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Trends and Developments In Communication Education and Training In India: Implications for Ethical Practice And Social Responsibilities In The Media Professions

By

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Trends and Developments in Communication Education and Training in India: Implications for Ethical Practice and Social Responsibility in the Media Professions

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Trends and Developments in Communication Education and Training in India: Implications for Ethical Practice and Social Responsibility in the Media Professions.

Abstract

Besides 50 universities, training in journalism and the allied areas is now imparted in a large number of other institutes -- private and government. In the last two decades, training efforts have expanded a great deal and have taken varied forms -- pre-service and in-service, institutional and on-the-job.

The course structure has undergone a sea-change in the last 50 years. Beginning with purely skill-oriented courses for the print media, now the allied areas like advertising and public relations and the media of radio, television and film are being covered in most institutions.

The university courses, at times started with unholy haste, have many shortcomings. The faculty is often small in size and low in calibre. There is lack of reading material and essential training equipment. The duration of the course is too short to do full justice to many subjects prescribed and the requirements of practical training. Internship is inadequate. Admission and evaluation procedures are faulty.

In the recent times, many Master's courses have come up. Some universities have also introduced journalism or communication as one of the optional subjects in their B.A. courses. Some are now offering correspondence courses. More and more universities are arranging facilities for education and training for Indian language newspapers and other media.
In 50 years since the first university department — that of Panjab University — was set up at Lahore in 1941, the number of university departments of journalism and communication has gone up to 50. By 1966, there were only six university departments but the next 25 years witnessed a quick expansion — from 6 to 50. This happened for a variety of reasons — media expansion, development of allied areas like advertising and public relations, increasing realization all over that journalists could also be trained. Besides, the universities have been more than eager to start journalism courses. Quite often they have done so without adequate planning and ensuring the availability of faculty, reading material and training equipment. No wonder many of the programmes are ill-conceived, ill-equipped and inadequately staffed. The general standard of education and training is poor and there is a marked unevenness in the quality of training provided.

Other Institutions

Besides universities, training in journalism and the allied areas is imparted in India today in other institutions— government and private. There are some 60 private colleges and institutes now offering part-time instruction in different parts of the country. The oldest among them is the Horniman College of Journalism
Education in ethics gets low priority. Several university courses have half a paper or a small section on law and ethics. In respect of ethics, particularly, instruction is uneven and unsatisfactory. The questions of censorship, media monopoly, social responsibility figure in the syllabi of different subjects, but in a small way. Instruction in ethics has not been much effective in promoting ethical media practices. The number of trained graduates in media is still small and very few have reached top positions where decisions are taken and from where directives are issued.

The need is to set up a national body of communication teachers, researchers and media representatives. This body, with the authority to give accreditation, should insist on the institutions meeting norms and standards laid down by it on various aspects of training programmes. This would provide the opportunity to strengthen instruction in issues of ethics. Once the trained graduates from these accredited institutions get into the profession, they are likely to influence the thinking of other media men on merits of professionalism, ethical values, social responsibility and public accountability of the media and this will uplift the overall media performance.
It was set up in August 1965 in pursuance of the recommendations of the Mass Communication Study Team sponsored by the Ford Foundation in 1963 at the request of the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting. The basic recommendation of the team, headed by Wilbur Schramm, was for setting up a Centre for Advanced Study in Mass Communication "with responsibilities for consultation, training, and research and development, particularly in the use of mass communication in support of national economic and social development".

Besides the I.I.M.C., the Government of India runs the Film & Television Institute of India located at Poona. It was founded in 1961 for films, and television was added to it in 1971. The Institute of Film Technology in Madras, supported by the Tamil Nadu Government, was also born in 1961. On-the-job training has been attempted by several Indian newspapers in the recent years.

It is evident that the training efforts have expanded a great deal in the last two decades and have taken varied forms. We have now pre-service training and in-service training. We have institutional training and on-the-job training. Institutional training itself is being imparted in government institutes, university departments and private colleges.
in Bombay which was established in 1936 and was then called the American College of Journalism. The growth in private sector was phenomenal in the sixties and seventies. The largest chain today is that of the Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan whose main centre at Bombay, founded in 1961, is known as the Rajendra Prasad Institute of Communication and Management. And then there are others. Quite different from these private courses is the whole-time diploma course of one year in Mass Communication technologies and TV production being offered at the St. Xavier Institute of Communication, Bombay.

Correspondence courses in journalism are available from the Bombay offices of the British Institute of Commerce and International Correspondence Schools apart from several other private institutes.

The Press Institute of India, set up in 1963, does not offer any formal diploma or degree courses but arranges refresher courses, seminars, workshops and conferences for journalists and other media personnel in different parts of the country.

Among the governmental training efforts, one is the Indian Institute of Mass Communication, New Delhi.
The need for training is no longer in doubt or dispute. What is being debated now is the type of training that we need and the manner in which it should be organised. Nearly every form of training mentioned probably fulfills need of a kind and will survive.

However, the bulk of the need for professionally trained men for the print and other media and for journalism/communication teachers and researchers will have to be met through institutional training at the university level. Let us take a closer look at communication education in universities.

Course Structure

The journalism course structure has undergone a sea change since the inauguration of Panjab University's diploma course in Lânore. The first courses were purely skill-oriented with emphasis on writing, reporting and editing along with principles and history of journalism and press laws. Printing and newspaper business management were thought of later. In the second stage of development, such allied areas as advertising, public relations, photography and radio journalism (and even TV and film journalism) were covered in the syllabi of many universities. Most of the courses also started making provision for training in Indian language journalism in one form or another. In the recent
years, communication theory and research and the various applied areas of communication (like rural communication, development communication, population communication) have started receiving attention.

It would be seen that the scope of the courses has expanded considerably in the last 15 to 20 years. They were once concerned only with producing reporters and sub-editors for newspapers. Later, they were training men also for advertising agencies and public relations departments; they were training men not only for the print but other mass media. The added effort now is towards producing men with grounding in communication theory and research who would become researchers and teachers. This necessarily calls for an inter-disciplinary approach which is conveniently possible in universities. At the same time there is need for the departments of journalism/communication to work in close liaison with the media.

University Courses: Shortcomings

Most university departments have an impressive array of subjects to show for their one year Bachelor's programme, accompanied by a lengthy list of books recommended. To what extent the promise of the syllabus is fulfilled must be examined in the context of the duration of the course, availability of reading material and facilities for practical training, admission and examination procedures and lastly
the size and quality of the teaching faculty.

**Duration**: An academic year in Indian universities is of just about 150 working days. What is sought to be accomplished in this short period is a thoroughly unrealistic proposition. There is no way one can hope to do any kind of justice to the nearly one dozen subjects prescribed. Teachers and students run through the syllabus with unholy haste and practical training becomes a sure casualty. The designing of each practical exercise whether it is in the area of reporting, editing of whatever else, correcting every student's copy diligently and then discussing the individual and group performance in classroom meaningfully is a time-consuming activity.

Where the internship is during the academic year, it cannot be of sufficiently long duration. If the period of internship is short, it is ineffective; if the internship is long enough, it makes a short academic year even shorter for all other course work. There are departments in fact with no provision whatsoever for internship and that is a major lacuna. Once again, it is for want of time (though not exclusively for this reason), that the laboratory journal which must be considered a very important vehicle for practical training is ignored. The frequency is often low and the quality poor. Several departments with no provision for laboratory newspaper and without any satisfactory arrangement for media internship continue
to produce "trained personnel" for our mass media.

If the one-year period is short for the full-time course, imagine the limitations of a part-time course where instructions relating to all theoretical and practical aspects of mass media are sought to be provided through a two-hour morning or evening session. We do have universities where wisdom is yet to dawn on the authorities that journalism or communication is too serious a business to be handled on a part-time basis.

Reading Material: The impressive list of books prescribed or recommended in the syllabus is not always matched by the reading material available in the department. Roughly a fourth of the existing departments can claim to have a fairly well stocked and managed library with the facilities of a reading room and subscription to a variety of professional journals, popular magazines and daily newspapers. At the other extreme, there are departments which cannot count more than a hundred volumes on their shelves. Budgetary constraints prevent them even from buying a sufficient number of dailies and periodicals which the students must constantly see, read, examine and compare.

It is commonly said that there is a dearth of indigenous books in the country. This is true. But another truth is that whereas thirty years ago there was not a single book, we have now about 300 publications on different aspects of
communication in English alone. More than a hundred titles are available in Indian languages. Admittedly, the literature is growing rather slowly and this calls for a concerted effort to step up production of quality books. Priority must be accorded to those areas which remain neglected (e.g., communication theory and research, editing, editorial writing, ethics, news writing for radio and TV and media management).

What is sad, however, is that even much of what has been published in India does not find its way into many of the departmental libraries. The lack of funds is a major difficulty.

Equipment: The exact requirements of equipment in a department would depend on the orientation of its training programme. Earlier, the university departments were chiefly concerned with training men for the print media. The needs were quite simple then: enough typewriters for students, subscription to a news agency's TP service so that students could edit live news copy and then compare their work with what is published in newspapers, some still cameras for news photography and either a small printing press of their own or dependable arrangements with the university press to get the lab journal printed. Occasionally, some department showed keenness for a full-fledged photo lab. In most departments, the struggle is still on to have these basic facilities for practical training for the print media. Indeed, there are places which do not have typewriters and duplicators even for departmental use.

Meanwhile, the scope of training has considerably widened and in umpteen departments they claim to train personnel for radio and television. Several departments have recently
acquired TV sets, in some cases also VCR. However, only a couple of departments have been lucky to get the whole range of sophisticated electronic gadgetry essential for training in TV production but not each of them has been able to use it.

If the majority of the training ventures are starved of essential equipment, it is partly because of the paucity of funds in universities and with the University Grants Commission, the main funding agency. The distribution of the limited UGC resources has been lopsided; while the very basic needs of many departments are not met, costly equipment is provided to departments with no capacity to utilize it.

Trainees: Reading material and equipment are necessary but not sufficient by themselves to ensure the production of well-trained personnel for the media. What kind of people are attracted to these training programmes? How valid are the admission procedures?

In some departments, the criterion of admission is performance in the qualifying degree examination, usually with a provision for extra weightage to those holding the Master's degree. This is on the face of it faulty for where is the guarantee that a brilliant scholar of Sanskrit or a top-notch in Mathematics will have the makings of a journalist or PR man. Some other seemingly better departments have, therefore,
introduced a process of screening the eligible candidates through a written test followed by personal interview to assess their aptitude and ability for the intended profession. This makes sense but unfortunately the final outcome is not uniformly encouraging. The entrance tests conducted by departments are not above board and often enough inferior material with the "right" contacts gets in and superior talent is left out. Nor is there any dearth of instances of the university authorities having interfered with the admission process in one way or the other to accommodate candidates canvassed by influential politicians, editors and pressure groups of the campus. There is a third category of departments, mercifully small, where admissions are made indiscriminately. Some are yet to realize that unless the student-body is small and compact, it is well nigh impossible to provide worthwhile practical training.

There is no denying the fact that some of the trainees are brilliant. They not only get into the profession quickly but give a creditable account of themselves. The majority, however, is represented by those whose mental equipment most vividly portrays the deficiencies of the Indian educational system. With no aim in life, they drift like flotsam and jetsam of a wrecked ship. Besides their abysmal ignorance of men and matters, such students suffer from the disability of poor expression.
Yet the percentage of successful candidates is very high, at times 100 per cent. That is because the system of internal assessment (otherwise so essential for assessing the day-to-day practical work) is grossly misused and even the final university examination is not without faults. After examining one university's scripts, an editor had this to say:

"Almost the whole bunch of candidates attempted the same set of questions and the answers are almost similar. Only certain spelling mistakes are somewhat different!"

The Faculty:

If the strongest point of our training programmes is their comprehensive syllabus, the weakest link lies in the teaching faculty, usually small in size and low in competence. The UGC has laid down a minimum of 1 professor, 2 readers and 4 lecturers. What has happened in actual practice is vastly different and deeply distressing. There are departments without any whole-time teacher and are run by part-time heads.

The inadequate size of the faculty is just one dimension of the problem. A more serious one is the lack of competence. In fact there is a close relationship between the two. Many posts of professor, reader and lecturer have remained vacant for years for want of availability of qualified, trained and experienced teachers. At times, faced by a critical situation in the department and in sheer desperation, appointments have been made of undeserving men. Once a wrong appointment has been made, all that remains to be done is to
repent till the man retires. Things being what they are in Indian universities today, for anyone lacking in competence or character there is no lack of enthusiastic backing of teachers' union and other pressure groups whose support vice-chancellors value a great deal.

There is an endless debate on who should teach in the department of journalism and communication. Those of us who for long have had the opportunity of being involved in the selection process of universities from Ludhiana to Trivandrum and Pune to Gauhati now realize that it is almost impossible to lay down a set of qualifications and experience which would be foolproof and would ensure selection of only the right personnel. People have often taken somewhat extraneous positions—some overstressing the academic achievements like Master's, M.Phil and Ph.D. degrees and some blowing up the virtues of long experience with the media. Rightly speaking, the teachers need both academic and professional credentials. All one can say is that the teachers should have a wide and sound educational background, first-rate professional training and some media experience. Finally, however, it has to be verified whether the man has the ability to teach to impart skills and techniques. It is at this stage that things have gone wrong often; sometimes it is an error of judgement and at other times it is outright dishonesty.
We now find ourselves in the midst of a wave of Master's degree courses. About 20 such courses have sprouted in different parts of the country. We have the mortification of seeing departments offer both Bachelor's and Master's degree courses without any full-time teachers or with just one or two. Some time back the UGC took cognizance of one such course at Nagpur, appointed an enquiry committee and the course was suspended. What is not realized is that what was detected in Nagpur by accident is a mere symptom of the disease that has spread far and wide. A dozen other Master's courses are nearly as bad as was Nagpur's. The tragedy is that the Master's degree holders from all these sub-standard schools are now seeking—and at times getting—the lecturer's appointment. This poses the gravest threat to the credibility of communication education.

Reasons For Sorry Plight

The reasons for this sorry plight of media education in Indian universities are many. The authorities are usually unaware of the requirements of such courses. There are numerous instances of the universities having first launched the programmes and then starting to look for faculty, equipment and reading material. Subsequently they discover that it is not easy to get the teachers, that they don't have the resources for the required equipment; that it would take long to assemble even the minimum
reading material for students. No wonder some had to abandon the course within a year or two. So many others have continued without the minimum facilities for years. Yet, the right lessons have not been learnt. More universities are itching to take the plunge, unmindful of the fate of other training programmes.

There is another reality that cannot be disputed or wished away. The dynamics within the internal environment of the university system is such that the vice-chancellors have no choice but to keep the leaders of pressure groups in good humour; their demands have to be met irrespective of their merits otherwise the vice-chancellors cannot see their decisions through the Executive Council or Syndicate and other bodies. Among the external sources of pressure, the two most potent ones are politicians in power and the press. The ruling politicians decide the vice-chancellor's future and on them depends also the financial health of the university. Vis-a-vis the press, the university administrators' interests are two-fold: to see that the many skeletons in their cupboards are not exposed and to get favourable publicity in the newspaper columns. Journalists do oblige but only for a price. Perhaps it is best to quote the intro of Anthony Smith's piece in an issue of The Listener: "If one were invited to name the
profession most frequently abused by its own practitioners, I suppose the answer would have to be journalism." Often enough the origin of wrong admissions and appointments in communication departments can be traced to one of the sources listed here.

Besides, the Indian university system is known to be most rigid. This is of particular disadvantage to communication education which requires a flexible curricular structure that can respond quickly to the changing needs of the media. Lastly, communication studies are inter-disciplinary in nature. Unfortunately, despite all the talk of promoting inter-disciplinary studies and programmes, not much headway has been made in this direction and university departments continue to operate in isolation.

In 1989 and 1990, a team of professors from the universities in U.S.A. had visited India under the Indo-U.S. Sub-Commission on Education and Culture. It visited 22 universities and other training centres, both public and private. It may not be out of place to recall what in their assessment are "some of the problems that confront the educators".

a) Too many part-time faculty members and not enough full-time faculty.
b) Inadequate equipment.
c) Insufficient textbooks and library books.
d) Some faculty without practical experience in the media or without formal academic training in the field in which they were teaching.

e) Some administrators appointed from academic fields that have little or no relevance to journalism or mass communications.

f) A degree of dissatisfaction among many students who believe they receive too much theory and not enough practical experience.

g) An apparent reluctance on the part of working media professionals to consider journalism teaching as a career. (Some department chairs reported that they cannot interest professionals in full-time teaching.)

Recent Trends

The sixties and seventies saw the one year postgraduate diploma courses being upgraded to the degree courses; the newly started ones were of course straight degree courses. The nomenclatures vary a great deal: Bachelor of Journalism, Bachelor of Mass Communication, Bachelor of Mass Communication and Journalism, Bachelor of Communication and Journalism, Bachelor of Science in Communication. The seventies and eighties witnessed the coming of Master's courses of two types: one year's Master's course following one year Bachelor's; two-year Master's course for general graduates. In the recent years, some universities have introduced Journalism or Communication as one of the optional subjects in their B.A. courses. The curriculum, split in two or three papers, usually covers principles of journalism or introduction to communication, small dozens of print-media
oriented skills and techniques and advertising and public relations. Lately, a couple of universities have started the M.Phil course. The facility for doctoral work through registration with a recognised guide is of course now available at several universities.

What has not happened yet is the initiation of a professional course of three or four years immediately after matriculation. A U.E.F.I. sponsored Workshop in Bangalore in 1984 had recommended a three-year Bachelor's programme in Journalism and Communication after 10+2 stage. This Workshop, attended by senior professors as well as middle-level teachers, had recommended a balanced and well-blended course structure which included components of languages, culture, economics, political science, psychology, science and technology besides the various theoretical and practical aspects of communication. A module, very much patterned after this course structure, was also recommended to the U.G.C. by an expert committee in 1987. Here was a well conceived course, something like professional courses in medicine and engineering. This experiment deserves to be tried.

A couple of universities have launched correspondence courses -- diploma or degree in journalism or public relations and advertising. The Indira Gandhi National
Open University is shortly coming out with a Diploma Course in Journalism and Mass Communication.

With the launching of Master's courses and with the growing need of media for research personnel, communication research is now picking up, slowly but surely. Also, courses are being introduced in specialised areas of communication such as development communication, rural communication, population communication, science communication. The Indian language press having come into its own, more and more universities are arranging facilities for training people for vernacular newspapers; efforts are on to provide instruction and training through Indian languages even for other media. The U.G.C. has recently implemented a scheme as per which one university in every state is being given resources to start a two-year Diploma Course in Hindi Journalism as part of the scheme to promote functional Hindi.

EDUCATION IN ETHICS

Only a few of our top journalists are genuinely concerned with the questions of ethics and professionalism and are conscious of the need for adequate stress on ethical values in professional courses. How do those mediamen appreciate the importance of education in
ethics who have themselves been through a formal course of training? An alumni survey conducted in Delhi in 1988 included a question on the objectives of pre-service institutional training. The survey covered 72 Journalism/Communication graduates who had received training in Indian universities and were employed by media in Delhi. It revealed that eight out of ten alumni thought the objectives were to impart skills and techniques (87.5%) and to provide insight into the role of media in society (80.6%) and five out of ten (47.2%) thought that the objective was to inculcate ethical values in the minds of the trainees. *1

Curriculum

Most of the courses in Journalism and Communication in universities and elsewhere do include instruction on laws of the press (or media laws) and ethics; only a couple of training programmes have chosen to almost completely ignore this area. The constitutional and legal provisions relating to the freedom of the press, issues of formal and informal censorship, self-censorship and ramifications of monopoly ownership and various aspects of ethics (code of conduct, Press Council, etc.) are included here. The weightage given to the law and ethics section in the total course scheme varies a great deal from place to place. The syllabi in respect of ethics particularly show a wide variation — ranging from...
a few fairly comprehensive ones to many cursory ones. It is a mere touch and go at most places. The number of lectures on ethics, the discussion sessions on concrete issues arising in the media and the cases dealt with by the Press Council are woefully inadequate.

Reproduced below are the relevant portions of the syllabi of five universities. They give a fair idea of the variation in weightage and emphasis. These five universities are located in different parts of the country. Three of them offer one year Bachelor’s degree programme which is the dominant pattern. The other two offer a straight Master’s course of two years.

1. Banaras Hindu University. One year Bachelor of Journalism Course. In all 8 papers, each carrying 100 marks. In Paper II entitled History of Journalism & Press Laws, the first three paras list topics of history. The relevant fourth para is as follows:


Out of eight papers, carrying 100 marks each,
Paper I has three sections as follows:

- **History of Journalism**: 50 marks
- **Mass Communication**: 30 marks
- **Laws Affecting Press in India**: 20 marks

**Laws Affecting Press in India**


2. Important press laws in India - Laws of sedition (Sec. 124A, IPC), Law of obscenity (Sec. 292, 293, IPC) - Contempt of Courts Act 1971 - law of defamation (Sec. 499 IPC) - Law against class hatred and injury to religious feelings (Sec. 153 A, 295 IPC) - Official Secrets Act 1923 - Incitement to offence (Sec. 107, 108 and 505 IPC) - Criminal Law Amendment Act, 1961 prohibiting writings questioning territorial integrity of the country - Prevention of injurious advertisements (Drugs and Magic Remedies Act, 1955).
3. Illegality and impropriety about journalism -
extra - legal restraints on the Press - The Press Council - how far has it benefited the Press in India - Rights, Privileges and liabilities of the Press - Rights duties liabilities of different categories of people of the Press --- Editor - Printer, Publisher, Reporter, freelance-writers, contributors, news agencies, news vendors and proprietor; Professional secrecy of Journalists.

4. Parliamentary privileges and the Press -
Contempt of Parliament or the legislation; Art. 361 A - how far helpful to the Press - relation between the Press and the legislature.

5. Explanatory notes: Objectionable matter; Law of privacy; Incitement to offence; Press Registrar.

Karnatak University. Two-year M.A. in Mass Communication and Journalism. Total scheme of 1450 marks for various papers, practicals etc. There is no separate section as such on laws and ethics. In Paper I called Introduction to Communication (100 marks), the third and the last para is relevant:

Contemporary characteristics of Indian Press - Problems, Controls, government and internal. Major issues and the role of Press - An intensive analysis of any three major contemporary issues - Status of Journalism profession - News agencies
in India; history, expansion, service offered - Journalism education - Career prospects - Press organisations.

4. Panjab University. One year Bachelor of Mass Communication course. Six papers, each with 100 marks; every paper divided into two Parts, each with 50 marks. Practical Assignments: 200 marks. Total Scheme: 600 marks.

Part B of Paper V called Ethics of Journalism and Press Laws of India reads as follows:

Ownership and newspaper control; freedom of the press; objectivity, fairness and accuracy in reporting as well as in comment; responsibility and factors that interfere with it, professional integrity, yellow journalism, attacks on individuals; obscenity, crime and nude pictures; pressures on the press; code of ethics.

Press Laws:

The law of Copyright, Law of Contempt of Court; Contempt of the Legislature; Law of defamation; Young Persons (Harmful) Publications Act; Press and Registration of Books Act, Delivery of Books and Newspapers (Public Libraries) Act, Drugs and Magic Remedies Act; Parliamentary Proceedings

5. University of Poona. One year Bachelor of Journalism course. Seven papers, each one of 100 marks and 250 marks for practical examination, class work, etc. Paper I is entitled Principles, History & Law of the Press. There are thus three sections but no division of marks. The third section called Laws reads thus:

Laws:

(a) The Parliamentary Proceedings (Protection of Publication) Act of 1965; The Indian Copyright Act of 1957; The International Copyright Conventions.

(b) The Law of Libel and Slander including Defamation as contained in the Indian Penal Code.

(c) The Contempt of Court Act of 1952; The Contempt of Parliament.


Besides a specific section devoted to law and ethics, questions relating to code of ethics and proprietor-editor relationship almost inevitably figure in some small ways in the course of teaching other subjects like advertising, public relations, broadcast journalism and newspaper reporting, editing and editorial writing.

In most Bachelor's degree programmes, the topic of "theories of the press" is prescribed in the subject called Principles of Journalism or Introduction to Journalism/Mass Communication/Communication. The social responsibility of the media is discussed here along with the issues of freedom, censorship, pressures on media and media monopolies. Some of these also figure in the subject of Media Management. The Master's level course provides greater scope for considering in depth the social responsibility and public accountability of the media.

More than a dozen Indian books are now available on press laws. Some books on journalism or those dealing with media issues generally carry a chapter on ethics but as yet there is no full-fledged book on
ethics as such.

A 1990 survey of communication literature prescribed in universities of the SAARC region revealed that 47 books out of a total of 952 (4.93%) were on Media Law, Ethics and Policies. Nearly three-fourths of these books were region-related (published in SAARC region) unlike books in most other subject areas, where percentage of North American was very high. This IAMCR sponsored survey (supported by IPDC/UNESCO) covered 19 institutions in India and one each in Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Pakistan.

Promotion of Ethical Practices

The late M. Chalapathi Rau, one of the most respected journalists of India, had the correct appreciation of the role of professional education. He expressed the opinion that journalism education "will provide a useful theoretical and academic basis for journalism, an intellectual and moral background in support of codes of conduct."

For a variety of reasons, communication education has not been very effective in promoting ethical practices in the media. The shortcomings of the course content on ethics have already been noted. The instruction is usually provided by someone on the faculty and the faculty being very small at most places, the chances of the teacher concerned having specialised
in this area are small. Only at a few institutions, efforts are made to invite experts who deal with the issues thoroughly and competently. Also, the duration of the course is not long enough to allow ethical values to get deeply ingrained in the young minds.

Further, while it is true that the trained graduates are being increasingly accepted by the media, their total number is still small and as yet only a few have reached the top editorial and managerial positions. Often, the trained men and women, for sheer survival, fall in line with the rest.

So far as the electronic media are concerned, they are fully owned, operated and controlled by the Government of India. Where there is no freedom, the questions of autonomy of the profession and observance of ethics become irrelevant. Those who work for the radio and TV systems are government employees; on the one hand they are bound by a plethora of government rules and regulations and on the other have no choice but to act in accordance with the whims and fancies of politicians in power.

The press is in private sector and seeks to "benefit" most from the constitutional guarantee of the freedom of speech and expression. However, the exact quantum and quality of the press freedom are determined by other factors of which most important is
the ownership pattern. A few big business houses own a chain of daily newspapers in English and Indian languages which together corner a substantial portion of the total circulation. Besides, they also own a variety of largely circulated periodicals. There is a strong tendency among the press barons to use newspapers as instruments for promoting their commercial interests in other industries. In order to get government favours for their industrial concerns, they have no compunction in forcing the editors to toe the line of the party in power. Distortions in news and editorial columns is the most obvious outcome.

The freedom of the journalist is curtailed by pressures from other quarters. As per the 1988 alumni survey conducted in Delhi (referred to earlier), 88.9% of the respondents were of the opinion that journalists in print media were not "absolutely free to write and report as per their conscience". Among the sources of pressures and interference they identified were proprietor (85.9%), government (82.2%), editors (70.3%), political parties (60.9%), advertisers (48.4%) and trade unions (26.6%). Answering another question, 90.3% of the alumni said that editors and other newsmen did succumb to pressures and yielded to temptations.
Journalists in India are ever keen to ensure that the government does not tamper with the press freedom. Yet they depend on the government to fix their wages. They have no hesitation in living in government houses on a nominal rent. All over there is a scramble for residential plots at a concessional prices. Junkets, gifts and umpteen other favours are being sought all the time from governments, public sector undertakings and industrial houses.

No wonder most journalists are not enthusiastic about a code of conduct being evolved and enforced; some are totally opposed to the idea. A few attempts have no doubt been made by journalists' organisations at the national level to formulate codes of ethics. They all remain dead instruments in the absence of a mechanism to ensure their observance. The second Press Commission in 1981 had supported the Press Council's plea for powers to punish the guilty. This recommendation, however, has been rejected by the government, much to the delight of newspaper proprietors as well as journalists.

CONCLUSIONS

The numerous problems confronting communication departments in universities have been noted. The weaknesses
of courses in ethics are closely linked with the shortcomings of the departments themselves. The very first need in an effort to streamline communication education is to set up a national body with the authority to give accreditation to the training programmes. It would lay down norms covering all aspects of education and training: admission and evaluation procedures, student and staff strength, minimum qualifications and experience for teachers, duration and pattern of internship, library and laboratory facilities. Those programmes which meet the prescribed norms would be entitled to accreditation. Such a body should consist of communication teachers and researchers and representatives of all wings of mass media. This will prevent universities from launching training programmes in a casual and cavalier way. All the media would feel assured of getting with people/training of a certain standard.

This would offer an opportunity also to strengthen instruction in ethics through careful designing of the course and laying down the actual teaching norms. The chances are that once graduates from such accredited start institutions/entering the profession their thinking on merits of professionalism, ethical values, social responsibility and public accountability of the media
will influence other mediamen and thus uplift the overall performance of the media.

References:

1. Eapen, K.E. and Thakur, B.S. Journalism/Communication Alumni: Their Assessment of Professional Education. A study sponsored by the University Grants Commission, New Delhi. Printed at Bangalore: 1989. The research findings referred to in this paper can be seen on pages 53 and 54 and 57 to 60.