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ST. JOSEPH'S COLLEGE (AUTONOMOUS), BANGALORE-27
V SEMESTER BA-EJP: END-SEMESTER EXAMINATION: OCTOBER 2019
WRITING FOR JOURNALISM & CREATIVE WRITING
Advanced Journalism: JN 5113

Time: 2 ½ hrs

Max Marks- 70

Instruction:

1. This paper is meant for V semester students of BA-EJP course.
2. You are allowed to use a Dictionary.
3. You will lose marks for exceeding the suggested word-limit.
4. This paper contains SIX pages and THREE sections.

I. Read the following interview of Sandeep Bhushan and answer the questions that follow.

India's rapidly evolving television news industry has come a long way since the days of Doordarshan's plodding monopoly. With the influx of private players in the post-liberalisation era, newsrooms began diversifying vastly in ideologies, tone and tenor. Television news, especially in the English language, expanded its disproportionate influence over India's national conversation, owing, particularly to its proximity to power.

*Today, Indian newsrooms operate in a near-opaque environment with minimum regulatory oversight, coupled with increasing pressure from the establishment to toe the state's line. The senior journalist Sandeep Bhushan's upcoming book *The Indian Newsroom* is an attempt to deconstruct the agenda-driven journalism purveyed by corporate ownership, and the concentration of editorial powers in the hands of a star-elite within the studios, among other things. For his analysis, Bhushan relies on his 20 years of experience as a television journalist with channels such as NDTV and *Headlines Today*. He is also a regular contributor at *The Caravan*.*

In an interview with Appu Ajith, Bhushan spoke about an industry mired in a moral and institutional crisis, and how this impacted the recent general elections. He was scathing in his assessment of the role the media played in the elections, saying that "it infantilised politics, made politics into a game."

Appu Ajith: In your upcoming book, you have illustrated some disconcerting aspects of the Indian television news scene, including access journalism, marginalisation of reporters, power asymmetry in the newsrooms, and the rise of the "star system." Which among these is particularly worrying?

Sandeep Bhushan: Let me speak a little about why I wrote the book ... Nobody in India writes about their profession, that is, journalism. Nobody knows what is happening in the world of media. Having taught in some of the universities, I see there are parallel discourses [what is taught versus how media actually functions]. It is a very incestuous, self-referential world. I tried to write what I think as a reporter: the way I saw it and then connect it to the broader scheme of things. The second aim was introspection. There is a lot of introspection happening globally in the media industry but in India, unfortunately, it does not happen. Especially the liberal space in India—how the liberal media's shaped up, what are the issues facing it. While there is a lot of discrediting of the liberal media, there is still a case for looking inwards. Then there is the rise of this very powerful, right-wing ideological movement among the journalists.

I think it is important to put on record the journalists who have been hired and fired because that really is the crux of the issue. We talk so much of Modi media—that the establishment gets away with doing anything in news organisations, they arm-twist promoters, they arm twist editors, and in

turn the reporter gets arm twisted. This is because we have this whole power asymmetry at work. But first and foremost has been the culling of reporting. It has driven news content out, completely. There used to be specialist reporters and all those have been culled.

Then, stars are a problem because the star is the one who is going to be omnipresent—the person who knows everything. They replace reporters. Stars devour resources because [channels] divert all resources to showing-off the anchor's persona. The anchor becomes a brand.

AA: The evolution of the Arnab Goswami template—a perpetually angry and confrontational showman—which is being replicated across newsrooms, is one of the central concerns of your book. How much has this affected the news and newsroom culture? What does it tell us about the audience?

SB: In India, any kind of data relating to this [audience] is not monitored anywhere. Who are the Twitter users? Who are the social-media users? There is two-way traffic between news content in all the right-wing channels and what is figuring in the social media and what is figuring on the government and the BJP's agenda. What is happening is that there is a new class which I think the BJP is politically able to map very well. There is a new class which is aspirational, non-English speaking, irreverent; they perhaps take to social media, they watch Times Now. So, Times Now and Republic, they are in itself, they're very impactful.

But what is even more impactful about Arnab is that he's spawned copycats across Hindi networks. Like [AajTak channel's] Anjana Om Kashyap, or Amish Devgan [now with News18], ABP News, they all have screaming, shouting, hysterical, partisan anchors.

Arnab is a post-meltdown anchor, essentially. In the time of scarcity, where there are no revenues and ten channels that are squabbling to gather eyeballs, his kind of a daily theatre just fetches a lot of eyeballs. This is why access journalism, to me, is extremely important.

AA: Could elaborate on that as you have talked at length about access journalism in the book as well?

SB: Across the world, whenever there is a slump, like 2008–09, there is a shake-up: media houses have shut down, shed flab. But if you look at India, through the meltdown, in an industry that relies entirely on advertising revenue, the actual number of channels increased. I think it's something like 380 today and 250 then. You have 130 odd channels despite the dirge we hear everyday, that there is no money. And I think that the whole thing is access, in a very real sense.

I may not make money but I need to be there because it gives you clout, gives you an entry point to the elite. You become a media owner and your whole status changes. Like Subhash Chandra, the Zee owner. In the absence of any regulatory structures, access has become extremely important. As it happened with Kapil Sibal's channel [referring to Tiranga TV], they had huge run-ins [with the government] and now also one does not know whether it is going to survive the new government. Access becomes a very important point but it is tied up to the media economy that is emerging.

AA: When it comes to access, you have talked about the blurring of boundaries between the boardroom and the newsroom citing Rajeev Chandrasekhar and the Newsland investigation of Asianet. Do you think this factor impacted the coverage of the general elections?

SB: In India, if I am the promoter, I set up the network; I am bound to have a huge say in its affairs. If Mukesh Ambani has set up a shop, he runs the business as he wants. Media, which is a public good, cannot be run the way you run your own private *dukan* [shop]. This distinction between media and non-media properties is not being made by any government, whether it is the Congress or the BJP. Consequently, there are no special regulations to deal with the media.

In India, it is an open season sort of thing, you do what you want to do, you use the media platform the way you want to do. What this media did in these elections is basically this; it infantilised politics, made politics into a game. Everything is a masterstroke, everything is in essence trivialised.

AA: The media coverage of the Pulwama attack and the Balakot airstrikes was blatantly jingoistic despite multiple analyses concluding that no significant targets were actually hit during the strikes. Do you think this affected public perception during the elections?

SB: The media blacked out the Indian helicopter downed by its own forces [An Mi-17 was brought down by friendly fire on 27 February, killing six personnel, in the middle of an intrusion by Pakistan's

jets]. Has there been any press meeting about the fact that your air force shot down and killed their own forces? And it was not even a war-time operation. Where do you begin when you say that media contributed to Modi's win? Media was not the only cause of victory; there are multiple causes. But in the media you just had Modi, Modi, Modi. I am not a young man, I have seen several elections. I have not seen anything like this [the media coverage of and leading up to the general elections 2019] in my life, and a lot of senior journalists will vouch for it.

Everywhere journalists are working in sheer terror. Three days ago, I was speaking to a Hindi news journalist who is a colleague of mine from Aaj Tak and he said he has his job only because he knows Modi very well. Another way how Modi operates is, he has bypassed the star system in Delhi. He sidesteps the big editors in Delhi. None of them get an audience with him. He only operates with the beat reporters, which in many ways appears more democratic. But it is basically designed to subvert the system.

AA: What do you have to say about the liberal media in this context?

SB: Liberal media in India is in no mood to introspect; you can look at the post-loss discourse [referring to the losses of opposition parties, such as the Congress]. They are just heaping the blame on Modi, that he is the main culprit, but what has the liberal media done? Digitisation has led to a low expense dumbing down in the media. Some guy sitting in Meerut sees somebody getting hit because they are Muslim. He just puts this footage either on social media, or if he is a stringer he will give it to a news channel. And then all the channels will just debate that: get one Sambit Patra [a Bharatiya Janata Party spokesperson], one Congress guy, one RSS guy, one regular and you have your debate. I think it's posturing to say digital media is going to come to the rescue. At the moment there is nothing, simply because digital media has been unable to generate viable revenue models. I think the only way is some kind of regulation, some fix on who can and cannot own television channels. You cannot have Mukesh Ambani owning television channels when he owns half of India.

AA: This brings us to the entrenched power structures in the media. In your book, you have talked about how the public-school groomed, upper-caste elite control most media houses. Do you think this lopsided power structure influences the range of issues covered during elections?

SB: Yes. In the specific context of NDTV, I think it is important to know that it is not a democratic network. It is run through a particular kind of clique—if I am a promoter, it is run through my acquaintances, my wife's acquaintances and my pal's acquaintances with higher people. If you are from [the private school] Doon School or St Stephens [a Delhi University college], these were institutional loyalties that they [NDTV] valued. It was specific, but also upper-caste.

This is true everywhere in the English language space. What it means is that these are the people who take the editorial calls, so the newsroom becomes top-heavy, unequal and agenda driven. In specific cases like NDTV, it is classist, it is a top-heavy newsroom and it also can run the risk of being out of touch editorially with the kind of things people want. Should media organisations be organised in this way?

It has been a raging issue in India for several years that our newsrooms are monochromatic, upper-caste driven and do not have a democratic representation. So what happens to that question? In NDTV, I have actually done stories about this: should Dalits be organised? Should there be reservations for Dalits in the private sector? I have done a story in NDTV about that and yet is NDTV prepared to give [anchor positions] guys who do not look "good," who may not speak good English by which they mean who are from a lower-caste, are you willing to give them a chance? This goes beyond bare news delivery and organisational issues, to what is the responsibility of a media organisation. How do you serve public good? Can you serve public good by having just one lot of people in power in perpetuity?

AA: The media situation looks very pessimistic, as you say, but have you mapped any encouraging trends?

SB: I really cannot see any silver lining. Even news portals are falling in line with the government. There is a political polarisation among serious news portals. When you talk about digital media, what do you imagine? You imagine a freer media where comment is free, where reporting is freer. But no,

we do not have that. The public-spirited news portals are financially crippled or relying on either crowd funding or benefactors. At the moment, there is no revenue model that looks viable. In print, it has all but come down because the reporter has no elbow room, no freedom to do anything. It is very tough to be optimistic at this point.

I.A. Answer any TWO of the following questions (150-200 words each) (2x10=20)

1. Write a news story on the interview above. Give your piece a suitable headline
2. Bhushan suggest that the newsroom is 'top-heavy, unequal and agenda driven' do you agree/disagree with him? Elaborate
3. Bhushan says, 'I think it's posturing to say digital media is going to come to the rescue.' Is this a fair assessment of digital media? Draw from your personal experience of using digital media to elaborate.

II. Read the following article by Shiv Vishwanathan in 'The Hindu' and answer the questions that follow.

Citizenship today is divided into four categories, four styles of role-playing and involvement. The first two are more advertised and discussed in sociological detail. These are the voter and the consumer. They combine different times and involve different dramas. The other two are the fan and the reader. The cinematic fan has found his place in the south; and the fan club, in fact, is the only real cadre in politics today. The fan's commitment to his iconic star goes beyond the dramas and demands of ideology. The reader, however, is portrayed as a more laidback, reflective character. He is loyal, but openly critical, and sustains a running commentary on the newspaper he reads. For him, the newspaper commands a certain loyalty, a certain ritual where, for many, the newspaper and morning coffee go together, articulating the pleasures and demands of citizenship.

The role of the reader deserves to be analysed in greater detail. His invisibility hides the fact that he is an informal trustee of a newspaper, tuned to its nuances and style. He sustains his favourite columns and greets them with a kind of enthusiasm which is moving. As a columnist, I can testify that readers' comments sustain one, and their openness and honesty are moving. I still remember an old reader who complained to me imperiously: "Please do not ruin my morning coffee with your difficult English!"

One faces the paradox that while a particular news might be ephemeral, the newspaper is a commons of memory, and the reader a trustee of news and its integrity. News, in that sense, is a public landscape maintained by the reader. He is its symbolic guardian. Memory is crucial and critical in a newspaper, and some columns sustain it brilliantly. The civics of ordinary life is sustained by these people through what I call an informal economy of ethics and aesthetics. There is no policing here – just a celebration of a way of life, an appeal to its norms.

This forces one to ask whether the time for the reader to play a more creative role has not arrived. As a trustee of news, the reader enacts a fascinating ritual of citizenship. He becomes the argumentative Indian discussing every facet of democracy and culture. In this very moment when democracy is threatened by majoritarianism, the reader can play a more pluralistic role, sustaining norms when institutions fail. He becomes an ethical second skin of news and the newspaper he is loyal to. He fine-tunes a sense of truth and plurality, signalling it with terse reminders we call "Letters to the Editor".

As mnemonic, as consumer, as trustee, the reader can be more proactive as a part of the networks of civil society. Consider an ongoing event: the fate of the media activist Julian Assange, who is being harassed by many Western governments for revealing the real secrets behind today's governmentality. The state had been waiting vindictively for Mr. Assange ever since he showed that the emperor had no clothes. He is being harassed and mentally tortured. Consider a situation where a newspaper were to nominate him as 'a prisoner of conscience'. Resistance becomes an everyday affair as readers rise to the occasion and readership transforms itself from a passive act of consumption to an active sense of citizenship. The readers help the newspaper to sustain its efforts at plurality. It helps consolidate the power of civil society in unexpected ways. Imagine a newspaper

selects half a dozen exemplars like this, and the subscriber becomes the trustee from the reading room. The possibilities are fascinating. We become not acceptors of paid and fake news, but protectors of real news, where writing is a form of risk. It consolidates a sense of citizenship within the everydayness of an information community.

One realises with a sense of dread that TV as a medium belongs to the lynch mob, the patriotic goon squad. It is no longer a public space except as a symbolic longing. Print, at least the communities around newspapers, has acquired a more reflective style. It demands immediacy, but the urgency is not instantaneous. It has space for memory, judgment and morality. We must think of ways to deepen this precious space, where responsibility combines with rationality. Given the disorders of development which every newspaper reports, one suggestion is that a newspaper, through its readers, become a trustee responsible for the fate of at least one craft, one language, one species such that readership becomes both life-giving and life-affirming. It must be emphasised that such a concern is not organisational, but stems from a community's sense of its own membership. Decades ago, the French poet and essayist, Charles Baudelaire, described the newspaper as a landscape. His description was immaculate, and the reader today walking through this landscape realises that citizenship needs the language of care and resistance, an owning-up to the cultures in which it is embedded. Given the power of information, one realises that the state and the corporation practice forms of organised indifference and illiteracy. Their responses to the ideas of the Anthropocene is evidence of it. For years, scientists, at least many dissenting scientists from James Lovelock, Lynn Margulis to Isabelle Stengers, have fought a battle to reread science and its responsibilities to the earth. The planet acquires a new sense of sociology, a new politics of ecology, as a result of their writings. States and corporations have avoided these issues, stunting it under the idea of corporate social responsibility or by playing blame games, focussing on advanced industrialised countries. The Anthropocene becomes the newspapers' responsibility and the readers' trusteeship. It will unravel debates between experts and laypersons, homemaker and policymaker, but make the Anthropocene everyone's responsibility. It is what a sociologist and journalist called "the Big News".

Robert Park was a journalist who helped establish the Chicago School of Sociology which saw urban life, its violence, ethnicity and migration as the Big News of the era and chronicled it with subtle ethnographic insights. The Anthropocene, or the damage and transformation man as a species has inflicted on the earth today, is the Big News of our time, but sadly it is the Big News that few newspapers in India are reporting. Ordinary citizens have already sensed the power of the project and its philosophical and ethical implications. I remember one villager near a Sterlite plant telling me that climate change is a label for whatever governments want to wash their hands of. The villager realises that the problem demands a new kind of governmentality and a new social contract between state and citizen which goes beyond national boundaries. The reader as a citizen of the planet and the newspaper as a global player become ideal custodians of such a text, where memory, compassion, responsibility and an innovative science emerge in a new way. Both democracy and science invent themselves in new ways.

II.A. Answer any TWO of the following questions in 250 words (2x15=30)

1. The writer quotes a reader saying "Please do not ruin my morning coffee with your difficult English!" do you agree with the reader? Does the newspaper ruin your morning coffee too? Write about your experience of reading the paper.
2. The writer says, '...news might be ephemeral, the newspaper is a commons of memory' what is your understanding of this statement. Draw from the article and elaborate
3. What does the writer call 'Big News'? Do you agree with his identification of the 'big news' of the present era? Substantiate with examples.

**III. Write a PITCH for a feature that looks at Whatsapp messaging and the effect it has as a source for news. Draw from personal experience and your reading/consumption of WhatsApp to frame your pitch. Give your feature a suitable headline.(250-300 words)
(1X20=20 Marks)**