

Working under shadow of Vinod Mehta

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By Sidharth Mishra



To Vinod Mehta's credit, who passed away on 8 March 2015, without having worked in any of the behemoths of Indian print media, he commanded a stature, which not many of his contemporary editors from these publications do. He was no great intellectual, but still made effective intrusions in political dynamics with pithy expressions. He could achieve all this because he was an effective editor and more important he got well-meaning wealthy people Ashwin Shah, Vijaypat Singhania, Lalit Mohan Thapar and

Rajan Raheja to invest in his projects, which saw launching of *Sunday Observer*

,
Indian Post

,
The Independent, The Pioneer
(Delhi edition) and, finally,
Outlook

. He could not continue at the helm for long in most of his briefs because people who invested in him would soon lose trust in his "capabilities as editor." Except

The Pioneer
and
Outlook

, both sputtering for breath, others have shut down. It's said that his decision to carry the transcript of Niira Radia tapes hastened his retirement from

Outlook

. That was Vinod Mehta, with whom I never had a chance to work with but spent initial years in this vocation under his long shadows.

In the late spring of 1994, I was interviewed for a job in
The Pioneer

(launched in Delhi by the redoubtable Lalit Mohan Thapar), which was then edited by Mehta. I was selected but the appointment letter did not arrive as Mehta resigned and left. Sometime in November, I received a call from his successor AK Bhattacharya with the offer to join, I grabbed the opportunity.

It had been few months since Mehta had left but his presence was felt in every nook and cranny of the office. The editorial honchos –Ajoy Bose and Kanchan Gupta, who had their cubicles outside editor's chamber, were seen as Mehta's boys. The third of the triumvirate – Raminder Singh, had just left. Mehta's protégé Padmanand Jha too had handed over charge as chief of

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bureau to his deputy KV Ramesh. But down the corridor and hierarchy, the news desk (VM Badola), the business bureau (Pranjoy Guha Thakurta, Shankar Raghuraman), the sports desk (V Krishnaswamy), the city reporters (Raman Kirpal), the Sunday section (Ajaz Ashraf) and other smaller departments could not overcome the fact that Vinod Mehta had left.

His impact on the paper continued till 1996, when Chandan Mitra joined as Editor. Though Chandan initially managed to retain confidence of majority of editorial staff and ensured there was no exodus to

Outlook

, which Vinod Mehta by then had launched. However, in the summer of 1998, with Chandan Mitra coming to own the paper, Vinod's gang quit

The Pioneer

in hordes and many went to join the

Outlook

and helped making it into a fine editorial product.

I did not quit, as I was not part of that gang, but looking back my best learning years were when I worked under his long list of shadows.

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