RAKSHAK FOUNDATION

The Use of Print Media for the Propagation of Information and Awareness on Rural Issues

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PREFACE

I am Aditi Annapurna, a student of Journalism in Lady Shri Ram College for Women Delhi, and am currently in the second year of pursuing my education in Journalism. Having attained a somewhat substantial understanding of the media in my two years of studying the subject, I have been confronted with questions like the extent to which the media and journalism wields its power over public opinion, how far it uses its potential to justifiable means and ends and whether its potency requires to be limited in today's day and age where there have been instances of the media maligning from its ethical standards and using irresponsible methods to derive profit in a commercially-motivated environment.

I joined Rakshak Foundation for the very fact that it would give me the space to look at ways of regulating the media environment through policy initiatives and by prescribing ethical norms and values for journalism to operate under. At a time when everyone assumes that the media is largely unregulated and goes about its operation under the uncertain claims of 'self-regulation', I am looking at paving the way for a policy climate of accountability and transparency among media organisations.

My association with Rakshak Foundation transcends beyond my research project. It has not only given me a broader understanding of the functioning of the Indian media, but has also sensitised me to the issues that go unheard in the common media discourse. My choosing to focus on increasing the representation of rural issues in the print media is thus an expression of my concern towards building a more democratic channel of communication among the masses, where exchange of diverse opinions, while fully assured, also brings forth the voices of the unheard communities that lie in the villages; voices of the people that actually make India the socially heterogeneous country that it is.

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Acknowledgements

Working in this policy research project has been a truly enlightening experience, and therefore I wish to thank Rakshak Foundation for providing me with the opportunity of getting a first-hand experience of issues involved in policy-making and implementation. I thank my mentor, Shri Amitabh Thakur, SP of the Rules and Manual Division, Government of Uttar Pradesh, for giving me his valuable advice and guiding me through the course of my project with his professional insight. My internship coordinators, Ms. Nikita Anand, Mr. Pritesh Mittal and Mr. Siddhartha Das have been most helpful in extending their advice during times of confusion or difficulty in my time at Rakshak Foundation.

While researching for my project, I had the most rewarding opportunity of speaking to Mr. P. Sainath, the Rural Affairs Editor of The Hindu and understand his views on the issues confronting the Indian media's agenda-setting and the under-representation of rural issues as a result of it– I thank him for sparing his valuable time to advice me on my approaches to the project. I would also like to thank Mr. Vipul Mudgal, researcher with the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies for providing me with his professional opinion on what would be the most important issues to concentrate on in my policy research project, and for being kind enough to put me through journalists in the industry for further commentary and guidance.

Last, but in no way smaller in their contributions towards making my project a success, I would like to thank my co-interns at Rakshak Foundation for their help and advice during my interactions with them, and for providing me with a peer environment as conducive as this, stimulating learning through dialogue and discussion.

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Executive Summary

The rural population of India encompasses 70% of the total population, and unlike earlier-existing conditions of growth, is growing at as fast a rate as its urban counterparts. However, it continues to be confronted with its earlier problems of social, political and economic development – a problem deep-rooted in the socio-cultural evils and excesses of a society that enjoys growth without equitable development. In light of such a circumstance, the responsibility of media to bring light to problems posed to the Indian countryside is of greater importance than ever before.

It has been correctly said that the media is a Mirror to the Society. It reflects the problems, successes, endeavours, failures and the general mood of the social sphere, and in doing so, forms the fourth pillar of a democratic system. However, today, the media in many instances falls short in its effort to represent different sections of the society. It lives on the support of the hegemony, and forsakes the protection of the oppressed.

The marginalised population of rural areas is largely under-represented or in worse cases, even unrepresented in the print media. This has led to rural problems being covered by a thick shroud of ignorance and has created a largely uninformed or misinformed public when it comes to issues of rural communities. The sort of stories that the print news media chooses to cover on rural communities may also propagate certain stereotypes about communities and provide an incomplete and inaccurate picture of the village side. For example, farmer suicides receive more attention than successes of agrarian and farmer development; violence in rural communities gets more attention than cooperative efforts – the media takes interest in excesses and even in these excesses, it is the negative excesses that form greater priority. While the media is expected to set the agenda for political debate and influence the areas in which government action is directed, it does little justice to its responsibility of exposing some of the most under-developed sections of society that lie in rural areas. This has pushed the villages of India further into a state of helplessness and impoverishment – a helplessness characterised not only by its distance from political agency, but by perpetuation of a cycle of underdevelopment and lack of independence.

In order to improve conditions of development of the media with respect to rural issues, a two-pronged approach is necessary.

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This involves, firstly, an improvement in coverage of rural issues in the mainstream and national media. Media organisations are being increasingly dominated by commercial interests, and in exercising editorial decisions over which issues receive coverage and which are excluded from this coverage, advertising potential becomes a determining factor. News is now being viewed as a 'product' rather than a public service, and news content which offers the possibility of attracting a greater reading audience has more potential to attract more advertising, and as a result, urban-centric and corporate-centric stories get greater coverage than rural issues. Another process that is increasingly starting to shape the media in India and the world over is that of rapid conglomeration and corporatisation. Independent media organisations are being incorporated under large parent organisations, thus creating media conglomerates, leaving little of what earlier existed as smaller media organisations that harboured their own diverse opinions and editorial policies. Completely dominated by the corporate interests of their parent companies, these media organisations enjoy little editorial independence, and have given rise to a more uniform opinion in media discourse. In such an environment, even the smaller media players which may try to engage in issues of the marginalised rural people, end up either being swallowed by existing corporates or get caught in the struggle for economic survival because of market domination by the bigger players.

In ensuring greater representation of issues concerning rural marginalised communities, addressing supply-end problems of traditional print media outlets is important. While it is impossible to create any obligatory responsibility within media organisations as to the kind of issues that they must cover, it is more feasible to create mechanisms that ease the process of gathering, producing and curating news about rural populations. This can be done by forming effective channels of communication, through which news and information can be disseminated from rural areas to urban centres (where editorial power of most mainstream print media tends to be concentrated in). If the lack of professional resources to devote to rural news reporting forms part of the reason why news from the countryside fails to meet the quality of reporting that constitutes credible and accurate journalism, then alternative means of building capacity for local journalism in villages are an effective solution.

Secondly, there must be concerted efforts in developing community media in rural centres of the country, as this would encourage the presence of community voices in popular discourse. This is important because in the mainstream media, it is rare that individual voices find a space to be heard, and more often than not, one notices a set nature of issues that are conventionally highlighted in the mainstream print media, and at the risk of making other, relatively under-represented issues seem of lesser importance. However, it is the individual-centric problems that form

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honest representations of the trials and limitations posed to Indian villages. Media discourse that lays equal emphasis on rural problems – be they topics of conventional discussion or not – is potent in building public pressure towards issues that require government intervention, and has the capacity to critically evaluate existing policies and systems put in place to aid rural development.

This report aims to address two broad issues – one, the current state of reporting and journalism around rural issues in the mainstream as well as alternative print media and two, recommended steps to improve the current representation of rural issues in the general media discourse, whether it is through an improvement in the content produced by the mainstream print media, or in the encouragement of the formation of community-owned local print media organisations.

Among the recommendations this report makes, the two areas covered are such – a) creating information hubs in villages using ICT and communication technologies in order to build steady communication networks for news to flow from rural areas to larger urban centres and b) establishing formal representational bodies for editors and journalists in the rural print media, in order to bring their needs to the notice of the government and organisations such as the Press Council of India.

Where initiatives such as building communication channels are concerned, the goal is always to include voices from individuals and rural communities in media discourse and encourage participatory journalism. Projects such as the CGNet Swara, a voice-based mobile platform based in Chhatisgarh that empowers locals to send in their news stories for public dissemination have been taken as models that can be emulated. And where the issue of representation of the interests of rural newspapers in formal bodies like the Press Council of India is concerned, while there are organisations like The Association of Small and Medium Newspapers in India, which even rural newspapers can appeal to, the sheer magnitude of demands of the rural print media calls for a separate authoritative body to deal with the development of print media in rural India.

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1. Goals and Objectives

The goal of this report is to provide a substantive academic approach to the issue of representation of rural India in the print media. It aims to lay greater emphasis on the problem rather than jumping to the subsequent step of making recommendations to improve the current situation.

An analysis of two of the most widely read dailies in the country – Dainik Jagran and The Times of India was done. This research gives the reader an insight into the priorities of a majority of the mainstream print media and where rural reportage stands in the scheme of editorial decisions. The news analysis will also help derive conclusions about the news values given to rural issues – i.e. what makes a rural issue worth covering in the newspaper, and what makes it 'unworthy' of the same. This report also aims to address the problems posed to sustained rural journalism in similar large print media organisations.

If increasing the overall representation of rural issues in the media discourse is to be achieved, it is very important to take into consideration the role of small and community-specific rural print media in providing localised reporting of rural problems and populations. In this respect, organisations working in the area of rural journalism within smaller communities have been identified – their news production methods carefully gauged. This project looks at the prospects and problems of the rural and community-owned media, and how its limitations can be addressed with effective policies and mechanisms.

To increase the representation of rural issues in media discourse, a two-pronged approach is necessary – one which looks at an increased representation of rural India in the national and mainstream print media, and the other which looks at extending help to community-owned and rural print media organisations. In the case of the national and state-based print media, the constraints posed to rural reporting will be addressed by recommending certain mechanisms to ease the process of news production in large print media organisations.

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2. Introduction

While the earlier definitions of the media relied on the fact that it was only supposed to be a 'provider of information', today's times have expanded the media's role to facilitators of change. It is a known fact that media acts as the 'agenda setter' in the sense that it frames the issues that get an important place in public discussion and debate and consequently exerts a larger impact on the public sphere and popular discourse. The diversity of opinion thus created fulfils a dual role of not only spreading awareness, but also of sensitising the masses towards the real issues of the world. Further, with the increased expertise that the media shows in terms of being able to critically evaluate existing political systems as well as policies put in place by governments, they exert greater influence in providing well-grounded solutions to solving problems in society. And even for a field such as policy-making or even judging government action towards development objectives, which in the past used to be dominated by a handful of the 'policy elite', the media is fast gaining ground as an equally-established political and policy commentator. Today's governments respect the media for the informed debate that it has in many ways given rise to, as well as turn to it for identifying the lacunae of existing policy mechanisms.

In terms of being used as a support for development communication, the role of the media is similarly paramount. Development initiatives, if not backed by public support, are futile. This is because the bedrock of development projects lies in the support of the people, and support can be generated only through effective communication strategies. The media shows great potential in creating awareness about development initiatives and in building a strong case towards adoption of new (and improved) practices, and in translating this into sustained impacts in the lives of the people. Furthermore, the media can also form a channel for the feedback from the masses to the government with respect to the efficacy of the policies put in place for their benefit. If the biggest criticism levied against government action is that it has a top-down approach and fails to take into account the critical assessment of the people, then the media has the power to bring the public as well as decision-makers in a common platform for the two to negotiate policies best suited to interests of both sides. The right communication channel, the right message and the right problems being addressed – when concerns at these three levels are sufficiently addressed, then media and communication for social development becomes an easier vision to enact.

The emergence of rural media and journalism centred on rural populations in India was from the time of the Independence Movement, when newspapers and radio were used to propagate national messages of the independence movement

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that was emerging in India. Following the establishment of the Indian union, the media in villages and the hinterland continued to be an effective channel of broadcasting messages of social, economic and cultural development. A good example of the media aiding rural development can be seen in the Green Revolution. As the agricultural scientist and food policy expert M. S. Swaminathan points out, the Green Revolution was successful largely because of the enthusiasm the media reports generated among farm families on the opportunity created by semi-dwarf varieties of wheat and rice to enhance yield and income substantially. Experienced reporters from the print media closely followed the improved scientific methods developed by agricultural research institutes, and took these messages of improved farm production and management to farmers in the villages. The reporting carried out thus was so influential and compelling that it encourages thousands of farmers to adopt new and improved farming practices and generated a whole lot of demand for the high-yielding varieties of grain offered by the government, and eventually fulfilled the policy objectives put in place by state and central governments.

The current scenario though is quite different from the earlier years. Today, with the emergence of the media as a commercial entity rather than a means of communication of information and development messages, issues that do get represented are determined by a 'profit value' of sorts. Rural issues are assumed to possess lesser profit value than issues coming from the economic hubs of power, and as a result are given lesser 'news space' than issues plaguing the urban populations. What this has led to is a deliberate avoidance of issues of marginalised rural populations, something which is counter-purposive to the very existence of a democratic and representative media.

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3. Traditional Print Media Channels: Problems and Prospects

3.1. The News Gathering Process

The news-gathering process in a media organisation in many ways determines the level of importance given to a story by the editorial decision-makers. Today's print media is structured in such a manner as to simplify the work of professional journalists by slotting them into various 'beats'. These beats are specialised areas where reporters and journalists are 'posted' in, in order to keep abreast of information and updates received from individuals, organisations and events of substantial importance in the beat. For example, every large newspaper, in today's times has at least one reporter working in the 'Crime' beat and this reporter is updated with issues pertaining to major criminal activity in the city and closely follows developments with respect to ongoing criminal investigations.

While in the earlier years of the print media, there were specialised beats and correspondents reporting issues of 'Poverty', 'Labour issues' and 'Rural Affairs', the current trends in the organisation of the mainstream national print media suggest that as a result of the decreased importance given to rural issues in national coverage, the 'Rural affairs' beats cease to exist anymore. This trend, pointed out by the likes of veteran journalists like P. Sainath, signifies the limited professional and material resources devoted to sustained rural reporting and news-gathering from the countryside. The Hindu remains one of the few national dailies that continue to have a dedicated section for Rural Affairs. As the senior rural journalist with The Telegraph, Mr. Jaideep Hardikar puts it; even news bureaus in smaller areas are either defunct or lack enough resources to devote sufficient time and money to gathering news from smaller areas and villages – a majority of the sufficiently-funded bureaus of national newspapers are set in urban and metropolitan centres. Studying current trends in reportage of news from the villages gives the additional implication that even in the few times that the print media chooses to focus on news from the countryside, the dominant themes are either conflict and violence-related or shed light on political turbulences. A glaring example of this skewed reportage can be seen in the coverage devoted to Naxal-related themes in the country. Owing to the scope for sensationalisation of violence that stories relating to Maoist encounters offer, the mainstream print media devotes a substantial percentage of its coverage to highlighting killings, clashes and similar terror activity perpetrated by insurgent groups.

In the case of the print media, a majority of news outsourcing is dependent on national news wires like Press Trust of India (PTI) and the United News of India

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(UNI), and these agencies themselves do not give rural reportage its due attention. Both news wires employ the use of stringers and semi-professional reporters based out of districts in order to gather information and updates about the on goings in rural areas, even in which case the fact remains that they have access to only a small amount information from these villages, and in almost all cases, it is only official sources that are quoted, voices from the community and villagers constitute for lesser media coverage. The lack of communication infrastructures in many villages of the country makes news and information difficult to transmit to urban centres, where news organisations are majorly situated. Thus, events either go unreported, or reach public attention at a very delayed stage, sometimes adversely impacting the media's role to extend help in times of crisis.

Other problems include a lack of agency for media initiatives – in the form of infrastructural limitations, lack of training for journalists reporting from rural areas, the absence of government mechanisms to ensure their economic sustainability and the vulnerability of journalists to political pressure from local civic functionaries and political authorities.

3.2. The Process of News Reporting

According to Mr. Sainath, news in today's media tends to concentrate on events, rather than processes. In reporting incidences of violence in Maoist-inflicted regions, print journalism tends to concentrate lesser on locating the same instances within a larger socio-political system, and instead reports happenings and crises as they are – isolated and distant from any historical, social or political context. The reason why this calls for attention from media regulatory organisations is because such news reporting which engages only on the fine layer surrounding a particular instance or issue without going into the depths of what caused the issue, the accompanying impact the same issue carries, and how the issue must be dealt with in the future represents an inadequate responsibility of the media. To translate media discourse into action, concerted efforts need to be made in the direction of following up news with respect to particular events and its future developments, and towards pointing out problems in the socio-political and cultural system that give rise to issues of underdevelopment and inequality. As Mr. Hardikar rightly puts it, there is a need for a shift from just reporting news as it is to an 'explanatory journalism'. The role of the media is not only to objectively present facts and figures, but to make sense of the same facts and figures in order to put issues in perspective for the reading audiences.

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In its endeavour to avoid merely dwelling on the facts, what interpretative journalism needs most is expertise. As conversations with many journalists working in the field of rural issues went, a common grievance was the lack of expertise when it came to matters of covering issues underlying news events in the villages of the country – the fact that rural issues are as diverse as they are, and require a knowledge and expertise spread across different disciplines calls for an expansive know-how of even the most basic reporters. For example, on covering an issue such as the effect of climate change on agricultural output, a journalist must have an understanding of agriculture as well as climatology. Similarly, were the issue being explored be about commodity markets of crop prices, a journalist would be required to have a knowledge of local markets and to go one to explain why farmers continue to face losses even in the event of increased agricultural output and productivity – sociology, economy, political sciences are all interwoven into these issues.

3.3. The Increased Commercialisation of News

In the case of the big national English newspapers, rural readers form a very small component of their readership as a consequence of the fact that almost all national English dailies have operations concentrated in largely urban and semi-urban centres. And in today's changing times, news has become a product for mass consumption rather than a service that enforces the interests of the underprivileged and the common citizens of India. Given the constraints that a newspaper has in terms of trying to encompass a maximum number of stories in a limited space, editors are constantly pursuing the objective of ensuring commercial viability of stories, so as to ensure that the newspaper can make money out of the news that it 'sells'. Thus, preference is naturally accorded to stories that interest an affluent audience within the readership profile, capable of attracting advertisers to buy advertising space in the newspaper. And considering that advertising accounts for the singular largest source of revenue for newspapers, factors such as news selection and agenda-setting of the newspaper become directly influenced by the motive of increasing advertising appeal of the publication.

3.4. Nature of content

If English language national newspapers are largely out of the purview of rural and vernacular readers, then the duty of journalism that comes from the national print

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media is to address the issues of rural India to a concerned middle class or urban audience who reads these English newspapers. The role of the national media thus lies in apprising the nation, the polity and the policy-makers of what exactly is happening in the countryside, so that attention is directed towards gaps in the social and political systems of villages and appropriate policies are made to address them.

If articulating the local to the national (or even the global) forms one spiral of news production and journalism, then the other spiral tells the global story locally. For example, the Food Security Bill – a legislation that is taking shape at the national level – how will it impact the countryside? The Union Budget encompasses various implications on the national economy, but what possibilities does it hold for the people of the villages? Thus, rural coverage does not only mean telling the rural stories to urban audiences, rural coverage also means telling the larger policy stories to the rural audiences. And as of today, there exist problems in journalism centred around both the spirals.

3.5. Impact

Commercial as well as newsroom-centric factors have led to rural problems being covered by a thick shroud of ignorance and has created a largely uninformed or misinformed public when it comes to issues of rural communities. The sort of stories that the print mews media chooses to cover on rural communities may also propagate certain stereotypes about communities and provide a one-dimensional picture of the village side. For example, farmer suicides receive more attention than farmer successes, violence in rural communities get more attention than cooperative efforts – the media takes interest in excesses, and negative excesses take greater priority. While the media is expected to set the agenda for political debate and indirectly influence the areas in which government action is directed, it fails in its task to expose some of the most under-developed sections of society that lies in rural areas. This has pushed the villages of India further into a state of helplessness and impoverishment, where their problems continue to plague them and there exists no scope for government or policy intervention.

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4. Methodology

4.1. Literature Search

In a report of the Key Note Address by Justice G.N. Ray, the former Chairman of The Press Council of India, in a discussion on *Print Communication in Rural India,* the readership trends of print media like dailies, magazines and other publications in rural and urban areas have been emphasised.

Vipul Mudgal, a researcher at the Centre for Studies on Developing Societies, in his article in The Economic and Political Weekly titled '*Rural Coverage in Hindi and English Dailies'*, gauges the newspaper content of six major national dailies in the country – Times of India, The Hindu, Hindustan Times, Dainik Jagran, Dainik Bhaskar and Amar Ujala – for the year 2009, and makes many interesting conclusions about the agenda-setting of newspaper editors, and where rural issues and issues affecting the marginalised youth stand in such a situation.

A similar analysis can be found in Neeraj Khatri and Pt. Amandeep's 'Coverage of Rural News in Print Media of Aligarh'– which analyses the rural reportage in the Aligarh editions of the newspapers Amar Ujala and Hindustan.

The media scrutiny online magazine, The Hoot, provide a picture of the problems with journalistic activities in the village side, along with researches done in the area of reporting on issues affecting the rural communities in the country. Some of them are – "Urban Press Glosses over Rural Protests", "Slur on Imphal-based Media?", "Khabar Lahariya: When Six Women Started a Wave", "Rural Scribes: Maligned and Vulnerable".

Arjun Banjade, in his report titled *Barefoot Community Journalism in Western Nepal*, a case study on the weekly newspaper published in Palpa District, '*Gaunle Deurali'*, looks at the possibilities and obstructions posed to the operation of the rural publication. It provides a deeper look at the realities in the media business and what it takes for a newspaper to survive.

V. S. Gupta and Rameshwar Dyal in their book '*Rural Press: Problems and Prospects*' stress on the role of the rural press in India – in terms of literacy and development objectives, the role of advertising in financial sustenance of the print media organisations as well as on the management of rural newspapers.

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The concept note of The People's Archives of Rural India, a website that provides the public free access to community stories throughout the villages of India, sets down the objectives set by such a universal archive of information regarding India's villages and the methods to set this up.

The Annual Report: Press Council of India of 2007 (Chapter 5: Report on Problems of Small and Medium Newspapers) explores the role, scope and importance of small and medium newspapers in society, along with their shortcomings, along with methods of improving the status of these publications.

4.2. Surveys

The most widely-read English and Hindi dailies as the subjects of the analysis i.e. The Times of India and Dainik Jagran respectively were chosen as subjects for the survey. The archives were accessed in the Nehru Memorial Library, Delhi.

The research involved going through articles of the daily editions of the newspapers 'Times of India' (Delhi edition) and 'Dainik Jagran' (Delhi edition), and noting down important characteristics of each of the articles that were discussing issues of rural India. The reason the Delhi editions of both newspapers were chosen was that being the 'Capital' or 'Rajdhani' edition, these editions would best reflect the nature of issues represented to the national reading audience, and would give a better idea of how issues are selectively covered in the national edition, so to speak, of the national dailies. The newspaper editions of the months from March 2013 to May 2013 were surveyed.

The factors that were especially emphasised on in judging an article carried by any newspaper publication are as follows –

i) Scope of article: whether the effects of the issue described in the article are national, regional or local
ii) Placement of the article: has the article been placed in the front page, in the editorial or in the 'national' section of the newspaper – A placement in the front page or the editorial page obviously points out to a higher priority in editorial preferences.
iii) Has the article been supported with a picture or not? – an article being substantiated with a picture points out to an extra amount of space being shelled out by the editor to add value and appeal to the news story.

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iv) What is the source of the article? Is it from a news bureau of the media organisation, a news wire service or a correspondent? Has the reporter been identified in the byline? – this provides telling information on how much quantity of professional resources are devoted to news gathering and production.

v) Size of the news article: 1 column long, two columns long, less than half a page, half a page or more, full page feature – longer articles are obviously signifying of more attention given by the editor to provide greater detail to the issue.

vi) Themes: What is the nature of the theme in the article? Is it agrarian themed, general development-centric, politically-themed, legal, extreme rural poverty-related, rural crises and accidents-related?

vii) Percentage of rural stories to total stories carried by the newspaper

viii) Any noted series of news stories devoted to a particular issue or news event?

Thus, articles were coded with respect to their characteristics with respect to the aforementioned criteria.

4.3. Meetings and Interviews

Date	Name	Designation	Institution	Topic of Discussion
2nd June, 2013	**Mr. Vipul Mudgal**	**Researcher**	**Centre for the Study on Developing Societies**	**The scope of research project**
8th June, 2013	**P. Sainath***	**Rural Affairs Editor**	**The Hindu**	**Questions regarding the mainstream media's coverage of rural issues, methods to encourage journalism about rural issues**
24th June, 2013	**Ms. Shalini Joshi**	**Director**	**Nirantar, the organisation which manages**	**The challenges of rural newspapers**

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			Khabar Lahariya	
8th July, 2013	**Mrs. Arti Manchanda**	**Programme Leader, Communications**	**Institute of Rural Research and Development**	**On the implementation of trainings inculcating media skills in villages**
9th July, 2013	**Mr. Jaideep Hardikar**	**Special Correspondent and Journalist working in Rural Issues**	**The Telegraph, Nagpur**	**On the challenges faced by mainstream print media while reporting rural stories**

Please refer Appendix A for details on discussions with Mr. P.Sainath*

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5. Current NGO and Government Efforts

5.1. Current Efforts from Non-Government Organisations

There have been newspapers formed primarily on the grounds of reporting rural issues and issues from communities that are usually marginalised out of media discourse. Following are two examples of newspapers which have been formed out of smaller areas in the country and employ local reporters in order to ensure that the voices of the community are brought to the fore.

5.1.1. Gaon Connection

This is a weekly newspaper based in Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh, and works on the primary aim of communicating to its audiences the changing landscape of villages in India. Launched in December 2012, this newspaper expresses its vision as a tool to bring democracy to villages, give a voice to rural India and provide the urban centres of the country a lens into the countryside. While it employs only rural reporters and is operated and managed by people within smaller communities in Uttar Pradesh it is backed by some of the most successful and experienced media professionals in the country. In fact, trainings with rural reporters are done by these professionals. Gaon Connection also boasts of the best infrastructure and promises a quality of content that is comparable to the best news organisations in the country. Gaon Connection relies on advertising for its revenues, and has recently tied up with advertising agency Ogilvy, which will be exploring the commercial prospects it offers.

5.1.2. Khabar Lahariya

Khabar Lahariya is a fortnightly local language newspaper based in Chitrakoot, Uttar Pradesh. Founded in 2002, it is entirely managed by local women from Dalit, Muslim and backward communities. Priced at only 2 rupees but enjoying a significant readership of 80,000, Khabar Lahariya explores issues that are of primary importance to its rural readers, along with some national and international news. It makes concerted efforts to upkeep standards of quality when it comes to content by regularly holding interactions with media professionals and workshops. They have a specialised focus on women's issues, and thus have a significant focus on issues like marriage, domestic violence, policy abuse, rights-based issues etc.

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5.1.3. Inclusive Media for Change

The aim of websites like Inclusive Media for Change is to provide informational support to researchers and journalists alike on deeper aspects to issues like poverty, community affairs and politico-legal aspects of rural India. As its website states, IM4Change is "a clearing house of information on India's rural crisis so as to generate meaningful debates and sharper media coverage". This project was initiated in 2009 with a Ford Foundation grant, and conducts workshops on developing a more inclusive, transparent and democratic media. It even awards fellowships, which welcome candidates who would be willing to spend two to three weeks with rural communities and write series of stories or make radio/ TV programmes on grassroots issues that require wider coverage and policy debates.

5.1.4. People's Archives of Rural India

The People's Archives of Rural India (PARI) is an online platform that aims to bring together the untold stories of the community – the activities that members of rural communities engage in, the farm crisis, the traditions of handicrafts and cultural expressions among different communities among many other social-cultural themes. The People's Archive of Rural India will be a public resource to which people have free access. It will be governed by two structures. One is a charitable trust that will own the archive. The second is a network of about 1,000 members or more that will support and fund the Trust and its primary activity through membership fees, voluntary work, donations and direct personal contributions. When it comes to the production of content, PARI aims to be an open platform and encourages people visiting rural communities and people living in rural communities to collect textual, audio as well as visual material that may be able to document the ways of life in the villages of the country.

5.2. Current Efforts of Government Organisations

5.2.1. Press Council of India

The Press Council of India is the statutory regulatory body for the print media in the country. While it sets laws and norms as to what kind of content must not be published, it has little control over what the print media does publish. Specifically in the respect of rural journalism and rural newspapers, it has done little to create an environment for such journalistic initiatives to survive in. Attention, if any, is given to 'Small and Medium Newspapers', but even these are a larger entity in themselves, and therefore any focus on where the rural print media stands with respect to small newspapers has little scope for intervention.

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According to the speech given by former Press Council of India Chairman, Justice G. N. Ray, and here his speech is being quoted verbatim – "About a decade ago, the Council had conducted an in- depth study into the problems of small and medium newspapers and came out with as many as 22 specific recommendations to encourage the small papers to play their role efficiently and to ameliorate their conditions. Highlights of these recommendations were additional advertisement support to these papers by the government; cheaper newsprint; machinery and equipment at concessional rates; transparency in advertisement empanelment and release, quick clearance of advertisement bills by the DAVP and other advertising authorities, making separate arrangements for input of information, news materials and visuals through Press Information Bureau (PIB) of the Government of India.

To this, I would add offering them subscription support and organizing workshops to nurture local journalistic talent. However, the most important recommendation of the Council was that, "A small and Medium Newspaper Development Corporation (or a small and Medium Newspaper Advisory Committee) should be set up as an autonomous body sufficiently representative of all medium and small newspapers with a view to promote and ensure the development of small and medium newspapers. It may have its branches at appropriate places. It may start with sufficient fund to be provided by the Government. It should keep the small and medium newspapers right from the stage of filing of declaration and act as a forwarding agency for applications for telephone facilities, to procure land on concessional rates, to procure, newsprint and to storage and distribute it to recommend postal facilities, telecommunication facilities, travel concessions to journalists etc." In the alternative, the small and medium newspapers (may) be encouraged to form a co-operative society for the above purpose." The Annual report of 2007 of the Press Council of India made many similar recommendation such as increasing the minimum limit for government advertising expenditure on small newspapers from 15% to 20%, but this hasn't been implemented as of yet.

5.3. Analysis of Current Efforts

In the end of non-government organisations, there have been a fair number of initiatives to promote journalism centred around marginalised rural populations, a number of problems continue to confront these efforts.

- Sustainability remains a problem in the case of smaller rural newspapers. Sales and subscriptions only meet a small percentage of the costs to sustain

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printing operations, and therefore alternative sources of revenue need to explored.

- Quality of content and difficulties of content production are usually worst hit when members of the community come together to engage in journalistic activities. Thus, training of journalists is an important step that must be addressed.
- Recommendations such as that to increase advertising expenditure on smaller newspapers from 15% to 20% have still not be implemented and therefore requires more pushing for.

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6. Results and Discussions

6.1. Findings from the literature

The report on *Print Communication in Rural India* gives an idea of the readership trends of print publications in the news media across different regions in India, and acts as a comparison between rural populations and urban populations.

Table 1: Readership Trends

	2006			2007		
	All India	**Urban**	**Rural**	**All India**	**Urban**	**Rural**
Dailies	**37.4**	**57.0**	**28.6**	**37.1**	**55.8**	**28.6**
Magazines	**13.8**	**23.9**	**9.2**	**12.2**	**21.1**	**8.2**
Any publication	**38.7**	**58.7**	**29.9**	**38.3**	**57.5**	**29.7**

Source: Indian Readership Survey 2006 and 2007

The findings of the research 'Rural Coverage in Hindi and English Dailies' conclude that newspapers in India devote an insignificant 2% of space to rural issues. And even among the rural issues covered, 36% of the content is devoted to issues of violence, crime and disasters, less than 28% is devoted to agrarian themes and less than 15% pertains to extreme poverty-ridden conditions in villages of the country. Another observation was that most rural stories had a very predictable structure – one that took up one to two columns of space, were completely factual and gave little or no background information of the issue at large. Also, it was observed that many rural stories were described in extremely concise displays of hardly a paragraph or two in the "briefs" section of the 'National' section of the newspaper. The bulk of the news stories are generated by the newspapers' own reporters, but in most cases sources are unidentified. While it is well known that rural issues often dominate the Parliamentary discussions and deliberations in State Legislative Assemblies, only 3.4% of the news items studied pertained to parliamentary or assembly proceedings. More stories (8.1%) were inspired by farmers' protests and public meetings while a slightly larger number of stories (9.1%) originated from press conferences or press releases.

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Table 2: Individual Newspapers' Coverage of Rural Stories

Paper	No of Rural Stories	Percentage of Day's News (Per Day) (Approximately)
The Times of India	**1.97**	**2**
Hindustan Times	**2.93**	**1.76**
The Hindu	**3.38**	**2.2**
Dainik Jagran	**1.85**	**1.3**
Dainik Bhaskar	**5.3**	**3.2**
Amar Ujala	**4.68**	**2.07**

In an article by Shilpa Krishnan titled, "Urban Press Glosses over Rural Protests", one sees an analysis of the coverage among urban newspapers of the protests among rural populations in Tamil Nadu against the Kudankulam Nuclear Reactor Project. Major national dailies like The Times of India, The Telegraph, Hindustan Times and The Hindu were analysed for their coverage of the fifteen-day protests in May 2012. While all newspapers mentioned the power project and the issues involved in its debate and contestation, only 15% of the articles of The Hindu mentioned the protests in Idinthakarai. The Times of India and Hindustan Times had only a few articles mentioning the nuclear power project, and even fewer mentioning the hunger strike. And in the fortnight of the event of those protests, The Telegraph made no mention of either Kudankulam or the protest in any of its articles. No visual material was provided to the readers in order to help form more compelling images of the protests happening in Tamil Nadu, and the number of people who had turned up at the venues to fast (as a means of highlighting the magnitude of the situation) was sparingly mentioned.

Teresa Rehman, in her article in The Hoot magazine, titled "Slur on Imphal-based Media?": On how the political antagonism between communities like the Meiteis of Manipur and the Nagas of Manipur has led to allegations of biased news reporting in the local newspapers. This article also addressed allegations of misinformation of events on the part of the Meiteis, saying that the Press Trust of India Imphal unit had even gone as far as creating false reports of two students being killed in a stampede in order to generate public perceptions of mistrust towards the Nagas.

In The Indian Express article reprinted in The Hoot magazine, Prarthna Gahilote's "Khabar Lahariya: When Six Women Started a Wave" discusses the succeses of the women's publication, Khabar Lahariya and how women of marginalised communities with only basic skills of literacy are using existing technologies to be

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able to tell stories in a more fitting manner. As the article says, "As a precaution, the women back their stories with pictures, taped versions and even signed testimonies from those being quoted in the story. 'We must have enough proof so that we can steer clear of trouble,' says Sonia."

In her article "Rural Scribes: Maligned and Vulnerable", Geeta Seshu spoke to the district journalists in Maharashtra on the increased vulnerabilities faced by rural reporters from the investigative and critical journalism they engage in. For example, the Marathi Patrakar Parishad (MPP) which boasts of a membership among 7000 registered journalists in 35 districts and 207 tehsils of Maharashtra claims that there have been 184 registered attacks on journalists from Maharashtra over the past two years. Journalists even find it difficult to register complaints with the police, because the general perception about rural journalists is that they, like their political subjects, engage in corrupt practices and use information as a means of extortion, and thus welcome these attacks upon themselves.

The report on 'Barefoot Community Journalism in Western Nepal' discusses the life of Gaunle Deurali, a rural newspaper in Nepal. Launched with the support of Nepal Press Institute and the Asia Foundation in 1993, it is published by a local NGO called Grameen Bikash Palpa. Gaunle Deurali consists of development news, covering a wide range of subjects – from HIV/AIDS to crops and environment, to campaigns against alcohol and drugs. It focuses on both the success and failure of farming patterns and plantations. Grameen Bikash Palpa received an offset press from the Asian Foundation and periodic financial assistance from MS Nepal. It mobilizes the community members in planning, reporting, editing and publishing the newspaper. Like India, in Nepal, most rural areas are under-represented or unrepresented by the media. Gaunle Deurali's objective has been to address and fill the gaps existing in the media and information system by providing news about community voices and problems and successes of the people of the community. It takes a special role in publishing news that matters to villagers and presents political news and views without actually taking sides or showing any form of political or party-related inclination. It has been successful in empowering the villagers, who find their knowledge and expertise as extensive and significant as formal domain experts, and the villagers have, as a result, felt more included in the process of dialogue and action.

However, Gaunle Deurali faces problems of its own. Sales and advertisement are not adequate revenue streams for the newspaper. Even farmers in Nepal are not able to buy subscriptions to the newspaper because of their inadequate incomes. Gaunle Deurali also faces lack of government or non-government support to provide free subscriptions to villagers. Another challenge faced by Gaunle Deurali is the editorial standards of the content produced by community journalists.

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Because Gaunle Deurali sources most of its content from community reporters, there is a great deal of editing required to the stories received, a task which is time-consuming.

Advertising is another area where the rural press finds constricted in its ability to raise revenues from. Advertisements today are allotted in the basis of giving preference to the newspapers with higher newspapers. Rural newspapers, being characteristically small in their circulation, are unable to settle attractive advertising deals. In terms of being able to accept advertising for its revenue generation, Gaunle Deurali only accepts a certain type of advertisements. It has in the past rejected many attractive advertising offers from beverage, cigarette and fast food companies. The rationale given for this stems from the fact that the readers of the Gaunle Deurali read everything that is published in the newspaper, and publishing misleading advertisements of food products that lack nutritional value in an areas where many people are poor and unable to afford even two square meals a day goes against their ethical values. In a similar vein, the weekly newspaper published in Chitrakoot district of Uttar Pradesh called Khabar Lahariya sparingly allows advertisements, and in the beginning years of its inception, did not allow the publication of any advertisements at all.

In its Annual Report: Press Council of India 2007 (Chapter 5: Report on Problems of Small and Medium Newspapers), it has been suggested that the fund allocation bar for smaller newspapers be raised to 20%, and that the standard procedure implemented for issuing advertising contracts to smaller newspapers be accelerated. In the current understanding of the media environment, it is important to go a step further and provide special allowances for the rural news media in this respect.

6.2. Findings from Survey

The survey conducted was a content analysis of the news covered in the Capital editions of national newspapers. The survey involved going through articles of the daily editions of the newspapers 'Times of India' (Delhi edition) and 'Dainik Jagran' (Delhi edition), each the most widely-read English and Hindi national daily in the country. Important characteristics of each of the articles that were discussing an issue of rural India were noted down. The newspaper editions ranging from March 2013 to May 2013 i.e. three months were analysed. The sample was randomised by picking out daily editions of each of the newspapers on an every-fourth-day basis. The following editions were thus selected for the research, 23 in total –

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March 1st, March 5th, March 9th, March 13th, March 17th, March 21st, March 25th, March 29th, April 2nd, April 6th, April 10th, April 14th, April 18th, April 22nd, April 26th, April 30th, May 4th, May 8th, May 12th, May 16th, May 20th, May 24th and May 28th.

The most widely-read English and Hindi dailies were made the subjects of the analysis, because doing so would give an insight into the practices of media organizations as fully-functioning corporate and profit-making industries, and the same newspapers would best represent the nature of content that maximum readers of Hindi and English dailies in the country get to read.

6.2.1. Factors taken into account in survey

Each of these articles was carefully examined under the following criteria

i) Scope of the article: Does the article address an issue affecting the rural population of only one state, of a region comprising more than one state, or of the entire country?

ii) Placement of the article: Has the article been positioned in the front page of the newspaper, in the editorial pages of the newspaper, in the 'Business' page of the newspaper, in the general reporting sections of the newspaper (i.e. the 'National' or 'City' sections of the newspaper), or does it form part of a larger issue being reported (e.g. government priority given to rural roads in reporting about the Union Budget 2013)?

This criterion was selected on the grounds that observing placement of news stories gives an idea of the editorial priority given to reporting rural issues. Front page and editorial articles obviously enjoy greater priority than articles under general reporting.

iii) The presence of visual elements: Has the article been substantiated with a visual element, like a picture, a graphic or a comic?

An article that is complemented by a visual element gives the impression of more newsprint space being devoted to the article, in order to make it more eye-catching, and in some cases, substantiate the facts put forward in the news article. However, such a *visual element → greater editorial priority* relationship may not hold true in all cases, because in some articles, the visual element provided is a picture that is either too small to be noticed, or provides little backing to the issue explored in the article. Often, the news story is inadequately small, and a picture is added to give an impression of more space being devoted to the article.

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iv) Nature of sources: Is the source of the article a national news wire agency (i.e. Press Trust of India, United News of India, Indo-Asian News Service etc.), an unidentified correspondent, the bureau or in-house news service of the newspaper (in the case of Times of India, 'Times News Network' and in the case of Dainik Jagran, Jagran News Network or Jagran 'Bureau') or an identified correspondent i.e. one who has been named in the byline?

The nature of sources for a news story provides a look into the extent to which resources are devoted to gathering facts and producing news content for a news story pertaining to a rural issue. For example, a newspaper whose majority of stories come from unidentified correspondents, news wires or in-house 'bureaus' signifies that the amount of professional resources devoted to sustained and concerted rural reporting are lesser, while one whose stories come from bylined journalists suggests a greater amount of professional expertise involved in reporting 'from the field'.

v) Size of article: Does the article occupy a column's length, two columns' length, more than two columns' length but less than half a page or half a page and more? Obviously, the bigger the article, greater will be its editorial priority.

vi) Themes explored in the article: Does the article explore the theme of general development, farmers' issues, political themes, legal themes, government criticism, socio-cultural themes Violence, Naxal-related themes or corporate and business affairs?

6.2.2. Findings from Dainik Jagran Analysis

Scope of news

66% of the articles had a local scope, i.e. pertained to issues of only one state.
8% of the articles had a regional scope, i.e. pertained to issues of more than one state.
26% of the articles had a national scope, i.e. pertained to matters of a national level.

Placement of news articles

2% of the news stories occupied the front page.
4% of the news stories occupied the editorial/opinion pages.
6% of the news occupied the Economics/Business section.
8% of the news was part of a series of reporting related to a bigger event.

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80% of the news belonged to the general reporting sections, i.e. the 'City' and 'National' sections.

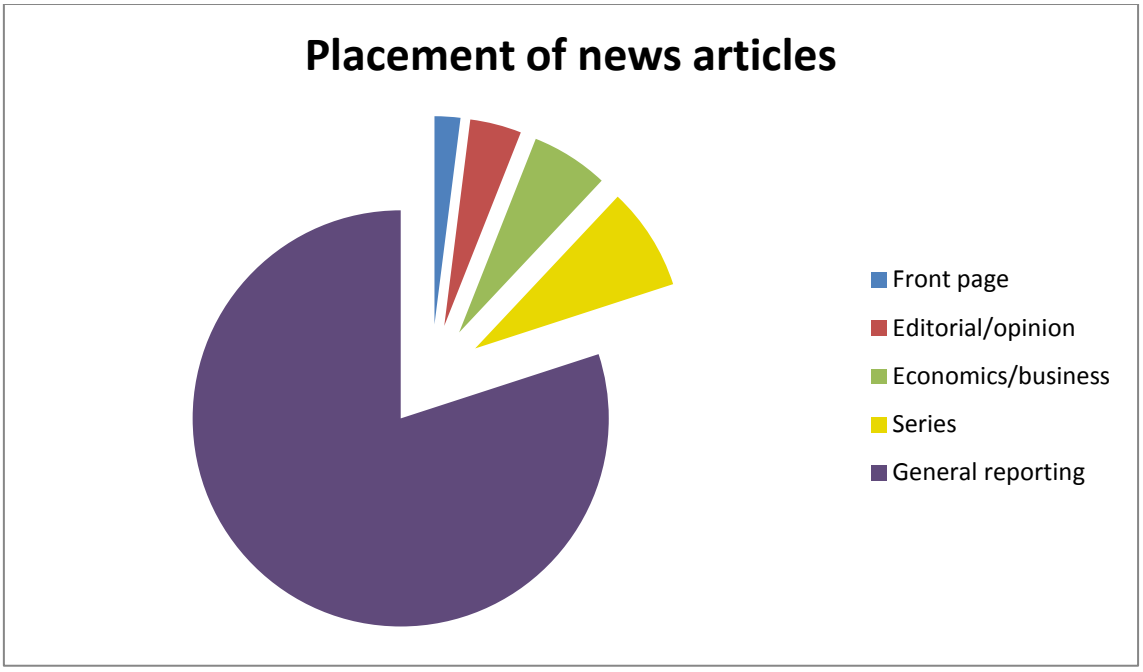


Figure 1: Placement of News Articles (Dainik Jagran Survey)

With/without visual elements i.e. pictures, graphs, comics etc.

30% of the articles were substantiated with the use of a visual element i.e. a picture, graph, comic etc.

70% of the articles had no support of a visual element i.e. a picture, graph, comic etc.

Size of the article

34% of the articles were of a column's length.

42% of the articles were of two columns' length.

24% of the articles were more than two columns long, but less than a half page long.

Nature of sources

22% of the sources were from the in-house bureau, i.e. 'Jagran Bureau'.

2%, i.e. only one article was from a national news wire, here Press Trust of India.

52% of the sources were unidentified, i.e. were stated a 'Correspondent' or 'Special correspondent'

18% of the articles were from identified i.e. named sources.

6% of the articles were from the Jagran News Network.

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Themes of stories

28% of the stories had violence-related themes, in which 4% were accidents-related and 8% were of violence against women.
10% of the stories had a Naxalism-related theme.
14% of the stories had a socio-cultural theme.
12% of the stories discussed farmer-related theme.
6% of the stories had a legal theme.
10% of the stories were around 'government-criticism' and political themes.
16% of the stories discussed government schemes and initiatives.
4% of the stories discussed corporate and business affairs.

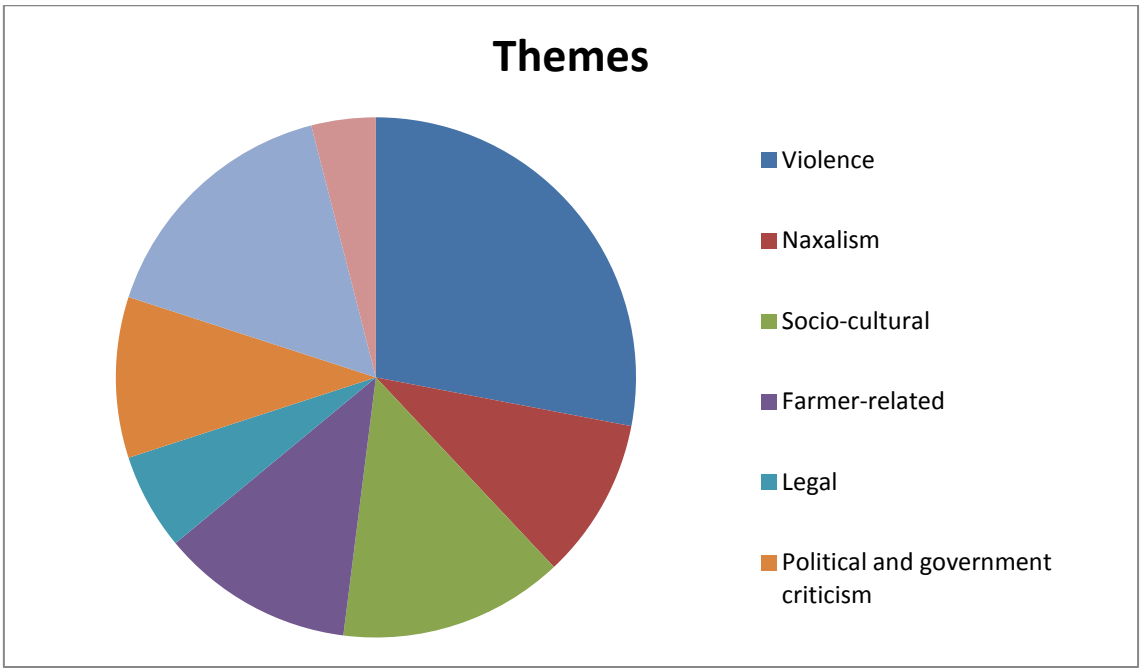


Figure 2: Themes of Rural News Stories (Dainik Jagran Survey)

6.2.3. Findings from Times of India Analysis

Scope of news

64.71% of the articles had a local scope, i.e. pertained to issues of only one state.
5.88% of the articles had a regional scope, i.e. pertained to issues of more than one state.
29.41% of the articles had a national scope, i.e. pertained to matters of a national level.

Placement of news articles

5.88% of the news stories occupied the front page.

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5.88% of the news stories occupied the editorial/opinion pages.
8.82% of the news was part of a series of reporting related to a bigger event.
79.41% of the news belonged to the general reporting sections, i.e. the 'National' sections.

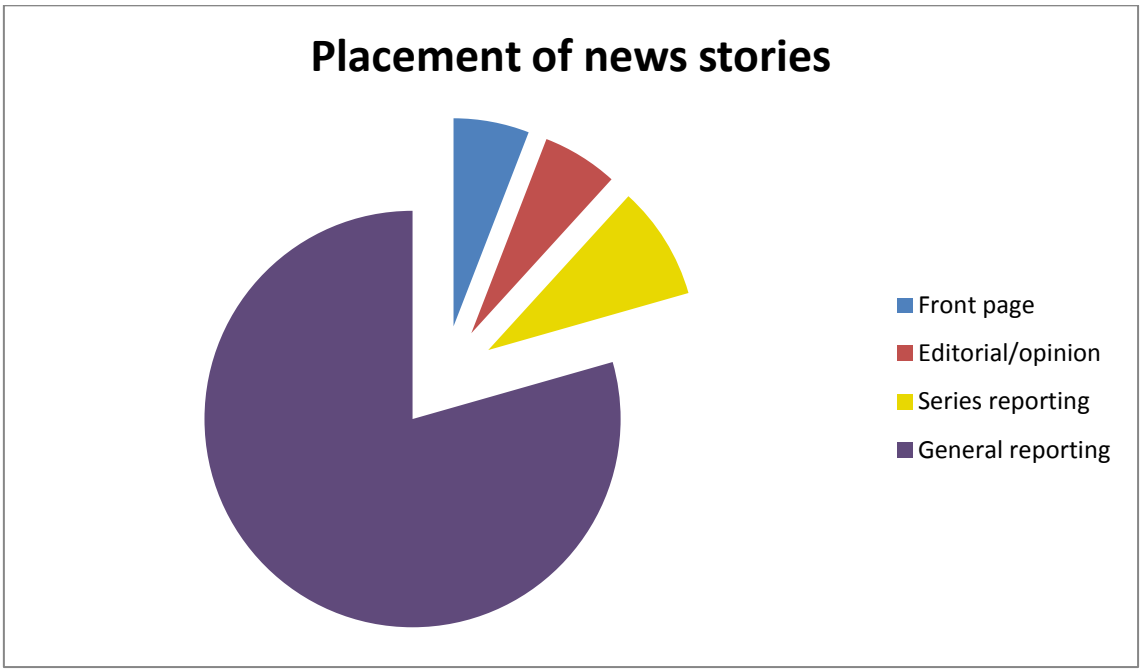


Figure 3: Placement of News Articles (Times of India Survey)

With/without visual elements i.e. pictures, graphs, comics etc.
38.235% of the articles were substantiated with the use of a visual element i.e. picture, graph, comic etc.
61.76% of the articles had no support of a visual element i.e. a picture, graph, comic etc.

Size of the article
47.06% of the articles were of a column's length.
38.235% of the articles were of two columns' length.
11.76% of the articles were more than two columns long, but less than a half page long.
2.94% of the articles were of a half-page length or more.

Nature of sources
20.59%of the articles had unidentified sources.
20.59% of the articles were from the in-house news agency i.e. 'Times News Network'.
58.82% of the articles had identified i.e. named sources.

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Themes of stories

14.71% of the stories had violence-related themes.
14.71% of the stories had Naxalism-related themes.
14.71% of the stories had a socio-cultural theme.
5.88% of the stories had farmer-related activities as central theme.
11.76% of the articles had a legal theme.
20.59% of the stories had political themes or government-criticism-related themes.
8.82% of the stories explained government schemes and initiatives.
8.82% of the stories explored themes related to general development concerns.

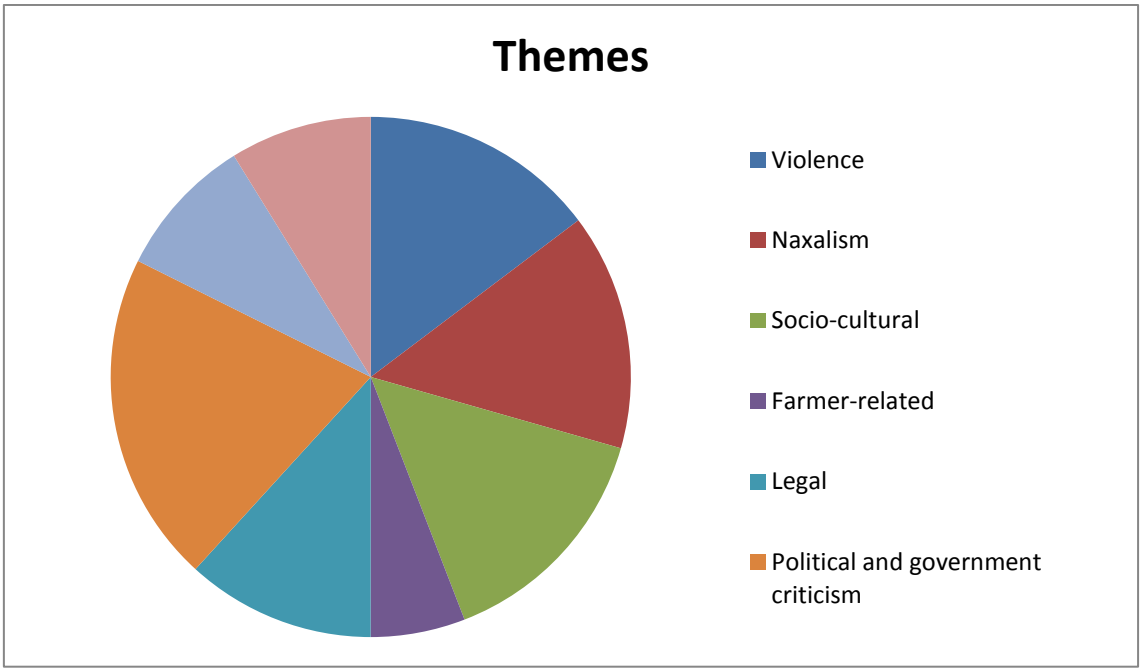


Figure 4: Themes of Rural News Stories (Times of India Survey)

6.2.4. Aggregate reportage of rural issues in surveyed editions

Out of the 23 editions that were surveyed in each of the newspapers, the number of rural issues covered in each was recorded, and their percentage with respect to the total number of individual stories was measured.

In Dainik Jagran, 2.64% of the stories were devoted to rural issues.
In The Times of India, 1.21% of the stories were devoted to rural issues.

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7. Recommendations, Scope and Strategy for Implementation

7.1. ICT-empowered information hubs

7.1.1. The Communication Network

The Bharat Broadband Network Limited (BBNL) is a project undertaken on a Public-Private-Panchayat model which will provide mobile-wireless broadband access to 2.5 lakh gram panchayats through an optical fibre network. It plans to employ para-technicians or interlocutors to increase awareness of technology among local communities and citizens. It is being funded majorly by the Universal Service Obligatory Fund (USOF), which comprises the money paid by consumers as part of a small fraction of their telephone bills.

The problem with lack of a communication network between rural newspapers and mainstream newspapers can be addressed by establishing information channels between villages and their head districts. This would give scope for the generation of huge amounts of local content in newspapers having certain district and state editions. The same information generated in these information outlets can be sent to news wires like the Press Trust of India and The United News of India. Quality standards for news content can be ensured by instating curators and 'editors' of content, who make sure that content submitted is credible and in a presentable form. Additionally, trainings can be provided to these 'rural citizen reporters' to produce relevant and quality content.

Implementing this recommendation will not require significant expenditure, because once the optical fibre network is set up, e-services will not be a distant prospect. The only important step required for this to materialise is for awareness measures to be enforced. In case formal rural press institutions cannot be set, this sort of a network can at least ensure that community voices reach the political centres of power that district headquarters and state centres have.

A case that can be looked into is the CGNet Swara, an initiative based out of villages in the country. This is a voice-based portal, freely accessible via mobile phone that allows anyone to report and listen to stories of local interest. Reported stories are moderated by journalists and become available for playback online as well as over the phone. Upon experimenting with the use of this technology by dialing the number given on the website, it was observed that the service works in such a way that all the caller needs to do is call the number and wait for a call-back from the receiver. Upon getting a call-back from the receiver, one is required to either

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record his/her message (in which case news-worthy events of local areas are reported by local people), or listen to news stories sent in by other people. In case a news story input is sent to the online server, a team of curators verify the accuracy of facts quoted, edit it for quality standards and summarise it in text, before this news story is finally made available for public dissemination. The reason for focusing on this initiative is because such a communication channel is effective even to send as news inputs to district-based and state-based news wires and news organizations. And 'Mojomail' is a complementary initiative taken by the developers of the same technology, which enables the moderator to send received news inputs back to the server for publishing as well as to blogs, for web publication. Similar information can be used to send to news wires and bureau offices of the media in district centres and state centres, so that local stories do not go unreported. CGNet Swara deals with the issue of assuring quality in such sort of citizen news reporting by training the local communities that this system is implemented in.

The penetration of Information and Communication Technologies networks throughout the country holds great potential in the country, for it presents the possibility of providing connectivity even to the unconnected parts of the country. And as the country awaits the communication revolution that this technology is to bring about, it is important to formulate effective strategies of tapping into this newly-created potential. Using the existing model of CGNet Swara of crowdsourcing news content and following it up with moderating of the received content by professional journalists, community-centric information can be exchanged. This community-generated news content would be of use to district and state-established bureaus and news channels of existing print media organisations, and could also solve the problem of lack of resources available to print media organisations in posting their journalists to all villages of the country.

7.1.2. Conducting media training sessions that inform rural citizens on the use of media for reporting information

Initiatives like the CGNet Swara, and even the rural newspaper Khabar Lahariya are able to ensure that the quality of news content gathered from rural people is maintained, by carrying out trainings in villages on media use. Given the fact that the media, and especially up and coming innovations like Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) are very technology-intensive, it is no surprise that common citizens would not be aware of all its uses to be able to effectively use them as tools for communication and social change.

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Here, the duty of organisations like CGNet Swara comes in - to help local people realise not only the importance of issues like rights, labour and social security, but to also empower them to use media as a means of bringing the attention of local governments towards issues of denial of rights. With respect to understanding reporting news, the following issues would most importantly be covered –



Apart from addressing these issues of media use, these trainings would also aim to form an environment for villagers to form a network that will respond to each others' issues.

7.2. Formation of an official body which represents the needs and interests of the rural newspapers

Much like the Association of Small and Medium Newspapers, which represents small and medium-scale newspapers in the country and also represents the needs and problems of the same in the Press Council of India meetings, rural newspapers and broadly speaking, the print media organisations formed in rural areas need a representative body that can officially speak for their needs in bodies like the Press Council of India. Following conversations with the Chairman of the Association of Small and Medium Newspapers, it was understood that even though the same association deals with the problems of rural newspapers, the magnitude of requests received from rural newspapers is so high that it becomes difficult for a

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single organisation to deal with both generic small and medium newspapers, as well as rural-based newspapers.

This body for Rural-based Print Media of India would be empowered to do the following –

1. To act as an agent in the process of getting newspapers certification with the Registrar of Newspapers in India (RNI), or if the media organisation wishes so, can provide them with the certification of being a not-for-profit organisation. During my conversations with Shalini Joshi, the co-Director of the organisation 'Nirantar', which funds the rural newspaper Khabar Lahariya, I was told that the media organisation had a non-profit status, as a result of which it had the added opportunity of getting funding and support from corporate as part of their CSR initiatives.

2. To be an organisation with journalists from all rural print media organisations, which would have the mettle and authoritative power to address incidences of violence and threats to Freedom of Expression made to rural print media organisations. The Patrakar Halla Virodhi Samiti of Maharashtra, for example, addresses complaints received from journalists with regard to threats made by local politicians to rural journalists. Upon asking organisations such as Gaon Connection, Khabar Lahariya and even the Association of Small and Medium Newspapers, a common problem that all organisations agreed to was threats from local power-holders for any reporting that risked their authority.

3. To officially represent rural newspapers in the Press Council of India, including the Committee that is formulated with the purpose of making Annual Reports. This organisation would also hold the authority in pressing for subsidies like tax exemptions, subsidised machinery, technological advancements etc.

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8. Future Work

The future work in a project such as this would involve a greater cooperation between rural, community-owned media and larger print media organisations in order to ensure that rural issues are adequately represented on both a localised level as well as the national level. As India still takes its shape in the cusp of a developmental revolution, the role of the print media, or for that matter, that of the general media channels is paramount. In places where the government action and development policies fail to deliver, or when social excesses and evils continue to cripple the complete development of people in the villages, the role of journalism centred around the rural population and rural issues is to bring attention to areas where progress still has to take shape. The media as a provider of a public service needs to be reinforced as the primary objective of journalists and media professionals across the country.

It is a known fact that one of the most limiting factors of the rural press is its lack of resources – because rural news media is more region-specific, it enjoys a smaller circulation than its urban counterparts and as a result makes lesser money from its operations. Additionally, rural newspapers cater to predominantly rural populations, which have considerably lower incomes than urban populations. As a result, external subscription support is equally important for rural newspapers if they are to be circulated among larger groups of people who may not be able to afford subscription. In order to create funds for such support for the rural press, the possibility of levying an Advertising Tax on large newspaper companies can be looked into.

In Sweden, for example, the print media is supported with subsidies as a measure of resuscitating the dying media. Additionally, newspapers that need government support because they have a circulation second to that of other major newspapers are also provided subsidies. In 1969, the government also developed a fund that offered loans to weak newspaper companies needing to update their technology. Applications that were received from competing newspapers that were looking at a model of co-operating in their editorial or publishing-related functions were given priority, in order to incentivize joint production and efficient utilization of given resources. The press subsidy system of Sweden was financed by an advertising tax of 6%, which while originally applied to newspaper advertising, in the future came to be applicable for any kind of print advertising. The advertising tax was later decreased to 3%, and continues to cover the costs of the subsidy system and has even created government surplus. Considering that rural newspapers and setting up media outlets in rural areas will require greater resources, introducing subsidies to encourage the same – be it in the form of

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newsprint or subsidized equipment and machinery – the same can be funded by private media organizations.

While the scope of this project is restricted only to the print media, there is unarguably a similar need to extend similar reforms to television and new media technologies. The television media holds great potential as a medium for dissemination of news, as it is capable of attracting greater audience groups – it does not require a person to be literate to understand the content, and is a more interactive medium. Similarly, new media technologies offer greater possibilities in our country as it is in the process of establishing increased penetration among the Indian masses. New media technologies break earlier-existing barriers of space, time and money – and are more global in the sense that information is accessible across national boundaries. Thus, rural journalism and the emergence of rural issues in the public sphere can be made easier with the use of accompanying media technologies.

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Appendix A

A. Interview with P. Sainath

Date: June 8, 2013

Time: 3:55 PM

Duration of Discussion: 30 minutes

Discussion:

1. Understanding the class approach to reporting on rural issues
2. I was enlightened on the selection of rural issues in the mainstream print media being dominated by corporate interests – for example, even in covering an issue such as mining in villages of Odisha, what was more covered were the corporate interests involved in it, the difficulty in obtaining land acquisition licenses etc.
3. The structural organisation of print media as an impediment to rural reportage – the lack of the Rural Affairs beat, the Agriculture beat etc.
4. The ownership of the media determines the universe of issues covered: The need for regulating media ownership to increase plurality of issues explored. This can help even address other problems like the difficulties in survival of smaller rural newspapers and print media by virtue of undue market domination by the bigger players.
5. The need for a strong public service print media to propagate information an awareness about rural issues: this is to stress on the fact that only if the government media agencies take an active effort in spreading awareness about problems affecting marginalised rural populations, only then will their prominence of public discourse increase and set the stage for more discussion for similar issues in the public sphere.

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"The highest measure of democracy is neither the 'extent of freedom' nor the 'extent of equality' but rather the highest measure of participation."
- A.D. Benoist

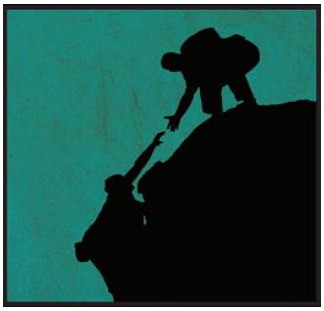
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