

Journalism In An Emerging Power:

How The Roles Of Journalists Are Evolving In India

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Analysis

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

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

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

The sustainability of this growth can be explained simply. First, there is no digital competition because less than 10 percent of the population has access to the Internet.

Second, papers cost no more than 10 cents daily and can be even cheaper if the readers recycle them at the end of the month. (Recycling programs, commonly known as *raddi*, pay 10 cents per pound of newspapers.) Another reason is that the entire industry has adopted a business model essentially based on advertising.

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

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

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

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

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

While there are prescribed norms of journalistic conduct that require journalists to disclose any interest that they may have in a company about which they are reporting,

there are no equivalent requirements in the case of media companies holding a stake in the company which is being reported or covered.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

practices in the field, often skipping the ethical discourse for journalism, as it exists in the West.

In this context, some journalists are guilty of nothing more than working for greedy, corrupt owners who use their editorial platform to highlight or ignore issues to suit their interests, but the professionals I spoke with care about the job they do and do it the best they can. They take the risks to expose scams and corrupted officials, travel to the most remote villages of India to raise awareness about hunger and poverty, and challenge social norms to talk about child marriage, female infanticide and acid attacks.

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

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

Corporate-Commercial News Media at Risk

The Times of India has corrupted the entire face of Indian journalism, says Yogesh Pawar, a newspaper reporter and assistant editor at *Daily News and Analysis*. Launched in 2005, *dna* is an English-language newspaper with a target audience of young

readers. Pawar's seen how *dna* has followed the *Times*' advertising-based business model to establish itself in the news market.

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

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

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

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

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

He knew he had to meet the management of the Tata Group to get their version of the facts. "They spent a lot of time trying to convince me to drop the story," Pawar says.

“So much that one of them, who had looked at my past, saw that I had studied at their institute and benefited from their scholarship.”

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

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

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

In 2012, he even resigned from his leading position at *dna* after he refused to support Zee TV¹ (part of the same group as *dna*), which was “caught trying to extort a billion rupees from an industrial house that had illegally obtained contracts from coal mining.”

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

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

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

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

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

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

Shobhana Bhartia, the owner of the HT Media Ltd., the parent company of the *Hindustan Times*, has always supervised the editorial line of the newspaper, though. In an interview with Madhu Trehan’s News Laundry², a compelling media-watcher, Bhartia says that she signs off page one everyday instead of the editor-in-chief.

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

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

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

² https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eFs09C3gz_w

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

Sunita Aron, a senior resident editor at the *Hindustan Times* in Lucknow, says the government has also been made one of the minders, supervisors and shareholders of the media. Because there’s no legal framework to media in India — the word “press” isn’t even mentioned in the constitution, the government has increasingly monitored and controlled the media, according to a report published by Freedom House, a U.S.-based nongovernmental organization that conducts research on democracy, political freedom and human rights.

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

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

Aware of these pressures from the government and the corporates, Aron of the *Hindustan Times* has learned to focus on issues instead of individuals. Her reporters know that picking on a specific politician or businessperson would initiate problems;

whereas, highlighting a larger issue would always have a greater outcome and prevent the journalists from being sued at the drop of a hat.

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

Adaptive Evolution of Journalistic Roles and Practices

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

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

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

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

As a former social worker deployed in rural areas, Pawar witnessed the misery of his country. The Family Planning Association of India would send him to remote villages as a sexual and family planning counselor and would expect a report on the communities he visited. He was in the field as a counselor, but he wasn’t able to go back to a village and make sure that authorities tackled the problems he had uncovered.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The *Indian Express* carried³ the story with the headline: “1, 2, 3, 4... Yashoda saw her kids die of hunger.” The piece was converted into a court case, which went to the Bombay High Court. There were elections coming up, so the government ordered the construction of a bridge over the river to facilitate access and provide the people with food and medical assistance.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Reforming Indian Journalism

Although the publishers have unsurprisingly experimented with new business models, they have taken shortcuts to profits and put journalism at risk. Specifically, Pawar thinks journalistic practices have eroded because the news has become a simple product.

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

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

In March 2014, in the run-up to India’s parliamentary elections, the Committee to Protect Journalist, a U.S. nonprofit organization that promotes press freedom around the world, published a report⁴ on free press in the country.

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

Conversely, the media have come to accept compensations for favorable coverage, also known as ‘paid news.’ In 2012, a report by a subcommittee of India’s

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

Press Council, an organization that governs the conduct of the print media, examined the phenomenon and called corruption in the media industry “pervasive, structured and highly organized.” The council specifically pointed out that the *Times* had spurred the epidemic among newspapers and some of the more than 500 television channels.

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

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

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

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

⁵ http://www.cjr.org/the_audit/the_trust-fund_newspaper.php

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Western journalists also offer professional trainings around India.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Is There Hope?

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

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

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

The Index on Censorship, an international organization that promotes and defends the right to freedom of expression, says in a report⁶: "As it became an active partner in promoting a consensus on economic liberalization, the media shaped the image of a new middle class as atomized and individualistic consumers united only by their disdain for state intervention and their aspirations towards international patterns of consumerism."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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