

# UNDERSTANDING THE RECRUITMENT PROCESS OF JOURNALISTS IN PRINT MEDIA: CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF SELECTED MAINSTREAM NEWSROOMS IN BANGALORE.

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**Abstract:** Due to the inevitable digitisation of media, the traditional print media and its newsrooms have been undergoing though substantial amount of changes. The competition has made the work tougher, recruitment and employment patterns are undergoing a shift, diversity is slowly seeping into the newsrooms, the environment for a gender inclusive workspace is gradually improving and also, most journalists are still underpaid for the work that they do. The mediums for the dissemination of news have evolved and so have the newsrooms, bringing both positive and negative factors into play. This research paper aims to shed light on the above highlighted topics with an addition of few other issues of importance related to the topic of study and it was done with the help of perspectives and opinions of working and retired journalists of mainstream newsrooms in Bangalore. A qualitative approach was taken forth which included several expert interviews and an observational study, both, for an access to a proper insight on the topic of study

**Keywords:** Print Media, Recruitment, Diversity, Newsrooms, Gender Inclusive, Work Culture.

## Introduction

The ever-changing landscape of the media industry has been accelerated in the recent years with the onset of technology, especially, the internet. The functioning and dynamics of the print media newsrooms have been subjects of change. The digital platforms have changed the ways we consumed news. The wait for the 9 o'clock news or the next morning's newspaper is not like what it used to be. Internet and smartphones have brought news and information to everyone's fingertips and the speed that comes along with is also one of the reasons why people are addicted to it.

The need for instant consumption and gratification did come with a price. The credibility of the news brought out started to be questioned because after the internet, it was more about views and website clicks rather than journalistic integrity. There has been an immense rise in the 'fake news' and 'yellow journalism' post the rise of internet enabled journalism. Adding to that, citizen journalism has allowed all people with smartphones to pass down any news that they feel is important, mostly without filter.

Another effect of the digitization of the media is that there has been a significant transition within the newsroom and the employment patterns are also evolving to meet the demand of the market. Nowadays, the media houses prefer journalists with basic 'digital proficiency'. Regular reporting and writing do not fit the bill anymore. This has led to huge employee layoffs in the print organisations which further leads to the closing down of media houses, if they are unable to keep up with the changing times and trends of the present era.

With all the technological growth in place, the fundamental questions still arise:

- With the emergence of the platforms, has the newsroom grown and evolved with time?
- How inclusive has the newsroom in terms of cultural, gender and educational differences?
- Has the 'work culture' improved in the newsroom with the availability and comfort of the newer platforms?
- Have there been changes in terms of opportunities for women and journalists from marginalised communities?
- Does the current day 'diversity' promote inclusivity in the newsroom or is it only for circulation and business?

This research paper attempts to draw an insight to the above-mentioned questions with inputs from journalists writing and working in mainstream newspapers in Bangalore.

## Review of Literature

Media newsrooms were not as how we see them today. It has been through a lot of struggle in the past to become what it is today. They have not yet reached to levels of where they are actually supposed to be but the changes are being welcomed now and the steps towards growth are being taken.

In the article titled “Dalits and the lack of diversity in the newsroom” by author J. Balasubramaniam, he talks about how the Dalits are overshadowed in the newsrooms that they work which eventually leads to the exclusion of the Dalits from the newsrooms. (Balasubramaniam, 2011) He shares his experience of how he was primarily rejected in a job interview primarily because he was a person from the Dalit community. The article further states that in the Delhi based print publications and television channels, 90% in English publications and 79% in broadcast were from the ‘Upper Caste’.

Women, in a lot of Asian countries were facing restrictions on their professional roles and media organisations. (Abraham, 1988) As stated in the article “Asian Women Journalists Take Stock” by Amrita Abraham, there is a mention of the electronic media bringing about a high number of employees among women, averaging about 30%-40% but even after that, women did not have access to the decision making positions in the organisation. Taking the issue of gender and sexism forward, acts of blatant sexism are seen in an article brought forward by Mary Dresser titled “Newsroom Bias – Establishment Style”. The article states that even when most of the newspaper reading audience in America were females, the content and stories were assigned, written and edited by males. (Dresser, 1970) The article has hard facts like how on three Washington dailies, women are rarely promoted upwards to the editorial post, how only a handful few are chosen as the national and foreign staff and out of six reporters hired by the Washington Post in the last three years, there was only a single female among them.

The issue of representation in journalism and newsrooms have not been fully addressed to yet. India has their caste system and in this article by Clint C. Wilson II titled “Desegregating the Newsroom”, there is a display of colour tormenting the representation of the black minority in the American newsrooms. The American journalism has been failing to communicate to both black and white population of the country as address its grievances. (Wilson, 1979) The media reports and writes from a white man’s perspective and the absence of the black representation in the media has an effect among both black and white audiences in the country.

In the article “Social Control in the Newsroom – A Functional Analysis” by Warren Breed, he talks about the control and structural pattern of the newsroom which eventually affects the writing of the content and also the recruitment of the journalists in the newsroom. (Breed, 1955) It talks about the problems of the bias of the press which related to the publisher’s policies which had to be followed. In similar light, the article “Big Brother in the Newsroom” by Nireekshak talks about the Big Brother in the Newsroom, who is no one else but the government of the nation. (Nireekshak, 1973) The article highlights the birth of publishing of sex scandals in the Indian newspapers, which is still in a growing phase in comparison to Europe and America. The government will survive and hush any incident to save the reputation of many.

The article “The Racialized Geographies of News Consumption and Production - Contaminated Memories and Racialized Silences” by Minelle Mahtani talks about symbolic media geographies that are refracted through lens of race, (dis)placement and identity. (Mahtani, 2009) The author here gets her data from the interviews with racialised journalists (or journalists who identify themselves as a minority racial group). Here the content is focused on Iranian Canadians in Vancouver to bring to light the structured production and consumption of racialised representation in Canadian news.

The New York Times article by Matthew Sedacca titled “Unions are gaining a Strong foothold in Digital Media Companies” sheds light on the efforts made at the online media company Vox Media to establish a union and the voices raised against unions, especially by their senior reporter German Lopez who stated that he was against it and said that the writers wanted a union as a “protection for laziness”. (Sedacca, Unions are gaining a strong foothold in digital media companies, 2017) The writers, since they joined the company, have helped the traffic increase but there has been no increment on the pay scale, bringing about an uncertainty in their financial stability. The article also states that writers in other companies had joined the Writers Guild of America in 2015 for a negotiation for a better pay. It is brought to notice that employees in these media houses do not have a safe zone unless they are aligned with any union or association, in terms of pay scale or job certainty.

The article on Uganda Radio Network (URN) titled “UHRC wants closed media houses re-opened” states that the Uganda Human Rights Commission (UHRC) involved itself when the Police closed down two of their media houses. They demanded the release and opening of these media houses and considered it as an attack on the Press Freedom of the nation. (URN, UHRC wants closed media houses re-opened, 2013) Monitor and Red Pepper Publications, the two media houses, were closed down over a political issue of the country where in the Police was searching for the letter written by General David Sejusa, commonly known as Tinyefuza, a decorated General and coordinator of Intelligence Services, is reported to have written a dossier alleging a plan by President Yoweri Museveni to have his son, Brigadier Muhoozi Kainerugaba, take over from him. Sejusa also reportedly asked the Director General of Internal Security Organisation (ISO) to investigate claims that there is a plan to eliminate those opposed to the so-called Muhoozi Project. Muhoozi is now the commander of the powerful Special Forces Command, an elite division of the army that is charged with the protection of the president among other roles. The Commission has encouraged the Police and been supportive to continue the search that would bring the matter to an end but also has been demanding the opening of the media houses.

## Research Questions

- A study of recruitment process of journalists in print media by critically analysing various criteria followed for recruitment by mainstream news organisations
- Does the print media newsroom have an inclusive work culture? The role of gender, caste, religion, region and education in the newsroom.

## Research Objective

Understanding the relationship between the recruitment process, newsroom work culture and the job satisfaction.

## Methodology

The research was carried forward using the Qualitative Analysis methodology because the questions contained answers that focus on the 'why' rather than 'what' aspects on the newsrooms.

Under Qualitative Analysis, the methods opted for are:

- Expert Interviews
- Observation Method

### *Expert Interviews*

The following research is based primarily on the interviews conducted with present and past print media journalists. Their first-hand inputs were taken into serious consideration as their inputs reflected the conditions of the newsrooms that they work/worked in.

### *Observation Method*

An observation of the newsroom of "Deccan Chronicle" was done for a period of one month from 3<sup>rd</sup> October, 2018 to 3<sup>rd</sup> November, 2018.

## Theoretical Framework

### *The theories of Professional satisfaction*

Human satisfaction is a psychological aspect which cannot be seen or/and quantified with specific numbers or titles. It can be only seen through the vocal and non-vocal expression of the human mind.

The theories of professional satisfaction that have been used for this study are:

- Job Characteristics Model
- Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

These theories have been taken into consideration while doing this research as most of the interviewed journalists specifically mentioned passion and satisfaction being some of the most important incentives that sustains them in the field. Added to that, all of them mentioned that they are in the field because they want to be and not because they have to be, even when they have more profitable options in the diverse field of media.

## Analysis of Data

The data was gathered mostly via interviews conducted via email and in person. The sample included interviews from 8 journalists working in the print media newsrooms. Also, an observational analysis of the newsroom 'Deccan Chronicle' was done for a period of a month from 3<sup>rd</sup> October, 2018 to 3<sup>rd</sup> November, 2018.

The sample size was intended to be larger in number but a lot of the journalists were not ready to come forward with their answers and opinions even with the added promise of confidentiality. Their reasons for doing so could vary from the topic being sensitive and the fear that it might have a backlash on them, the job insecurity if it actually backlashes and also the nature of their temporary contractual employment. The organisational pressure has always been present because whenever a journalist speaks, it is a representation of the organisation too. Also, the documents of recruitment of the journalists were not accessible for the study of the research

The questions prepared for the interview were structured into two parts:

1. The process of recruitment and work culture.
2. The work culture and diversity present in the newsroom.

The first set of questions which was regarding the process of recruitment and work culture, there were questions regarding why the profession of journalism and why print media in particular, process of recruitment, educational requirements for the job, contracts and probationary periods, the recruitment committee and experiences as a fresher. For all these questions, the answers were similar from all the interviewees. The interest in news and current affairs, having a 'nose for news', the inclination towards writing, gaining new experiences everyday and

meeting new people, helping change people's lives and the society were the common answers that most of the journalists came up with. All of them mentioned that it was a passion that gave them the professional satisfaction that no other job could.

The process of recruitment was different for a few. Most of them had applied for a job but the others were placed post their internships, got placed after their education and some were referred. They had to go through a written test and an interview and the recruitment committee differed from organisation to organisation. For some it was just the Editor while for others it was the editor and even a few senior journalists. In terms of formal education, a degree in journalism was preferred but anyone with a 'good news sense' was accepted into the newsroom. When it came to a person who had worked prior in another news organisation, the opinions from the previous news organisation editors and senior journalists would also be taken into consideration. After getting recruited, they also mentioned about working under a probation period for 6 months to a year, the time differing from organisation to organisation. In regards to training, the journalists for desk work were given a basic training when they joined about technical aspects like the software being used, page design and layout etc. Reporters were not given a formal training as such, rather, they were sent directly into the field and they had to figure their way out by themselves. However, the senior journalists who were present out there in the newsroom did help out the fresher reporters.

Taking the Job Characteristics Model to analyse their answers, the five compartments of the model are well fulfilled in their workspace. The five compartments of the model are:

- **Skill Variety** – Skill Variety refers to the degree to which a job requires a variety of different activities in carrying out the work, involving the use of number of different skills and talents of a person. The job of a journalist requires different skills and talents to get the story out. It is usually never repetitive in nature. The ability to scrape out news, to communicate with people from all walks of life, to interrogate anyone necessary etc requires a variety of skills and an understanding of the human psyche and behaviour.
- **Task Identity** – Task Identity is the degree to which the job requires completion of a whole, identifiable piece of work; that is, doing a job from beginning to end with visible outcome. In this case, the journalists are allowed to work on the entire process and not just bits and pieces of the process of their work. When it comes to a story, they are given the complete independence to work on it however they feel comfortable, from getting the information from the sources to finally writing the copy of the article.
- **Task Significance** - Task significance is said to be the degree to which the job has a substantial impact on the lives of other people, whether those people are in the immediate organization or in the world at large. The job of journalists has a lot of significance and impact on the lives of the people. It depends on them to keep them aware and updated about everything that is going on. Also, people need the journalists to voice out their grievances to the government so that the problems are resolved or resolved to some extent.
- **Autonomy** – Autonomy pertains to the degree to which the job provides substantial freedom, independence, and discretion to the individual in scheduling the work and in determining the procedure to be used in carrying it out. As mentioned earlier, the journalists are given full autonomy when it comes to their work. They are never told on how to go about getting their stories or writing them. The only aspect that they do not have a handle on is whether the story that they would bring out would go into the paper or not.
- **Feedback from the job** – Feedback from the job refers to the degree to which carrying out the work activities required by the job provides the individual with direct and clear information about the effectiveness of his or her performance. The newsroom has always been a place for feedback for the journalists. The Editor does give his input and understanding to the story when required to the journalists and also, the senior journalists and colleagues are always around to help and correct whenever necessary. In rare cases, the readers of the paper also at times drop a mail to the journalists giving opinions or/and feedbacks to their story on the paper.

The five aspects of the Job Characteristics Model are well fit into the work and psyche of the interviewed journalists which provides them a professional satisfaction that probably no other job could.

Moving on to the second set of questions, the questions were about their initial beats and assignments, the composition of the newsroom in terms of diversity, the question of lack of transgenders and the role of caste in the newsroom.

For this set, the answers varied to some extent. Some of the journalists were fortunate enough to be allowed to choose their beats and therefore the assignments but the others had to go into which ever one had the vacancy. One of the interviewees said that this was a good approach, at least in the beginning, because the journalist would not have to narrow himself down to his/her interests and instead would have the opportunity to explore other aspects of journalism that would be beneficial for him and later could even be something of his liking.

Coming to the questions of diversity, the journalists were not very open to answer these like they did the other questions. Questions about caste, gender, cultural, regional and educational background were raised and there were differences of opinions. The veteran journalists directly said there were lesser females in the newsroom and in the field back in the day but now things have changed. The number of females has increased and, in some shifts, there are usually more females than males in the newsroom. The newer journalists said that there was no gender disparity in the newsroom and the gender count was rather equal amongst the employees but in the hierarchy, it is very rare that a woman is in the post of the Editor in Chief. Also, amongst the department heads, there are few women heads running certain departments in the newsroom. They mentioned that females were covering crime, sports, politics etc too which are usually thought to be male centred departments. Also, there was a mention of lack of females in the field of photography and photo journalism.

A few of the journalists refused to answer the questions about caste and its role in the newsroom. The others that did were very neutral in their answers and tried to be very caste sensitive. The most common answers were that they did not believe in the system of caste in the newsroom and no one went around with a caste badge in the newsroom. One of the reasons for this is that this study is done in a metropolitan city of Bangalore where the city is known for its varied diversity.

The few that answered were open to the fact that there was a presence of varied caste members in the newsroom but like mentioned before, no one wore a caste badge in the newsroom. The presence of caste was only noticed if their names gave it away because no one really asked

about the caste. The sensitivity levels on caste were rather high therefore, most of the journalists did not touch it. The topic of transgenders had a unified answer that it was them who did not come up to the media houses. They said that the media was open to everyone, regardless of their sexual orientation. But the question about transgenders have layers of answers that cannot be answered by one or a few journalists or even media organisations alone. It goes back to the education systems that whether they are open to transgender students, whether they are comfortable with transgender students studying media in their colleges and also, whether the transgender students themselves want to be a part of the media industry or not.

In the final set of questions, the questions comprised of low pay and lack of a journalistic union in country. The low pay aspect was answered or rather covered up with passion and a huge sense of professional satisfaction for the job by the journalists. One of the interesting answers here received here was that it was the precedent journalists to blame who did not fight for a better pay and now it has become a such a big issue that it can be considered a fireable offence if touched upon. This also has pushed a lot of journalists to move to a better paying PR sector.

The absence journalistic union had varied opinions. Some of the journalists said that it was good because the lack made the journalists more vigilant than complacent. Others said the lack of it or the presence of it was not really the answer to the problems because pressure of the unions have also ruined journalistic institutions in a lot of cases.

Taking into account the theory of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs in terms of their workspace, it is visible that they have attained a sufficient level of satisfaction in the various levels of the hierarchy. Bottom to top, the five levels of hierarchy are:

- **Physiological** – The interviewed journalists stated that the job was able to take care of their physiological needs. Although the pay was not great and not many companies provide non-monetary incentives and healthcare but they said that they had kind of made peace with it and worked accordingly.
- **Safety** – The newsroom is considered a place of safety in most aspects. Even when a news article by a journalist turns out to be volatile among the public, the violence is mostly never brought into the newsroom.
- **Belonging** – There is a certain sense of belonging that comes attached with the newsroom and the colleagues that a journalist works with. A possible reason for this could be the diverse backgrounds that they come from and also as mentioned before, they do not wear the caste badge in the newsroom, which is actually a big factor in an Indian setting.
- **Esteem** – Esteem, in the hierarchy here has two aspects to it. The first one is the internal esteem factors and the second one is the external esteem factors.
- **Internal Esteem Factors** - Here, the factors at play are self-respect, autonomy, achievement etc. These different factors are achieved through the work that they put in day in and day out. The quality of the work that they deliver and the feedback they receive from the editor, colleagues or even their audience boosts their self-respect and also, the good work that they deliver will eventually provide them autonomy on how they go about with their work. All of these achievements, big and small, it helps them work better each day.
- **External Esteem Factors** - The factors that comprise the external esteem factors are status, recognition, attention etc. The external esteem follows after the success in the workplace and a growth of the internal esteem of the journalist. With the success in the workplace, there is bound to be a leap in the social status and recognition of the journalist which also would garner attention from the public. The internal and external esteem factors are interlinked with each and when looked upon with a broader perspective, it fits right in place with the theory of human motivation.
- **Self-Actualisation** – The final step in the Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs is the self-actualisation that journalists attain or try to attain in their workspace and work life. The process of self-actualisation helps the journalist to grow in his field and become the best capable version of himself that he can be in his professional life, in all aspects.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, the data gathered from the journalists and the findings, there are a few things that need to be pointed out to conclude this research paper.

The first amongst the list is the transition in the work culture. The television and especially the internet now have made it a lot harder for the traditional print journalists to go about their work. Newspapers no more 'break' news stories because the internet has put all the information at every smartphone and computer user's fingertips. A few clicks and the news flashes out in front of them instantly. This has made it harder for the print journalists as they now always have to give something extra to its audience, even if it is a minor detail that news channels and news websites left out in their race for the TRP and website clicks.

Taking in regards the change that have happened in the newsroom in the past few years, there is a march towards a more gender inclusive newsroom. The numbers have definitely improved from what it was but it is still a long way to go. Also, as mentioned earlier, the gender numbers amongst the employees are slowly trying to even up but still there are few women in the higher levels of hierarchy in the newsroom. There is still a long way to go when it comes to an ideal gender inclusive newsroom but the initial steps have been taken and the march is always forward.

Another major problem of most newsrooms, even mainstream, is that pay of the journalists have not improved much and they are still underpaid. The journalists have kind of made peace with it does not mean that it can be normalised for all of the future generations too. The ever-increasing cost of living in this time period brings a lot of needs along with. It is not enough if the journalists can only satisfy their basic needs. Also, only a few news organisations provide non-monetary incentives and other benefits to their employees and that needs to change. The system of a contractual work life is a threat to the job security and all these other problems only add layers to it, making it even more complicated for the journalists. This is one of the reasons why they move from the field and get into public relations and/or advertising

which, if nothing else, pays them better than what the news organisations do. The financial aspects of the newsroom have to be mended because a journalist, like any other employee in any other workspace can function better if all his financial needs are met with ease. This is the only best way forward.

The lack of training and recurring educational programmes for journalists is a negative factor in the news industry. The reporters are directly thrown into the 'deep end' and they are expected to learn everything in the field. This does help the journalist develop an individualistic style amongst others but it does have its backlash too. Not everything can be learnt by oneself and every now and then, a quick training session or a seminar would help them to not fall into the same rut working every story in the same way over and over again for years.

Lastly, the aspect of language plays a huge part in journalism. In regards to Bangalore, there are journalists who are doing well even without using Kannada even while getting the information from their sources. But knowing the local language has been an added advantage. People tend to connect more with the journalist when the conversation is in the local language. Even while writing, knowing the local language would be better because there would not be information lost in translation. In contrary, the other side of the argument is that a lot of people open up to the journalists when they speak in, for example, English or even Hindi for that matter. They feel that an elite person has come to talk to them which makes them feel good about themselves and therefore, they open up.

### Scope for further study

- A further study could be done in the Broadcast and New Media Newsrooms, outlining their criteria and also could be compared with the Print Newsroom.
- A similar study could be done with a larger sample which would be able to give a better understanding about the issue itself.
- A study can be done on the non-mainstream papers and also the smaller vernacular papers based outside of Bangalore which are assumed to be more orthodox in nature.

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