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Workshop Report

By

Victor Valbuena

Paper No.5
WORKSHOP ON EDITORIAL MANAGEMENT FOR SENIOR WOMEN JOURNALISTS
New Delhi, India, 23-28 November 1992

WORKSHOP REPORT

To upgrade the editorial and management skills of women journalists in the South Asian Region, a Workshop on Editorial Management for Senior Women Journalists was held on 23-28 November 1992 in New Delhi, India. The workshop was organized by the Asian Mass Communication Research and Information Centre (AMIC), Singapore and the Press Institute of India (PII), New Delhi. The Commonwealth Secretariat, London provided the funds to support the programme.

The workshop is part of a series of AMIC training programmes for women journalists, organized to equip them with professional skills necessary to help them compete successfully for more senior, responsible positions in their news/media organizations.

Participants. Fourteen journalists were invited to participate in the workshop. However, only ten were able to come as full-time participants. Two came as part-time participants, attending only those sessions that were relevant to their professional needs. One journalist from Maldives was unable to come due to airline problems. Another withdrew due to illness.

The following attended the course as full-time participants:


Saaz Kothare, Editor, Management Page, The Times of India, Bombay, Sushila Ravindranath, Bureau Chief (South), Business India, Madras, Maitreyee Saha, Reporter, The Hindu, New Delhi, and Shyamala Shiveshwarkar, Chief Sub-Editor, The Hindustan Times, New Delhi, India;

Ishrat Hyatt, Senior Diplomatic Correspondent, The Muslim, Islamabad, and Saida Fazal, Assistant Editor, The Nation, Lahore, Pakistan;


Those who attended part of the course were Debjani Sinha, Senior Journalist, Sunday and Business World, Calcutta and Benodini Banerjee, Senior Contributing Reporter, The Indian Express, New Delhi.

(See Appendix A for Directory of Participants.)
Programme. The six-day programme, held at the Committee Room of the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI) House, consisted of lecture-discussions by resource persons, workshop discussions, practical exercises, and demonstrations on various aspects of editorial and newspaper management. Sessions were held from 9:30 a.m to 5:00 p.m daily.

Following is a summary of the workshop proceedings. (See programme in Appendix B.)

Monday, 23 November

Opening Session. At the simple opening ceremonies, Mr. S. Nihal Singh, renowned Indian journalist and Director of the Press Institute of India, welcomed the participants and explained the role of the Institute in the organization of the workshop.

The Press Institute of India was responsible for identifying and inviting the Indian resource persons and Delhi-based participants, and coordinating the local workshop requirements.

Dr. Victor T. Valbuena, Head of AMIC's Seminars and Institutional Development Programme, also welcomed the participants on behalf of AMIC, reviewed the background and rationale of the workshop, and gave a brief orientation on the working procedures of the programme.

The participants then introduced themselves before the group broke up for tea.

Discussion: Women in the Newsroom. The first working session was a group discussion on the problems and opportunities of women journalists in the newsroom.

The participants conceded that there was a growing number of women journalists finding their way into newspapers and newsmagazines in the region, but also agreed that many are still pigeonholed into traditional women's beats like home, arts and culture, society happenings, education, and of course, women's issues. Few are assigned to traditional male preserves like crime, politics and government, business and economics, and sports.

They concluded that they just have to push editors and demonstrate to them that they can handle these assignments as well, if not better, than their male counterparts. These efforts require backgrounding and apprenticeship in the various beats. The Indian participants said that the local newspaper practice of rotating beats among reportes, male or female, have afforded them opportunities to cover "hard news" beats.

The women writers deplored the poor working conditions of journalists - women included - such as low pay, absence of provident funds, poor job security, inadequate transport facilities to promote greater access to news sources and events, risks of physical harm from terrorists and criminal elements, and politi-
The conceded that in certain work areas, their being women is an advantage. They get more cooperation from the production team, particularly when they are working nights. They are also seemingly able to coax more information from government and political figures than their male colleagues; they are not seen as "macho" threats or potential political rivals.

They also cited certain cultural factors such as religion, societal prescriptions on the role of women, and social prejudice against journalism as a profession, as hindrances to their career advancement. For example, women journalists working in the field are still frowned upon to some extent in Bangladesh and Pakistan. Women journalists who work closely with male reporters suffer some disrepute in very conservative societies. Others who work odd hours and leave their children to the care of others are perceived as inadequate mothers and poor role-models.

The participants said that the conflict between home and career will always be there for working women. They concluded that women journalists will just have to regard it as a matter of professional choice. They praised an early effort of The Times of India, Bombay to provide creche facilities for female staff but lamented its termination due to management-union friction. (Ironically, it was the union that stopped the operations of the management-initiated care facilities.)

The participants said that they can aspire to higher positions in their organizations, if they really work hard at it. However, they said that they always have to be one-two steps ahead of their male colleagues to be recognized. The participants felt that as a group they were luckier in that they were all English-educated, from middle-class backgrounds, keenly aware of issues in gender politics, and more active in articulating their professional needs and aspirations.

They said that their sisters in the rural/community, local language or vernacular press were in a more disadvantaged position. They felt these women journalists suffered more job discrimination and had less access to professional development opportunities. The group strongly suggested that similar training programmes for women journalists in the local language press be considered by the workshop organizers.

Generating Story Ideas. After the initial group discussion, Dr. Victor Valbuena, formerly Associate Professor of Journalism and Communication, University of the Philippines, made a presentation on how to generate story ideas. He talked about strategies such as brainstorming and story conferences, reading stories from rival publications, scanning the vernacular press, press releases and press conferences, reviewing letters to the editor, analysing pictures, participant-observation in specific events, consulting almanacs and reference guides, keeping track of national/religious/cultural holidays and related festivities,
consulting readers through polls and informal discussions, observing public reactions to events, following up tips, etc. Dr. Valbuena illustrated his presentation with examples from newspapers and other publications.

**Newsgathering/Interviewing Techniques.** In the afternoon, Mr. Saeed Naqvi, former editor of leading Indian newspapers and now book author and television interviewer, discussed the topics of newsgathering and interviewing techniques. Falling back on his extensive experience as a working journalist, Mr. Naqvi emphasized the value of building and cultivating a network of contacts and news sources, keeping a handy notebook/diary for contact addresses and phone numbers, guarding and filing accurate notes, checking and cross-checking facts, respecting "off the record" requests from information sources, and maintaining the discipline of meeting and talking with people on current issues, daily.

He also compared the relative advantages and disadvantages of working with new technology for gathering and processing news - video cameras, computers, satellite transmissions, etc - and exhorted the participants to familiarize themselves with these new tools. Citing a "lost scoop interview" on the Gulf War due to technical inadequacies, he said that sometimes, these new technologies can spell the difference between getting and transmitting your story.

During the session on interviewing, the author of a new book on the Ayodhya issue compared the direct, confrontational interviewing style of Western journalists with the paced, slightly deferential style of many Eastern reporters. Citing examples from his interviews with world political and business leaders, Mr. Naqvi said that he was able to bring down defenses and get more information from his interviewees this way. When they are more relaxed, you can usually catch them off-guard, he said. Some of the participants commented that this was a devious way of extracting information. Candidly, Mr. Naqvi conceded that journalism is sometimes a devious profession.

**Tuesday, 24 November**

The morning was devoted to an integrated session on the topics of **Story Structure** and **Writing Development Stories**. Ms. Usha Rai, Editor of Development Page, The Indian Express, served as resource person.

Ms. Rai started off by giving an overview of development issues and how such stories can be covered, angled, and structured to attract various types of readers: general audiences, programme planners, policy-makers, sectoral interest groups. She said that development stories are not necessarily dull; they have inherent human / reader interest. Many do find themselves on the front pages, provided they are structured well.

Ms. Rai illustrated her points with personal experiences in covering certain stories, as well as specific examples culled
from national and local Indian newspapers. The stories/issues included dowry deaths across India, female infanticide in Tamil Nadu, police brutality, rape as extension of local power politics in Rajasthan, child labour in the carpet-weaving and fireworks industries, and population and family planning.

In response to Ms. Rai's examples, the participants shared their own experiences in covering and handling development-oriented stories. Cases cited included abandoned children in Bangladesh, drug abuse in Pakistan, sexual abuse of male children in Pakistan's Northwest Frontier Province, abuse of Sri Lankan domestics in the Middle East, and AIDS.

Picking up the suggestion of Ms. Rai, the participants went out in the afternoon to observe/cover development-oriented stories around New Delhi as a practical workshop exercise.

Wednesday, 25 November

The morning session started off with a 30-minute video on Investigative Reporting. The video traced the development of the genre in the American context and how it has evolved in the print and broadcast media.

Following this, Ms. Neerja Choudhary, Senior Journalist, The Indian Express and formerly investigative reporter for The Statesman, discussed the genre as practiced in the Indian context.

She differentiated two categories of investigative reports: (1) those that deal with social issues and rely on people as sources of information; and (2) those that focus on power structures and depend on politicians, bureaucrats and interest groups for data.

She illustrated the first category with such examples as the blinding of jail inmates, the sexual abuse of women and juvenile prisoners, bonded labour, and prostitution -- issues that received in-depth investigative reports in the local press. For the second category, she discussed corruption in government, the Bofors case, and Mehta financial scam as recent examples.

Ms. Choudhary emphasized the following requisites for doing good investigative reports: a keen nose for digging facts, time to do field investigations, a research orientation and discipline to uncover documentary evidence, and the support of the editor/publishers. She said that certain papers in the South Asian Region used to have "Inside Teams" - a corps of enterprising reporters who editors and publishers regularly assigned to pursue investigative stories. She lamented that many of these teams have been disbanded.

During discussions with the participants, the following issues in investigative reporting were explored: (1) the objectivity of a reporter who assumes another persona in the process
of getting data for his story; (2) partisanship and selectivity of certain publications in pursuing political stories; (3) total fabrication by investigative reporters, as in the case of the American journalists who won a Pulitzer Prize for a fake story; (4) government/military intervention preventing access to / dissemination of information under threat of Official Secrets Acts and other restrictive legislation.

Ms. Choudhary said that in her work as an investigative journalist, she found her being a woman more of an advantage rather than a liability. She said that her sources were more willing to talk to her than her male colleagues.

Sub-Editing. The rest of the day was covered by Mr. D. Subramanyam, formerly Chief Sub-Editor of The Times of India and ex-News Editor of The Indian Express, who discussed and conducted practical workshop exercises on subbing.

Mr. Subramanyam covered the sub-editing functions of rewriting/recasting stories; interpreting data-filled but badly-written stories sent from the field; shortening sentences, paragraphs, and stories; making "officialese" intelligible; doing composite stories; and handling pictures and captions. He emphasized the need for a style book by every newspaper or newsmagazine. He illustrated his points with sometimes humorous examples from the Indian newspapers.

Afterwards, Mr. Subramanyam led the participants in sub-editing exercises, using materials from various local newspapers. The exercises were discussed, pointing to various ways of approaching a sub-editing task.

Thursday, 26 November

Headline-Writing. The first half of the morning was devoted to the subject of headlines, with Mr. D. Subramanyam as resource person. After reviewing the principles of good headlines, Mr. Subramanyam cited examples from the various issues of the day's morning papers. He recalled some memorable though not necessarily brilliant headlines, a few touched with a lot of humour. For example: "Mutton cheaper, Hutton better" referring to an old English newspaper's headline on two unrelated stories - the decrease in meat prices and the victory of a sports figure. Also "Sons of soil buried under tons of soil" - about a farmer buried in a cave-in accident.

Practical exercises on creative headline writing were conducted afterwards.

Picture Editing. Mr. Sondeep Shanker, Photographic Editor of Business and Political Observer took on the subject of picture editing. He talked about the technical and aesthetic criteria (composition, focus, sharpness of image, depth and perspective, lighting, color, etc) and the journalistic values (human interest, action, drama, celebrity, controversy, etc) that editors and
photo editors take into account when selecting photographs for publication.

Mr. Shanker illustrated each principle with actual photographs used in Indian newspapers and magazines. These photographs were passed around and the participants raised questions on each.

He also engaged the participants in discussions on approaches to using certain controversial photographs, e.g. a close-up of three dead sisters hanging by their necks from the rafters of their home. The three women committed suicide because their parents could not afford the dowry to marry them off.

The award-winning photojournalist also showed the participants how to spot bad pictures, how to crop pictures, how to select/highlight details to achieve a desired effect, how to optimize the use of a bad, "only picture available", etc.

Mr. Shanker also pointed to the conflicts between photo editors and newspaper/newsmagazine editors in selecting pictures for publication. Some editors are just concerned with filling up a blank space with any picture; others just crop without assessing the over-all impact of the picture, leaving essential details out of the cropped frame.

He bemoaned the neglect of the Photography Department by many editors and publishers and the poor recognition given to photojournalists in the region. He batted for the recognition of photojournalists with full by-lines in the newspapers and magazines, among other incentives.

Newspaper Design and Layout. The final session for the day was taken by Mr. Partha Majumdar, Deputy Editor, Business and Political Observer. He observed that in terms of design and layout, newspapers in general have tended to follow developments in typography. He said that newspapers, particularly the English language ones, were substantially different now because of advances in printing technology. He added, however, that the vernacular papers for the most part have not been affected by changes in typography.

Mr. Majumdar said that computerization of graphic arts has outstripped other developments in journalism, and that it has greatly influenced decisions on the design philosophy of a paper. He said that essentially, the design philosophy makes a statement on the editorial philosophy of a newspaper. To illustrate, he held up copies of national Indian newspapers and compared their design and layout features. He said that the newspaper is a product, just like soap, and that it has to be concerned with the design and impact of its packaging.

He said that computerization of newspaper processes has brought about cheaper operations, brought down investment costs, reduced manpower requirements/costs, but has reduced communication between editors and journalists and other newspaper staff.
It has changed the character of the job of sub-editor. He stated, however, that computerization in the newsroom, per se, has not addressed itself to the fundamental question of whether or not it has resulted in higher quality journalism. Computerization, he said, has practically eliminated newsmanship.

In ensuing discussions with participants, Mr. Majumdar also answered questions on designing mastheads, layout designs, choosing typography for headlines, desk-top publishing, and computer software for page makeup.

Friday, 27 November

Technology in the Newsroom. Mr. Viren N. Chhabra, General Manager of The Statesman, New Delhi started the morning session with an overview of the development of printing technology, from the movable type to the present computerized typefonts. He said that technology has changed then definition of the journalist. Newsroom technology has combined the journalistic, production, processing, and creative functions in a newspaper. The journalist has become a compositor-repro information technician, he said. Computerization and digitization has revolutionized the gathering and processing of news, pictures and advertisements, he added.

To illustrate Mr. Chhabra's presentation, Wing Cmdr Vijay Kumar Sethi, the local distributor of Apple Macintosh, demonstrated through two computers the application of computer technology to news gathering/processing, page make-up and layout, and production. The demonstration was followed by a question and answer session on the various software applicable to newsroom operations, their relative costs, and training requirements.

To illustrate technological advances in colour, infographics, typography and other pre-press operations, Mr. Henrik Hansen, representative of Agfa, Hong Kong gave a slide presentation on pre-press systems, hardware and software. He also answered questions on costs, training requirements, compatibility with existing systems, maintenance, etc. He distributed brochures on systems applicable to South Asian newspaper operations.

Market Research. The first half of the afternoon was devoted to the subject of market research for newspapers. After a brief overview of the marketing process, Dr. Victor Valbuena focused on its application to the newspaper industry, particularly in terms of editorial guidance and advertising sales. He said that increasingly, newspapers must see themselves as a product competing for a share of the large reading market. To attract a sizable portion of this market and ensure economic viability, a newspaper must concern itself with the Ps of marketing: profile of target market, product, packaging, positioning, point-of-purchase, price, and promotions. Dr. Valbuena illustrated each of these factors with examples from ASEAN and South Asia.

Dr. Valbuena discussed several market research methods/techniques applicable to the newspaper industry, including readership
surveys, content analysis, readability tests, and circulation audits. Ensuing discussions revealed that most of the papers represented by the participants hardly conducted in-house or external market research to periodically evaluate the position of their papers in the market.

The second half of the afternoon was focused on the subject of Advertising and Circulation Development. Dr. Valbuena discussed several strategies for boosting advertising such as advertising sales presentations, surveys of potential display and classified advertisers, complimentary copies and trials, among others. He also illustrated circulation promotion activities, e.g., free trials, door-to-door canvassing, advertising/cross advertising, supplements and special pages, tie-ups with educational institutions, incentive schemes for agents/distributors/newsboys, reader-related contests, and public relations.

Saturday, 28 November

The first session in the morning was a group discussion on The Role of the Newspaper in Society during which the participants reviewed the information, education and entertainment functions of the newspaper. They also conceded the economic function of the newspaper, i.e., to make a reasonable profit, as a newspaper is a business that needs to secure its viability.

The participants noted that newspapers in the South Asian Region are "too political" and are remiss in not addressing adequately critical social issues like AIDS, liquor consumption, "Eve-teasing" (sexual harassment/molestation of women), and the dowry system. They suggested that newspapers should, as a matter of course, run once-weekly comprehensive articles on such issues. They agreed that where necessary, newspapers should take the lead in campaigning on certain social issues like the dowry system and bonded labour.

Following this discussion session, Mr. S. Sahay, retired Editor, The Statesman, talked about Public Service Journalism. He said that journalism is a public service, but added that overriding economic interests have reduced this concept to a secondary function. News has become a commodity that must be packaged and sold, regardless of whether or not it serves the public interest. He maintained that community interest is a higher value than news, although he conceded that the notion of what is good for a community is relative. Public service and public interest will differ from community to community.

For an English-language editor/journalist to identify the public interest is difficult, he said. He added that "Those who knew English knew very little of India; those who knew India knew very little English."

He said that newspapers (and journalists) have the power to influence public good and can promote certain social ideals. He agreed that newspapers should initiate public information and
education campaigns on social issues.

Mr. Sahay recounted that The Statesman formerly refused matrimonial advertisements because the paper believed people should marry for love, and that the ads reinforced caste distinctions. He added that during his tenure as editor, he refused to accept advertisements for certain products which he believed were not really beneficial to consumers.

After the lunch break, Mr. Sahay continued with a discussion on Ethics and Media Law. He elaborated on the pros and cons of self-restraint vis-a-vis government censorship; the need for a professional code of ethics; the role of a Press Council; and the usual legal and extra-legal restraints to journalism practice, such as newsprint quotas, withdrawal of government advertising, emergency decrees, official secrets acts, sedition laws, media licensing, etc. He read pertinent provisions from legal texts and Press Council pronouncements, and illustrated them with case examples from India and other Asian countries.

During the discussion that followed, participants raised several ethical questions that they or their colleagues have encountered in their professional life: accepting gifts from individuals, public relations officers and government officials; taking bribes from industrial and political leaders to highlight or kill certain controversial stories; going on junkets in exchange for favourable coverage in the media; succumbing to threats from political terrorists; partisanship and non-objectivity in reporting the news as matter of publisher's policy; non-coverage of certain issues that relate to advertisers and/or their products; impersonation to secure information; pandering to sex to increase circulation; padding circulation figures to sell advertising; and resorting to gimmickry to boost readership and circulation.

In the final analysis, Mr. Sahay concluded, it is the journalist's personal integrity and sincerity of purpose that matters most in reckoning with questions of ethics.

Concluding Session. After the tea break, the group gathered for a brief closing ceremony.

Dr. Victor T. Valbuena, the Workshop Coordinator, thanked the journalists for joining the programme and for their active participation in the proceedings. He acknowledged the contribution of the Press Institute of India in the implementation of the programme, and the material support of The Commonwealth Secretariat which made the workshop possible. Following these remarks, he proceeded to distribute the Certificates of Participation to the women journalists.

Mr. S. Nihal Singh delivered the closing remarks. Likewise, he thanked the participants for attending the workshop and expressed the hope that the programme would prove useful once they are back in their newspaper offices. He also acknowledged AMIC
for a successful first collaborative programme with PII.

On behalf of the participants, Ms. Sumana Saparamadu from Sri Lanka thanked the organizers. Collectively, the group also reiterated their request that the programme be continued, particularly for women journalists in the local language papers.

Evaluation. The participants were asked to evaluate the workshop in terms of several items, using a questionnaire with a five-point scale where 1 is lowest and 5 highest. They were also asked to write down whatever feedback they wanted to communicate to the organizers.

In general, the participants rated the workshop favourably. Majority felt that the right participants were selected for the programme and that their number was "just right". Comments on the participants included the following:

1. "Some of the participants were already in senior positions but the others did learn from them, and that was a good thing."

2. "Most participants were already holding responsible positions in their respective organisations. As such, the programme served as a refresher course. It also helped them to gather many valuable insights into newspaper work."

3. "It was a good group. Most of the participants came from mid-level professional backgrounds and different areas of expertise --- the kind of people who can benefit most from such programmes."

4. "It would have been interesting to have been interesting to have journalists from regional press of the countries participating."

5. "The think the group was of optimum size - small enough for good interaction, large enough for variety."

The participants reserved the highest average rating of 4.6 for relevance of workshop to work. One participant commented that the programme offered new insights on how to approach their work as journalists and editors.

For over-all value of the workshop, the participants gave a rating of 4.0. They also gave the same rating for over-all quality of the programme. Comments on the programme included the following:

1. "Certainly a useful programme in terms of expanding the participants' professional horizons as also creating a better awareness about issues that should be of concern to journalists."
2. "The sessions were indeed interesting and thought-provoking. It enabled us to get a perspective of how the media functions in the Asian region and even a little on their social, cultural and other mores."

3. "Some of the items on the agenda were very interesting and useful. The presentation on sub-editing and headline writing I felt was too "old school" and the one by the AGFA representative was too technical."

4. "Some discussions were too elementary - sub-editing and writing headlines. Picture editing was very interesting. Sessions on market research and circulation very useful."

4. "The programme did cover most of the major issues of editorial management. A little more stress would be appreciated on assigning reporters and major development story ideas."

5. "Good, but not all the speakers were positive. Some were not well-prepared. One or two seemed in a bit of hurry to finish their lectures."

The next highest rating of 4.5 was given to opportunities for exchanging ideas with fellow participants. One participant wrote: "The exchange of information and opinions was tremendous. Plenty to think about!" The group also gave a rating of 4.2 for the workshop discussion sessions. The participants were unanimous in saying that the workshop encouraged meaningful discussions. Individual comments included "very fruitful" and "excellent."

For workshop organization and coordination, the participants gave an average rating of 4.3. Most of the participants praised the organizers for "a job well done". However, they did offer the following comments:

1. "It was a very well organised programme except for the presentations on technological applications which tended to get a little heavy."

2. "It was well organised. The only drawback was - the programme was rather tight, which left the participants with virtually no time for sightseeing."

3. "It would have been helpful if participants were afforded the facility of computers to do some classroom work - editing, writing headlines, etc on the screen. Some, or rather most of us still work with typewriters, pen and paper, and the opportunity to experiment with computers would have been helpful."

4. "Some of the themes being nurtured by the organization deserves appreciation such as women's issues, and professionalism for all in the media."
5. "The programme was too tight. A day should have been kept free for participant's discretion to use the time best."

6. "Perhaps we could have visited a newspaper office."

For hotel accommodation, the group gave a rating of 3.2. Participants were housed at the Hans Plaza Hotel, a three-star hotel near the workshop venue.

The participants gave a few suggestions for future workshops, including the following:

1. "Keep up the programme."

2. "Please have more such seminars. Perhaps a special effort could be made to include editorial desk staff rather than just those in the field, and also from the language papers."

3. "Hold follow-up programmes."

4. "To reinforce this, periodic follow-up is essential."

5. "There should be follow-ups of the workshops. Otherwise, the whole thing may appear meaningless."

6. "A follow-up meeting is likely to be fruitful - to see the result of this workshop. A regional women journalists' forum could be formed through AMIC's initiative."

7. "A follow-up would be useful after some time."

8. "A half-day break in the programme would be very helpful."

9. "Have more audio-visuals in future programmes."

10. "Have more samples of newspapers from host country and the other participating countries."

Conclusion. Judging by the evaluation and the comments made by the participants, the Workshop on Editorial Management for Senior Women Journalists was a success. Through the evaluation exercise as well as during the workshop, the participants made a case for the holding of more workshops for women journalists in the future. They specifically pressed the need to hold one for women reporters and editors in the regional or local language press as the latter have less access to training opportunities such as this workshop.

Perhaps The Commonwealth Secretariat could consider supporting such a programme. -end-