.
- Amend Article 10 (15) of the draft constitution to allow unrestricted entrance to journalists and media persons in all proceedings of the parliament. Also remove the provision of necessary permission from the parliament before publishing any materials regarding the proceeding of the parliament or vote cast in the house.

- Amend Article 33 (7) of the draft constitution to ensure that media will have uncensored access to any places during the time of emergency as well. This is fundamentally important to protect the right to information of the citizens.
- Guarantee that a license issued once will not be repelled in any pretexts such as violations of the national laws or speaking against king, country or people.
- Repel all provisions in constitution, media act and the newspaper regulation that media houses would be taken under control or owned by the state during the period of emergency thereby ensuring that citizens get correct information on what's going on in the country without any interference by the state.
- Allow certain percentage of foreign investment in media with guarantee that editorial contents are not administered by the shareholders. Partial foreign investment in media is necessary in Bhutan since Bhutanese do not have capability to make bigger investments for expansion of media houses.
- Include provisions in newspaper regulations/Media Act that accreditation would be issued to journalists working with foreign media as well (both national and foreign).
- Ensure that journalists would be consulted while formulating laws, by-laws or regulations related to press freedom and working journalists.
- Guarantee the security of the working journalists and state the perks and other facilities that journalists must get from media organization in return to the services provided.

- Effectively implement the strategy prepared for media development which says, ‘Upholding the universal rights of citizens to information, freedom of opinion and expression, and independence of the media which has the mandate to connect, inform, educate and entertain’.
- Describe the degree of criminal acts of persons to bar him or her from getting a media license. Petty cases of criminal acts, as has so far been defined by the royal government, should not be the basis to restrict anyone from receiving license.

Appeal to international press freedom bodies:

We the undersigned appeal the international press freedom bodies and free expression activists to:

- Put pressure on the Bhutanese government for provisions in constitution and laws guaranteeing greater extent of press freedom;
- Ask the Bhutanese authority to repel or amend all the restrictive and objectionable provisions in the constitution and laws that do not meet the international standards of press freedom;
- Ask the Bhutanese government to end the misuse of the state owned media;
- Advocate for uncensored telecast of all foreign TV channels taking into consideration the interests of the Bhutanese people;
- Recognize the efforts made by the media organizations in exile for establishment of press freedom and freedom of expression in Bhutan like that done by Third World Media Network, which recognized the formation of its Bhutan chapter comprising all journalists in exile.

- Encourage the representation of journalists in exile in international media forums to make their voices heard;
- Train the journalists in exile for development of media environment in Bhutan;
- Monitor of the media situation in Bhutan by making regular visits to the country;
- We draw attention of the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ), Reporters without Borders (RSF), Freedom House, SAFMA, Centre for Protection of Journalists (CPJ), International Press Institute (IPI), International Media Support (IMS), World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters (AMARC), World Association of Newspapers (WAN), World Press Freedom Committee (WDFC), International Freedom of Expression Exchange (IFEX) and such other media organizations regarding the need to improve media situation in Bhutan.

Appeal for Bhutanese organizations

We the undersigned appeal the Bhutanese organizations – political or apolitical – to:

- Include the demand for press freedom and freedom of speech and expression in their charter of demands;
- Support for promotion of media sector in Bhutanese community;
- Make the Bhutanese media organizations to be the first to know any events related to Bhutan and Bhutanese refugees;
- Make efforts to train their cadres on importance and necessity of the free media for democracy and human rights protection in Bhutan;

- Make their cadres responsible towards respecting the works of Bhutanese journalists guaranteeing to make no hindrance in any aspects of the journalists' duty;
- Provide possible assistance to Bhutanese journalists while they are in duty in the field.

Our Commitments

We the undersigned pledge to:

- Continue advocating for complete press freedom in Bhutan;
- Ask the Bhutanese authorities to repeal or amend all the restrictive and objectionable provisions in constitution and laws;
- Ask the political parties and human rights groups to advocate for press freedom and freedom of expression in Bhutan alongside their political and human rights issues;
- Continue to strive for development of journalism in Bhutanese community in the long term;
- Work to sustain the publications in exile and encourage the Bhutanese to begin new media ventures in Bhutan;
- Work for increasing awareness in the Bhutanese community regarding the importance of media in democratic environment;
- Expand the readership of the Bhutanese newspapers and listeners of the radios;
- Encourage the younger generation to build their career in journalism;

- Organize regular workshops, trainings and seminars of media and journalism for enthusiastic journalists;
- Network collaboratively and cooperatively with the media organization in Bhutan and across the globe to establish complete press freedom and for the development of journalism in the Bhutanese community;
- Extend possible support to media and media personnel inside Bhutan and in exile to any troubles they come upon
- Regard Bhutan News Service as an independent news agency of the country

Signed by

I. P. Adhikari, President, For APFA Bhutan

C. N. Timsina, President, For BPU

T. P. Mishra, President, For TWMN - Bhutan Chapter

Date of Declaration

October 20, 2007

Place of Declaration

Damak-11, Jhapa, Nepal (in Exile)

A refugee woman rests with briquette distributed by UNHCR on her way to residence in Beldangi I camp. Photo: Author



There is growing trend of consciousness on right to information even among refugee children. Photo: Author

PART IV

- **Understanding, patience, depth of knowledge**
- **Practicing about writing**
- **Journalism: Rising above the identity barrier**

► SOME EXPERIENCES ◀

7.1 Understanding, patience, depth of knowledge

- *By Deepak Adhikari*

Since my early childhood I was curious to find out about the numerous events that took place in my society. My childhood desire to understand every incident in society gradually developed as a longing to know and understand society and people. This later turned out to be the career I would choose. Born and raised in Panchthar, a hilly district in the Far-eastern region of Nepal, I was fortunate enough to navigate the political and societal transformation of 1980s and 90s in Nepal.

My interest in journalism was further cemented by my father, who was an editor of a local vernacular weekly, called *Kabeli*, based in Phidim, the headquarters of Panchthar. The name *Kabeli* itself, comes from a river that flows by my district of Panchthar. The weekly publication with a circulation of just one thousand (in that provincial town), was closed down just after a few years.

This, however, did not deter me from my dream of becoming a journalist. Because democracy was

reintroduced by the peoples' movement in 1990 and the country was enjoying the freedom of democracy, newspaper publication flourished.

Amidst such an atmosphere of fledgling democracy and people learning to live with a democratic culture, I completed my high school. After that, I decided to go to Kathmandu, which many youths during that time, thought to be a storehouse of opportunities. I pursued my higher studies in Ratna Rajya Laxmi Campus, a reputed college affiliated with Tribhuvan University, which at the time was the only public university in Nepal. With a strong desire already embedded in my heart to become a successful journalist, I chose journalism as major subject for my higher studies.

Along with my studies, I worked in *Drishti*, a Nepali-language weekly newspaper, as an intern. I felt my passionate work and understanding of the issues was duly paid when the editor of the newspaper offered me a job. I got an opportunity to hone my skills in journalism. I learned that it requires much understanding, patience and the depth of knowledge to get to the roots of issues and analyze them. It was the first platform for me and I left no stone unturned to develop my skill.

The post 1990 era saw a huge upsurge in peoples' awareness, which prompted the growth of media. Dozens of newspapers, Television networks and FM (Frequency Modulation) radios were launched to satisfy peoples' appetite for news and information. Although the democracy introduced a great transformation in Nepalese politics, economy and society, it's the media which could appreciably feel its benefit. It's also a poignant fact that the journalists in tabloids and weekly newspapers were less paid at that time.

As it was getting harder and harder for me to maintain my living with such a meager salary, I started looking for alternatives. Like many youths, who think they can bring the world down to their feet if they have a million dollars, I boarded a plane for Dubai (UAE) to work in McDonalds in 1998. My passion for journalism left me dissatisfied with myself in Dubai. Finally, I decided to come back to Nepal again, and pursue journalism.

I returned to Nepal in the autumn of 2002 and resumed my studies for a MA in English Literature. Meanwhile, *Nepal Weekly* a newsmagazine, published by Kantipur Publications, one of the biggest media houses in Nepal, offered me a full time job in early 2003. Before that I worked in the same newsmagazine as a stringer.

The transparency and accountability of the media met a serious set-back in Nepal when King Gyanendra usurped executive power through a military coup. As a one-time haven for journalists and journalism, Nepal turned out to be the most dangerous spot for media pursuers.

I can vividly remember the day; February 1st, 2005, when the King made his statement on state-owned television, stating that armed soldiers had taken control of media houses. Those were tough days to work in, as we had to follow instructions from army personnel, instead of our editors while looking for news.

We ignored the mounting risks and continued disseminating news. The media, which had grown into one of the most respected, powerful non-governmental entities during the fifteen years of democracy, was now forced into bravely pushing the boundaries for regaining its own freedom. Thousands of political activists, human

rights defenders, journalists and civilians were put behind the bars. Despite this, the autocratic government of the king's henchmen couldn't face the pressure from national and international communities. The king finally backed down and handed over the executive power back to political parties. However, it took 19 days of continuous demonstrations that also the lives of twenty-one people, besides leaving thousands injured before the King retreated.

After the restoration of freedom and democracy, journalists were enjoying their role in correctly informing the public of events, and making the leaders accountable. I then got an opportunity which any third world journalist would die for. I was selected as an Alfred Friendly Press Fellow 2008. Every year, Alfred Friendly Press Fellowships, selects 8 to 10 journalists from developing countries and train them for six months in an American newsroom. After a two week long orientation in Washington, DC, I was sent to the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, the second largest daily in Pennsylvania, in early April 2008.

In Nepal, I had been writing about the issue of Bhutanese refugees since 2006. In the Post-Gazette newsroom, I was ruminating over story ideas in an unfamiliar setting, as it was my first trip to the Western world. Then suddenly a Nepalese friend of mine told me about three young Bhutanese who had been resettled in Pittsburgh. I called the agency that resettled them, and requested an interview. When I met Man Maya Odari, Dilli Odari and Yani Maya Odari (all in their early 20s), they turned out to be happier than I was. It was the first time they had met a Nepali speaking person, since they arrived in Pittsburgh. The young refugees had been joined by their parents and siblings after a month, and when other refugees arrived,

a "Little Bhutan" was gradually created in suburban Pittsburgh.

Amidst the lack of touch with Nepali community, I was drawn towards them and after a few months, I was no longer a stranger. My weekends were often spent with the Bhutanese community, who were struggling to adjust to a life in this new world. Kishor Pradhan, a Bhutanese who had been in US for three years, helped me connect to the larger Bhutanese community. After six months of my sojourn, it was really hard for me to say goodbye. Never in my life had I become so deeply attached to a place and a community, in such a short span of time.

When I was back in Nepal in early September, 2008, I was greeted by a new enthusiasm. Now even the decade long Maoist insurgency was history. Nepal had become the world's youngest Republic. A month after my arrival, I was offered a job as a coordinator for the features section at *Kantipur*, Nepal's largest daily newspaper. I happily accepted the offer as I wanted to implement the skills I had learned at the Post-Gazette in a daily newspaper. My experience so far has been interesting and enlightening. In recent years, the Nepali media has been gradually heading towards one of professionalism and integrity. However, from my experience in US, I can say that there is a long way to go.

(Adhikari is a Kathmandu-based journalist working for Kantipur Daily. He has worked with Drishti Weekly newspaper and Nepal Weekly magazine. He is also an Alfred Friendly Press Fellow 2008.)

7.2 Practicing about writing

- *By Laura Elizabeth Pohl*

Being a journalist means being a voice for those whose voices might otherwise go unheard. As both a writer and a photojournalist, I go a step further and give a face, a place and a shape to those voices.

Being a journalist means chasing down sources, double-checking facts and working hours without a break, sometimes in emotionally and physically difficult conditions. I once spent five cold, rainy hours photographing anti-free trade agreement protests in Seoul. Hundreds of angry people turned on the riot police, who unleashed high-pressure water hoses on the crowd. The water hit me square in the chest.

Being a journalist means sometimes receiving hate mail from readers. It means spending a large period of time away from family and friends. It means never being rich, and often having to work holidays. After all, the news does not stop for Thanksgiving or Christmas. So why did I pursue a journalism career?

I was 10 when I decided to be a journalist. Mostly, I thought it would be a great way to travel and learn about different cultures. I also liked the idea of having

a reason to be nosy and pose questions to strangers. My first big break came in 7th grade, when I landed an exclusive interview with my school principal. I do not remember what he said but I remember feeling weighted with the gravitas of holding this important information. I needed to get my story down on paper and quick.

Now technology has changed; people send stories over their Blackberrys, but the profession itself has not been fundamentally changed. Being a journalist still means opening people's eyes, learning about the world, educating the public, documenting history and making a difference.

Sometimes the difference you make is not the difference you thought you would be making.

A few years ago I spent 11 months getting to know, interview and photograph two North Korean refugee women adjusting to life in South Korea. One woman was depressed and lonely. Though she shared intimate details of her life with me and let me photograph her, I never got the feeling she liked me. I wondered why she kept allowing me to come back.

Then came our last meeting. We shared a big pot of spicy fish stew at a restaurant near her place. After eating our meal mostly in silence, we walked to a nearby mart, where she needed to pick up some items. I, however, had to get going. I started to say goodbye. Suddenly, she hugged me tight and started crying. "You helped me so much and I didn't help you!" she cried in Korean. "Thank you so much for your help!"

I was shocked. I started sobbing. We must have made a funny pair, a tall foreign woman and a short Korean woman, clinging to each other in front of the busy mart. I had expected my story would help people understand

the plight of North Korean refugees. I had not expected the story would help her personally. It was such a wonderful feeling knowing I made a difference in her life.

While being a journalist is an amazing job, becoming a journalist is an entirely different matter.

You must be inquisitive, compassionate and objective. Inquisitiveness means asking the right questions and the right follow-up questions. Showing compassion means being able to empathize and understand where your subject's point of view, even if you do not agree with what the person is saying or doing. Objectiveness means telling all sides of the story and not letting your feelings interfere with your work. Unless you are an editorial writer or a columnist, your job is to deliver the facts.

Becoming a journalist means learning to get your facts right. I double-check information sources give me, even if I write it word for word in my notebook. For example: "You said you want to hire seven people by the second quarter. So does that mean you want them all working in your office by the beginning of April or the end of June?" It might seem like a small detail, but small details make the difference in a story. Just look at the corrections in any newspaper. Here's one from the New York Times on Jan. 25, 2009:

The, "30 Seconds Within a column," last Sunday, featured an interview with the Olympic swimmer Ben Wildman-Tobriner, and misidentified, in some editions, the university where he attends medical school. It is the University of California, San Francisco not the University of San Francisco.

Finally, becoming a journalist means learning what makes a good story. Sometimes this is obvious: the star

athlete, the struggling single mother (I have photographed stories on two different mothers), the sick child, the failing business. More often though, a good story is not so obvious e.g. "how French fries are a leading indicator for the world economy," is a story for which The Oregonian won a Pulitzer Prize, in 1998. Recognizing a good story often means understanding your community and having good contacts within that community.

Of course, you do not have to go to school to develop these skills. Having the right mentors and editors in your life can make up for formal schooling, as long as you keep practicing your writing and photography, and continually learn from your mistakes.

I saw this first hand when I photographed, and wrote a story about Bhutanese refugee journalists running a newspaper in Nepal. Only a few had formal journalism training. They certainly did not have a lot of money. What they did have though, was mentors, readers and a drive to provide informative and interesting news to their readers. Their editorial meeting was as spirited and serious as any I have attended at American magazines and newspapers.

That is really what matters most about being and becoming a journalist: having a passion for telling truthful stories.

(Pohl is a freelance photographer and web journalist based in Washington D.C. She is also the treasurer of the Women Photojournalists of Washington. Laura has taught photography at Tidewater Community College in Virginia and worked as a business reporter for Dow Jones Newswires in New York and Seoul. She received an MA in journalism from the University of Missouri and a BA in interdisciplinary studies from American University. You can see her work at www.laurapohl.com)

7.3 Journalism: Rising above the identity barrier

- By Subir Bhaumik

In areas of intense ethnic or religious conflict, fairness and balance are the first casualties in journalism. I will tell you how any journalist worth his salt should handle this conflict within. It is not easy but it is possible for a journalist to rise above his identity of race, religion or nationality and report without fear or favor.

The Northeast of India is a bridge between two great civilizations, the Indo-Gangetic and the Southeast Asian, and population flows back and forth have turned it into a great melting pot of races, religions and cultures. Sustained conflicts such as the Moamaria rebellion in Assam have scarred the region's landscape since medieval times. In the post-colonial period, the conflicts have intensified over lands, jobs, business opportunities, political space and cultural competition. Fairness and balance has usually been the first casualty in reporting.

I was a college teacher, not a journalist as yet, when my home state Tripura, encircled on three sides by

Bangladesh and located just below the state of Assam, was gripped by violent ethnic riots in June 1980. Tripura's demography has undergone the most profound change since the Partition of India. In the last fifty years, the indigenous tribesmen have been reduced to a minority and Bengali settlers from East Pakistan, now Bangladesh, have come to constitute more than seventy percent of the state's population. The tribesmen have lost out on lands, jobs and other opportunities and have been marginalized in politics and the economy of the state. Since the late 1970s, younger generations of tribesmen have formed underground rebel groups and unleashed much violence against the settlers. Over the past decade, kidnappings and killings have increased.

During the 1980 riots between the indigenous tribesmen and the Bengali settlers, the Bengalis suffered heavy losses. Hundreds were killed – nearly four hundred in one village Mandai alone – and thousands were rendered homeless. The newspaper industry in Tripura is totally dominated by the Bengali settlers. All the Bengali vernacular and English dailies and weeklies are owned by Bengalis, the reporting corps is almost wholly Bengali and there is no newspaper or local cable channel in Kokborok, the language of the indigenous tribespeople. During the 1980 riots, the reportage in the Tripura newspapers (there was no local cable TV channel those days) was an endless string of "weep-and-lament" stories, about the massacre of the Bengalis, their woes in refugee camps and so on. Into the second week of the riots the tribals were also suffering heavily, as they faced the wrath of the Bengali-dominated state police and armed Bengali gangs backed by it.

This was one side of the story that went almost wholly unreported, except in one small left wing weekly "Agami". Anyone could see that the sufferings of the tribals were no story for the Bengali-dominated newspaper industry in Tripura. An editorial in the largest circulated "Dainik Sambad" even went to the extent of lambasting the Tripura Chief Minister Nripen Chakrabarty for his alleged "softness for tribals." The language it used was plainly abusive – the Chief Minister, the editorial said, "would not be spared because he was sucking up to the tribesmen". In such a surcharged atmosphere, any journalist reporting on the atrocities perpetrated on the tribals was a likely target for Bengali vigilantes in the towns, from where the newspapers are published. No wonder, the "Agami" folded up soon after the riots.

The newspapers from Calcutta, catering to a largely Bengali audience in West Bengal, also played up the "Bengali angle" almost shamelessly. They picked up scores of unsubstantiated stories from the Tripura papers, of gory massacres that had not happened, of "scores of bodies flowing down the rivers", of "villages being burnt down one after another".

Calcutta's largest circulated "Ananda Bazar Patrika" even talked of "helicopter gunships and tanks" chasing the rebels, when no such thing was happening. The army had been called out by the Tripura government in aid of the civil authority but only infantry columns were out on a confidence building role. Tripura's only rebel group at that time – the Tribal National Volunteers – were armed with locally made muzzle-loaders and tanks and helicopters were surely not needed to combat them. The rest of the Indian media was slightly more balanced and there were stories looking at the causes of the conflict. But between themselves, the local, the regional and the national media perpetuated the

stereotype of the tribesman as the violent rebel, the merciless killer, the "anti-national insurgent". The image has stuck, but nothing could be farther from truth.

Like the Bengalis, the tribals suffered heavily during the riots. They lost their homes, many of them were killed and they suffered at the hands of the police. Now, they suffer as much at the hands of the security forces as at the hands of some insurgent groups like the National Liberation Front of Tripura, who have punished tribal families with death and rape for not heeding their appeal to convert to Christianity.

In the very first month of my job with the "Dainik Sambad", which I joined the year after the riots, I raised the issue of balance with the editor, who, like most others in the state, was also the owner of the paper. "I have to take care of my circulation," he was quick to add. The hint was obvious: since most readers of "Dainik Sambad" were Bengalis, it was necessary for the paper to play up the "Bengali angle". Since that was the message from the top, the newsroom would usually go a step further, double-guessing the emperor. Reporters would go out of their way to play up the "Bengali angle" in their coverage – as much to give vent to their ethnic passions as to "please the management."

Later when I joined the Press Trust of India in Agartala, my senior colleague Manik Chakrabarty told me the amazing story of the state Congress(a leading political party) chief Asok Bhattacharya walking into his office at the peak of the riots and claiming that "eighteen thousand Bengalis have been slaughtered." Mr. Chakrabarty questioned the story and demanded to know the basis of such claims and possible sources they could be sourced to. "Quote me if you want and

ascribe the story to me," thundered the state Congress Chief," but for heaven's sake, write that eighteen thousand Bengalis have died. Otherwise, Delhi will not sit up and take notice."

At that time, the state government was confirming the deaths of around eight hundred people, more than two-thirds of them Bengalis. Unofficial estimates varied between 1500- 2000 but here was the Opposition leader in the State Assembly claiming a death toll nine times as much! Mr Chakrabarty refused to carry the story and lost a source forever – the Congress Chief went to town accusing him of being a "government agent" and a "Marxist lackey". Mr. Chakrabarty is certainly not fond of the Marxists who rule Tripura and West Bengal states in India but here he had to put his foot down on such senseless personal accusations at a moment of great crisis.

This incident raises three key issues – (a) how far can a journalist in a delicate conflict situation trust his source, however well-placed he or she may be (b) how will he or she handle an obviously "biased" source but one who is as important as the Opposition leader of Tripura Assembly (c) how will the journalist maintain balance and fairness in such a surcharged atmosphere. For a young journalist with no real-life experience or training to handle conflict situations, for me, this was baptism by fire.

I derived some clear lessons and set myself four professional tasks : (a) to rise above the "identity barrier" and recognize that all involved in the conflict have a point of view that deserve media attention (b) to develop a wide a range of acquaintances and sources in all communities in the shortest possible time (c) draw on a wide range of sources and report with appropriate attribution, so that the reader could get a balanced

version of events (d) wherever and whenever possible, avoid second-hand sourcing and report from the spot, since presence and access is key to insight into such events. One could then avoid reporting claims – even preposterous ones like the one made by the Tripura Congress Chief.

Later in Assam, where my community, the Bengalis were the target of the Assam agitation, I made a conscious effort to rise above the identity barrier. I interacted extensively with the agitation leaders and the Assamese intelligentsia and soon realized they had a point. No one wants to become a foreigner in his own land. Three decades later, I remain a popular columnist in Assam, read and appreciated by both Bengalis and Assamese.

(Bhaumik is BBC's East India Correspondent based in Calcutta. He is a former Queen Elizabeth Fellow of Oxford University and author of a highly acclaimed "Insurgent crossfire.")

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Notes

A handbook for training journalists living and working in exile, setting out best practice advice and universal ethical and editorial guidelines.

- MHM, United Kingdom

This book is very useful for college students and is equally helpful for new media practitioners.

- CJMC, Nepal

This book helps to encourage journalists to overcome state's suppression on media freedom and it is a perfect tool that reflects the horrific state of Bhutanese media.

- Author of Independent Radios Under Royal Regime: Stories of Suppression and Resistance

The first of its kind, *Becoming a journalist in exile*, has profoundly opened doors on how to culture journalism in a ravaged situation like refugee settlements and assist refugees tell their stories through their own media.

- APFA-Bhutan

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An assistant editor for Independent News Service Nepal, Nepal's leading private news agency, from 2007-08, Mishra has published dozens of articles and feature stories in various national dailies and international online including The Kathmandu Post, The Rising Nepal, Nayapatrika, Rajdhani (Nepal), The Sikkim Express (India) among others.

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