

Message for the Students

Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Open University is the only state Open University, established by the Government of Gujarat by the Act No. 14 of 1994 passed by the Gujarat State Legislature; in the memory of the creator of Indian Constitution and Bharat Ratna Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar. We stand at the seventh position in terms of establishment of the Open Universities in the country. The University provides as many as 81 courses including various Certificate, Diploma, UG, PG as well as Doctoral to strengthen Higher Education across the state.



On the occasion of the birth anniversary of Babasaheb Ambedkar, the Gujarat government secured a quiet place with the latest convenience for University, and created a building with all the modern amenities named 'Jyotirmay' Parisar. The Board of Management of the University has greatly contributed to the making of the University and will continue to this by all the means.

Education is the perceived capital investment. Education can contribute more to improving the quality of the people. Here I remember the educational philosophy laid down by Shri Swami Vivekananda:

“We want the education by which the character is formed, strength of mind is increased, the intellect is expands and by which one can stand on one’s own feet.”

In order to provide students with qualitative, skill and life oriented education at their threshold. Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Open University is dedicated to this very manifestation of education. The university is incessantly working to provide higher education to the wider mass across the state of Gujarat and prepare them to face day to day challenges and lead their lives with all the capacity for the upliftment of the society in general and the nation in particular.

The university following the core motto ‘स्वाध्यायः परमम् तपः’ does believe in offering enriched curriculum to the student. The university has come up with lucid material for the better understanding of the students in their concerned subject. With this, the university has widened scope for those students who are not able to continue with their education in regular/conventional mode. In every subject a dedicated term for Self Learning Material comprising of Programme advisory committee members, content writers and content and language reviewers has been formed to cater the needs of the students. Matching with the pace of the digital world, the university has its own digital platform Omkar-e to provide education through ICT.

The University is offering MA in Journalism and Mass Communication course under the School of Humanities of Social Sciences, it aims to emerge its learners as excellent communicators in the global arena by developing skills in thinking, reading, writing, and editing, audio-video production and more.

With all these efforts, Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Open University is in the process of being core centre of Knowledge and Education and we invite you to join hands to this pious *Yajna* and bring the dreams of Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar of Harmonious Society come true.



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Specialisations - Beat Reporting & Types

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Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Open University
(Established by Government of Gujarat)

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Specialisations : Beat Reporting and Types

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

The reporting team of any media house is its pillar of strength. In order to understand the functioning of a newsroom, it is important to understand how the team of reporters function and gather a variety of news for the organisation. In order to understand the functioning of reporters, it is important to understand the concept of beat and assignment. This unit discusses in detail the concept of beat and assignment reporters, the various important beats in a newsroom, the qualities required for a beat reporter to excel in his field and overcome the challenges, and how to

initiate work on a new beat as well as manage multiple beats simultaneously.

1.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Understand the concept of beat and assignment
- Understand the importance of beat and assignment in a newsroom
- Understand the various important beats in a newsroom
- Understand the qualities that a beat reporter has to develop
- Understand the various challenges faced by beat reporters

On completion of this unit

On completion of this unit, you will be able to understand:

- Concept of beat and assignments
- Why beats and assignments are important for a media house
- The various reporters in a newsroom and their qualities
- How to initiate work in a new beat and manage the responsibilities of multiple beats

1.2 BEAT AND ASSIGNMENT: CONCEPT, DEFINITIONS, AND EXAMPLES

Media organisations, be it a newspaper or news channel, cover a wide gamut of developments going on in the society on a routine basis. These developments are from an array of areas ranging from politics to sports and from crime to governance. One of the reasons behind covering these sectors is to cater to the heterogeneous readers having different likings.

For example, a middle-aged person might have an interest in local and national politics, whereas, for youngsters, news from sports and cinema might be of prime importance. However, for a media organisation, both youngsters and the aged are potential readers. Therefore, it has to carry news from an array of sectors.

In order to operate smoothly and to gather newsworthy developments from various areas on a day-to-day basis, media houses function through a battery of reporters, with each reporter assigned a specific area or sector. **The specific area of coverage that a reporter is assigned is called a beat.** These beats are generally fixed and the concerned reporter

is required to track developments, dig out stories from the concerned beat, and report them.

The beats are generally assigned to a reporter based on a number of factors. These include educational background, language skills, people skills, calibre, interest in a subject area, and dedication among others. While junior reporters or a fresher might not have a say in what beats they are going to get, usually senior journalists are hired by media organisations to cover the area in which they have developed an expertise.

For example, a senior journalist having an exceptional hold on local politics for almost a decade might get an opportunity in a rival organisation for covering local politics. So, it is often seen that a journalist having commendable track record and experience in covering a particular beat is asked to stick to that beat for a longer period, mostly in years.

While beats are fixed in nature, every reporter, irrespective of his beat, is assigned specific events to cover which may not be related to the beat entrusted upon him. This is known as assignment. This specific event can be a press conference, product launch, seminar, exhibition, film screening, factory visit, or an inauguration ceremony.

This apart, a reporter or a team of reporters can be assigned to follow a specific news development for a 360-degree coverage, which may not be related to their beats, but is important for readers. For example, during the Patidar agitation at GMDC Ground in Ahmedabad in 2015, most city-based media houses deployed a team of reporters, irrespective of their beats, to cover the event. Similarly, during state or general elections, not just the political reporter, but all reporters, irrespective of their beats, contribute in election news coverage.

Every media house receives several invites for news coverage on a day-to-day basis. These invites are sorted and then distributed to reporters in the form of assignments. Assignments are important for both the media organisation and the reporter as it leads to optimum utilisation of available human resources for newsgathering and the reporter gains experience of covering subjects beyond the beats assigned to him.

In several large media organisations, there are general assignment reporters who are supposed to cover the events, seminars, product launches, press conferences and any other programme assigned to them.

In other words, a general assignment reporter can be assigned any work on a wide variety of subjects on any day at any given point of time. They are usually junior reporters who are yet to be assigned any beat.

For example, a general assignment reporter may be asked to cover a seminar on diabetes on a given day and the next day he may be asked to follow a trend story on summer holiday destinations.

1.3 IMPORTANCE OF BEAT AND ASSIGNMENT SYSTEM

The readers or viewers of any media organisation are heterogeneous in nature and therefore, it is essential for a media house to cover newsworthy developments from a variety of areas, which may or may not be mutually exclusive. In a bid to achieve this objective, media houses appoint a battery of reporters to gather information about developments from various fields.

Now, imagine a situation where the reporters are clueless about which beat they are supposed to follow on a daily basis. This is not only going to derail the newsgathering process of the organisation, but might also result in duplicity of work and missing several important news developments of the day. Therefore, the system of beat and assignments was introduced in media organisations way back at the end of the nineteenth century in several developed nations and was adopted by media organisations worldwide.

Following are the importance of the beat system in the day-to-day newsgathering process:

1. To avoid missing major stories

One of the major advantages of having a beat system is to ensure that media houses do not miss important news developments from major areas that are covered by rival organisations. Missing important news items from major sectors might seriously affect the credibility of a media organisation and eventually, its readers or viewers may shift their loyalty towards rival organisations.

Example: There is a major judgment by the high court in which the court made parking of vehicles in malls, multiplexes, and similarly situated commercial establishments free of any charges. This news is important for readers. However, if a media house does not have a court reporter, it might miss the story.

2. Focus and direction to newsgathering activity

The beat system also helps in giving focus and direction to the newsgathering activity of a media organisation. During the allocation of beats, the reporters are categorically instructed about the kind of stories that the organisation is looking for. Also, several sectors are left out in beat distribution as the newspaper or the news channel might not be interested in covering those sectors and instead wishes to focus on other beats that might generate more news.

Example: Some newspapers consider religion as a beat and there are dedicated reporters who look into religious developments, festivals, etc. However, many newspapers do not have dedicated reporters for covering religion beat and in case of any major religious event, the same is covered by assigning it to a reporter. Similarly, some general newspapers do not cover the energy sector, whereas there are dedicated reporters to cover the energy sector in many newspapers.

3. Defines responsibility of reporters to avoid overlap of stories in newsroom

The beat system helps in defining the responsibility of all reporters in an organisation by clearly demarcating the area they have to look after. The beat reporters are clear about what they have to cover and do not require any day-to-day instruction. Since beats are mostly mutually exclusive in nature, it seldom happens that two reporters come up with the same story.

Example: There is a murder that has happened in a particular pocket of the city. If there are two crime reporters in an organisation, chances are that both will have information about the murder. However, which one of them is going to write about the murder is clear as both the crime reporters have a fixed geographical area to cover under the beat system. This not just helps in avoiding any confusion between reporters, but at the same time, it ensures that there is no overlap of story in the newsroom.

4. To gather information for a story in limited time

Newsgathering is a tedious process, especially if a reporter has no idea about the sector in which he is looking for stories. At the same time, a story has to be developed within a limited time with all the information, quotes and comments to meet the deadline. It is always easier for a beat reporter to develop a story from his or her beat within this limited time as he has the required contacts and sources for the same. Also, beat reporters

are aware of the routine developments in their sector and therefore, they know where to look for the required information and whom to contact.

Example: There is information about a murder at Aakriti Society in Model Colony in Pune. For a reporter who does not cover crime, writing a story on the same will be difficult as he will have to first find out the concerned police station and then look for the contact of the investigation officer. Getting the contact of the investigation officer may turn futile if the investigation officer refuses to divulge any information as he does not have any rapport with the reporter. On the contrary, the concerned beat reporter (crime) can gather the required information for the story easily within a short time because he is aware of the sources who will divulge the required information about the murder.

5. In-depth, investigative reporting becomes easier

Due to the beat system, a reporter develops a rapport with various sources in his beat, which helps him in writing in-depth as well as investigative stories. In the absence of the beat system, it becomes very difficult as sources do not divulge crucial information with a reporter on whom they do not have any confidence. Personal rapport and the knowledge of the sector help the beat reporter in writing stories with better information and the required quotes and comments.

Example: There is a major judgment on parking charges levied by malls, multiplexes and commercial establishments running into 200 pages. However, as usual, the judgment is full of legal parlance and technical detail. For a court reporter, it is easier to write an in-depth story after going through the judgment as he can decode the legal parlance and write the story in a way that readers can understand how the judgment is going to affect them. On the contrary, a reporter having zero exposure to court reporting might get confused after going through the judgment.

Importance of assignments

Following are the importance of assignments in the day-to-day newsgathering activities:

1. Breaks monotony, enriches reporter

After covering a beat for a considerable time, monotony may set in for a reporter. In such a situation, assignments for events, press conferences, media launches, and seminars may provide a much-required respite for

the reporter by breaking the monotony. Also, assignments help reporters in developing sources beyond their beat and provide an opportunity to cover developments in other beats.

Example: Covering a food festival can be a welcome change for a crime reporter, who is bored with covering crimes for the past 5 years.

2. Optimum utilisation of reporters

Every media organisation wishes to make optimum utilisation of its human resource including its reporters. Since a large number of invites are received by media houses on a daily basis, the same has to be sorted as per their news value and distributed among the beat reporters. This helps in generating more stories on any given day and helps in saving special stories of reporters, which can be utilised on a poor news day.

Example: If a media house receives around 10 media invitations and find five of them are important, it would be distributed among the beat reporters. It will ensure that there are around five additional stories apart from the routine and special stories generated by the beat reporters.

1.4 IMPORTANT BEATS IN A NEWSROOM

Every media house earmarks a number of beats, which may vary from organisation to organisation, and depends on its target readers or viewers. For example, the beats in a general newspaper such as The Times of India as against a political mouthpiece such as Samna will be completely different. Similarly, beats in a sector-specific newspaper such as The Economic Times or The Financial Express will be entirely different as they cater to an entirely different and selective reader base.

Despite all these factors, there are several core beats that are crucial in all newsrooms. These include:

1. Crime

Crime is perhaps one of the most important beats in a newsroom and depending on the availability of reporters, the crime beat is divided into two or more reporters. In any newspaper, the crime beat generates the maximum number of stories on a regular basis. More space is offered to crime stories also because of the fact that people like to read such stories. There are hardly any developments in other beats during a government holiday or a long weekend, but that is not the case with crime beat.

2. Courts

Court reporting is another important beat in a media organisation that generates important news stories having wider ramifications. Court reporting comprises of reporting stories from lower courts, high court, and the Supreme Court. It is also considered a difficult beat as a reporter has to always stick to facts and court proceedings and there is no scope for committing any mistake.

For example, consider the massive coverage granted to the court proceedings and the verdict in the Ayodhya Ram Mandir-Babri Masjid dispute, or the Supreme Court verdict decriminalising homosexuality, or the Gujarat High Court verdict on multiple petitions filed by farmers against the proposed land acquisition for the ambitious bullet train project between Ahmedabad and Mumbai.

3. Politics, Government, and Bureaucracy

Politics, government, and bureaucracy are another important beats for a media organisation. Depending on the size of the reporting team, one or more reporters are allocated to cover these areas. While they are interlinked, large media organisation often have separate reporters for covering politics, government, and bureaucracy.

For example, a reporter can be assigned to take care of a major political party such as BJP and Congress. Similarly, there are dedicated reporters who cover government secretariat and come up with news and developments related to the various moves planned by the government, the effectiveness of government schemes, etc.

4. Education

Education is another important beat for a media organisation. An education reporter is entrusted to cover school education, higher education, and research institutions. Right from stories on admissions to exams and then results to convocations, the events calendar of an education reporter is always full.

For example, a story on the city toppers in the Class X and XII board examinations and how they achieved the feat will enjoy a higher readership, especially among students and their parents.

5. Civic and infrastructure

It is undoubtedly one of the most important beats in any newsroom and generates stories that have a direct reader connect. The stories generated by a civic and infrastructure reporter are always on local issues of the city and enjoy higher readership.

For example, a story on how the municipal corporation plans to carry out road repairs post-monsoon and which areas are on its top priority is a story that every citizen of that particular city would like to read. Similarly, a story on the civic body planning to construct a flyover along a busy junction, or a change of route in the city metro project would enjoy higher readership.

6. Business

While there are several dedicated business newspapers, news channels and web portals in the market, even general newspapers give importance to major business stories and how the market has reacted to the government policies or RBI rate cuts. General newspapers either have a dedicated business page or try to include business stories in the city page by localising the content.

For example, if the Bombay Stock Exchange crashes by over 1,000 points on a day, the news is certainly going to make it to the front page. A business reporter can localise the story by tracking the movement of share prices of the city or state-based industries and taking quotes and comments from city-based brokerage firms.

7. Sports

Sports is another important beat in a media organisation that enjoys a higher readership among all age groups. Apart from reporting on major sports such as cricket, football, hockey, and tennis, a sports reporter is also entrusted to cover local sporting events such as a school-level basketball competition, or state-level sports meet, to give the sports page a local flavour.

For example, an interview of a budding city-based cricketer who has made it to the national squad will definitely enjoy a higher readership.

8. Healthcare and wellness

Prevention is better than cure and health reporters are actually torchbearers of latest information on disease management and its prevention. They also report on the prevalent diseases in a particular season in the city, what the authorities are doing to contain the menace, and what the citizens can do to safeguard themselves. Therefore, the stories done by them have a direct reader connect and enjoy higher readership.

For example, research suggests that Type II diabetes can be reversed using the combination of active lifestyle and the right medicines. Such a story can be of great help for millions of people suffering from Type II diabetes. Similarly, a story on how the symptoms of dengue in patients this year are different from the usual symptoms and why the vector-borne disease is getting deadlier will definitely interest the readers.

Other important beats

Apart from the above core beats, there are several other beats that might or might not be present in a newsroom depending upon the need, flow of news stories, and the availability of reporters. These include entertainment reporting, science, environment, agriculture, technology, transport, and culture among others. At times, reporters entrusted with the core beats are specially assigned to cover any major developments in these beats in the absence of a regular beat reporter.

Qualities of a beat reporter

While nose for news is a general requirement for any reporter out there in the field, a beat reporter needs to have several important qualities to achieve mastery over the beat entrusted upon him. The following are the top five important qualities of a beat reporter:

1. Understanding of the beat

One of the most important aspects of a beat reporter is to understand the nuances of a beat and have all the basic information about the area he is looking after. For example, it is a must for a crime reporter to understand the hierarchy in the city police administration and the contact details of all the police stations in the city.

2. Writing for readers

Unlike a general assignment reporter, a beat reporter needs to understand the subject area and report stories in such a manner that it is easily understood by the readers. For example, the Supreme Court verdict on Ram Mandir-Babri Masjid dispute can run into hundreds of pages with a plethora of technical details. For a court reporter reporting on the issue, he must be aware of the long-drawn legal battle, the case history, as well as decode the judgment for the readers in a simple way.

3. Aware of competition

It is absolutely essential for a beat reporter to be aware of the rival news organisations and how they are doing stories from that particular beat. A beat reporter should never suffer from complacency and always try to be a step ahead of the competition. For example, a journalist covering the civic beat for The Times of India must be aware of the stories that rival news organisations such as Hindustan Times and The Indian Express are doing and the sources being utilised for the same.

4. Develop and maintain trusted sources

One of the major differentiators between a successful and an average reporter is the kind of trusted sources one has in the beat. Developing and maintaining trusted sources is very essential for a beat reporter as it helps in writing in-depth, investigative, and exclusive stories. Also, these sources can provide the right information at the right time keeping the reporter abreast of developments in the beat and helping him plan stories in advance. For example, a trusted constable who is part of the investigating team in a high profile murder case can divulge more information to a crime reporter than the investigating officer.

5. Keep a tab on social media accounts of sources/organisations

At a time when governments are utilising social media to connect with masses and for dissemination of information, it is very essential for a beat reporter to track the social media accounts of organisations and important people related to his beat. For example, a tweet by the municipal commissioner about the civic body's plan to develop a particular stretch as a model road can act as a lead for a beat reporter to gather more information and develop it into a story. Also, social media can be helpful in contacting or staying in touch with important people related to the beat.

1.5 CHALLENGES IN BEAT REPORTING

While there are several advantages of the beat reporting system, there are some disadvantages and challenges as well for both for the organisation and the concerned beat reporter. The following are the top five disadvantages or challenges in beat reporting:

1. Monotony or boredom in reporting

A reporter after covering a beat for a considerable time may find it boring or monotonous to report on the same subjects time and again. As a result of it, the reporter might lose interest in undertaking that extra effort to bring something exclusive from his beat. For example, a crime reporter after covering routine crime for years might lose interest in the beat as it is no longer challenging for him to find stories from the beat.

2. Beat reporters suffer from complacency

A beat reporter who has performed exceptionally well and has complete control over the beat at one point of time may become complacent. This is where the problem starts as the concerned reporter starts thinking that whatever stories he is doing is better than other competing reporters in his beat, which might not be the case.

3. Beat reporter may become loyal towards sources

The basic attribute of a reporter is to question everything and not to accept anything on face value. However, one of the problems with beat reporters is that they may develop strong loyalty towards some officials in their beat and start writing whatever the sources tell them, without questioning or cross-checking the information. In order to remain loyal, the reporters stop criticising the authorities for their wrongdoings and instead try to give a positive spin to the stories filed by them. For example, a civic reporter may turn loyal towards the municipal commissioner and it results in stories that show the authorities in a positive light.

4. Nose for news might not work

A reporter who is covering a particular beat for a long time may start missing some stories as he might think that the development that has happened in his beat is nothing extraordinary to report about. However, on the contrary, a reporter who is new in the beat might actually try

harder to get to the bottom of the development and might unearth a great news story out of it.

For example, a reporter who covers the civic beat for a long time and shares a great rapport with opposition councillors may find a tip about financial irregularities in a government scheme useless and term it as “unnecessary political opposition”. However, a reporter who is new in the beat might find that information useful and might eventually unearth a scam in the implementation of the government scheme.

5. Beat reporters lose objectivity

Reporters after covering a beat for a considerable time might lose objectivity in reporting stories and end up behaving as an activist rather than detached observers. They might start reporting in favour of a group/party/segment while completely overlooking the views of the other side. For example, an education reporter may do a story on parents protesting against fee hike by a private convent school without even taking the view of the school. This will restrict the diversity of views and might not present the real picture before the readers.

1.6 DEVELOPING AND MAINTAINING SOURCES

One of the factors that differentiate a good reporter from an average one is the network of sources he has in his beat. Sources not just help in keeping the reporter abreast of the latest developments in the beat, but are also important in writing in-depth, investigative, and exclusive stories. In a nutshell, a reporter needs to have a wide network of sources in order to get story leads and to cross-check information in case of any doubt.

A reporter can do the following five things to develop and maintain sources in his beat:

1. Meet new people, follow website

A reporter should try to meet new people from his beat on a daily basis who can become his potential sources. A reporter can adopt the top-down or bottom-up approach in doing so. For example, a civic reporter adopting the top-down approach may start building a rapport with the municipal commissioner and mayor first and then meet their subordinates such as the additional municipal commissioners, deputy municipal commissioners, assistant municipal commissioners, etc. A reporter should

also follow the websites and social media accounts of organisations that come under his beat for latest updates.

2. Keep in touch

A senior official who had given an exclusive story to a reporter might not remember the latter after six months. One of the key aspects to develop and maintain sources is to stay in touch with them. This can be done through personal visits, telephone calls, and social media. Remember, out of sight is out of mind.

3. Earn the confidence of sources

A source will reveal crucial information only if he has confidence on the reporter. This is something that cannot be developed overnight. A reporter has to be honest and when the latter demands anonymity while revealing some information, a reporter must respect it. Quoting an official in a story criticising the authorities and for which the official does not want to be quoted can actually rupture the relationship between the official and the reporter.

4. Use sources to build a network

At the end of a discussion, a beat reporter can ask his source to recommend a few more people who can tell him more about the topic in hand. At times, senior officials tell reporters to contact their colleagues or subordinates to get more information and this can help the reporter in developing a wide network of sources. For example, if a civic reporter meets an additional commissioner for information required for a story following the commissioner's recommendation, there is no way that the additional commissioner can deny such information.

5. Build sources during official events

It is relatively easier for a reporter to approach hard to reach officials during events such as press conferences, award ceremonies, official dinners, etc. A reporter can approach such officials while they are in a good mood and introduce themselves. Also, the reporter must try to exchange contacts and seek an appointment, if possible. For example, meeting the chief secretary is a difficult task for a reporter new to the bureaucracy beat, but during a press conference, the reporter can certainly introduce himself, ensure that the bureaucrat saves his contact details and then seek an appointment.

1.7 WORKING ON A NEW BEAT

Allocation of a new beat should be always taken as a fresh challenge and learning opportunity by a reporter. For initiating work on a new beat, a reporter should do the following things:

1. Read to understand the beat

In order to understand a new beat and the kind of stories that he has to chase, a reporter should read old stories from the beat. This will give him a head start on the kind of stories that are done. A reporter can use both online and offline sources for reading old stories and prepare a list of stories in which he can do a follow-up.

2. Collect basic information

A reporter should understand the basic periphery of the beat and the organisations that come under it. He should also collect the contact details of senior officials of these organisations as well as a list of people whom he needs to meet in the first month. A reporter can take the help of seniors for doing so and utilise the official websites of organisations and departments for the same. He should also prepare a list of the important issues related to his beat that might be of readers' interest.

3. Positive stories can break the ice

A reporter cannot unveil a scam in a government entity right on the first day of his new beat. So, the best way is to meet officials, exchange contacts, and try to do positive stories in the beginning to earn their confidence. This usually helps in breaking the ice.

4. Finding potential stories

Once a reporter is aware of the stories that have been done from the beat in the past six months, one of the easiest ways to find potential stories is to do a follow-up. Since the reporter is aware of the background of the story, there is not much effort that he needs to put in to do a follow-up. Meeting the top hierarchy in an organisation and seeking their help can also get the reporter a few stories or story ideas.

5. Keep a tab on competition

A reporter who is new to a beat should definitely keep a tab on the stories being done by competing newspapers or news channels. He should try to

ascertain the sources that have provided information to rival news organisations and try to tap these sources for getting stories.

6. Promote exclusive stories

A reporter should try to promote his exclusive stories by sending it to important people in his beat and seek their reactions. It helps the reporter in establishing himself in the beat and in the administrative circles. This, in turn, will help the reporter in developing more sources. For example, a court reporter does an exclusive interview of the chief justice of a high court. Lawyers in the state will be interested in reading the interview. The reporter can establish himself in the field by sending the interview through messaging applications to lawyers and ask them to post the same in their professional groups.

1.8 MANAGING MULTIPLE BEATS

When a reporter is managing a single beat, it is relatively easier for him to take care of newsworthy developments in the beat and not miss any important news. However, things become a little complicated, at least initially, when a reporter has to manage two or more beats.

A reporter can do the following things to manage multiple beats with ease:

1. Time management

Time management is the first and foremost thing that a reporter managing multiple beats needs to focus on. Such a reporter will have to divide the working days in such a way that he is able to meet sources in all the beats at least once a week. There is no point in wasting hours in travelling from one location in the city to the other. The reporter instead should focus on meeting all the sources in an organisation or area during his visit there and try to explore new sources as well.

2. Resort to smart work

A reporter should resort to smart work, whenever possible, while covering multiple beats. It is practically impossible for a reporter to personally visit all the sources in all his beats on a daily basis. Instead, the reporter should make use of technology and communication tools to stay in touch with his sources. He should also learn to prioritise which events and news developments are important and try to focus on them.

The other routine developments can be taken care of by telephoning the concerned officials to seek information.

3. Stay in touch with other reporters

Reporters, despite their professional rivalry, do share stories among themselves. So, a reporter with multiple beats should definitely share a good rapport with reporters from other media organisations covering the same beat. While no reporter will share a special or exclusive story, good rapport with other reporters will ensure easy availability of routine developments in the beat.

4. Ensure availability of press releases, invitations

A reporter entrusted with multiple beats should ensure that the press releases and invitations for press conferences and other official events should directly reach him. This will ensure his access to basic information regarding a story so that he can develop it further or give it a spin after talking to concerned officials.

1.9 CONCLUSION: REPORTERS CAN CONQUER ANY BEAT WITH THE RIGHT SKILLS

While there are several important and not so important beats in a newsroom, it is essential that a reporter should work on specific skills required for a beat as well as acquire the general traits of a good reporter. A reporter needs to understand that he can conquer any beat provided he is ready to work hard, acquire the skills required for the beat, and read a lot on the various subjects associated with the beat. At times, reporters find it difficult to manage multiple beats, but even that is possible with proper time management. However, it should be kept in mind that when a reporter is asked to take care of multiple beats, he should learn how to do smart work by utilising the tools available at his disposal for newsgathering.

1.10 LET US SUM IT UP

This unit must have helped you in understanding:

- The difference between beats and assignments
- Why the beat system is essential in a newsroom and its various advantages
- The qualities that a reporter working on a beat must develop

- How to manage and develop sources in reporting
- How to manage multiple beats by resorting to smart work

1.11 KEYWORDS

Beat	The specific area of coverage that a reporter is assigned is called a beat.
Assignment	Every reporter, irrespective of his beat, is assigned specific events to cover which may not be related to the beat entrusted upon him. This is known as an assignment.
Source	A person or platform from where a reporter gets or procures information for news stories.
Newsgathering	The process adopted by a reporter or a newsroom to collect information that is newsworthy.
In-depth reporting	A reporting style in which a reporter goes deep into the details of a subject and presents the same to his readers in a manner that it explains all the aspects related to the issue.

1.12 CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Questions:

1. What is a beat?

2. What is an assignment?

3. Why the beat system is important in newsrooms?

4. What are the various important beats in a newsroom?

5. What are the challenges in beat reporting?

6. Why sources are important in beat reporting?

7. Why positive stories are important while initiating work on a new beat?

8. Why smart work is important while managing multiple beats?

9. What are the most important qualities of a beat reporter?

10. Why social media is important for a beat reporter?

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EOM/Nirupam

:: STRUCTURE::

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2.0 INTRODUCTION

If there is one beat that a newsroom cannot do away with, it is the crime beat. Crime stories are an integral part of the city coverage of any newsroom. Right from financial crimes to a murder in the neighbourhood and from the kidnapping of a city-based billionaire to the brutal rape of a college student, crime stories attract readers and there is no doubt in it. Similarly, courts play an important role in a democracy like India and are still trusted by citizens for dispute redressal. Therefore, stories from courts are also important for a newsroom. This unit will help you in

understanding the nitty-gritty of the crime and court beat and why it enjoys so-much importance in a newsroom.

2.1 OBJECTIVES

- Understand the concept of crime and court reporting
- Understand the importance of crime and court reporting in a newsroom
- The various sources of news for crime and court reporters
- Potential stories from the crime and court beats
- Understand the challenges in crime and court reporting

On completion of this unit

On completion of this unit, you will be able to understand:

- What encompasses the crime and court beat
- The importance of crime and court reporters in a newsroom
- Why people are interested in reading about crime and court stories
- The various sources that crime and court reporters have to tap to function in their respective beats
- The challenges in reporting about crimes and courts
- The potential stories that crime and court reporters usually generate from their beat

2.2 INTRODUCTION TO CRIME REPORTING

Crime beat is one of the most important beats in a newsroom. It is often divided among two or more reporters who are supposed to cover nothing, but crime. One of the factors due to which crime reporting gets prime importance in any newsroom is the newsworthiness of the stories.

Crime reporters are often called ‘police reporters’. However, the title is a misnomer as the responsibility of a crime reporter is not just to report on what the police are doing, but it encompasses all aspects associated with a crime—the police, the criminals, and the victims.

It should be also mentioned that investigative reporting is an integral part of crime reporting. A crime reporter is expected to visit the spot of the crime, talk to victims and eyewitnesses, talk to police for information regarding the probe, and then write the story covering all aspects. However, crime reporters these days are more dependent on the police for

getting the required information and it results in crime stories lacking depth and even the basic information.

In order to become a successful crime reporter, a reporter must learn how to develop sources in the police department at the administrative level as well as the ground level. He should have a working knowledge of the Indian Penal Code and other relevant laws. For example, when a reporter asks a police personnel regarding the charges levied on a crime accused in the FIR, the latter would tell only the sections under IPC. The reporter is expected to be aware of these sections so that he can ask any counter questions, if required.

A crime reporter is also supposed to understand the legalities involved in reporting a crime. For example, if there is a murder and the accused has been arrested by the police, the reporter should address him as “murder accused” in his story and not as a murderer. Unless, a court declares a person guilty of a crime, till then he is to be addressed as an accused.

Similarly, if a reporter is writing a story on rape, it must be ensured that the identity of the victim or its family is not revealed in any manner in the story. If there is a rape in a small village with just 50 families, the reporter should avoid writing the name of the village as there are chances that the victim or her family can be identified through the name of the village.

The crime reporter is also expected to cover major incidents that happen in a city on a given day such as fires and accidents. For example, in case if there is a fire in a hospital resulting in multiple deaths, the responsibility of filing the main incident copy lies with the crime reporter. Similarly, in case if there is a road accident resulting in multiple deaths, the story has to be filed by the crime reporter.

2.3 IMPORTANCE OF CRIME BEAT

The following are the factors that make crime reporting important for any newsroom:

1. People are interested in reading crime stories

One of the major factors that make the crime beat an indispensable part of any newsroom is that people are generally interested in reading crime stories. Be it a gruesome murder in broad daylight in a commercial area of the city or a businessman getting kidnapped, crime stories always have

readers from all age groups. Mostly readers try to find the answers to “why a crime has happened?” and “could it happen to me?” in crime stories.

For example, a girl getting kidnapped from outside her school and found dead two days later in a mysterious condition is a story that every parent would definitely read.

2. Creates awareness

Crime stories create awareness about the prevalent law and order situation in any area. These stories tell the readers about how laws are being violated, what the police (or any other law enforcement agency) are doing to tackle the situation, and the punishment that a crime accused is facing for committing the crime.

For example, the stories about traffic cops strictly implementing the new fines for violating rules under the amended Motor Vehicles Act created awareness among motorists in various cities of Gujarat. It was evident as there were long queues outside helmet shops and pollution under control certification centres.

3. Unusual crimes, revenge stories are a wonderful read

Unusual crimes and revenge stories always provide the right ingredients for a good crime story, which would appeal to the reader. However, the desk also has to play an important role in the same as the story needs to be given the right treatment and a headline that would attract the readers. A story about a father killing a daughter for marrying a man from a lower caste (honour killing) can certainly make it to the front page or can become the lead story of the city pages.

Similarly, a story about a psycho killer who targets young girls through their social media profile and who has so far killed five girls in the city, with the police clueless about the killer, can be a perfect story or a series of stories. This is because people would be interested in knowing about the investigation updates and whether the killer has been nabbed or not.

4. Adds a local or hyperlocal flavour to overall news coverage

While stories from other beats may have a statewide or countrywide impact or interest, crime reporting is perhaps one of the few beats that regularly generate stories at a local or hyperlocal level. These stories

attract the readers as the crimes being reported are happening in-and-around his city.

For example, a story on a certain policy of the state government, or a verdict delivered by the high court may have statewide implications and is not just limited to a city, whereas crime stories such as a murder or kidnapping are mostly local in nature.

5. Heinous crimes have national appeal

Heinous and barbaric crimes have the tendency to hit national headlines and it no longer remains a local crime story. Such crimes often result in mass outrage against the administration and eventually to a chaotic situation. The Nirbhaya gang rape case in the national capital is a perfect example of a local crime that resulted in mass outrage across the country.

6. Alerts the reader

There are several crime stories, including trend stories, being done by crime reporters on a routine basis that alerts the reader and make him aware of what to do to not fall in the trap of criminals. This is also relevant due to the fact that cybercrime and financial frauds are on the rise in the country.

For example, the Ahmedabad edition of The Times of India on November 15, 2019, carried a lead story package on helpline frauds with the headline, “Helpline fraud worrying cyber cell”.

The story reads as: “The menace of helpline fraud is growing by the day. As of now, more than 50 such unsuspecting callers have been cheated after calling fake helpline numbers they found via search engines. In such cases, a consumer seeking a solution searches for help on a search engine, but instead of help, he gets into more trouble. The cybercrime cell is putting all its efforts into catching these scamsters”.

The story not only explains the various cases of e-fraud that has come forth and the modus operandi of fraudsters to get users to part with critical bank and card information, but also alerts the readers on the mistakes that they should avoid.

2.7 Sources in crime reporting

Sources play an important role for a crime reporter and enable the latter in getting the right information at the right time that helps him to stay

ahead of the competition. A crime reporter has to have formal and informal sources at conventional and commonplaces of information such as police headquarters, district headquarters, hospital, mortuary, police stations, control room, etc.

In order to eliminate the risk of inaccuracy and write stories with all the required information, a crime reporter should make use of multiple sources for information gathering and for cross-checking any doubtful information. Following are the important sources of information for a crime reporter:

1. Police department

A crime reporter should always try to develop a wide network of sources in the police department across the hierarchy. It means that the reporter should be able to secure information from various sources in the police department ranging from a police commissioner to a constable. While the commissioner is the right person for getting quotes and comments, the investigation officer and its team entrusted in solving a case might be the best source for some inside information.

2. Press Conferences

In all major cities, the police department holds a daily press conference for the media where senior police officials brief the press about the major crimes reported in the city during the past 24 hours. The police department also provides the basic details about these crimes and what all action has been taken by the department. Reporters are also allowed to ask questions and clarify their doubts. This apart, press conferences are also held at police station level when the concerned police station has solved a major case or has averted a major crime. Also, special cells of the police department such as Anti-Terrorist Squad (ATS), Anti-Corruption Bureau (ACB) and cyber cell hold their separate press conferences to provide information and updates to the media.

3. Documents and reports

Documents and reports about crimes and annual crime statistics are one of the most trustworthy sources of information for a crime reporter. The police department regularly collates data regarding various crimes reported in a city during a particular period. This data, if accessed, can be a goldmine of stories. Also, crime reporters should keep a tab on the question and answers during a Parliamentary or Assembly session.

For example, the annual report on crimes in India published by the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) is usually considered a gold mine of stories for a crime reporter. Using the state-wise data and analysis of various crimes recorded during a period, a reporter can write analytical pieces on whether there is a rise or decline in crimes; which crimes have increased and by what percentage; the status of crime against women and children, etc. Similarly, the copy of an FIR registered in a crime is a crucial source for gathering its basic details.

4. Victims and eyewitnesses of crimes

Victims and eyewitnesses of crimes can also prove to be crucial sources for getting additional information for a crime reporter, which the police department may not be ready to reveal. The victims and eyewitnesses of a crime may reveal something extra to the crime reporter that will help him in writing an in-depth story with additional information. This additional information can act as a differentiator for a media house and can take the story forward.

For example, suppose there is a case of honour killing where a father has killed his daughter and her lover. While the police may treat it as a simple case of honour killing and most media houses may report the same, a crime reporter who took the extra effort to trace the family of the deceased man may find that the duo had already married last month and the girl was pregnant. This extra information will provide an edge to the media house against its competitors.

5. Experts, organisations

There are experts in various domains who work with the police department or render assistance to it in solving complicated crimes. For example, if there is a rise in online hacking cases, a crime reporter can actually talk to a cybercrime expert, or an ethical hacker, or a person associated with online security systems to write a trend story or an in-depth story. In case of murder, the forensic experts, or the doctor carrying out the post-mortem can reveal crucial information.

Similarly, there are organisations and NGOs which work in the field of human rights and against police brutality. These organisations can also provide information to a crime reporter regarding incidents of misuse of power by police, which the police department is never going to reveal.

For example, a custodial death took place in Ahmedabad's Bopal police station in 2018, in which a man was beaten to death by police personnel for suspected gold theft. As usual, the police department did not inform the press about the incident and it came to light much later. In fact, people started discussing the case only after the brother of the deceased with the help of an NGO moved the Gujarat High Court demanding a CID inquiry, which was allowed by the court. The court also pointed out several loopholes in the process adopted by the police in arresting the man that led to widespread criticism of the police department.

2.5 POTENTIAL STORIES IN CRIME REPORTING

The crime beat generates an array of stories that can be of interest to the readers. Right from routine crimes to unusual cases and from financial frauds to police brutalities, the crime beat can prove to be a goldmine of stories depending on how much hard work the reporter is ready to do to unearth these stories. Broadly, the various potential stories from crime reporting can be as follows:

1. Routine crime stories

There are several complaints that are registered in police stations within a city on a regular basis. Some of these complaints have the right ingredients to be turned into a story. However, most of the crimes are routine in nature and might not interest the reader to a great extent, unless the reporter finds an interesting angle or additional information to play the story. These stories are easier to get or develop as the primary information is provided by the police department.

For example, there is a complaint about the theft of Rs10,000 in a slum area. Is that interesting enough to be carried as news? The answer is, no. Similarly, a complaint regarding a burglary in a posh locality of the city can become news. However, if the reporter can find information such as the burglary happened in the society of the police commissioner or in an area that is stone throw away from a police station, then such a story can be played prominently.

2. Unusual crime stories

Unusual crime stories have very high newsworthiness resulting in higher readership than routine crime stories. However, it must be mentioned that the 'unusual' factor in a crime is often unearthed, when a reporter tries to collect as much information as possible by utilising various sources.

Suppose, there is a murder that has happened in the city in which a brother has killed his sister for having an affair with a man belonging to a different religion. While this may appear like a regular honour killing story, the reporter upon investigation finds that the brother had killed the woman by severing her head and came to the police station with the severed head and admitted his crime. Now, these details can be gory, but at the same time, it also makes it an ideal spine chilling crime story for the readers. All that is required to be done is the proper packaging of the story.

Similarly, the story about a man getting lynched to death due to a dispute over parking in a civic body run parking lot in a commercial area of the city is not an incident that happens daily. Such an incident will definitely interest the readers.

3. Cybercrimes and financial frauds

With the advent of technology, there is a rise in digital transactions in the country. However, there is a flip side to this development, which is the rise in financial frauds and cybercrimes. According to National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), cybercrimes in India have doubled in India in 2017 as compared to the preceding years. As per NCRB data, there were 21,796 cases of cybercrimes recorded in the country in 2017 as against 9,622, 11,592, and 12,317 cases in 2014, 2015, and 2016, respectively. So, cybercrimes and financial frauds are important areas for a crime reporter to dig deep and come out with excellent stories. For example, a senior police officer who falls prey to cybercriminals can be an interesting story.

4. Crimes involving well-known people

Crimes involving well-known people and celebrities are important for any news organisation. Even if the crime is a petty one, it will make it to newsrooms if it involves a well-known person from the city or a celebrity either as an accused or a victim. For example, if Salman Khan is even penalised for not wearing a seat belt, it becomes news. Similarly, a well-known doctor from the city getting cheated by fraudsters, or hackers hacking the website of the chief minister will definitely become news.

5. Trend stories

A crime reporter equipped with good observation skills can come up with excellent trend stories from the crime beat that are appealing to the

readers. This apart, he can refer to documents, presentations of the police department, white papers, and reports regarding periodic crime statistics, to write analytical and in-depth trend stories from the crime beat.

For example, if there are 10 burglaries that had happened in a particular area of the city in the past month, a reporter can write a trend story on rising cases of burglaries by referring to old data. Similarly, the annual report published by the NCRB can be a goldmine of information for writing trend stories and analytical stories on various categories of crimes.

2.6 INTRODUCTION TO COURT REPORTING

Courts have always remained a hub of news and therefore, the court beat is an integral part of the daily newsgathering activity for a media house. Depending on the size of the newsroom and the availability of reporters, two or more reporters can be assigned for the beat.

It is considered a challenging beat for a reporter as court proceedings and judgments are full of technicalities, legal jargons and run into hundreds of pages making it difficult to decipher; the litigants and their lawyers might not reveal any information to the media claiming that the matter is sub-judice; and there is no scope for committing an error or to exaggerate while reporting a case.

Courts can be divided into three categories—the lower courts, the high court, and the Supreme Court. Lower courts can be again divided into several categories such as the taluka courts, commercial courts, family courts, metropolitan courts, and the sessions or district courts. Every state has a high court which is its topmost court. All the high courts in the country come under the Supreme Court, which is situated in New Delhi.

A court reporter should first understand the hierarchy of the judicial system in the country and the jurisdiction of each court. This will help him in understanding which case is to be listed before which court. For example, if there is a defamation suit, it is going to be heard by the metropolitan court. However, if there is a murder case or any criminal case having a prescribed punishment of more than seven years, it is going to be heard by the sessions court, which is the top court in any district.

Similarly, there are certain powers given to the high court alone and therefore, certain cases are directly listed before a high court bypassing the lower court. For example, only the high court has the power to direct

the police for registration of an FIR or to set-aside an FIR. So, a citizen has to knock before the high court to get an FIR registered, if the police are not ready to do so, or to get an FIR removed. Also, a Public Interest Litigation (PIL) can be heard by the high court and then by the Supreme Court only. Lower courts have no jurisdiction over PILs.

Apart from understanding the hierarchy of the judiciary and the jurisdiction of each court, a reporter also needs to have a fair understanding of the criminal justice system and the knowledge of the commonly used legal terms. A reporter should understand how a trial proceeds, what is a prosecution, chargesheet, framing of charges, cross-examination, examination-in-chief, final argument, etc. This will clearly give an edge to a reporter who has just started working on the court beat.

In order to have a grip on the beat, a reporter is also expected to be aware of the legal developments in the country, which can help in striking a conversation with lawyers and court staff. This apart, he should be aware of some basic sections of the Indian Penal Code and Criminal Procedure Code. Overall, a court reporter needs to be a voracious reader who can decode lengthy and technical judgments and write stories based on them in the simplest way possible.

2.7 IMPORTANCE OF COURT BEAT

Judiciary, being the fourth pillar of democracy, plays an important role in a country like India. People may lose their faith in the government or its systems, but it is the court that gives a common citizen the power and platform to fight back injustice by the government, or its diktat and policies. It is also the court that decides whether an accused is guilty of a crime and the quantum of punishment that is to be awarded to a guilty person.

Following factors make court beat very important for a newsroom:

1. Courts protect our constitutional rights

Courts are perceived as the protector of constitutional and human rights of people. It ensures that injustice is not meted out to any citizen of the country irrespective of his or her caste, creed, religion, sex, etc. Governments, at times, have come up with legislations that are contrary to the Constitution and eventually, the legislation, upon being challenged, has been struck down by courts. Citizens must be aware of such developments. For example, a five-judge bench of the Supreme Court on

September 26, 2018, ruled that Aadhaar was constitutional, but making it mandatory for availing government services was unconstitutional.

2. Court judgments have widespread ramifications

The verdicts delivered by the high court and Supreme Court have widespread ramifications and therefore, it is an essential responsibility of the media to explain citizens about the implications of a court's verdict. The judgments, at times, are against social conventions. For example, the Supreme Court in 2018 lifted the ban on the entry of women aged between 10 and 50 years from entering inside the Sabarimala Temple. The Supreme Court held that devotion cannot be subjected to gender discrimination.

3. People are interested in litigations related to high profile celebrities

Common citizens are interested in reading about the routine updates related to litigations involving high profile personalities such as movie stars, politicians, businessmen, etc. For example, the court proceedings in the trial of actor Salman Khan in the hit-and-run case were widely reported by all media organisations. Similarly, the Sahara India Parivar investor fraud case was also regularly reported by the media in which Sahara group chief Subrata Roy was put behind bars.

4. PILs, suo motu cases interest readers

Courts often take up cases on their own which are of people's interest through suo motu petitions. This apart, high court and the Supreme Court hear cases known as public interest litigations (PILs) in which issues affecting the people at large are raised. For example, a PIL on the poor condition of roads in a city and the court lambasting the authorities for the same is definitely worth reporting. Similarly, if the court takes suo motu cognizance on a media report on shortage of ICU facilities in state-run hospitals resulting in death of critical patients, it is certainly worth reporting.

5. Courts break social conventions

Courts have often delivered landmark verdicts by breaking social conventions. Therefore, such developments need to be reported by media organisations. For example, the Supreme Court in September 2018 decriminalised gay sex holding that consensual sex between two adults was covered under the right to privacy. Similarly, the Supreme Court in

2018 held that adultery is no longer a crime, but if it leads to someone committing suicide, the act will be treated as an abetment to suicide.

2.8 SOURCES IN COURT REPORTING

Unlike other beats, developing and maintaining sources in the court beat is a bit tricky and as one gains experience, it becomes easier to connect with people and get information from them. Following are the sources for a court reporter:

1. Litigants

Litigants are the primary source for accessing information regarding a case. They may provide information which is not trustworthy to report, but the basic information about the case can be accessed from a litigant.

2. Petition memo

A petition memo is a document filed by the petitioner/s that contains all the information related to the case—identity of the petitioner/s, chronology of events, legal arguments raised by the petitioner/s, and prayers sought by the petitioner/s. A petition memo is the most trustworthy document to depend upon for understanding a case.

3. Lawyers

Lawyers are one of the crucial sources for a court reporter and the success of a court reporter depends upon the network of lawyers who feed information to the reporter. Every case has lawyer/s who appears for the petitioner and lawyer/s who appear for the respondents. It is always a good idea to clear any doubt from the lawyers concerned with the case before writing a story on the same.

4. Lawyers representing the government

It is a known fact that the government is the biggest litigant in courts and every courtroom has at least one dedicated lawyer who represents the government. Right from the advocate general (the topmost law officer of the state government) to solicitor general (the topmost law officer of the Union government) and from government pleader to public prosecutor, government lawyers are an important and crucial source of information in the daily newsgathering process. Government lawyers have access to all the documents associated with a case they are handling and a good rapport with them can be beneficial for a reporter.

5. Court staff and registry officials

Every courtroom has a court master who has access to all the cases listed in a particular court on a given day. Also, they have access to the judgments delivered by a bench. This apart, court masters along with officials of the registry can provide administrative details about a particular court that can be useful in writing stories. For example, a court reporter can do a story about the pendency of cases in the state for which he will have to seek information from the registrar general of the high court, who is the custodian of all the administrative information and data related to all the courts in the state.

6. Court website, law journals, and legal websites

A court reporter is supposed to regularly check the court website to access new judgments delivered by the court as well as associated news and updates. Similarly, law journals and legal websites are also important resources from which a reporter can update his knowledge of the legal domain.

2.9 POTENTIAL STORIES IN COURT REPORTING

The court beat is a hotbed for a variety of stories ranging from criminal trials, public interest litigations, intellectual property issues, corporate disputes, and petitions challenging the constitutional validity of government orders among others. The following can be potential stories for a court reporter:

1. Criminal trials

Trials, especially in cases involving a major crime, can be newsworthy and is a fit subject for regular reporting. The trial becomes important as people are interested to know the fate of the accused in the case. For example, the trial of Patidar Anamat Andolan Samiti leader Hardik Patel in the sedition case for the PAAS agitation in Ahmedabad in 2015 that resulted in widespread violence and deaths has always remained in the limelight.

2. Court proceedings and judgments in major cases

Court proceedings and judgments in major cases are important for a court reporter due to the interest of people in such cases. For example, multiple petitions were filed in the Gujarat High Court against the proposed

acquisition of land by the state government for the ambitious bullet train project. Court reporters during the marathon hearing of the case that continued for days used to regularly report about the day's proceedings in the case as people are interested to know what the various stakeholders in the project argued before the court. Similarly, when the verdict in the cases was delivered in September 2019, it was widely reported by all media houses.

3. Cases involving celebrities

Cases involving celebrities are always a potential story for the court reporter. Even if it is a petty case, it will be of readers' interest. For example, the drink and drive case involving actor Salman Khan, or the petition filed by actor Amir Khan for quashing of an FIR registered against him for shooting a blackbuck in Gujarat during the shooting of his movie Lagaan.

4. Administrative decisions

Administrative decisions of the high courts and the Supreme Court can also become a matter of public debate and therefore, they are important for a court reporter. For example, the Supreme Court collegium had to often face criticism for bowing down before the government pressure in matters related to the transfer of judges and elevation of lawyers as judges. Similarly, a high court's decision to elevate some lawyers as senior advocates can become a bone of contention in the legal fraternity. Also, a reporter can do an analytical story about judicial vacancies in the state and the pendency of cases.

5. Unusual cases

A court reporter in his career will definitely stumble upon several unusual cases that come before the court for adjudication. Such cases always hit headlines. For example, a Russian woman had to approach the Gujarat High Court for getting a visa from Indian authorities to return to her country so that she can take care of her minor daughter. When the court started hearing the case in 2019, it was found that the woman had entered the country without legal documents. However, after several twists and turns, the woman was eventually allowed to return to her country after she gave an undertaking that she would never re-enter India without proper documentation.

6. Family, marital disputes

While family disputes or marital disputes are personal issues, a reporter can find some of the best human interest stories from family courts. For example, a judge acting as an agony aunt and solving the marital discord between a couple which had approached the court for a divorce. Similarly, a story on a family court in Ahmedabad asking an industrialist to pay Rs 200 crore to his wife as one-time settlement for divorce in October 2018 had hit the national headlines.

2.10 CONCLUSION: CRIME AND COURT BEATS A CRUCIAL PART OF THE NEWSROOM

There is no doubt that crime and court reporting are a crucial part of any newsroom. Both these beats are connected as after a crime takes place and the police investigate the matter, it eventually reaches the court which decides whether the accused has committed a crime or not. Similarly, a crime reporter is expected to know the legal implications while reporting a crime. Usually, there are different reporters covering the court and crime beats, but since both are connected, it is essential that they maintain coordination among them to stay ahead of the competition and to avoid missing an important update.

2.11 LET US SUM IT UP

The unit must have helped you in understanding:

- The basics of crime and court reporting
- The reasons behind the importance enjoyed by crime and court reporters
- The important sources of information for crime and court reporter
- The potential stories generated by crime and court reporters
- The challenges faced by crime and court reporters

2.12 KEYWORDS

Police reporter	A misnomer used for crime reporters
Investigative reporting	A reporting style where a reporter investigates an issue and dig out hidden information.
IPC	IPC stands for the Indian Penal Code. It is the official criminal code of India.
PIL	PIL stands for Public Interest Litigation.

Suo motu case

These are litigations raised by common people on issues affecting the citizens such as poor road conditions, lack of health infrastructure in government hospitals, etc. A case initiated by the court based on certain documents.

2.13 CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Questions

1. Why crime reporters are called ‘police reporters’?

2. Why investigative reporting is an integral part of crime reporting?

3. Why crime reporting is essential for a newsroom?

4. What are the important sources of news for a crime reporter?

5. How can a crime reporter identify crime trends?

6. Why the court beat is a challenge for a reporter?

7. What are the various categories of courts?

8. Why the court beat is important for a newsroom?

9. Why citizens are interested in PILs and suo motu cases?

10. What are the various sources of information for a court reporter?

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3.0 INTRODUCTION

Political and government secretariat reporting is one of the most important beats in a newsroom for various reasons. This unit discusses in detail about what all encompasses these beats, the sources that a reporter has to tap, and the qualities that he needs to develop in order to excel in his beat. Since covering elections as well as Assembly and Parliamentary proceedings are integral job responsibilities of a political reporter, the chapter also discusses these aspects in detail. This part, the unit also

explains the various challenges faced by political reporters and their fight with allegations of biases and prejudice among other important things.

3.1 OBJECTIVES

- Understand the concept of political and government secretariat reporting
- Understand the importance of political and government secretariat reporting
- Understand the importance of sources in political and government secretariat reporting
- Learn how to initiate work in political reporting and develop the qualities required for the beat
- Understand how to cover elections, Parliament and Assembly proceedings

On completion of this unit

- On completion of this unit, you will be able to understand:
- Concept of political and government secretariat reporting
- Why political beat enjoys so-much importance in newsrooms
- How to start working on the political beat
- How to cover elections, Assembly proceedings, and Parliamentary proceedings
- Various sources that a political reporter has to tap in his beat

3.2 INTRODUCTION TO POLITICAL REPORTING

Political reporting is a branch of journalism that encompasses the coverage of all aspects of politics and political science. However, the term usually refers specifically to the coverage of civil governments and political powers. It is one of the most crucial beats in a newsroom and no media organisation can run the risk of not having a political reporter.

This is because politics is deep-rooted in Indian society. Right from the rise in prices of onions to economic or social development policies of the government, there is politics involved and people are eager to read about it. Also, India is a democratic country with the Constitution empowering citizens with freedom of speech and expression. Because of the vast and complex polity of the country, there is some election happening at someplace round the year across the country and elections are a hotbed of political journalism.

So many elections and a strong democratic process naturally generate people's interest in politics. People want to know about the various political developments right from what is happening in the local civic body to the developments in the Indian Parliament. It is evident as all media organisations produce a plethora of political stories on a daily basis.

The job of a political reporter is not easy and one needs to develop several crucial skills to become a successful political reporter. It includes a thorough understanding of the Indian Constitution, history and evolution of the country and political parties, political realities of the state and the country, and a wide network of sources across the political hierarchy. Because of the skills and understanding required for political journalism, it is usually allotted to a seasoned reporter who has the right temperament and skills to do justice to the beat. The political beat is never allotted to freshers and entry-level journalists.

Political journalists aim to provide citizens with the right information to ensure that they formulate their own opinion on issues of local and national importance affecting them and participate in the nation-building process through voting. In their endeavour to serve the people with the right information on political developments, a political reporter is supposed to stick to objectivity—the pillar of good journalism. However, the irony is that the majority of the political journalists lose objectivity in reporting political developments and start taking sides or opionate the stories. This results in biased reporting.

For example, if a reporter covering the ruling party is doing a story on certain government policy and takes the view of the concerned minister or leaders from the ruling party, no one is going to criticise the policy. Instead, all of them will try to project the positives of the policy decision. This will result in a biased story that might not reflect the real impact that the policy decision will have on people. Reporting such stories with a biased viewpoint restricts the citizens from developing their own opinion on the policy based on the correct facts. Instead, the political reporter influences the readers to form an opinion based on a one-sided fact.

3.3 IMPORTANCE OF POLITICAL REPORTING

Political reporting plays a crucial role in any newsroom across the country. Following are the factors that make political reporting important:

1. Creates awareness on political developments

Political reporting is the only way out to provide citizens with various political developments in the country. There can be a local issue that can snowball into a major controversy and hit the national headlines. Such developments are often associated with politics. For example, Bharatiya Janta Party's Member of Parliament Pragya Thakur's controversial statements on Nathuram Godse and Mahatma Gandhi have often resulted in a major controversy in 2018 and 2019, with the parliamentarian eventually forced to tender an apology in Lok Sabha. Similarly, former Congress president Rahul Gandhi's controversial jibes on Prime Minister Narendra Modi during the run-up for the 2019 general elections also resulted in major controversy and several cases were filed against the Gandhi scion.

2. Forms opinion of citizens on various important issues

Political reporters are crucial to form or mold or change the opinion of citizens on various important aspects being discussed in society. It is because political reporting often lacks objectivity and end up becoming political propaganda. Whether it is right or wrong is debatable, but political stories by media houses play a crucial role in shaping the opinion of citizens on important subjects. For example, the ruling BJP abrogated Article 370 providing special status to Jammu and Kashmir in August 2019. It was a major political development and lead to a huge uproar in the country with people debating for and against the move. However, it was a highly technical and legal issue, but the majority of the people formed their opinion on the move based on the political stories reported in various mediums.

3. Politics play a crucial role in international relations

Internal politics of a country plays a crucial role in defining the government's stand on the relationship with other countries. The repeated hammering of stories done by political reporters can force a government to take major decisions affecting diplomatic relationships with other countries. At the same time, political stories create awareness on why the government has taken a certain decision with respect to a neighbouring country. For example, anti-China sentiments in the country have often forced the government to increase anti-dumping duty on Chinese goods. Similarly, the hot and cold relationship with Pakistan has forced the Indian government to impose trade restrictions on the neighbouring country.

3.4 SOURCES IN POLITICAL REPORTING

Depending on the size of the newsroom, there can be one or more reporters who are assigned to take care of the political news coverage. Usually, one of the reporters is assigned the ruling party, while the other one is assigned the opposition parties. There can be an array of sources for political journalists. However, he must tread carefully as some of these sources, especially politicians, can be misleading at times that could result in giving a wrong spin to a story or development. Therefore, it is always essential to check and crosscheck the information provided by political sources before doing a story. A political reporter can use the following sources to gather information:

1. Media/PR wing of political parties

With the changing times, most political parties in a bid to propagate their views on subjects of political importance have come up with a media or public relations wing. The objective of this wing is to maintain liaison with journalists from various media organisations and take care of their queries. The media wing plays a crucial role as they often help a journalist to develop contacts in the political party. A journalist who has just started working on the political beat is supposed to get his contact details registered with the media wing so that he starts getting official information from the concerned political party.

2. Party spokespersons

It is well known that a news story should be supplemented with quotes and comments of people associated with the development to increase its credibility. Every political party has designated spokespersons who are supposed to take media queries and comment on issues related to the party or its stand on a subject of political or national importance. Party spokespersons are usually accessible to journalists and a political reporter should try to maintain good rapport with these spokespersons. For example, if a politician of a certain party has made a derogatory statement on women and is not returning the calls of a journalist, the latter can approach that party's spokesperson and take his view on the issue, which in most cases can be construed as the party's view.

3. Press release and press conferences

Press release and press conferences are two official modes for a political party to propagate its views. While the former is a one-way

communication by which the political party informs the media about a development, changes in political leadership, or clarifies its take on subjects of political importance, a press conference, usually, provides an opportunity to a journalist to ask questions. A press conference is usually organised by a political party to deal with important (read newsworthy) subjects. It also provides an opportunity for the journalist to interact with senior leaders who address the press conferences and develop a rapport with them.

4. Office bearers of political parties

The office-bearers of political parties are an important source of information for a journalist. These office bearers, especially those sitting on top of the hierarchy, are also the newsmakers and political journalists are supposed to maintain a good rapport with these politicians for exclusive news and developments from the beat. For example, maintaining a good relationship with BJP and Congress' national and state presidents can always help a journalist in doing better and credible stories related to these parties.

5. Social media

In this era of social media, it is essential for a political journalist to track the timelines of political parties and leaders on social media websites such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. All major political parties and their leaders maintain their social media accounts and regularly update them. Political leaders are quick to comment on news developments related to governance, public policies, and issues of national and political importance. These comments often become a source of news. For example, the reaction and comments of top politicians of the country on abrogation of Article 370 from Jammu and Kashmir on social media websites fed the national headlines of newspapers and news channels for a considerable period of time. Similarly, the reaction of politicians on the Citizens Amendment Act and the National Register of Citizens on Twitter and Facebook became an important source of information for a political journalist for writing news stories.

3.5 INITIATING WORK ON POLITICAL REPORTING

Political reporting is one of the beats which are never assigned to a novice. It is always assigned to seasoned journalists who are mature enough to deal with the intricacies of the political beat, have a clear understanding of the political scenario in the country and the state, and

enjoy a wide network of sources. In other words, a journalist who has been newly assigned the political beat is well aware of the basics.

In order to initiate work in the political reporting domain, a journalist needs to read about the political stories that have been published in the last six months. This will provide the reporter a much-required heads-up on what are the developments and issues in the beat that had been already reported. Through this exercise, the reporter will also identify issues where there is a possibility of a follow-up.

After this exercise is over, a reporter is supposed to visit the headquarters of the political parties in the city and get in touch with the media wing of these political parties to ensure that he starts receiving the press releases and invites for press conferences. In this way, the reporter can secure information related to routine news developments. Also, the reporter should try to meet as many office-bearers of the party as possible and exchange numbers.

Since one of the major pitfalls of political reporting is biased coverage, a political reporter should always try to balance political stories by taking counter comments from a rival party or people closely associated with a certain development. For example, if the ruling political party is claiming that its welfare schemes related to farmers is one of the best in the country and has greatly facilitated the distressed farmers, a political reporter should take views from the opposition and also from farmers' organisations.

Like any other beat, it is imperative that a political reporter needs to develop a wide range of sources for information and tip-offs. He must understand that right from the tea vendor selling tea at the party office to the peons and from the local councillor to the party president can become a tentative source for information. A political reporter should definitely stay in touch with the party spokespersons for the party's official stand on issues.

Also, a political reporter needs to follow the social media accounts of the political parties and its leaders for any newsworthy development. Interestingly, over the past few years, it has been noticed that politicians prefer to clarify their stand on political subjects and issues of governance on their social media accounts so that it directly reaches to his or her followers.

This apart, a political journalist should also try to cover the various events, rallies and, press conferences organised by the party. This will help the journalist in connecting with more people, which will help him in writing stories that have a ground connect. For example, if the state government has introduced stringent fines for parking violations and the opposition parties are organising a rally against it, then a journalist should definitely attend those rallies to understand the counter view of people opposing the stringent fines and the grounds for the same. People participating in the rally might be opposing on the ground that the government has not made provisions for parking at major thoroughfares before implementing the stringent fines. This will help the political reporter in writing an in-depth story on the issue.

3.6 TOP 10 TIPS FOR POLITICAL REPORTERS

While it is true that a reporter can develop his grasp over the political beat with time, there are certain attributes that a political reporter should develop to do his job in the best possible manner. According to British Broadcasting Corporation's (BBC) political reporter Adam Fleming, a political reporter needs to develop the following traits:

1. Be a good listener

Often politicians will give away things in subtle ways. So, one needs to listen very carefully to the words they use. They very rarely say: "Listen to this next bit of my interview because I am about to tell you that I disagree with the Prime Minister." It is for the reporter to spot it and accordingly frame his next questions.

2. Have a good memory

If a political reporter hears an interesting fact that might not be totally relevant to the story he is working on at that moment, he should make an effort to remember it because it might come in handy while planning future stories. A reporter should always try to jot down things in his notepad.

3. Learn the lingo

Politics is full of weird words. A reporter should take his time to learn what a "second reading" is or what a "whip" does or the job of a "select committee". It will make him sound smart during interactions and will also make things seem less scary.

4. Be wary of numbers

When a reporter starts to hear statistics and data, he should be able to analyse it in his mind and start asking questions because numbers can be manipulated. For example, a politician might say "We are spending so many billion pounds on this." OK, but over how many years? Spread over how many places and people? Is this new money or the government has already promised to spend it?

5. Don't be worried if you don't feel like an expert

If a political reporter feels intimidated by people who know more about a subject than him, rather than getting tensed, he should ask lots of questions and find things out. Although, it helps to know a bit!

6. Try to get a straight answer

Politicians love talking, but at times, they keep on beating around the bush and refrain from giving straightforward answers. Senior and seasoned politicians are tough nuts to crack and might not utter something that might leave the party embarrassed, even if they do not agree to the official stand of the party on a particular subject. Therefore, a political reporter should try his best to get straightforward answers from a politician by framing his questions intelligently and should not shy away from asking questions that the politician is trying to dodge.

7. Be polite

A political reporter or a senior journalist can be a big name in the media industry and there are interviews of politicians done by them in which politicians really had to face some tough questions. However, one needs to keep in mind the difference between tough questions and rude ones. A political journalist should always be polite in nature. There can be aggression in the stories done by a political reporter, but certainly not in his behaviour.

8. Spot a change

It is often said politicians change with seasons. A reporter must keep in mind what a politician is saying now vis-à-vis what he had said in the past. These comparisons can often result in interesting stories which analyse why the politician has changed his opinion. Often such contrasting views could mean that the politician is on his way out to join some other party as defections in politics are very common.

9. Watch lots of news

For a political reporter, it is essential to know what a politician is saying before television cameras and to rival media organisations. He should be well aware of what is happening in the country and its impact on the state. Therefore, a political reporter is supposed to be well aware of news developments.

10. Maintain objectivity

Although it is difficult to maintain objectivity in political reporting, a reporter must always try to achieve it. He should refrain from writing a story mixed with his own opinions on the subject. Also, a political reporter might agree to the view of a certain political party on a particular subject, but that should not reflect in his writing. He should always try to take counter views and provide a 360-degree view of the subject.

3.7 COVERING ELECTIONS

Elections are a crucial part of any democracy and when it comes to India—the largest democracy in the world—there is always an election happening somewhere. Right from the Parliamentary Elections to Assembly polls and from urban local body (ULB) elections to polls for Panchayat Raj institutions, elections are always a hotbed for stories for political reporters. It is also a time when political reporters are busiest as they are expected to come up with more and more stories.

There is no set formula for covering an election. This is primarily because each election is different and fought on different issues in different geographies. For example, the issues raised by political parties during the general election will be different for an underdeveloped village in a tribal district of Uttar Pradesh and for the metropolitan area of Mumbai. Similarly, the mentality of voters differs from state-to-state and political parties tweak their poll campaigns considering this factor. For example, caste can be a major factor for elections in Uttar Pradesh or Madhya Pradesh but is a non-factor in West Bengal where voters are polarised on party lines.

Therefore, it is essential for a political reporter to understand the ground realities while covering different elections in different geographies within the country. This understanding can be developed by reading more and more stories on local politics in the area going to polls. This is a must exercise before venturing out to cover elections.

There are certain things that a reporter should be well-aware of before covering elections. One of them is the understanding of the democratic structure of the country and how governments are elected. The second is the knowledge about the Election Commission of India and state election commissions and their respective roles in conducting various elections in the country.

This apart, a political reporter covering elections should tap his 'highly placed' sources in the political parties to know who all are expected to get tickets for elections and which leaders are going to be rested. The stories on these issues are to be done before the starting date of filing nominations by-poll candidates. Once the date for filing nominations is over, a reporter can do the profiling of all the candidates who are contesting major constituencies with the help of the poll affidavit filed by the respective candidates. The poll affidavits are made available online by the Election Commission.

A political reporter is also expected to go through the election manifesto of major parties launched for the present election and he should also do a review of the poll promises made by the parties during the previous election and whether it has been fulfilled or not. Such stories are often an interesting read for the voters to ascertain whether the party in power has fulfilled the poll promises or not.

Similarly, polling campaigns are also an integral part of the election coverage, especially when a high profile leader or a star campaigner is going to address an election rally. Often, these rallies end up hitting the national headlines for the statements made by the senior party leaders and star campaigners.

For example, if the Prime Minister is going to address a poll rally for a particular candidate in a particular state, a political reporter working in that geography, or otherwise assigned to cover it, should definitely try to remain physically present in the rally. The reporter should also record the entire speech of the Prime Minister or top leaders so as to avoid any mistake while writing a story, especially when the former has made any controversial statement.

In all, a political reporter is expected to keep his eyes and ears open and try to come up with the best possible poll coverage by giving interesting twists and turns to stories through hard work and application of the brain.

3.8 COVERING PARLIAMENT AND ASSEMBLY SESSIONS

Political reporters are often assigned the job of covering Parliament and Assembly sessions, which can be a herculean task in itself. The Indian Parliament is composed of Lok Sabha (House of People) and Rajya Sabha (Council of States). The concerned reporter is supposed to keep a tab on the various discussions and debates that take place there and report on the same.

While the job may sound easy, it is certainly not because often the Parliament or Assembly sessions are long and there are chances that a reporter can get bored and lose concentration. This can lead to a situation where the reporter can miss out on a major development, whereas the same becomes the headline on the front page of a rival newspaper. This apart, a reporter should also have considerably better skills in taking notes because mistakes in stories from Parliament and Assemblies can cost the newspaper dearly.

A reporter should also remember the name and faces of all the representatives of people taking part in the session and at the same time should be well aware of the issues that are being discussed during the session. For example, the discussion could be on farmer suicides with the state/central government enumerating the steps taken by it to assist the farmers in distress. Suddenly, the opposition comes up with a government report (which the government was hiding) that provides that farmers' suicide has increased in the country by 50 per cent. This certainly can hit the national headlines. However, an inattentive reporter may miss out on this development.

This apart, a reporter should be also well aware of the legalities in house reporting, the etiquette and norms he should follow, and the various processes and procedures undertaken by the house. He should understand what is a "whip" or a "zero hour". These terms might baffle initially, but a reporter will come to know about these terms with time and experience.

For a reporter covering the Parliament or Assembly sessions, it is essential to understand the process of how bills are tabled, passed, and enacted. He should be also well aware of the strength of ruling and opposition parties in the Lok Sabha, Rajya Sabha, and Assembly. The reporter shall also keep a tab on the website of Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha where all the questions raised by the MPs and the answers

provided by the concerned minister are made available. It is one of the best and authentic sources for securing data for writing analytical stories on issues affecting the country.

He should also try to connect with political leaders outside the house to do exclusive stories based on the information made available to him. For example, if a leader from the opposition party argues on a certain subject by referring to a particular report, a journalist can approach the leader to access the report and file a detailed story.

There are basically three sessions in the Indian Parliament—the budget session, monsoon session, and the winter session. The joint session of Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha is addressed by the President.

3.9 GOVERNMENT SECRETARIAT REPORTING

One of the most important avenues of news for any news organisation is government secretariat reporting. It is one of the few areas that no news organisation can ignore and depending on the strength of the newsroom, one or more reporters are usually assigned to cover government secretariat. Unlike other beats, a less experienced journalist will never be asked to cover government secretariat and it is usually assigned to a senior journalist, who is well aware of the political and social scenario in the state.

In the case of the union government, the cabinet secretariat is responsible for facilitating the smooth transactions of business in ministries and departments of the government. The secretariat provides secretarial assistance to the cabinet and its committees, and also assists in decision-making in the government by ensuring inter-ministerial coordination, ironing out differences amongst ministries and evolving consensus through the instrumentality of the standing/ad-hoc committees of secretaries. Through this mechanism, new policy initiatives are also promoted.

The cabinet secretariat headed by the cabinet secretary keeps the President, Vice-President, and the ministers, informed about various developments in the union ministries. It also helps in managing crisis situations in the country and coordinating activities of the ministries in such a situation. The cabinet secretariat works directly under the Prime Minister. (*Source: Official website of cabinet secretariat <https://cabsec.gov.in/>*)

In the case of the state government, it is the chief secretary who is the head of bureaucracy in the state and attains the role of the cabinet secretary. The chief secretary works directly under the Chief Minister and plays a crucial role in assisting the government in taking policy decisions. He also ensures coordination among various departments of the state government, which essentially forms the state secretariat.

In the state secretariat, the various departments are headed by principal secretaries, which are essentially Indian Administrative Services (IAS) officers. Under the principal secretaries, there are deputy secretaries who are responsible for the day-to-day functioning of the department. Each deputy secretary, who is usually a state administrative services officer, is assigned a specific area under the department to look after and reports to the principal secretary.

A variety of stories are generated by reporters covering government secretariat which includes development projects being planned or executed in the state, policy decisions affecting citizens, cabinet and bureaucratic reshuffle, political developments, urban development issues, health emergencies, etc. Most of the stories generated from government secretariat are important because the stories are relevant to the entire state and affect the lives of citizens.

For example, the Central Government came up with an amendment in the Motor Vehicles Act in 2019 and considerably increased the penalties for traffic rule violations. However, the Gujarat government, owing to the pressure of citizens unhappy with the hefty fines, decided to reduce the penalty to half. Similarly, it also decided to make use of helmets in areas under urban local bodies voluntary. Both these decisions are important for the citizens and therefore, it is essential for media organisations to report on these developments.

3.10 INITIATING WORK IN GOVERNMENT SECRETARIAT REPORTING

A reporter entrusted with the responsibility of government secretariat reporting should read stories related to governance, politics, and policies, etc, before he ventures into the field. He should have a clear idea about how the bureaucratic and political structure works in tandem in the state. The reading of old stories will also help the reporter in identifying issues that were reported in the past and where there is a possibility of a follow-up story.

For union government, usually, media organisations appoint reporters who are entrusted to cover a bunch of ministries. On the contrary, a reporter covering the state secretariat is expected to cover all the government departments.

A reporter initiating work in a state secretariat or a government ministry can adopt a top-down or bottom-up approach in developing sources. The top-down approach means the reporter will try to connect with the principal secretary first and then go down the hierarchy, whereas in bottom-up approach, a reporter will initiate from the bottom of the hierarchy and eventually go up the order. Both approaches have their own pros and cons and may or may not work in all situations.

Generally, a reporter apart from introducing himself to senior officials in the state departments and union ministries should also have a clear agenda in mind while meeting them. A reporter should ask questions related to projects, any upcoming policy, the status of ongoing development projects, etc while meeting officials. These officials are always busy and striking a good relationship and staying in touch with them will help the reporter in the long-run in excelling in the beat.

Such a reporter should also register his contacts with the information department of the government and regularly monitor the websites of various departments of the state government to secure regular updates about various activities of the state government. Another important source of information for a journalist in secretariat reporting is to keep a tab on the social media accounts of the cabinet ministers and the principal secretaries.

A reporter should keep in mind that bureaucrats, especially senior ones, are sharp enough not to reveal information to the media that shows their department or the government in a bad light. It is usually the middle and lower-rung officials who reveal crucial information about government initiatives based on the actual ground reality. These officials also handle several important documents and data that will considerably help the reporter in filing an analytical story on government projects, initiatives, and policy decisions.

For example, a state government may come up with a policy to further strengthen institutional deliveries in the state. However, a government press release will never reveal that the decision was taken as the state fares at the bottom when it comes to maternal mortality and infant mortality in the state. A reporter will have to gather this information from

his sources in the health department by asking the relevant questions on the issue.

A reporter covering the state secretariat should keep his own biases out while reporting on issues and should refrain from becoming a public relations agent of the government. In fact, such a reporter should never accept anything on face value and try to go deeper into the subject in order to write good stories. He should maintain objectivity and try to include the counter view of politicians and civil society against government initiatives or claims.

3.11 CONCLUSION: POLITICS IS A DIFFICULT BEAT THAT CAN BE MASTERED OVER TIME

Unlike other beats, the political beat is a comparatively difficult beat that needs a lot of hard work, solid networking, and the right attitude. There are several factors that make the job of a political reporter a challenging one, but with the right skill set, an experienced reporter can gain mastery over this beat. However, one of the biggest challenges a political reporter faces is allegations of biases and prejudice. These are areas where a political reporter is supposed to work hard right from the beginning so that he does not deviate from the path of objectivity in his reporting.

3.12 LET US SUM IT UP

This unit must have helped you in understanding:

- What is political and government secretariat reporting
- Why it is important for newsrooms
- What are the sources of information for a political and secretariat reporter
- What qualities a political reporter needs to develop
- How to cover elections and Assembly and Parliamentary proceedings

3.13 KEYWORDS

ULB	It means Urban Local Body such as a municipality or a municipal corporation.
Whip	A whip is an official of a political party whose task is to ensure party discipline in a legislature
Legislative Assembly	It is the legislative body of elected representatives of people (MLAs) in states.
Top-down approach	Top-down approach means the reporter will first try to connect with the head of the department or organisation and then go down the hierarchy.
Bottom-up approach	In bottom-up approach, a reporter will initiate work of developing sources from the bottom of the hierarchy and eventually go up the order.

3.14 CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Questions

1. What is political reporting?

2. Why people are interested in political news?

3. What are the crucial skills that a political reporter needs to develop?

4. What are the important sources for a political reporter?

5. Why learning political lingo is important for a political reporter?

6. Why there is no set formula for covering elections?

7. What is top-down and bottom-up approach in developing sources?

8. Why the quality to spot a change is essential for political reporters?

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:: STRUCTURE::**4.0 Introduction****4.1 Objectives****4.2 Civic reporting****4.3 Importance of Civic Beat****4.4 Source of Civic Beat****4.5 Initiating work in the civic Beat****4.6 Introduction to infrastructure reporting****4.7 News sources in infrastructure reporting****4.8 Initiating work in infrastructure beat****4.9 Conclusion: Citizens enjoy stories on city's development****4.10 Let us sum it up****4.11 Keywords****4.12 Check Your Progress****4.13 References**

4.0 INTRODUCTION

With cities growing at a fast pace and the union government's renewed focus on improving the state of infrastructure in urban areas, the importance of the civic and infrastructure beat has increased manifold. There is no doubt that people are interested in reading stories about developments in their own city more than what is happening in other states. Therefore, these two beats end up being a crucial part of any newsroom. This beat also exposes a reporter to so many other aspects such as how to handle bureaucrats, understand city-level politics, and

learn how a city is administered by the civic authorities. This unit discusses in detail the various aspects of civic and infrastructure beat from a reporter's perspective.

4.1 OBJECTIVES

- Understand the concept of civic and infrastructure reporting
- Understand the importance of civic and infrastructure reporting
- Understand the various important sources of information on civic and infrastructure reporting
- Understand how to initiate work in the civic beat
- Understand the challenges faced by civic reporters

On completion of this unit

On completion of this unit, you will be able to understand:

- What encompasses the civic and infrastructure beat
- What are some of the potential stories that can be done from this beat
- Why civic and infrastructure stories are liked by the audience
- What are the most important sources of information for a civic and infrastructure reporter
- How to initiate work on the civic beat

4.2 CIVIC REPORTING

If there is a beat in the newsroom that has a direct and palpable connection with the citizens, it is the civic beat. Civic beat, generally, encompasses the coverage of issues and situations that affect the daily life of citizens. Right from the pothole-riddled road to a poorly maintained park and from traffic snarls to disruption in water supply, a civic reporter is expected to cover a wide gamut of subjects that directly or indirectly affect the readers.

Civic reporters are also known as corporation reporters as they are entrusted to cover the urban local bodies, a municipal corporation in case of cities. The job of a civic reporter is not an easy one as he has to cover the developments and civic issues prevalent across the length and breadth of the city.

A municipal corporation runs a city and is just like a mini-government, where there are elected representatives of people taking policy decisions and bureaucrats implementing them. Since a corporation involves the election of representatives of people and politics, a civic reporter is expected to have a fair idea of politics in the state and in the city.

It is also said a good civic reporter has a fair chance to develop himself as a good reporter for government secretariat reporting. This is because a civic reporter is used to cover various departments in the urban local body running the city, which is similar to the departments in the government running the entire state, albeit at a larger scale.

In order to have a grip on the civic beat, a reporter needs to have a fair understanding of the city, its demographics, geographical area, culture and traditions, major festivals, problematic areas, etc. Without having proper knowledge of the city, it is difficult for a reporter to write on issues affecting the city, or its citizens. Also, the reporter needs to develop hyperlocal knowledge of areas, which will help him in writing on issues affecting a particular area and not the entire city.

One of the most important attributes of a good civic reporter is his connect with citizens. A civic reporter should always try to process information in such a way that it is useful for the readers or informs them about the issue in totality in the simplest way possible. For example, if the civic body is planning to spend Rs100 crore in road repairing, a reporter shall try to find out which stretches are going to be taken up for repairing, when is the work likely to start and end, the estimates cost of repairing the roads, when was the last road surfacing work done in that area, etc. All this information will help in presenting the story in detail to a reporter.

A civic reporter is also expected to know the art of packaging stories and breaking stories into boxes and infographics. Remember, no one is interested in reading lengthy stories, but if a story is broken down into boxes with catchy slugs, infographics, and the right picture, its readability goes up.

4.3 IMPORTANCE OF CIVIC BEAT

The civic beat is one of the most important and integral parts of any newsroom, irrespective of its size. No media house can afford to ignore the civic issues that plague the city while focusing on other beats and

developments that might not have any major impact on city dwellers. Following are the factors that make civic beat important:

1. Civic stories establish a direct connection with readers

Civic stories establish a direct connection with readers, an attribute that is missing from news originating from many other important beats in a newsroom. A political development in Maharashtra might be important for a newspaper publishing from Ahmedabad in Gujarat, but what is there for Amdavadis in it? This void is filled by civic stories. Stories done by a civic reporter establishes a direct connection with the reader as the issues raised by him also affects the reader.

For example, on a given day there is a story on diabetes and another story on water disruption in the city expected during the coming weekend. It is obvious that the water disruption story will interest the readers more because it directly affects them.

2. Civic stories are hyperlocal

Many civic stories are hyperlocal in nature. It means that the story is not on issues or situations affecting the entire city, but is limited to a certain part of the city. In fact, these stories are important for media organisations to penetrate into hyperlocal readership or viewership. Also, civic reporters often pursue issues affecting a particular area until the civic administration takes note of it and resolves the same.

For example, a civic reporter can do a story on the drainage problem affecting only a particular area of the city and how it affects the local residents. Similarly, a story can be also done on poor road conditions in a certain part of the city due to the apathy of the civic administration, which is busy in providing the best infrastructure in posh areas.

3. Civic stories set the agenda for the local administration

A hard-hitting story or a series of stories on a particular civic issue being faced by the citizens which is affecting their routine life can provide the much-required ammunition to the opposition councillors in a civic body. Such stories are then discussed during committee or house meetings of the civic body thereby forcing the ruling party and the civic administration to take note of it and resolve the same.

For example, if a civic reporter does a hard-hitting story with facts and figures exposing the financial irregularities in the implementation of a

government scheme such as Swachh Bharat Abhiyan, then it can attract the readers as well as the opposition parties. Eventually, the issue can make it to the house meeting where there can be a debate on it and ultimately, the administration is forced to take action against the accused officials.

4. Civic stories bring out issues affecting the city

Civic stories are mostly about issues that affect the growth and development of the city. Everyone is interested in reading about the poor road network problem, or the sewage water flowing on road affecting motorists, or water supply disruption, or how the civic body plans to tackle the encroachment issue to make way for the widening of a major thoroughfare. The issues taken up the civic reporters are often the ones that directly affect the citizens. Similarly, a reporter and the media organisation will earn the confidence of citizens if they not just raise the issue, but also ensure that it is resolved.

For example, if a newspaper starts hammering stories on a regular basis on poor road conditions on a particular stretch, it might eventually force the civic administration to repair or relay the road to avoid further criticism.

5. Civic stories involve the readers/viewers

Unlike other beats that generate news about newsmakers, civic stories may involve the common citizens in the storytelling process. This human element entices the readers because views or feedback of common citizens is taken by the civic reporter for telling a story.

For example, if there is a story about parking issues on a particular stretch in a city, the civic reporter will take the views or feedback of shop owners of the area on how the lack of parking facility is affecting its business. Similarly, if there is a persistent problem in water supply in certain parts of the city, the civic reporter can do a story about the hardships faced by the local residents and how they are managing the water shortage.

4.4 SOURCES IN CIVIC BEAT

Sources are important for any beat in the newsroom. However, in case of the civic beat, sharp observation skills and fair knowledge about the city are also important and play a crucial role in the performance of a civic reporter. All said and done, the importance of official and unofficial

sources of information cannot be ignored in the day to day newsgathering process for a civic reporter.

Following are the important sources of information in a civic beat:

1. PR and media relations wing of the civic body

The PR and media relations wing of the civic body is an important source for securing official information about the development going on in the civic body. It is also one of the most important sources especially when a reporter is initiating work in the civic beat. The PR and media relations wing of the civic body sends press releases and invites the media for press conferences, official events, etc.

2. Civic administration

Officials running the civic body are a very important source of information for a civic reporter. Right from the municipal commissioner to the fourth-grade staff of the civic body in a ward office, a civic reporter needs to inculcate a wide range of sources. While senior officials are the ones who can provide authentic information about a development and can be quoted in a story, the lower rung officials are the ones who can give a reporter the clue to unearth irregularities in the civic body. Also, senior officials try to rundown any development that can put the civic administration in an uncomfortable position.

For example, if the municipal commissioner has found irregularities in the implementation of a particular government scheme and has lambasted the officials responsible for the same, chances are that the former will never reveal the same to a journalist. However, such information can be made available by the staff of the municipal commissioner or a peon who was serving tea when the officers were taken to task.

3. Mayor and mayoral council

A mayor holds a very crucial position in a civic body not because he is the first citizen of the city, but also because he is the political head of the civic body and responsible for the policy decisions taken for running the city. The mayor's position is just like that of the chief minister, but at a very small scale. Similarly, the mayor operates in the civic body using a mayoral council in which councillors from his party are made heads of various civic departments such as health, finance, public relations, solid

waste management, parks and squares, etc. Therefore, the mayor and mayoral council are privy to a lot of information which are newsworthy.

4. Ruling and opposition councillors

The elected representatives of people from both the ruling and the opposition parties are important sources for a civic reporter. Since the councillors represent an area (ward) within the city in the civic body, they are excellent sources for securing information related to any problem or development in that area. Also, these councillors are to be questioned for any civic issue in their area and what steps have been taken to resolve the issue. In most cases, the councillor will pass the blame on the civic administration and the reporter is then supposed to question the responsible officers citing what the councillor had said.

5. House proceedings

Like a legislative assembly, a civic body also has monthly or bi-monthly house meetings when all the councillors from the ruling and opposition parties are expected to remain present and issues concerning the city are discussed. It is also a platform where policy proposals are placed and debated before approval. The house meetings usually have a predefined agenda. However, in case of an urgent issue raised by the opposition, the meeting can deviate from the set agenda. Overall, house proceedings provide the best platform for a reporter to meet and develop contacts in the beat and hunt for stories.

6. Resident welfare associations

A civic reporter needs to write about issues affecting the common citizens and one of the best ways to identify such issues is to develop contacts in various resident welfare associations in the city. The office-bearers of a resident welfare association can provide information to a reporter about the issues prevalent in their locality. Also, these associations can provide their views and feedback to any policy decision taken or proposed by the civic administration. For example, if the civic administration is contemplating to increase the property tax, a civic reporter can do a story on the same by taking reactions from various resident welfare associations.

7. NGOs and social activists

The civic administration can tom-tom about how effectively it has implemented a government scheme that has benefitted thousands of people, or comes up with a scheme that will greatly benefit the citizens. However, the ground reality can be completely different. NGOs and social activists play an important role in exposing the utter lies of the civic administration. Therefore, a civic reporter should stay in touch with such social activists and NGOs. For example, civic bodies across the country have claimed that they have done outstanding work in the implementation of the Swachh Bharat Mission. However, NGOs and social activists have exposed the utter lies of many such civic bodies by exposing that the number of toilets claimed to have been constructed under the central scheme is a manipulated figure and in reality not even half of them have been constructed.

4.5 INITIATING WORK IN THE CIVIC BEAT

For any reporter who has been assigned a new beat, it is next to impossible to do earth-shattering stories. However, one of the first steps for a reporter who has been assigned a new beat is to tap the routine stories or developments from the new beat.

For a civic reporter, one of the easiest ways to tap routine developments is to get in touch with the public relations and media relations wing of the civic body. Once a reporter provides his email and phone number to the officials in the media wing, he will start receiving press releases and invites. A reporter is also supposed to source the telephone directory of the civic body from the media relations wing which will be of great help for a reporter.

Secondly, the reporter shall try to develop sources in the civic administration. For doing so, he needs to meet at least 5-10 officials on a daily basis, introduce himself and seek their help for getting stories. The most important part is to ensure that the officer registers the reporter's contact details. In doing this exercise, a reporter can adopt a top-down or bottom-up approach. It means that he can start from the municipal commissioner and then move towards his subordinates or vice-versa. It is important that the reporter stays in touch with the officials he had met. A reporter will never face a dearth of stories if he can develop a good rapport with the municipal commissioner, who is aware of all the developments in the civic body.

Thirdly, a reporter shall meet the mayor and the mayoral council as soon as possible. While an officer might not trust a reporter and reveal information in the first two-three meetings, it is usually easier to source information from a politician with high ambitions. Also, the mayor and mayoral council can prove to be crucial sources in the long-run for a journalist.

It is of utmost importance for a reporter who has been newly assigned the civic beat to have a fair idea of the city, its geography, demographics, culture and traditions, major festivals, etc. Without understanding the city, it is difficult for a reporter to develop a hold on the civic beat. For doing the same, a reporter needs to roam around the city and explore it.

Once the reporter is well aware of the city, he can take up issues that affect the citizens. These issues can be the ones that are relevant to the entire city, whereas some issues can be area specific. For example, if a reporter is doing a story about poor roads in an area of the city, then such a story will have limited impact. However, if he can identify and do a story on top 10 poorly maintained roads in the city, then such a story can have a wider impact.

At the same time, it is essential for a reporter to know about the stories that have been already done from his new beat in the past six months. Once the reporter is aware of the stories and developments reported from his new beat in the past few months, he can revisit those stories and plan follow-ups.

Another important aspect for a reporter who has initiated work in the civic beat is to develop a good relationship with journalists from other media organisations who are covering the same beat. This will also help the reporter in tapping routine developments in the beat. Also, the reporter should keep a tab on what kind of stories the rival media organisations are doing from the beat. He should try to tap the sources utilised for such stories.

A reporter shall also try to utilise official events and house meetings to develop a rapport with councillors and civic officials and turn them into sources for potential stories. Usually, house meetings are a place where all senior officials of the civic body and councillors will remain present.

4.6 POTENTIAL STORIES FROM CIVIC BEAT

The civic beat is one of the few beats in a newsroom which provides an interesting gamut of stories throughout the year, provided the reporter is ready to put in the extra effort to turn ordinary stories into interesting extraordinary stories and packages. The following are the potential stories for a civic reporter:

1. Issues affecting citizens

A civic reporter can do a story or a series of stories on issues affecting citizens. Right from the poor condition of roads to chocked sewerage lines and from traffic snarl due to encroachment to disruption in water supply, there is no dearth of issues for a civic reporter to focus upon. Also, it is a known fact that readers or viewers are most interested in stories that directly or indirectly affect them. So, if a civic reporter is reporting on issues that directly affect the citizens, it is definitely going to entice the readers or viewers.

For example, a series of stories on poor road conditions and what the civic administration is planning to solve the issue will definitely interest the readers. Similarly, a story on the civic body's plan for scientific closure of open waste dumping sites in the city to reduce the city's pollution levels will also interest the readers.

2. Political developments

A civic body apart from being an organisation rendering services to the people is also a hotbed for political developments. With mayor being the political head of the civic body along with the presence of councillors from both the ruling and opposition parties, there is no dearth of political developments in the civic body.

It is a routine business for the opposition councillors to blame the ruling party for the mismanagements in the city, whereas the mayor and the ruling councillors consider the opposition as a bottleneck in the city's development. Due to the ideological and political differences between the opposition and ruling councillors, blame games, criticism, agitations, walkouts, etc are routine developments in any civic body that are worth reporting.

Also, opposition councillors can provide information or lead about the loopholes in the civic administration's plans, or the irregularities in the

implementation of major government schemes. For example, if there are financial irregularities in the implementation of government schemes such as Housing for All (HFA), or Swachh Bharat Mission, chances are that the opposition councillors might expose the same.

3. Development plans of the civic administration

The civic administration comes up with several development plans for the betterment of the services rendered by it or to improve the public infrastructure of the city. These development plans are always newsworthy and are reported by all media organisations. For example, if the civic administration is planning to install storm water drainage pumping stations across the city to provide the much-required relief to areas with acute waterlogging problem, then it is a story worth reporting. Similarly, if the civic body is planning to renovate all the old parks in the city, it is again a story worth reporting. It is the reporter's job to acquire all the required information for these stories and present them in an interesting way that will attract the readers.

4. Civic budget

Unlike any other session of the house in the civic body, the budget session is the most important one as it clears the air about what the civic administration has done in the ongoing financial year and what it proposes to do in the coming financial year. Budget sessions are usually held in February and March in a civic body and are spread over two-three days. The mayor's speech in a budget session is very crucial as it is often the summary of what the civic body has achieved and the major policy changes and development plans that are going to be implemented in the next financial year along with the financial allocations proposed for the same.

Any raise in the property or water tax or service charges collected by the civic administration, major infrastructure spending proposed in the next fiscal, any major policy change, increase or decrease in financial allocation for important departments such as health, solid waste management, etc are always newsworthy and must be reported.

5. Civic elections

Election in the civic body is an important and busy period for a civic reporter as he has to report on a number of issues ranging from the work done by the ruling party to the accusation of the opposition and from

interviewing the top councillors to writing on the top contenders for the mayor's post. Before initiating work on election coverage, a civic reporter shall prepare an exhaustive plan on issues and subjects that he wishes to cover during the elections. He shall also prepare a format and standard questionnaire for interviewing the candidates from various wards in the city before initiating the poll coverage to maintain uniformity. The election work of a civic reporter starts even before the poll dates are declared and usually ends with the declaration of results.

4.10 Introduction to infrastructure reporting

In this era when governments are hell-bent on improving infrastructure in not just cities but in rural areas as well, infrastructure reporting becomes an important area for a newsroom. Depending on the strength of reporters in a newsroom, infrastructure beat may or may not be allocated as a separate beat to a reporter and instead, the civic reporter is entrusted to cover infrastructure beat as well.

However, in all major media organisations, infrastructure is not just treated as a separate beat, but it is treated as a separate specialisation. There is an infrastructure editor who is entrusted to lead a team of reporters covering nothing but developments in the infrastructure sector across the country.

Infrastructure reporting also gains importance because of the fact that a huge amount of government funds are involved in implementing infrastructure projects aimed at benefitting the citizens. Every year, huge funds are spent from the government coffers in erecting or modernising infrastructure for airports, roads, railways, water supply, irrigation, power generation, etc.

Also, the rapid industrialisation and globalisation are exerting acute pressure on the world's finite resources and therefore, erecting new infrastructure with greater capabilities or modernising the existing outdated infrastructure is the need of the hour. Since infrastructure projects involve huge sums, there are greater chances for financial irregularities or favouritism in the allocation of work to private contractors.

There are also instances where over-enthusiastic bureaucrats try to copy European or American infrastructure projects in Indian cities, which results in disasters. The bureaucrats not just waste government funds, but also these projects remain of no use to the citizens.

The central government's focus on urban infrastructure started with the Congress-led United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government's Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission (JNNURM) and Housing for All (HFA). Thereafter, in the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government's regime, the Housing for All scheme was continued and a new scheme to develop 100 smart cities in the country under the Smart City Mission (SCM) was introduced.

The Smart City Mission has given the much-required impetus to the infrastructure sector as city-level smart city companies are using the Rs1,000 crore seed funding to come up with state-of-the-art modern infrastructure. Due to the popularity gained by the smart city projects, it has become important for news organisations to cover the infrastructure development and modernisation projects planned by the smart cities across the country.

For example, a smart city company is planning to come up with high-tech cameras across all the major crossings in the city that will be equipped with systems to detect and penalise motorists for red light violation, speed violation, stop line violation, lane violation, two-wheeler riders not wearing helmet, etc. It's a development that is important for the citizens and therefore, an infrastructure reporter is supposed to report on the same. Similarly, if power distribution companies raise their domestic tariff, it is certainly a newsworthy development as it is going to add to the financial burden of citizens.

One of the key aspects that an infrastructure reporter needs to keep in mind is that it is important to explain how a project is going to impact the citizens, or in other words—the utility of the project. For example, if a flyover is being constructed at an estimated cost of Rs 1,000 crore connecting between points A and B, the reporter needs to explain how the flyover is going to save the time of motorists.

4.7 NEWS SOURCES IN INFRASTRUCTURE REPORTING

Depending on the city and the state government, there can be multiple agencies that look after infrastructure projects. Also, there are instances when a particular project is executed jointly by several agencies.

Although this is not an exhaustive list, the following can be major news sources for an infrastructure reporter:

1. National Highways Authority of India

The National Highways Authority of India, or NHAI, is a government agency under the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways. It is responsible for the development and maintenance of national highways across the country. All major cities have road connectivity with national highways and any project announced by the agency is always newsworthy. National highways also play a crucial role in easing the traffic entering or exiting a city.

For example, Sarkhej-Gandhinagar Highway is one of the major thoroughfares that pass through Ahmedabad and is developed and maintained by NHAI. In 2018, NHAI started work on widening it into a six-lane highway. This resulted in traffic snarls and road diversions, which affects the citizens who take the highway for their daily commute.

2. Smart City Company

With 100 cities being developed as smart cities in the country, there is no dearth of stories for an infrastructure reporter if he can tap the right sources in a smart city company. Under the Smart Cities Mission, all the selected cities have formed a dedicated city level smart city company, which is expected to do all the planning and execution of projects under the mission. Smart cities across the country are engaged in executing an array of infrastructure projects combined with technology such as area-based development, housing projects, beautification of the city, upgradation of city's road infrastructure, etc.

3. Development agencies

Apart from the municipal corporation, there are several agencies under the state government that help in augmenting the infrastructure of the city. These agencies are also responsible for planning and developing infrastructure projects just outside the jurisdiction area of the municipal corporation. For example, in a tier 2 city such as Bhopal, which is also the capital city of Madhya Pradesh, there are agencies apart from the Bhopal Municipal Corporation such as the Bhopal Development Authority (BDA) and Capital Projects Administration (CPA) that executes development projects in the housing, roads, and water supply sector. Similarly, in a metropolitan city like Kolkata, apart from the Kolkata Municipal Corporation, the Kolkata Metropolitan Development Authority (KMDA) executes several development projects in-and-around the city.

4. Real estate sector

For a reporter covering infrastructure beat, it is essential to tap the developments going on in the real estate sector. Right from the developments in the affordable housing sector to commercial retail space, there is no dearth of stories if the reporter can develop the right sources in the real estate sector. A reporter should develop sources with all the major real estate developers and should also stay in touch with associations of realtors. A reporter can do stories such as how the real estate sector performing in the city, problems faced by realtors, problems faced by real estate buyers, changes in government policies affecting the sector, etc.

5. Urban Development Department and Public Works Department

There are two major government departments that deal with infrastructure projects across the state—the Urban Development Department and the Public Works Department (PWD). While the role of the Urban Development Department is to carry out the development of various areas under Urban Local Bodies (ULBs) as per government policies, the responsibility of the PWD is mostly to develop and maintain infrastructure. The Urban Development Department is also responsible for taking policy decisions that affect ULBs across the state. For example, it is the Urban Development Department that can decide to raise the floor space index (FSI) for real estate projects, or to decide the area development plan. PWD is entrusted to develop and maintain major roads in a state, or to construct a bridge, flyover, or any other government utility.

4.8 INITIATING WORK IN INFRASTRUCTURE BEAT

In order to initiate work in the infrastructure beat, a reporter needs to have a fair knowledge of the city, its surroundings, and the available infrastructure. It is difficult for a reporter to entice the readers with a story on infrastructure if he cannot explain the existing situation and how the new infrastructure is going to help the citizens. Therefore, it is a must for a reporter to know the city, its demographics, its available infrastructure, etc.

At the same time, a reporter who is initiating work in the infrastructure beat needs to have a fair idea of the existing infrastructure projects being executed in a city. One of the best ways to get this information is to read the stories about these projects that have been done in the past. Also, the

reporter needs to find out whether these projects are on time, latest developments in the project implementation, which agency is handling the project, etc.

Once a reporter has the basic idea about projects and the implementing agencies, he should try to develop a rapport with the officials who are taking care of the project implementation. While doing so he is supposed to ensure that he develops a rapport with both senior officials and lower-rung officials who are actually overseeing the project at the ground level.

This apart, the reporter is also supposed to develop contacts in associations of realtors, contractors, labour associations, etc, which play a pivotal role in the infrastructure sector. These associations are a hotbed of information from where a reporter can get the required leads for stories. The associations also publish whitepapers and reports that help in tracking the developments in the sector. Also, these associations are the first to react to any changes in policies or taxation structure affecting them.

A reporter who is initiating work in the infrastructure beat is also expected to regularly visit the offices of the Urban Development Department, Public Works Department, housing board, railway and metro railway, smart city company, National Highways Authority of India, etc, to keep a tab on any new projects being planned by them and the status of the existing projects under implementation.

4.9 CONCLUSION: CITIZENS ENJOY STORIES ON CITY'S DEVELOPMENT

Civic and infrastructure beats are among those beats that have a direct and palpable effect on readers. Citizens are interested in reading a local or hyperlocal story delivered by civic reporters as it affects them. There are several other factors that make these beats so-much important for media houses. No media house can compromise with stories on civic and infrastructure beat. However, all said and done, the success of a civic reporter depends on how much effort he is willing to put and the kind of stories he can bring to the world.

4.10 LET US SUM IT UP

The unit must have helped you in understanding:

- The concept of civic and infrastructure reporting

- The reasons that make these beats important for a newsroom
- The sources that a reporter has to tap for information in these beats
- The various potential stories that can be done from these beats
- The approach that a reporter should adopt when assigned these beats

4.11 KEYWORDS

Swachh Bharat Abhiyan: A scheme floated by the government of India in which participating urban local bodies are ranked on several parameters related to cleanliness.

Mayoral Council: The mayor operates in the civic body using a mayoral council in which councillors from his party are made heads of various civic departments such as health, finance, public relations, solid waste management, parks and squares, etc.

Resident welfare associations: These are associations of local residents of an area

NGO: It stands for a non-governmental organisation. These organisations work for the betterment of society with or without the help of the government.

House meeting: These are monthly or bi-monthly meetings organised in a civic body where all senior officials and the councillors of both ruling and opposition parties are present and issues related to the city are discussed.

4.12 CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Questions

1. What is the first step for a reporter who has been assigned a new beat?

2. Why house meetings are important for a civic reporter?

3. How resident welfare associations can help a civic reporter?

4. What are the various sources of information for a civic reporter?

5. Why civic bodies are considered a hotbed of political developments?

6. Why the civic budget session is important for a journalist?

7. Why infrastructure reporting is important?

8. Enumerate the government schemes aimed at improving urban infrastructure?

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:: STRUCTURE::**5.0 Introduction****5.1 Objective****5.2 Introduction to transport as a beat****5.3 Importance of Human Transport****5.4 Source in Transport Beat****5.5 Initiating work in transport beat****5.6 Introduction to technology reporting****5.7 Importance of technology reporting****5.8 Sources in technology reporting****5.9 Writing stories on technology****5.10 Conclusion: Transport & technology an indispensable
part of the newsroom****5.11 Let us sum it up****5.12 Keywords****5.13 Check Your Progress****5.14 Reference**

5.0 INTRODUCTION

With the cost of vehicle ownership on the rise and the government's renewed focus on improving public transportation has resulted in a lot of changes in the transport sector in recent years. These changes have a high impact on the public and therefore, reporting these changes introduced in the form of new policy decisions or renewed tax slabs becomes crucial

for any media house. Similarly, new technologies are being introduced in all aspects of life and affect people directly or indirectly. The union government's Digital India programme is a major step towards introducing technological solutions to make the life of citizens easier and reduce corruption in government systems. All these factors make transport and technology beats very much important for media organisations. This unit discusses in details the transport and technology beats from a reporter's perspective.

5.1 OBJECTIVES

- Understand the concept of transport and technology reporting
- Understand the importance of these two beats
- Understand the different sources of information available for these two beats
- Understand how to approach these beats
- Understand the challenges faced by transport and technology beat reporters

On completion of this unit

On completion of this unit, you will be able to understand:

- Concept of transport and technology reporting
- Why these two beats are important for people and the media house
- The various sources that reporters entrusted with these two beats have to tap for information
- How to initiate work on these beats
- The factors to be kept in mind while writing news on technology
- The potential stories that can be done by reporters from these beats

5.2 INTRODUCTION TO TRANSPORT AS A BEAT

While transport was never a standalone beat in Indian newsrooms in the '90s and the first decade of the new millennium, the importance of transport as a beat has grown manifold since then, especially for newsrooms serving the urban population. Right from news on traffic diversions to metro projects and from the disruption in local railway services to a strike of bus operators, all these developments are crucial for citizens and in-turn becomes essential for a newsroom to report.

So, what encompasses the transport beat? The areas that a transport reporter is entrusted to look after may vary from city-to-city and from newsroom-to-newsroom. However, as far as a general description of the beat is concerned, it may include all the forms of public transportation in the city, traffic wing of the police department, newsworthy developments from the transport department including Regional Transport Offices (RTOs), transporters associations, etc.

For example, a transport reporter working in any of the metropolitan cities is expected to cover the developments from the airports, railway station, metro railway, government and private bus services, ferry services, taxi, and autorickshaw services, RTOs having jurisdiction in the core city and its adjoining metropolitan area, etc. While there is no dearth of good stories from the transport beat, a reporter, at times, might find it difficult to find routine developments from the beat. Therefore, such a reporter is often assigned other smaller beats along with transport.

A transport reporter can do an array of stories that are always newsworthy. These include flight and train delays due to poor weather conditions, cancellation of trains and flights, introduction of bus services on new routes, and development projects of the Airport Authority of India and the Railway Ministry for the city. Stories can be also done on new amenities being introduced by the authorities for bus and railway passengers, transporters strike, traffic issues on the highways and city roads, policy decisions of the government related to motor vehicles, occasional drives of the RTOs against vehicles flouting rules, etc.

A transport reporter is also supposed to be resourceful as he might not be able to reach every nook and corner of the city on a daily basis. However, in case of a development in any part of the city, he should be able to gather information and photographs related to it.

For example, if there is a major traffic jam in a particular part of the city due to road work, a reporter will have to secure both information and photographs related to the traffic snarl. A story on traffic jams in the city without an actual picture is not a very good idea. A picture of the traffic snarl will not just lend credibility to the story, it will also add to the visual appeal of the newspaper's page. Similarly, for a television journalist, securing videos of the traffic snarl is very important for doing a story.

A transport reporter is also expected to have an excellent connection with the officials of multiple agencies that might not be directly connected to transport. For example, a transport reporter might do a story on traffic

snarl in a particular part of the city due to road work. However, road work might be executed by the municipal corporation. Therefore, the story on traffic snarl should also include information on how long it will be taken by the municipal corporation to complete the road work and why the traffic police have not come up with a traffic diversion plan to ease the traffic in the affected area, especially during peak hours.

5.3 IMPORTANCE OF TRANSPORT BEAT

As discussed above, transport was never considered important so as to be treated as a standalone beat in Indian newsrooms in the 90s and 2000s. However, with the passage of time, transport has become a crucial beat in any newsroom that is catering to the urban populace. There are several factors that make the transport beat an indispensable part of the newsrooms. These are:

1. Growing importance of public transport

The importance of public transport in the country is increasing, especially in urban areas. This is due to a plethora of government initiatives aimed at promoting public transport such as increasing the number of buses, local trains, introducing metro railway in major cities, increasing flight connectivity between cities, etc. For example, a person hiring a cab or driving his own car will have to spend a hefty amount to travel 20 km in a city on a daily basis. If he travels by metro, he can reach his destination within a shorter span and at one-tenth of the cost of a cab.

2. Government coming up with new policies

The state government, as well as the Centre, is coming up with several modern policies related to transport that is going to revolutionise the way people travel. It is essential for newsrooms to report on these policies. For example, the government has made 'FastTag' mandatory for vehicles for automatic payment of tolls at toll plazas on highways. The move is aimed at reducing the delays at toll plazas. Similarly, the government is promoting e-buses for cities and urging citizens to use public transport to reduce pollution.

3. Helps readers in making informed decisions

Stories done by a transport reporter create awareness among readers so that the latter can make informed decisions related to their travel. For example, if there are reports of traffic snarls on a particular stretch in the

city due to road development work, an informed reader can decide to take an alternate route to avoid the traffic jam. Similarly, if a reader has read a story about scheduled traffic diversion due to a festival or other events, he can plan his travel to the area accordingly. A story on scheduled strike of school bus operators will help the parents in making alternative arrangements for their children.

4. Directly affects the readers

Several stories from the traffic beat directly affect the readers and hence have a higher readership. For example, a story on new flights connecting the city with international destinations such as London and New York might help a reader who is planning to visit these cities. Similarly, a story on traffic snarls across the city due to poorly planned development works can actually pressurise the authorities to take corrective steps. Also, these stories are important as the issue raised by the transport reporter directly affects the citizens.

5.4 SOURCES IN TRANSPORT BEAT

Like any other beat, there are a number of sources for a transport reporter that he needs to tap in order to perform well in the beat. These include:

1. Transport department

The transport department in itself is one of the biggest sources of news for a beat reporter. This is the place where a reporter can get information about existing government policies related to transport, any upcoming change in policy or rules, data related to the sector, etc. It is also a place where a reporter can get integrated information related to the number of driving licences issued by various RTOs across the state, number of people who failed the driving test, new technology being introduced in RTOs to reduce corruption, number of new vehicles registered in the state, etc.

The transport department is headed by the transport commissioner, who is a one-stop source for securing data and information related to the transport sector in the state for a variety of stories. All the RTOs in the state are within the ambit of the transport commissioner. The department is entrusted with the responsibility to provide an efficient public transportation system and control of vehicular pollution.

2. Regional Transport Office (RTO)

If a reporter is planning to do stories from the sector limited to a particular city, he will have to approach the concerned RTO. It is the place where a reporter can secure information on a variety of subjects ranging from category-wise total vehicle population in the city and how it has increased over the years, driving licenses issued every year, revenue collected by the RTO from vehicle registrations and fines, and year-wise data on road accidents, number of deaths, etc. Every RTO is headed by a regional transport officer.

3. Traffic wing of the police

Since a reporter entrusted with the transport beat is also supposed to write stories on possible traffic disruptions, traffic diversions, and traffic drives against errant motorists, he needs to develop a good rapport with officials in the traffic wing of the city police. A good relationship with traffic police officials will help the reporter in the long-run in doing data-rich stories about road accidents, traffic violations, penalties, etc. While the commissioner of police is the head, the traffic wing is practically looked after by an assistant or deputy commissioner rank official.

4. Railway, Metro, Airport

Other important sources of information for a transport reporter are railway stations, metro, and airports. Development in the city's airport, railway station, and metro network is of prime importance for citizens and therefore, it becomes essential for newsrooms to carry news related to these developments. For railways, the best place for gathering information related to newsworthy developments is the divisional railway manager's (DRM) office along with the major railway stations. This apart, the reporter should also frequent to the office of the local metro authorities to keep himself abreast of the latest developments. Similarly, the Airports Authority of India keeps on introducing new things to make air travel safer and less cumbersome for passengers. A reporter should always keep a tab on developments in the city's airport by frequently visiting the airport manager's office.

5. Agencies operating city bus services

A transport reporter is expected to develop a good rapport with officials of agencies that run both intra-city and inter-city bus services. The number of agencies that deal with bus services can vary from city-to-city.

For example, city bus service in Kolkata is operated by Calcutta Tramways Company (CTC), Calcutta State Transport Corporation (CSTC), and West Bengal State Transport Corporation (WBSTC) along with private operators. A transport reporter working in Kolkata is expected to maintain good rapport with officials of all these corporations and should also know the private operators operating bus services on various routes.

6. Transport associations

Transport associations are also important for a transport reporter to do several stories. These associations can include school bus associations, school van associations, truckers association, bus operators association, railway employees association, etc. A good rapport with office bearers of these associations will help the journalist in writing on ground realities and facts related to the sector, which authorities are not going to reveal. Also, a good relationship with these associations will help a reporter in getting timely information on a probable strike.

5.5 INITIATING WORK IN TRANSPORT BEAT

Like any other beat, a reporter who is assigned the transport beat is required to adopt a strategy that will help him in excelling in the beat in the long-run. The first and foremost step for such a reporter is to start reading news items that have been published in the last six months. This will give a heads-up to the reporter on what are the issues that have been already reported in the media. It will also help him in identifying issues where a follow-up story can be done and the variety of stories covered under the beat.

Once a reporter is aware of the issues that are covered under the beat, he should ascertain the number of companies, or agencies, or associations that he needs to start visiting in order to develop sources. There are certain sources of news that a transport reporter will definitely have to visit such as the transport department and the RTO.

The transport department is a one-stop site for gathering data related to public transport, vehicle population in the state, the number of persons who have been given or denied driving licenses in the state, the rise or decline in road accidents, policy changes related to the sector, etc. The transport department is headed by the commissioner of transport and maintaining a good rapport with him is a must for a transport reporter.

However, when it comes to stories that are focused on just the city, the Regional Transport Office comes into the picture. Every city has an RTO which is headed by the regional transport officer. The RTO is responsible for issuing transport permits, driving licence, vehicle registration, and also looks after the norms related to vehicular emission. RTOs are a hub of stories such as a rise in road accidents in the city including the number of deaths and injuries in such accidents, rise or decline in vehicle registration in the city, auction of special registration numbers, etc.

This apart, the transport reporter is also expected to cover the city police's traffic wing. He should regularly roam around the city to better understand the traffic issues in various parts of the city. He should also develop a good relationship with senior officials of the traffic wing to do data-rich stories related to the city's traffic woes and what the department is planning to resolve the issues.

For example, if the traffic police are doing to study on poor traffic signal cycles across major thoroughfares in the city, the transport reporter can do a story on which are most affected stretches due to the poor traffic signal cycle and how the traffic police aim to resolve it by adopting the scientific solution of signal synchronisation.

Since the transport reporter is also expected to cover all modes of transport including roadways, railways, and air travel, he will also have to frequent to the railway stations, airports, bus terminuses. He will have to meet officials across hierarchy and departments so as to develop a wider network of sources who can inform him about newsworthy updates in their organisation. However, it is absolutely essential for a reporter to frequently meet and maintain a good rapport with top railway and airport officials such as the airport manager and divisional railway manager.

This apart, a transport reporter is also expected to strike a good relationship with city bus operators associations, airport, and railway workers union, city bus operators association, school bus operators association, etc. Since the transport reporter will have to visit so many places in search of news, it is important for him to prepare a weekly plan in advance to identify the places and officials he will be visiting during the week. Also, he should call the officials before visiting them in order to avoid wasting time. Moreover, he should also regularly track the social media accounts of the transport department, railway ministry, Airport Authority of India (AAI) and their officials to keep him abreast of the latest news and updates.

5.6 INTRODUCTION TO TECHNOLOGY REPORTING

Technology as a beat was non-existent in the Indian newsrooms in the last century. However, things have changed since then and the importance of tech reporting (as is called in popular culture) has increased manifold. This is primarily because of the growing use of technology in all aspects of life and how it has made life easier and simpler for an average Indian.

Gone are the days when technology stories were meant only for geeks. It is now equally consumed by an average Indian, who is dependent on technology for performing various daily activities. Right from using a battery-operated toothbrush in the morning to putting on the wireless headphones for music and from booking a cab on a mobile application to checking the heart rate on a smartwatch, we are surrounded by technology.

However, when it comes to technology journalism, it is not confined to just cool gadgets. Technology journalism can be loosely defined as a genre dealing with news, reports, reviews, and analysis covering a wide range of topics from the world of the internet, social media, communication technologies, information technology sector, scientific research, robotics, and policies and changes in laws dealing with the digital world.

One of the crucial job responsibilities of technology reporters is to write about enterprise technologies and how businesses are adopting and utilising new technologies for business gains. Also, they are supposed to write reviews of new technology products, which are appealing to the consumers. These include laptops, mobile phones, television, smartwatches, and other digital products. Product reviews enjoy higher readability because consumers often decide to buy a product based on its reviews.

Unlike other beats where a reporter has to move around multiple places to meet sources and gather news, the job of a technology reporter is mostly desk oriented. However, they are supposed to cover product launches, interview top honchos of companies dealing with technology, and events related to the sector such as technical seminars and conferences.

Apart from consumer electronics, technology reporters also deal with various other subjects such as e-mobility, data analytics, cloud computing, cloud storage, technology solutions, and artificial intelligence

among others. Since many of these subjects deal with high-end and complicated technology or convergence of technologies, the role of a technology reporter becomes very crucial as he will have to explain these complicated subjects in a layman's language to the readers.

The coverage of technology has not only increased in traditional newspapers and magazines, but the importance of the beat can be ascertained from the fact that many publications have come up with their own technology magazines or supplements. Also, many technology bloggers and video journalists running their independent YouTube channels have achieved cult status in India, with millions of online followers. These video bloggers explain the digital products and the technology behind it in the simplest way possible which attracts the viewers.

Unlike other beats where things change slowly, a technology reporter cannot take the risk of remaining unaware of evolving technologies that are going to change the way of life of people. They need to foresee how the technology is going to revolutionise the way certain things are done and therefore, they are supposed to keep themselves aware of the changes in the technology domain.

5.7 IMPORTANCE OF TECHNOLOGY REPORTING

With the impact of technology and its applications ever increasing in our lives, the importance of stories on technology and the readers who are interested to read such stories have registered a manifold increase. There are various reasons that have made the technology beat an indispensable part of many newsrooms. These are:

1. Technology is part of life

Technology has touched all aspects of our lives and there is no way one can stay away from it. We are surrounded by the use of technology right from the time we wake up till we go to bed. This is why stories on technology have become important for most newsrooms in the country. While newspapers have come up with separate supplements or sections for technology news, television channels have dedicated slots for technology shows.

2. Creates awareness on new technologies and their benefits

Stories done by technology reporters create awareness on new technologies available in the market and how such technologies and their applications are going to benefit us. For example, earlier certain cab aggregators started serving their customers with “call a cab” service where a customer can call a particular number to book a cab. However, as technology evolved, Ola and Uber came into the picture and with the help of modern mobile applications, booking of cabs became possible along with a host of features. Along with the companies promoting the service, the media also played a major role in promoting the service. Also, after several media houses came up with stories that raised the question of women safety in such cab services, the cab aggregators came up with several technology-based safety features for its customers.

3. People across age groups are interested in tech stories

Not just the youngsters, but people across all age groups are interested in stories done by technology reporters. While for youngsters there can be multiple sources for technology news, but for aged people, especially senior citizens, stories on various available technologies have helped this segment in adopting the new technologies. The penetration of social networking websites and communication applications such as WhatsApp is an example.

4. Tech stories make life easier, more secure for citizens

Often people are unaware of various available technologies that can make their life easier and more secure. Media plays a crucial role in creating awareness about such technologies—be it in the domain of banking or home security. For example, parents are often concerned about the safety of their kids, especially when they are not at home. Earlier CCTV systems were not only expensive but were ineffective as there was no way the live footage can be accessed from a different location. However, a story on top 5 home security systems for keeping an eye on kids can create awareness on how parents can do so with the help of Wi-Fi-based camera systems along with its cost implications. Similarly, technology reporters through the repeated hammering of stories have created awareness among the society on how not to fall in the trap of online fraudsters and maintain the safety of bank accounts.

5. Helps in introducing new technological changes in the market

Technology is constantly evolving and journalists have helped in creating favourable conditions for the adoption of these technologies. Be it the online education system or the mobile applications for doing daily chores, technology journalists through their stories have created awareness about new technologies, how it has made the older technologies redundant, and why people should adopt the new technology. While all this has added to crony capitalism, there is no doubt that people want to read about how iPhone X is better than iPhone8 and why Amazon Fire Stick is better than Google Chromecast.

5.8 SOURCES IN TECHNOLOGY REPORTING

Like any other beat, sources play a crucial role in technology beat. However, unlike conventional sources in other beats, there are very few conventional sources of newsworthy information for a technology reporter. Following are some of the major sources of information for technology reporters:

1. Research institutions

Research institutions, especially the ones working in the scientific domain, are one of the major sources for technology reporters. The flow of news from these institutions could be erratic, but a technology reporter is expected to maintain good rapport with the research wing of these institutions. For example, in a Tier 2 city like Ahmedabad, there are a number of institutions working on major research projects. These include Indian Space Research Organisation, Institute of Plasma Research, and Indian Institute of Technology, among others. This apart, several engineering colleges are involved in research and come up with unique technology-based solutions to everyday problems.

2. Technology journals and magazines

In a bid to remain updated with the latest developments in the technology domain, journalists have to read a lot. One of the dependable sources of information for journalists is technology journals, magazines, etc. Most of these journals and magazines come up with in-depth articles on upcoming technology and developments in the technology sector. This may range from personal technology-based devices to enterprise solutions. These articles greatly help a journalist to understand the technology and pass on the information to people in a simple manner.

Some of the renowned journals include the International Journal of Innovation and Technology Management, Information and Software Technology, Journal of Food Science and Technology, Science Technology and Society, etc.

3. Tech companies

Companies involved in building enterprise solutions and those working in the technology domain are also one of the major sources of information for a technology journalist. These companies may work on several projects including better mobile application security, new platforms for software development, a new operating system for computers, advanced software for industries, etc. Staying in touch with these companies can help the reporter in understanding what is happening in the technology world and what is in and what is out. For example, the journalist can target companies such as IBM, HP, Adobe, TCS, Infosys, Wipro, PwC, Delloite, etc. These companies often work with governments in bringing in better tech solutions for governance issue, a development which is always newsworthy.

4. Tech events and trade fairs

Technology events and trade fairs are like a one-stop centre for a journalist to gather what is happening in the technology industry and what are the new technologies that companies are working on and might soon launch. For example, there is an event called the World Mobile Congress. It is an event where all the major companies dealing with mobile phones participate and showcase what is in store for the consumers in the months to come. Many of the technologies showcased are still under development, but it reflects in which direction the research and product development is going on.

5. Trade associations, industry bodies

There are several trade bodies and associations that look after the interest of a particular sector and journalists should maintain a good rapport with the office bearers of these trade associations and industry bodies for a regular flow of stories. These associations also come up with research papers, trade figures, and organise tech events, which are a must for technology journalists. For example, the Internet and Mobile Association of India is an industry body that aims to improve and expand the value-added services pertaining to mobiles and several online services.

Similarly, there is NASSCOM—the trade association of Indian information technology and business process outsourcing industry.

5.9 WRITING STORIES ON TECHNOLOGY

Unlike other beats, writing stories on technology is a major challenge for a journalist because he is supposed to explain the most complicated functions in the simplest manner and that too by avoiding technical jargon. However, there are certain fundamental aspects that a journalist needs to keep in mind while writing on technology. These include:

1. Avoid jargons

One thing that a reporter covering the technology beat should definitely follow is to avoid jargon in writing stories. When an expert in a technology interacts with a journalist, he can use all sorts of technical jargon to explain a certain product or service. However, the journalist must keep in mind that he will have to explain the same to his readers or viewers in the simplest way possible without using any of the technical jargon. Also, to do so, a journalist must understand the nuances of the technology so that his concepts are clear before he ventures to explain the same to his readers or viewers.

2. Simplify by exemplifying

The challenge for a tech journalist is always to explain the technology in the simplest possible way and at the same time, he must ensure that the readers or viewers do not lose their interest. In order to achieve this, a journalist can use simple examples to explain complicated technologies. For example, if scientists have developed a super strong sewing thread that can bear the load of thousands of kilograms. Now to make it attractive and appealing to the readers, he can use an example of an elephant or hippopotamus by writing that scientists have developed a super strong sewing thread that can bear the load of an elephant. While no one is going to hang an elephant to test the sewing thread, the illustration will help readers to easily understand how strong the sewing thread is.

3. Avoid sensationalising stories

Technology journalists should avoid sensationalising stories just to grab eyeballs. Often journalists come up with a headline or an intro that may appear as a major breakthrough in technology while in reality, it is not.

For example, there are several kinds of research going on new technologies to cure dreaded diseases like cancer, AIDS. However, none of them have given concrete results and have not been approved by the government. At times, when doing stories on such technologies under development, journalists may come up with headlines or an intro that may suggest that cancer can be cured by a certain technology, but in reality, the technology is still under development, is yet to show concrete positive results, and yet to be approved by the government for clinical applications.

4. Explain properly

Often technology journalists take it for granted that the readers or viewers have a basic understanding of a certain technology. However, it might not be the case always. There are times when a reader loses interest because the story does not explain certain technical terms. For example, if the story is about the increasing use of cloud storage, rather than expecting that readers must be well aware of cloud storage, the journalist should explain cloud storage right at the beginning of the story.

5. Use visual elements

It is a well-known fact that pictures are worth a thousand words. A journalist should always try to include a visual element to his technology story. This will not only increase its appeal, but it will also ensure that people are able to understand the technology easily. For example, rather than writing 500 words on how cloud storage works, a reporter can simply use an illustration to explain it. Similarly, rather than explain how the new iPhone looks from the side and back, the reporter can use pictures of the new phone from the side and back.

6. Background details are essential

Very few technological developments happen by accident and a majority of them are a result of years of hard work and dedication. A reporter should explain the development by setting the context. In easier words, he should explain why such development or new technology is essential and how people are going to benefit from it. For example, if a reporter is writing about cloud storage facilities, he should explain why such a facility is required and how it is going to help the users. Similarly, if a reporter is writing about a new gadget that can detect abnormal changes in heart rate on a real-time basis, he should also explain the growing

incidences of heart failures and statistics associated with it while explaining the advantages or necessity of the new technology.

5.10 CONCLUSION: TRANSPORT & TECHNOLOGY AN INDISPENSABLE PART OF THE NEWSROOM

Keeping the above discussion in mind, it is clear that the importance of transport and technology reporting has increased manifold over the years and now, they have become an indispensable part of the Indian newsrooms. The growing importance of the transport and technology sectors combined with the changes in the news delivery platforms has given a certain edge to stories from these beats. Also, technology stories are not confined to a particular city and have a national or global approach, a major factor that increases the readership base of such stories.

5.11 LET US SUM IT UP

The unit must have helped you in understanding:

- The concept of transport beat and its growing importance over the past two decades
- The various sources for a transport reporter
- The importance of RTO and stories that can be done based on the information from the RTO
- How transport stories help readers
- The concept of technology reporting and its growing importance
- The various sources of information for a technology reporter
- Things to keep in mind while writing stories from the technology beat

5.12 KEYWORDS

RTO: It stands for Regional Transport Office. It works under the transport department which is entrusted with the responsibility of vehicle registration, issuance of driving licence and permits, and keeping a check on vehicular pollution.

NASSCOM: It is the trade association of Indian information technology and business process outsourcing industry.

Cloud computing: It is the on-demand availability of computer system resources, especially data storage and computing power, without the direct active management by users.

E-mobility: It stands for electric mobility in which vehicles are no longer dependent on fossil fuels.

Data analytics: It is the process of inspecting, cleansing, transforming, and modelling data with the goal of discovering useful information, informing conclusion, and supporting decision-making.

5.13 CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

1. What encompasses the transport beat?

2. What is RTO?

3. Why the importance of transport beat has increased over the years?

4. What information can be gathered from the RTOs?

5. Who heads the RTO?

6. Why technology has become an important beat in newsrooms?

7. What encompasses technology journalism?

8. Why a technology reporter should avoid jargons?

5.14 REFERENCES

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:: STRUCTURE::**6.0 Introduction****6.1 Objectives****6.2 Introduction to health beat****6.3 Importance of health beat****6.4 Sources in Health beat****6.5 Initiating work on health beat****6.6 Challenges in health beat****6.7 Packaging and scheduling health stories****6.8 Reporting on wellness****6.9 Conclusion: Importance of health reporting is increasing****6.10 Let us sum it up****6.11 Keywords****6.12 Check Your Progress****6.13 References**

6.0 INTRODUCTION

Health beat is one of the primary beats in a newsroom that is rich in stories having a higher readership. People are interested in reading health stories because of several factors. Also, it needs to be mentioned that all governments are bothered about public health and no government can risk the lives of its citizens. This is because of the growing disease burden and rise of non-communicable but killer diseases such as cancer, diabetes, stroke, heart ailments, etc. In such a scenario, health stories enjoy enviable importance in newsrooms. However, the beat comes with its own set of challenges that a reporter has to overcome to excel. The unit discusses all these aspects in detail.

6.1 OBJECTIVES

- Understand the concept of health and wellness reporting
- Understand the importance of health as a beat
- Understand the various sources in health beat
- Understand the challenges of health beat
- Understand the aspects that need to be taken care of while planning a health story package

On completion of this unit

On completion of this unit, you will be able to understand:

- What encompasses the health beat
- Sources that a health reporter needs to tap for stories and information
- Challenges faced by health reporters in their day-to-day newsgathering activities
- How to initiate work in the health beat
- The scope of wellness features in news media
- Planning and scheduling of health packages

6.2 INTRODUCTION TO HEALTH BEAT

Public health has always remained a major cause of concern for governments across the world and certainly, there are a plethora of reasons for the same. No government can take the risk of underestimating an issue that can result in a major health crisis. Owing to globalisation and due to the modern lifestyle adopted by people, there is a growing homogeneity in disease patterns across the globe.

It is evident by the fact that diseases such as cancer, high blood pressure, and diabetes, which were once considered as the diseases of the affluent in western societies have rapidly spread their tentacles in developing countries as well. Not just this, these diseases have also become one of the major factors for morbidity and mortality in developing countries.

At a time when both chronic non-communicable and communicable diseases are on the rise combined with the sedentary lifestyle of people at-large, there is a growing need for awareness and effective communication between policymakers, healthcare providers and the public. In this scheme of things, the media plays a crucial role along with

healthcare professionals in informing people on what is good or bad for their health.

Therefore, healthcare becomes an indispensable part of any newsroom and has always been considered as a primary beat. Depending upon the demographics of a city, the beat can be divided into one or more reporters. Due to the wide impact of health stories among the public, it is one of those beats where a reporter cannot commit mistakes or spread rumours without verifying the facts.

The health beat encompasses a lot of things including policy decisions of the government related to healthcare, issues from government and private hospitals, new treatment procedures being adopted by the government, research from the medical field, issues from the pharmaceutical sector, healthcare events, etc. The reporter is expected to develop a wide range of sources ranging from ward boys to the administrative clerk and from treating doctors to the hospital superintendent.

This apart, the reporter is also supposed to keep a track on new health schemes or initiatives being promoted by the state or central government and ascertain their efficacy. For example, the government can claim that the free ambulance scheme for pregnant women to ensure an increase in the total percentage of institutional deliveries is working wonders. It could come with misleading figures such as 20 lakh women who availed the facility. However, the real story is not the 20 lakh women availing the free ambulance scheme. The reporter should delve deep and find out whether the scheme has actually made any difference to the percentage of newborns born in health institutions or not. He should also focus on the root cause that forced the government to come up with the scheme—maternal and infant mortality—and try to secure data related to these two aspects in order to analyse the situation.

Health reporters should also have the urge to understand scientific concepts and the human physiology to do their job properly. They may have to go through scientific publications to do stories on researches in the medical field and must develop the skill of explaining complex health procedures or diseases in the easiest way.

6.3 IMPORTANCE OF HEALTH BEAT

The health beat is one of the primary beat in newsrooms across the world. There are several factors that make it an indispensable part of newsrooms. These are:

1. Affects people

We all are concerned about our health and therefore, stories done by health reporters directly or indirectly affect people. A story on a new treatment technique or medication about diabetes can be appealing for diabetics to try the new technique. Similarly, a person might not have diabetes but can ask his diabetic parents to try the new medication or the treatment technique. A story during the fortnight that promotes eye donation clarifying that more than 50 per cent of the eye donations go waste can create a negative impact on people who have pledged to donate their eyes after death.

2. Informs and alerts people

Health stories are essential for society-at-large, especially the ones dealing with public health. There can be a deadly virus that is in the air or the cases of vector-borne diseases such as dengue might be on the rise. These are developments that people need to know to remain aware and alert. While reporting on the virus or dengue, health reporters also explain the symptoms of the disease, the precautionary steps, and what to do when one is exhibiting these symptoms. The information provided through these stories become important for citizens.

For example, when writing about the spread of dengue in the city, a reporter will also focus on the kind of symptoms that those already affected by the disease are showing, whether there is a deviation from the usual symptoms, what is the treatment procedure, etc. Notably, dengue usually results in high fever and joint pain. However, there are several strains of the disease where the symptom of fever is completely absent. This information is essential for any person living in the affected area as it could save lives.

3. Helps in success of government health initiatives

The health ministry or the health department can come up with a number of initiatives and policy decisions related to the public health sector for the benefit of citizens. Mass media plays a crucial role in the success or failure of these initiatives. It is media that helps in percolation of the scheme so that it can benefit even the last man in the society.

For example, the state government can come up with a free ambulance scheme whereby citizens can avail of an ambulance to take critical patients to the hospital of their choice—government or private. However,

the scheme can achieve success only when there is widespread publicity about it as people usually refrain from availing government ambulance service because the patient will be taken to a nearby government hospital only. The change in government policy to include private hospitals in the ambulance service has to be promoted through the media for the benefit of citizens.

4. Interest of people

Right from the spread of infectious diseases to problems in the nearby hospital and from advancements in the medical field to new treatments being adopted by doctors, people are interested in reading about health stories. It is because of this interest that health stories enjoy higher readership. For example, a story package on how diabetes affects our health, the latest treatment procedures, and how we can control the same, will definitely garner the attention of readers. It is because millions of people in India are affected by diabetes and such a story is definitely going to be read by many.

5. Bring medical advancements, new treatments to the fore

Over the years, the medical field has witnessed a plethora of advancements and new treatment procedures replacing the old treatment methods. Media plays a crucial role in creating awareness among people about these advancements and changes in the treatment procedure. For example, a few decades back open-heart surgery was the only way out for patients with a blockage in the arteries, valve, etc. Later, angioplasty came into the picture making open-heart surgeries redundant. However, this change would not have been adopted by all hospitals and cardiologists at once. The knowledge about the new treatment method and where all it is performed can help a patient make an informed decision before going under the knife.

6. Health connected to politics

Healthcare, especially the lack of infrastructure in government health set-up, is directly connected to politics. Governments often had to face severe criticism when the lacunae in critical health infrastructure in major government hospitals result in multiple deaths. Be it the death of infants in a government hospital of Uttar Pradesh due to the lack of oxygen under BJP's rule or the death of infants in Kota and Jodhpur under the Congress rule, such developments became national headlines with both the ruling and opposition parties playing politics over the issue.

7. Rich source of human interest stories

Health beat has always remained an important and rich source for human interest stories. Health journalists often encounter stories where there is a novelty or human interest angle. For example, Civil Hospital in Ahmedabad in August 2019 had carried out surgery on a mentally unstable person who was admitted with abdominal pain and removed over 350 metal objects weighing over 3.5 kg. Similarly, the hospital was again in the news when it straightened the curved spinal cord of a 22-year-old woman from Surat enabling her to stand straight for the first time in her life. This apart, there are often stories on how poor people have to carry a dead body on their shoulders after being denied an ambulance facility.

6.4 SOURCES IN HEALTH BEAT

Like any other beat, there are multiple sources of news in the health beat. While corporate hospitals will come forward and share the development with the media, journalists, on the other hand, will have to work hard and develop sources in government hospitals if they do not want to remain confined to doing positive stories and instead want to do some hard-hitting stories. The following are the important sources that a health reporter needs to tap:

1. Health ministry/department

It is one of the crucial sources of news for journalists covering health. The reporter is supposed to develop an excellent rapport with the health minister and the health secretary. This apart, the reporter should be well-aware of the various directorates under the health department and their respective functions. Since policy decisions are taken at the department/ministry level, it is very important for a reporter to develop a wide network of sources. It is also a place where the reporter can secure data about critical health indicators for the entire state.

2. Government hospitals

The health reporter is also expected to develop a good rapport with doctors and administrative staff of government hospitals, which are a hub of stories, provided that the journalist is ready to invest time and energy for the same. The reporter should definitely stay in touch with the hospital director, superintendent, and head of various departments. Also, in case of accidental death or crime, the post mortem is carried out in a

government hospital and developing a good rapport with police personnel deployed in the hospital can be a good idea, especially when there is a high profile crime or criminal involved.

3. Private Hospitals

Private hospitals are also an important source of information for a health reporter. While it is true that everything that the corporate communications or public relations team of these hospitals try to push is not news, but there are times when these hospitals have actually done some commendable work or performed a critical surgery never ever done in the history of India. Unlike government hospitals, private hospitals adopt modern diagnostic services and new treatment procedures, which is newsworthy. However, a reporter is expected to remain cautious and not accept the information provided by private hospitals at face value.

4. Research institutions

Institutions or organisations involved in research in the medical field are also important for a health reporter. For example, the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR), National Institute of Virology, Regional Medical Research Centre, Indian Institute of Public Health, etc, are institutions that are actively involved in researches in the medical field. Apart from these renowned organisations, researches and clinical trials are also conducted by doctors in medical colleges and hospitals. Many of these researches are newsworthy. However, the only thing that the reporter needs to keep in mind is that he has to present the information in a simple manner so that even a layman can easily understand what the research is all about and how it is beneficial for the mankind.

5. Medical journals

There are several renowned medical journals that publish papers written by Indian authors. These medical journals are also an important source for news and developments in the field of healthcare and often provide the reporter with several story ideas. A reporter should regularly read these journals to stay updated on what is happening in the healthcare sector. For example, there can be a cover story on how eating fast food and aerated drinks can increase the chance of diabetes by 50 per cent as has been witnessed in a research in US. The reporter can take inspiration from this story and try to localise it by talking to local diabetologists and obtaining city-specific data related to the disease.

6. Associations

Associations of medical practitioners, paramedical staff, and hospital employees, are also important sources that a beat reporter needs to stay in touch. A health reporter can get several stories from the local chapters of the Indian Medical Association and associations of specialist doctors. A reporter can utilise his connection with the office bearers of the Indian Medical Association to secure the contacts of other important doctors in the city and develop a good rapport with them. Similarly, these associations become important when there is a strike called by doctors or hospital staff.

7. Question-answers in Parliament, Assembly

Questions raised by lawmakers in the Parliament and Assembly and the answers given to these questions by the concerned often contain important countrywide or statewide data related to health indicators, which enables a reporter to write an analytical story. It is an easier way to do such stories as procuring the detailed countrywide data required for such a story is otherwise hard to get. As the answers are tabled before the floor of the House, a reporter does not necessarily need to check the authenticity of the information.

8. Social media, websites

All major government ministries or departments, organisations, and senior officials have their social media accounts. A health reporter needs to track the social media accounts of the health minister, health secretary, commissioner of health, directors of various health directorates, and associations related to healthcare for regular news and updates. Often the government publishes the latest notification or circulars on its social media accounts before issuing a press release. Similarly, the health reporter should keep a tab on announcements and updates on the website of the health ministry or department for official reports, latest health indicators, etc.

9. Conferences and seminars

Events associated with healthcare such as conferences and seminars are a great way to connect with people. Such events provide a platform for a health reporter to connect with renowned people from healthcare in one place, which otherwise is not possible. Health seminars and conferences also help a journalist in coming out with exclusive stories based on

reports and presentations tabled during the event. These events enrich the knowledge of a reporter on a variety of subjects. For example, a seminar of oncologists on leukemia can help a reporter understand a variety of aspects associated with the disease as well as the latest treatment procedures being followed across the globe.

10. Patient and patient relatives

Patients and their relatives are also an important source of information for a health reporter which can help the latter in writing stories based on ground realities. For example, a hospital superintendent can claim that the strike called by doctors and paramedical staff did not have any impact on hospital operations. However, in reality, patients had to face a lot of difficulties in availing treatment due to the strike. So, a reporter who is writing a copy of the strike and its impact shall always talk to patients and their relatives to get a clear idea of what happened in reality.

6.5 INITIATING WORK ON HEALTH BEAT

The health beat is one of the most important beats in a newsroom and a reporter needs to be careful while initiating work on this beat. While there are several beats where the news flow comes from just one location or organisation, it is not the case with health reporters as they have to roam around the city covering multiple government and private hospitals, while also keeping a tab on what is happening in the health department and the multiple directorates under it.

For beginners, it is very essential to understand the health beat and the responsibilities that come with it. Usually, newsrooms have only one health reporter who is supposed to take care of all the news and developments that originate from the health beat. The beat encompasses news and developments from the health department, government and private hospitals, research organisations, etc.

A reporter initiating work on the health beat should try to identify the major sources of health news in the city—major hospitals, important government officials, research institutions. He shall then try to read the various stories that have been published from the beat during the past six months. This will give a fair idea to the reporter on the issues that have already been covered and where there is a scope for follow-up. He should also identify the sources of news mentioned in the stories already published from the beat which will provide him a heads-up on who all he needs to approach.

Once all this is done, he should prepare a plan and start visiting one or two places to start developing sources. He should initially register his contact with the health department's PR wing as well as the PR wing of the government and private hospitals. This will ensure that he does not miss any routine developments. Thereafter, the reporter should start approaching the top officials of government and private hospitals such as directors and superintendent, as well as the heads of departments of various medical branches. He should also track the social media accounts and websites of the health ministry, health department, and hospitals, along with their senior officials.

A reporter should keep in mind that doctors are a busy lot and therefore, they have a limited time to spare. He should go prepared and ask specific questions rather than asking general questions which often results in an exercise in futility. Also, a reporter should try to develop a good rapport with senior doctors who can help them in securing contacts of other important doctors in the city. He should also ask the doctors about any researches being conducted by them.

A health reporter should also frequent to the various directorates of the health department and develop a clear understanding of the hierarchy in each directorate and their specific functions. In this process, he should develop a rapport across the hierarchy—right from the office peon to the health director.

While the PR wing of private hospitals directly approaches the journalists for news coverage, it is a different ball game in case of government hospitals. The official sources in government hospitals will only try to create a rosy picture of the hospital. However, the reality could be entirely different. Therefore, a reporter needs to develop a wide network of sources in the hospital to secure information and cross-check the information provided by hospital administrators. The reporter should also talk to patients and relatives to evaluate the kind of treatment made available to them and the problems they have to face.

The reporter should read medical journals and stay on top of developments in the medical field. This will help in sharpening his journalistic skills. He should try to make the most of events related to healthcare and connect with as many people as possible.

6.6 CHALLENGES IN HEALTH BEAT

The job of a health reporter is not an easy one. Unlike other beats where the majority of the information comes from a single source or location, a health reporter has to roam across the city to find newsworthy developments. Depending on the demographics of a city, there can be a number of hospitals and medical colleges spread across the city that a health reporter needs to cover. Therefore, a health reporter needs to put in extra effort to take care of the responsibilities entrusted to him. Following are the major challenges for a health reporter:

1. No place for mistakes

A health reporter under any circumstance cannot commit any mistake in reporting a story. He should always check and cross-check information before filing a story and should never accept anything on face value. For example, a reporter writing a story on cancer treatment cannot write the name of the medicine wrong or cannot promote a misleading treatment procedure that is yet to be approved by the government.

2. Hospitals/doctors with propaganda

Health reporters often come across hospitals and doctors who are trying to sell their own treatment procedures and use their media connections to gain publicity. A health reporter should remain aware of such hospitals and doctors and refuse to become a vehicle for their propaganda. For example, a hospital can claim to be using stem cell therapy for the treatment of neurological disorders. However, if the treatment is yet to be approved by the government, the reporter should not do a story on the subject unless the hospital provides detailed documents to establish its claims. Similarly, a diabetologist may send a press release with the headline “Type 2 diabetes is reversible”. However, in reality, it can never be reversed. The only thing achievable for patients is to reduce the dependence on medicines by adopting a strict diet.

3. Ethical challenges

Often a health reporter might have to report about the spread of a deadly infection in a particular area and its impact so far. While doing so, a reporter has to report the number of persons already infected with the disease. While there is no protocol on whether journalists should write the name of such patients or not, a journalist is often in two minds on whether he should write the name and place of the victim or not. For

example, if there is a story on a patient suffering from Congo fever, it is for the reporter to decide whether he wants to write the details of the patient or not.

4. Lack of scientific knowledge

Health is a beat in which a reporter is supposed to have basic scientific knowledge so as to understand the various concepts of healthcare and write about them. However, there are instances where a reporter who has been assigned the health beat has no scientific knowledge. This creates a lot of difficulties for the reporter to read medical journals, understand it, and write on the subject by localising the content. Also, the lack of scientific knowledge can result in misreporting. Health reporters are hardly provided any training on how to report on issues of public health and they are expected to learn the nuances of the beat while covering it.

5. Shortage of time

Health journalists are always running against time. They have to report on a variety of subjects within a limited time and do not get the time or the right resources to cross-check the claim of doctors or hospitals. For example, there can be a press conference by a corporate hospital at 5 pm claiming that they have performed the world's first robotic brain surgery. While the news may appear attractive, it needs to be cross-checked to ascertain whether any other hospital has carried such a surgery in the past or not. However, except for a google search, the reporter hardly gets time to cross-check this information. In reality, most of these claims turn out to be false and misleading.

6.7 PACKAGING AND SCHEDULING HEALTH STORIES

Health is one of the beats in a newsroom where there is an immense scope of pre-planning story packages that can be scheduled on a particular day. Due to the growing importance of public health and the concrete efforts of the government, days, weeks, fortnights, and months, are celebrated across the globe to create awareness about a particular disease. A reporter shall identify these days for an entire month in advance and come up with story packages on the relevant subject.

For example, the World Blood Donor Day is celebrated every year on June 14. A reporter can plan a story package in advance on a variety of aspects related to blood donation so that it can be used on a relevant day. The package can take care of aspects such as shortage of voluntary blood

donation in the state and country, infections found in donated blood, and how blood donation is good for health, among other things.

Following are the aspects that a health reporter needs to keep in mind while planning story packages:

1. Data and quotes to support claims

Making mere statements and claims in a story package can raise questions in the mind of readers regarding the credibility of the information provided. Therefore, it is essential to arrange for the required data and quotes required for the story in advance. For example, if the package is about the rising number of diabetes patients, it should contain data related to disease incidence and how it has increased over the years.

2. Localise

Localising a health story is essential for journalists before it is served to viewers or readers. A package can be based on a report published in a renowned medical journal, but readers will be attracted only if there is a local angle to the story. For example, if the package is related to the growing burden of cancer in cities, the reporter while including the national and global disease data should also try to find out the number of people affected due to the deadly disease in the concerned city. For a Mumbai-based media house, the headline: “Mumbai is cancer capital of India” will have a wider impact than a headline “10 million cancer patients in India”.

3. What is in it for readers/viewers?

A reporter should always keep it in mind that he is writing the story for readers. He should be able to explain properly what the readers are going to benefit after reading the story package. For example, if the story is about autoimmune diseases, a reporter shall properly explain to the readers what autoimmune diseases are and what all the patients can do to live a normal life with autoimmune diseases. The reporter shall also provide examples of autoimmune diseases to make things clear for readers.

4. Arrange for visual elements

While visuals are a must for television, it is also important for print media. A reporter planning a package should also arrange for visual elements in the form of pictures, illustrations, etc to be used along with

the package. No one wants to read a text-heavy package. This apart, the text should be broken into sub-headings. There should be quotes and comments. In the absence of any visual element, the reporter shall ensure that an infographic is prepared by the designers in advance to be carried along with the story.

5. Arrange for multiple quotes

Story packages done by health reporters should contain multiple quotes and comments. This is usually done to ensure that even contradicting views are carried and to avoid promoting the view of only one doctor. For example, a doctor may support a certain treatment procedure while another expert may suggest a different treatment procedure. Both the quotes are essential to ensure neutrality and to avoid taking sides.

6.8 REPORTING ON WELLNESS

Wellness can be loosely defined as an active process of becoming aware of and making choices towards a healthy and fulfilling life. Wellness is more than being healthy and may include emotional, environmental, financial, intellectual, physical, sexual, occupational, social, and spiritual well-being. Gone are the days when people were concerned only about their health which essentially meant remaining free from diseases. In the modern world, people are concerned about their weight, height, physical built, sexual prowess, and emotional satisfaction as well.

These concerns create enough opportunities for journalists to write on subjects that can help people in achieving the so-called different forms of well-being. For example, people overburdened with stress can find Yoga as a powerful means to reduce stress and add positivity in life. So, a story on how various postures in yoga benefit us will attract such readers. Similarly, people unable to maintain their work-life balance will read an article on how to maintain a work-life balance to get the required tips.

It is always not essential that a health reporter is expected to write features on wellness. The responsibility of writing such features can be entrusted to feature writers or freelance reporters. Irrespective of whoever writes the feature, the role of experts dealing with the subject and their viewpoints are of prime importance in such stories. For example, it is not possible for a health reporter to write on various yoga postures and their actual benefits. It is always better that the information is sourced from a yoga guru. Similarly, which spa messages are the most relaxing for a tired body is a subject best dealt by experts.

A person entrusted to write wellness features should keep in mind the festival calendar and write accordingly. For example, the reporter can do a story on pollution caused by firecrackers during Diwali and how to safeguard oneself from pollution. Similarly, just before Holi, there can be a story on how chemicals used in artificial colours are harmful for the skin and what precautionary measures people can take before venturing out to celebrate the festival of colours.

This apart, food is a major segment for writing wellness features. Every media outlet publishes wellness features on food clarifying what food should be taken and avoided in a particular disease or health condition. For example, a person suffering from low haemoglobin should consume green leafy vegetables and certain fruits that are rich in iron. Similarly, there can be a story on food items that a person suffering from gastroenteritis should avoid.

Emotional wellness or mental wellness is also important and a reporter can do stories on depression and various aspects associated with it. There are certain societal myths related to depression and a health reporter can do detailed feature stories to break these myths and create awareness on the subject. Availing psychiatric counselling is often perceived by society in a negative manner as if the person is suffering from mental illness and there is an urgent need to put an end to these societal prejudices.

6.9 CONCLUSION: IMPORTANCE OF HEALTH REPORTING IS INCREASING

With the spread of non-communicable diseases and their growing disease burden and the innumerable efforts taken by governments to improve the state of public health and allied infrastructure, it is obvious that the importance of health beat has increased manifold. The increase in the importance of the health beat is also attributed to the growing awareness about healthcare and wellness among the public. There are several challenges as well that a health reporter has to overcome to excel in his beat. All this makes health reporting one of the best learning opportunities for a journalist.

6.10 LET US SUM IT UP

The unit must have helped you in understanding:

- Concept of health and wellness reporting

- Importance of health beat
- Sources of information for a health reporter
- Challenges in health reporting
- How to initiate work on the health beat

6.11 KEYWORDS

Public health	The health of the population as a whole, especially as the subject of government regulation and support.
Globalisation	It is the process of interaction and integration among people, companies, and governments worldwide.
Autoimmune diseases	A category of diseases in which the body's immune system attacks the healthy cells of the body. Examples are rheumatoid arthritis, lupus, coeliac disease, etc.
Demographics	Statistical data related to the population and particular groups within it.

6.12 CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

1. What encompasses the health beat?

2. Why public health is important for the government?

3. What is the role of media in public health?

4. Why the health beat is important for a newsroom?

5. What are some of the most important sources of information for a health reporter?

6. What are some of the major challenges in the health beat?

7. Why scientific acumen is important for health reporters?

8. Why localising health stories is essential?

6.13 REFERENCES

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:: STRUCTURE::**7.0 Introduction****7.1 Objectives****7.2 Introduction to the environment beat****7.3 Importance of the environment beat****7.4 Challenges in environment reporting****7.5 Sources in wildlife reporting****7.6 Challenges in wildlife reporting****7.7 Let us sum it up****7.8 Keywords****7.9 Check Your Progress****7.10 References**

7.0 INTRODUCTION

Pollution and climate change have posed a major threat to mankind. While these threats were not taken seriously in the 1980s and 1990s, things have completely changed and now, governments are forced to ensure that enough measures are taken to minimise the damage to the environment and wildlife. Governments are also taking measures to achieve the goal of sustainable development. The pressure is more on developing countries like India as it is struggling with poor technological knowledge to make use of non-polluting sources of energy and reduce its dependence on fossil fuels, combined with its urge to maintain a good economic growth rate. All this makes the environment and wildlife beat an interesting arena for a journalist. While the beat comes with its own

set of challenges, it comes with an opportunity for a journalist to come up with path-breaking investigative stories. The unit discusses the various aspects of environment and wildlife reporting from a reporter's perspective.

7.1 OBJECTIVES

- Understand the concept of environment and wildlife reporting
- Understand the importance of the environment and wildlife beat
- Understand the sources for environment and wildlife reporters
- Understand the challenges that an environment and wildlife reporter faces
- Understand how to initiate work on these beats

On completion of this unit

On completion of this unit, you will be able to understand:

- Concept of environment beat and wildlife beat
- Importance of environment and wildlife beat in newsrooms
- The sources that environment and wildlife reporters need to tap to excel in their fields
- Challenges of environment and wildlife reporting
- Why investigative reporting is essential in these beats

7.2 INTRODUCTION TO THE ENVIRONMENT BEAT

The rapid industrialisation and urbanisation in the past few decades have put a lot of pressure on the environment bringing the debate on sustainability and climate change to the fore. It is a well-known fact that many of the most polluted cities across the world are in India. Cities like New Delhi and Kanpur have always hit headlines over the growing air pollution, which becomes unbearable, especially during winters.

While rapid urbanisation and industrialisation has been achieved at the cost of the environment, people have never been so concerned about the air they breathe, the water they drink, and the area they live in. This growing concern is primarily the reason why the environment beat has strengthened its position in the Indian newsrooms. In the last century, there were hardly any dedicated reporters for environment reporting. However, things have changed for the better and stories on environment

garner quite a considerable readership resulting in the growing importance of environment reporters.

So, what encompasses the environment beat? While the specific aspects related to environment that a beat reporter has to cover may vary from city-to-city, there are some general aspects of the environment that every reporter has to deal with. These include both indoor and outdoor air pollution, water pollution, pollution caused by local industries, untreated sewerage disposal, environmental hazards of dumping yards, occupational health hazards, global warming, and climate change.

It also includes government policies on pollution prevention, the environmental threat posed by mega infrastructure projects, reverse boring of harmful chemical waste by industries, news originating from the state and central pollution control boards, litigations related to environment and violation of green norms going in the National Green Tribunals and high courts, etc.

How difficult is environment reporting? Unlike other beats, it is difficult to find stories on a regular basis from environmental reporting. However, at the same time, it should be mentioned that if a reporter can invest his time, energy, and dedication in the beat, it can reward him with path-breaking sensational stories having widespread impact.

An environment reporter needs to have or develop a few qualities to achieve success in the beat. These include scientific temperament, ability to read between lines, and the ability to go deep into a subject and investigate the same. There is immense scope for a journalist to become an investigative reporter while working on the environment beat. It is because no company or government will ever tell citizens that it is involved in something that is causing pollution and degrading the environment. In fact, every company and government will try to justify that it has taken enough measures to control pollution, which could be just an eyewash. Therefore, it is always essential for an environment reporter to not accept anything on face value and instead, he should try to find out the hidden truth through diligent investigation on the subject.

Another important aspect that an environment reporter needs to ensure is that he will have to write on environmental issues in a manner that even a layman can understand. Since environmental issues may require a lot of scientific knowledge and its application, it becomes a major challenge for an environment reporter to simplify things for his readers.

7.3 IMPORTANCE OF THE ENVIRONMENT BEAT

As people have become more concerned about what is happening in their surroundings and how it is affecting their health, the importance of the environment beat is increasing day by day. For example, a resident of New Delhi is always concerned about the ambient air quality in his area and he or she will definitely read about reports on air pollution in the city, especially during winters. There are several factors that make environmental reporting important for society and the newsroom. These are:

1. Creates awareness

The environment beat is important because it creates awareness among citizens about the environment they live in, the air they breathe, the quality of water they enjoy, the public spaces that are part of their life, and why climate change is a real threat. This awareness is important for people to make informed decisions, which can be lifesaving at times. For example, a city might lack infrastructure in water supply and people might depend on groundwater to meet their daily needs. If tests have traced that there is a high quantity of arsenic in groundwater, the authorities, owing to their own limitations, might now reveal this information. However, an environment reporter who is privy to this information can come up with a detailed story. This will help the citizens dependent on groundwater to question the authorities and resort to better water filtration techniques to minimise health risks due to arsenic.

2. Informs readers about government initiatives affecting the environment

Governments often make decisions that can have a negative impact on the local environment and on the health of citizens. The negative impacts of these decisions are seldom told to the local population to avoid any protest or backlash. It is an important responsibility of an environment journalist to ascertain the environmental impact of a development project being planned by the government. For example, the government might come up with a plan to install a 100-megawatt coal-based power plant and tried to promote the project as an initiative to augment power supply in the state. An environment reporter needs to assess whether there is a shortfall of energy in the state and whether the project is going to destroy the local environment by causing air and water pollution.

3. Environment news affects people

Unlike news from other beats, environment news directly affects people. It is because such news items are mostly about their surroundings and what is happening in there and its impact. For example, a story done by CNN in March 2019 titled “22 of the top 30 most polluted cities in the world are in India” created a sort of global debate with several countries blaming India for the lack of initiatives to curb its dependence on fossil fuels and move towards renewable energy forms. It also exposed how consecutive elected governments failed to ensure a healthy environment for its residents.

4. Environment news has a strong impact on government policies

There are several instances where a government has to change its policy or shelve projects owing to the protests caused by people, NGOs, and civil society groups, due to the constant hammering of stories by environment journalists on how the policy or the project is going to affect the local environment. For example, the coalition government of Shiv Sena-NCP-Congress of Maharashtra after coming to power in 2019 shelved the plan to construct the metro car shed construction at Aarey Colony in Mumbai, which is also considered as the green lungs of the city. Notably, after the constant hammering of stories by media, citizens, celebrities, and social activists protested against the cutting of trees at Aarey Colony to make way for the project. It ultimately forced the new government to shift the metro car shed.

5. People are interested

One of the most important factors that make the environment an important beat in a newsroom is that people are interested in stories about the environment. It is because the stories from the environment beat are a combination of science, politics, crime and lifestyle choices. For example, the stories about rising pollution levels in New Delhi, especially during the winters, is a combination of what are the reasons behind the rise in pollution levels; what the government is doing to curb pollution; the local politics between BJP, AAP, and Congress and the associated blame game; the success and failure of the odd-even policy of Arvind Kejriwal government; how many motorists violated the odd-even rule; and how the rise in pollution is resulting in a rise in sale of air purifiers and anti-pollution masks. In all, these stories, apart from discussing the central point of pollution, also ends up being a gamut of aspects related to the everyday life of citizens.

6. Produces high impact investigative stories

Environment beat is one of those beats which provide immense scope to a journalist to investigate things and come up with high impact stories. These stories cannot be done overnight and a reporter needs to have a network of good sources and the right skills for the same. For example, a company might be claiming on papers that it is not causing any pollution. However, the reality could be entirely different. It could also happen that it lacks even the essential treatment facilities to curb air and water pollution and is operating in connivance with officials of the pollution control board. It could also happen that the company is releasing the fumes directly into the air without treating and dumping untreated effluents in rivers. These are stories that are not available easily and a reporter has to dig deep and investigate to unearth them.

7.7 Sources in the environment beat

Like any other beat, sources in the environment beat play a very crucial role in the success or failure of a reporter. However, at the same time, it must be mentioned that the success of an environment reporter does not depend merely on sources, but also depends on the analytical ability of the journalist. A source can provide a journalist with a sheet of scientific data, but it is for the journalist to identify the story from the datasheet and give it the right spin. The following are important sources of information that an environment reporter needs to cultivate:

1. Environment department and ministry

One of the major sources of news for an environment reporter is the environment department in the state and the ministry at the Centre. It is the environment department that frames new policies and modifies existing ones related to the environment that directly or indirectly affects citizens. The department is the apex body in a state for the implementation of the Environment (Protection) Act, which is the principal Act for environmental protection in the country. The department operates through various subordinate agencies constituted in order to ensure sustainable development in the state.

For example, the environment department in Gujarat has four executing agencies—Gujarat Pollution Control Board, Gujarat Ecology Commission, Gujarat Institute of Desert Ecology, and Gujarat Environmental Management Institute. A reporter covering the environment beat must maintain good rapport with officials of the

department irrespective of hierarchy. He should also maintain a good relationship with the environment minister and secretary to remain abreast of developments in the domain.

2. Pollution Control Boards

The Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) and the state pollution control boards are a major source of information for an environmental reporter. Since the responsibility of ground-level implementation of the pollution norms lies with the pollution control boards, it is important for the beat reporter to stay in touch with officials of the board. The reporter should connect with scientists working in these boards as well as the administrators such as the chairman of the board, who is privy to a lot of newsworthy developments.

For example, a reporter will have to approach the pollution control board to get figures related to pollution, how it has increased over the years, worst areas to live in a city in terms of pollution, etc. Also, it is a place where a reporter can know about showcause notices or punitive action against companies for violating pollution norms. Another routine story that is done every year with the help of data made available by the pollution control board is the comparison of pollution levels due to the bursting of firecrackers during Diwali over the years.

3. Environmental impact assessment reports

All major projects of the government are assessed by experts on how it is going to affect the local environment, what preventive measures can be taken, whether the advantages of the project outweigh the disadvantages, etc. These reports also contain details about the existing environmental parameters and how the project is likely to affect them. The reports are prepared after carrying out a thorough exercise including field visits and are usually voluminous in nature. The sanction of a project depends upon the environmental impact assessment report. These reports are a wealth of information that an environment reporter can utilise to come up with insightful stories.

For example, if the government is planning to come up with a plan to construct an expressway that passes through forest areas, the environmental impact assessment report, also popularly known as the EIA, can be a major source of information for a reporter. These reports are usually difficult to get, especially in case of a controversial project. In

order to access such reports, the reporter needs to have a good network of sources in the agency executing the project.

4. Green activists and NGOs

There are several activists and NGOs that are working in the domain of environmental protection. These activists and organisations are privy to a lot of developments in the state or city, which otherwise is hard to track for a reporter. An environment reporter should always maintain a good rapport with these organisations and activists. However, he should also keep in mind not to fall in the trap of these activists and write whatever they try to pitch. Instead, a reporter should never accept anything on face value and seek documents before doing any story.

For example, an activist might try to hard sell that a company, involved in the manufacturing of chemicals, is violating green norms and releasing untreated effluents in the nearby river damaging its ecology. However, a reporter should not accept the claim on face value and should ask for requisite documents and photographs that establishes the same. Also, the reporter should also take comments of the concerned company before publishing the story to ensure objectivity.

5. National Green Tribunal

The National Green Tribunal (NGT) was established in October 2010 under the National Green Tribunal Act for effective and expeditious disposal of cases pertaining to environmental protection and conservation of forests and other natural resources. It also deals with the enforcement of any legal rights related to the environment. The principal bench of the tribunal sits at New Delhi and the other benches of the tribunal are available at Bhopal, Pune, Kolkata, and Chennai. Depending on the place of the dispute, the cases will go to one of these benches. An environment reporter should always keep a track of litigations related to his city being adjudicated by NGT. These green courts often come down heavily on authorities for their lackadaisical approach related to environmental issues of the city. Since all the judgments of the bench are available online on NGT's website, it is essential for a journalist to keep checking the website for regular updates.

For example, the principal bench of NGT in September 2019 severely criticised the Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation for not doing enough to solve the problems in the existing dumping yard at Pirana. It was only after the criticism that the civic authorities in Ahmedabad swung into

action and initiated working on a plan to solve the long-pending problems of Pirana dumping yard.

6. Environmental journals

There are several international and Indian journals on environmental sciences that are a rich source of information for journalists covering the environment beat. Many of these journals are monthly or fortnightly. Apart from environment journals, there are several publications that deal with only environmental news and green and innovative initiatives being taken in various parts of the country. One of the best examples of such a publication is 'Down to Earth'. The content in these journals might not be always relevant to a particular city. However, a journalist should regularly go through these journals to remain aware of the latest happenings with regard to the protection of the environment and the best practices being adopted for the same.

7.4 CHALLENGES IN ENVIRONMENT REPORTING

While environmental reporting may seem an easy beat, a journalist should be rest assured that it is not. There are several challenges that a journalist covering the environment beat has to face in his day-to-day newsgathering process. There can be several days when an environment reporter might not have any story to contribute from his beat. While the flow of stories from the beat is comparatively less than other routine beats, it should be also mentioned that an environment reporter can come up with path-breaking stories that are an excellent read. In a nutshell, following are the challenges for an environment journalist:

1. Lack of scientific acumen

Journalists are not scientists and vice-versa. Scientists working in the domain of environmental protection and pollution control often fail to explain developments from the field to a journalist in a layman's language. Scientific terms often confuse a journalist and it could result in the latter missing a newsworthy development. A journalist covering the environment beat is not always a science graduate and he might not understand the difference between fog and smog, PM10 and PM2.5, NO₂ and SO₂, etc. The scientific acumen that is required for the environment beat is usually developed by journalists they are working in the beat.

2. No formal training

Journalists do not receive any formal training for covering the environment beat. This is a major issue that has not been addressed by the media industry as very few media houses are interested in investing in their people to upgrade their skills. Due to the lack of formal training, an environment journalist often fails to understand how to approach a particular subject. For example, climate change is an umbrella term and used frequently by environmental journalists. But, most journalists do not have a consolidated idea about climate change, how it is taking place, what are the factors behind it, and what all are countries doing on their part to address climate change. It needs to be kept in mind that a journalist with poor knowledge and skills will not be able to deliver a good story.

3. Corporate pressure on media houses

Corporate firms running manufacturing businesses often violate green norms as they are reluctant to invest heavily in technology to reduce pollution caused by the manufacturing facility and are always hell-bent on maximising profit. In such a situation, an environment journalist who is aware of these violations by corporate firms might plan to do a story that might result in a lot of negative publicity for the company. A corporate firm that is aware that a journalist is pursuing such a story might directly or indirectly try to pressurise the journalist or his media house to drop the story. At times, media houses dependent on advertisement revenue from these companies succumb to the pressure.

4. Journalists have to dig deep

In a bid to come up with excellent stories, an environment reporter has to dig deep, investigate, and then come up with a story. When it comes to major development projects, governments hardly give any importance to environmental damage that the project is likely to cause. In fact, environmental damage is the price we pay for many development projects. At the same time, it should be also mentioned that neither the government nor industry will ever reveal the violations of the green norms caused by them. It is for a journalist to investigate, procure the relevant data and then do the story. For example, if the pollution levels in a residential area adjoining a government industrial unit are 10 times above the permissible limit, the concerned governmental authority is never going to reveal that.

5. Environmental controversies influence business, politics

Environmental controversies often involve influential business and economic interests, political battles, criminal activities, and might be against government initiatives. All this makes environment reporting a risky business for a journalist as he needs to maintain the fine distinction between a journalist and an activist. Also, at times, journalists covering these issues might find themselves in cross-hairs.

7.5 INTRODUCTION TO WILDLIFE REPORTING

Wildlife reporting is one of the few beats in a newsroom that provides both hard and soft news. A wildlife reporter can write both lead stories on newsworthy developments and feature stories, as well, that are meant to be anchors on a news page. While there is no dearth of interesting stories from the wildlife beat, it is not considered an important beat in a newsroom and is usually assigned to a reporter as a secondary beat. This is because of the poor flow of stories from the beat.

So what encompasses the wildlife beat? In a nutshell, the prime responsibility of a wildlife reporter is to report on issues related to forests, wildlife, government policies or projects affecting wildlife, wildlife tourism, human settlements in forest areas, etc. In fact, wild animals are a matter of pride for many Indian states that provide them with a distinct identity. For example, Gujarat is known for its Asiatic Lions, Madhya Pradesh is known for its Tigers, and West Bengal is known for its Bengal Tigers, wild elephants, etc.

The job of a wildlife reporter is not easy as forests are usually located far away from cities and a reporter needs to develop a terrific network of sources so as to cross-check information. The problem also arises because wildlife reporters have to depend on government officials for information and the official version of the government might not always reflect the right facts. Forest department officials often do not provide the right information or manipulate the information so as to make way for a development project coming up in and around the forest area.

For example, mining in forest areas is a major problem. While the government provides mining leases to some firms, many others operate in the forest area without any proper sanction. Also, many firms who have been issued mining lease violate terms of the lease within the forest area. However, government officials of the forest and mining departments will never agree to the same. It becomes difficult for a wildlife reporter to

report on such issues because government officials will not reveal information regarding the illegalities in mining activities going on in the forest area. Even if some government officials reveal the information, it is difficult for a reporter to prove the same in the absence of photographs. Also, it is not possible for a wildlife reporter to visit the forest area every time he plans to do a story.

In order to perform well in the wildlife beat, a reporter needs to be aware of the forest cover in the state, the various wild animals found in these forests, the various wildlife sanctuaries in the state, the government policies for the protection and conservation of forests, and the scope of wildlife tourism in the state. The knowledge in these aspects is also essential for a reporter to write insightful stories that are rich in information. Wildlife reporters should also have good linguistic skills to write travelogues on wildlife tourism and feature stories.

A wildlife reporter is also supposed to know about the human settlements and communities living in the forest area and the issues faced by them. For example, human settlements have often created a problem for wildlife and resulted in the death of wild animals due to falling in open-wells, illegal tourism, poaching, electrification of farm fences, etc.

7.6 SOURCES IN WILDLIFE REPORTING

Wildlife reporting is one of the beats where maintaining sources is a major challenge. A reporter has to often depend upon the official version of information and there are limited ways in which that information can be cross-checked. Even if wild animals are facing any trouble due to human interference in forests, unlike humans, they never will be able to reveal the same by staging a protest. Therefore, a wildlife reporter should develop a network of trustworthy sources for wildlife reporting. The following can be the potential sources for a wildlife reporter:

1. Forest and wildlife department

The forest and wildlife department of the state government is one of the major sources of news for a wildlife reporter. It is a place where there is a constant flow of information that the reporter has to tap to spread his tentacles in the wildlife beat. The department is the authority that is entrusted with the responsibility of converting open and degraded forests into dense forests; resolve the issue of man-animal conflict; protect mangroves, sacred groves, and other highly sensitive ecosystems; provide livelihood opportunity to forest-dependent communities; promoting

ecotourism facilities in forest areas, and regulating the sustainable utilisation of forest resources.

The department is headed by the principal chief conservator of forest who is assisted by a battery of officials looking after domains such as wildlife crime, monitoring, land, research and training, etc. With so many responsibilities being handled by the department, there is no dearth of good stories that a wildlife reporter can unearth. However, it all depends on the rapport that the reporter has developed with the officials. For example, if a reporter needs the data related to man-animal conflicts in the state during the past 10 years, he can approach the principal chief conservator of forest for the same.

2. Local communities

Since a wildlife reporter cannot take the risk of over-dependence on government officials for information, it is essential for the former to develop a good network of sources in the local communities living in-and-around the forest. The local communities are the first to get updates on any development in the forest area and can tip-off the journalist about any wrongdoings or corruption in the forest department. It has been often found that certain anti-social elements from the local communities with the connivance of forest department officials run illegal hotel and forest tour business.

For example, several illegal hotels and resorts were operating illegally in the areas in-and-around Gir National Park in Gujarat right under the nose of the authorities without the requisite permissions. After news regarding the same was published, the Gujarat High Court took suo motu cognizance of the issue and initiated a public interest litigation. Thereafter, the court issued several stringent directions to the government that resulted in the closure of illegal businesses.

3. Associations related to wildlife tourism

In order to facilitate ecotourism in forest areas with wildlife populations, governments have come up with various schemes to attract private investments. This has resulted in the development of tourism facilities such as hotels and resorts, open jeep safaris, forest tours, etc. The hotels and resorts operating in the forest area have their own association and so does the vehicle operators rendering vehicle facilities to tourists. These associations are an important source of information for a wildlife journalist. The office-bearers of these associations are well-aware of

developments taking place in the forest area and can pass on newsworthy information to a journalist.

For example, if a lion has chased down a tourist jeep in a national park, the authorities are not likely to reveal the same to journalists as it may draw negative publicity for the national park which will ultimately affect tourist footfall. However, a tourist jeep driver will definitely share this information with fellow drivers and therefore, a good rapport with the office bearers of the tourist jeep association will ensure that the reporter gets the information on time. The associations can also provide information to a journalist related to the unusual behaviour or movement of wild animals in the forest area.

4. Activists and NGOs

Activists and NGOs working in the domain of forest and wildlife conservation are an important source for news and updates for a wildlife reporter. These activists and NGOs are aware of the developments in the forest areas and have a fair idea of whether a project or change in policy planned by the government is good or bad for the local wildlife populations. They have a deep-rooted network in the forest area and have comparatively easier access to government documents. A good rapport with the activists and NGOs will ensure that the reporter will continue to get news and updates from them.

For example, there is a world-renowned NGO called World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) that works in the field of wildlife conservation, protection of endangered species, and reduction of human impact on the environment.

7.7 CHALLENGES IN WILDLIFE REPORTING

The wildlife beat comes with its own share of challenges for a reporter. Unlike other conventional beats, wildlife reporting does not enjoy too much importance in a newsroom unless there is a big breaking story. Often wildlife news is curtailed or dropped to make way for news from the world of crime, politics, health, and urban development, as a majority of the readers are not interested in reading stories about wildlife. Following are some of the major challenges in wildlife reporting:

1. Limited interest of people

One of the major factors due to which newsrooms do not give importance to wildlife reporting is that there is a limited section of people who are interested in reading about wildlife stories. People are interested to see a nicely framed picture of a wild animal from the wilderness and a brief caption on it. But, when it comes to reading stories about wildlife, the majority of people simply ignore it and jump to another news item.

2. Wildlife stories lack any direct impact

People are interested in reading stories from crime, political, civic, and health beat, as the stories generated from these beats have a direct or indirect impact on them. Usually, these stories are discussed in society. However, when it comes to stories from wildlife, people overlook them as they do not have a direct impact on them. People completely forget the crucial role of wildlife in maintaining ecological balance. For example, a story on a tigress giving birth to two cubs might not interest all, but a story on the municipal corporation increasing property tax rates will definitely enjoy a much higher readership.

3. Poor access to documents and poor record-keeping

One of the major challenges that a wildlife reporter faces is the lack of access to documents related to wildlife conservation in India. While a lot is being talked about wildlife and its conservation, governments often give more priority to development that results in shrinking forest cover and an increase in man-animal conflict. Even as the Right to Information Act has made it relatively easier for a journalist to access government documents, but poor documentation and record-keeping is a menace that all governments are fighting at their end.

4. Threat from local mafias

Local mafias are always a threat to a journalist covering wildlife. Be it the timber mafia, or animal poachers, or local groups running illegal jungle safaris, a news story against them is definitely going to rub them in the wrong way. A journalist doing such stories has to be tactful in dealing with such threats and should not take them lightly.

5. Getting visuals is a problem

Since it is not possible for a wildlife reporter to always remain on the spot and remain abreast of the developments happening in the forest area, it is

difficult for the reporter to manage the visuals for the story. For example, a lion attacking and killing two lionesses is a wonderful story for a reporter, but if the fight had happened in the core of the forest area at night, it is difficult for the reporter to manage the visuals.

7.8 CONCLUSION: ENVIRONMENT AND WILDLIFE BEAT CAN GENERATE HIGH-IMPACT STORIES

Environment and wildlife beats are one of the most challenging beats in a newsroom. This is because of the poor flow of stories and the lack of interest of the news consumers. However, at the same time, it should be mentioned that if an environment and wildlife reporter can develop the skills required for investigative journalism, he can come up with insightful stories that can have widespread impact. But that would happen only when the concerned reporter is able to present the information in an attractive manner, which is free from jargon, uses simple language, and provides 360-degree coverage of the issue so that even a layman can understand it.

7.9 LET US SUM IT UP

This unit must have helped you in understanding:

- What encompasses environment and wildlife beats
- The importance of environment and wildlife beat in newsrooms
- Various sources that these beat reporters need to tap
- Qualities required for environment and wildlife reporting
- Challenges faced by these beat reporters
- Why it is important to acquire skills of an investigative reporter while covering the environment beat

7.10 KEYWORDS

Urbanisation	It is the increase in the proportion of people living in towns and cities.
Sustainability	It is the avoidance of the depletion of natural resources in order to maintain an ecological balance.
Climate change	Also known as global warming, it is the long-term rise in the average temperature of the earth's climate system. Climate change occurs when changes in the earth's climate system result in new weather patterns that remain in

Wildlife

place for an extended period of time.
It traditionally refers to undomesticated animal species, but has come to include all organisms that grow or live wild in an area without being introduced by humans.

7.11 CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

1. What encompasses the environment beat?

2. How difficult is the environment beat?

3. What are the qualities that an environment reporter needs to develop?

4. What are the factors that make the environment beat important?

5. What are the various sources of information for an environment reporter?

6. What are the challenges in environmental reporting?

7. What are the responsibilities of a wildlife reporter?

8. What are the sources of information for a wildlife reporter?

7.12 REFERENCES

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:: STRUCTURE::

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8.0 INTRODUCTION

The modalities of foreign affairs reporting have completely changed in the past two-three decades. These days owing to financial pressures, very few media houses can afford to have a dedicated foreign correspondent in different countries. Either they are investing on journalists who can write about foreign affairs while staying in India, or are collaborating with foreign media for content sharing. In this changing scenario and with the advancement of technology, the need and process for foreign affairs reporting have completely changed. This unit discusses in detail the various aspects of modern-day foreign affairs reporting from a reporter's

perspective. It also explains defence reporting and the scope and challenges of a war reporter.

8.1 OBJECTIVES

- Understand the concept of foreign affairs reporting
- Understand the importance of foreign affairs reporting
- Understand the various sources of information for foreign affairs reporting
- Understand the skills required for breaking into foreign affairs reporting
- Understand the concept of defence reporting and its importance in the present circumstances
- Understand the scope and challenges of war reporting

On completion of this unit

On completion of this unit, you will be able to understand:

- Overview of foreign affairs reporting and its importance in the newsroom
- Various sources for a foreign affairs reporter and the challenges in the beat
- Overview of defence reporting and its importance in the prevalent geopolitical scenario
- Scope and challenges of war reporting and why it is the most dangerous forms of journalism.

8.2 INTRODUCTION TO FOREIGN AFFAIRS REPORTING

Unlike other beats in a newsroom, reporting on foreign affairs is a different ballgame altogether. There was a time when all major newspapers and news channels used to have foreign correspondents that were deployed in different countries to write about news and developments in that country that would interest the native audiences because of the socio-political and economic reasons. However, with the passage of time and owing to financial considerations, most Indian newspapers and news channels have discontinued this practice and instead started a practice of temporarily deploying their staff in foreign locations to cover a major event.

With the concept of having foreign correspondents becoming a thing of the past, Indian media houses started investing in a new crop of journalists who can write on foreign affairs while sitting in India. The work of these journalists is not an easy one as they need to have a

thorough knowledge of the diplomatic relations of India with the country they are writing about and the story has to be based on facts and data that are not always easy to procure.

India's military expenditure is third largest in the world and it has the second-largest armed force. Similarly, it is the fifth-largest economy by nominal rates and the third-largest economy when it comes to purchasing power parity. With all these factors, it is natural that India is a major regional power with growing international influence and a strong voice in global affairs. Therefore, it makes reporting on foreign affairs an equally important subject for media houses as people want to know what is happening in the world, how it is going to affect India, the standpoint of the Indian government on global issues, and how the world is reacting to developments in India.

For example, after the Narendra Modi-led BJP government came to power in 2014, there were occasional border tensions along the Indo-China border in northeast India. This led to a major uproar in the country and people started campaigns for boycotting Chinese goods. All these developments affected Indo-China relations and there were several news reports on the same as people were interested.

Similarly, after the USA assassinated a top Iranian general Qasem Soleimani in a drone strike in January 2020 alleging the latter's involvement in anti-American activities, tensions increased between the two nations with Iran retaliating by targeting American troops in neighbouring Iraq. India was quick to demand peace in the region. There are two factors for India's concern—Indians working in Iran and the latter being a major supplier of crude oil to India. These developments were reported by all media houses.

The importance of foreign affairs reporting can be ascertained by the fact that Indian newspapers have a dedicated page for international news and news channels have dedicated slots for the same. In fact, in the case of major development, international news becomes the subject matter for front-page lead stories for newspapers and special programmes for news channels. For example, when the USA assassinated top Iranian general Qasem Soleimani in a drone strike in January 2020 alleging the latter's involvement in anti-American activities, it was the front-page lead story of newspapers that explained the implications of a war between America and Iran on India and its economy. Similarly, television news channels

broadcasted special programmes on the drone strike explaining how it was carried out, how the world reacted, how India reacted, etc.

8.3 IMPORTANCE OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS REPORTING

In this era of globalisation when events or decisions by a country can affect other countries and their citizens, there is a growing need for people to remain aware of what is happening around the world. This need is satisfied by media organisations by covering major developments from across the world and serving it to the native audiences in a way they can understand. The various factors that make foreign affairs reporting important are:

1. Globalisation

We live in a globalised world where the economies and cultures of various countries have been drawn deeper together and are interconnected through global networks of trade, capital flows, and the rapid spread of technology and global media. In this era, a major development in America will not just affect the American economy alone. Therefore, it is essential to know about these developments and that is being made possible by media houses through foreign affairs reporting.

For example, after the USA assassinated a top Iranian general Qasem Soleimani in a drone strike in January 2020 alleging the latter's involvement in anti-American activities, tensions increased between the two nations with Iran retaliating by targeting American troops in neighbouring Iraq. This greatly affected the Indian stock markets especially the stocks of oil marketing PSUs as a war between the two countries would result in a disruption of crude oil supplies for India from Iran, which would affect the fuel prices in the country.

2. Information on geopolitical developments

Through foreign affairs reporting, people come to know about various geopolitical developments that affect diplomatic relations between the two countries. These developments are also important for the citizens to know so that they are aware of what is happening in the neighbouring countries and how it affects their own country.

For example, Pakistan has been always blamed for terrorist attacks in India and for being a safe haven for terrorists. In 2018 and 2019, the USA cancelled the funding promised to Pakistan for the latter's failure to take

action against military groups. In fact, US President Donald Trump had accused Pakistan of deceiving the US while receiving billions of dollars in foreign aid. This is a major development for India which has a bitter relationship with the neighbouring country for the past several decades.

3. Crucial information for investors

International news and developments provide crucial information to investors that help them in making informed decisions. Since investors are crucial for any economy, news on foreign affairs directly or indirectly affects the economy. Developments in major economies also affect the value of their currencies and affect trade.

For example, an Indian investor might have plans to start a business in the US. However, due to a new policy of the Donald Trump government, an Indian investor might incur losses due to an increase in the taxation rates. The news on the Trump government's new policy and its implications would greatly help the investor in deciding whether he wants to go ahead with his investment in the US or look for another tax-friendly country for his business.

4. Clarifies India's stand on foreign developments

Foreign affairs stories are a major source for citizens to understand the stand of the Indian government on any major development in the world. It also helps in understanding why the government has taken that stand and the various interests of the country related to the issue. These stories also help in setting an image of the country in the world.

For example, after the USA assassinated a top Iranian general Qasem Soleimani in a drone strike in January 2020 alleging the latter's involvement in anti-American activities, tensions increased between the two nations with Iran retaliating by targeting American troops in neighbouring Iraq. India was quick to demand peace in the region. There are two factors for India's concern—Indians working in Iran and the latter being a major supplier of crude oil to India. The various news items published on the issue also establishes India's external image as a "peace-loving country".

5. Provides updates on developments in various fields

Journalists entrusted with foreign affairs reporting are often instructed to write in-depth and insightful stories on a variety of subjects that interests

the native audiences such as economics, national defence and security, culture, and international bureaucracy. Stories are also done on the development of nations, health, human rights, terrorism, politics, science and technology, and environmental concerns, among others. For example, the collaboration between Indian and the US on a space mission will definitely become major global news. Similarly, a joint defence exercise between India and France is also important news, especially in the Asian region.

8.4 SOURCES IN FOREIGN AFFAIRS REPORTING

Like any other beat, there is an array of sources for reporters entrusted with the foreign affairs beat. However, foreign affairs reporting is a relatively challenging beat than regular beats. There are several crucial sources in foreign affairs reporting that are hard to reach and on several occasions when the reporter is looking for crucial information, the sources might not reveal anything newsworthy. But, challenges apart, foreign affairs reporting is an interesting beat and a reporter entrusted with this beat has immense scope to earn name and fame in journalism. Following are some of the important sources of information for foreign affairs reporters:

1. Ministry of External Affairs (MEA)

The Ministry of External Affairs, also colloquially known as the MEA, is a ministry under the Indian government which looks after India's foreign relations with other countries. It also represents the country in the United Nations and provides advisory services to other government ministries, departments, and agencies, when the latter are dealing with foreign governments or institutions. The bureaucratic head of MEA is the foreign secretary who is assisted by several other secretary-level officers. Notably, there are dedicated officials who act as the ministry's spokespersons and handle media queries. The ministry's office is situated in the South Block building which also houses the Prime Minister's office and Defence Ministry's office. Other offices of MEA are located in Jawaharlal Nehru Bhawan, Patiala House, and ISIL Building. MEA is an important source for authentic news and information on diplomatic relations with other countries, visits of Indian dignitaries (Prime Minister and President) to other countries and vice-versa, any major development threatening the life of Indians in other countries, etc.

2. Diplomatic missions of India

India, being an important player in the global economy and geopolitics, has a large diplomatic network in the world. The diplomatic missions of India are particularly found in Central Asia, East Africa, Southeast Asia, the Middle East, Caribbean and the Pacific, and the rest of the Indian subcontinent, where there is a history of the vibrant Indian diaspora. India, being a member of the Commonwealth of Nations, has High Commissions (embassies) in the capital cities of other Commonwealth nations. This apart, it also has consular missions in other cities of these countries. As of January 2020, India has diplomatic missions in 130 countries across the globe and honorary consuls in 35 countries. These diplomatic missions are a major source of information for a journalist for stories on trade and diplomatic relations.

3. Diplomatic missions in India

Like India has diplomatic missions across the globe, several countries have their diplomatic missions in India. Most of these embassies (or high commissions) are present in New Delhi and some of the countries also have their diplomatic missions (deputy high commission, consulate general, or consulates) in other important cities such as Mumbai, Kolkata, Bengaluru, Chennai, Agartala, Guwahati, Hyderabad, Panaji, Puducherry, and Thiruvananthapuram. These embassies are an important source of information on trade, cultural, and economic relations, between the two countries.

4. Organisations working on bilateral ties

There are several organisations, both within and outside the country, that help in strengthening the bilateral ties of India with other countries and look for opportunities to strike collaborations in several domains. India is a part of several important international organisations such as the United Nations, the Asian Development Bank, New Development BRICS Bank, and G-20. These apart, there are organisations like the Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) that is an active player in the formulation and implementation of policies and programmes to promote cultural collaborations between India and other countries. Also, there are several trade bodies that aim to promote trade between their country and India. All these are important sources for a journalist covering foreign affairs.

5. Major global events

Major global events in which various countries participate are also an important source of news and diplomatic developments between nations. For example, the annual meeting of World Economic Forum, or the meets of BRICS, UN, G-20, etc, is an important platform for a journalist covering foreign affairs to develop his sources and do meaningful and in-depth stories on trade and bilateral exchanges. Along with the main events, the diplomats of countries hold meeting with their counterparts in other countries to discuss important issues. These meetings held on the sidelines of the main event are also important for a journalist. For example, meeting between Indian and French authorities over defence deals on the sidelines of the G-20 summit is definitely newsworthy for a journalist and it is a development that he should definitely pursue.

6. Foreign media

One of the major sources of information for an Indian journalist covering foreign affairs is news reports published and broadcasted by the native media houses of that country. It is not possible for a reporter to always visit a place of the event in a foreign location and then report about it. To make things easier, there are media organisations operating in that country and news agencies that can provide detailed information about the event.

For example, there was a major fire that damaged the Notre-Dame de Paris, a very popular cathedral church popular for its architecture and rich heritage. It was not possible for any Indian media house to send journalists to Paris to cover the disastrous fire. So, Indian journalists depended on the local French media and news agencies for information and details. Similarly, Australia was devastated by the worst forest fire seen in decades that started in late July of 2019 and continued till December. Over 28 people died and around 3,000 homes were destroyed. The fire also resulted in the death of millions of animals. All these developments were covered by the Indian media with the help of the native Australian media and news agencies.

8.5 CHALLENGES IN FOREIGN AFFAIRS REPORTING

Unlike other beats in a newsroom, foreign affairs reporting is a comparatively challenging beat and comes with its own sets of challenges that are a major impediment in the way of a journalist to attain success in the beat. The following are some of the major challenges in the beat:

1. Media houses cutting budget on foreign affairs reporting

Gone are the days when media houses used to have journalists deployed in various countries to report on news and developments from that country that are of importance to the Indian audiences. Due to cost cuttings, media houses do not want any expenditure on journalists deployed in foreign locations. Instead, they want a journalist who can report on foreign affairs while staying in India. Also, media houses subscribe to news feeds of various news agencies that supply news and information on major developments from across the world. This apart, media houses in India also collaborate with media houses in other countries for sharing news and developments thereby saving cost. For example, DNA had entered into a collaboration with the New York Times for sharing editorial content. Similarly, the Times Group has entered into a collaboration with the US-based Business Insider.

2. Language

Language is another major bottleneck for foreign affairs reporting. For example, an Indian Journalist who is well conversant in English and Hindi may find it difficult to communicate with foreign sources who might not know English and are comfortable in their own language alone. An Indian journalist who needs to communicate with an agency in France might not know French and similarly, the officials of the French agency might not know English. The situation becomes more difficult when websites of foreign agencies are not available in English. Earlier foreign correspondents used to hire translators for their work, but that is no longer an option.

3. Affects diplomatic relations

Foreign affairs reporting also affect diplomatic relations and a story that shows the diplomatic ties between two governments in poor light might not be liked by both the governments. Therefore, a journalist covering foreign affairs has to always remain careful or he might earn the wrath of the government. There have been several incidents in the past when journalists were warned for writing on issues that affect the government's diplomatic ties. In fact, the government had to register a case against journalists for false reportage on the Indo-China border dispute.

4. Nations do not want foreign journalists to touch upon controversial domestic issues

In general, a country would not like foreign journalists to dig deep into controversial issues of the country and report on it. Often foreign affairs reporters are not provided with the right information and are not permitted to visit certain areas. These restrictions are imposed by a country to protect its image in the outside world. For example, Pakistan would not like foreign journalists to visit the Afghanistan-Pakistan border and explore how the country is facilitating terror groups in the region. Similarly, China also does not want foreign journalists to write about the human rights violations taking place in the country under the communist regime. Chinese officials had blocked the visas of reporters from The New York Times and Bloomberg News after both organisations ran stories on the wealth of the family members of Chinese leaders.

5. People interested in news from only a few countries

While India may have developed bilateral ties with hundreds of countries across the world, people are interested in only developments from a few countries such as the US, Pakistan, the UK, France, etc. People are not interested to read about stories on growing ties between Indian and African countries. For example, whatever US President Donald Trump says might hit the headlines in India, but the assassination of a major leader in Kenya might not be of any interest to the Indian audiences. Similarly, the visit of Sri Lankan President to India might not get the media attention that the visit of US President Donald Trump to India will get.

8.6 QUALITIES REQUIRED FOR BREAKING INTO FOREIGN AFFAIRS REPORTING

Foreign affairs reporting is not an easy beat. It is one of the most challenging beats in the newsroom and an experienced journalist requires the right skills to break into foreign affairs reporting. According to an article by Hampton Stephens in the website mediabistro.com, he has written that if you have an insatiable appetite for world news, you can make a career into international affairs writing. Although, it would not be an easy path as most experts on foreign affairs have spent years in foreign affairs reporting. Following are the qualities that are required by a journalist to break into foreign affairs reporting:

1. Be a jack of all trades

In this digital age, a foreign affairs journalist must develop a wide range of skills including reporting, writing, and editing, along with production, coding, and social media marketing. In the present era, a foreign affairs reporter cannot survive merely on his writing and reporting skills. He needs to understand how articles are produced and distributed online and how to develop a reader base.

2. Master of one

While being a jack of all trades is the need of the hour, a foreign affairs journalist should also try to develop deep knowledge in one area which will increase his value. He can find an international issue or region that he is interested in and do thorough research on the same. It is also important for him to try to identify potential newsworthy issues from the international arena before others identify them.

3. Develop analytical skills

It is essential for a foreign affairs reporter to develop analytical skills. There is plenty of information available on the internet. However, the crucial part is to identify the facts from fiction and analyzing the information in such a way that people are able to understand why an issue is important and its probable impact on them. For example, it is important for a journalist to explain the impact of an impending war between the US and Iran due to the heightened enmity between the two nuclear-powered nations.

4. Avoid passing an opinion on issues

Unless a journalist is a well-known name on foreign affairs, he should avoid passing his opinions in stories done by him. There are several reasons for the same. The first and foremost is that people, as well as the media house, are not interested in your opinion and secondly, it is better to stick to objectivity in reporting. Unlike an editorial, an objective story with 360-degree coverage of an issue will attract readers.

5. Find the next big issue

One of the ways to ensure that a foreign affairs journalist sustains his demand is by mastering a topic that might not be in the limelight but has all the potential to catch the eyes of media houses down the line. This will ensure that the journalist is well-positioned when the issue comes to the

limelight. For example, imagine the importance of a journalist who has expertise in the Syrian region and ISIS prior to March 2011.

8.10 Introduction to defence reporting

With governments spending loads of money to augment the country's national security and defence preparedness, defence reporting becomes an integral part of any newsroom. Not just because of the money, but defence reporting is way more than that. In the words of journalists who have covered defence for a long period of time, if there is one beat that is thrilling, to say the least, it is defence.

Gone are the days when defence reporting was limited to war reporting or what is happening in Kashmir. It is an age where the defence forces do not just play the most crucial role in safeguarding the borders, but they are the ones who risk their lives when there is a natural calamity or law and order situation in the country. For example, the defence forces played a crucial role in the rescue and relief operations during the flash flood in Uttarakhand, Kerala, and Kashmir. The jawans also earned kudos for the work during other natural disasters such as cyclonic storms in Odisha and Andhra Pradesh.

India's military expenditure is third largest in the world and it has the second-largest armed force. These are factors that put India in an advantageous position in the world. Also, India's multi-billion defence deals with friendly nations such as the 7.8 billion Euros deal with France to procure Rafale jets or the purchase of AH-64 Apache and the CH-47 Chinook helicopters from the US.

For a journalist willing to delve into the defence beat, it is essential that he has the basic information about the Indian Armed Forces and its service branches. He should be also aware of the hierarchy of these service branches. For beginners, the Indian Armed Forces consist of three services—the Indian Army, Indian Navy, and Indian Air Force.

Additionally, the armed forces are complemented by the Indian Coast Guard, paramilitary organisations such as the Assam Rifles and Special Frontier Force, and various inter-service commands and institutions such as the Strategic Forces Command, the Andaman and Nicobar Command, and the Integrated Defence Staff. The Supreme Commander of the Indian Armed Forces is the President of India and the forces are managed by the Ministry of Defence.

Reporting on issues related to defence and war is always a challenging and complex job for a journalist. While securing enough information for writing a story is a challenge in itself, the reporter also needs to be double sure of the ranks and regiments of army personnel he is using in the story. Also, he has to ensure that there is no error or factual mistake in the story.

While the days of dedicated defence journalists in newspapers have slowly started to become a thing of the past because of the poor flow of stories, a hardworking defence journalist with patience, hard work, and perseverance can definitely come up with a story that could prove to be a path-breaking one for his career.

8.7 IMPORTANCE OF DEFENCE REPORTING

With India being a major military power in the world with increasing dominance in matters of world politics, the importance of defence reporting is increasing with each passing year. There are several factors that make defence reporting important:

1. People are interested

People are interested in knowing about developments from the defence ministry and what all is happening in the Indian Army, Indian Air Force, and Indian Navy. This apart, people are also interested in reading about defence deals and the new facilities and infrastructure that are being made available to the armed forces. Heroic deeds of army personnel have always attracted news consumers.

2. Constant threat perception

India shares a bittersweet relationship with its neighbours, especially Pakistan and China. It has a long-pending border dispute with both the countries and has a history of fighting several wars with them. These apart, Indian governments since Independence have repeatedly blamed Pakistan for cross-border terrorism in the latter's attempt to occupy Kashmir. Due to all these factors, India always lives under a threat perception and requires a strong military to fightback any misadventure of the neighbouring nations. All this makes reporting on developments and updates from the defence sector important. For example, news and developments about the Uri attack and the Balakot airstrike continued to hit the headlines for a considerable period of time in 2019.

3. Geopolitical factor

India has to fight back the geo-political situation prevalent in South Asia and has always tackled the misadventures of neighbouring countries with an iron hand. The Indian Armed Forces play a crucial role in strengthening the position of the country in the region. Therefore, news and developments from the armed forces of not just India, but that of China and Pakistan are also important for Indians. For example, if China is supplying defence technology to Pakistan, it is a cause of concern for India.

4. Involves money

India spends a considerable amount of its annual budget on the armed forces and frequently purchases state-of-the-art technology and equipment. These defence deals are not just diplomatically important, but also important from the perspective of securing internal security and the country's borders. All these defence deals involve loads of money and often there are allegations of corruption and kickbacks in the deals, which make them newsworthy. Some of the biggest examples include the controversy surrounding the purchase of Rafale jets and Bofors tanks.

5. Heroic deeds of defence forces are a matter of national pride

The heroic deeds of the defence forces are a matter of national pride and need to be propagated among citizens. These heroic deeds are not just limited to the roles played by the armed forces on the border. The Indian Armed Forces play a crucial role in the event of national emergencies as well as peacekeeping forces across the world. For example, the role played by Indian Armed Forces in the rescue and relief operations in Kerala, Uttarakhand, and Kashmir during flash floods was highly appreciated by people.

8.8 WAR REPORTING: SCOPE AND CHALLENGES

War reporting is one of the most dangerous forms of journalism where a reporter is expected to cover stories firsthand from a war zone. War reporting brings the journalist to the most conflict-ridden parts of the world where he attempts to get close enough to the point of action to provide written accounts, photos, or video footage. It is also one of the most successful branches of journalism that can provide instant fame to the journalist and also help his or her channel or newspaper stay ahead of the competition.

As far as Indian journalism is concerned, Barkha Dutt is perhaps one of the most celebrated war reporters of her time. She is well known for her on the ground coverage of the Kargil War between India and Pakistan in 1999. As far as the scope of war reporting in India is concerned, the last war that India had fought was the Kargil War in 1999. Although India is always at loggerheads with Pakistan and there are occasional tensions with China along the Northeast border, the chances of a war happening are too less. Also, considering the economic burden of fighting a war and several other serious implications, no country in the present era will be interested in fighting a war. Most of the countries are interested in solving their problems with mutual understanding and dialogue. However, in case a war happens, a journalist with the required skills for war journalism will be a much-sought-after asset for any media house.

War reporting is driven by the passion of a journalist, but in the end, however passionate a journalist is, war reporting throws multiple challenges that are hard to tackle. Several war reporters have lost their lives and many have become disabled while covering wars. The following are some of the major challenges of war reporting:

1. Access

One of the most difficult things for a journalist with a war reporting assignment is to get access to the point of conflict. In the case of a war, usually, journalists or civilians are not allowed to enter the conflict zone. Despite his or her popularity or reach within the army ranks, it is difficult for a journalist to get the requisite permission for accessing the point of conflict.

2. Risk of life

Even if the reporter manages to access the conflict zone, he will be risking his life to cover the war for his media house. He might get shot or killed in the cross-firing. In journalism, the most important thing to remember is never trying to become a hero. A journalist can only report the war for his media house if he stays alive or does not get seriously injured.

3. Lack of communication facility

Communication infrastructure is shut down in a conflict zone and this creates a problem for a journalist, especially if he is working for a news channel. Due to the unavailability of telephone lines and the internet, it

becomes practically impossible for a journalist at the war front to pass on news and information.

4. Lack of stamina

It is easier for the army personnel to remain alert in a chaotic condition without the proper supply of food and water because they are trained for these circumstances. However, a journalist covering the war from the front may not have the physical and mental stamina to cope with these challenging conditions. He may not be able to work non-stop without getting the required sleep.

8.9 CONCLUSION: FOREIGN AFFAIRS, DEFENCE, AND WAR REPORTING CAN BE CHALLENGING

Foreign affairs, defence, and war reporting are perhaps some of the most challenging fields of journalism. It is hard for journalists to foray into these areas easily without the requisite skills. However, it is also true that once a journalist develops the requisite mindset for these specialisations, it becomes easier for him or her to earn name and fame. It should be also mentioned that things are constantly changing in the field of journalism and it is best for a journalist not to live with his prejudices and instead adapt to the change.

8.10 LET US SUM IT UP

This unit must have helped you in understanding:

- Foreign affairs reporting, its scope, and importance in newsrooms
- Challenges in foreign affairs reporting
- Skills required for foreign affairs reporting and how to foray into it
- Defence reporting, its scope, and challenges
- War reporting, its scope, and challenges

8.11 KEYWORDS

PSU	It stands for public sector undertaking. A PSU is owned and controlled by the Government of India.
Global Economy	It is the international exchange of goods and services that is expressed in monetary units of accounts.
BRICS	It is an association of five major emerging national economies—Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa.

UN It stands for the United Nations, an intergovernmental organisation responsible for maintaining international peace and security.

G-20 The G20 is an international forum for the governments and central bank governors from 19 countries and the European Union. It was founded in 1999 with the aim of discussing policy for the promotion of international financial stability.

8.12 CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

1. How foreign affairs reporting have changed over the past two-three decades?

2. Why foreign affairs reporting is important?

3. Cite an example of how developments in other countries affect India.

4. How globalisation has promoted foreign affairs reporting?

5. Enumerate some of the important sources in foreign affairs reporting.

6. Enumerate the challenges in foreign affairs reporting.

7. What are the skills that a journalist must develop to break into foreign affairs reporting?

8. What are the aspects that a journalist planning to delve into defence reporting must know?

9. Enumerate the challenges in war reporting.

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:: STRUCTURE::**9.0 Introduction****9.1 Objectives****9.2 Overview of education beat****9.3 Importance of education beat****9.4 Sources in education beat****9.5 Initiating work in education beat****9.6 Overview of science reporting****9.7 Sources in science reporting****9.8 Challenges in science reporting****9.9 Conclusion: Education beat has evolved but science reporting has gone down the hill****9.10 Let us sum it up****9.11 Keywords****9.12 Check Your Progress****9.13 Reference**

9.0 INTRODUCTION

Education is one of the most important beats in a newsroom. It is one of those beats that have evolved with time and now-a-day, education reporters cover a number of new things that were earlier not a part of the beat. This unit discusses in detail the nitty-gritty of the education beat with examples of the kind of stories done by education reporters. It also gives an overview of science reporting in mainstream journalism and why it is going down the hill. The unit also focuses on the various sources in

science reporting that a reporter has to tap and the challenges of the beat. All the sections have been explained from a reporter's point of view.

9.1 OBJECTIVES

- Understand the concept of education and science reporting
- Understand the importance of the education beat
- Understand the various sources of information for an education reporter
- Understand why science reporting is going downhill
- Understand the various sources of information for a science reporter
- Understand the challenges in science reporting

On completion of this unit

On completion of this unit, you will be able to understand:

- Concept of education reporting
- Importance of education reporting and the various sources of information that an education reporter has to tap
- How to start working on the education beat
- Concept of science reporting
- Various sources of information for a science reporter
- Challenges in science reporting

9.2 OVERVIEW OF EDUCATION BEAT

Education is a wide umbrella term that can include anything from pre-school to higher education and from research institutions to institutions imparting vocational training. It is one of the most important beats of a newsroom and because of its broad horizons, the beat is often divided into two or more reporters.

The job of an education reporter is not an easy one as he has to move around the city and develop his contacts in schools, colleges, the government's education department, coaching classes, and training institutes among others. Average tier 1 and 2 cities would have hundreds of such institutions and keeping a track of routine developments from these institutions is not an easy task.

This apart, education reporter is also supposed to keep a track on entrance exams and the performance of city-based students in them. For example,

in the case of Common Admission Test (CAT), which is organised for admission to Indian Institute of Managements (IIMs) and other colleges offering MBA courses, the education reporter is supposed to write stories on when the examination will be held, how many students from the city are appearing, and whether there is a change in pattern of the exam.

On the day of the CAT exam, the reporter will have to track all the examination centres and write a story on whether the exam was difficult or easy based on the feedback of the aspirants, how many students from the city appeared for the exam, and whether the exam was conducted smoothly or not. Similarly, on the day of result, the reporter will have to find out how many students from the city cracked the exam and will get admission in IIMs, interviewing some of these students, and write about the reasons for their success that can inspire future aspirants.

Another example would be the National Eligibility cum Entrance Test (NEET) and the Joint Entrance Examination (Advanced) which are organised for admissions to medical colleges and Indian Institute of Technologies (IITs), respectively. An education reporter has to report on when the exam will be held, how many students from the city are appearing in how many centres, any change in exam pattern, whether the questions were difficult this time, etc. Similarly, on the day of the results, he will have to write on how many students from the city cracked the exam and their mantra from success.

But, education reporting is not just limited to competitive and higher education entrance exams. It also includes writing on school education, board examinations, college politics, the education policy of the state and union government, etc. Since the reporters are dealing with young minds in their stories, they have to be careful so that they do not pass on wrong information on any issue that could lead to harassment or problems for the students or their parents. Just imagine a situation when a newspaper publishes a story that forms for admission for a renowned and well-performing school will be available from the school's office from a certain date by mentioning a wrong date. Just imagine the harassment that parents willing to secure an admission of their child in that school will face because of the reporter's mistake.

9.3 IMPORTANCE OF EDUCATION BEAT

Education is one of the most important beats in newsrooms and stories done by education reporters have a wider reader base, especially among

parents and students. No newsroom in India or in any part of the world can ignore the importance of the education beat. In fact, education was one of the major parameters on which the Delhi Assembly election of 2020 was fought. While the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) claimed that it has revamped the education infrastructure in the state that the earlier governments had not done, its chief contender BJP claimed that the former has not done anything on the ground level. The following are some of the most important factors that make the education beat important:

1. Targets young audiences

With around 35 per cent share in the country's total population, youngsters are one of the most important categories for any media organisation. The latter cannot operate while completely ignoring the needs, requirements, and demands of the former. Therefore, all media houses have to focus on stories from the education sector. Youngsters are interested to read about news and developments from their college or university campus, upcoming fields that are likely to attract jobs, examination results, etc.

2. Creates awareness among parents

Parents in India and across the world are always concerned about the education and career of their children. It is always not possible for the parents to remain aware of the upcoming specialisations or professional courses that might make their children job-ready or ensure their success in the future. In such a scenario, stories from the education beat create awareness about the availability of such courses. This apart, the stories done by education reporters also provide news and updates to parents about their children's school, college, or university.

3. Provides information on government policies

As part of the education beat, a reporter also covers policies being planned by the state education department to improve the standard of education. However, the role of the reporter is not confined to writing about policies related to the education sector being planned by the state government. It also includes writing about the failures of the state education department and its machinery in implementing the existing policies resulting in the harassment of parents and students. For example, students from the poor strata of the society are supposed to be given admission in private schools under the Right to Education Act. The

district education officer (DEO) is supposed to take care of its implementation at the district level. However, the majority of the states in India have miserably failed to implement this provision in its letter and spirit. In fact, many state governments had to face the criticism of their respective high courts and the Supreme Court for their failure in implementing the Act.

4. Exposes the problems in the education sector

Stories from the education beat expose the problems in the state's education sector, as well as the government's failure to ensure the availability of educational infrastructure for youngsters in the state. It also brings forth the actual standard of education in the state. For example, a story done by an education reporter on the district-wise shortage of teaching staff in the state will reveal the state of education and the seriousness of the state government to improve the standard of education.

5. Provides information on the important entrance and competitive exams

Stories done by education reporters provide crucial information about major entrance and competitive exams like JEE Advanced, NEET, UPSC, CAT, etc. This information may be related to changes in the examination pattern, timings, syllabus, results, and performance of students from the state appearing in the examination, among others. Such information not only helps the current aspirant of these examinations, but also the future aspirants. For example, a story or an interview of a Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) topper on how he prepared for the examination and his success mantras is surely going to inspire several other UPSC aspirants.

6. Educational institutions are political battlefields

With the growing importance of student unions in the daily operations of a college or university, educational institutions have become a hotbed of student politics and political rivalries. Several colleges and institutions have seen violence between rival student unions. For example, Congress' student wing National Students Union of India and BJP's student wing Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP) are regularly in news for the violence erupted by them. Violence against students with a different ideology had also earned a bad reputation for the Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) authorities, who have failed to control this menace.

9.4 SOURCES IN EDUCATION BEAT

Like any other beat, there are multiple sources of information for an education reporter. These sources are usually spread around the city and a reporter has to always remain alert and keep meeting his sources to ensure he does not miss critical information. There are several occasions when an education reporter might find it challenging to manage the various developments that had happened in his beat on a single day. However, there are days when the reporter might not find anything worth a story. In order to stay ahead of the competition, a reporter must try to tap the following sources:

1. Education Department

Every state government has an education department that is entrusted to look after all the aspects related to education in the state such as primary and secondary education, continuous education, literacy education, higher education, technical education, etc. The department forms policies on education and ensures its implementation. The education department is also entrusted with the implementation of the mid-day meal scheme. It also ascertains the fees and other charges that private educational institutions can levy on students for various courses. There are various branches within the education department that take care of different responsibilities of the department. The department is headed by the principal secretary who is usually an Indian Administrative Services Officer.

2. District Education Officers (DEOs)

The district education officer is one of the key functionaries of the state education department who is entrusted to take care of all the functions of the department at the district level. He is the person who can issue guidelines for educational institutions in the district and take punitive action for not following the same. The DEO through his subordinate officers collects all the data related to education relevant to the district and sends it to his higher-ups in the department. He is also the custodian of all the data related to education in his district. A reporter must maintain a good relationship with the DEO for regular news and updates.

3. Educational Institutions

Educational institutions such as schools, colleges, and universities, are also important sources of information for an education reporter. Most of

these institutions have a dedicated media or PR cell that regularly provides updates to education reporters. However, it is important for a reporter to have a good rapport with the administrative officials and faculty members across the hierarchy to get inside information about newsworthy developments. For example, it is important for an education reporter to maintain a good relationship with the vice-chancellor, registrar, and head of the departments of a university. These institutions regularly host events and invite renowned people as guests making these events newsworthy for a journalist.

4. Ministry of Human Resource Development

The Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD), which was earlier known as the Ministry of Education until September 1985, is responsible for the development of human resources in India. The ministry is divided into two departments. One of them is the Department of School Education and Literacy which takes care of primary, secondary, and higher secondary education, adult education, and literacy. The second department is known as the Department of Higher Education that takes care of university education, technical education, and scholarships among others.

All the central institutions of repute such as Indian Institute of Technologies (IITs), Indian Institute of Managements (IIMs), School of Planning and Architecture (SPA), Kendriya Vidyalaya Sangathan, etc, comes under the ministry. The ministry is entrusted with the responsibility of formulating the national policy on education, planned development of educational institutions throughout the country, ensuring the education of children from the deprived section of the society, and entering into collaborations with foreign governments and institutions for improving education.

5. Student unions

Student unions and student wing of political parties are also important sources of information for education reporters. An educational institution will never reveal its shortcomings and problems. However, if a reporter develops a good rapport with the office bearers of the student union, it will help him in getting regular updates about happenings in the college and university campus. Also, it will help him in writing about the shortcomings and problems related to the institution. Student elections are also an important event for any college or university and are newsworthy for an education reporter.

6. Parents' Associations

Associations of parents are also an important source for an education reporter. Parents whose children study in a particular school usually form an association and regularly interact with the school authorities. These associations often protest against decisions taken by the school administration that might affect them. For example, parents' associations often protest against the exorbitant rise in school fees of their children, or against the school administration for forcing them to buy goods from the school at an exorbitant price.

9.5 INITIATING WORK IN EDUCATION BEAT

Education is one of the most important beats in a newsroom that covers a wide range of subjects from preschool to higher education and from governments' education policies to student politics. The beat has become more complex in the past few years with reporters focusing on entrance and competitive exams and the growing impact of national and local politics on the campuses of educational institutions.

In doing all this, a journalist has to often navigate through overlapping layers of authority to acquire the required information in order to understand a subject and delve deep into it. In order to write in-depth and insightful stories, an education reporter needs to be well-aware of what is happening in society. He should be able to analyse trends, develop a wide network of sources across hierarchies, and develop specialised skills for education reporting to excel in the beat. The reporter should also understand the structure, staffing, and economics of the school and higher education system.

A reporter initiating his work in the education beat should be well-aware of what comprises the education beat. He should read the stories done by education reporters in the past six months. This will help him in identifying issues to report upon and he would also be able to find old stories in which he can do follow-ups.

Once a reporter is aware of the issues he has to write upon, he should start visiting educational institutions and share his contact details with the PR or media wing. This will ensure that he will start getting the routine updates from these institutions. He should also try to meet the various administrative officials and teaching faculties of these institutions to find out about any interesting update that is newsworthy. A journalist should always keep in mind that common people usually do not know that the

information they have is newsworthy or not. It is for the reporter to identify if the information is newsworthy or not. The reporter is also supposed to develop good contacts with the various committees formed by the college or university authorities, as well as with the office-bearers of the students union.

After he is done with the education department, the reporter should also meet the district education officer and try to develop a good rapport with the latter. Notably, the DEO is one of the crucial sources of information for a journalist covering education. The DEO also has all the data related to the implementation of the government's education schemes and policies that can help the reporter in writing detailed stories based on facts and figures. The DEO can also provide details related to the problems faced by his officials in the implementation of the government's education schemes.

For example, if a reporter wants to write on the shortage of teaching staff in government schools and colleges in a particular district, he will have to approach the DEO for the latest data. The officer can also provide details on other aspects such as school dropout rates, number of mid-day meal beneficiaries, enrolment of girls in schools, etc.

Once a reporter develops a good relationship with the DEO and understands the functioning of the education department's machinery, he should meet officials of the state education department across the hierarchy. He can start with the principal secretary and then meet his subordinates, or vice-versa. Good rapport with officials of the education department will help in getting information and data concerning the entire state for stories on time. It will also help in writing analytical pieces on the success and failure of government schemes and policies for improving the standard of education in the state.

An education reporter should frequently visit educational institutions and keep in touch with his sources to stay updated. While it is true that it is not always possible for him to attend each and every event, especially when there are multiple events in a day, he should try to attend the most important ones. In such a situation, it is better for a reporter to resort to smart work rather than hard work. It has often happened that the invited guests say something which becomes a national headline the next day.

9.6 OVERVIEW OF SCIENCE REPORTING

If there is one beat that reporters are afraid of covering, it is the science beat. While reporting on scientific developments is a different art altogether, it is often perceived as dull and boring. Unlike other beats that have strengthened their position over time in newsrooms, the science beat has lost its importance with each passing year. Now-a-day, very few mainstream media house have their dedicated science reporter and most of them have done away with the beat. This is because organisations are tight on budget and do not want to spend on anything that does not have a considerable readership.

It is only when something major happens in the scientific field, media houses start looking for a journalist within the team who can take care of that coverage. As people have lesser time for news consumption and their attention span has considerably gone down, media houses are not interested in dishing out stories on scientific developments on a routine basis. However, in case of a major event, like a satellite launch by the Indian Space Research Organisation, or the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) successfully testing a nuclear-capable missile, media houses have to report these developments because people are interested in them.

Earlier newspapers used to have dedicated pages for science stories, but it has been discontinued long back as people are no longer interested in reading about scientific developments. There are several factors behind the same, but the two most important factors that have made science reporting redundant these days are the technicalities involved in scientific developments and the inability of the journalist to explain these developments in a language that common people can understand.

Despite all this, there are certain fortnightly and monthly magazines that deal with science reporting in India such as the Science Reporter and Down to Earth. However, the latter is more focused on the politics of environment and development. Apart from these magazines, science reporting in mainstream newspapers and news channels is very limited and the science stories that eventually make it to these news outlets are usually taken from foreign news agencies.

Unlike other beats, science reporting is not an easy job for any reporter. A journalist is supposed to have knowledge about basic sciences and also requires a scientific temperament to deal with science reporting. He

should also have a way with words and learn to turn a technical and jargon-laden scientific development into an easy to read, not to forget interesting, copy for an average reader. It has often happened that a journalist entrusted to write a copy on a scientific development is not sure about what he is writing. In such a scenario, there are chances that he might commit a mistake in the copy and also pass it on to the readers.

Irrespective of the above discussion, it must be mentioned that there are several institutions that are involved in active scientific researches and produced praiseworthy results, which have often become national headlines. A science reporter should try to focus on researches that are directly or indirectly going to solve a major problem that mankind is facing.

9.7 SOURCES IN SCIENCE REPORTING

Sources are highly important for a science reporter. Unlike other beats where people approach the reporter with news and developments, scientists hardly are interested in coverage of their scientific feat in the mainstream media. In fact, most of them are not even sure whether the scientific findings are newsworthy or not. Also, the beat generates very few stories and the flow of these stories is erratic. All this makes sources an important factor for the success of a science reporter. The following are some of the important sources for a science reporter:

1. Research institutions

There are several institutions in India that are involved in dedicate scientific research. These institutions are a rich source of information for a science reporter. The latter should try to develop a good rapport with the administrative officials of these institutions cutting across hierarchy to stay updated on the latest scientific breakthroughs. These institutions are usually involved in hundreds of researches and only through a proper discussion, a reporter can understand whether any of the researches is worth a story or not. For example, institutions like Indian Institute of Chemical Biology in Kolkata, National Institute of Immunology in New Delhi, and Indian Institute of Plasma Research in Ahmedabad, are dedicated research institutions and a good rapport with the administrative officials of these institutions will help a science reporter in regularly getting news and updates.

2. Science journals

Since scientists may not understand that their research findings are important or not, they might not be able to propagate about the same to the journalist. Therefore, a journalist should regularly go through scientific journals and try to find out about research papers of Indian scientists published in these journals. This way, a reporter can then contact the concerned scientist to discuss the latter's research and its findings for a story.

3. Ministry of Science and Technology

The Union government's Ministry of Science and Technology is also an important source for a science reporter. The ministry is responsible for the formulation and administration of the rules and regulations and laws pertaining to science and technology in India. It has three departments—Department of Biotechnology, Department of Scientific and Industrial Research, and the Department of Science and Technology. The constituent departments have various central research institutions working under them.

4. State government's science department

Like the Ministry of Science and Technology under the Union government, every state government has a dedicated department that looks after all the aspects of science and technology in the state. The department is responsible for the formulation of policies and their implementation for promoting science and technology in the state. One of the main aims of the department is to ensure employment generation in the domain of science and technology and allied research that will help the state in strengthening its position in the country.

9.8 CHALLENGES IN SCIENCE REPORTING

Science reporting is one of the most challenging beats in a newsroom. A science reporter has to face several challenges in his daily newsgathering process and in writing stories that are jargon-free and easy to understand. The following are the major challenges in science reporting:

1. Understanding science

One of the major challenges for a science reporter is to understand the basic sciences. A reporter entrusted with the science beat might not have

a science education background. Therefore, one of the foremost challenges that a science reporter faces is to have a clear understanding of basic science concepts. For example, during an interaction between a journalist and a scientist on a research project on optics, the scientist can use a scientific concept such as “refraction”. However, the reporter might not understand what refraction is.

2. Lack of training

While foreign media houses provide proper training to journalists entrusted with the science beat, there is no such training made available to journalists in India. The lack of training increases the time taken by the journalist to start producing quality science stories and if the reporter lacks the required zeal, there are absolutely no chances for him to excel in the field.

3. Writing in simple language

One of the major challenges that science reporters face is to write stories in a simplified manner which is free from scientific jargon and technicalities. A scientist or researcher may explain his research to a journalist using scientific terms and technical details. However, the journalist’s role is to simplify it and write it in a manner which even a layman can understand.

4. Writing for the people

Scientific developments may be important in the long-run, but it might not have a direct impact on the lives of readers. It becomes difficult for a science reporter to find what is important in the research that makes it relatable to the readers. For example, an Indian astrophysicist might have found a new asteroid. While this development is important, it is difficult for a journalist to explain how it is important for the readers.

5. Poor flow of stories

Unlike other beats in the newsroom, the number of stories generated by science reporters is limited and the flow of such stories is also erratic. It is one of the major reasons that a reporter is never engaged by a media house just to cover developments from the field of science. Science reporting is always treated as a secondary beat and usually, reporters who are covering other important beats are entrusted with the science beat as an additional responsibility.

6. Cross-checking information is difficult

Cross-checking of information and claims made by a scientist is difficult for a journalist. It is because of the lack of knowledge of the subject and the unavailability of resources for cross-checking of information. For example, a company involved in medical research might come out with a new device that can check the blood pressure of a patient without any physical contact. The company might claim it to be the world's first device and a revolutionary one. However, it is difficult for a journalist to cross-check these claims.

9.9 CONCLUSION: EDUCATION BEAT HAS EVOLVED BUT SCIENCE REPORTING HAS GONE DOWN THE HILL

While education reporting has evolved over the years and still is one of the most important beats in a newspaper, science reporting, on the other hand, has gone down the hill. The scope of education reporting has expanded in the past two-three decades with the reporters covering several new things under the beat from writing on competitive exams to writing features on new career options. On the contrary, science reporting is slowly moving towards a dead-end in mainstream media and coverages are limited to major scientific events only. No mainstream media house has a dedicated science reporter these days. Therefore, it is high time for the scientific community and journalists to come together and think of possible solutions that can revive science reporting in India in the years to come.

9.10 LET US SUM IT UP

The unit must have helped you in understanding:

- Concept of education and science reporting
- Kind of stories that education reporters are supposed to cover
- Importance of the education beat and possible sources of information for an education reporter
- Various sources of information for a science reporter
- Challenges in science reporting

9.11 KEYWORDS

NEET: The National Eligibility cum Entrance Test-Under Graduate, succeeded from All India Pre-Medical Test is an entrance examination in India for students who wish to study undergraduate medical courses and dental courses in government or private medical colleges and dental colleges in India.

UPSC: The Union Public Service Commission, commonly abbreviated as UPSC, is India's premier central recruiting agency. It is responsible for appointments to and examinations for All India services and group A & group B of Central services.

JEE Advanced: Joint Entrance Examination – Advanced, formerly the Indian Institutes of Technology-Joint Entrance Examination, is an academic examination held annually in India. It is conducted by one of the seven zonal IITs under the guidance of the Joint Admission Board.

NSUI: The National Students' Union of India is the student wing of the Indian National Congress which was established on 9 April 1971. The organisation was founded by Indira Gandhi after merging Kerala Students Union and West Bengal State Chhatra Parishad to form a national students' organisation.

ABVP: Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad is a right-wing all India student organisation affiliated to the Hindu nationalist Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh. It claims to be India's largest student organisation with more than three million members.

ISRO: The Indian Space Research Organisation is the space agency of the Government of India and has its headquarters in the city of Bengaluru. Its vision is to "harness space technology for national development while pursuing space science research & planetary exploration".

DRDO: The Defence Research and Development Organisation is an agency of the Government of India, charged with the military's research and development, headquartered in New Delhi.

9.12 CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

1. What encompasses the education beat?

2. Why the job of an education reporter is difficult?

3. Why the education beat is important for the newsroom?

4. Enumerate some of the important sources of information for an education reporter.

5. Why educational institutions are called a hotbed of politics?

6. What are the qualities required in an education reporter?

7. Why science reporting is going down the hill?

8. What are the major challenges in science reporting?

9.13 REFERENCES

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:: STRUCTURE::**10.0 Introduction****10.1 Learning objectives****10.2 Overview of agriculture reporting****10.3 Importance of agriculture reporting****10.4 Sources in agriculture reporting****10.5 Challenges in agriculture reporting****10.6 Overview of weather reporting****10.7 Importance of weather reporting****10.8 Sources in weather reporting****10.9 Conclusion: Agriculture and weather reporting cannot be overlooked by newsrooms****10.10 Let us sum it up****10.11 Keywords****10.12 Check Your Progress****10.13 References**

10.0 INTRODUCTION

Agriculture and weather are two such beats in a newsroom that do not enjoy the importance as enjoyed by other beats such as politics, sports, health, crime, civic, etc. However, these are also beats that cannot be ignored or overlooked by a newsroom. There are several days in a year in

which the most important news of the day is generated from the weather or agriculture beat. Both the beats come with their own challenges and a reporter entrusted to cover these beats will have to develop the required skill sets to excel in these beats. This unit discusses in detail about these two beats from a reporter's perspective.

10.1 OBJECTIVES

- Understand the concept of agriculture reporting
- Understand the importance of agriculture reporting
- Understand the various sources of information for an agriculture reporter
- Understand the challenges in agriculture reporting
- Understand the concept of weather reporting
- Understand the various sources of information for a weather reporter and why the beat is important

On completion of this unit

On completion of this unit, you will be able to understand:

- Concept of agriculture reporting and weather reporting
- Various sources of information for agriculture and weather reporting
- Important of agriculture and weather reporting
- Challenges in agriculture and weather reporting

10.2 OVERVIEW OF AGRICULTURE REPORTING

While agriculture is certainly not a primary beat in any media house and does not enjoy the importance as enjoyed by other beats, it is certainly not one of those beats that can be completely overlooked or ignored. Unlike other beats where a development may or may not affect the common people, developments in the agriculture sector will surely affect the public, directly or indirectly.

For example, people might not be interested in reading about an imminent war between the US and Iran or protests against a central legislation by civil society groups across the country. However, if the prices of onions cross the Rs100 mark due to unseasonal rains or any other factor, it is certainly going to affect citizens. In such a situation, people would be interested in reading about the reasons behind the rise in

prices of onions, what the state and union governments are doing to meet the shortage, and when the prices are going to come down.

Although inflation is a common phenomenon in any developing country, media houses keep a close tab on prices of vegetables, fruits, and other grocery items. This is because people are interested in reading about stories on inflation and exorbitant rise in prices of necessary items. People are also interested in reading about the agrarian crisis and how it is going to affect the common man.

As far as the Indian economy is concerned, agriculture as a sector plays a very crucial role. The sector alone accounts for the employment of around 50 per cent of the Indian workforce and contributes around 17-18 per cent to the country's GDP. While the contribution of the sector to the country's GDP is gradually declining as other sectors are contributing more to India's growth story, agriculture still continues to be a robust sector that plays an important role in the socio-economic development of the country. India is also a major exporter of agricultural products across the globe.

So, what encompasses the agriculture beat? It may contain an array of subjects from the agriculture sector such as farm output, disease outbreaks, crop damage, crop insurance, farming statistics, import and export of agriculture, horticulture, and fisheries products, problems faced by farmers, new farming technology, availability of seeds, fertiliser and irrigation facilities, labour issues, agricultural policies formulated and implemented by governments, farmers suicide, etc.

In order to perform well in the beat, a reporter is expected to know the basics of agriculture in India, the season-wise harvesting of crops, the best weather conditions required for a crop, knowledge of storage facilities, market forces and distribution channels, and the ability to make information from the sector relevant for the masses. For example, if there is unseasonal rain resulting in crop damage, an agriculture reporter should have the capability and the required information to write about the extent of damage, the crops that are likely to be affected due to the rainfall, and the subsequent impact on the prices.

For a country like India that is dependent on agriculture with an urgent need to increase production to meet food security for its rising population, no government can take the risk of ignoring farmers and the agriculture sector. Each state government, as well as the union government, takes several measures to improve the income of farmers

and provide them with better facilities for agriculture. Despite these measures, farmer suicides are still a major cause of concern that governments have failed to address.

10.3 IMPORTANCE OF AGRICULTURE REPORTING

Agriculture, unlike other beats, might not enjoy the same importance in the newsroom. But, there are instances when a newsroom that is devoid of an agricultural reporter might have to depute someone to take care of routine developments from the sector. For example, when the entire nation is discussing an exorbitant rise in prices of onions, a media house cannot ignore such a development. In such a situation, it will have to regularly report on prices of onions in various markets, the gap between demand and supply, and what steps have been taken by the government to bring the prices down. The various factors that make agricultural reporting important are:

1. Agricultural developments affect people

Developments in the agricultural sector can directly or indirectly affect citizens. There can be a rise in prices of agricultural commodities, pest infestation affecting crops, unseasonal rainfall damaging crops, poor crop output, and a rise in import or export of agricultural commodities. All these developments have an impact on the budget of a household. Therefore, it is important for media houses to report on these developments as people are interested in reading such stories. For example, an exorbitant rise in prices of vegetables will surely affect common people.

2. Provides information on government policies

Government policies related to the agriculture sector have widespread ramifications. Changes in taxation rates applicable to agricultural commodities, the decision to import or export agricultural goods, ensuring the availability of fertilisers and good quality seeds, and policies on upgradation of irrigation facilities affect the farmers, as well as those involved in the trade of agricultural commodities. Eventually, it affects the common people who buy these commodities. Therefore, it is essential for media houses to write about the changes in the state and union governments' policies on agriculture and allied facilities. For example, if the sugar prices in the market are at an all-time high, the union government might impose a ban on sugar export. The decision to ban

sugar exports will ultimately result in the availability of more sugar in the domestic market, which will bring the prices down.

3. Highlights the problems of farmers

Agriculture reporters also highlight the problems and hardships faced by farmers. Often farmers have to bear losses for their produce while middlemen reap the benefits out of it. Similarly, farmers face other problems such as lack of irrigation facilities, shortage of fertilisers, poor minimum support price (MSP) being offered by the government, unseasonal rains, crop damage due to pest infestation, etc. It is because of these problems that many farmers have left farming and are involved in doing menial jobs just to earn their square meals. Therefore, it becomes essential for the media to highlight their problems so that the government can take corrective steps. For example, the criticism by media over the poor minimum support price being offered by the government has often forced the latter to increase the support price. Similarly, media reports on how farmers have been forced by traders to sell their stock at a low price have forced the government to intervene, which ensured that the farmers are compensated for their loss.

4. Politics associated with agriculture

No government or political party can ignore the farmers or the agriculture sector. Farmers and the agriculture sector as a whole plays a very important role when it comes to elections. No ruling political party can get re-elected if the majority of the farmers are unhappy with its policies and the general apathy towards the farm sector. Nationalist Congress Party chief Sharad Pawar's major reason behind his political success and a long-political career is his hold in the farmers' community. Similarly, for states having high dependence on agriculture, the state governments cannot ignore the plight of farmers. Farmers' bodies are also known to have their direct or indirect political affiliations and therefore, they play a crucial role in the state and national-level politics.

5. Money is involved

The government spends a huge amount of money on the agriculture sector in the form of subsidies, compensation for crop loss, crop insurance, relief packages for farmers, direct purchase of agricultural commodities, etc. The huge spending also comes with its own share of irregularities and corruption. All these factors make it important for newsrooms to report on these developments. For example, the Madhya

Pradesh government in 2017 had decided to directly procure onions from farmers for Rs10 per kilogram and sell it to citizens for Rs2 per kilogram. This was done to help the onion farmers who were incurring losses. Later, it was discovered that several people had purchased the onions from the government for Rs2 per kilogram and then again sold the same stock to the government for Rs10 per kilogram. This resulted in a huge loss for the government exchequer.

10.4 SOURCES IN AGRICULTURE REPORTING

Like any other beat, there are several sources of information for agriculture reporters. However, the success or failure of an agriculture reporter does not solely depend on his network of sources, but also his analytical ability as he might have to go through several data sets to performance of the agriculture sector. The reporter also needs to have a sound idea of the agricultural ecosystem in the country to write in-depth and insightful stories from the beat. However, all said and done, sources do play a crucial role in agriculture reporting. The following are some of the important sources of information for an agriculture reporter:

1. Agriculture department

Every state government has an agriculture department that takes care of the agriculture sector and allied matters in its charge such as horticulture, soil conservation, dairy development, animal husbandry, etc. The agricultural universities in the state operate under the department with an aim to promote education and research in the field of agriculture. The agriculture department may have several directorates, boards, and corporations, with each of them entrusted with a specific area to look after. One of the key objectives of the department is to increase the income of farmers by increasing agricultural productivity with the help of scientific methods of farming. The department is always headed by a principal secretary, who is usually an Indian Administrative Services officer. For an agriculture reporter, it is essential to maintain good rapport with officials of the department across the hierarchy.

2. Agriculture ministry

An agriculture reporter who wants to excel in his beat must develop a wide network of sources across the hierarchy in the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare of the union government. The ministry with an annual budget of around Rs42,000 crore looks after the formulation and administration of the rules and regulations and laws

related to agriculture in India. The ministry is headed by the agriculture secretary and is headquartered at Krishi Bhavan in New Delhi.

3. Food Corporation of India

The Food Corporation of India (FCI) which was created under the Food Corporations Act is an important source of information for agriculture reporters. The major responsibilities of FCI includes effective price support operations for safeguarding the interests of the poor farmers, distribution of food grains throughout the country for public distribution system (PDS), ensuring satisfactory level of operational and buffer stocks of food grains to ensure National Food Security, and to regulate market price to provide food grains to consumer at a reliable price. Notably, the FCI procures rice, pulses, and wheat from farmers. It is headed by a chairman.

4. Agriculture universities

Agriculture universities are also an important source of information for agriculture reporters. These universities are involved in the teaching of scientific methods of agriculture and also carry out several kinds of research that aim to improve productivity and profit for the farmers. Therefore it becomes essential for a journalist to report on these research projects and their findings. For example, if agriculture researchers with the funding of Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) develop a rice variety that can be grown using less than 50 per cent water required for other varieties and are also disease resilient, it can work wonders for paddy farmers in water-scarce regions of the country.

5. Farmers' associations and trade bodies

An agriculture reporter needs to write about ground realities prevailing in the agriculture sector and the best way to do it is to contact farmers and farmers' associations. These associations rake up several important issues related to farmers and can give the real picture prevailing on the ground. Similarly, the reporter also needs to maintain good relations with office bearers of various bodies that deal with the trade of agricultural commodities. For example, the government may claim that its scheme to help out distressed farmers has worked wonders for the latter. However, the reality might be completely different from the claim. For a reporter to write on the success or failure of the scheme, it becomes essential for him to interact with farmers and farmers' organisations.

6. Agricultural Produce Marketing Committees

An Agricultural Produce Market Committee (APMC) is a marketing board established by state governments to ensure farmers are safeguarded from exploitation by large retailers, as well as ensuring the farm to retail price spread does not reach excessively high levels. If an agriculture reporter wants to do a story on the quantity of a particular commodity reaching a market or whether there is a shortage of a particular agriculture product in the market, he will have to contact the district level APMC for details.

10.5 CHALLENGES IN AGRICULTURE REPORTING

Like any other beat, agriculture reporting comes with its own share of challenges. Since agriculture is not a subject that is taught in schools or regular college education and is not discussed in households, reporters do not have any direct or indirect exposure to agriculture. Therefore, a reporter who has been newly assigned the agriculture beat might find it difficult to bring in-depth and insightful stories to the newsroom. Some of the major challenges in agriculture reporting are:

1. Lack of agricultural knowledge

Reporters in mainstream media who are assigned to do stories from the agriculture beat have hardly any knowledge of the subject. Agriculture is a subject that is neither taught in schools or colleges running regular courses nor discussed at home. So, reporters are not aware of what is Kharif and Rabi, which crops are grown in which season, which crops require more moisture, etc. The lack of agricultural knowledge affects the output of a reporter, at least initially.

2. Lack of knowledge of weather and its impact

Weather is a very crucial factor in agriculture. While the right weather can result in better produce and more profit for a farmer, adverse weather can have a catastrophic effect on crops resulting in a huge economic loss for the farmer. Also, the majority of the farmers in India are dependent on rainfall for irrigation and therefore, a delayed monsoon or poor rainfall can also affect their farm yield. So, an agriculture reporter needs to have knowledge of the weather in India and its impact on agriculture.

3. Data procurement

One of the major challenges for an agriculture reporter is procuring the data to substantiate his stories. In order to do a story on how unseasonal rains have affected the standing crops of wheat, a reporter may talk to farmers and farmers' associations. However, farmers and farmers' associations cannot quantify the loss and the figures quoted by these associations might not reflect the ground reality.

4. People are not interested

While agriculture may be an important sector for India and its economy, one of the most important things that a reporter needs to keep in mind is that he is writing for readers. While some of the agriculture stories related to the rise in prices of commodities may interest the readers, not all stories from the agriculture sector will interest the audiences. So, an agriculture reporter may find it difficult to always twist and turn the stories in a way that interests the readers.

10.6 OVERVIEW OF WEATHER REPORTING

If there is one beat in the newsroom that caters to all age groups, generates stories having a high readership and has a direct impact on the audience, it is the weather beat. While the weather may not be a primary beat in the newsroom, it is undoubtedly one of the most important beats. Newsrooms usually have a dedicated weather reporter unless it is perennially short of staff. The importance of weather reporting can be ascertained by the fact that weather stories and videos posted on Twitter and other social media networks by media houses have the highest clicks.

IMD has evolved over time and has immensely improved its weather forecasting services. It is now capable of making a near-perfect forecast, nowcasting with the help of radars, provides satellite image of cloud cover and temperature variations for the country, provides real-time air quality index of cities, and provides specialised forecasting for tourists and pilgrims. This apart, IMD is also capable of tracking the onset and withdrawal of monsoon, provides monsoonal data for various purposes, can track a cyclone with speed and accuracy, provides weather updates to farmers, etc. Along with the evolution of IMD, weather reporting in India has also evolved over time. Now-a-day, the weather beat is not confined to reporting just a weather event and how it will influence the mercury.

The biggest example of this evolution in weather reporting is evident from the news reports of media houses catering to the population residing along the coastline of Bay of Bengal. Notably, the population residing along the coastal areas of Odisha, West Bengal, and Andhra Pradesh have to face the maximum brunt of the frequent cyclonic storms that form in the Bay of Bengal. If we analyse the media reports from these states before, during, and after a cyclone, it will be evident that media plays an important role in countering rumor-mongering and fake news that creates panic. It will be also evident that the media plays a crucial role in creating awareness about the weather event in advance so that people can shift to safer places.

Interestingly, media is used to the fullest by authorities and governments while planning its strategy to counter a disaster such as a heatwave or a cyclone and journalists are sent hourly weather bulletins by the disaster management authorities to keep them updated. The journalists use those bulletins to pass on crucial information to people-at-large.

A weather reporter working for a media house catering to the urban audience will have to ensure that the stories done by him should clarify on how the weather is going to affect the citizens. It should also contain how long the extreme weather conditions are going to prevail and whether there are any chances of respite in the near future. He should be also able to explain the reasons behind extreme weather conditions.

It needs to be mentioned that for being a successful weather reporter, a journalist must know the geography of the country, the various seasons, the weather patterns, the wind flow patterns, etc. Without the right knowledge and understanding, weather reports will remain very superficial and devoid of important information. Also, if a reporter fails to understand the art of weather reporting, how will he explain the same to his readers.

10.7 IMPORTANCE OF WEATHER REPORTING

Unlike other beats that may or may not have a direct impact on people or bother them, weather reporting has a direct impact on citizens and help them in making an informed decision before heading out of their homes. There are several factors that make weather reporting important. Some of these factors are:

1. Direct impact on citizens

A person might not be interested in reading about political developments or sports updates as it does not directly impact him. However, the stories done by weather reporters have a direct impact on citizens. It helps them in making an informed decision before heading out from home. For example, if the Met department has predicted that it is going to rain tomorrow and the day after, a person reading the story might carry an umbrella or a raincoat to avoid getting drenched. Similarly, if there is a prediction for heatwave conditions with the temperature expected to remain above 45 degrees Celsius, people might avoid going out in the sun or rescheduling their plans post evening or wear light cotton clothes.

2. Informs the readers

Weather stories inform the readers about the onset and withdrawal of a season along with a plethora of other important information. For example, people after bearing the scorching sun during the summers eagerly wait for the onset of monsoon that provides a much-required respite. Weather reporters often do stories that inform the readers about when the monsoon is likely to arrive in a particular city, whether the northern limit of southwest monsoon has entered the country, how long the monsoon is going to take to cover the entire state, etc. Similarly, weather reporters also report on the onset of winter and the entry of cold northerly winds that brings the temperature down in the country.

3. Helps in disaster preparedness

Weather reporters play a crucial role in ensuring better disaster preparedness during natural disasters such as floods, cyclones, heat waves, cold waves, etc. In fact, authorities make use of the media in informing people about what they are supposed to do during such extreme weather conditions and the things they should avoid. Media reports also help in countering rumours and fake information being spread through social media and thereby considerably help the authorities in disaster preparedness. For example, during the severe cyclonic storm Phailin, media in Odisha helped the local disaster management authorities in passing on crucial information related to the cyclonic storm and the various do's and don'ts they are supposed to follow.

4. Helps people in taking better decisions

Weather stories also help people in taking better and well-informed decisions by informing them about crucial weather updates. For example, if a person sitting in office comes to know that authorities have closed two underpasses on the way to his home due to waterlogging pursuant to the heavy rains, he might plan to wait for some time for the water to recede or take a different route to avoid traffic snarls. Similarly, if a resident of Ahmedabad is planning to go to Delhi, he can check the weather forecast for the national capital in advance and take appropriate clothes for his tour.

10.8 SOURCES IN WEATHER REPORTING

There are various sources of information for a weather reporter. Some of the important sources include:

1. Indian Meteorological Department

The Indian Meteorological Department is one of the most important sources of information for a weather reporter. The department operates under the union government and has field stations across the country. IMD usually issues weather bulletins and updates on a daily basis, which is made available to the media. However, it is always advisable for a reporter to go beyond the press releases and meet the meteorologists who come up with the forecasts. This will ensure an improvement in the knowledge base of the journalist, as well as enable him in writing in-depth and insightful stories.

Notably, it is important for a weather journalist to understand how a particular wind pattern is going to affect the weather in a particular area, what is a western disturbance or an El-Nino effect, what is nowcasting, how northerly winds bring winter in India, what is a sea breeze and land breeze, how atmospheric moisture is related to mercury levels, etc. These are basic fundamentals based on which a weather reporter can perform his job. In order to understand these fundamentals, it is essential for a reporter to develop a good rapport with scientists and other staffs working in IMD. Every state has a Met director, who is the head of IMD's operations in the state, and a reporter should definitely have a good rapport with the director.

Notably, IMD is the principal agency of the Ministry of Earth Sciences that is responsible for meteorological observations, weather forecasting,

and seismology. It is also one of the six regional specialised meteorological centres of the World Meteorological Organisation and has the responsibility of forecasting, naming, and distribution of warnings for tropical cyclones in the northern Indian Ocean region, including the Bay of Bengal, Arabian Sea, Persian Gulf, and the Malacca Straits.

2. Skymet and other private weather forecasters

Skymet and other private forecasting services are also an important source of information for a journalist. Although services provided by Skymet have been often criticized by senior IMD officials, still at times, the explanation done by weather experts from Skymet on a particular weather phenomenon was found to be better. However, when it comes to mainstream media, IMD is the most trustworthy source of information. There are several other websites and mobile applications such as ‘The Weather Channel’, Accuweather, etc, that also provide weather forecasts and updates for free.

3. Local civic body, irrigation department, State Emergency Control Room

As discussed earlier, weather reporting is no longer confined to reporting about weather events and its impact on mercury. It also includes information about how rainfall is going to impact the city, the rise in the water level of lakes, rivers, and dams due to the downpour, and whether sluice gates of dams and lakes are going to be opened or not. This information is not available with IMD and it is usually provided by the local civic body and the irrigation department. Similarly, in the case of disasters, the state government operates the State Emergency Control Room where data and information for the entire state are available and provided to media. The control room is also crucial as it releases regular bulletins that provide an update to the media on weather phenomenon and its impact on the state. Also, it acts as a centre from where a journalist can get detailed district-wise data.

10.9 CONCLUSION: AGRICULTURE AND WEATHER REPORTING CANNOT BE OVERLOOKED BY NEWSROOMS

It is true that agriculture and weather as beats are not as important as many other beats in the newsroom. However, at the same time, these beats generate several important stories that have a direct impact on people. There are days when the most important development of the day comes from these two beats. Therefore, media houses have to assign

these beats as secondary beats to reporters who have been already assigned a major beat.

10.10 LET US SUM IT UP

This unit must have helped you in understanding:

- Concept of agriculture and weather reporting
- Importance of agriculture and weather reporting
- Various sources of information for an agriculture and weather reporter
- Challenges in agriculture and weather reporting

10.11 KEYWORDS

Nowcasting: It is weather forecasting on a very short term mesoscale period of up to 2 hours according to the World Meteorological Organization and up to six hours according to other authors in the field

IMD: The India Meteorological Department is an agency of the Ministry of Earth Sciences of the union government. It is the principal agency responsible for meteorological observations, weather forecasting and seismology in the country.

ICAR: The Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) is an autonomous organisation under the Ministry of Agriculture that works as an apex body for co-ordinating, guiding, and managing research and education in the field of agriculture including horticulture, fisheries, and animal sciences in India.

MSP: The minimum support price (MSP) is the price fixed by the union government to protect the farmers against excessive fall in prices during bumper production years. In short, it is a guaranteed price for the farm produce by the government to save farmers from distress.

FCI: The Food Corporation of India (FCI) has been created under the Food Corporations Act and its major responsibilities includes effective price support operations for safeguarding the interests of the poor farmers, distribution of food grains throughout the country for public distribution system (PDS), ensuring satisfactory level of operational and buffer stocks of food grains to ensure National Food Security, and to regulate market price to provide food grains to consumer at a reliable price. Notably, the FCI procures rice, pulses, and wheat from farmers.

10.12 CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

1. Explain the role of agriculture in the Indian economy.

2. What encompasses the agriculture beat?

3. Enumerate the basic knowledge required by an agriculture reporter to perform well in the beat.

4. Enumerate the factors that make agriculture reporting important in a newsroom.

5. What are the various sources of information for an agriculture reporter?

6. What are the challenges in agriculture reporting?

7. Enumerate the importance of weather reporting in newsrooms.

8. What are the various sources of information for a weather reporter?

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:: STRUCTURE::**11.0 Introduction****11.1 objectives****11.2 Overview of entertainment journalism****11.3 Importance of entertainment journalism****11.4 Sources of entertainment journalism****11.5 Challenges in entertainment journalism****11.6 Writing a film review****11.7 Art and culture reporting: Scope and challenges****11.8 Writing a book review****11.9 Conclusion: Entertainment, Art & Culture Journalism
Essential to Target Youth****11.10 Let us sum it up****11.11 Keywords****11.12 Check Your Progress****11.13 References**

11.0 INTRODUCTION

To inform, educate, and entertain people are the most important functions of the media. Entertainment journalism, along with art and culture reporting, takes care of entertainment of the audiences with the help of news and developments from the world of cinema, celebrities, performing arts and the masters of pop culture. The youth is an important segment that every news media wants to lure and this journalistic genre certainly helps a media house in attracting young audiences. This unit describes in detail the various aspects of entertainment, art and culture reporting from

a reporter's perspective and will also help the students in understanding how to successfully write film and book reviews.

11.1 OBJECTIVES

- Understand the concept of entertainment journalism
- Understand the importance of entertainment journalism
- Understand the various sources of information for an entertainment journalist
- Understand the challenges in entertainment journalism
- Understand how to write a film and book review
- Understand the concept of art and culture reporting

On completion of this unit

On completion of this unit, you will be able to understand:

- Concept of entertainment, art and culture reporting
- Importance of entertainment, art and culture reporting
- Various sources of information for an entertainment reporter
- How to write a film and book review
- Challenges in entertainment, art and culture reporting

11.2 OVERVIEW OF ENTERTAINMENT JOURNALISM

Entertainment journalism is a form of journalism that deals with stories from the world of cinema, television, music, fashion, celebrities, and popular pop culture such as stand-up comedians, YouTube content generators, video bloggers, etc. It is completely different from the other beats in a newsroom. While the other beat reporters are involved in news journalism, entertainment journalists are more concerned about celebrity gossips, fashion updates, cinema, events, etc.

While entertainment journalism may appear glamorous, there is a lot of hard work that a journalist has to put-in to achieve success in this genre. Unlike news journalism which has the purpose of informing the audiences on newsworthy developments, the main objective of entertainment journalists is to entertain people with their stories and scoops. There is a cut-throat competition among entertainment journalists to break developments from the industry. The competition has further intensified post the mushrooming of entertainment bloggers on video hosting sites such as YouTube.

Entertainment journalism can be divided into various sub-categories focusing on different aspects of the entertainment industry. One of them is focused on celebrities and their lifestyles. Stories can be on their movies, television serials, personal life and property, relationships, link-ups and break-ups, and their fashion sense among others. Another aspect of entertainment journalism is focused on motion pictures and film reviews. Such journalists are often called film critics and their job is to analyse a movie based on several parameters such as acting, direction, music, background score, cinematography, screenplay, story, etc.

With a plethora of entertainment choices available these days on these platforms, it is essential for entertainment journalists to review the content and new releases on these platforms as well. For example, Netflix's original production Sacred Games was a cult hit among the Indian audience and therefore, it was essential for entertainment journalists to review such a web series. Interestingly, these platforms have become so popular that many big banner production houses are now engaged in producing content such as movies and web series that are exclusively meant for these platforms and do not get a conventional release. For example, Karan Johar's Dharma Production had produced movies such as Drive and Lust Stories that were exclusively released on Netflix.

11.3 IMPORTANCE OF ENTERTAINMENT JOURNALISM

While many journalists look down upon entertainment journalists for the kind of stories generated by the latter, it is true and beyond any doubt that stories generated by entertainment journalists enjoy a far greater readership than conventional news stories. For example, people would be more interested in reading a story on Shah Rukh Khan's upcoming movie than reading about a story on the opposition leaders criticising the ruling government on poor implementation of mid-day meal scheme. There are several factors that make entertainment journalism important for a newsroom. These are:

1. Attract youngsters

Entertainment stories attract youngsters and usually cut-across the age group barrier that is applicable for several other beats in a newsroom. For any media house, youngsters are a major target group. Celebrities from the world of sports, films, television, and music have a very deep impact on young minds as the latter is exposed to the formers' work. Youngsters

often try to imitate the celebrities by adopting their dressing and hairstyle, using the same accessories used by stars, and by expressing their love and support for their favourite movie star and his or her films. In such a situation, no media house can ignore the demand of youngsters which makes entertainment news indispensable.

2. Breaks monotony

Entertainment stories are never boring and therefore, it breaks the monotony created by the monotonous nature of the stories generated from the various news beats such as politics, health, sports, bureaucracy, etc. Since entertainment stories are meant for entertainment, people enjoy reading these stories. While entertainment stories might not affect citizens directly or indirectly unlike health or civic story, the entertaining nature of stories done by entertainment journalists attracts people.

3. People want to know about celebrities

People have a great interest in learning more and more about celebrities and their secrets. The more important or bigger the celebrity, the more people are going to read a story on him. For example, a story on megastars such as Amitabh Bachchan, Shah Rukh Khan, Amir Khan, and Salman Khan is certainly going to get more readership than a story on actor Rajpal Yadav. People are interested in knowing about the films these stars have signed, the fee they are charging for a movie, their diet, fitness regime, relationships, holidays, outings, etc. All this information is made available to the public by entertainment journalists.

4. Showcases an alternate reality

Celebrities are known for their extravagant lifestyle. It is something that is the aspiration of many people, but only a few are able to achieve such a lifestyle. For the majority of the people, the lifestyle of a celebrity is an alternate reality and people are interested to know about it. For example, Shah Rukh Khan may appear before journalists in a jacket that alone costs around Rs25 lakh. For an average middle class or an upper-middle-class person, it is difficult to wear a jacket that is as expensive as the one used by Shah Rukh. However, he wants to know about what is so special about Shah Rukh's jacket that is so expensive. Similarly, Salman Khan may arrive at an event in a Porche that costs around Rs10 crore. It is a car that common people will never be able to afford, but people are interested in knowing about the car and the other cars owned by the star.

5. Assist people in making an informed decision

Entertainment journalists, especially film critics, assist people in making an informed decision related to films, television shows, web series, etc. Critics play a crucial role in influencing people on whether they should watch a movie, television show, or web series. For example, if a movie gets negative reviews from the majority of the critics, people may avoid that movie despite the star cast or the strong movie promotions. Also, post the advent of online streaming platforms, people are spoilt for choice and nobody wants to invest his or her time watching a movie or a web series that is not worth it. Therefore, entertainment journalist plays an important role in helping out people on what they can watch on these platforms and the content that can be avoided.

6. Informs readers on entertainment and fashion

One of the major functions of entertainment journalism apart from entertainment is to inform the people on what is happening in the field of entertainment, the latest fashion trends, the latest styling accessories for both genders, etc. Entertainment journalist also plays an important role in promoting various fashion trends and personal styles initiated by celebrities. For example, Salman Khan's hairstyle was one of the most discussed issues during the release of his film *Tere Naam*. Similarly, the styling and clothing of actor Sonam Kapoor also become very popular among the masses as she is considered a fashion icon.

11.4 SOURCES OF ENTERTAINMENT JOURNALISM

Like any other beat, there are several sources of information for an entertainment journalist. However, most of the sources always remain hidden and their names are seldom mentioned in stories. People are interested in reading about celebrities, but apart from the celebrity himself, there can be multiple sources that can provide information to the media about the star. While the sanctity and authenticity of the information cannot be always verified, entertainment journalists are known for spreading rumours and gossip related to the entertainment industry. The following are some of the sources of information for an entertainment journalist:

1. Events

Pre-scheduled events such as award shows, muhurats, music release, poster release, fashion shows attended by celebrities, etc, are one of the

major sources of information for an entertainment journalist. Usually, celebrities have a busy schedule and it is difficult for a journalist to always trace them for updates. However, these pre-scheduled events provide the scope to journalists to ask questions from celebrities, do small interviews, and take photographs of the star. These events also provide an opportunity for an entertainment journalist to network with sources. For example, during an awards show such as IIFA, all major celebrities from the Hindi film industry will remain present. If a journalist can remain present during the red carpet, he can catch hold of these celebrities.

2. PR managers/publicists

Every major star has a dedicated PR team that takes care of the promotions that the star may require. These PR managers are in regular touch with journalists and provide information about the celebrity. On several occasions, good relations with these PR managers might help a journalist in tracking down a star or get an exclusive picture or a scoop worth publishing. For example, PR managers of celebrities can inform a journalist about a celebrity getting offers from Hollywood, their love life, link-ups and break-ups, vacation details of stars, their fights with fellow film stars, etc.

3. Celebrities

When an entertainment journalist shares a good rapport with the celebrity, he can directly get information from the latter without any involvement of his or her PR team. Good relationships with celebrities can also help a journalist in getting easier access to his shootings, events, and parties, as well as a plethora of unfiltered information about the entertainment industry. It also helps a journalist in getting exclusive interviews of a star. For example, if a journalist shares an excellent rapport with Shah Rukh Khan, he might get an invitation from the star for his parties or easy access to the star. In any circumstance, good rapport with a celebrity is definitely going to help an entertainment journalist in the long-run.

4. Production Houses

All major production houses have their own dedicated team of PR specialists. It is the production house and its PR team that creates the plan for creating hype around a movie and plans all the promotional activities. A good relationship with the production house and its PR team will ensure easier access to shootings and exclusive scoops and information

about the film during the pre-production, production, and post-production stage.

5. Social media

One of the biggest sources of entertainment, news, controversies, and gossips is the social media accounts of celebrities. With the popularity of mediums such as Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter, celebrities themselves or their PR managers manage these accounts. These accounts are used by celebrities to directly interact with people. For example, celebrities such as Deepika Padukone, Ranveer Singh, Kapil Sharma, Alia Bhatt, Varun Dhawan, Richa Chadda, Kunal Kamra, etc are very active on social media. These celebrities often react to the major news developments on their social media accounts, which makes it easier for journalists to access it and write a story.

11.5 CHALLENGES IN ENTERTAINMENT JOURNALISM

Entertainment journalism is not everyone's cup of tea. While it may appear a glamorous beat as reporters are entrusted to cover the developments related to celebrities, films, television, etc, it is a tough beat. An entertainment reporter has to face a lot of challenges in covering this genre and it requires a lot of hard work, good networking, patience, and perseverance to achieve success in this beat. The following are the challenges that entertainment reporters have to face:

1. Tantrums of celebrities

As an entertainment reporter, one has to chase celebrities for news, developments, and information from the world of cinema and television. One of the biggest problems that an entertainment reporter has to face is to chase these celebrities and bear their tantrums. A big star may not be ready upfront for an interview. Similarly, if stars are not happy with the line of questioning, they may cancel the interview. While many superstars are well-behaved and treat a journalist with respect, there are several stars who treat journalists like dirt.

2. Lack of information

Writing stories from the field of entertainment is a different art that journalists working on the entertainment beat have to learn over time. One of the major challenges that entertainment journalists have to face on several occasions is the lack of information. It often happens that a

reporter just has one line of information and he has to write a 300-word copy out of it. In such a situation, one has to exaggerate as much as possible and blend the same with the available information in such a manner that it appears fresh information to the readers.

3. Lack of access

Another major challenge that an entertainment journalist has to face is the lack of access to celebrities. There can be instances when a reporter has to write about a superstar in the film industry, but he is unable to access the latter. While the PR teams of celebrities play an important role in bridging this access gap, it is always not feasible for a journalist to reveal the PR team about the story he is planning to do. For example, a journalist might want to interview superstar Salman Khan over his fights and differences with other stars in the industry. However, if the journalist reveals the same to Khan or his PR team, he is not likely to get an interview.

4. Lack of novelty

Stories that are done by entertainment reporters often lack novelty. It is the same old wine being served in a new bottle. Except for stories on new movies and new content being served through television and the web, there is a serious dearth of good stories from the entertainment beat. As far as writing about celebrities is concerned, there is already a lot of information available on the web regarding them. Also, all major stars have given thousands of interviews throughout their career. So, an interview with the same kind of questions does not interest readers.

5. Entertainment stories not taken seriously

For any newsroom, the stories generated by reporters from hard news beats such as politics, crime, business, health, courts, etc, are given more prominence as against entertainment stories. Entertainment journalists are often not taken seriously and their stories are often considered as gossip and rumours. In fact, many celebrities in the past had threatened to take legal action against entertainment journalist for coming up with stories and gossip related to them that they did not like. For example, ace comedian Kapil Sharma had abused and filed a complaint against journalist Vickey Lalwani for the latter's stories on him.

11.6 WRITING A FILM REVIEW

People, in general, love movies. It is not only a great medium of entertainment, it is also considered one of the most powerful mediums of storytelling. If asked, movie lovers will be easily able to recall some of their favourite characters from movies that are etched in their memories. There have been times when some of the greatest movies of the century have proved to be a box office dud. There can be several reasons for the success or failure of a movie, with film critics playing an important role in the process.

Film critics are those influencers who can create a positive or negative image of a movie upon its release. One cannot become a film critic overnight. There are several attributes that a film critic has to garner such as knowledge of films, cinematography, screenplay, music, etc, to do his job properly. Many people decide to watch a movie or give it a pass depending on its reviews by film critics. Some of the popular film critics in India include Anupama Chopra, Rajeev Masand, Taran Adarsh, Komal Nahta, and Khalid Mohamed. The following tips will help journalists in writing a good film review:

1. Understand the process of filmmaking

In order to become a successful film critic, one needs to have a working knowledge of the filmmaking process. It is important that the person understands what is meant by pre-production, production, and post-production. He should also understand the various essential aspects of filmmaking, the important role played by the story, screenplay, dialogues, acting, visual and sound effects, background score, and direction in the success of the film. This knowledge is essential to dissect a film for doing a proper review.

2. Carefully watch the film

A film critic should carefully watch a film, irrespective of the fact that it is boring or interesting. While once is necessary, twice is preferable. It is also important to continuously take notes of the thoughts and reactions as the movie progresses. It will eventually help him in writing a good review. While watching a movie, a journalist might have several thoughts about a particular scene, how the actors have emoted, cinematography, or the use of the background score. If the journalist does not take notes, he might not be able to include his thoughts in the review.

3. Substantiate your criticism

A film reviewer should not shy away from expressing his opinions on the film—the good, bad, and the ugly. However, he should also substantiate his criticism. For example, if a reviewer did not like the songs of a movie, he should explain the problems in the songs such as poor lyrics, poor music, unnecessary placement in the movie, etc. This will help a person in understanding the reviewer's thoughts on the movie and whether he should watch it or not.

4. Explain the performances of the actors

People often watch a movie because of its star cast. So, a film reviewer should also spend some time appraising the audiences about the performances of the ensemble cast, the kind of role that has been done by the movie stars, and a brilliant performance by a star. For example, celebrities such as Shah Rukh Khan, Salman Khan, and Aamir Khan have a huge fan following. Whenever their movies release, fans go crazy and want to know about their performances in the film. This is where a film reviewer is important as he dissects the movie for common people so that they can make an informed decision on whether to watch the movie or not.

5. Avoid spoilers

A film reviewer should provide information about the plot of the film, but he should make sure that his review does not include any spoilers that may ruin it for the people interested in watching the movie. A reviewer should never get too excited and reveal the entire plot of the story. Instead, he should try to get people interested in watching the film.

6. Understand the audience

Movies can be categorised into different genres and every category has a distinctive audience. Similarly, a movie can be absolutely bogus in terms of filmmaking but can end up becoming a major hit on the box office because of its star cast. Therefore, it is essential for a journalist to dissect a movie based on the audiences for which it is made. For example, a film critic cannot expect movies made by David Dhawan to have logic as his movies are meant to be mass entertainers. Similarly, an arthouse movie such as Raincoat might not be appealing to the masses as it is made for a different category of audiences.

11.7 ART AND CULTURE REPORTING: SCOPE AND CHALLENGES

Art and culture reporting is an integral part of the features section of any newsroom. Art and culture reporting may include reviewing and writing about art exhibitions, dance, photography, architecture, design, theatre, musical and cultural events, books, and anything and everything that is related to our culture. While the contours of this journalistic genre are not well-defined, art and culture reporters usually generate content that fits in the features and entertainment pages of the newspapers and web portals.

For example, if there is a major event in a city where classical singers are going to perform live in front of the audience, such an event will be covered by an art and culture reporter. While art and culture journalism plays an important role in newspapers where there are dedicated pages for art and culture reporting, it is not that important for television news channels. However, over the years, television channels, owing to the growing interest of people in such art and culture events, have organised their own events promoting the art and culture of the country. One of the biggest examples of it is the annual event organised by TV Today Network to promote literature, which has been christened as ‘Sahitya Aajtak’.

Art and culture reporting plays an important role in any newsroom. It provides a much-required change to people bored with hard news from the field of crime, civic, health, court, and politics. Also, it attracts youngsters who are more interested in the field of art, culture, and entertainment and no newsroom can take a chance to ignore this segment. For example, if a college is organising a cultural fest in which top actors from the Hindi film industry are going to perform, it is certainly going to interest the youngsters.

Photographs and videos play a crucial role in art and culture reporting. Stories devoid of photographs or videos are never carried prominently in a newspaper or channel as the visual element is essential in such stories. For example, if a journalist is writing a story on an art exhibition by a prominent artist that happened in the city, people reading the story would be also interested in seeing some pictures from the exhibition and the kind of paintings put on display.

This journalistic genre also has its own share of challenges. One of the most important challenges is that people interested in hard news hardly

read stories from the art and culture section. Similarly, there are several art forms that have very few takers. For example, a story about a popular dance form—Bharatanatyam—might not interest many. Similarly, a story about an art exhibition might also have a few readers as there are few people who can understand and appreciate paintings.

Also, in the absence of any major event or exhibition or a major play, art and culture reporters often find it difficult to come up with stories. Then these reporters try to explore trend stories in college fashion, book launches, home decoration themes, ways to prepare for a festival, etc.

11.8 WRITING A BOOK REVIEW

At a time when the reading habit of people has completely transformed in the past two decades and the new generation hardly interested in reading books, questions have been raised on the importance of book reviews in mainstream media platforms. Even though many newspapers and magazines have stopped reviewing books, there are several publishing houses that have adopted new strategies to promote upcoming books from their stable which are written by famous celebrities. This results in a buzz around these books and therefore, media houses have to do stories about these books or an interview of the author, if not a book review.

However, all said and done, there are several media houses, especially newspapers, magazines, and web portals that are still carrying book reviews on a regular basis. A good book review should contain a hook, essential information about the book, the basic plot or storyline, praise and criticism of the content explaining what is good and bad about the book, conclusion, and rating. A hook is essentially a line that will keep the readers interested in reading the remaining portion of the book review. It could also be a compelling or provocative statement from the book.

In order to write a good book review, a person must know the various parts of the book. He must know what the difference between a preface and foreword is. He should properly explain the subject and plot of the book and at the same time, he should ensure that there are no spoilers. While praising or criticising the book, he should substantiate why he is doing so. He should also properly conclude the review by clarifying his thoughts about the book—whether people should buy it or not? Similarly, ratings are also essential for a book review and a reviewer should explain his audiences the rationale behind choosing a particular rating.

11.9 CONCLUSION: ENTERTAINMENT, ART & CULTURE JOURNALISM ESSENTIAL TO TARGET YOUTH

Unlike other beats that generate hard news, reporters covering entertainment, art, and culture, generate stories that have a high appeal among the youth. Youngsters are not interested much in hard news but are interested in movies, theatre, cultural events, etc. This journalistic genre also breaks the monotony of hard news and entertains the readers by catering a different type of content. Nonetheless, entertainment, art and culture reporting is an integral part of any newsroom and any media house cannot take the risk of ignoring this genre if it wants to target the youth.

11.10 LET US SUM IT UP

This unit must have helped you in understanding:

- Concept of entertainment, art and culture reporting, and its importance
- Various sources of information for an entertainment reporter
- Challenges in entertainment journalism
- How to write a book and film review

11.16 Keywords that you have learnt from this unit

Hook: A hook is essentially a line that will keep the readers interested in reading the remaining portion of a book review. It could also be a compelling or provocative statement from the book.

Preface: A preface or proem is an introduction to a book or other literary work written by the work's author.

Foreword: A foreword is a piece of writing sometimes placed at the beginning of a book or other piece of literature. Typically written by someone other than the primary author of the work, it often tells of some interaction between the writer of the foreword and the book's primary author or the story the book tells.

VFX: A foreword is a piece of writing sometimes placed at the beginning of a book or other piece of literature. Typically written by someone other than the primary author of the work, it often tells of some interaction between the writer of the foreword and the book's primary author or the story the book tells.

Cinematography: Cinematography is the art of motion-picture photography and filming either electronically by means of an image sensor, or chemically by means of a light-sensitive material such as film stock.

Screenplay: A screenplay, or script, is a written work by screenwriters for a film, television program, or video game. These screenplays can be original works or adaptations from existing pieces of writing. In them, the movement, actions, expression and dialogues of the characters are also narrated.

11.11 CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

1. What is entertainment journalism?

2. How content streaming services have changed the conventional definition of entertainment?

3. Enumerate the importance of entertainment journalism.

4. Enumerate the various sources of information for an entertainment journalist.

5. Enumerate the challenges in entertainment reporting.

6. Why it is essential for a film critic to understand the process of filmmaking?

7. What is art and culture reporting?

8. What are the various contents of a book review?

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:: STRUCTURE::**12.0 Introduction****12.1 Objectives****12.2 Overview of sports journalism****12.3 Importance of sports journalism****12.4 Sources in sports journalism****12.6 Skills required for sports journalism****12.7 Challenges in sports journalism****12.8 Overview of food journalism****12.9 Importance of food journalism****12.10 Conclusion: Sports and food journalism are growing in importance****12.11 Let us sum it up****12.12 Keywords****12.13 Check Your Progress****12.14 References**

12.0 INTRODUCTION

Sports have always remained an important beat in a newsroom. Its importance has grown over the years. With the advent of technology, the coverage of sporting events has completely changed over the years. Unlike the late '90s when sports journalists used to provide only the basic details of the game to the readers, sports stories are more and more becoming analysis-oriented, with people demanding information about

their favourite sports celebrities from both on-and-off the field. This unit discusses in detail the various nuances of sports journalism. This apart, the unit also sheds light on a new genre in journalism that is growing leaps and bounds with each passing year—food journalism.

12.1 OBJECTIVES

- Understand the concept of sports journalism
- Understand the importance of sports journalism
- Understand the various sources in sports journalism
- Understand the key skills required for sports journalism
- Understand the challenges in sports journalism
- Understand the concept of food journalism
- Understand the importance of food journalism

On completion of this unit

On completion of this unit, you will be able to understand:

- Concept of sports journalism
- Importance of sports journalism and the various sources in sports journalism
- Challenges faced by sports journalists
- Concept of food journalism and the various subjects covered by food journalists
- Importance of food journalism in mainstream media

12.2 OVERVIEW OF SPORTS JOURNALISM

Sports journalism is one of the most important genres in the media business which is evident by the fact that most general newspapers have dedicated pages for sports news and similarly, news channels have dedicated slots for sports. The editorial wing of media houses has a separate sports team that comprises of two or more journalists entrusted with the responsibility of sports news. Unlike other beats where the responsibilities of a reporter and the desk are mutually exclusive, sports journalists, especially in newspapers, are entrusted with the work of reporting as well as making the sports pages.

So what encompasses the sports beat? As the name suggests, sports journalism deals with the coverage of sports events and personalities from across the world. There can be events in which India has no

participation. However, if the event is popular worldwide, sports journalists have to report about it. For example, cricket is the most popular sport in India and there can be tournaments between cricketing nations where India is not playing such as a bilateral series between Pakistan and Bangladesh. However, sports journalists have to report about the developments in the bilateral series as cricket enthusiasts are interested in such developments.

People are also interested in sports personalities and want to know more about them and their personal life. While their on-the-field developments are important for the fans, their off-the-field developments are equally important. For example, cricketing legend Mahendra Singh Dhoni had not played any international cricket since the World Cup debacle in mid-2019 and was seen playing for Indian Premier League (IPL) franchise Chennai Super Kings in IPL 2020. However, during this interim period, fans were eagerly waiting for any developments in Dhoni's life. Be it Dhoni's decision to serve the Indian Army or his holiday with family in Madhya Pradesh or the Board of Control for Cricket in India's (BCCI) decision to not include him in the annual contract list of players, sports journalists continued to cover developments related to him and such news items were very popular among the audience.

While sports events at the international level are popular, sports journalists should not only focus on international events and also include the events at the domestic (countrywide) and local levels. Localising the content is one of the major challenges of a sports journalist and depending on the scale and target audience of the media house, a sports journalist might have to cover school-level, district-level, and state-level sporting events. For example, India might not have a national basketball team, but if there is a state-level basketball championship, a sports journalist must cover the event.

Sports journalism is a fun genre for a journalist on most occasions as they are supposed to enjoy the sporting event live or on television and write about it. However, at times, it can be challenging, especially when sporting events are happening in foreign locations having a wide time gap with India. For example, if a football match is happening in Rio de Janeiro in Brazil which is eight-and-a-half hours behind the Indian Standard Time (IST), it becomes difficult for a sports journalist working in an Indian newspaper to include the match summary on the same day as the latter will have to stick to page releasing deadline.

Like any other beat, a journalist must have the requisite skill set to excel in sports journalism. However, two of the most determining factors that a sports journalist must have are a passion for different sports and a sharp observation skill. Often there are stories done on the behaviour of sportspersons exhibited on the field during a match and a journalist without a sharp observation skill cannot do such stories. A sports journalist is also supposed to have good analytical skills so that he can dissect the match for the audience and write about what went right and what went wrong for the teams.

12.3 IMPORTANCE OF SPORTS JOURNALISM

Sports journalism is one of the most important genres in journalism that has grown in importance. Its importance is evident by the fact that newspapers that have stopped several supplements and cut down on the editorial section in their bid to reduce costs have not curtailed the coverage of sports news. Every mainstream newspaper continues to publish at least a page of sports news, with some English dailies publishing 3-4 pages of sports news every day. Similarly, there are several sports magazines and websites that are performing really well amidst the cut-throat competition. News channels have also created dedicated shows for sports news combined with better coverage and analysis of sporting events.

Nelson Mandela had once said: *“Sports have the power to change the world. It has the power to inspire. It has the power to unite people in a way that little else does. It speaks to youth in a language they understand. Sports can create hope where once there was only despair”*. The various reasons that make sports journalism important are:

1. Sports is entertainment

Sports, directly or indirectly, are a very popular form of entertainment for the masses and therefore, people are interested in sports news. Reading a sports story on a cricket match that happened between Indian and Pakistan a day before is just like watching the highlights of the match. Just like watching a movie helps in relaxation after a tiring day, watching a football and cricket match also has the same effect, albeit people watch a match with more enthusiasm and passion.

2. Youngsters are interested

Although sports news cuts across various age groups, media houses have increased the coverage of sports news as it attracts the youngsters who are more interested in knowing match updates and behind the scene developments of the sporting world. Also, unlike the middle-aged or aged people who are conservative about their preferred sports, youngsters are more liberal and are interested in multiple sports such as cricket, football, hockey, tennis, badminton, etc.

3. Glamour and money in sports

Gone are the days when sportspersons have to somehow manage their economic condition to make way for their passion (sports). These days sportspersons are known for their extravagant life, their love life, high-value purchases, brand endorsements, foreign holidays, and literally anything and everything they do. With the inflow of more money into sports, glamour has become an integral part of sporting events as well as sportspersons, both on-and-off-the-fields. This makes sporting events and sportspersons an attractive proposition for people.

4. People want to know beyond the match

Often it is asked why a reader would read a 500-word story about a cricket match when he has already seen the entire match. The answer is that people do not read a story just to read about the match and scores, but to read about developments that happened pre-and-post match. A reader wants to read an analysis of the match, what went right and wrong, anything that the team administration is likely to do about a non-performing player, or how a team celebrated the victory. Sports enthusiasts are no longer interested in reading a story just to know about what happened in the match and the scorecard. They want information beyond the match.

5. Sportspersons inspire people

With sportspersons becoming the epitome of success, they inspire the youngsters to work hard to achieve their dreams. The majority of these stars have a very humble background and have worked really hard to climb the ladder of success. For example, tennis star Sania Mirza or badminton ace Saina Nehwal or boxing queen Mary Kom are an inspiration for youngsters, especially women, who want to pursue their career in sports and earn name and fame for the country and themselves.

6. Sports unite people

Also, sports unite people in a way that nothing else can do. For example, the match between India and any other cricketing team in the world during the World Cup finals will be watched by the whole country irrespective of caste, creed, and religion. It is an event that has greater importance for the people at that point in time, which ensures that they forget their personal prejudices and differences for the time being and cheer for the country.

12.4 SOURCES IN SPORTS JOURNALISM

Like any other beat, there are multiple sources that a sports journalist has to tap in order to perform well in his beat. These sources may range from the officials in the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports to those working in Sports Authority of India and from BCCI to All India Tennis Association (AITA). Some of the sources that a sports journalist has to develop include:

1. Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports

The Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports is the branch of the union government that is entrusted with the responsibility of promoting various sports and the related infrastructure in the country. It is divided into two wings—the Department of Youth Affairs and the Department of Sports. The ministry is headed by two IAS officers as secretary of youth affairs and secretary of sports, respectively. The ministry is a rich source of information for various initiatives taken by the government for the promotion of various sports and the support provided to various sports personalities so that they can prepare well for international competitions.

2. Associations and boards controlling various sports

All the major sports in the country are controlled by their respective associations or boards. Office bearers of these associations and boards are the best sources for news and updates related to these sports. All these associations and boards have dedicated persons to handle media queries and requests. For example, the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) controls the game of cricket in India. It is responsible for organising cricket series between India and other cricketing nations, domestic cricket tournaments and Indian Premier League. It is also responsible for overseeing the functioning of various state cricket boards,

scheduling matches across the country, and arranging the Indian cricket team's visit to foreign countries for cricket matches.

Similarly, the All India Tennis Association (AITA) is the governing body of tennis in India and is affiliated by the International Tennis Federation and Asian Tennis Federation. AITA operates all of the Indian national representative tennis sides, including the India Davis Cup team and India Fed Cup team. It is responsible for organising and hosting tennis tournaments in the country and scheduling the home international fixtures as well.

3. Sportspersons

Sportspersons are another important source of information and analysis for sports journalists. They are the best to comment on the performance of a player in a sport they are playing or had played in the past. Also, they have a vast knowledge about the sport and therefore, they can analyse a match easily. A journalist should try to maintain good rapport with the present players playing a sport as well as the former players. A good rapport with sportspersons will also ensure that a journalist can secure information beyond what has happened in a match.

For example, a good rapport with the Indian cricket team's captain Virat Kohli will ensure that a journalist might get information about the strategy of the team for the next game, or insights about how the team is unwinding after a coveted win, etc. Similarly, a good rapport with former stars of Indian cricket Sachin Tendulkar, Sourav Ganguly, and Virendra Sehwag will help a journalist in understanding the game better and taking their help in analysing the game. It might also help the journalist in developing more contacts with other cricket players.

4. Social media

These days even sports authorities are busy creating transparency and provide information to the followers of the sports through their official social media accounts. Not just the authorities, but even players have their own social media accounts where they share information about their life and the game. All such information can be utilised by a sports journalist to come up with stories about these players. The use of social media accounts by sports personalities has become very common and it is being used by them to directly communicate with their fans.

For example, when Virat Kohli and actor Anushka Sharma got married, they posted their marriage pictures from Italy on their respective Instagram account. The pictures were later splashed by the media along with the news as there was no other way that the journalists could approach the couple. Similarly, Mahendra Singh Dhoni often posts pictures and videos of his family holidays and his play-time with his daughter. These pictures and videos are then tuned into news stories.

5. Sports Authority of India

The Sports Authority of India (SAI) is the apex national sports body of India established under the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports for the development of various sports in the country and for mentoring sportspersons for international tournaments including Olympics. It has two sports academic institutions, 10 regional centres, 14 centre of excellence, 56 sports training centres and 20 special area games. All these institutions work with the aim of improving India's performance in various international sporting events and nurturing the right talent for the same. The office-bearers of SAI are important sources for a sports journalist if the latter wants to explore the arena beyond cricket.

6. Live sporting events

One of the best ways to experience and write about a sport is to watch a live match. While watching a match in the stadium is the best way to enjoy the game, it is always not possible due to time constraints. However, with the advent of technology, journalists can watch a game on their mobile or computer even if they do not have access to a television at that point in time. Most journalists are able to write an analytical and insightful copy only after closely following a game. For example, if the match is happening in a foreign country, it is always not possible for a sports journalist to travel with the team. Therefore, the best way is to use technology, watch the game, and write a good story.

12.6 SKILLS REQUIRED FOR SPORTS JOURNALISM

Like any other beat, sports journalists also need to develop the required skills for excelling in the field. However, two things that are considered the most important skills for sports journalists are a passion for sports and sharp observation skills. Without these two skills, it is advisable that a journalist should not venture into sports journalism. Sports journalism being a highly specialised field requires specialist knowledge about

sports. A sports journalist needs to have the following skills to excel in the beat:

1. Keen interest in playing or watching sports

Interest in sports is something that is a prerequisite for a sports journalist. In order to cover sports, a journalist must have at least played that sport or regularly watches it. Without interest or passion for sports, a journalist cannot succeed in the beat. For example, if a journalist has never played cricket and is not even interested in sports, he can never become a good sports journalist in India.

2. Sharp observation skills

A sports journalist needs to have a sharp observation skill. Sometimes, the behaviour and conduct of sportspersons on the field becomes a point of discussion and hit the headline rather than the outcome of the match. For example, in the 2008 edition of the Indian Premier League (IPL), during a match between Kings XI Punjab and Mumbai Indians in Mohali, the latter's captain Harbhajan Singh slapped Kings XI Punjab bowler S Sreesanth. This infamous incident became the talking point in the country rather than the outcome of the match. Later on, Harbhajan Singh was banned for the entire 2008 IPS season and he was banned for 5 ODIs by BCCI. Similarly, players are often seen sledging their opponents, which also can be turned into an interesting story.

3. Eye for accuracy

Since sports journalism also includes mining through data, statistics, and figures about a team and individual players, as well as dealing with scorecards, a sports journalist has to ensure that there is accuracy in the information provided by him in the story. A goof-up in these figures can seriously affect the credibility of the journalist and the media house.

4. Patience

A match is not over until it is over. A journalist must understand this and have patience. Often, in their bid to meet deadlines, journalists write a match copy even before it ends. This can have a disastrous impact. While it is okay to write down the points that are to be included in the copy or prepare its structure, a match copy should be written only after the match is over.

5. Resourcefulness

A sports journalist has to be resourceful and develop the right contacts and sources for information on a regular basis. While the information overflow on social media websites and the internet has somehow dented the importance of a sports journalist with excellent connections, still journalists with a good connection in the sports domain are an asset for a media house. A resourceful journalist will be able to get the interview of a sportsperson at the right time and also get inside information from the team that can help him in writing exclusive stories.

6. Willingness to travel

A sports journalist has to travel a lot, if the media house permits, to cover sporting events across the country. While news agencies do cover all the major sporting events in the country, some media houses prefer to send their own reporter to the venue for exclusive and insightful stories. A journalist who is not ready to travel and explore various sports should refrain from sports journalism.

7. Ability to work under pressure

A sports journalist might have to write and send a copy to the newsroom right from the stadium when thousands of people are cheering and making noises. So, he should be also able to work under challenging conditions. Also, a match can end really late but, he will have to ensure that the match copy is sent to the newsroom before the deadline.

8. Analytical skills

A sports journalist should definitely have analytical skills so that he can dissect a match and write a copy with all the details and analysis that will attract the audience. People who have already watched the match are not interested in reading a story that just contains the summary of the match and the scorecard. Instead, they are interested in reading about the analysis of the match, what went right and what went wrong, the strategy of the team for the next game, which player will be rested during the next match and who will get an opportunity, how the team celebrated the victory, etc.

12.7 CHALLENGES IN SPORTS JOURNALISM

Like any other beat, sports journalism comes with its own share of challenges. Some of the challenges faced by sports journalists are:

1. Lack of access to sportspersons

One of the major challenges faced by sports journalists is the lack of access to celebrities from the world of sports. Many developments take place in the dressing room of the team or the board room where important decisions are taken. However, the dressing room, as well as the board room, remains out of bounds for a journalist.

2. Players want privacy

While people might be interested in knowing more about their favourite sports personalities, the latter might want privacy. Many renowned players refrain from interacting with journalists and even after being poked by the latter, they do not reveal what is going on in their minds. Also, many sports personalities are not comfortable discussing their private life with journalists.

3. Information overflow on social media

In this age of social media and the internet, there is too much private information available about sports personalities on the web. In fact, many sports personalities prefer to interact with their fans directly through their official social media accounts and provide information about their personal life, the game, where are they holidaying, and their views on various issues of public importance. This reduces the importance of sports journalists who so far had exclusive access to these celebrities from the world of sports.

4. Lack of opportunity to cover live events

Often media houses expect sports journalists to do exclusive and special stories from the world of sports but, are not ready to finance their trips to venues where the sporting events are taking place. Journalists are often told to watch the match on television and write the copy. While writing a match copy is easy after watching the match on television, finding exclusive stories without actually going to the field and interacting with players and team management is difficult.

5. Maintaining deadlines

While deadlines are sacrosanct, sports journalists often find themselves running against time as matches end late and then they are supposed to write a copy in a jiffy. There are occasions when a match happening at a venue in a different time zone ends well past midnight as far as Indian Standard Time is considered. This makes it difficult for sports journalists to report these matches, especially in newspapers.

12.8 OVERVIEW OF FOOD JOURNALISM

As the term “food journalism” is relatively young, most people presume it to be restaurant and food reviews. While restaurant and food reviews are certainly a major responsibility of a food journalist, the genre includes much more than just that. Food journalism encompasses researching about food and the ingredients used in it, investigating the history of age-old famous dishes, exposing the adulteration in food items, simplifying the politics of food, and adopting healthier food habits.

Nutrition in itself has become a huge topic among youngsters who want to maintain that perfect figure and stay healthy. People want to read about how the food they consume affects their health and how to cook healthier food without compromising on taste. For example, health freaks are very much concerned about the amount of carbohydrate they consume. This concern has given birth to the fascination for the low-carb diet. Similarly, health and figure conscious people are going gaga over the newfound fascination for the ketogenic diet.

Food journalism is growing in importance as is evident by the success of several food bloggers on the internet. These food bloggers were non-existent till the last five years and now they have millions of followers. While many consider venturing into food blogging and into food journalism owing to their love for food, only a few are successful and making money out of their liking for food. It is to be noted that food journalism is a niche in which every journalist cannot excel. There are specific skill sets required for food journalism and above all, he needs to be a foodie in the real sense who is ready to try different cuisines keeping his prejudices under check.

A food journalist working in a mainstream media house is entrusted with the responsibility of exploring various food trends in society. For example, the fascination for organic and healthy food was not there till the end of the twentieth century. However, post the new millennium,

people have become more conscious about the ingredients they use for preparing their food and more and more people are now using organic vegetables, fruits, and cereals. It is a trend that a food journalist is supposed to identify and write about. Similarly, an increasing number of people are avoiding any intake of sugar and now prefer to have green tea to reduce toxicity from their bodies. It is again a trend that a food journalist can write about.

Food journalism also includes investigative journalism. For example, if people buying fish from a particular market are falling sick and had to be admitted to hospitals, there is some problem in the way fishes are preserved in the market. A story exposing the excessive use of formalin to keep fish fresh can shake the administration and can be a wonderful read for fish eaters. Similarly, people would love to read about popular dishes and how they originated and evolved over the years. For writing such a story, a food journalist will have to investigate the same with the help of food connoisseurs.

A food journalist is also supposed to review restaurants on various parameters ranging from restaurant decoration to ambience and food quality to kitchen hygiene. He is also supposed to provide his audiences with authentic recipes of popular, historic, and exotic dishes.

12.9 IMPORTANCE OF FOOD JOURNALISM

The importance of food journalism is growing considerably with each passing year. With people becoming more conscious about the food they eat, food journalists play an important role in providing the right information to readers so that they can make an informed decision as far as their food choices are concerned. Some of the factors that make food journalism important are:

1. Food attracts people

While there is no doubt that we need food to stay alive, it is also a fact that good food attracts people as they want to know more about it. People want to know where they can taste a particular dish, how to prepare a popular dish, etc. A well-presented story about the history and evolution of Biryani is certainly going to bring water to the mouth and also attract people to go through the story.

2. Helps people in making informed decisions

A food journalist through his insightful stories often explains the new food trend in society and its pros and cons. It helps people in making whether they should ignore the trend or join the bandwagon. For example, the ketogenic diet is in demand these days and people are spending a lot to get a customized keto diet prepared for them. However, it should be also mentioned that the ketogenic diet is not suitable for various persons, who might not get the desired results by adopting a ketogenic diet.

3. Helps people in adopting healthier food habits

Food journalists through their stories often explain to people which food habits are good for health and which are bad. They also explain what healthier food habits people can adopt for a healthier mind and body. Such stories have high readership as people are also concerned about their food habits. For example, a food journalist can explain the advantages of vis-à-vis disadvantages of using red chilli powder in regular cooking. This will help people to decide whether they should use red chilli powder or not.

4. Entertains people

Food stories, especially the ones that come out during festivities, entertain people. For example, a story on Maharashtrian sweets that can be made during Diwali is a story that will entertain the readers even if they are not going to make these dishes. Similarly, a story on what constitutes the lunch of India's topmost CEOs is a story that will also attract the readers.

12.10 CONCLUSION: SPORTS AND FOOD JOURNALISM ARE GROWING IN IMPORTANCE

The importance of both sports and food journalism is increasing with each passing year. There are several factors that make these two beats important. While the former is present in the newsroom for a long time and has evolved with the changing society, the latter has taken birth in the fag-end of the twentieth century and grown in importance since then. There is immense scope in both these beats, but a journalist needs to have the right skillsets for these beats in order to achieve excellence.

12.11 LET US SUM IT UP

This unit must have helped you in understanding:

- Concept of sports journalism
- Importance of sports journalism and the various sources of information for a sports journalist
- Challenges in sports journalism
- Skills required for sports journalism
- Concept of food journalism and its importance in mainstream media

12.12 KEYWORDS

AITA: AITA stands for the All India Tennis Association. It is the governing body of tennis in India. It was established in 1920 and affiliated by International Tennis Federation and Asian Tennis Federation.

BCCI: The India men's national cricket team, also known as Team India and Men in Blue, is governed by the Board of Control for Cricket in India. It is a full member of the International Cricket Council with Test, One-Day International, and Twenty20 International status.

IPL: The Indian Premier League is a professional Twenty20 cricket league in India contested during March or April and May of every year by eight teams representing eight different cities in India. The league was founded by the Board of Control for Cricket in India in 2008.

SAI: The Sports Authority of India is the apex national sports body of India, established in 1984 by the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports of Government of India for the development of sport in India.

Ketogenic diet: The ketogenic diet is a high-fat, adequate-protein, low-carbohydrate diet that in medicine is used primarily to treat difficult-to-control epilepsy in children. The diet forces the body to burn fats rather than carbohydrates.

12.13 CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

1. What encompasses the sports beat?

2. Is sports journalism a fun genre for a journalist?

3. What are the two most important skills required by a sports journalist?

4. Enumerate the importance of sports journalism in the mainstream media?

5. Enumerate the various sources of information for a sports journalist?

6. What are the various skills required by a sports journalist?

7. What are the challenges in sports journalism?

8. What encompasses food journalism?

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:: STRUCTURE::**13.0 Introduction****13.1 Learning objectives****13.2 Overview of business journalism****13.3 Importance of business journalism****13.4 Sources in business journalism****13.5 Things to do for venturing into business journalism****13.6 Challenges in business reporting****13.7 Sectors in business journalism****13.8 Conclusion: Business journalism has immense scope****13.9 Let us sum it up****13.10 Keywords****13.11 Self-evaluation exercise****13.12 References**

13.0 INTRODUCTION

If there is one beat that has multiplied its importance in the newsroom in the past two-three decades, it is the business beat. Several factors make the business beat important and one of them is the growing financial literacy in the country. Now, people are aware of and concerned about the economy and the various parameters that are used to judge the health of the economy. Gone are the days when only political developments were a hot topic for discussion at roadside tea stalls. Nowadays, people are also discussing the rise or fall of financial markets, the government's financial policies, etc, at the breakfast and dinner table. This unit discusses in detail the various aspects of business journalism from a reporter's perspective.

13.1 OBJECTIVES

- Understand the concept of business journalism
- Understand the importance of business journalism
- Understand the various sources in business journalism
- Understand the things to do before venturing into business journalism
- Understand the challenges in business journalism
- Understand the various sectors in business journalism

On completion of this unit

On completion of this unit, you will be able to understand:

- Concept of business journalism
- Importance of business journalism
- Various sources of information for business journalists
- Things to do for a journalist before venturing into business
- Challenges that a business journalist has to face
- Various sectors in business journalism

13.2 OVERVIEW OF BUSINESS JOURNALISM

With India being the world's fifth-largest economy by nominal GDP and the third-largest in terms of purchasing power parity, the rise and fall of the Indian economy play an important role in the global arena. The Narendra Modi-led NDA government aims to capitalise on the growing demand for the manufacturing and service sector and make India a five trillion dollar economy by 2024-25. Such a scenario clearly explains the importance of the Indian economy for the government and the people, which paves the way for the greater consumption of business news.

Business journalism is perhaps one of the genres that have grown over the years due to an ever-increasing population of financially literate people. While the mainstream print media such as newspapers and magazines have been covering major developments in the business sector since the past many decades through dedicated business pages, the rise in demand for business news has led to many media barons opening their dedicated business news channels and web portals.

In fact, in the last two decades, the number of business news channels has increased considerably. For example, Zee Business, a dedicated 24x7 business news channel, was launched by the Zee Group in November 2004. Similarly, NDTV profit, a 24x7 business news channel of the NDTV group formed by Radhika Roy and Prannoy Roy, was launched in 2005. Another business channel ET Now of the Bennet and Coleman group was launched in June 2009. CNBC TV18, another business news channel, was launched on October 26, 2011, by the Network 18 group. BTVi (Bloomberg Television), which has now become Bloomberg Quint, was launched in the year 2016.

As far as business newspapers are concerned, most of them were launched between the 1960s and late 1990s, except the Mint and Financial Chronicle. While Mint was launched by the Hindustan Times group on February 1, 2007, the Financial Chronicle was launched on April 16, 2008. Two major business newspapers—The Economic Times and The Financial Express—were launched in 1961, Business Standard was launched in 1975. This apart, Business Line or The Hindu Businessline was launched in 1994.

So what encompasses the business beat? The business beat usually deals with the developments that take place in the business, economic, and financial activities in the society. The various issues taken care of by business journalists cover all the commercial activities related to the economy. Business journalists usually write news and feature articles about people, places, and issues related to the business sector. Most newspapers and magazines, as well as television news channels, have dedicated business reporters who cover the most important happenings from the world of economy and business. However, in-depth and insightful coverage of news and developments from various business sectors are usually found in dedicated business newspapers, magazines, and business news channels.

While business stories with too much corporate technicalities or full of jargon are often repelling for a common reader having no knowledge of the business sector, the best business stories are often considered the ones that are local and explain the readers the context and implications of a particular development. For example, if the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) is pumping money into the economy and driving down interest rates, the business reporter must explain to the readers whether this is a good or bad step for the consumers. A business reporter should also explain to the readers what is ahead for them around the bend.

13.3 IMPORTANCE OF BUSINESS JOURNALISM

At a time when even a common man is concerned about the change in GDP figures of the country and is affected by a fall in the stock market because he has invested in stocks and mutual funds, business news is very crucial. Gone are the days when business news was only consumed by a handful of people who have high stakes in the economy. Now, it is consumed by a large number of people who are neither businessmen nor a market analyst. In fact, the importance of business journalism has increased over time which is evident by the fact that several media houses came up with dedicated business news channels and newspapers in the past two-three decades. The following are some of the factors that make business journalism important:

1. Make people financially literate

Many people are highly educated but they cannot be termed as financially literate as they are not aware of how the economy functions, the role of the RBI, the implications of financial policies of the government, which instruments are best for wealth creation and tax savings, and how the rise and fall of the share market exhibits the market sentiment of people at-large. Business news helps in creating awareness about the various subjects related to the economy and it helps people in becoming financially literate and making informed decisions. For example, people often read articles on the comparison of various tax savings instruments available in the market before they invest their surplus funds to save income tax.

2. Explains the government's financial policies

Business news also helps in creating awareness about the various financial policies of the government, the reason behind their planning and implementation, and how it is going to affect the people. For example, if the government is planning to increase import duty on Chinese plastic goods, it might do so to promote the domestic plastic goods industry. A business journalist will not only break the development that the Indian government has increased the import duty on Chinese plastic goods, he will also explain why it was done and how it is going to affect the common people by a rise or drop in prices of various plastic goods available in the market.

3. Discusses the plight of businessmen and consumers

It is often the business journalists who raise the plight of businessmen or traders and the consumers as well which forces the government to take corrective steps if required. For example, if there is a sudden rise in prices of onions and it is retailing at over Rs100 per kilogram, business journalists, especially those covering the agriculture sector, will write stories on why the price of onion has increased and how it is affecting the common people. This will attract the attention of the government which might decide to import onions from outside the country. Similarly, upon stories being done on the exorbitant rise in prices of sugar in the domestic market, the union government often imposes a temporary ban on sugar exports. This results in increased availability of sugar in the domestic market and an eventual drop in sugar prices.

4. Provides crucial information on stock market and wealth creation opportunities

Business journalism also plays an important role as it explains the people about the various developments in the stock market and also provides wealth creation opportunities to people by suggesting investment instruments in which they can park their money for greater returns. Almost all business news channels have their dedicated shows during the stock market opening hours in which experts suggest which stocks to buy and which ones to sell. Also, the business news channels and newspapers create awareness about wealth creation opportunities available to people along with the amount of risk they have to take. For example, Zee Business, the business news channel of Zee Media, has a dedicated show called “Equity Gurukul” in which experts from the stock market explain the viewers the various nuances of the stock market, how to pick profitable stocks, and how to minimise losses.

5. Provides updates about corporate companies

Business journalists keep a close tab on major corporate companies in the country and across the globe. They keep the readers informed about various developments in the company along with updates on new products that the company is planning to launch, the status of its debt in the market, whether it is a good plan to invest in the company’s stock, interviews of top administrators of the company, etc. Often business journalists are the ones who reveal that the company is planning to file for bankruptcy which essentially means it does not have the funds required for servicing its debt.

Business journalists also keep a tab on the various litigations related to the company and the implications of court orders on the company. For example, the Supreme Court's direction to telecom operator Vodafone-Idea to pay \$13 billion to the Indian government in adjusted gross revenue as spectrum usage charges and license fee has left the company on the brink of bankruptcy and closure. The diktat from the apex court has also affected the share prices of the company and left the investors in the lurch.

6. Business news and interviews inspire people

While many people are inspired by Bollywood celebrities, many are interested in understanding the life mantra of highly successful businessmen and their road to success. For example, an interview with Asia's richest man and the chairman of Reliance Industries Mukesh Ambani on his life's journey and how he has succeeded in the business world will certainly inspire several people. Similarly, one of the most successful investors and American business magnate Warren Buffet's mantra on investing in value stocks has inspired many investors. Similarly, many people are inspired by the simple living and high thinking motto of Infosys co-founder Narayan Murthy and his wife Sudha Murthy.

13.4 SOURCES IN BUSINESS JOURNALISM

Like any other beat, there are multiple sources of information for a business journalist that he has to tap to achieve success in his beat. While it is much easier for a business journalist working in business news channels or newspapers as they have to manage sources from a particular business sector only, it is relatively difficult for a business journalist of a general newspaper or news channel as he has to develop and maintain a large number of sources from the world of business ranging from market experts to ministry officials and from trade bodies to bankers. Following are some of the important sources of information for a business journalist:

1. Stock and commodity markets

The Indian stock market comprises of two major exchanges—the Bombay Stock Exchange (BSE) and the National Stock Exchange (NSE). BSE was established in the year 1875 and is located at Dalal Street, Mumbai. It is Asia's oldest stock exchange and the world's tenth-largest stock exchange with an overall market capitalisation of more than \$2.2 trillion as of April 2018. Similarly, NSE is the leading stock exchange of

India and is located in Mumbai. It was established in 1992 as the first dematerialised electronic exchange in the country. While the Sensex is the market index of BSE, it is Nifty for NSE.

This apart, people interested in the commodity market invest through the Multi Commodity Exchange of India Ltd (MCX), an independent commodity exchange. It was established in 2003 and is located in Mumbai. A business journalist should have a good understanding of the share and commodity market and he needs to tap various sources in the market including market experts, traders, brokerage firms, etc. Rise and fall in the Sensex and Nifty have a serious impact on the securities market in the country and on investors' wealth.

2. Market regulators

Market regulators are also important sources of information for a business journalist as the directions issued by the market regulators have a wide impact on investors as well as companies. For example, the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) is the regulator for the securities market in India owned by the Government of India. It was established in 1988 and given Statutory Powers on 30 January 1992 through the SEBI Act, 1992. It also controls the commodity market in India. Similarly, the Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India (IRDA) is an autonomous, statutory body tasked with regulating and promoting the insurance and re-insurance industries in India. A business journalist should develop sources in these institutions for doing some path-breaking stories.

3. Finance ministry and departments

The Finance Ministry of the union government and the finance departments of the state governments are an important hub of information for a business journalist. The ministry and departments are responsible for framing financial policies having serious repercussions on the market and the economy. One of the glaring examples is the response of the share market to the general budget announced by the government in February every year. Usually, a rise in the Sensex and nifty figures reflect a positive market sentiment post the budget announcement whereas, a fall in Sensex and nifty reflects a poor market sentiment and that investors have not liked the budget. The financial policies of the government have a direct or indirect impact on the people. For example, a ban on sugar export by the government will result in the availability of more sugar in

the domestic market and lowering of prices that will facilitate the people suffering from high inflation.

4. Planning and advisory bodies of governments

Planning and advisory bodies of the union government are also an important source of information for business journalists. One of the biggest examples of such a planning and advisory body is the Niti Aayog. It is a policy think tank of the Government of India, established to achieve sustainable development goals with cooperative federalism by fostering the involvement of state governments in the economic policy-making process using a bottom-up approach. In fact, it was Niti Aayog that promoted the concept of smart cities in India that led to the formation of Smart Cities Mission. Similarly, it was Niti Aayog that promoted the concept of e-mobility that led to the rise in the adoption of various electric vehicles in India that has now considerably affected the fossil fuel-based conventional vehicle market.

5. Trade associations

Trade associations ranging from the local chamber of commerce to major trade bodies like the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) to the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI) are an important source of information for journalists. A business reporter should keep in touch with the office-bearers of these associations to remain updated about proposed changes in government's policies related to the sector, the problems faced by traders, policy paralysis on the part of the government, unfair trade practices, etc. Also, the local chapters of these trade associations help a business journalist in localising a national story and understanding its impact on the local population. These trade associations also regularly organise workshops and seminars which are an excellent way for a journalist to gather more knowledge and meet the who's who of the industry. This eventually helps in developing and maintaining sources.

6. Corporate companies

A business journalist should always maintain a list of corporate companies in a particular city and try to meet the top administrators of the company for doing business stories. All the major corporate companies have a dedicated media and PR team and a journalist should stay in touch with them for news and updates. However, a journalist should not act as a tool in the hand of corporate companies who are interested in free or paid

publicity but, he should try to do in-depth and insightful stories from these companies which might interest the readers. For example, if a corporate house is going to open a manufacturing unit in a village adjoining a city by investing over Rs 20,000 crore, a journalist should try to gather more information about the project and try to write about how the project is going to affect the economy in-and-around the village and how many people are likely to get a job in the new unit. As earlier discussed, it is very important to localise the story and ascertain the impact of the development on the local economy.

7. Registrar of companies

The Registrar of Companies is an office under the Indian Ministry of Corporate Affairs that deals with the administration of the Companies Act 1956 and Companies Act, 2013. There are around 22 Registrars of Companies (ROCs) operating from various states in the country. Under the Companies Act, the primary duty of ROCs is to register companies and LLPs floated in their respective states and to ensure that they comply with the statutory requirements as enshrined under the Companies Act. The records related to a company can be accessed by the general public on payment of a fee. If a business journalist needs to access details related to a company, its shareholding pattern, board of directors, etc, he can access the same with the help of ROC.

8. Courts and tribunals

Business houses fight many legal battles at multiple levels—tribunals, High Courts and the Supreme Court. The verdicts on these legal battles are most newsworthy. Therefore, a business journalist should always keep a tab on the legal battles being fought by these corporate houses and their outcome as well. For example, the Supreme Court's direction to telecom operator Vodafone-Idea to pay \$13 billion to the Indian government in adjusted gross revenue as spectrum usage charges and license fee has left the company on the brink of bankruptcy and closure. The diktat from the apex court has also affected the share prices of the company and left the investors in the lurch. Many corporate companies also approach the court for arbitration.

13.5 THINGS TO DO FOR VENTURING INTO BUSINESS JOURNALISM

Like any other beat, a business journalist also needs to develop certain skills to achieve success in his or her beat. These skills along with a nose for news and attention for detail are crucial for a business journalist. A journalist needs to do the following things to venture into business journalism and to strengthen his profile as a business journalist:

1. Meet the movers and shakers

A business journalist must know the industry leaders as well as laggards, who are dominating a particular sector, their market share, etc. These are some of the most important aspects that a business journalist must know as it will help him in doing better stories and to interact with people from the business sector. For example, a business journalist covering the automotive sector must know which auto companies in India are selling how many vehicles, what is their market share, and product portfolio. The journalist must also know the top administrators of these companies who are at the helm of affairs.

2. Learn the lingo

Business journalists must know the language of businessmen and the lingo used by them. While heavy financial jargons are a part of business reporting, a journalist must try to pick these words as fast as possible. For example, a business journalist must know the difference between equity and debt, NSE and BSE, Repo rate and reverse repo rate, etc. Learning the jargon will help the journalist in easily understanding the subject and in striking a conversation with experts from the field.

3. Find a mentor

The initial few months for a business journalist can be challenging because of a lack of understanding of various business and economic concepts. Therefore, it is always advisable that a journalist should try to find a mentor—a senior business journalist, a market expert, an economist, or an industry insider—who can guide and assist the journalist in his formative years as a business journalist. The guidance and assistance provided by the mentor will help a journalist in improving his performance in the beat.

4. Prepare a list of experts

A business journalist must prepare a list of experts from various business sectors he can refer to when in need. Business journalists often need to understand the various economic and financial decisions of the government and how it is going to affect the industry. In such a situation, the best option is to approach the experts and take their opinion for writing the story. For example, he can prepare a list of experts from the field of telecommunication industry, automobiles, stock market, tax consultants, economists, corporate lawyers, etc. However, it needs to be mentioned that merely maintaining a list will not work and a business journalist should keep in touch with the experts regularly.

5. Triple-check the numbers, names, and designations

It is a grave mistake for a business journalist to mess up the figures in his story as it can seriously affect his credibility in the business world. Therefore, it is always advisable that a business journalist should always cross-check the facts and figures mentioned in his stories. Figures that depict a corporate house in a bad light could result in legal implications for the journalist and the media house. The majority of the mistakes happen when converting foreign currencies into INR. Also, the top performers of the corporate world are very touchy about their names and designations. Therefore, a journalist must ensure that he should not end up making mistakes in names and their designations.

6. Patience and hard work

A business journalist also needs to be patient in his approach. He must understand that he cannot become a king of his beat right from the first day and expertise in the beat is an attribute that is achieved with time and experience. A business journalist should never lose his patience and try to learn from his mistakes. He should work hard to understand the beat properly and achieve success in it.

13.6 CHALLENGES IN BUSINESS REPORTING

Like any other beat, business journalism comes with its share of challenges. Any journalist who starts working on the business beat might not be able to overcome these challenges very easily. However, with time and experience, business journalists can overcome these challenges. The following are some of the major challenges in business reporting:

1. Lack of knowledge of all business sector

Business, unlike other beats, is a vast sector and a journalist can't cover all aspects of business journalism and develop expertise in all the sectors. Business journalists, usually, develop expertise in the specific sector within business journalism which they have been asked to cover or are covering. For example, a business journalist having expertise in banking might not be well-aware of the developments in the automobile sector and vice versa. Similarly, a business journalist covering the retail sector might not know what is happening in the information technology sector.

2. Difficult to access the top bosses of India Inc

Often a business journalist might be asked by the media house to take an interview of the top bosses and industrialists of the country's corporate world. However, it is always not easy for a journalist to do so as these personalities are difficult to access and they do not share their contact details with journalists. A business journalist, except for events attended by these top business personalities, can access them only through the proper channel—PR or company officials. For example, a business journalist might be asked to take an interview of Reliance Industries chairman Mukesh Ambani. However, the latter might not be willing to give the interview or might be very busy to spare time for the interview.

3. Dealing with numbers

A journalist with a poor grip on arithmetic may find it extremely difficult to read and analyse business reports, quarterly performance reports, and audited results of corporate houses. A business journalist has to deal with a lot of numbers and do a lot of number crunching which is not easy for someone with poor mathematical and analytical skills. For example, a business journalist after going through a company's quarterly results of two successive years should be able to ascertain whether the company is performing good or bad and that is only possible when he can compare the figures mentioned in the quarterly results for various parameters.

4. Business jargons and explaining them to readers

Regular business dealing involves a lot of business jargon that makes sense to an experienced business journalist. However, the same jargon can be challenging for a novice business reporter and readers as well. Common people reading a business story might find it difficult to understand a story if it is full of technical information and jargon.

Therefore, it is always the responsibility of a business journalist to write the story in the simplest form and without using business jargon.

For example, there is a business term called brand equity. However, it is a term that common people would not understand. So, a reporter needs to explain what brand equity is. Brand equity is the added value a brand name identity brings to a product or service beyond the functional benefits provided. For example, Apple benefits from the fact that its brand name is a household name in smartphones and computers.

Similarly, there is a term called capital expenditure, which is also popularly written as CAPEX. Capex essentially means spending on fixed assets of a project or venture such as buying an official space or machinery for manufacturing.

5. Business news has limited reach

Apart from those interested in business news, common people, especially the younger generation, are not interested in business news, or they have a very limited interest in business news. For example, news about a new phone or technology-based gadget launches might attract them, but news on market crashing resulting in a major loss for retail investors or a company filing for bankruptcy will hardly interest them.

6. Lack of formal training

While business journalism requires much more than just news sense, there is hardly any formal training provided to a journalist who is asked to cover business sectors. It is mostly an area where journalists have to learn from their mistakes and with experience. Also, they are not chosen from the sector based on their knowledge or educational qualification. For example, media houses do not appoint someone to cover business journalism based on whether they have done their college or university degree in business management or economic. A journalist with a background in business studies or economics will be able to do a much better job in the field right from the beginning.

13.7 SECTORS IN BUSINESS JOURNALISM

Business journalism comprises of various sectors which are divided among a team of journalists. While this division might not be evident in the case of general newspapers, magazines, or news channels, it is much more prominent in the case of business news entities. For example, there

are only a few business journalists who take care of the business pages of The Telegraph or any other general newspaper. However, when it comes to business newspapers such as The Business Standard or Mint, the team of reporters is usually big and each reporter is assigned a specific business sector.

Some of the important sectors for a business newspaper are agriculture, automobiles, aviation, banking, consumer durables, e-commerce, financial services, FMCG, real estate, power, ports, pharmaceuticals, health, oil and gas, metals and mining, media and entertainment, textile, infrastructure, retail, telecommunication, tourism, and hospitality, etc. These apart, there are dedicated reporters for covering financial markets—the Bombay Stock Exchange (BSE), the National Stock Exchange (NSE), and the Multi-Commodity Exchange of India (MCX).

To cover any of these sectors, the concerned journalists need to have a thorough idea about the sector, the size of the sector, its importance in the domestic economy, the major players in the sector, the market demand, the various market forces affecting the industry, the government policies related to the sector, etc. Without understanding these aspects of the business sector, it is difficult for a business journalist to come up with in-depth and insightful stories.

One of the most important sectors in business journalism is the stock and commodity markets. The rise and fall of the Sensex and Nifty indicates the condition of the Indian economy and market sentiments. It also indicates the global economic factors and their impact on India. For example, Sensex and Nifty tanked in March 2020 due to the coronavirus scare that gripped China and 60 other countries including the US, Italy, South Korea, and Iran. At the same time, the Reserve Bank of India imposed a moratorium on Yes Bank and set a withdrawal limit of Rs 50,000 a month for the bank's customer that severely affected market sentiments. These two factors were so strong that even declining crude oil prices failed to uplift market sentiments.

13.8 CONCLUSION: BUSINESS JOURNALISM HAS IMMENSE SCOPE

Business journalism is one of those beats that have immense scope for a journalist to prosper in life. While print media is in doldrums and so is electronic media that is going through a transition due to changing habits of news consumers, the demand for business journalism has not gone

down. In fact, post the entry of news websites and portals, several business news portals have come up that are financially in a better position than conventional media houses due to low investment requirements. It is also a fact that business journalists, especially those who can write well in English, are paid much more than their vernacular colleagues.

13.9 LET US SUM IT UP

This unit must have helped you in understanding:

- Concept of business journalism
- Importance of business journalism
- Sources that a business reporter has to tap for information
- Things that a reporter has to do while venturing into business journalism
- Challenges of a business journalist
- Various sectors in business journalism

13.10 KEYWORDS

Sensex: The BSE SENSEX is a free-float market-weighted stock market index of 30 well-established and financially sound companies listed on the Bombay Stock Exchange. The 30 component companies, which are some of the largest and most actively traded stocks, are representative of various industrial sectors of the Indian economy.

Nifty: The NIFTY 50 index National Stock Exchange of India's benchmark broad-based stock market index for the Indian equity market. The full form of NIFTY is National Index Fifty.

Capex: Capital expenditure or capital expense is the money an organisation or corporate entity spends to buy, maintain, or improve its fixed assets, such as buildings, vehicles, equipment, or land.

BSE: The Bombay Stock Exchange is an Indian stock exchange located at Dalal Street, Mumbai. Established in 1875, the BSE is Asia's oldest stock exchange. The BSE is the world's 10th largest stock exchange with an overall market capitalisation of more than \$2.2 trillion as of April 2018.

NSE: The National Stock Exchange of India Limited is the leading stock exchange of India, located in Mumbai. The NSE was established in 1992 as the first dematerialized electronic exchange in the country.

Brand Equity: 'Brand equity' is a phrase used in the marketing industry refers to the perceived worth of a brand in and of itself—i.e., the social value of a well-known brand name.

13.11 CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

1. What encompasses the business beat?

2. Write about the history and evolution of business news channels in India.

3. Write about the history and evolution of business newspapers in India.

4. Why does a business journalist need to avoid jargon in a story and explain the implications of a development in the business sector to the reader?

5. Explain the importance of business journalism.

6. Enumerate the various sources in business journalism.

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UNIT : 14**DEVELOPMENT AND GONZO
JOURNALISM****:: STRUCTURE::****14.0 Introduction****14.1 Objectives****14.2 Overview of development journalism****14.3 Importance of development journalism****14.4 Sources in development journalism****14.5 Challenges in development reporting****14.6 Initiating work as a development journalist****14.7 Introduction to Gonzo Journalism****14.8 Conclusion: Development journalism is a genre worth
exploring for every journalist****14.9 Let us sum it up****14.10 Keywords****14.11 Check Your Progress**

14.0 INTRODUCTION

Development journalism is a concept that is hard to define and there is no universal definition for it. Its definition changes from place to place and from country to country. Development journalism is important because it provides an opportunity for journalists to take up issues that affect the people at the grass-root level and work for their betterment. The unit discusses the various aspects of development journalism in detail from a reporter's perspective. It also explains a relatively new style of journalism

called ‘gonzo journalism’ in which the reporter writes a story as he experiences a development rather than trying to maintain objectivity.

14.1 OBJECTIVES

- Understand the concept of development journalism
- Understand the importance of development journalism
- Understand the sources that a development journalist needs to tap
- Understand how to initiate working as a development journalist
- Understand the challenges in development journalism
- Understand the concept of gonzo journalism

On completion of this unit

On completion of this unit, you will be able to understand:

- Concept of development journalism
- Importance of development journalism
- Various sources that a development journalist needs to tap
- Challenges faced by a development journalist
- How to initiate work in development journalism
- Concept of gonzo journalism

14.2 OVERVIEW OF DEVELOPMENT JOURNALISM

In a world brimming with so many inequalities, development becomes a subjective concept. For a developed society in a developed country, the term development may hold a different meaning altogether. On the contrary, for a poor country with inadequate resources, the term ‘development’ could mean something different.

For example, in the US, development could mean that all Americans have the best of gadgets and technology that can make their life easier. However, for a developing country like India, development could mean that all people have access to toilets and get their square meals. Similarly, there are other challenges as well such as access to clean drinking water, farmers’ suicide, poverty, etc.

So, there is no way to arrive at a universal definition of development that is applicable in all circumstances. Therefore, the definition of development is always dependent on the social and economic conditions

of a place and the various challenges that a country faces in resolving the issues that affect the lives of its people.

As it is difficult to arrive at a universal definition of development, it is also difficult to arrive at a universal definition of development journalism. Different scholars have come up with different definitions of development journalism which may or may not apply to a particular geography or country.

For example, Vilanilam defined development journalism as journalism that deals with the process of development in developing nations. He defined development news as news related to administrative reforms, family planning, agricultural development, employment and labour welfare, education, and food production among others. If we consider this definition, the majority of the issues mentioned do not apply to developed nations. So, does that mean development journalism is only limited to developing countries?

The answer is that there is greater scope for a journalist to take up issues that affect people at the grass-root level in developing countries than in developed countries. A country is called a developed country because it has met a certain level of social and economic benchmarks. However, it does not imply that there are no developmental issues in developed countries. These issues could be similar, related, or different from developing countries.

For a country like India, there is no dearth of issues for people interested in development journalism. Right from the problems faced by farmers to villages devoid of electricity and from the poor healthcare system in rural areas to the lack of toilets, there are innumerable issues for journalists to delve into and come-up with stories that shake the conscience of people.

Development journalism plays an important role in developing countries as it raises grassroots issues. Journalists working in the field of development journalism often come up with stories that mainstream journalists seldom do.

In a bid to promote developmental journalism and to highlight the socio-economic issues prevalent in rural India, the central government started a monthly journal called 'Yojana' in 1957. Renowned author and journalist Khuswant Singh became its first chief editor and now the journal is published in 13 languages such as English, Hindi, Urdu, Gujarati,

Marathi, Bengali, Assamese, Telugu, Tamil, Kannada, Malayalam, and Odia.

The main idea of the government behind starting such a journal was to showcase the development taking place in rural India and how the quality of life of people living in villages is gradually changing for the better—a phenomenon that most newspapers and magazines of that time hardly covered considering their obsession for developmental activities in cities which were the epicentre of these media outlets.

A development journalist can delve into multiple areas such as healthcare, environment, pollution, sustainable development, agriculture, industrialisation, ecology, wildlife, etc, for doing stories. However, such a journalist must keep two essential things in mind.

Firstly, he must have a thorough knowledge of the area or sector in which he is doing the story. Superficial or limited knowledge is not going to help a journalist at all. Secondly, the journalist must acquire authentic data pertaining to his story to substantiate or support it. He must ensure that the data and its analysis are correct as nothing can be more detrimental to development news than being based on wrong data.

For example, if a journalist is doing a story about the impact of pollution caused by a major steel plant on the nearby population, he must ensure that he has included the view of all stakeholders in the story—the villagers residing near the factory, the data on pollution levels around the factory, the view of the factory administration, the view of the district administration, the view of doctors or hospitals that treat those villagers, and the view of the pollution control board. In all, he needs to ensure that the story is complete and provides a 360-degree view of the issue being discussed.

14.3 IMPORTANCE OF DEVELOPMENT JOURNALISM

Stories from the genre of development journalism are completely different from the stories produced from other beats. Such stories cannot be executed in the 300-word bracket that most other stories are granted in a newspaper. Therefore, such stories are taken as special features on special pages or are taken as a series. News magazines, on the other hand, provide a much better platform for a journalist to do such stories because of the kind of space and treatment that is given to them. The various factors that make development journalism important are:

1. Stories from the ground

While most other journalists are busy in doing stories from their beats that usually feature the government and governmental agencies on what they are doing and their reaction to a particular development, journalists practicing development journalism come up with stories that are based on what is prevailing at the ground and not what the government or the authorities are claiming. It is because of their ground connect, stories from this genre touch the heart of readers and often forces the government to initiate action for the betterment of people.

For example, schools were closed down by the government as a precautionary measure to safeguard the students during the coronavirus pandemic in 2020. Due to the closure of schools, the mid-day meal scheme, a major initiative of the government to ensure children from poor families complete their education, was also discontinued. A particular state government declared that it will distribute cereals to students during this period to ensure they do not go to sleep hungry. The government earned praise for the initiative and none of the reporters who covered the development bothered to check whether the students were actually getting the cereals or not.

It was when a rural journalist broke the story (a perfect example of development journalism) that the government has made no special provision for the distribution of cereals and students were given 500-gram cereals for a period of 11 days. It means the government was actually providing less than 50 grams of cereals per student per day and it was grossly inadequate to take care of their hunger. The publication of the story with data and relevant pictures made sure that the government cannot rebut the story and it eventually resulted in severe criticism of the authorities.

2. Impactful stories

Stories from this genre are also impactful and often draw the attention of the authorities to solve the problem highlighted in the story. Since such stories are substantiated with data and thorough research and provide a 360-degree view of the issue, the authorities hardly get a scope to rebut the facts showcased in such stories and are often forced to initiate action to solve the issue.

Suppose, a journalist is doing a story on arsenic contamination in groundwater and how several villages are forced to drink the

contaminated water. If the story is merely based on what people or authorities are claiming such a story is hardly going to have any impact. However, if the journalist makes some additional efforts and comes up with the test reports of water samples drawn from various wells and tubewells in these villages to substantiate his claim, it would surely have an impact on authorities, especially if the test is done at a government laboratory.

Similarly, if the journalist can also successfully conclude that the villagers are suffering from various health problems because of consuming the contaminated water, it would also add to the credibility of the story. Thereafter, authorities will be left with no alternative but to initiate action to ensure the availability of drinking water to the population.

3. Raises issues that many avoid

Journalists doing stories that fall in the domain of development journalism often raise issues or chose subjects that mainstream journalists (read beat reporters) will never do because it does not affect the readers/viewers. Such journalists often raise uncomfortable questions before the authorities and expose things as they are at the grass-root level.

For example, suppose a government announces that it is going to construct a dam in a particular area and a certain percentage of the water released from the dam would be used only for irrigation purposes. A mainstream journalist, let us assume a government secretariat reporter, will do a story about the features of the dam and how it is going to benefit the area. He will also cover the inauguration of the dam and related subjects. However, the secretariat reporter is not going to look into whether the government is keeping its promise of supplying a fixed percentage of water released from the dam for irrigation purposes or not.

Later, it was found that the local authorities have diverted the water meant for irrigation to local industries resulting in farmers' distress. It is a subject that most media houses avoid as urban readers or viewers are not interested in such stories. However, a journalist practicing development journalism will definitely do such a story and that too with facts and figures. In fact, several such journalists have done stories on how farmers are forced to steal water from canals because the authorities have diverted the water meant for irrigation to local industries.

4. Exposes the ground realities

What a minister in the government or a bureaucrat says while introducing a scheme or policy could be entirely different from how the scheme is implemented at the ground level. It is often seen that some of the most path-breaking schemes are implemented by the government machinery in the shoddiest manner and the end result is the failure of the scheme. These failures of governmental schemes are exposed by development reporters who know the reasons behind the failure of such schemes and those responsible for the same.

For example, let us assume that the government has come up with a crop insurance scheme whereby damage to crops because of unseasonal rain is covered under the scheme. Due to unseasonal rainfall and subsequent flood, the standing crops of farmers in 10 villages got completely damaged. The district administration along with a representative of the insurance company is supposed to carry out a survey to assess the quantum of loss and how much compensation is going to be paid to the farmers. However, it is always seen that several farmers whose crops got damaged do not get the compensation at all or get only a portion of the actual loss. This happens due to the connivance of the district administration officials responsible for the survey and the insurance company. These are areas that are exposed only by development journalist.

5. Commemorates the achievements of the rural people

While the media talks about innovation and achievements of people all the time, the achievements of rural people and villages that have done something extraordinary are seldom celebrated by media houses unless one of them wins a coveted award such as the Padma Shri. However, it is development journalists who bring forth the achievements of such people for the world to celebrate. These stories are not just feel-good stories, but also inspire people to fight the odds to achieve goals.

For example, the local media in Kerala had done a story on two women—Karthayayini Amma, 96, and Bhageerathi Amma, 105, who scored outstanding marks in the fourth standard equivalent course under the Kerala Literacy Mission's Aksharalakasham scheme. These two women achievers from small villages of Kerala got national recognition after their stories were published in the local Malayalam media and then picked up by the national media. Eventually, the two were awarded the

‘Nari Shakti Purashkar’ in 2020 by President Ram Nath Kovind for their superb performance despite their ripe age.

14.4 SOURCES IN DEVELOPMENT JOURNALISM

Like any other beat or genre in journalism, there are multiple sources of information that a development reporter has to tap to come up with good stories. Since one of the most important attributes of stories from such a genre is the ground connection, a development reporter, unlike many other beats, need to meet and develop sources in common people who do not hold any position of authority. Following are some of the important sources of information for a development reporter:

1. Journals

Development journals are one of the most important sources of development stories. A journalist interested in the genre should definitely read these journals from where he can get several story ideas and information. The majority of these journals are either fortnightly or monthly. In fact, several state governments, as well as the union government, have their journals that come with some heart-touching and sensational development stories. For example, ‘Yojana’ is a monthly journal published by the union government that focuses on socio-economic development subjects and commemorates the achievement of rural people or communities in countering social, environmental, or economic challenges.

2. Government press releases

The press releases of various ministries of the government associated with development work such as the Ministry of Health, Rural Development, Education, Culture, Women and Child Development, Agriculture, Science and Technology contain a lot of information about the schemes and plans being implemented by these ministries. Apart from the press releases, the ministries also come out with their annual reports that provide insights on the performance of schemes floated by the ministries over the years. All this information greatly facilitates a development reporter in identifying his next subject for a story.

3. National and International NGOs

There are several NGOs that are working in tandem with government departments in the domain of health, education, agriculture, women

empowerment, environment, women safety, social welfare, pollution, etc. People working in these NGOs develop expertise over these sectors over time and are a wonderful resource for a journalist interested in these sectors. Also, since these NGOs have a ground connection, they can provide insights on which government schemes are working and which are not. They can also inform the journalist on why a particular scheme is not working and what the issues that affect the local population are. For example, the NGO Child Rights and You (CRY) can provide state-wise data of child rights violations in India. Similarly, the NGO HelpAge India can provide insights about the issues that affect the elderly in India, especially those belonging to the disadvantaged section of the society.

4. Seminars and conferences

Voluntary organisations, as well as the government, organises several seminars and conferences to deliberate on important issues. Usually, such seminars and conferences are attended by all the stakeholders associated with the subject. Therefore, attending such events can provide a lot of insight into the sector to a journalist. Also, these events provide a wonderful platform for a development reporter to connect with more people.

5. Common people

Since one of the most important attributes of a story done by a development reporter is the ground connection, such a journalist should always try to source information from the horse's mouth. If people are facing problems because of the government apathy, such information should come from the affected people rather than a mediator or an NGO that could have their vested interest in selling a story. Common people are the best sources of information for a journalist.

For example, if a journalist is doing a story about drinking water problems in an area, he should talk to people who are facing the problem. Then, he will get an idea of the quantum of the problem, how old is the problem, how the local population is managing its drinking water requirements, etc. All this will help a journalist in writing a better and insightful story on the drinking water issue.

14.5 CHALLENGES IN DEVELOPMENT REPORTING

Like any other beat, there are several challenges in development reporting that a journalist has to face on a routine basis. These challenges might not

be akin to the challenges faced by the routine beat reporters. Some of the challenges faced by a development journalist are:

1. Managing the data

As discussed earlier, development reporting is not about what a politician or a bureaucrat or a government officer says or does, it is more about how things are at the ground level. A story done by a development reporter has to be comprehensive, free from errors—both factual and analytical, and should present the issue in a 360-degrees manner validated with related data and information. Data and statistics play an important role in development stories. However, acquiring this data is a major challenge, especially due to the shoddy recordkeeping by lower-rung government officials and small organisations.

For example, if a reporter has to do a story about the theft of water from canals by local farmers, he needs to write about the volume of water that is distributed through the canals, the volume of water that gets stolen, why farmers are forced to steal water, what is the volume of water that is made available for irrigation, etc. All these aspects involve a lot of data and if a reporter cannot manage the required data and statistics, the story will hardly have any impact.

2. NGOs, self-help groups have their agendas

Since NGOs, self-help groups, and other civil society organisations are a major source of information for a development reporter, a journalist should always keep in mind that these organisations may have their agenda and motive behind pushing an issue. These motives at times could be harmless and meant for the betterment of the people. However, at times, these organisations might aim to mint money by pushing these issues in the media and blackmailing the people who are at fault. Therefore, a journalist should always remain alert and not become a means for these organisation to mint money in the wrong way.

3. Friction with industrial houses

Many stories done by development reporters might not go down well with industrial houses and business entities. A journalist working in a media house must understand that his organisation is dependent on advertisement revenue and these business houses are one of the most important advertisers. Often, a story that showcases the industry or business entity in a negative light might result in the cancellation of

advertisements that would cause revenue loss for the media organisation. The latter would in-turn pressurise the journalist to drop stories against the industrial house. However, at times it could also happen that the industrial house promises more advertisement to the media house on the condition that stories against it or showing it in a negative light are dropped.

4. Friction with government

Since development journalists often showcase ground realities, a government, which does not entertain any criticism, might not like it. A development journalist often comes around stories that prove the announcements made by the government were a farce and the schemes announced have not been implemented in the right spirit. This results in a lot of friction between the journalist and the government. At times, hard-hitting and critical stories also result in the government deciding not to give any advertisement to the media house—a major revenue loss for a media outlet.

For example, if the government is claiming that it has achieved 100 per cent electrification in the state and a week later, a journalist does a story on 100 villages across the state that are still forced to live in darkness and have not been electrified, it is going to seriously dent the credibility of the government's claim.

Similarly, suppose a government is claiming that it has ensured that all farmers in the state receive compensation at the market rate for crop damage due to the unseasonal rainfall. And a journalist does a story on how farmers are being paid a paltry sum ranging between Rs 100 to Rs 500 and thousands of farmers are yet to get their compensation with all the required facts and figures, it is going to seriously puncture the credibility of the government's claim.

5. Meeting deadlines

While meeting the deadline is a challenge for every reporter out there on the field, it is a major challenge for development journalists. Unlike routine beat reporters, a story done by a development journalist has to be thoroughly researched and cover all aspects of an issue combined with facts and figures. Therefore, a development journalist has to always run against time to complete the stories within the set deadline. Also, finding new and innovative issues for writing a story is a challenge for the journalist.

6. Space/time constraints

With newspapers reducing the number of pages to cut costs and news space being limited, it is often a challenge for a development journalist to write a 360-degree comprehensive story on an issue within 300-400 words. A detailed story of 600-800 words can be placed only as a package and sometimes these stories are put on hold to make way for routine development stories from other beats. At times, such package stories become redundant over time and get wasted. Magazines, on the contrary, are still providing space to detailed news reports and development features.

14.6 INITIATING WORK AS A DEVELOPMENT JOURNALIST

While there is no universal formula for initiating work as a development journalist, one of the best ways to start is to read stories, especially the ones that are published in regional vernacular mediums. The national media has a very limited interest in development stories, but the stories from grassroots are usually done by local journalists who might not be well known. In fact, it has often happened that an outstanding story done by a local journalist did not have any impact on the authorities, but when the same story is picked up by the national media, it generates the desired impact. Unfortunately, the local journalist who broke the story seldom gets credit for the same.

A development journalist trying to do good stories from the grassroots must have a sound understanding of the geography of the state, the various problems affecting people in different regions, the various civil society organisations and NGO's operating in a particular area, etc. It may not be the case that a particular problem applies to the entire state or country and different regions and different societies have their own issues.

For example, the availability of water for irrigation is a major problem for farmers across the country. But, generally, it is not a problem for the majority of the farmers in Punjab because of a robust irrigation network. Similarly, the availability of water is a major problem in the Vidharba region of Maharashtra. However, it is not a major problem for western Maharashtra that receives abundant rainfall.

A development journalist should also learn how to acquire the data required for a story and how to quantify a problem faced by a village, region, or state. He should refrain from doing claim and counterclaim stories and instead, he should try to justify the gravity of a problem by quantifying it. For example, a story that says 90 per cent of farmers of a particular district are unable to manage their square meals is likely to have more impact than a story based on a farmer's account that claims the government is not doing enough for agriculturists.

A development journalist should also ensure that he has thoroughly researched about an issue in hand so that he can ask the right questions from the authorities and the people concerned. At times it becomes difficult to gather the data required for a story and therefore, a development journalist should develop good contacts with people who are working at the grass-root level. Also, a development journalist must know how to use the Right to Information Act to gather authentic, trustworthy data from government departments and agencies.

A development journalist should also be ready to make that extra effort to reach out to people affected by an issue or who are change-makers of the society. He should always prefer meeting such a person rather than opting for a telephonic conversation.

14.7 INTRODUCTION TO GONZO JOURNALISM

Ever since the beginning, journalists are taught to follow 'objectivity in journalism'. They are asked to write a story as it has happened and without adding their own thoughts, prejudices, or biases. All this is done to ensure that readers or viewers decide whether a certain development is good or bad and the latter should develop their own opinion on the reported development. Print journalists are often told that the news pages are meant for news as it has happened and for opinions and thoughts, there is the editorial page.

Objectivity is a principle that is still followed by media houses that want to stay neutral and do not have a covert political or business agenda. However, in the 1970s, a new form of journalism emerged that deserted objectivity and narrated news or any development from a reporter's perspective. It was gonzo journalism. The term "gonzo" was first used to describe an article written by Hunter Thompson, considered to be a pioneer of this new style and who made it immensely popular. Thompson's descriptive essay written in June 1970 and titled 'The

Kentucky Derby is Decadent and Depraved' was called pure gonzo journalism. Another example of gonzo journalism was Thompson's book titled 'Loathing in Las Vegas' which was later turned into a motion picture.

According to Thompson, objectivity in journalism was a myth and his new style of journalism told things the way they were. As a result of this, the proponents of objectivity in journalism at that time had severely criticised Thompson for his fictionalised writings that were heavily dependent on quotes rather than facts and were highly exaggerated.

Gonzo journalism continues to be practiced to date. However, not many are aware of this terminology. These days, media houses often take stands on issues—political and non-political—resulting in a decline in objectivity in reporting. With the advent of television journalism and the focus on breaking news and live reporting, more and more journalists are engaging in giving first-person accounts, thereby adding their own views, comments, and prejudices with facts.

Similarly, even print journalists are writing stories as first-person accounts. Incidents of violence, rioting, etc are also written as first-person accounts by journalists who have experienced the same. While it cannot be said that the first person account is always mixed with prejudice, biases, and lack of judgment, there are occasions when journalists have fallen prey to the larger scheme of things planned by the government or a community.

For example, suppose the government and authorities are blaming a particular community for violence or spread of a highly infectious disease, there are chances that a journalist who covers the violence or is doing stories on the spread of the infectious disease might start blaming that community as well. When such a journalist is writing a first-person account, in all probability, his stories will be tilted against that community.

14.8 CONCLUSION: DEVELOPMENT JOURNALISM IS A GENRE WORTH EXPLORING FOR EVERY JOURNALIST

For the rich and the mighty, there are many ways to raise their grievances, but for the poor, downtrodden, and the people at the bottom of the hierarchy, there are journalists. Development journalism is a great way to explore the heart of India and touch the lives of people by raising

issues that needs the urgent attention of the authorities. It is the relentless pursuit of a development journalist that helps in the resolution of issues at the grass-root level. Development journalism makes journalism more humane than just being a profession of reporting facts.

14.9 LET US SUM IT UP

The unit must have helped you in understanding:

- Concept of development journalism
- Importance of development journalism
- Sources in development journalism
- Challenges in development journalism
- Concept of gonzo journalism

14.10 KEYWORDS

NGO: Organisations that are independent of any government's involvement are called Non-governmental organisations. These organisations are also known as NGOs or non-government organisations.

Objectivity: Objectivity is a philosophical concept of being true independently from individual subjectivity caused by perception, emotions, or imagination. A proposition is considered to have objective truth when its truth conditions are met without bias caused by a sentient subject.

Nari Shakti Purashkar: Nari Shakti Puraskar, literally meaning "Woman Power Award", is India's highest civilian award for recognising the achievements and contributions of women. The awards are given away by the President of India every year on 8 March, International Women's Day at Rashtrapati Bhavan in New Delhi.

Quantification: In mathematics and empirical science, quantification is the act of counting and measuring that maps human sense observations and experiences into quantities. Quantification in this sense is fundamental to the scientific method.

RTI: Right to Information is an Act of the Parliament of India which sets out the rules and procedures regarding citizens' right to information. It replaced the former Freedom of Information Act, 2002.

14.11 CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

1. Why is it difficult to define development journalism?

2. Is development journalism is only limited to developing countries?

3. What was the reason for the government of India to start the journal 'Yojana'?

4. Why development journalism is important?

5. What are the various sources of information for a development journalist?

6. What are the two most important things that a development journalist needs to keep in mind?

7. What are the challenges faced by a development journalist?

8. Why vernacular news mediums and local journalists are crucial for development journalism?

14.11 REFERENCES

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