

By Sidharth Mishra



### SELF-PORTRAIT.

Your reporter is a conservative journalist, a breed I would not say is fast getting extinct. Now, what's a journalist in conservative form? Well, there are several parameters that describe it. First and foremost, a newsperson should never become news, s/he should report the news. I believe a reporter tries to cover the failure to get a meaty copy of the incident by making a story around himself. Those who worked with me closely as part of several news teams that I led for more than a decade would vouch that I never allowed a self-approration copy. The copies of reporters narrating their woes covering the production of Jawaharlal Nehru University Students Union (JNUSU) president Kanhaiya Kumar in Patiala House were ridiculous and could pass muster of an editor because they might never have been to a

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courtroom to cover proceedings. The so-called "harassment" of the reporters at crime scenes and at court rooms is commonplace;

at least, it was used to be that way when I started as a city reporter more than two decades back.

The reporter's job is demanding and a reporter on job must understand that as one of the four estates of parliamentary democracy, s/he is in an adversarial to the other three pillars -- Legislature, Executive, and Judiciary. They are all equal in denying access to news about their particular estate and a reporter's challenge is to overcome these obstacles.

Many years ago, your reporter with another colleague was able to discover an unlisted meeting of a corporate baron with the government at Delhi Secretariat. Our sheer presence invited the wrath of both the government bosses and the corporate honcho, who even called up my then editor desiring a suitable reprimand. Well, the reprimand did not come my way but a suitable counsel did. I was told that one should be more careful while punctuating a question and never say, "So you have managed the contract?"

Some years later in the leadership position, I was cajoled by my dear friend and legendary Delhi Police PRO Ravi Pawar to agree for an appointment with then Police Commissioner. Our crime reporters had actually made Delhi Police hot under their ears with their absolute A-Class reporting. When we met, the Commissioner narrated a story about how as Superintendent of Police of notorious Banda district in Uttar Pradesh, he had made life miserable for an adventurous district reporter of now defunct Northern India Patrika.

The message which the top cop was trying to convey was obvious, I looked at my friend Ravi Pawar from the corner of my eyes; he was flushed with embarrassment. I politely told the person on the other side of the table, "Neither you are SP of Banda today, nor am I a district correspondent of Northern India Patrika. I see no urgency to make any change in my crime team." Pawar later that evening came down to our Bahadur Shah Zafar Marg office, he was happy that I remained firm and polite and then said, "Here is a little rejoinder to your story please carry it for my sake." We published it happily.

A fellow reporter recently told me how a source for many years from bureaucracy, changed colours on getting a cushy job in Chief Minister's office. "The officer in question first discussed a few things and then came straight to the point, what if we get your management to show you your place. I was nonplussed for sometime at his changed attitude and left his room, but not before telling him that we can look for another management," this colleague shared with me.

But then these threats and challenges faced during our reporting assignments can be best left to be part of our memoirs, as and when we write it. A common reader has interest in a good

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story filed by a scribe rather than a story on him. And if my story is so great, somebody would make a biopic on me. This need to subsume our identity to provide objectivity to a story suffered irreparable damage ever since the melodramatic reporting of the Kargil war. I wonder why Barkha Dutt should object to Arnab Goswami’s histrionics. After all, both ferret out their individual personalities more than the news they ought to truthfully and objectively broadcast.

I have never been part of any big media house. All my life I have worked with relatively smaller brands of newspapers. The pressure on the management of such publication houses is greater, given their vulnerable financial position, and it’s also difficult to them to fend such pressure. In most of the circumstances, my own line on issues has not necessarily converged with that of the management but I can say with some certainty that never ever have I had my space for independent opinion encroached upon.

Therefore, I wonder for whose sake are the media lords at each, other’s neck? One has the freedom of pursuing one’s own editorial line but at the same time, one doesn’t have any right to decide on what should be somebody else’s line. The challenge for an editor is to back his or her line with such credible reporting that the other loses out.

The challenge is not to score high on TRP or about holding a better media trial. The challenge is whose report would people - common, apolitical people - refer to with greater confidence. And this feedback can never come by raising a storm on social media. The feedback is part of the respect and affection (not awe) that one earns as a reporter after spending years in the trade of news. In their effort to turn TV news into editorial pages of newspapers, the channels are churning out a new genre of “tamasha” (folk theatre), which are greater than the soap operas in its idiosyncratic ways.

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