

INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

WDF-25
Newspaper with an Indian Accent

c/o American Express Co.
Connaught Place
New Delhi, India
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Mr. Walter S. Rogers
Institute of Current World Affairs
522 Fifth Avenue
New York 36, New York

Dear Mr. Rogers:

In a coffee shop in Madras, a shirt-sleeved reporter, making the first stop on his way from the office, complains in English accent about his "bloody boring assignment."

In the shade of banyan tree in a village in the Ganges plain, a young high school graduate sits surrounded by illiterate villagers and reads aloud an Urdu paper from Delhi.

In the dim-lit, dirt-floor office of a weekly near the Bombay waterfront, the ink-stained fingers of a compositor deftly fill a galley with type of curling, curving script of the Gujarati language.

Late at night in New Delhi's Connaught Place, a five-year old newsboy patters in bare feet alongside the prospective customer, pleading "Sahib, sahib, newspaper, only two pice." "O.K., kid. Now scram."

Newspapers in India? Like the blind men defining the elephant, the man who tries to define the Indian press (even with the help of 20/20 vision) is liable to come to the conclusion that it certainly is different from itself, depending on where you touch it.

You can touch a big city daily like the stately Hindu of Madras, with its enlightened family owners-editors, an "our-man" news-gathering network that stretches as far as London and New York, and a modern plant that produces a 10- or 12- page paper that would do itself proud in the American press Ayer competition.

Or you can touch a district-town weekly owned and edited by a cantankerous defender of his caste or political party, whose "news" is really editorials written down by hand, transferred to a stone block, printed on a broadside of hand-made paper, and altogether looking (to paraphrase Robert Benchley's remark about French newspaper engravings) like it was printed on a slice of bread.

But to describe the whole elephant at once, and to get it over with: the Indian press is free, responsible, fairly competent, and getting better all the time.

By American standards the Indian press is small in scope and influence, having a core of 330 dailies with a combined circulation of about 2.7 million.

But by Asian standards, India's press is big, the biggest outside Japan. At that, the odds are against it. In this country one person in ten knows how to read. There are 14 major languages. The price of a newspaper equals a laborer's hourly wage.

Thus limited in the supply of prospective customers, the press stays mostly in the cities, where the educated, interested and coin-carrying people live. Newspapers cater to their interests and have a strong influence on them, but they leave the vast mass of India unsold, and uncovered.

Even at that, Indian news-readers get their fill of capital city news, from New Delhi and the States. The sayings of Ministers and the doings of legislatures and Government departments are covered at great column length. There is also a great deal of news from Western Europe, especially London.

This is largely a carry-over from the days of India's non-violent Independence movement, when the pen took the place of the revolutionary sword. The patriotic press helped shove the British out of the country, and it still shows a persistent boost-India, build-the-nation attitude.

But there is no Izvestia or People's Daily loudspeaking for the Government, nor is there any pressure to do so. Papers increasingly criticise the Government, and know they can be critical and still remain constructive.

In fact, with the coming of a new crop of professional newspapermen, the rise in literacy and income, the extension of news-gathering networks, the rounding-out of reportage, and the growth of Indian-language newspapers, the future of the Indian press is promising.

The first Indian newspaper was not published in 1768 in Calcutta by William Bolts. Mr. Bolts, a disgruntled ex-employee of the ruling East India Company, was deported by the Company for bringing up the idea.

Twelve years later another former EIC-man, James A. Hickey, did found India's first paper, The Bengal Gazette or Calcutta General Advertiser. But the paper advertised the private lives of Company officials, and Hickey was quickly put into jail and out of business.

Within a decade, however, other papers appeared in Madras and Bombay, and newspapering in India was underway. Most papers were begun

by English publishers and missionaries and they dominated the field. The most celebrated reporter of Empire days was Rudyard Kipling, who worked by the Civil & Military Gazette of Lahore and the Pioneer of Allahabad. Kipling's handling of Government news was too frivolous for the Pioneer, so they sent him about India on a roving assignment, to the enduring pleasure of everybody.

Meanwhile, as early as 1818, Indian social and religious reformers began publishing in self-defence against the British. As the Independence movement gained momentum, papers and politics became entangled. A surprisingly large number of leaders of the Indian National Congress (now Nehru's party) were publishers. Gandhi himself edited several weeklies, including Young India and Harijan ("Children of God," his name for Untouchables), and Nehru founded the National Herald, an influential daily.

Since Independence in 1947, the number of newspapers has doubled. Today there are 6570 newspapers of various kinds in India (according to the 1956 report of the Registrar for Newspapers for India). The dailies number 476, monthlies 2506 and weeklies 1903.

Circulation figures are sketchy, but after juggling ABC, Registrar, USIS and publishers' figures, it seems safe to say that all dailies together sell 2.7 million copies a day. The weeklies sell about 2.5 million and the monthlies slightly less.

The English-language dailies are the big ones--- English is still the national language of the educated---and they claim a 730,000 combined circulation. This compares to 350,000 for dailies published in Hindi, the North Indian language that's supposed to replace English in the long run; 275,000 for Gujarati and 230,000 for Marathi, the two main languages of Bombay State; 170,000 for Tamil, the language of Madras; 150,000 for Malayalam, the language of Kerala, in southwestern most India; and the others.

But the number of Indian-language papers is growing. There are now 94 Hindi dailies, compared to 59 in English, and in general Indian language circulation is showing the faster rate of growth. The "English-knowing" population is about 3.6 million, 1% of the whole populace, and the percentage isn't likely to increase much. Roughly one-third of the Indian people speak some dialect of up-and-coming Hindi. Literacy in all Indian language is on the rise as education spreads.

Taking all the kinds of periodicals, 42% of them are published in the national or State capitals, and 26% are published in cities of more than 100,000 population---this in a country where 80% of the people live in villages. Two-thirds of the English-language papers are sold in the cities, compared to the two-fifths figure for Indian-language papers.

Bombay City has been the newspaper city and more than one-fourth of all of India's dailies are published in Bombay State. But in the past ten years, New Delhi has become the news capital of the nation. Five big dailies compete there now, and all together there are 560 papers of all sorts in Delhi.

Calcutta, the heart of now-limp-and-then-fiery Bengal, has had a succession of distinguished, controversial newspapers. Highly literate (40%) Kerala, the Communist-governed State, has a lively press with 24 dailies, many of them with an ex-grinding attachment on the press. On the other hand, the relatively backward States of Assam, Bihar, Orissa and Rajasthan are weak in the number of newspapers and newspaper-readers.

Including the small-fry papers, 45% of all periodicals are owned by individuals, another 22% by societies (including religious groups), and 10% by joint stock companies. But taking dailies only, the five leading "chains" hold one-third of the total circulation. These are:

1. The Times of India group headed by Shanti Prasad Jain but associated with the industrial Dalmia family. The group clusters around the Times, published simultaneously in Bombay and Delhi and boasting a circulation of 106,000, India's biggest. There are nine other publications in English and Hindi.
2. The Indian Express newspapers of Ram Nath Goenka, who publishes, and keeps a close eye on, the Express, which is published in four cities (please see the accompanying box below). There are 10 other associated periodicals in the Tamil, Telgu and Marathi languages.
3. The Hindustan Times and all other publications owned by the Birla family of industrialists. The chain includes English and Hindi dailies in New Delhi, Allahabad and Patna, and the Weekly Eastern Economist.
4. The Amrita Bazar Patrika group of four---simultaneous English dailies in Calcutta and Allahabad and one in Bengali and one Hindi in those same two cities, respectively. T.K. Ghosh heads the private corporation owners.
5. The Ananda Bazar Patrika group of four directed by Asoka Kumar Sarkar for a private company. These are the name sake Calcutta paper in Bengali, and the English-language Hindustan Standard in three forms: a Calcutta AM, and a Delhi AM and PM.

THE BIG ONES
India's Most Influential Dailies

<u>Name</u>	<u>Place</u>	<u>Language</u>	<u>Circulation</u>
Times of India	Bombay, Delhi	English	106,000
+ Navabharat Times	Delhi, Bombay	Hindi	45,000
Hindustan Times	New Delhi	English	65,000
+ Hindustan	New Delhi	Hindi	45,000
Statesman	Calcutta, New Delhi	English	80,000
The Hindu	Madras	English	70,000
Indian Express	Madras, Madura Bombay, Delhi	English	100,000
Amrita Bazar Patrika	Calcutta, Allahabad	English	70,000
+ Jugantar	Calcutta	Bengali	60,000
Ananda Bazar Patrika	Calcutta	Bengali	75,000
+ Hindustan Standard	Calcutta, New Delhi	English	40,000
Tribune	Ambala Cantonement	English	18,000
Malayala Manorama	Kottayam, Kerala	Malayalam	30,000
Dinamani	Madras, Madura	Tamil	70,000

The total investment in the Indian newspaper business is estimated at Rs120 million, or \$25.2 million (one rupee officially equals \$.21). The total annual income comes to about the same, with circulation bringing in Rs 6 for every Rs 5 from advertising.

Advertisements take up an average of 40% of total column space in the dailies. The display ads run largely to cosmetics and soap ("Nirupa Roy, lovely star of Mukti Films, uses pure white Lux Toilet Soap"), drugs and medicines (Amrutanjan ointment, "Conquerer of Pain"), and films ("Tumsa Nahin Dekha," meaning "I've never seen anyone like you").

The classified ads, good money makers, include "Business Offers", "Situation Vacant" and "Matrimonial" bids: "Tamil Brahmin Bride, Decent, handsome, home-loving, required for foreign-trained Engineer. Give copies of horoscope, subsect, full details, Box 8260..."

In fact, looking through the daily newspapers, they are a hodge-podge of the familiar and the strange.

The big dailies are demy-sized (17"x23" or so), with eight columns and about 12 pages. There is a shortage of the newsprint that comes from Canada, Scandinavia, China and, in a trickle, from India's one Nepa Mill in Madhya Pradesh.

On the front page, the lead story goes, like the Indian automobile, on the left-hand side. Most of the credit lines read "From Our Political Correspondent," "From our New Delhi Office," "PTI" (for Press Trust of India), or "Reuter."

Inside, past more national and international news, some local stories and a scattering of photos, comes the grey editorial page, with a couple columns of "leaders," short notes and comment, a featured interpretive piece by "Surveyor" or "Observer" or a by-lined writer, and then Letters to the Editor: "Sir--- May I bring to the notice of the authorities the lack of courtesy and civility shown at various post offices....."

There are cinema and dance reviews, the local calender of events (a meeting of the Delhi House-Owners Federation or open house at the Yoga Ashram), followed by market and stock exchange reports and sports (field hockey and cricket). India has neither TV nor Tangletunes, and only one or two comic strips.

Taking a closer look at this "average" Indian paper, the preoccupation with national and international politics becomes all the more apparent: Parliament discusses, Nehru warns, Congress plans, Minister declares.

The English-language dailies serve a heaping portion of New Delhi news, and what's more the reader can keep up pretty well with what's going on in Britain. Nye Bevan (Socialist India prefers Labourites to Tories) appears in the news as often as some important Indian politicians, and English cricket players are sports page heroes.

The United States, as it appears in the newspapers, is a land of contrasts. It's the land of H-bomb and guided missile tests, Dulles with mouth ajar and racial segregation, and also the nation of wheat gifts, foreign loans and mature democracy.

The domination of political news is understandable. The British Empire is just ten years past, but the Commonwealth is still here. India is proud of its status as a leading nation and is interested in keeping posted. Again, foreign affairs is the grand passion of Mr. Nehru, in talks and travels, and he is the papers' best copy.

At home, politics, especially as it pertains to economic nation-building, is the concern of educated Indians. In general, however, Indian-language papers go lighter on the international news than do the English-language papers, and they provide more State and local news instead.

Perhaps the complaint should be not "too much political news" but rather "too much official-sounding news." There are excellent analytical pieces by special correspondents and regional situationers ("Letter from Madras") by stringers. But these are all too few. Too much of the copy is simply a near-full stenographic report of speeches and proceedings, or Government hand-outs, with little benefit of selection, background, or human interest.

This produces the sort of "objective" writing that amounts to a gentle brain-washing. For example, this recently appeared in a New Delhi daily:

Mr. Lobanov, President of the U.S.S.R. Academy of Agricultural Science, and leader of a delegation of the Supreme Soviet of the U.S.S.R., was questioned at a Press conference today on the working of the Supreme Soviet and its influence on Soviet administration.

Asked to comment on the institution of Opposition parties, Mr Lobanov said every party represented a class and the system helped to represent the views of different class interests, but in the U.S.S.R., there was only one party because there were no antagonistic classes.

The Soviet delegation leader said Ministers were criticized in the Supreme Soviet. The criticism was directed not at ousting someone in power but at improving the administration for the people's good....

There was no line in the story to provide the reader with prospective. Mr. Lobanov couldn't have done better by Tass.

There's no point in suspecting the reporter of Russian sympathies. He probably would do the same for an American visitor. Henry Cabot Lodge recently got a good press.

But something's amiss. A lot of people come to India these days and the press is perpetually announcing that a "warm welcome" is planned for the visiting Prime Minister of Ruritania. And sure enough, the next-day newspapers report that a "warm welcome" was provided.

(Incidentally, that Visiting Prime Minister is probably from the People's Republic of Ruritania. It's a rare Communist P.M. who has not visited India, and, automatically, gotten a good press.)

This may be the India zeitgeist ---- "Be Neutral"--- but is not the kind of objectivity that is good newspapering.

On the other hand, perhaps as an inheritance of the pre-Independence days when newspapers were in the propaganda business, there is a great deal of editorializing all down the length of many an Indian newspaper column.

In the English-language papers there is also a touch of emulating the interpretive writing of the British national dailies. But many an Indian reporter, lacking the personal background, the source of information, perhaps the tradition, and the skill with the language, often winds up with what seems like a shoddy counterfeit of the British model. His story, written with a dash of "Babu" English, the affected dialect of the minor Indian bureaucrat, is frequently soggy and confusing.

These twin amateurish peculiarities --the narrow "I'm -only-quoting-him" objectivity and the fuzzy impressionistic essay-- are found on all pages of the paper.

There is special twist to the reporting from Pakistan, the neighbor with whom India does not happen to have good Panch Shila relations. A couple of Indian correspondents there produce excellent, independent commentaries befitting prophets who are not in their own country. But much of the total report includes items that are so slanted they are practically lying down. Like this lead: "Mr. H.S. Suhrawardy, The Prime Minister of Pakistan, today stepped up the propaganda that India had massed troops on Pakistan's border....."

All in all, because of subject matter and its treatment, reading the Indian newspaper becomes a trifle dull. Even if the Indian reader is spared the accounts of man's barbarity to man ("Mad Hachetman Slays Schoolgirls") that appear in some of the world press including the American, and even if he is thankful for being presented "serious" news, there is no point in boring him.

Some papers are beginning to give space to human interest stories, features, and pieces that show imagination and investigation. And may be there will be crisper, more readable writing.

There is no prospect for over-night change, however. And this despite the new crop of journalists coming up, many of them with B.A.s and M.A.s these days. As journalists they inherit some of the they-aided-Independence sympathy of the public. But their social status in general, and often their relationship to the person whom they are interviewing, is sub-par.

Low wages lower the reporter's morale and his social status. Most respectable Indian fathers wouldn't want their daughter to marry one of them.

At any event, it's also going to take more enlightened proprietors who will spend money for gathering news and editors who will inspire their staff to do a solid job.

Unfortunately, in the financial aspect, newspapers are not such a lucrative business owners are prepared to expand their staff and services. To some of the new businessmen-owners, talk of spending more money for news apparently offends their economic sensibilities.

The low wages of journalists have been made a concern of the Government's. An official wage Board for working Journalists has proposed a scale of minimum wages beginning at Rs.90 (\$18.90) a month for reporters on the smallest papers and rising to Rs1000 for a big-city editor, plus "dearness allowance" (cost of living bonus) as high as one-third of the salary. But the Supreme Court of India has just invalidated the decision, maintaining that the Board didn't bear in mind the financial capabilities of the paper.

Sixty or so papers are paying these rates now, but even so this is not a lot money. The journalist is a white-collar man, but the collar is frayed. He has rolled up his shirt sleeves at that, though, and gone to work for himself: the nation-wide Indian Federation of Working Journalists counts its membership at 2000 and was the lobby that called insistently for the Wage Board.

News also comes out of the teleprinter. The big wire agency, the Press of India (PTI), is described by one editor---and this is a typical comment---as "indispensable but deficient." The direct descendant of Reuter in India, PTI is now owned by its subscribers.

It produces news in bulk drawing from its more than 40 offices around the country and about 18 foreign bureaus.

Like the butcher who is uncertain about how much meat to put into the sausage he himself is going to eat, the owners of PTI have been torn between spending more or saving their money and providing themselves less satisfactory service.

Covering official news at such great stenographic length---the PTI men in Parliament seem to rival the official stenographers---the agency is most useful.

But it is also unselective, and unimaginative. Rut-bound, PTI copy is frequently indistinguishable from the handouts of the Government's Press Information Bureaus, and PTI often gives the impression that it is blindly patriotic.

PTI is also city-bound, and its file contains a high proportion of foreign news (45%, during a two-week check). The United Press of India (no relation to the American agency) has a smaller service, and the new Hindustan Samachar agency, dealing in several languages, has made an effort to seek out news in the district towns.

The Government Press Information Bureaus (PIBs) are quite a network of their own, providing, if you take the word of the Minister of Information and Broadcasting, a "link between the Government and the people." The Government also owns India's only broadcasting system, as in Britain.

The PIB, for the most part, is competent and helpful.

Indeed the Government's whole attitude toward the press falls into the democratic tradition---with a socialist qualification.

In the first place, the Constitution guarantees the right to "freedom of speech and expression," subject to the interests of the "security of the State, friendly relations with foreign States, public order, decency or morality, or in relation to contempt of court, defamation or incite to an offence." The Government respects that.

On Mr. Nehru's suggestion, a special Press Commission of

distinguished citizens was appointed to "examine the State of the press and its content." It did a good job, to its own credit and that of the Government. Its report in 1954 scattered facts, figures and advice all through its 1000 pages, and suggested, among other things, that PTI be taken over by a public corporation, minimum wages be set for journalists, and a watchdog All-India Press Council be established.

Commenting on "The Government and the Press," the Commission rightly and forthrightly did some plain talking to both: It warned of the Government's "excessive tendency to consider the Press as a means of publicity for certain selected activities of the State, or for certain individuals..."

It further scolded newspapers for "publishing far too many handouts obviously because material is made available to them in ready form at no cost." And it registered complaints that the PIB was "spoon-feeding" the press with the handouts while with the other hand weighing it down with a great deal of useless material. All true.

Actually Government itself is in the newspaper business, both as a publisher of information-papers (4.5% of the total publications) for its development programs, and as an advertiser (an estimated 7% of the total) for its nationalized corporations and other enterprises. Here is a potential source of encroachment and pressure.

From many publisher's point of view, the Government's intervention ~~in the press~~ in the form of the Press Commission and the Wage Board is indeed encroachment on his own free enterprise. Generally the publisher has ignored the Commission and battled the Wage Board. The All-India Editors Conference representing some 85 dailies has concerned itself with this business of wages, but members are split on the issue.

So, where does the Indian Press stand, and where is it going?

It's a good press, honest and serious. Its ideals are higher than its personal and economic resources now let it fulfill.

It is undergoing a big change, a change in role, cast and even language. Once a patriot campaigning for Independence, the press is becoming more of a public servant working for independent India. The new reporters are ~~coming who are~~ young men in a more professional mood. And newspapers set in the mammoth typecase of Indian languages are appearing, growing.

Some have worried that the absence of a strong opposition party to the dominant Congress party deters the growth of democracy in India. It may be that, without becoming involved in party politics, the press will increasingly provide friendly opposition.

Will the English-language papers shrink in size and influence with the growth of Indian-language newspapers? They will probably level off some day while the Indian papers shoot ahead, but they will have an important place.

This illiterate country is slowly learning to read. With books and radios expensive, movie houses few and TV not yet arrived, the newspaper will get an increasingly good reading.

You can see already. Bring a newspaper into a railroad car. Someone will likely smile politely and lift it from your lap, read it, and pass it on to somebody else. As a newspaperman that gives you a good feeling.

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