

“Education is a liberating force, and in our age it is also a democratizing force, cutting across the barriers of caste and class, smoothing out inequalities imposed by birth and other circumstances.”

— Indira Gandhi



“शिक्षा मानव को बन्धनों से मुक्त करती है और आज के युग में तो यह लोकतंत्र की भावना का आधार भी है। जन्म तथा अन्य कारणों से उत्पन्न जाति एवं वर्तगत विषमताओं को दूर करते हुए मनुष्य को इन सबसे ऊपर उठाती है।”

- इन्दिरा गांधी

Block

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INTRODUCTION TO THE BLOCK

Having got acquainted with various channels of mass communication and their characteristics you went on to acquire basic media skills such as reporting, editing, layout and design. Thereafter you acquired skills for interviews and feature writing. You were all along being advised to be objective and neutral in your approach.

Now, in this block you are going to become more personal in your stance. This subjective approach of a newspaper, journal, radio, television or internet can be observed in the editorials, special feature articles and letters to the editors. You will read about these aspects of journalism in this block.

Amiya Bhushan Sharma





UNIT 13 EDITORIAL WRITING

Structure

13.0 Objectives

13.1 Introduction

13.1.1 What is an editorial?

13.1.2 Importance of an editorial

13.2 Parallels of editorials in other media

13.2.1 Television Editorials

13.2.2 Radio Editorials

13.2.3 Internet Editorials

13.3 Writing an editorial

13.3.1 Length of an editorial

13.3.2 Language of an editorial

13.3.3 Glossary

13.4 Types of editorials

13.4.1 Staff editorials Vs. front page editorials

13.4.2 Signed Vs unsigned editorials

13.4.3 Third editorial or entertainment editorial

13.4.4 Critical editorial

13.4.5 Persuasive editorial

13.4.6 Interpretative editorials

13.4.7 Advocacy editorial

13.5 Structure of an editorial

13.6 Let us Sum Up

13.7 Suggested Readings

13.0 OBJECTIVES

After having read this unit you will be able to

- Read and analyze an editorial in a news paper
- Identify the various types of editorials
- Understand the different styles of editorial writing
- Write an editorial

13.1 INTRODUCTION

Newspapers report the news. When newspaper reporters tell a story, it is only facts and we readers can form our views. Journalists generally have to leave their opinions out of their writing. They have always been told to be unbiased and not to take a stance. Yet most news papers do have opinions. This is a class of writing called “editorials” found in your newspaper every day.

Where can you find them? Are they on the same page everyday? Who writes them? Who is offering this opinion? Why do we need to write the editorials? What are possible reactions of the readers to an editorial?

This section will answer all these questions. But before beginning it is important to recognize the difference between fact and opinion. We have reprinted for you a report and an opinion on the same report from the newspaper Hindustan Times.

Luxury heads converge in Delhi

Vinod Mair
New Delhi, March 27

EXPERTS AND top industry officials from across the world will meet from today for the Mint-Hindustan Times Luxury Conference to discuss the relevance of premium brands and high-end trends in India's booming market, and its opportunities and challenges.

The two-day meet, the third such organised by HT Media Ltd, will focus on Mystique of Luxury and will be inaugurated by Minister for Commerce and Industry Kamal Nath. Experts will address a wide spread — from fashion and accessories to hospitality, fine interiors, travel, gourmet cuisine and intellectual property rights at a time when the luxury market in India is poised to touch \$30 billion by 2015 as people become richer and more conscious of international brands.

HT Media Ltd was the first to spot this emerging trend that resulted in the launch of this annual meet in 2006, according to Shobhana Bharti, the company's Vice Chairperson and Editorial Director.

"The demand for luxury products is on the rise; the retail environment is getting busier with the emergence of high-end malls; and

Hindustan Times
LUXURY
conference

India will soon be one of the most promising retail destinations for luxury goods in the world. This segment will bring in more revenue to the exchequer by way of taxes even as it meets the growing consumer demands," she said.

The last two conferences hosted the top brass from the best known luxury houses — brands such as

Louis Vuitton, Gucci Group, Chanel, Kamenegildo Zegna, Hermes, Asprey & Garrard, Kenzo, Gieves & Hawkes and L'Oréal. This year will have more: Mark Lee, CEO, Gucci; Andrea Perrone, CEO, Brioni; Vittorio Missoni, chairman, Missoni and vice chairman, CNMI (Milan Fashion Week); Armando Branchini, managing director, Altagamma; Alain Coblenz, leading corporate and IPR lawyer; Frank Zambrelli, president & creative director, Leiber; Paolo Canali, sales and marketing director, Canali; Joseph Wan, CEO, Harvey Nichols; Andrea Bonardi, managing director, La Perla; and Andrea Ily, chairman, Ily Café, among many other speakers from India and abroad.

An AC Nielsen study says India is among the three top brand-conscious countries in the world. We throw open the gates of luxury to you; stay with us as we go up the value chain.

12 Hindustan Times, New Delhi, Friday, March 26, 2008

Brand with the best

THE WORD 'luxury' and what it signifies have, for far too long, been associated in India as something sinful. Such a taboo against luxury goods stems from a misplaced 'socialistic' notion that if a vast majority of Indians cannot afford a square meal a day, nobody deserves exclusive items or services that, by virtue of their exclusivity, cost a packet. Of course, that's not — thankfully — how India really works. As the two-day Mint-Hindustan Times Luxury Conference brings leaders behind the world's finest brands under one roof today, it is the right moment to take note of a rapidly changing India and its accompanying change of attitude towards luxury.

A consumer confidence survey by Nielsen Company shows that 57 per cent of Indians now see labels as status symbols and are indeed welcoming luxury brands in their spheres of life. This should hardly come as a surprise. As far as human nature goes, people value premium products and one guarantee of an item's quality is its exclusivity — which, in turn, puts a price tag to it. With a growing number of rich Indians and an even more dynamic aspirational class bursting forth, it was only a matter of time that the 'artificial value' put to luxury goods would be accepted, not to mention celebrated, in this country of new economically-fuelled royalty. The likes of Louis Vuitton, Christian Dior, Gucci, Hermes

and other high-end luxury brands are setting up shop in India not out of some Marie Antoinette-style sense of philanthropy but because these companies know that there is an eager market in India waiting. Brand consciousness, as the Nielsen survey shows, is high here and it is the supply side, rather than demand, that requires to be firmed up.

To understand this vorable demand in a clear-eyed manner, one needs to look at luxury as one section of a multi-layered consumer demand. To mix this high-end layer with that of the middle-class or those below, as has been the case until recently, is not only to miss the point but also to miss an opportunity. By definition, luxury goods are 'controlled' in number — partly because of maintaining the highest standards of quality and partly to enhance its mystique of exclusivity. This delicate matter of supply-demand lies at the core of any luxury brand building. So while the Nano is the (required) car for the masses, the Jaguar is the (luxury) car that signifies quality and status. And it is apt that these Tata brands, one created, the other acquired, tell the other story of Indian luxury. While we are turning into one of the world's largest buyers of high-end brands, we are yet to build and maintain any luxury brand of our own. That is a question that could be muffled over by the participants of this year's conference.

13.1.1 What is an editorial?

An editorial is an article that states the newspaper's views on a particular news, event or an issue of concern. It is the official stance of the publication.

You can find them at the same place on the same page of the newspaper, everyday. This page is called the editorial page and the place is the left hand column of the page, from top to bottom. The reprint of an editorial page of Times of India will help you to understand the above statement.

A THOUGHT FOR TODAY

*It's the speed with which everything was provided
(for Nano in Gujarat), particularly land.*

RATAN TATA, Industrialist

A New Deal

*Reform land acquisition to put
industrial growth on fast track*

Given the all-round economic gloom, India's need for fast-track industrialisation cannot be overstressed. Rural uplift specifically rides on industrial growth, which reduces poverty, spurs infrastructure and creates jobs that ease pressure on land. Yet land-related agitations threaten to wreck the industrialisation process. The source of controversy is generally land acquisition and human displacement. Land transfer has in fact been handled with myopic insensitivity by the political class, deploying a colonial-era law in dire need of upgrade: the Land Acquisition Act, 1894. This legislation, awaiting amendment, has long been viewed as sanctioning land-grab by government at the behest of private industry. Any blame for its fallout is passed off on a demonised Big Business even as politicians take sides.

Tata's Nano may be shifting to Gujarat. But relocation cannot be the panacea for all contested projects. Raising popular stake in development is urgent. First, we need clarity on what the Act calls public purpose for which land is acquired under eminent domain. The judiciary's criteria may help: employment and revenue generation. Again, land is notoriously undervalued when fixing compensation. Past prices are averaged or, as per the Act, future value is not factored in. Without a New Deal on fair value, real or perceived injustice will rankle. Also, landowners but not landless labourers are compensated or rehabilitated. To incentivise the former while where possible in latter's forced job loss, both could be absorbed where possible in new projects. An incentives package for oustees could include money and a flexible mix of equity stakes, jobs and training for skills upgradation, depending on local circumstances.

On land to be earmarked for industry, the Act doesn't distinguish between fertile and arid land. Taking the claim of Maharashtra's Raigad villagers to arable land as a case in point, one way to soften resistance could be to treat non-cultivable land as a preferred purchase option. But agricultural land can't be off-limits given industry's priority when choosing a setting is infrastructure. Besides, research shows that, as a ratio of total agricultural land, the estimated amount in industrial use would have little bearing on food security.

Finally, government should ideally play enabler, not acquirer, in land acquisition. But, for now, industry-landowner transactions are impractical, given complexities relating to title deeds, fragmented landholdings or likelihood of speculative holdout by farmers. Direct deals will, however, circumvent political troublemaking or bungling. So, streamlining ownership records is a must. Government could also promote sellers' collectives to give farmers bargaining power vis-a-vis industry. The moral of the story: India's industry-and-investment-friendly image is under siege. Steps for damage control is now.

13.1.2 Importance of an Editorial

An editorial is usually written by the editor, one of the associate or deputy editors or one of the writers on the behalf of the editor. These opinions reflect the stance of the newspaper and do not have bylines.

Politicians, bureaucrats and the common people – all want to know the stand of the newspapers on matters which make a difference to society. Why is this view so important? Well, the press is the fourth estate and the watch dog of society. The rest of the world would definitely want to understand the policy of the newspaper, on issues of importance. The editorials not only persuade the reader to change their views, but also help them to form views. This creates a major public opinion and public wave. Hence, the interest of politicians and bureaucrats in editorial stands.

The editorial acts as:

- A voice of the common man.

- Advocate of human rights
- Critique of government policies
- Interpreter of constitution
- Forecaster of political and social changes
- Informer and analyst of complicated issues
- Promoter of worthy activity
- Problem solver of any issue of social importance

Self Check Exercise 1

- 1) Collect 2 editorials each from one English and one vernacular newspaper of your state.
- 2) In the space provided below write whether you found the editorials on the same page and same space on two different days or on different pages and spaces.

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13.2 PARALLELS OF EDITORIALS IN OTHER MEDIA

By now it must be clear to you, that the editorial is not only the view point of the media organization, but is also an important and essential part of the newspaper and is found in every issue. Does this mean that only the print media enjoys this privilege of commenting? Do we see editorials on the television. Do we hear them on the radio and in the virtual world do we read these on the internet? This section will answer all the above questions.

13.2.1 Television Editorials

It is surprising, but there is no exact parallel of a print editorial in the television news channels. There are panel discussions and analysis programmes, which are conducted by anchors of the channel and the expert is also a journalist working for the channel. These are the nearest television got to editorializing.

Some channels have fixed slots for these programmes whereas some do not. Television news channels, being guest and expert based, most of the time have outsiders commenting on various issues and the channel bears no responsibility for these comments.

In the case of Doordarshan, the official government media, the stand Government of India has to take on various issues, are telecast as statements made by the ministers or government public relation officers.

Self Check Exercise 2

In the space below write the names of programmes on private news channels which are parallels of editorials; after watching 2 channels of your choice and Doordarshan.

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13.2.2 Radio Editorials

Lets start this section with a series of questions. Write the answer in the space provided below the question.

a) Do you listen to the radio?

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b) AIR, BBC, VOA or private FM channels

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c) Which one do you like the most?

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d) Does it have serious or light content?

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By now you must have understood that radio is a medium which is most convenient for information gathering and has the maximum reach. But one fact is also true that the private FM stations have not been granted the rights to broadcast news. So most of the serious and developmental content is audible only on All India Radio, the official radio.

The private stations like Red FM, Big FM, Radio Mirchi and others have only entertainment based programmes but many a times as a humor or pun an issue is commented upon by the jockey. This is the nearest these stations can come to editorializing.

AIR is the news station and broadcasting serious content along with entertainment is its agenda.

It is surprising, that no views of the government or the AIR are broadcast as editorials. Statements of ministers or government Public Relation Officers, on issues of importance are aired time to time and analysis of these, as a part of news bulletin, are done sometimes. This is the nearest AIR gets to being a parallel of newspaper editorial.



13.2.3 Internet Editorials

Internet or web journalism has its vestiges in the print media. If it is a website of the newspaper or magazine the editorial column is absolutely there at the allotted space, every day.

In cases of other websites, the views of the organization are put on the site and regularly updated. In fact most of the content could be opinionated. Cyber media can also be called a comment based media.

Exact parallels between editorials cannot be drawn on the cyber media but comment is free here.

Blogs initiate a debate on an issue where the owner of the site gives his or her points of view and invites comments from the audience.

The screenshot shows the website header for 'The Tribune' with the 'ONLINE EDITION' label. The date is Sunday, March 23, 2003, from Chandigarh, India. A navigation menu on the left lists categories like Punjab, Haryana, Jammu & Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, etc. The main content area features a 'SPECIAL EDITORIAL' titled 'Goodbye, my lords!' by Hari Jaisingh. The text of the editorial discusses the author's role as Editor, the institution's history, and its commitment to press freedom and public trust. A '4BACK' button is visible at the bottom right of the page content.

Self Check Exercise 3

1. Surf the internet and list out comment based sites in the space below.

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2. Open the site of the Times of India and read the editorial. Is it the same as the hard copy news paper editorial. Comment?.

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13.3 WRITING AN EDITORIAL

An editorial is one of the writing styles used to express an opinion or reaction to timely news, event or an issue of concern. Most editorials are used to influence readers to think or act the same way the writer does. Not all editorials take sides on an issue but have one of the following four purposes:

- i. Inform: The writer gives careful explanations about an important issue.
- ii. Promote: The writer tries to promote a worthy activity.
- iii. Praise: The writer praises a person or an event.
- iv. Entertain: The writer entertains the reader with light and humourous issues.

Steps to writing your editorial

Selecting: Choose an issue – your editorial could be about how the readers could help the environment and ecology sustenance, inform the public about a particular scam, praise an effort by a group who has helped to remove garbage dumps and recycle it or make the people aware of a social worker

and his campaign on abolishing child labour or any other idea that can be used as an editorial. First check with your counselor to make sure that it is an acceptable subject.

Collecting: Gathering support – gather as many details to convince others about your opinion. These could be facts or evidence, written statements from sources or authorities on the subject, comparisons to similar situation to support your argument and be able to counter argue.

Connecting: Remember to brain storm before you write the first draft – Body should have clean accurate details and examples. Give strong examples at the beginning and at the end. Show the opposing arguments and their weaknesses. Offer a solution in the end.

Correcting: Getting it right – your editorial should be clear and forceful. Do not preach. Be honest and accurate.

Sample of what could go into the five paragraph editorial:

- i. A personal experience, a thesis statement
- ii. Explanation of the other side of the issue
- iii. Examples to support your view points
- iv. Reasons for your view point
- v. The last paragraph should restate your thesis statement and end on a positive note.

Tips for writing editorials

1. Don't use the word I. Your life is not interesting. Your personal experiences are tiresome. Using the first person also sounds preachy and righteous, which alienates readers.
2. Avoid sarcasm. You aren't very funny. Too much sarcasm comes off as immature and can ruin your credibility.
3. The sky is not falling – do not exaggerate. It makes you feel too emotional and irrational.
4. Challenge authority not personality. Attacking coaches or politicians simply attract letters to editors but attacking their ideas, policies and actions is great editorializing.

13.3.1 Length of an editorial

An editorial is averagely of 500 words. Three editorials of 500 words each can fit into full page editorial column. For example The Economic Times. Some newspapers have editorials of 750 words. In such cases only two editorial column. For example The Indian Express. There are exceptions to the rule when one editorial fits the complete length. This is normally in stories of grave importance. We are reprinting some editorials of the above mentioned types, for you to understand.



THE ECONOMIC TIMES

WEDNESDAY 1 OCTOBER 2008

US dithers on bailout

RBI Faces Liquidity And Re Challenge

THE reluctance on the part of US legislators to clear the \$700-billion package to rescue Wall Street banks had its predictable impact on markets across the world. There was heavy selling in equities and commodities, with oil plunging 10% at one go. In India, the stock markets are hitting newer lows for 2008. The market opened extremely nervous on Tuesday morning and was 3% down within no time. It recovered to post gains of 2% on the sensx after Sebi chairman C B Bhave made some reassuring noises about adequate systems being in place to deal with volatility. What is more worrisome is that the rupee is coming under increasing pressure as short-term capital flows become very uncertain. This is linked directly to the financial bailout package getting the Congressional nod in the US. If the package gets cleared, emerging markets would become much calmer. After all, the Wall Street investment banks are still heavily invested in emerging markets on their proprietary account. If the US legislators do not clear the package soon, deleveraging (selling of assets) by the US investment banks could happen in a more precipitous manner. Such a hard landing may not be good for emerging markets as prices could crash across different asset classes. The idea is to soft-land the process of deleveraging, which is possible only if the \$700-billion bail-out gets off the ground.

Meanwhile, the Reserve Bank governor will face the challenge of managing both the liquidity problems in the domestic banking system as well as the downward pressure on the local currency, which breached the Rs 47 to a dollar mark on Tuesday. There could be more short-term volatility in the currency markets going forward, mainly triggered by concerns on the capital account. The RBI governor would be well advised not to take any hasty step to ease interest rates until the currency volatility gets smoothed out in the near term. Cutting interest rates could be disastrous when the rupee is constantly under pressure to depreciate. The RBI must take a call on that only after a semblance of stability returns to the currency markets. Of course, there may be a case for cutting rates in due course, after the volatility across various market segments subsides.



The Indian EXPRESS

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

Not an Oscar winner

UPA government gets bruised by yet another ministerial lightweight

LABOUR Minister Oscar Fernandes's response to Monday's brutal murder of a Noida-based CEO has provoked justifiable outrage. Fernandes, in ill-considered, off-the-cuff remarks, said that corporation policies should not "push" workers, and that the tragic incident should serve as a "warning"; that "simmering discontents" were responsible, caused by "disparities" between contractual and permanent workers, and that what was needed was "compassion". Outrageous indeed — not to mention displaying a callous lack of sensitivity to a recently bereaved family — but, in an unfortunate way, typical of aspects of this government's functioning.

The UPA government has faced, since its inception, the problem of party loyalists comfortably ensconced in key ministries. They don't owe their positions to their competence, or to a political base. So the performance of their ministries in crucial tasks is below-par. The labour ministry, which Fernandes heads, is in charge of overseeing and reforming India's byzantine labour regulations. It is a well-understood fact that outdated approaches to labour policy — the sort whose replacement by "hire-and-fire" policies Fernandes attacked — are major constraints on the growth of industry and industrial employment. Movement on this front has been deeply unsatisfactory under this government:

with Fernandes speaking out of turn and betraying a daunting capacity for confused thinking, perhaps we now know why.

Of course, Fernandes had to retract his unwise comments, though only after they invited rebuffs from cabinet colleagues such as Kapil Sibal and Kamal Nath, and caused Pranab Mukherjee to call a meeting of senior ministers to discuss the fallout. Other ministers too have led the Congress down this path many times these past four years. Lightweights of Fernandes's stripe naturally believe that they are embedded in an alternate power structure, one that doesn't recognise the cabinet as paramount. For them, the party's high command is the source of their authority. They have no incentive to work with their colleagues or the prime minister; indeed, they might think they have good reason to undermine the PM — for example, by periodically calling for Rahul Gandhi's elevation. Consequently, their statements and actions will continually paralyse an effective, coordinated approach to solving India's problems. This is a political failure for which the UPA is ultimately responsible, and for which voters will eventually hold it accountable. For now, the cabinet and the "high command" have done well to nip the Fernandes controversy in the bud. But the conditions producing such controversies remains alarmingly fertile.

13.3.2 Language of an editorial

There are some magic tricks which when used can choose out the most effective editorial. These are clarity, rhythm, good word choices, active sentence construction, seamless transition and evocative phrasing. The assumption is that an editorial writer knows the language well.

Simple tips

1. Get the reader's attention quickly by the first paragraph being written in attractive language.
2. Write short paragraphs and vary the length of sentences for effect.
3. Write with strong verbs and adjectives.
4. Use transitional devices for continuity.
5. Avoid redundancies in an editorial.
6. Use of one word substitution is prominent in editorials.
7. Use active verbs while writing an opinion.
8. Use concrete nouns while writing a comment.

Special tips

1. Both direct and indirect speech can be used while writing an editorial.
2. Metaphors and similes or both to be used if required.
3. A mixture of abstract and concrete expresses better while commenting.
4. Rhetoric can be used.
5. Direct affirmations and negations too can be written.
6. Use of exclamations is justified in persuasive writing.
7. Apostrophe and within quotes can be paraphrased.
8. Dangling modifiers are helpful in editorial writing.
9. Inadvertent comment can be written in loaded words.
10. Sequence of tenses can be past – present – future to create effect.

All the above grammar is explained in unit 7 Block 2, which tells you how to edit. Consult it and you will understand the above section.

13.3.3 GLOSSARY

Editorial: An article expressing opinion of the newspaper on certain issues.

Masthead: The information printed on first page on the top with the name, ownership, logo, rate and date of the newspaper.

Op-ed page: Page opposite the editorial which contains nationally syndicated columns and good writers pieces.

Editor: A person who decides what news will go in the paper and where it will appear.

Editorial board: A seven member board headed by publisher which decides what issues the newspaper will offer an opinion on.

Editorial Cartoon: A Cartoon which expresses opinion, appears on the editorial page.

Editorial policy: Policy of coverage of news and stances of newspaper decided by the editorial board.

Column: An opinion piece that expresses the writer's own view and carries his or her name and often a picture.

Syndicated column: Columns sent by associations which buy and sell stories, features, etc.

Letters to editor: Letters of feedback or opinion on various issues by the readers.

Middle: A humorous write up in the centre of the editorial page in a box.

Editorial writer: Any member of the editorial board who researches and writes the editorials that represent the newspaper's position on most issues.

13.4 TYPES OF EDITORIALS

An editorial as a genre is considered a type of opinion discourse, that aims to persuade the reader to accept new opinions. Although the editorial is thought to be the personal opinion of the newspaper, it is however based on social opinions. It also evaluates news events and propagates ideologies. Come, let us see how can the editorials be classified. There are several parameters on which editorials are categorized. The first one being their location. Second one their bylines and the third their content.

13.4.1 Staff editorials Vs. front page editorials

Staff editorials comment on the opinion page written by the editors or writers working for the newspaper.

Front page editorials are opinions of the editor-in-chief or owner of the newspaper in an editorial column format on the first page of the newspaper. These are written only in great emergencies or on topics of supreme importance.

13.4.2 Signed Vs Unsigned editorials

The staff editorials are unsigned editorials, which means that the name of the author is not given. It implies, that it is the opinion of the newspaper. Front page editorials are usually signed and this is to stress the importance of the viewpoint of not only the newspaper but also of the editor-in-chief or managing editor. Generally these people are persons of stature, with

importance in society and their opinion makes a difference. After the cease fire of Gulf War I, Times of India's front page editorial Pax Americana signed by the Editor-in-Chief Dilip Padgaonkar was very popular. Events like September 11, deaths of nation heads and change of governments have also seen front page signed editorials written.

13.4.3 Third Editorial or Entertainment editorial

Traditionally on the opinion page there are three editorials. The first two are on serious news issues. The third editorial often is humor based and entertains. Many a times newspapers follow this in their policy and other times they don't. At least once a week the edit pages of newspapers have a third editorial. This can or cannot have a byline, depending on the policy of the newspaper. Reproduced below is a bylined third editorial of the Hindu.

Cyclist's Confessions

Charan C S

I stuck to my stand — even when others scoffed at my idea of using a bicycle — having been motivated by a newspaper article that advised readers to “just listen to your heart when it came to matters of health”. Ever since, it's been a rediscovery of wheels for me, on the go! The resolution to use the cycle to go places within a 10-km radius of my home amid honk-happy motorists on Bangalore roads made me learn a lot of things — like patience and perseverance. If one has lost anything, it is weight — 10 kg in seven months. “Nothing can help me unwind as much as cycling after a hard day's work” was my belief. The same was changed for the better when one got a chance to take part in a 105-km cycle race in Shimoga, a city in Karnataka, known as much for its greenery as its world-famous Jog Falls. When the race was flagged off near the falls in the morning, medal aspirants left the scene like bullets out of a gun. However, yours truly, twice as old as most participants who were still students, pedalled leisurely. For a person who had to ride in traffic-ridden Bangalore with cotton plugs in the ears and a mask over the nose, the experience of riding on calm roads in the serene environs of Malnad was indeed enlightening.

While others were sure of reaching the destination within four hours, well ahead of the lunch hour, I was prepared to keep my batteries charged. So, there were dry fruits for the body and music for the mind and soul. Of the 100-plus songs of various genres and languages that kept me going, the one penned by Kannada writer Jayanth Kaikini still rings in my mind: “Aadae Bhoomi, Aadae Baaru, Ee Nayana Nootana/ Aadae Daari, Aadae Tiruvu, Ee Payana Nootana”. Loosely translated, it means “it's the same earth, the same sky, but only perceptions differ; it's the same road, the same curve, but the journeys differ”. His lines best summarise the contrasting experience one gets in those calm places as compared to the one in busy Bangalore. If the pre-Nano Bangalore is bursting at its seams, what would the future hold for the dwindling lot of cyclists? Hope town planners won't eject them from the roads when the wallet-friendly car hits the streets.

**BRIEF
CASE**

13.4.4 Critical Editorial

As the name suggests a critical editorial seeks to point out a flaw, judge severely and find fault. This is likely the type of editorial you are used to seeing.

A THOUGHT FOR TODAY

All by herself till 3 a.m. at night in a city... you should not be so adventurous.

SHEILA DIKSHIT, Delhi chief minister

Blaming The Victim

It's your fault for getting killed, some Indian politicians seem to suggest

The murder of 25-year-old journalist Soumya Vishwanathan in Delhi in the early hours of Tuesday was tragic and demonstrates the sorry state of law and order in the capital today. But instead of focusing her energies on ensuring that the culprit is found, Delhi chief minister Sheila Dikshit has instead chosen to imply that Soumya brought her murder upon herself by travelling alone in an unsafe city so early in the morning. Dikshit has been quoted as saying that Soumya should not have been "so adventurous".

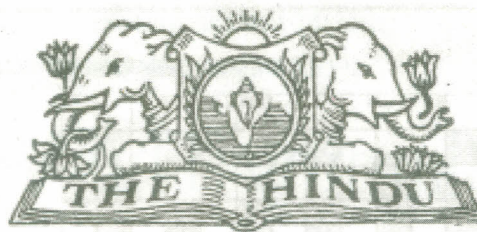
For a working woman such as herself to display such insensitivity is shocking. But, unfortunately, Dikshit's attitude appears to be more the rule than the exception among Indian politicians. Whether it is Dikshit in this case or Oscar Fernandes, Union labour minister, a few days ago, when he implied that the chief executive of a multinational corporation who was bludgeoned to death had somehow asked for it, politicians seem to be blaming the victims of such crimes for some perceived error that invited the attack.

Where crimes against women are concerned, such an attitude is not new. Reactions to crimes against the so-called weaker sex are ordinarily accompanied by allegations about the victim's lifestyle, as the Scarlett Keeling murder case in Goa earlier this year proves. Responses to such incidents usually aim at limiting the freedom of women, rather than ensuring that an adequate security mechanism is in place. For example, in response to rising crimes against working women in Karnataka, that state put in place a ban on night shift for women in shops and commercial establishments, which has since, mercifully, been lifted.

But the propensity of politicians to shift the blame onto victims for being too rich, too "adventurous" or too female remains. It's designed to shift attention from their inability to provide adequate security to citizens. While cases involving women may be more visible and draw greater media attention, the fact is that our cities are no safer for men. Such an attitude is not good enough. Instead of passing the buck, particularly to quarters it does not belong, our political leadership must concentrate on improving the law and order situation in their respective areas. It is grossly inappropriate for a politician to suggest, even in passing, that the victim of a murder in any way asked for her life to be taken. In Soumya's case, the important facts are these: that a young woman has been murdered, and that the perpetrators are still at large. She is the victim. Whatever she did, however she lived her life, is irrelevant. She didn't invite murder.

13.4.5 Persuasive editorial

A persuasive editorial seeks to persuade the readers about a sensitive issue. Is it the best way to convince the masses that your opinion is better? Yes, normally it uses valid examples that play on your emotions and also make sense. Remember, it is an editorial where the writer presents both the sides of the issues and illustrates why your opinion is logically better.



WEDNESDAY, MARCH 26, 2008

The question of Tibet

If you go by western media reports, the propaganda of the so-called 'Tibetan government-in-exile' in Dharamsala and the votaries of the 'Free Tibet' cause, or by the fulminations of Nancy Pelosi and the Hollywood glitterati, Tibet is in the throes of a mass democratic uprising against Han Chinese communist rule. Some of the more fanciful news stories, images, and opinion pieces on the 'democratic' potential of this uprising have been put out by leading western newspapers and television networks. The reality is that the riot that broke out in Lhasa on March 14 and claimed a confirmed toll of 22 lives involved violent, ransacking mobs, including 300 militant monks from the Drepung Monastery, who marched in tandem with a foiled 'March to Tibet' by groups of monks across the border in India. In Lhasa, the rioters committed murder, arson, and other acts of savagery against innocent civilians and caused huge damage to public and private property. The atrocities included dousing one man with petrol and setting him alight, beating a patrol policeman and carving out a fist-size piece of his flesh, and torching a school with 800 terrorised pupils cowering inside. Visual images and independent eyewitness accounts attest to this ugly reality, which even compelled the Dalai Lama to threaten to resign. There was violence also in Tibetan ethnic areas in the adjacent provinces of Gansu and Sichuan, which, according to official estimates, took an injury toll of more than 700. Western analyses have linked these incidents to the March 10 anniversary of the failed 1959 Tibetan uprising, non-progress in the talks between the Dalai Lama's emissaries and Beijing, China's human rights record, and the Beijing Olympic Games, which will of course be held as scheduled from August 8 to 24.

Recent accounts, however, express unease and sadness over the containment of the troubles, the 'large-scale,' if belated and politically slow, response by Beijing, and the 'brutal ease' with which the protests have been 'smothered'. In another context, say Pakistan under Pervez Musharraf, such a response would have been called exemplary restraint. As evidence accumulates, the realisation dawns that it is too much to expect any legitimate government of a major country to turn the other cheek to such savagery and breakdown of public order. So there is a shift in the key demand made on China: it must 'initiate' a dialogue with the Dalai Lama to find a sustainable political solution in Tibet.

13.4.6 Interpretative editorials

An interpretative editorial takes a complex issue and breaks it down. It tries to answer questions like why, how, whom, what, when and where. In addition such an editorial will also comment on the positive and negatives of the issue.

Hindustan Times

Thought for food

THE SUCCESS of the mid-day meal scheme in states like Tamil Nadu and Karnataka should be proof enough that this programme can be a winner. So it is puzzling as to why Minister for Women and Child Development Renuka Choudhary should balk at the 'impracticality' of the scheme and propose that pre-cooked packaged food should replace hot meals for children. Amartya Sen, who certainly knows his onions about food security, has expressed his reservations over the minister's proposal. While there is no doubt that the government must withdraw from many parts of administration, nutrition for children — linked as it is to primary education — is one 'sector' that it cannot abdicate from.

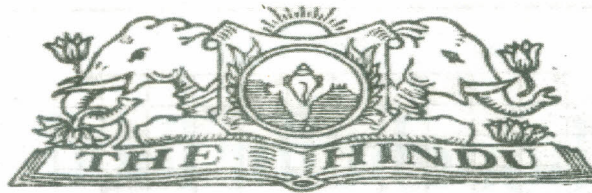
But let's not dismiss the minister's proposal outright. She may have a point when she says that it is more feasible to have pre-packaged food for mid-day meals. The point, however, remains that our track record of leasing out such issues to contractors has, to put it gently, not been successful. Ms Choudhary cannot be unaware that malnutrition among children has decreased by a paltry 1 per cent in the last eight years. The mid-day meal is a sure shot way of combating this. There are several reasons why the hot meal scheme must not be scrapped. For one, it provides an incen-

tive for children who would otherwise be not in school and be put to work to be sent to school. It also gives women in the area a source of employment and, therefore, encourages them to send their children to school. The Planning Commission has found that the mid-day meal scheme is a method of strengthening the panchayati raj system, which again translates into empowerment for women. It is no secret that lack of nutrition is a major problem for children in the age group of 3 to 6. This is precisely why the mid-day meal programme was instituted. The UPA government assumed office on the promise that it would take care of the *aam aadmi*. The mid-day meal scheme is one way of developing infrastructure at the grass-roots while fulfilling the needs of the people who are overlooked by the State.

While privatisation is welcome, the State must have fool-proof systems in place to ensure that something as crucial as meals for children are not tampered with. To cite Tamil Nadu again, the state not only provides hot meals for children but also gives a small stipend for parents to send their children to school. The results have been encouraging. These are things the minister needs to ponder over before making such sweeping changes in a scheme that seems to work so well in many states.

13.4.7 Advocacy editorial

These are editorials which advocate certain causes or issues. These explain the significance of an idea and tell the reader, why whatever happened is important. Such editorials promote or advocate changes. They may also add solutions and recombine a course of action. However, the overall tone of the editorial is neither negative nor is it point by point criticism.



MONDAY, MARCH 31, 2008

Democratic way forward

President Mahinda Rajapaksa and his government have taken a significant step forward in their project of finding a political solution to Sri Lanka's ethnic conflict by going in for Provincial Council elections in the Eastern Province in May. This will be the first democratic exercise of its kind in nearly two decades. The ground was prepared by the peaceful conduct of local body elections in March in Batticaloa district. In briefings to diplomats and journalists, Foreign Minister Rohitha Bogollagama characterised these local body elections as a first step, proceeding from the proposals of the All Party Representative Committee (APRC), in "a continuing process for greater devolution of power, with the objective of achieving a final and durable political settlement." The devolution exercise was within the framework of fully implementing, for the benefit of "the areas it was most intended to serve," the 13th Amendment that was enacted in 1987 following the Indo-Sri Lanka Agreement. Predictably, this move has both incensed and unnerved the militarily beleaguered Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam and the parties of the Tamil National Alliance (TNA) that dance to its Pol Potist tune. Fighting for survival in the one-and-a-half northern districts under its control against a relentless onslaught by the Sri Lankan armed forces, the LTTE seems paranoid over the fact that the elections to the nine Batticaloa district local bodies were free from untoward incidents and irregularities; that the breakaway Karuna group, the Tamil Makkal Viduthalaai Puligal (TMVP), now led by Pillian, won eight of these local bodies; and that the government, having thoroughly exposed the LTTE's pretence to be the sole representative of the Tamils of the North-East, has unveiled a credible idea of the shape of things to come in the region of conflict.

What is also clear is that the LTTE is training its propaganda guns at India once again. First, it issued an unusually sharp statement against official Indian policy for allegedly encouraging "the military approach of the Sinhala state" and for its "anti-Tamil" moves, in particular the recent hosting of a visit by Army chief Lt. Gen. G.S.C. Fonseka, whose itinerary included a trip to Jammu & Kashmir. Secondly, the Tigers have tasked some key TNA Members of Parliament to lobby pro-LTTE political leaders in Tamil Nadu to make a noise against the conduct of Provincial Council elections in the eastern province. Ironically, this stand is based on the argument that such an exercise in the East, as distinct from the North-East, would violate the provisions of the 1987 India-Sri Lanka Agreement. Nobody of political consequence in Sri Lanka other than the LTTE regards the "merger" of the North and East as a live issue for the conceivable future. The 2004 Karuna revolt, and the military support given to the breakaway group by successive Sri Lankan governments, put paid to the political claim of an indivisible Tamil homeland comprising the Eastern and Northern provinces. In October 2006, the Supreme Court of Sri Lanka dealt a constitutional blow when it ruled the temporary merger of the two provinces, which came as part of the Indo-Lanka Agreement, to be null and void. Although the judgment was on technical grounds, it is instructive to remember that the main contention of the petitioners was that the fundamental rights of citizens in the Eastern province stood violated by the absence of an elected Provincial Council.

Self check exercise 4

a) Lets get into the editorial page of the newspaper you have selected. Write down the titles of the three editorials you see

Edit 1 _____

Edit 2 _____

Edit 3 _____

(Try to pick out editorials that address national issues – problems that effect the entire country – rather than local issues, which might only effect the city in which the newspaper is published)

b) Now identify where they are signed or unsigned.

Edit 1 _____

Edit 2 _____

Edit 3 _____

Tick mark for signed / Cross for unsigned

c) Identify which one is persuasive, interpretative or critical.

Edit 1 _____

Edit 2 _____

Edit 3 _____

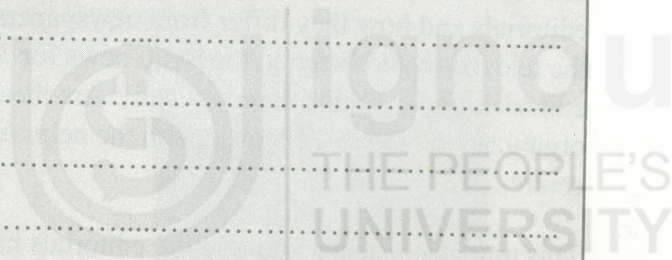
d) Read your newspaper for 10 days. Identify a third editorial. In the space given below write about the theme of this entertainment editorial.

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13.5 STRUCTURE OF AN EDITORIAL

- The editorial is first of all a text. So remember no pictures or graphs can go into it.
- It will have an introduction, a body and a conclusion.
- Introduction – In the introduction answer the 5 Ws & 1H to attract the reader’s attention.
- Body – In the body persuade the reader by identifying the opposition, show why it is wrong and give your reasons for not supporting the issue.
- Conclusion – Prompt the reader into action by giving solution. You can end with a famous quotation or a rhetorical question.

A large rectangular area with a dotted grid pattern, intended for writing an editorial. The grid consists of approximately 25 horizontal rows and 60 vertical columns of small dots.



UNIT 14 SPECIAL ARTICLES

Structure

- 14.0 Objectives
- 14.1 Introduction
- 14.2 Difference between a Feature and a Special Feature Article
- 14.3 Middle
- 14.4 Side Articles
- 14.5 Column
- 14.6 Let us Sum Up
- 14.7 Hints to Activities

14.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this unit you will be able to

- Understand the salient features of a special article
- Understand what makes a good special article writer
- Write a polished special article for publication

14.1 INTRODUCTION

If you want to be just “a writer”, then you don’t need to read further. However, if you want to know how to succeed as a writer of an analytical/interpretative/feature article, you need to know the essence of the type of writing that you certainly will come across.

The edit or op-ed page articles are also known as ‘opinion pieces’. They are usually contributed by writers who present their opinion in analytical and interpretative form. Social, political and economic issues, pervading the world including the home country time to time are usually topics. The prestigious edit page which is never read by more than 10 per cent readers is given the top priority. Little wonder, the edit page is considered the soul of a publication.

On it, besides two or three editorial comments by the editorial team under the direct supervision of the Editor of the newspaper on the contemporary social, economic and current affairs in the country and abroad, running in not more than 400-500 words each, there is a main article which is often written by an outsider, not by a staff member of a newspaper. Besides, a ‘middle’ in not more than 500 words is also published. It is generally in a lighter vein. This type of writing has one common characteristic. It expresses certain opinion, passes some judgement or offers certain suggestions.

14.2 DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A FEATURE AND A SPECIAL FEATURE ARTICLE

The “special feature article” is a type of writing that has emerged out of the growing popularity of magazines and magazine sections in daily newspapers during the last three decades. This type of writings presents interesting and up-to-date subjects in popular form. It was originally designed to attract new readers which were not reached by older publications.

A generation ago articles covering scientific discoveries and inventions, political and social movements, celebrities and events were written by experts in their respective fields. Unfortunately, these experts’ considered opinions only reached a limited circle of well-educated readers. In order to reach a broader segment of readers, editors designed a trendy form and style that would turn the article as attractively as possible based on high public demand of fiction. Therefore, techniques in writing short story, drama, and even melodrama were applied just to grab casual readers’ attention.

Daily newspapers also found the effectiveness of presenting the day’s news in a form that could be read rapidly with ease and high human interest by average readers. Some newspapers known as tabloids have gone further by adding attractiveness to news and enhancing the sensational aspect.

The language press has adopted this new model of presentation so eagerly that on every day of a week, a supplement on a different subject is published. The printing in colour has enhanced the presentation of such supplements.

Thus a special feature can be defined as a detailed presentation of facts in an interesting form adapted to rapid reading, for the purpose of entertaining or informing the average person. It usually deals with:

- 1) Recent news that is of sufficient importance to warrant elaboration;
- 2) Timely or seasonal topics not directly connected with news;
- 3) Subjects of general interest that have no immediate connection with current events.

The article we know nowadays with its story-like form, its friendly and touching description, its dramatic situations, its character portrayal, has gone through a long journey. The change in style and presentation is for the convenience of the readers. While, the special articles on the edit page or the opinion page or both are meant for serious readers.

Editorial or edit article or edit piece, often more than one, is the mirror of the newspaper’s opinion. It is the conscience of the paper. It projects the viewpoint of the paper on a particular policy, programme or event. It can inspire, motivate, excite, appeal, criticise or reject certain ideas or policy. The expression of opinion is intended to lead, educate and guide the public opinion and convert the readers to its point of view. Unlike U.K. and the U.S.A. the Indian newspaper claim to be independent as far as the political leanings of newspapers are concerned. However, they are branded by the readers on the basis of their writings. While the Indian Express and The

Statesman are considered the anti-establishment, the Hindustan Times and The Times of India are known as pro-establishment.

The special articles on the edit page are written with reason and conviction. The writer should have his heart in the subject on which he is writing. The article in editorial page of a newspaper is a writer's specific opinion on a specific topic and may or may not be biased (i.e. policing, budget etc.) Articles appearing on a newspaper's editorial pages generally represent the views of the newspaper's editor and/or its editorial board as they are selected from the solicited and unsolicited articles though a writer has the freedom to express his opinion. Newspapers often publish editorial pieces that are in line with their publication's editorial slants. However, dissenting opinions are also given space specifically to promote balance and discussion.

General opinion holds that the content of editorials and special articles needs to carry a message strong enough to eliminate the need for photos associated with the opinion expressed. However, there is no bar on inserting a relevant photograph along with the article. Sometimes, for the sake of getup and to buttress a particular point of view, a single photograph is carried along with the article

Most editorial pieces take the form of a short essay using arguments to promote a point of view. Requirements for article length vary according to each publication's guidelines. Other factors including style and topic also affect the selection of articles for publication. A special article is an elaborate piece of composition written on some broad subject, well documented and expresses the opinion of the writer who is expected to study the subject in all its aspects. Unlike features, the subject of the edit page article is not very narrow, specific or minute. The article is generally written in sober style and the subject matter is treated in a scholarly manner.

Activity 1

What are the salient features that make features different from special articles?

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Activity 2

Why is a photograph carried with a special article?

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14.3 MIDDLE

A small write-up that generally appears at the centre on the editorial page below the main 'article' in a newspaper is known as 'middle'. It is so called in journalistic parlance because of its middle position on an editorial page.

It is generally humorous, entertaining, witty and crisply written piece, a satire, an unusual experience, a nostalgic memoirs or a personality sketch. It may either deal with an offbeat or a topical subject or attempt to expose or ridicule certain policy, programme, activity or bring to public notice some grievances or inconvenience. The 'middle' is written in lighter vein so as to make it an interesting reading and provide entertainment to the readers.

The selection of topic, general approach, treatment, style, etc. followed in the middle are akin to feature writing. Such writing as a rule does not have much of statistics or documentation or scholarly or sober treatment of the subject as is the case with the analytical/interpretative articles. The language is simple but effective with small sentences. The thrust is always on specific aspect or on a single point. Its success lies in its power to hold the interest of readers from the beginning to the end.

Activity 3

Are middle pieces humorous? If yes, why

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14.4 SIDE ARTICLES

In some newspapers, more than one interpretative or analytical articles commenting on the current issues are carried. The second one is a short one, often running into about 800 words. Its second place is not a pointer to its reduced stature. A writer of the side piece, not as renowned as the writer of the main edit page article may be, may carry more weight with his readers on account of better exposition of the subject with which he deals with in his article.

Activity 4

Is a side article different from the main article?

14.5 COLUMN

There are regular columns in newspapers by established writers. You may find columns "Between The Lines" by Kuldip Nayar; "Byline" by M.J. Akbar; "Sunday Sentiments" by Karan Thapar and "Counterpoint" by Vir Sanghvi in newspapers. That is why these big names in the print media are also referred to as columnists. They are allotted a particular day and a particular slot (space) for their weekly contributions. They fall in the category of special articles.



Karan Thapar

SUNDAY SENTIMENTS

Silly spokespersons

I wonder how often our politicians think before they speak? I'm not talking of their long and tiresome speeches or the crafty answers they offer in formal interviews. I assume those must be thought out. Although when they're not, it's painfully obvious — it just cannot be hidden.

No, I'm referring to the ceaseless small comments they make on a vast assortment of subjects, which the rest of us accept as oracular pronouncements and television calls sound bites. And, before I proceed further, let me add that television both entices and encourages them, as well as provides an easy and always available platform.

Not so long ago, on the occasion of M.F. Husain's 94th birthday, a Congress spokesperson was asked what the gov-

ernment was doing about protecting the artist against the many 'Hindutva' threats he faces that have forced him to live in exile. This was the reply:

"I don't think it's the highest thing on our list of priorities at the moment given the act of terror against our country (and) given (the) particular situation we find ourselves (in). It's simply not the job of the government in my view."

When I heard that delivered on the nine o'clock news I almost fell out of my chair. I was dumbfounded. Why? Because, I can't think of a more disastrous answer. It's not only insensitive and callous, it's ignorant of the duty of government and it fails to realise that what Husain faces is also a form of terror. To put it in a nutshell, it's

THE QUESTION I WANT TO ASK THE PM AND MRS GANDHI IS THIS: WHAT STEPS HAVE YOU TAKEN TO ENABLE M.F. HUSAIN TO RETURN HOME?

downright wrong.

I'd say the first duty of government is to protect the life and property of each citizen. From Plato to Hobbes and down to Dworkin — and let's not forget our own Chanakya — there's not a political philosopher who has thought differently. So when the Congress spokesperson pronounces "it's simply not the job of the government", it's a strange, if not ludicrous, thing to say. And if this is what the government actually believes then, pray, what are its duties? And to whom devolves the task of protecting the citizenry? Or are we to protect ourselves and "sarkar jaye bhaad mein"?

But that's not all. If you look carefully at that answer it also contains a bizarre interpretation of terror. The victimisation of M.F. Husain, the spokesperson suggests, is not part of

this subject. But what then would you call the carefully planned vandalisation of his paintings, the attacks on his home, the public burning of his effigies and the orchestrated pressure on museums and galleries not to exhibit his work? Terror by another name is still terror. Indeed, even the deliberate attempt to ensnare him in a web of court cases is a form of terror.

However, beyond the foolishness of the answer, I'm also perplexed by the attitude to M.F. Husain that I suspect lies behind it. Politicians usually don't wash their hands of people who need help. Even more so when they are members of a minority community and the politician is a Congress person. So why, then, was this spokesperson willing to appear insensitive and callous when it comes to protecting M.F. Husain? I'd really like to know.

Finally, the question I want to ask the Prime Minister and Mrs Gandhi is simple and direct: during the five years you've been in power what steps have you taken to enable Husain to return home with confidence?

I eagerly await their answer.

The views expressed by the author are personal

Activity 5

Please explain the terms "Column" and "columnist".

Column:

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Columnist:

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Activity 6

Name at least four established columnists.

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2.
3.
4.

14.6 LET US SUM UP

A special feature article is the most flexible writing type that one can use for conveying ideas. Subject selection for articles is only limited by the writer's knowledge and experience as we can make any theme interesting to our readers. However, selection of topic might affect whether an article will serve local or global interest.

If a topic is related to nearby people that relates to the subject, then the article is best to be published in a local media. If the theme is one that will attract larger public, the article might be published in a media that has wider distribution. In fact, some unique local material is also quite relevant for readers in many other communities, and hence is suitable either for newspapers, for magazines or for the Internet.

Please bear in mind that some subjects might be suitable only to limited communities who have common interest. Special articles on these subjects are tailored to meet the needs of certain communities such as farmers, traders, bikers, or niche marketers.

Now you can start writing your article with confidence.

But Do not...

- Use bad grammar and bad spelling.
- Use bad English
- Use idioms (words or phrases that mean something other than what they say).
- Use words you're not sure about without using a dictionary.
- Write articles so short that they offer no useful information.
- Write in the second person. Good articles are never addressed to "you". Do not make statements about "you".

Also keep in mind...

- 1: Unless solicited by the editor do not e-mail an article;
2. Go through the articles in the particular newspaper for several weeks to ascertain the style and requirements of the particular newspaper;
3. Submit only typed copy or a print out from a computer;
4. The typed copy should be in triple space, giving enough space for editing work;
5. A special article should not be more than 1200 words;
6. These articles are not classroom essays or summary of a thesis;
7. Sub-headings are given by the editorial staff of the newspaper;
8. They should be timely and on contemporary subjects;
9. Refrain from reminding the Editor about your contribution.

There are chances that you may be privileged enough to find your contribution in the newspapers within a week of submission of the article. Otherwise you may consider that it has been rejected. Earlier, the editors used to return the unused articles with a printed terse slip saying "The editor extends his thanks for the contribution but expresses his inability to use it."

But do not feel dejected when you get a rejection slip. Instead of cursing an editor for rejecting your contribution, please try to give a relook to your own contribution and attempt to compare it with articles on the same subject, carried by other publications.

14.7 HINTS TO ACTIVITIES

Activity 3

Try to make a distinction between humour, wit and satire. The best example is: Cartoons by Sudhir Dar in The Hindustan Times were humorous; Abu used wits in his cartoons in the Indian Express while R.K. Lakshman continues to use satire effectively in his pocket cartoons in The Times of India.

UNIT 15 LETTERS TO THE EDITOR AND FEEDBACK

Structure

- 15.0 Objectives
- 15.1 Introduction
- 15.2 Why should a reader or viewer write a Letter to the Editor/TV Channel
- 15.3 Some other basic rules of a Letter to the Editor
- 15.4 A sample letter to the Editor
- 15.5 Let us Sum Up
- 15.6 Aids to Activities

15.0 OBJECTIVES

This unit is aimed to familiarize you with one of the most important columns in a newspaper/ periodical/ radio station/ TV channel. Every form of media longs for feedback from its readers/ listeners/viewers to assess their contents and to improve their presentation. At the same time, the public is also eager to express its reaction to the contents. The communication gap between the producers and users are bridged by letters (snailmail or email).

At the end of this unit you should be able to write a letter to the editor of a newspaper/ periodicals or radio station or a TV channel telling them your reaction about a particular published item or broadcasted/ telecasted programme, give your suggestions and make complaints to the civic authorities through the columns of a newspaper/ periodical.

15.1 INTRODUCTION

On a page in a newspaper or a magazine, we find a space earmarked for some letters to the editor. In some publications, more space may be dedicated for this work. In a periodical, it is often in the first few pages while in newspapers, it is on the edit page, along with editorials and some articles. Even we have a weekly programme on the radio in which the letters from the listeners are read and responded to. The Electronic media too does not lag behind in soliciting response or feedback to its programmes. The New Media, or say blogging, is entirely based on the principal of participation by the readers.

Letters to the Editor column is one of the most widely read sections in a newspaper. Responding to an editorial or article that's published in your local paper is a good way to express yourself about the issue concerning you, community and the society.

Activity 1

Can you show your concern about an issue affecting the community in a letter to the Editor? Pl. elaborate your submission

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15.2 WHY SHOULD A READER OR VIEWER WRITE A LETTER TO THE EDITOR/ TV CHANNEL

We don't always like what we read in magazines, newspapers and online media or listen on various radio channels or view on TV channels. We may have a different perspective on a particular issue which may be at variance with the stand of the newspaper/periodical. Sometimes, we love the article, appreciate a talk and a live show on the television and want to add our appreciation or wish repetition of the programme on the air or the idiot box. If you have something to say, say it!

How to Communicate with Journalists

There are 101 excuses for not writing or calling the media when you see unfair, biased or inaccurate news coverage: "I don't know enough"; "I'm too busy"; "My computer crashed."

Communicating with journalists makes a difference. It does not have to be perfect; not all letters to journalists need to be meant for publication. Even a one-sentence, handwritten note to a reporter can be helpful. If you take the time to type a substantive letter, send copies of it to two or three places within the same media outlet- perhaps to the reporter, his or her editor, as well as to the letters-to-the-editor department.

If media outlets get letters from a dozen people raising the same issue, they will most likely publish one or two of them. So even if your letter doesn't get into print, it may help another one with a similar point of view get published. Surveys of newspaper readers show that the letters page is among the most closely read parts of the paper. It's also the page policy-makers look to as a barometer of public opinion.

When you write to journalists, be factual, not rhetorical. Do not personally attack them; that's more likely to convince them that they're in the right. Address them in the language that most journalists are trained to understand: Call on them to be responsible, professional, balanced and inclusive of diverse sources and viewpoints.

Letters that are intended for publication should usually be drafted more carefully. Here are some tips to keep in mind:

- Make one point (or at most two) in your letter. State the point clearly, preferably in the first sentence.
- Make your letter timely. If you are not addressing a specific article, editorial or letter that recently appeared in the paper you are writing to, then try to tie the issue you want to write about to a recent event.
- Refute or support specific statements, address relevant facts that are ignored, but do avoid attacks on the media in general or the newspaper in particular.
- Check the letter specifications of the newspaper to which you are writing. Length and format requirements vary from paper to paper. (Generally, two short paragraphs are ideal.)
- Look at the letters that appear in your paper. Is a certain type of letter usually printed?
- Support your facts. If the topic you address is controversial, consider sending documentation along with your letter. But don't overload the editors with too much info.
- Keep your letter brief.
- Write to different sections of the paper when appropriate. Sometimes the issue you want to address is relevant to the lifestyle, book review or other section of the paper.
- An increasing number of broadcast news programs (60 Minutes, All Things Considered, etc.) also solicit and broadcast "letters to the editor." Don't forget these outlets.

Way back in March 05, 1968, in the inaugural issue of the Delhi edition of the National Herald (now defunct), the legendary editor M. Chalpathi Rau wrote under the heading "**Letter from the Editor**".

Dear Readers,

It is usual for readers to write to the Editor; the Editor never writes back, he dare not, he need not.

You are welcome to write in this newspaper, and as a reader, read it too. There will be no limitations on your freedom; only, you should not perpetrate sedition, libel, or blasphemy, crimes against the state, against neighbours and against God. This freedom of yours may not be real. The Editor can refuse to publish what you write, mangle it or make mince-meat of it, cut and tailor it to suit his policy and taste. He has the last word.

With me, your freedom will be real. You are as good as I am. You make this newspaper as much as I do.

You have, however, to fulfill some conditions, play the rules of the game. You should respect grammar and the rules of composition, write English as she should be written. You should attain some minimum clarity of expression, even when you achieve the maximum confusion of thought. You should respect the

definite article and the past perfect and all other forms of perfection, and though you may write on both sides of the paper or write in long hand (your hand), it should be legible to the last syllable. You should never give me the excuse of throwing you into the wastepaper basket by being dull, abusive or irrelevant. You should be a writer, indeed.

Ross, the great Editor of the famous weekly 'New Yorker' insisted on legibility and clarity: he had the utmost contempt for anything he did not understand; so have I. Here are the Ross rules condensed:

1. Don't use too many adverbs.
2. Writing full of clichés is as bad an old barn full of bats.
3. You may be liberal with expletives, but not with adjectives.
4. On the whole, be hostile to puns.
5. So far as possible, make your piece grammatical. Fowler's *English Usage* is the reference book. But don't be precious about it.
6. A contributor's style shall be preserved, if he has a style.

You can write as you please, without imagining that the Editor is a maniac. You can write in anger, frustration, desperation, joy, but you should generally write with dignity and in tranquility. If you are an angry young man, you can write like one and damn the consequences. If you are an angry young woman, you can still write like an angry young man, if you like.

What will you write on? That is your business, but it is also mine. A lot of muck is written in what are called provincial papers, on booster pumps and drains. There are manholes in metropolitan towns too to write about, pompous mayors and stupid councilors, selfish and corrupt sanitary inspectors, dry fire-brigades, peevish policemen. You are free to complain, but we do not expect you to grumble perpetually. No public opinion column can be interesting, if it is packed with petty grouse and if personal venom is spit under an ugly and un-publishable pseudonym.

I do not care for your age, your sex, or your profession, what opinion you hold or why you hold it. I do not care whether you are serious or merely fond of writing. One thing you should not do. You should not impose yourself on us as the common man. The common man, to whatever centuries he may belong, cannot in this country read newspapers or write letters to editors. You give up your conceit; we shall give up ours. We shall jointly do something for the common man by exposing inefficiency, corruption, waste, delay, bureaucratism. You are our correspondent, You are our workaday Hogarth (British artist noted for his satirical narrative paintings and engravings); only, do not invent facts, do not grind axes.

You need not call us "esteemed journal" etc. It irritates us and is bad English; we have enough self-esteem and we are not easily flattered.

When submitting letters to the editor for publication, please be succinct and include your address though the address is not published. We reserve the right to edit for space, style or grammar.

These columns are yours now. You are free to express yourself on the city's rot or the ancestry of your town. This is my first letter to you, my last also. Hereafter, you will be writing to me, and I am only the Editor.

Activity 2

Can we communicate with journalists? If yes, how and why?

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.....
.....

Activity 3

What are the important tips while writing to a newspaper/periodical?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

Activity 4

What are the salient features in the Letter from the Editor by M. Chalapathi Rau?

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.....

15.3 SOME OTHER BASIC RULES OF A LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Here are a few easy steps to help you write to an editor of a publication.

1. Pick a topic that you feel passionate about. Relate it to an issue very recently discussed in the publication to which you are writing.
2. Think of new ways to discuss the topic and present unique solutions to the problem.
3. Write clearly and concisely following the limitations usually given on the editorial page or letters-to-the-editor page.

4. Include your major points within the first few paragraphs.
5. Preferably type your letter and that too with double spaces between lines.
6. Check your spellings thoroughly.
7. You don't need a long, rambling introduction to your subject. Just focus on one or two key points that you want to make and then get out.
8. Write short, punchy sentences, grouped in two or three paragraphs.
9. Be witty. Let your sense of humor and irony shine through. You can even be a little wicked, as long as you don't cross the line of good taste.
10. Avoid wornout cliches and weak puns (groan).
11. If you are responding to a columnist's views (or any other opinion piece), don't launch a personal attack on the columnist — attack his/her views. Offer a countervailing opinion. Try to advance the debate so that other readers might join in the discussion in subsequent letters.
12. If you have read a news story or feature article that relates to something you've experienced, respond by putting your own personal twist on the subject.
13. Don't send copies of your letter to a whole host of publications. Make it an original to the publication you really want to publish it. If you don't get it published within a week to 10 days, then try submitting it elsewhere.
14. Don't be greedy. If your letter is published, wait at least a month before submitting another one. Editors want to give a chance as many people as possible to comment on the issues.
15. Mail (snailmail) or e-mail your letter to the address listed for the publication.
16. Keep in mind that publications may verify by phone or in writing that you, and not someone attributing these opinions to you, authored the letter.

Tips & Warnings

- If you don't want your name published, emphasize this outside the body of the letter, either before the letter, following the letter, or both places.
- Publications rarely edit and, instead, select well-written and grammatically correct letters. Make it easy to publish yours.
- If your letter is going to be shortened, it will usually be the final paragraphs, so don't save your point for the end.

Writing a letter to the editor would seem to be fairly self-explanatory. But it's actually something of a science. Imagine that you are the letters editor for a major paper. You get hundreds of letters a day from around the world. Which ones do you publish? In short, you publish the ones that

- 1) get there first **and**
- 2) are brief, pointed and punchy.



Please send in your feedback to letters@teheka.com

FINDING THE CENTRE

An interview with Habib Tanvir is always a pleasure to read, but the thespian's take on "modern women" is priceless (*I Am Repelled by Intellectual Dwarves and Extremists*, June 14). Remembering his mother, Tanvir says, "She could balance things, an ability that isn't there in women today". Read with Tanvir's condemnation of the market economy and his body of work (especially the radical anti-modernity play *Sadak*), most people will dismiss Tanvir's statement as another instance of his fondness for the good things of the past. But Tanvir's remark seems hardly off-the-cuff; if anything, it is a sharply etched observation. In the insular celebration of all things new in India, women are projected as the prime beneficiaries. This harnessing of women to the juggernaut of capitalism — in the 'market', financial independence of women is a natural outcome — is rarely problematised in the media or elsewhere. Really, money is more often a necessity than a pleasure, and the pressure to earn can be one more burden on a woman. For all their newfound empowerment, today's women, it must be said as Tanvir does, don't seem to be able to bear it with ease.

Mahesh Kumar, Bangalore

WHO DARES WINS

Former Karnataka CM SM Krishna is right when he says that the Congress failed in Karnataka because it lacked a chief ministerial candidate (*They Got Me Here and Didn't Want Me to Contest*, June 7). Even in the 2004 general elections, the Congress did not project a prime ministerial candidate and when it managed a majority with the help of the Left and quite a few

regional outfits, Dr Manmohan Singh was chosen as the compromise candidate. This faulty strategy of Sonia Gandhi will not work any more. The Congress failed not just in Karnataka but elsewhere in Gujarat and Rajasthan mainly because it was contesting elections under non-playing captains. The so strongly projected playing captains like Narendra Modi, Vasudhara Raje and Yeddyurappa. The voters appreciated this and rooted

for them. While Modi, Raje and Yeddy thundered, Sonia, Rahul and Manmohan just squeaked. For the 2009 general elections, Sonia Gandhi is best advised to pad up herself or someone like Pranab Mukherjee well in time as the playing captain. Her apparent like Rahul Gandhi can at best be groomed as the 12th man carrying the drinks tray.

Col CV Venugopalan (Retd).
Palakkad, Kerala

ADVANI'S CHARIOTEER

Swapan Dasgupta's piece on Arun Jaitley (*The Master of Ceremonies*, June 7) is one of the most well written and incisive political articles I have read in recent times. As I have known Jaitley since the past 35 years, I can say that Swapan has given a very in-depth view of the man behind the personality. Arun Jaitley was one of the fight leaders to be arrested on June 26, 1975, when Indira Gandhi im-



ILLS AND CHILLS OF AGRA BAZAR

IT IS NICE TO SEE that TEHEKA has started a series on cities in transition. In the June 14 issue, the city profiled is Agra (*India's Capital Destination*), but the report fails to make sense of the real ills and chills of Agra. The description of 'Jugaad' occupies half of your report and the reporter seems to worry more about the loss of employment of that iron foundry worker and less about the havoc the polluting industries put on the Taj Mahal and the health of Agra's citizens. The report seems to have been made in a hurry and with a lot of help from the Internet. It mentions the regular features of modernisation such as shopping

malls, Modonalds and the so-called growing apartment culture but seems to miss things such as a new FM Radio station called Radio Mantra which is making the people of Agra go gaga. The report fails to mention St John's College, started in 1850 and the oldest college in Agra, when it talks of the city's educational institutions. And what's the big deal in samosa and kachori? It's loved not only in Agra but those of us living in the National Capital Region (NCR) region love them too. There is no mention of the loss of the great music tradition of the Agra gharana. The most enjoyable and world-famous sweet from Agra, the *patha*

made from white pumpkin, finds no mention, as if it's only the leather industry that's bringing all the revenue. The biggest problem of Agra is not water (people in some pockets of NCR get worse water in terms of taste and supply) but poor supply of electricity.

Still, it's heartening to see that Agra with all its woe and worry is earning for the country millions of rupees in tourism revenue. The Central and state governments should stop milking this tourism *kamdhenu* and invest in it an urban planning that is not imitative but which reflects the true Agra and its tradition.

Gaurhav H. Atri, Noida



In most cases, it's as simple as that.

1. **Respond the same day or not at all.** When you read an article that really makes you hot under the collar, write the response that very minute. If you choked on your coffee over an op-ed or a quote from a government official, write a two paragraph response that morning. This is the same for an article with a factual error, though most papers catch those on their own. You might feel better stewing for a couple of days and firing off a lengthy response, but the odds are you will do the work and your efforts will never be published. Send it overnight even — they will get it first thing in the morning.

posed the Emergency. He was leading an agitation, being the Delhi University Students' Union, against the declaration of Emergency. In spite of many inducements by the Congress to join the party, Jaitley was one of the last leaders to be released from Tihar Jail — after 18 months.

Rajiv Chopra, Jammu

TOO MUCH TERROR

Apropos the reports *The Politics of Terror and Terrorism* (May 31), why is it that after every bomb blast the police name some Muslim militant organisation, pick up some Muslim youths at random, torture them in custody to accept responsibility for the crime or keep them in jails for indefinite periods without filing any chargesheet in the court? One wonders what if some of the blasts in this country are planned and executed by Hindu organisations to brand Muslims as terrorists and to create communal unrest.

Nazir Ahmed, New Delhi

INTOLERABLE ATTACK

Attacking Lokmat editor Kumar Ketkar's residence was an extreme act of vandalism committed by the members of Shiv Sangram and should be punished severely. Ketkar was absolutely right in criticising the Maharashtra government on its plans to install a statue of Shivaji in the Arabian Sea. A vast financial deficit, severe power crisis and farmers' suicides are a small fraction of the numerous problems that are looming over the state's horizon. The state government makes no sincere attempt to alleviate these disasters and on the other hand plans to squander public money for ridiculous and silly purposes like erecting of statues. I am sure Shivaji would have shed tears at such events had he been alive today.

Sandeep Ghiya, Mumbai

In Maharashtra, Shivaji has been invoked to build a particular kind

of identity which is anti-Muslim at the core. This is contrary to the fact that Shivaji was not against Muslims; he had innumerable Muslims in his administration and army. He also had immense respect for Hazrat Baba Behutthorwale, a Sufi saint. By and by, the Maharashtra identity has come to be fixed around Shivaji alone, bypassing the glorious heritage of saints like Tukaram and Chokha Mela and doyens of social change like Jyotiba Phule and Ambedkar.

Parallel to this has been a growing intolerance where any criticism, real or perceived, against Shivaji is met with attack. This type of politics essentially wants to preserve the status quo and distract attention from basic social issues. One instance of this is the large number of temples and statues of Shabri and Hanuman being installed by the RSS affiliate Varvasi Kalyan Ahirram in Adivasi areas to give the subtle message that Adivasis are to upper caste what Hanuman and Shabri were to Lord Ram.

One recalls attacks on journalists in the aftermath of the Babri Masjid's demolition. What one is witnessing today are attacks on those speaking against divisive identity politics. While those undertaking such attacks must be punished, the identity politics itself needs to be defeated and people's issues need to be put on the forefront of the social agenda.

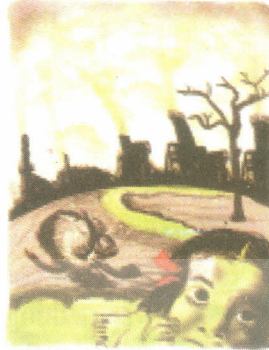
Ram Puniyani, by e-mail

DISPEL THE GLOOM

The cover story interview of R. Chidambaram (May 31) is the best example of how optimism should prevail. Our RM answers the

PEOPLE AREN'T PESTS

IT IS ASTONISHING to see that the Union government is still running a DDT factory even though India is a signatory to the Stockholm Convention and has banned the pesticide's use for agricultural purposes (Profits over People, June 7). Congratulations to TEHELKA and KA Shaji for such a fine piece of journalism. The willingness



to publish such stories is what makes TEHELKA different from the mainstream media. It is high time that the Union Minister of Fertilisers and Chemicals and his secretaries read Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*, a powerful account of the ill effects of DDT. What is the need of poisoning the African countries by exporting DDT from here?

Abhitha Kuriakose, Tamil Nadu

TEHELKA has done well in bringing into focus the harm done to human and animal life, crops, vegetation and water by the government-owned RM factory manufacturing DDT and Endosulfan. Situated about 18 km from Kochi city, the factor's effluents pollute the Periyar river on whose water the local population depends. The incidence of diseases like cancer and deformities at birth is high in the area. Chief Minister VS Achuthanandan, who was responsible for solving the problems of Endosulfan-affected people in the cashew plantations, should immediately shut the factory.

A. Jacob Sahayam, Thiruvananthapuram

gloomy questions of your reporter with complete positivity, even though he appears at times a bee-stung bear (with your reporters pricking him from all sides).

TEHELKA, raise your bar by at

least being optimistic. I urge you to take an oath to publish one positive report every week. Your stories make us feel gloomy, please do something about it.

Sameer Thole, Aurangabad

21 JUNE 2008 TEHELKA

2. **Identify yourself and why you are qualified to comment.**
"I was in Kashmir when insurgency began" or "I have just returned from a mission to the Chattisgarh....." are examples of good opening sentences.
3. **Keep it short.** Editors cut from the bottom, so put your main point up top. Letters should have short sentences and ideally, be no more than a couple of paragraphs long, no matter how ticked off you are about an article. Do not assume that because a piece is long, you must respond at the same length. The best advice I ever got from an editor (who cut my letter down to a single terse paragraph) is that short letters show confidence in your position — and long letters do the opposite. No one wants to read a long letter — and a point by point recitation of errors in an article only looks whiny and insecure.

4. **Style.** In terms of style, the best letters are punchy — and if possible, brief, wry and sharp. Some people are pre-disposed to think human rights types are annoying, humorless complainers anyway (of course we know this is not the case), but we don't need to reinforce that particular stereotype. Readers hate nit-pickers. Moreover, a point made with humor is one that people will remember. Did the author of that nasty National Review piece mis-spell your name six times? Make that point and gently imply that he is equally mistaken about the ICCPR.
5. **Know the style and format of where you are sending your letter.** A letter to the noted weekly Economist has a distinctive (British) style ("Sir:"). You can occasionally respond in a 1000 words in the New Republic or Commentary. Count yourself lucky to get a letter to the Hindustan Times (HT) in at 150 words (including your title or self description). The HT will still edit, even if you send in at this length, but it's better (and better form) to give them something short to work with.

Activity 5

Give at least eight most important easy steps to help you write a letter to the Editor.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.
- 8.

Activity 6

Give at least five important warnings while writing a Letter to The Editor

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

15.4 A SAMPLE LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Plan the letter first, before you start writing. A sample plan could have the following components:

1. Introduction: lead in to the issue
2. Body text: cover all relevant points/facts
3. Summary and/or conclusion: provide a solution and/or recommendation
4. Determine your key issue - write it down. Make sure your letter addresses the key issue and does not side-track to unrelated issues.
5. Identify and aim to develop an 'angle' (or theme). For example, you can:
 - respond to a previous letter (either for or against)
 - reference a recently published article
 - refer to a personal experience; what you have seen locally and/or overseas
 - comment on recently announced Government policy
6. While planning a letter, keep a scratch pad/sheet handy. Jot down any ideas or phrases that appeal to you onto a 'scratch sheet' before you forget them. This is similar to brainstorming.
7. Determine your target audience and write to their level. Some newspapers have 'educated' readers (you can use fancy words) while others are more tabloid oriented (keep your letter simpler).

Write a first draft of the letter, slotting in material from your scratch sheet. Make sure that you include text that covers all three sections (introduction/body text/summary).

Re-read your first draft and edit it:

- Check for grammar, spelling and punctuation mistakes
- Eliminate redundant words
- Re-sequence sentences or paragraphs to improve continuity.

The general form for letters is:

To the editor:

Sir,

Your June 20 editorial (or give page number) article on (describe the article here), totally missed the point.

Second paragraph: Explain why and give a couple of terse examples.

Close with a punchy one-liner. "The Finance Minister's concern is simply unconvincing in the face of increasing rate of inflation."

Cut to the chase and be witty to ensure your letter to the editor gets considered, rather than winding up in the reject pile.

Don't forget to put "Thanking you" in the last.

15.5 LET US SUM UP

Letters to the editor are among the hardest pieces to write. Just because they're short doesn't mean that it's easy to write one that a newspaper will actually print. Remember the old saying, "I would have written a shorter letter if I'd had more time."

The biggest challenge in writing a letter to the editor is making a compelling point in a brief space while still ensuring that readers can follow your argument even if they didn't see the news story to which you're responding. And it helps if the letter offers a clever, provocative, and as yet unexpressed perspective on an issue.

At the Washington Post (USA), for example, the most important rule editors use in deciding whether to print a letter is "Beware of predictability." So say something no one else has said. And remember, newspapers receive hundreds of letters a day, so yours must stand out to be printed. Not an easy feat in only 200–300 words! With careful thought about what you want to communicate and a well-written letter, your chances of publication will increase and allow you to provide another idea or perspective on an issue.

Don'ts

- Avoid being abusive or strident.
- Don't chase your letter personally or by phone or by sending reminder. It is a practice which is not liked by the editors.

Activity 8

What is the biggest challenge in writing a Letter to the Editor?

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Activity 9

Give two points which you should avoid while writing a Letter to the Editor?

- 1.
- 2.

15.6 AIDS TO ACTIVITIES

Activity 1

Read 15.1 again

Activity 2

Hint: Don't find excuse to write a Letter to the Editor

Activity 3

Hint: There are as many as nine tips to write a Letter to the Editor

Activity 4

Hint: Read the Letter from the Editor once again

Activity 5 and 6

Read 15.3 again thoroughly

Activity 7

Hint: Read the letters, published in this unit and in newspapers and periodicals frequently

Activity 8

Hint: Just because they're short doesn't mean that it's easy to write

Activity 9

Read 15.5 again. Remember, these are the most important tips for writing a Letter to the Editor



UNIT 16 REVIEWS

Structure

- 16.0 Objectives
- 16.1 Introduction
- 16.2 Book Reviews
- 16.3 Music Journalism
- 16.4 Film Criticism
- 16.5 Small Screen or Television reviews
- 16.6 Art Criticism
- 16.7 Let us Sum Up
- 16.8 Aid to Activities

16.0 OBJECTIVES

This unit is aimed to introduce you to the art of reviews. No major newspaper - regional or national - or periodical - weekly, fortnightly or monthly – is considered complete without devoting a section on reviews of books, films, music, theatre, art etc. A reviewer acts as a conduit between the art and the audience. The job of a reviewer is a part time one.

At the end of the this unit, you should be able to

- understand the importance of reviews in media;
- nuances of reviews;
- impact of reviews on the audiences

16.1 INTRODUCTION

The range and sweep of the books, music concerts, films, art exhibitions and theatre shows continue to flood the market in an unceasing stream. The process has been accelerated in the wake of rapid industrialization coupled with advancement of civilization and culture. One can easily drown in that ocean of written words, film shows, play, music concerts and art works so to say. There is too much information lapping on the shores of our understanding, and we have got to learn to reject the superfluous, useless and wrong kind of information, as well as the polluting fallout of the culture media. The reviews help the readers/viewers in sifting the grain from the chaff.

Reviews are no longer monopoly of the print media. The broadcasting and electronic (TV) media too are devoting enough time on the cultural scene of which reviews are an integral part.

A review is intended for non-expert or common readers/ viewers. The level of the audience, therefore, is more important than the expertise of the reviewer. A good review should be explanatory without being too technical; descriptive

without being too elaborate; evaluative without taking recourse to an absolute value-judgement. A good routine review should attempt to describe, explain, assess and evaluate without expressing too much of the reviewer's own point of view or notions or prejudice. It should give the audience enough information to go to that work, if they so wish with an open mind. The language of a good review is simple and direct.

The job also demands that the viewer/reader should not feel his precious time and money wasted on the recommendation. Your audience will be according to the medium in which you are writing the review. A reviewer is supposed to understand the mind of the contemporary world, and analyse the subject of review according to that. That can be safely said to be the first rule of review; understanding the importance of the subject.

Activity 1

What are the qualities of a good review?

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16.2 BOOK REVIEWS

In the realm of books, a caustic review hastened the premature death of the intense, invalid poet, Keats. Later Byron was to write:

“Tis strange that the mind, that most fiery particle
should let itself be snuffed out by an article.”

For the publishing industry and the authors, the book review columns form a channel of communications to the readers. They also help the librarians too to select books.

The book reviews that appear in modern journalism are of a different kind than the literary criticism. They are mostly press notices of books as they are released from time to time. In modern journalism the function of book review is to let the readers know what are the new arrivals on the book stands. Broadly speaking, they are quick notices – not meant to be value judgements – as such. The modern authors, modern reviewers and modern readers are in a hurry.

The differences, we can see in the book review columns of the foreign journals and of our papers. It is not only the qualitative difference, which is very much there. There is a question of timing also – the timing of book notices. Sometimes, there are pre-publication notices. At any rate, they will appear as soon as the new publications hit the book-stands. People know such and such books have arrived when they read the notices in the papers. The reviewers and the editors do not sit on the books, either, if they are to be noticed at all. They do a quick job of it. There are instances of the new books reviewed simultaneously in major newspapers and periodicals. But in

our country, the subjectivity, often riding the objectivity of the editor of a newspaper or a periodical or the person-in-charge of the book-review page or section, makes the very purpose of the book review section often defeated.

Some outstanding Indian book reviewers included Sham Lal (didactic and polemical), Dilip Padgaonkar (ideological), Krishna Chaitanaya (philosophical-encyclopaedic in range), V.V. John (urbane, pleasantly pedantic), C. P. Ramchandran (political-sparkling kind), Inder Malhotra (gossipy, readable), N.S. Ramaswamy (chatty, nostalgic), Sadhan Kumar Ghosh etc. Among them Dilip Padgaonkar and Inder Malhotra still contribute in publications. Pradeep Sebastian and Ravi Vyas writes regularly in *The Hindu* (book-review page and *Literary Supplement*) with gusto, reminding that the new generation is not devoid of spark.

To borrow Dr. Samuel Johnson's remark "the only end of writing is to enable the reader better to enjoy life or better to endure life", one can say that the only aim of reviewing should be to enable good authors to flourish, and to discourage the bad ones. Also to help the readers know what books are to be read and enjoyed, and what to avoid. In short, it is a service to the book lovers, if done honestly and competently.

Barring some refreshing exceptions, of course, our reviewers play safe, perhaps because they are not really sure whether the book is good or bad. Whenever they have a critical opinion, they hasten to make it up by a good chit or two with a 'nevertheless' or 'on the whole', 'however' etc. The stamp of authority is seldom noticeable in our book reviews. There are also reviewers who go to the other extreme, trying to feel and look important by picking on minor faults in an otherwise good book. It is all right to point out lapses, in a constructive spirit – that is part of the reviewer's job – but it should not be forgotten that what the would-be-reader wants to know is the highlight of a book and not whether a comma is misplaced here or there, or whether the reviewer is cleverer than the author.

Some reviewers plod on...."The book under review contains III parts divided into 21 chapters running into 427 pages. Chapter I says.....Chapter II deals with..... The appendices and the charts add to the value of the book which is a must for every library.....Printing and get up are excellent, though the price is a little on the high side.....etc. Such treatment to a book in the form of a book review is blatantly dishonesty as readers look to the reviewer as a guide for their own reading and do not deserve such superficial treatment.

A good reviewer will present the highlights of a book, as he sees it with a few deft touches, and sums up what he thinks about it. Of course a few quotes may be necessary, and some frills added for the grace of writing. Objectivity is the ideal to be aimed at, but some subjective colouring is inevitable. If the review is too subjective, it may become a caricature of the book, instead of being a fair portrait of it. Some reviewers use a book as not only a peg to hang their pet theories and prejudices but also to hang the author! Otherwise they set out to praise him, irrespective of the merits of the book. But we have mostly the safe, dull, neither-here-nor-there reviews in the columns of our newspapers and periodicals.

THE EYE OF THE BEHOLDER

The most insightful and definitive book about Indian cinema

PRADEEP SEBASTIAN

DON'T THINK the word Bollywood figures even once in Chidananda Das Gupta's *Seeing is Believing*, and for this to occur in a new book on Indian cinema is as refreshing for a reader as surfacing to breathe good, clean air. Das Gupta himself won't be so quick to make any such judgement — his essays here avoid condescension, allowing the reader to think up their own conclusions, nimbly jumping over that old trap of good and bad. To even say that there are only two kinds of cinema — not artistic and popular cinema but just good and bad cinema — is itself simplistic, warns the critic early in the book. Or take his essay on the nexus between cinema and politics in Tamil Nadu. With deft scholarship and analysis, he demonstrates how MGR's screen image was often taken to be MGR himself by the people. He doesn't, however, gloss any further (is this a good thing or a bad thing?) but simply paints a clear-eyed, detailed picture for you to consider.

Das Gupta is the last (and perhaps the best) of our film critics who can offer insight and style in writing on cinema. Contemporary film criticism is either breathless and journalistic or academic and abstract. What we have today, are film reviewers and film theoreticians, not the film critic as scholar, the film critic as film historian. Das Gupta's arguments are complex, original, subtle and persuasively shot through with scholarship. The book has several 'critic-at-large' essays, with the last part given over to notes on five filmmakers — no guesses about who they are (this is the only predictable part of the book): Ray, Ghatak, Mrinal Sen, Adoor and Benegal.

In 'Why The Films Sing' the critic writes that the song is "the transcendental element in the language of popular cinema." He notes that

behind its puritanical façade. Indian cinema is really erotic, and ever since the kiss was banned in the late 1930s, our cinema has found the song to replace sex. But even with the total ban on kissing being lifted, the Indian movie kiss remains "somewhat perfunctory... never suggesting the satisfactions of a real, wet kiss exploring the entire body as it were through the mouth."

An important and fascinating addition to our knowledge of early Indian film history is an essay titled, 'Precursors of Unpopular Cinema', where he picks out early examples of

films that were more personal, artistic and socially committed, opening up and defining an art cinema sensibility (he prefers to call it 'unpopular cinema'). Another essay brings the reader back to a discussion on parallel and popular cinema, tracing the roots of the distinction between these two to the notion of *margi* and *desi* in classical Indian aesthetics.

'The Crisis in Film Studies' is his attack on film academicians for "turning what is basically a picture into a 'text'... divesting it of its directness, its non-verbal being." He rein-

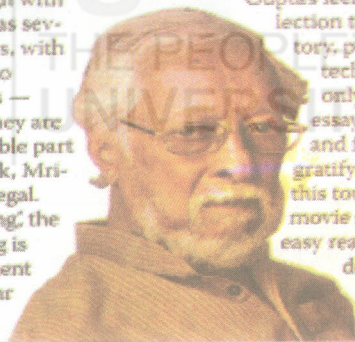
forces this, quoting Susan Sontag: "To interpret is to impoverish, deplete the world — in order to set up a shadow world of meanings." If film studies in India has to be relevant, urges Das Gupta, it has to "redefine categories in the light of the country's own tradition and its modern experience."

Among all the essays that have tried to define and describe Indian New Cinema, Das Gupta's feels like the definitive one. This collection tells of cinema in the context of history, politics, religion, culture and technology. I found the book wanting only in one respect — the absence of essays on contemporary Indian films and filmmakers. It would have been gratifying and interesting to find out what this tough-minded critic thinks of the movie scene now. *Seeing is Believing* is not easy reading but in the end, its rigour and depth wins you over.

(The reviewer is a literary columnist with *The Hindu*)



SEEING IS BELIEVING
Chidananda Das Gupta
Penguin
304pp; Rs 499



21 JUNE 2008 TEHELKA

In order to write a book review, you must not only be interested in reading but also develop the habit of analyzing what you read, and compare it with other books in the same field. Scholarship is the basis for a good review but take care not to show off your learning

At the end of a review, don't forget to give the standard details of:

Name of the author with the last name first (year of publication), *Title*, Place of publication; publisher (no. of pages, price of hardback/paperback, ISBN No.).

The average length of a book review in a double-spaced manuscript is around 500 to 600 words. There are at least three publications in India that are exclusively dedicated to the book reviews : *The Book Review*, *Biblio*, and

The Indian Review of Books. The Hindu is the only newspaper in the country, publishing a four-page literary supplement every fortnightly. The Times Literary Supplement (TLS) and the New York Times Sunday Book Review are famous publication abroad.

Activity 2

Do book reviews differ from literary criticisms?

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Activity 3

What is the difference between book reviews in publications in India and abroad?

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Activity 4

Name some of the Prominent book reviewers in the country?

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Activity 5

Name three publications exclusively dedicated to book reviews?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

16.3 MUSIC JOURNALISM

Music journalism is criticism and reportage about music. It began in Europe in the eighteenth century as comment on what is now thought of as 'classical music'. This aspect of music journalism, today generally classified as music criticism, comprises the study, discussion, evaluation, and interpretation of music and its performance. Modern music criticism is often informed by music theory consideration of the many diverse elements of a musical piece or performance, including (as regards a musical composition) its form and style, and as regards performance, standards of technique and expression.

A music critic is someone who reviews music and publishes writing on them in books or journals or on the internet. It is not necessary that a critic be a

composer of classical music also. Critics have not always been respected by their subjects. A rock music composer declared that “Most rock journalism is people who can’t write, interviewing people who can’t talk, for people who can’t read.” Little wonder, music critics are often on the receiving end as their subjects do not like negative reviews of their composition or performance.

Subudu and Mohan Nadkarni, Manjari Sinha and Ravindra Mishra are among the prominent Indian Music critics.

Activity 6

What are the salient features of Music journalism?

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16.4 FILM CRITICISM

Film criticism is the analysis and evaluation of films, individually or collectively. Film critics working for newspapers, magazines, broadcast media, and online publications, mainly review new releases. Normally they only see any given film once and have only a day or two to formulate opinions. Despite this, critics have an important impact on films, especially those of certain genres. The popularity of mass-marketed action, horror, and comedy films tend not to be greatly affected by a critic’s overall judgment of a film. The plot summary and description of a film that makes up the majority of any film review can have an important impact on whether people decide to see a film. For prestige films with a limited release the influence of reviews is extremely important. Poor reviews will often doom a film to obscurity and financial loss.

The impact of reviews on a film’s box office performance is a matter of debate. Some claim movie marketing is so intense and well financed that reviewers cannot make an impact against it.

Film producers respect the clout of reviewers. Since so much money is riding on positive reviews, studios often work to woo film critics. Any major release is accompanied by mailings to film critics press kits containing background information, many photos for use in a publication, and often small gifts. Film reviewers who appear on television are given clips from the movie which they may use.

However, when the noted film critic David Lardner was asked his opinion on Hollywood’s Panama Hattie, he said, “This film needs a certain something, possible burial.” On the other hand, Noted Indian actress Jaya Bachchan bristled, “Are there any”, when Karan Johar asked her in the rapid-fire round in her famous TV programme “Koffee with Karan” to respond to ‘film critics’. Her contention, which many will agree with, is that those who claim to write criticism are often persons who do little more than detail the storyline, something anyone can do. Their reviews have no informed comments on camera work or lighting. Critics are also accused of not really having the

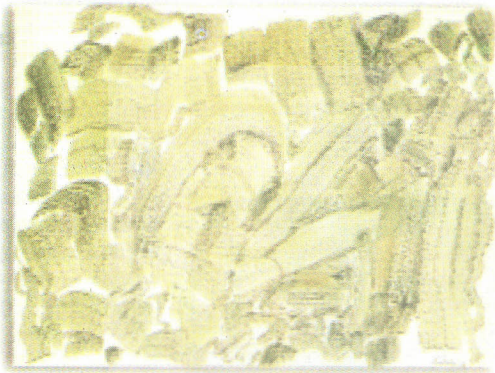
pulse of the people. What better example than *Sholey*, the blockbuster of its time, which a prominent critic of that period described as “a mishmash of East and West, neither here or there.”

Movie critic Pauline Kael's columns in *The New Yorker* in the '70s and '80s were must-sees in Hollywood. “You had to read it,” It used to be said about his column. “You just weren't in the business if you didn't. Today, Kael is considered one of the most influential film critics in the history of the medium.

Film reviews are quite different with the lengthy columns, dominating the space in newspapers and magazines these days in respect to gossips in the film world.

MASTERTAKES

CULTURE CRITIQUE BY THOSE WHO KNOW



The spirit within:
A still from Ambadas
Khobragade's exhibition
of abstract paintings

SIRAJ SAXENA ON

ART

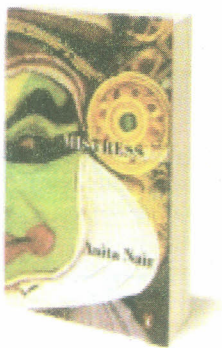
An artist I have admired and emulated over the years is *Ambadas Khobragade*, a senior artist who resides in Norway. I would equate him with the likes of MF Hussain. Recently, I saw some of his work at the Delhi Art Gallery. One that particularly struck me was an abstract painting from 2002 where Khobragade used mixed mediums. Burnt amber was the predominant colour, giving it a very rich texture. The representation was a unique mixture of geometrical patterns and calligraphic drawings. The application of colour is simple and non-decorative. What is remarkable about Khobragade's work is that it encapsulates the geography of the human soul. It is a complete detachment from the material world. There are never any explicit forms in the paintings. Instead it's a mirror held up to reflect the mediums that make up the world.

Saxena is a Delhi-based artist

MENKA SHIVDASANI ON

BOOKS

I have recently read *Anita Nair's* new book, *Mistress*. It was on the Orange Prize for fiction long list 2008. I think it is a masterful piece of work, richly textured and multilayered, and she unmasks these layers with care. Dance is the central motif in this novel and Nair, who is known for researching her subject in depth, had enrolled in a Kerala Kalamandalam to write this book. The protagonist, Radha, is married to a man she sees as an ambitious and insensitive boor, and finds herself drawn to a cello-playing foreigner who has moved in. By itself, this might have been a slight narrative but Nair successfully weaves in different strands



NAIR UNMASKS THE
LAYERS WITH CARE,
WEAVING IN STRANDS
FROM THE PAST

MENKA SHIVDASANI

Compiled by TUSHNA MITAL

from the past. She takes the ordinary and makes it memorable.

Shivdasani is the author of *Steet* and *Nirvana at Ten Rupees*



JULIANO ON

FOOD

I recently ate at the *Sakura* restaurant at the Metropolitan Hotel Nikko. It was an amazing experience and the combination of great food and pleasant ambiance makes it a place worth going to. The menu is expansive and features some of the most authentic Japanese dishes. One dish in particular that I really enjoyed was the soup they had specially made for me. The taste is still lingering in my mouth. The ambience too is authentically Japanese with small private booths where one can enjoy with family and friends. The décor of the place is very minimalist and elegant and it is a chic restaurant that caters to the very best. Their clientele is very upmarket and mostly in-house Japanese guests. I would recommend the place to those who have adventurous taste buds and like to experiment with their food. I'm sure if they are looking for some exciting options for eating out, *Sakura* will definitely top that list.

Juliano is chef
at the Delhi-based Olive restaurant

RYAN LOBO ON

PHOTO

A photograph that caught my attention recently was by a photographer called *Saibal Das*. It is a black and white image and has an ethereal quality about it. I like the image because it is the shot of a circus performer, but not while she's in the middle of a stunt. It has been taken when the performer is in isolation from the frenzied world of the circus around her. It is a quiet moment; the image is of a person alone with herself, anonymous, non-glamorous, human and tempo-



Chidananda Das Gupta, Mohd. Shamim, Khalid Mohammed, Subhash K. Jha, K.M. Amladi and Ziya us Salam figures among the prominent film critics whose comments mattered in the industry and are often respected by the film-goers.



rary. She seems lost in reflection. The image and his entire collection of photographs centered around circus performers reveals the humanity of these performers and of Saibal Das himself.

Lobo is a Bangalore-based photographer

BOBBY ON MUSIC 

Of late, I've been listening to a lot of upcoming Indian artists who are extremely talented and versatile. There is Delhi-based Chayan Adhikari who has come up with some brilliant solo songs. Another

artist that enthusiasts should definitely check out is Mumbai-based Nikhil. He is a singer as well as a songwriter and his sound is very acoustic. It is not exactly pop-ish like John Mayer, but is blended with an intensity that is reflected in his lyrics. He has a wonderful voice which completely blew me away, an unusual combination of sweet and husky.

Overall, his musical compositions are extremely well done. Another band I'd like to recommend is Swarathma, a Bangalore-based group that plays Hindi folk music. Their sound is very fresh. They play music influenced heavily by English, Hindi and Kannada.

Bobby is a member of Mumbai-based band Zero



Cultural strings:
A member of Hindi folk band Swarathma

theTAKE

AN OFFER YOU CAN REFUSE

POWER CANNOT BE given, it has to be taken" is a caption that rightfully belong to state electricity boards. It is no surprise then that electricity is at the core of *Sarkar Raj*. Anita (Aishwarya Rai) and her father have brought their international power project to Maharashtra and need the help of Subhash "Sarkar" Nagre (Amitabh Bachchan) and his son Shankar (Abhishek Bachchan), the powers behind the CM's throne, to be able to set it up. The project will provide electricity to the entire state but displace thousands. This time around, Shankar has taken up the reins of power and, despite Sarkar's objections, decides to support the project for the sake of progress. This plunges us back into the

world of Sarkar with its searing music and thumping beats.

Yet this time, through Ram Gopal Verma's characteristic angled shots, sepia tones and dim lighting, we see a new story forming. One that is less concerned with the underworld than with the politics of development. There are questions worth pursuing here. Can business be trusted with the progress of the nation? Do Indians, as one of the villains claims, want entertainment not development?

The movie unfortunately pursues none of these questions. With a sudden nod at *Godfather* before the interval, it shifts gear and returns to the underworld once more. There are still themes that interest. The tenderness between father and son. The tension and trust between the old and the young. The shades of Sarkar's dead son Vishnu that haunt the family. Abhishek and Amitabh create several



FILM - SARKAR RAJ
DIRECTOR - RAM GOPAL VARMA
STARRING - AMITABH BACHCHAN, ABHISHEK BACHCHAN, AISHWARYA RAI BACHCHAN

THERE ARE NO ANSWERS FOR THE SCEPTIC AS SARKAR RAJ SPINS OUT A ROUTINE ENDING, RESOLVING TENSIONS THAT HAVEN'T BEEN BUILT UP ENOUGH

memorable moments together keeping the movie alive. Abhishek does a competent job despite being allowed to smile just once. He broods but conveys wells of emotion beneath his aggressive front. Amitabh is excellent, often conveying reams with just a flicker of the eyelid.

All of these, however, do not hold the film up. Rai's performance is unconvincing. Her character could have been the central one given its scope but remains secondary and forgettable. There are also no answers for the sceptical viewer as the film spins out its routine ending, resolving tensions that haven't been built up enough. Where is Shankar's wife while he spends all his time with Anita? Why is Anita constantly present during the most intimate scenes of the Nagre family's life? Is it just that reel life cannot but help imitate real life? Why do characters that have been shot once turn around and cleverly decide to absorb as many bullets as they can?

Neither political nor thrilling, *Sarkar Raj* falls between two stools. RGV squanders an interesting plot to fall back on a familiar conspiracy. He might have had the guts to script a ruthless plot but he still does not have the guts to make a ruthless film.

VIVEK NITYANANDA



Activity 7

Do film criticism or reviews have any impact on the mass-market of a film?

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Activity 8

How did Ms. Jaya Bachchan react when asked about the role of film critic in India?

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Activity 9

What was the reaction of a film critic on 'Sholey'?

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Activity 10

Name some prominent film critics in India

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16.5 SMALL SCREEN OR TELEVISION REVIEWS

"We form our impressions through distilled images from television," says a TV critic of repute in the United States. A TV critic's job is writing about these images, rather than the programmes themselves.

A good TV critic doesn't write about what's on television; he writes about television itself. Television is more than the idiot box. Television is worthy of respect. That does not mean it is the best but it is the most important and influential. A TV critic looks at television as a cultural force, he looks deeper at the medium that most closely mirrors our society. A good critic doesn't just write about television as if it mattered; he knows it does.

Ms. Kavita Nagpal, A.N. Mudgal, Romesh Chandra, Dr. Sunil Kothari, Prayag Shukla, Diwan Singh Bajeli, Ajit Rai, Leela Ventakaraman, Anjana Rajan and Ms. Shanta Sarbjeet Singh are prominent Indian dance and drama critics.

Activity 11

Is television more than the idiot box? If yes, why?

Activity 12

16.6 ART CRITICISM

Art criticism is responding to, interpreting meaning, and making critical judgements about specific works of art. Usually art criticism focuses on individual, contemporary works of art.

Edmund Feldman, a famous Art critic writes that art criticism is “spoken or written ‘talk’ about Art” and that “the central task of criticism” is interpretation. He developed a widely used sequential approach to art criticism based on description, analysis, interpretation, and judgment.

Stephen Dobbs another renowned Art critic states that, through art criticism, people “look at art, analyze the forms, offer multiple interpretations of meaning, make critical judgments, and talk or write about what they see, think, and feel.”

Terry Barrett, hailing from the class of Art critic bases his approach to art criticism on the four activities of describing, interpreting, judging, and theorizing about art. He suggests that, although all four overlap, “Interpretation is the most important activity of criticism, and probably the most complex.” Though interwoven with description, analysis, and judgement, interpretation of the meaning of individual works of art is of foremost concern in contemporary art criticism.

Cardinal Principles of Interpretation:

- Artworks have ‘aboutness’ and demand interpretation.
- Interpretations are persuasive arguments.
- Some interpretations are better than others.
- Good interpretations of art tell more about the artwork than they tell about the critic.
- Feelings are guides to interpretations.
- There can be different, competing, and contradictory interpretations of the same artwork.
- Interpretations are often based on a world view.

- Interpretations are not so much absolutely right, but more or less reasonable, convincing, enlightening, and informative.
- Interpretations can be judged by coherence, correspondence, and inclusiveness.
- An artwork is not necessarily about what the artist wanted it to be about.
- A critic ought not to be the spokesperson for the artist.
- Interpretations ought to present the work in its best rather than its weakest light.
- The objects of interpretation are artworks, not artists.
- All art is in part about the world in which it emerged.
- All art is in part about other art.
- No single interpretation is exhaustive of the meaning of an artwork.
- The meanings of an artwork may be different from its significance to the viewer.
- Interpretation is ultimately a communal endeavour, and the community is ultimately self-corrective.
- Good interpretations invite us to see for ourselves and to continue on our own.

(Barret, Terry, (1994) *Criticising Art: Understanding the Contemporary*)

K.L. Kaul, Manohar Kaul, Keshav Malik, K.B. Goel, Suneet Chopra, K.B. Goel, Santo Datta, Leela Venkatraman and Shantiveer Kaul figures among the prominent Indian art critics.

Activity 13

Give most important cardinal principles of Interpretation?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.

Activity 14

Name some prominent Art Critics in India?

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16.7 LET US SUM UP

In his book *On writing Well*, William Zinsser says that good critics, true critics, do more than just review programmes, but actually provide a cultural context for what they are reviewing, in addition to their own opinions and thoughts.

In every other school of criticism – film, music, literary and theatre – there are Great Critics, critics whose writings are required reading for anyone even peripherally involved in that business.

16.8 AIDS TO ACTIVITIES

Activity 1

Read 16.1 again and also read 16.2

Activity 2, 3, 4 & 5

Read 16.2 thoroughly

Activity 6

Hint: Classical Music

Activity 7

Hint: Box office hits on the basis of film reviews

Activity 8,9 and 10

Read 16.4 thoroughly

Activity 11

Hint: Television as a cultural force

Activity 12

Read 16.5 again

Activity 13 and 14

Read 16.6 thoroughly



ignou

THE PEOPLE'S
UNIVERSITY

