Mainstream media does not step into villages, says Meera Jatav

Bundelkhand is known for two things — drought and caste-based violence. This region, which comprises small districts spread across the states of Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh, is plagued by socio-economic backwardness. As a result of four consecutive years of drought and crop failure, combined with fewer jobs under MGNREGS, at least half the families have members who have migrated. It accounts for a little over 30% of all the caste-based violence in the country and is far from gender-sensitive.

In this society steeped in patriarchy, Meera Jatav has made her voice heard. She is one of the first reporters of Khabar Lahariya, since its inception in 2002 and today its Chief Reporter. Meera has seen Khabar Lahariya, an IPSMF Grantee, transition from an eight-page local newspaper in Bundeli dialect to a video-only news platform run by an all-women team.

According to Meera, working with Khabar Lahariya gives her a sense of liberation and satisfaction. She cherishes her independence as a journalist which allows her to raise important questions around policy-making, governance and social issues in the region.

Initially, Meera was nervous about calling out people in power. But today, her job has instilled in her a sense of confidence and freedom to openly discuss issues that impact the backward classes and women. As a journalist, she feels responsible towards the people as she and her colleagues continue to call out issues of poor infrastructure, economic backwardness, gender and caste bias.

She believes that the credibility and success of Khabar Lahariya’s journalists will compel every mainstream media house to recruit rural women journalists in their teams. In a conversation with IPSMF, Meera Jatav airs her views on a range of issues. Below are excerpts from that conversation in the original Hindi:

On women in journalism

Meera Jatav airs the view that it is working.

ThePrint, veteran journalist and Editor-in-Chief of ThePrint, a Foundation Grantee, has made journalists more powerful.

Below are excerpts from the interview:

With entities like ThePrint doing stories that the mainstream media does not touch, how do you create a presence?

Social media has fundamentally changed the way news is consumed. How has the response on social media been, so far, for ThePrint?

It’s a fact that nobody goes to news any more. News has to come to you. Social media is, therefore, not just a vital tool, but an essential vehicle. ThePrint has done brilliantly on social media, both Twitter and Facebook. We have just begun developing Instagram.

Social media has replaced “serious news” with what is trending, going viral and creating a buzz. How does ThePrint match up?

It is true that everybody has to look at Google trends before starting the day. So, you align with that as much as possible but within the fundamental definition of news value. ThePrint is doing much that is edgy, on politics as well as social issues and attitudes. Our growth is evidence that it is working.

Continued on Page 2
“There is a fine line, between truth and half-truth”

29-year old Prashanth Hulkodu is a strong believer in the independence of media which is answerable only to the audience it serves. Yet, early on he realized that there was an inherent conflict between public-interest journalism and a media venture driven by profits. “In any media that is motivated by just profits, there cannot be a space for public-interest journalism,” he says. Prashanth has launched Samachara, a Kannada digital portal aimed at producing investigative stories and news analysis around topics of public interest. Samachara operates in the not-for-profit space and is a Foundation Grantee.

Prashanth let-go of a comfortable salary in 2017 to launch his own venture from scratch. “Without losing something, you can’t gain something,” is the adage he lives by.

Starting out

When he started out, Prashanth was surprised to see more than 3000 views for each of his stories and realized that the readers had an appetite for good and unbiased content. He regularly writes stories questioning the state’s political acrimonies and religious mutts, taboo subjects for some mainstream media. “We have faced a lot of online abuses. However, at one point when we stood our ground, people stopped trolling us,” he said.

Importance of being independent

“I am not saying that Samachara alone can make a difference. Karnataka is known for its alternative thinking on different topics. There is also alternative thinking in the field of journalism. Samachara is trying to create a new model not only with content, but also with its business. If one person can make a difference by working independently, imagine the impact 50 independent journalists can achieve,” he says. “For every issue there is a fine line, between truth and half-truth – right from the Cauvvery issue to atrocities on Dalits. What mainstream does is just surface level exploration and does not go deep,” he adds. Samachara is a little over a year old and Prashanth is learning the ropes of running the whole business, which is a new area for him.

In conversation with Meera Jatav

Continued from Page 1

On what makes news

“Mann was at a level where he could have a bigger public profile in a number of fields. Yet, on some issues, he has shown a clear understanding of the issues he has taken on. For instance, his stand on the Cauvery issue has been consistent. On other issues, he has taken a more restrained approach. Yet, his overall approach has been consistent and meaningful.”

On future of Khabar Lahariya

“I think it is important to preserve the language and culture of the region. Khabar Lahariya has played a significant role in promoting Hindi and regional languages. It has been a platform for people from different backgrounds to express their views. The challenge is to keep the language alive and relevant in the digital age.”

The challenge is to keep sanity and balance, says Gupta

Continued from Page 1

What is ThePrint doing differently in terms of covering politics and policy, government and governance?

ThePrint covers these areas, especially politics, comprehensively. More importantly, it is non-partisan and goes entirely by facts. Even the opinion section is like an open tent providing space for all kinds of opinion, irrespective of whether it coincides with ThePrint’s view or not. As for ThePrint, its institutional view on the day’s key issues is contained in an innovative product, The 50-Word Edit, that we have just launched.

You have a few other initiatives like the Democracy Wall.

How has been the response and what do you aim to achieve through it?

Our Democracy Wall, which currently has FB as the largest sponsor, is essentially a brand-building venture to evangelise the ideas of free speech, good politics and constitutional awareness among the young people on India’s most prominent campuses. The response so far has been excellent. We now have universities writing to us, requesting that we take Democracy Wall there. It’s also a source of healthy revenues. Encouraged by the response, more sponsors have joined in.

How important is it for the youth to participate in issues of governance?

It is essential that young people become politically aware and understand that there is no governance without politics and unless politics improves, governance won’t. Politics, in turn, will only improve if the citizens, particularly the younger ones, become more aware.

How has news consumption as well as coverage changed over the years?

The biggest difference is, the audience now gets an immediate choice of many platforms and channels to get news on the same issue. It is easy, therefore, to draw comparisons. On the downside, there is an increasing tendency to only read/watch/hear what you agree with. It is also an easy and tempting formula to achieve success in terms of numbers. It’s a challenge, therefore, to keep sanity and balance.

What should be the next course of action for journalists across the country?

Journalists must realise how technology has reduced entry barriers in their profession. Also, that social media has now given them a power they never had before, of being able to carry their audiences with them even if platforms change. On another level, they have to all focus on being read in languages other than English.
Who, Where & Why

The map below is a colour-coded representation of the Foundation’s Grantees. While there are areas of high-octane coverage, the pockets of influence are dynamic and wide-ranging.
Grantees reach new milestones

As the space for independent media picks up steam, some of the Foundation’s Grantees are going places, picking up laurels individually and collectively.

Abby award for TBI

The Better India won the Abby Award for the branded content series ‘Breaking Barriers’ in partnership with Unilever. Nieman Foundation for Journalism did a write-up highlighting TBI’s unique approach to journalism.

Best legal news portal

Live Law was awarded the Best Legal News Portal of the Year 2017 by the Indian National Bar Association (INBA) in November 2017. Each year, INBA felicitates individuals, in-house counsels, law firms and subject experts who perform exceptionally in their respective fields.

The Ken turns profitable

Eighteen months after its 2016 launch, The Ken turned profitable in April 2018. It has 15 full-time employees and offices in three locations, and just one revenue stream - subscriptions. Lately, The Ken is seeing 3-4X more subscribers sign up each day, on an average, compared to when it started out.

Gondi workshop

Chhattisgarh-based CGNet Swara in collaboration with the Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts in New Delhi, organised a five-day Gondi standardisation workshop in March of this year. The workshop saw 60 adivasis participating from six Gondi-speaking states of Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana and Orissa.

Shorenstein award

Siddharth Varadarajan, the founding editor of The Wire, has been named the 2017 recipient of the Shorenstein Journalism Award. The award, given annually by Stanford University’s Walter H. Shorenstein Asia-Pacific Research Center (APARC), is conferred upon a journalist who has produced outstanding reporting on Asia and has contributed significantly to the western understanding of the region.

Special jury award

In April 2017, in a three-part series, IndiaSpend examined what living with disability in India means, particularly with regard to access to education and employment, 22 years after the Persons with Disabilities (Equal Opportunities, Protection of Rights and Full Participation) Act was passed. This series won the Special Jury Award at the Press Institute of India-International Committee of the Red Cross Awards.

Recognition for TNM

The News Minute won the Kerala Media Award for Reportage on Child Rights 2016-2017, organised jointly by UNICEF and Kerala Children’s Rights Observatory. This is for their joint story on child marriages in Malappuram. Co-founder and Editor-in-Chief Dhanya Rajendran was also featured under the Forbes 40 (under 40 years of age) list this year.
Environment stories: Why does Kosi cause floods so often?

Kosi, the sorrow of Bihar, has remained an enigma for engineers and policymakers for the number of avulsions it has had till date causing huge floods every time. It was as recent as 2008 when it breached the embankment in Kushaha (Nepal) and shifted 108 km eastwards. The answer lies in the 1082 million tonnes of silt that has been deposited in the Chhattrai to Birpur stretch of the Kosi river in the last 54 years. The study was extensively reported by Down To Earth.

India’s air is toxic

As many as 7 million people are dying every year due to ambient and household air pollution as exposure to fine particles that go deep into the lungs and cardiovascular system, cause stroke, heart disease, lung cancer, chronic obstructive pulmonary diseases and respiratory infections. But the most disquieting fact is that Indian cities top the list of the worst affected. Down To Earth’s report on WHO’s release on air quality says that 14 of the world’s top 20 polluted cities are in India.

Unique garbage collection cart

The Better India’s report on a 15-year old boy from Mathura, Sikanto Mandal’s innovation for garbage collection evoked an overwhelming response. Sikanto, a class 12 student, invented the Swachhta cart. “I got many calls, emails, and messages from people in Mumbai, Pune and Haryana congratulating me for doing something like this at a young age,” he told TBI. He said he received calls from over a hundred people with offers of help. One person from Chennai even wants to help him construct his house and they are now sharing all the required details.

Kashi becomes wireless

Around 700 people, 150 engineers, and 25 consultants worked for months to lay 1,500 km of cables underground in the 16 square km area. Facilitating over 50,700 service connections, Suvarajya carried a detailed account of how the ancient city of Benaras, better known as Kashi, got rid of its even more ancient maze of electric wires, which until now hung overhead.
Where there are Indians, there is caste

When a US based organization, Equality Labs released data from a community-driven survey showing caste-based practices are prevalent in South Asian institutions and society in the USA, it was met with surprise and shock in many quarters. A comprehensive reading list from Engage listed out the various studies across the years in EPW, piecing together the story of how caste manifests itself in the diaspora. It was one of the most read articles of the month, getting 1200 shares on Facebook. It generated interaction and debate outside of EPW’s usual readership on social media.

Is there occupational mobility?

In another initiative, EPW Engage created an interactive tool which allowed readers to apply large-survey data to themselves. Based on a recent paper studying IHDS-II data on inter-generational occupational mobility, this feature lets readers compare and contrast their chances of moving up the social ladder with other caste groups and scheduled tribes. Through the interactive process of finding and selecting what their father's occupation is and what they aspire to be, it reiterates the compounded privilege of forward caste groups.

Justice system failing lowest castes

Even as more and more Dalits complete school and enrol in colleges, even as their incomes increase and poverty rates reduce, opposition to inter-caste marriages still rears its head in urban areas like Navi Mumbai—where 15-year-old Swapnil Sonawane, a Dalit, was murdered in 2016, allegedly because of a romantic relationship with a girl from an upper caste. IndiaSpend’s story shows how this case is a manifestation of a deeper conflict simmering within Indian society, and of India’s failure to provide justice to its lowest castes, who comprise 16.3% of India’s population.

In Kerala, tribal children are sold

This story reveals that slave trade is still very active in Kerala’s tribal area. Children are being sold out of Wyanad tribal settlements as domestic outside Kerala. After the story in Dool News, social activists and politicians have visited the settlements and made sure that children who have been rescued and released from slavery are getting proper treatment and and their needs are being met.

The inside story of Kathua

The rape and murder of an 8-year-old from the nomadic Bakharwal community at a local temple in Jammu’s Kathua district this January assumed communal overtones and fed a raging controversy in an area said to be deeply polarised. And it’s these deep fault lines that allegedly lie at the heart of this sordid saga. The child’s abduction and murder, according to police, was part of a plot to drive out members of her community from a village named Rasana. ThePrint looks at the inside story of how one of the most horrific rape-murders was planned and executed.

Bringing molester to book

A girl child was sexually harassed by a man with powerful connections on a train. The News Minute reported the story first and put the spotlight on him. The story forced the organisations and political parties that he was part of to denounce him. The magistrate, while denying him bail, mentioned that he is so low that the internet will barely tell you anything about him. In an interview with ThePrint, he narrated how SCL India started, what it tried to do, and why it failed. This report spoke of what the controversial firm Cambridge Analytica actually did in India.

Tollywood’s Me Too

In Tollywood, the Bottom of the Pyramid Is Leading the #MeToo Movement Female character artists and junior artists have raised disturbing questions about the exploitative culture and politics of the Telugu film industry. You can read more on this in this report by The Wire.

True face of education

The Wire also wrote an in-depth article about the pitfalls of the education system in India. Young minds in India are being destroyed by a faulty pattern of education, parental ambitions, the aggression of hyper-competitiveness and a flawed idea of ‘success’. In such a system that brings about the death of creativity, there is no real winner.

High-handed officer

This story saw a record number of page views, the highest so far on Samachara on a single day. The story recounted the action of an IAS officer who went to the busy Majestic area in Bengaluru and beat up sex workers. While other media have chosen to call him ‘Singham’, Samachara took a stand opposing the action, which the readers welcomed. There was a lot of discussion on social media, which went on for days. A follow-up report also got good traction.

Positive news: Forgotten stories on postcards

In an attempt to curate and revive original artistic creations, two young women are on a mission of collecting unknown stories and repackaging them on postcards with customized stamps. This story in The Better India helped the duo get access into mainstream regional language publications. “The TBI article helped us reach out to an untapped segment. We got emails for collaborations,” one of the founders, Omaiza, said.

Recordings bring results

This is a story from the Singhpur panchayat of the Kabirdham district of Chhattisgarh. Mithilesh Manikpuri was unable to get his disability certificate for two years despite multiple applications to the Sarpanch. He recorded his problem on CGNetSwara and his certificate came a month later. Similar is the story of Anturam from Khanjar village. Though the construction of toilets was approved in the name of his father, no money had come for a long time. He then recorded his message, 15 days after which he got the money. The village will now have toilets.

Midnight court hearing

LiveLaw’s coverage on the Supreme Court’s midnight hearing on the decision of Karnataka Governor and editorials regarding the Governor’s powers gained tremendous response from other mainstream media players.

Who is Avneesh Kumar Rai?

He is the fourth director of Strategic Communication Laboratories Pvt Ltd, the Indian partner of Cambridge Analytica. He is so low-profile that the internet will barely tell you anything about him. In an interview with ThePrint, he narrated how SCL India started, what it tried to do, and why it failed. This report spoke of what the controversial firm Cambridge Analytica actually did in India.

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A recent Nasscom study has shown that India is expected to have 730 million internet users by 2020, with 75 per cent of new users coming from non-English speaking rural areas. As if on cue, IPSMF has been supporting a host of language media initiatives which report on a range of issues. In the next two pages, we are showcasing some of those stories in their original languages.

جبانبالد ریپورٹ: نیتیش کمار کی شرائحت کا نشا گیریاں کو اثرر پڑ رہے ہیں

جوہر میں پھر ہے، وہ قومی کو ہم جمیع ہے، ہمے پر ہٹا ہوئے ہے کہ یہی یہاں پر بھی گھوڑا ہو جائے ہے، یہ فتح کی حالت ہے۔ یہ شخصیت پر خواتین کا نشان دہی ہیں۔

This is a ground report from Bihar which talks about how the poor are paying a heavy price ever since the Nitish Kumar government imposed prohibition in the state in April 2016.

Click here for the full report.

Click here for the full report.

Click here for the full report.
This exclusive report on a comment by a teacher of The Farooq Training College that “girls in our colleges are now showing their breasts like a watermelon vendor cuts the fruit to show how ripe it is”, had become the most discussed news in Kerala and the country for a week. The report evoked protests by student groups and women’s organisations. Based on this report, a girl student filed a police complaint leading to the teacher’s arrest.

For the full story click here.

Below is a screenshot of a report cum interview, originally written in Urdu (The Wire Urdu) by Yasmeen Rashidi, about a colloquium titled ‘Pathbreakers: The Twentieth Century Muslim Women of India’ organised by Muslim Women’s Forum in partnership with UN Women.