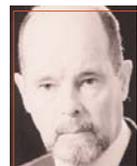


GOOD NEWS

The Indian media has been able to reverse the ageing process with advanced technology, good journalism and an increasing readership



Philip Knightley

In London, 40 years ago, I was privileged to meet an Indian journalist who was something of a legend. His name was Sunder Kabadi, a correspondent for the *Amrita Bazaar Patrika*. He had an office in a little alley off Fleet Street and from there he set out every day to gather those items of British news he thought would interest his Indian readers.

He had come to London in the 1920s to cover another of those conferences on Indian independence and stayed on. By the time I first met him he knew personally every Indian and British political leader.

I remember him in his office, addressing invitations to some event the Commonwealth Correspondents' Association was once holding. One read, "The Right Honourable Harold Wilson, Prime Minister, The House of Commons, London SW1." The association was important, but not that important. "Sunder," I said, "You're inviting the Prime Minister?" "Yes," said Sunder. "He won't come, of course. But I don't want him going around Whitehall saying, 'That bloody Sunder Kabadi has given me the snub'."

It was not impossible that Wilson might have said something like that because Indian journalists were thick on the ground back then and, along with their colleagues from other Commonwealth countries, the government wanted to keep them "on-side". As a result, the Commonwealth Correspondents' Association could conjure up an amazing list of speakers for its luncheons: I remember one with Lord Mountbatten and Douglas Fairbanks Junior sharing the top table.

Knowing the dedication of the Indian correspondents in

London, when I finally got to India in the early 1960s and read Indian newspapers, I was disappointed. Newsprint control still applied and the papers were tiny. The major English language ones seemed to specialise in long political articles by learned journalists aiming to bore their readers to death.

Local news coverage was poor and often delayed, sometimes appearing days late. This did not matter much because the same events kept repeating themselves. In Mumbai, for example, the police were always stopping buses from outlying areas because most of the passengers appeared to be pregnant. On examination, the "pregnant" women had truck tyre inner tubes full of "country" liquor under their saris.

The writing style was full of jargon and clichés. Criminals were always "absconding" but eventually, "nabbed". An elephant in any story was always an "elephant" when first mentioned but then quickly became a "pachyderm". Big events seemed to overwhelm the editorial staff. In 1961, the Indian Army went into Goa to liberate the country from Portuguese rule. This was a major international story by any standard but I found it almost impossible to follow the events through any of the Mumbai newspapers.

Layout was boring and unfriendly, quality of printing poor. Even then there were signs that journalism in India could flourish, given an opportunity. *Blitz* under the editorship of R.K. Karanjia was racy, irreverent and revealing. There was no television yet, but All India Radio put out serious news and documentaries.

I kept in touch with my Indian journalist friends after I returned to London. They turned out to be great contacts and confirmed my first impression that there were no better journalists at sniffing out the truth. You learnt more about what was happening in the Vietnam war from the Indian correspondents there than from the entire US press corps.

This impressed me and when *The Sunday Times* of



12,500

single screens in India compared to 1,629 in the US. India currently has 250 multiplexes while the US has 1,523.

64.9%

men read English newspapers, which is less than the percentage of men who read English magazines (67.3 per cent). The percentage of women who read English newspapers is 35.1%, while those who read magazines is 32.7%.

23 m

people watch Indian movies daily, compared to 20.03 m in the US

4 bn

tickets of Indian movies sold annually compared to 3 bn in the US. In 2004, the box office collection was \$ 1.3 bn in Bollywood while it was a whopping \$ 51 bn in Hollywood

18.57 cr

people listen to the radio at least once a week. Each person listens to an average of 90 minutes per week.

7,000

homes with peoplemeters in India, vis-a-vis 20,000 in the US. Peoplemeters track TV-viewing habits of families

9.7 cr

youngsters between the ages of 15 and 34 read regional newspapers compared to 1.2 crore who read English newspapers, according to NRS

300

television channels in India in 2005 compared to 112 in 2000



108 m

homes with television sets in India. It's the same as in the US. But while India has only 51 per cent TV penetration, the US has 100 per cent TV coverage





INDEPENDENCE DAY SPECIAL ARTS AND ENTERTAINMENT

London sent me to the Middle East, one of my first calls was at the local Indian Embassy where everyone, from the ambassador down, seemed much better informed than the Western embassies.

In Cairo, in the run-up to what became the Six Day war, I desperately needed an independent view on what had been going on in the Sinai. The press counsellor at the Indian Embassy suggested I try the commander of the UN peace-keeping force, General Indarjit Rikhye. He not only gave me a military-style briefing but a Punjabi-style breakfast with many eggs and piles of toast.

Every time I went back to India over the next 20 years, the media was leaping ahead with new technology. In cramped offices in the back streets of Mumbai and Delhi, a new breed of journalists, graphic artists, typographers and designers turned out magazines that rivalled anything, anywhere else. Lush, flawless publications flowed out of rickety sheds in distant suburbs. The revolution filtered down to newspapers and news magazines and then spread into television.

Investigative journalism took off, with reporters working undercover and TV producers using concealed cameras to expose the ruling classes. *Tehelka.com* transferred *Blitz* techniques to the screen and had the politicians choking over their *chota hazri*. *Tehelka's* exposures were greatly admired in Britain, especially about corruption in cricket.



Rs 13,200 cr

advertising revenue in India which is 0.34 per cent of the GDP while the global average is 0.98% of the GDP

\$ 30 m

the annual market for gaming in India, compared to an enormous \$10 bn in the US

1,050

movies produced annually in India, compared to 250 in the US in 2005

2 hrs

spent by Indians everyday watching TV compared to 6 hours in the US

Rs 14,800 cr

revenue from television in India in 2005

47

FM radio stations in India. The US has 8,961.

Spinning History

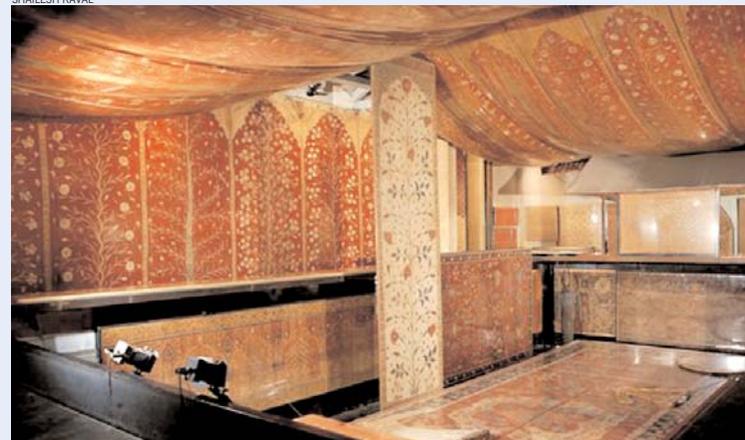
If Ritu Beri or Rohit Bal haven't visited this quiet storehouse they stand to lose a few marks on their reputation as India's leading designers. The collection of old hand-woven textiles at the Calico Museum of Textiles,

housed in the majestic Sarabhai Haveli of the Sarabhai business family in Ahmedabad's Shahibaug area, is a tribute to a centuries-old heritage.

Developed by late industrialist Gautam Sarabhai and his sister Gira Sarabhai, 79, the five-decade-old museum is one of the finest speciality museums in the world,

known for its priceless handlooms. The collection in the museum is drawn from nearly 10 states and stretches from the 15th century to a century ago. The richest is the section on Gujarat with old specimens of embroidered work by castes such as the Kathi, Bharwad, Koli, Banjara, Mochi, Maheshwari and the Muslim Jats.

SHAILESH RAVAL



WEAVING A TALE: A museum of priceless textiles

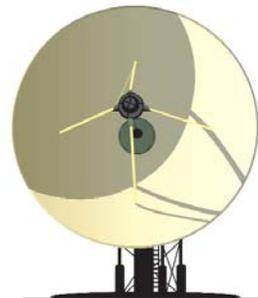
Specimens of Kutchi embroidery stand out in the form of wall pieces, canopies and bead work.

In the Orissa section, three-dimensional patchworks depicting Lord Krishna with Balaram and Subhadra, as distinct from the Gopis are appealing. The Punjab section stands out for its darning, stitching and thread work. The Bengal section displays quilts and kandhas made by weavers who rely only on visual instinct and no prefabricated designs. Then there is a section on bandhni work from Gujarat and Rajasthan, the difference between the two being that Rajasthani work is broad and flat while the Gujarati one is intricate.

But the section that leaves one spellbound is the one on the famous patolas of Patan in Gujarat where a solitary family still practises the art. The guide tells you that only one weaver works on a patola at a time and the yarn is dyed prior to weaving.

If a thread breaks while weaving, the weaver has to start afresh. It takes around five to six months to weave a patola and it is done so by two or three people at a time. From patolas to phulkari, the museum has few parallels when it comes to showcasing the warp and weft of India's textile history.

by Uday Mahurkar



190 number of times the soap opera *Kyunki Saas Bhi Kabhi Babu Thi* has bagged the first position, according to TRP ratings, out of **258** weeks till July 26, 2006. Baa, one of the characters, is technically now 104 years old.

\$ 285 m size of the Indian animation market. The global animation market stood at **\$ 25 bn** in 2005.

11,000

visitors go to Red Fort in Delhi every day compared to 16,000 visitors who troop daily to the Leaning Tower of Pisa in Italy

50 lakh

number of manuscripts in India. China has 69 lakh.

Data compiled by Gaurav Rajkhawa, Abbas Khan and Mallika Raghunathan

SUMEEET INDER SINGH



IN SAFE HANDS: DD archives

Annals of Antiquity

Almost 50,000 hours of video are preserved in Doordarshan's Delhi archives, but the most precious are the 168 hours retrieved from Indian television's first two decades, starting 1959. Be it an interview of astronaut Yuri Gagarin and his wife from the 1960s or recordings of Begum Akhtar and Birju Maharaj, the priceless rewind to the days of old evokes a sigh of wonder.

Recently, the need for archiving had not dawned on producers who, forever facing a funds crunch, had erased thousands of hours to reuse the tapes. Given Doordarshan's patronage, most recordings of political consequence were kept intact while seminal cultural milestones were recklessly abandoned. Today, the team of people resurrecting the glory of a bygone epoch clings on as passionately to the "media assets" as to its quirky slogan for careless producers: "Your trash is our treasure."

The All India Radio archives are in better shape, owing to the technology drive that has seen almost 70 per cent of the recordings being digitised. With more than 22,000 hours of recording—the oldest dating back to 1938—and 12,000 tapes of classical and folk music alone, it is the largest library of its kind in India. From Pandit Omkarnath Thakur's famous rendition of *Vande Mataram* on the eve of Independence to Mahatma Gandhi's prayer speeches, the archive houses many a treasure. A tie-up with MTNL has kickstarted a project which, in five years, will make recordings available to broadband users on pay-per-click basis. The audio and video archives are a colossal diamond in the rough, chipped and soiled in parts, but of immense cultural and historic value. With care, they will shine on for future generations.

by V. Shoba

They might however, get beaten up.

Rajan Narayan is a journalist in Goa. He came across some questionable practices among local politicians and thought his readers ought to know. The politicians warned him off, but he took no notice. Late one night, coming home from putting the paper to bed, a group of *goondas* set on him and beat him within an inch of his life. The police never found out who did it, nor who ordered it, but it was the reaction of his readers that should lift the spirits of journalists everywhere.

Rajan Narayan became a people's champion, and when he decided to start his own weekly, *Goan Observer*, a couple of years ago, they backed him with their savings. It's been a long bumpy ride from Sunder Kabadi to Rajan Narayan but one we all should admire and be proud of.

The writer is a London-based journalist and author.

I mustn't neglect the role of advertising in all this. Expenditure on advertising, a good index of urban prosperity, rose by 40 per cent every year in the first half of the 1990s. Ian Jack, editor of *Granta*, writes, "Cars, auto-rickshaws, motor scooters, lorries and buses choke the avenues of Delhi and new hoardings stand high above the flyovers to shine palely in the fumes." New newspapers blossomed and today, India is probably the only country where readership is increasing. The future looks bright, except for journalists' wages.

They have never been good and were often paid late. Indian proprietors, like anywhere else, believed that working for their newspaper was sufficient reward. But seeing friends like copywriters doing similar work and being handsomely rewarded, alerted journalists to their own value and slowly things are getting better. Today's journalists won't get rich, but anyway, they don't aim to. They won't starve, either.