

**Institute of Distance and Open Learning  
Gauhati University**

**Master of  
Communication & Journalism**

**Paper X  
Opinion Writing**

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**Unit 1**  
**Concept of Opinion Writing**

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**1.1 Introduction :**

From the very beginning of your course you must have been familiar with the saying which is repeated often in connection with Journalism that it is the duty of a journalist to present news 'as it is'. Similarly, you must also be aware of the fact that news and opinions must not be mixed up at all.

Then, it is quite natural for you to raise the question as to what is the importance of opinion in mass communication. Yes, it is indeed a valid question and the answer is that opinion is indeed a very important aspect of communication and in the mass media.

This is so because we all know that media personnel are a privileged lot in the society. With their long years of service and exposure from their day to day work in analyzing various complex issues of public interest, they develop a certain kind of expertise over them. And when a nation or society faces a crisis at any moment of time, they look up to the mass media to show them right path and thereby lead them out of the crisis.

An average reader of a newspaper or magazine, a viewer of TV or a listener of radio programmes (whether news or entertainment) is usually expected to be a common man or woman, not very much interested or skillful, to think about how to rescue themselves at times of turmoil in the society. There comes the highly important role of opinions to show the people the right path and thus lead them to a better situation.

### **1.2 Objectives :**

After completing the study of this unit you must be able to

- *discuss* the concept of opinion in mass communication
- *make* a thorough analysis of its various aspects
- *explain* different types of opinions and their implications for the masses
- *articulate* why these are so important

### **1.3 Concept of Opinion Writing :**

It is not at all easy to explain the concept of opinion, especially in the context of mass communication. Yet, for your convenience, it can be said that an opinion is a conclusion arrived at by a person on any issue, whether small or big, after a process of logical thinking about it. It can take many forms. Such as – an article, an analytical news item, a feature, an editorial, letters to the editor, columns on any particular issue, etc. These are the

most common forms of opinions you are always flooded with while you go through your daily newspapers or magazines.

In other words, it is nothing but looking at something from a person's own point of view. This point of view need not be endorsed by any other person. But then, it is important to remember that opinion writing in the mass media is not and cannot take the form of writing a pamphlet.

So, in simple terms we can say that an opinion is the expression of a person's way of thinking about a certain issue or event communicated through the mass media.

We all know that news media includes in its fold newspapers, magazines, TV and Radio channels and also internet news outlets. Now, even though news items must not be mixed up with views, there is a place for views or opinions in the news media. And it has a specific grammar or norm.

A news media - a newspaper, magazine, TV / Radio channel - is nothing but a judicious combination of news and views. The success or the popularity of a newspaper or magazine or a news channel actually depends upon the ability of the editor to present a balanced newspaper to the readers or masses. And that is where the concept of opinion writing becomes important in the industry. In other words, it is necessary that the news media contains news as it is (called hard news) and also carry opinions on at least the important news stories so that the readers/viewers/listeners get a complete picture.

While at the same time it is also important that news and views should never be mixed at all. A news item has to be presented in the exact form in which it has happened. One should never mix one's own opinion in it as this will amount to opinion rather than news.

The importance of opinions in a newspaper/channel/radio/web magazine is that mass media is one of the most reliable means of communicating with the maximum number of people at the same time in any society. In other words it is one mode of communication which can reach out to millions and crores of people everywhere in an instant (for electronic media) or within a few hours (in case of print media). Hence, this is the most preferred media for intellectuals, social leaders and others concerned for passing on their messages to the masses in the most convenient mode.

Under this knowledgeable, people including intellectuals express their concerns, assessment of situations and offer opinions about its positive or negative aspects or may be a balanced view of the subject. Thus, a wide variety of angles relating to the issues are discussed at length which ultimately leads to exposing all the options in front of the masses.

In these deliberations, the persons concerned express their own opinions or points of views on those issues. However, it is not that they urge the masses or the readers and viewers of newspapers or electronic media channels to specifically support any issue at hand. That will amount to exhorting the people to subscribe to their views which may not be a welcome step. Such acts, in fact, can even create problems for the media organisation and corrode the credibility of the organisation in the long run. It is important that opinion writing is different from propaganda or a campaign.

The purpose of an opinion article or a discussion with experts is to ensure that the readers/viewers/listeners are enabled to consider the different views and opinions on an issue on hand and then decide, on their own, which one to be adopted and which not. This is why the role of opinions in mass media is extremely important by any count.

Let us point out to a fine example. You must all be familiar with the controversial act Illegal Migrants (Determination by Tribunal) or in short the IM (DT) Act. This was a biased act in itself and a lot of eminent personalities expressed opposition to it in the various mass media forums. However, there were quite a few people, who on the other hand felt that it was a fair act which should be supported. Hence, for a long time, the mass media printed and broadcast a whole lot of articles, write ups, columns, discussions and debates about this act which were a mix of those opposing it as well as those not opposed to it. And the masses formed their own opinion about the act and expressed themselves in their own way and in their own fora.

Similarly, during the famous Assam Agitation against the illegal migrants to the state from Bangladesh most of the newspapers followed specific ways of dealing with it. Many of them supported the movement while others made a critical assessment of the various aspects of the movement and still others opposed it. Hence, we are stressing on the fact that media is an open university and an open platform for all kinds of issues confronting the society at any moment of time. The mass media, in other words, is a melting pot of ideas and views and in many instances reflect the turmoil in the society too.

This is one special platform which plays host to all the opinions even when some of them might go vehemently against the socially accepted conventions. Yet, it allows the people to look at an issue from different standpoints and thereby become wise enough to accept the most logical conclusion out of all the options made available to them.

At the same time, opinions are distinct from the editorials. The editorials published by all the newspapers and magazines enjoy the privilege of being allowed to directly ask people to follow a certain path whenever there arises

a crisis or problem in the society. It is clearly a view taken by the newspaper and in many ways a statement made by the organisation on a particular issue.

Whereas, the articles, write ups or other forms of opinions published in the editorial pages of newspapers and magazines are expected to present the various possible solutions to an issue from different standpoints. But the editor or the editorial personnel have the privilege of being able to analyze them seriously and thus urge the people to follow a specific option.

For example, all of you may remember the controversy which arose when the Indo-US agreement on Civil Nuclear Cooperation, called the 123 agreement, was to be signed between India and the USA some time back. During this period also, many articles and opinions were seen published in the media from experts and people concerned. So, under those circumstances, nothing can be a better option than to look up to mass media for a direction. At this point, the articles, write ups on the issue, speak of the individual opinions of the people after they have arrived at it from their own in-depth study. Further, the news items on those issues just present the facts and happenings as they are, without any personal opinion of the journalist or the newspaper as a whole.

The opinions are actually published in the form of editorials and other types of opinionated writings published in the media.

For the human society around the world, a newspaper or a media agency is not just a tool for disseminating news items to the masses. In the course on Introduction to Mass Communication you have already become familiar with the saying that mass communication plays the important functions of informing, educating, agenda-setting and persuading the masses among others. So, it



is not simply an instrument for informing us about what is happening somewhere nearby as well as at a distant place. It also has a very important social responsibility to be fulfilled towards the human beings in every society.

Mass media, especially news media is a universal platform which is an open forum for debates and discussions virtually on any and every issue on the earth. It provides the right platform for broadcasting and expressing all types of possible views of any issue – positive, negative, neutral. This serves the very purpose of informing the masses of the various possible alternatives available to them so that they can choose the most convenient and right one for them under their respective circumstances. Thus, mass-media has a much more important role to play in any society anywhere in the world in addition to just disseminating news and information to the masses.

#### **1.4 Innovations on Edit Page :**

"Everything is subject to change except the law of changes". Similarly, mass communication and media are also highly dynamic entities which improvise themselves from time to time and more particularly with the changes in technology and society. Let us consider, for example, the Radio. In the decade of the 1980s and later, due to the advent of TV and cable TV, it was assumed that a large portion of the audience base of radio was eroded all over the world. However, the medium has fought back with completely new features in itself to cope up with the changing situation and today all of you can see that it is regaining its lost position steadily.

In the same way, newspapers and magazines – the print media - are also improving their editorial pages every passing day to suit the requirements of the times to the readers across the world. Hence we can find quite a few

innovations incorporated into them over the years. Let us consider a few of them in brief.

**More than one editorial :**

Many of the newspapers are resorting to printing several editorials on the important current topics of the day. Some of them even print one of the editorials in a somewhat humorous tone to give a temporary relief to the readers. In the early 1980s *The Times of India* used to print three editorials on one day of the week which was later on extended to more issues in a week.

**Middle :**

This is one important innovations adopted by the daily newspapers and it is printed in the editorial page right in the middle position. Normally this write up used to be a humorous piece based on a true incident in one's own life, an anecdote, personal feelings, etc., which was put there to provide a humorous or comic relief to the readers who have to cope with heavy information and data-based articles and editorials on the page. As no specific name was suggested for this piece, the term 'middle' caught on and it still remains to be referred to in this name.

**Letters to the Editor :**

This is quite an old practice for the print media and still remains immensely popular. This is one major forum for getting to know the feedback from the readers of that specific newspaper or magazine about how the people are considering the newspaper as well as the reportage on a specific issue. The letters space is also a way to learn how the readers react to a particular editorial in the paper. This in itself is a fine reflection of the newspaper / magazine's popularity among the readers and also among a cross section of the people where the newspaper is

published. Earlier, several decades ago, the amount of space dedicated for this column used to be somewhat meager compared to the other features of the newspaper or the magazine. However, over the years, due to a heavy increase in the number of readers of the print media, the space of this column was also increased in a way to accommodate more and more letters. This column is also a major reflector of the peoples' or masses' way of thinking which further helps the editorial section of the newspapers and magazines to reorient their policies and thoughts.

#### **Articles :**

Articles and features on various important and burning topics is a major development in this direction. People do not just read newspapers and magazines only for knowing what is happening around the world. But also for getting hints and advises about how to move forward and act under certain circumstances. This is more so in the era of numerous television channels beaming hard news 24 hours in a day and 7 days a week. This is why articles, features, write ups from reputed persons, experts in their own field of specialization are invited for expressing their opinions on issues relating to our life and society so that people can get an advisory on what to do and what not to do. Usually two articles / features are printed in this space.

#### **Op-Ed page :**

This is one interesting development in the innovations of the newspaper and magazine editorial department. This is nothing but the page opposite to the Editorial page in a newspaper or magazine; and op-ed means opinionated editorial. This page normally contains a few articles / features, columns, etc., which may not be strictly in the same line as with the opinions of the editorial policies of the newspaper but are opinions nevertheless.

It is needless to repeat that mass media, specially print media, is a universal platform for all kinds of problems and issues concerning the people and society at large. Every human being or the reader is looking up to it for discussions and possible solutions as an ordinary person does not normally enjoy the privileges of being privy to so much of background and scholarly information and thus cannot form an opinion of his or her own. This is why it is highly necessary that articles / features / opinions and other similar write ups are printed regularly on a wide range of issues for catering to a equally diverse range of peoples' communities faced with difficult situations and crisis.

### **1.5 Political Analysis :**

This is one important area which takes a newspaper or magazine closer to the masses as time goes by. It is true that irrespective of whether we like it or not, politics is intimately connected to the lives of all human beings everywhere. Even the future of a nation or society to a big extent depends upon the political activities. Thus a close and minute analysis of the political developments and future projections about the destiny of a nation or society is going to be shaped up are quite significant issues to the mass media. People, in general, do like to read and get influenced by these analysis and they actually look forward to it.

It needs to be mentioned here again that the Edit Page along with the Op-Ed pages are the pages and windows where the editorial team is given ample opportunities to reflect that specific newspaper or magazine's own opinions on any issue on the earth - right from something very local to the global happenings.

In the earlier discussions you may have been told that mass media, specially the News media, should be devoid

of any opinion at all. But we always see that it offers quite a good amount of space for opinions on a variety of issues. A question may arise in your minds why it so happens when it should not have happened at all.

There are two important justifications for this aspect.

First of all- mass media is a very powerful instrument for reaching as well as influencing the masses anywhere across the world. And over the years it has acquired for itself such a very sacred status that people take its word for granted on a majority of the matters. Thus, whenever something important happens, we do keep looking forward to it for fulfilling our needs of information. It is both cheap as well as easily accessible anytime of the day.

Secondly- every human being and institution in this world has a certain amount of commitment and obligation to be fulfilled towards the very society in which they live in. Now, professionals in the mass media, especially News media like newspapers and magazines do enjoy a major advantage over others in society. In fact, they are privy to the inside stories of a whole lot of developments and issues, the peoples' aspirations, a deep insight into the emerging issues and thereby they develop a certain advantage of a 'foresight' by which they can foresee how the future of the society or a particular issue is going to take shape in the coming days.

As the editorial personnel of the newspapers and magazines definitely do enjoy such a status and foresight, it is one of their important and sacred duties to put before the people (the readers or the masses) how things are going to take shape in future so that the masses in turn can take their own decision after thoroughly discussing everything in the media forum.

Besides, the editorial and op-ed pages are not exclusive

forums for that newspaper or magazine's own editorial people. It is also a space for opinions of learned scholars and intellectuals on almost all the important issues on the earth - unemployment, floods, global warming, personal life of the celebrities, etc.

The most important idea is to put before the public or the masses all the possible choices for picking up the one which suits them the best.

#### **1.6 Encouraging Debates :**

It is an oft-repeated quote that politicians would try to create a bridge where there is not even a river for making petty gains in the world of politics. Similarly, many people do not hesitate to say that the mass media also rakes up an issue from time to time whenever there is a lean period of exciting news and events. This is done basically because of several factors. The first and foremost is to keep itself in the eyes of the masses. We have mentioned earlier that there is an intense and cut-throat competition going on in the media business. To make oneself popular by pushing back another one is a tough job these days. And thus many of them indulge in playing gimmicks by way of playing up small non issues by making them look like real issues of the moment. This is nothing but making a bluff with the target audiences. Thereby, encouraging debates on important as well as non important issues off and on is a major way of keeping oneself in the public eye.

Most of you might remember the episode of the United Kingdom's Prince Charles and his girlfriend a few years back when she turned 25 years of age which was hyped to a very high extent by even some of the conservative, old and traditional newspapers and magazines. The debate on this issue was carried out on more than one aspect including whether such news items should be given more publicity or not and the possible impacts of such news

items. I distinctly remember even a reputed daily like *The Hindu* one day publishing two editorial page write ups on this issue. One was based on whether it was the right thing to publish the episode and thereby breach the personal life of the two persons concerned. The other one was about the happening itself.

Then again, from time to time, debates on serious issues are encouraged. For example, when the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) began hitting the headlines after the unconventional and bold protest by a group of women of the state or when the Illegal Migrants (Determination by Tribunal) or the IM (DT) Act controversy was going on, there were several articles in the newspapers on the justness or otherwise of the specific laws. These debates on serious issues help the masses to know all the positive and negative aspects of the whole issue and thereby decide about the future course of action on their own. They are simply shown the right course of action to be taken whenever the need arises. So, we can say that encouraging debates and discussions is a very important and sacred function of mass media.

### **1.7 Participation of Readers in Content Development :**

About a decade back, an Editor of a medium-level daily newspaper from Shillong raised a very relevant question to the participants in a discussion on the future of print media on the occasion of attaining of diamond jubilee year by a reputed regional English daily of Guwahati. The person said that even though we - the editing people - claimed to have known the pulse of the masses or readers yet how many of the newspapers and magazines actually bothered to check out what the readers really wanted. That is why the newspaper edited by that person made it a point to invite its readers to an open forum on the annual launching day of it for expressing their free and frank views on various issues of the newspaper including news policy, circulation,

price and suggestions for changes. It proved to be a huge success. But, how many of us actually carry out such exercises.

**Peoples' Editor / Ombudsman / Citizen Editor:**

This trend was started in the country in the late 1980s by *The Times of India* when the media house appointed the first ever Press Ombudsman to look after the complaints of various discrepancies including bias in news coverage, malice, etc. This included grievances from both the masses and the readers of the group's newspapers and also the journalists covering different beats if they were subjected to any threat from various quarters whose interests might have been threatened due to exposures by the papers. A retired high court judge was appointed to this position which was a major encouraging development in the media world of our country.

An Ombudsman, on the other hand, is an office or an official who is appointed by a particular newspaper house or TV / Radio news channel to receive and then decide on complaints of bias by the media persons, the media house as a whole against any party about whom a news item is published or broadcast and also if the journalists feel that they have been intimidated, threatened by any party about whom they are reporting anything. We know that the masses or the readers or listeners to these news sources have long back developed a feeling that whatever is published or broadcast in the mass media are true. Thus, based on this faith, masses do place their unfailing faith upon the Ombudsman even though he or she may have been appointed by that media house and the salary / honorarium and perks whatever it might be, are borne by that particular news organization. Otherwise there is a scope for questioning the integrity of the Ombudsman as he or she is on the payroll of that particular newspaper house.



This is also a major innovation for the Editorial page over the years. However, *The Times of India* did not continue this fine tradition for long and it does not have an Ombudsman nowadays in its office. Yet, a very healthy encouraging tradition was started by this initiative.

On the other hand, from 2007 onwards, *The Hindu* has appointed an Ombudsman with a different name: The Readers' Editor. The functions are almost similar and this is a good and healthy development for the country's mass media scenario as otherwise we do not have any mechanism or system for getting this type of grievances redressed from any quarter, specially from the media houses themselves as these complaints would go against their own media persons.

Now, these Ombudsmen or Peoples' or Readers' Editor (by whatever name you may call this person) usually writes a weekly or monthly column in that newspaper which deliberates on his or her experiences while dealing with the grievances and complaints on a day-to-day basis. This column reflects very interesting situations and insights into the job and is quite popular among the readers. *The Times of India* Ombudsman used to write a column called 'The Blue Pencil' while *The Hindu* Reader's Editor writes the column called 'Second impression'.

Let me cite an example of what complaints readers do send in to this office. Sometime back, the paper published an achievement news report which informed the readers that a girl has obtained the top position in a journalism course that she was pursuing in reputed university in the USA. The report also informed that her father was the Editor of *The Hindu* who also incidentally did his journalism course from that same school. Soon after the report was published, a reader sent a letter to the editor saying that the achievement of the girl was published only because her father was the editor of the newspaper. If any other

girl or boy would have obtained such honours, would the newspaper give the same kind of coverage. In reply, the Readers' Editor informed that this was not the case and they did give equal coverage without any bias, based on such grounds, and also cited an example in which similar achievements of a boy who did not enjoy such privileges was also published.

Establishing this office as well as the column the Ombudsman writes in that newspaper raises peoples' faith upon that organization and it accords the newspaper more credibility among the masses. So it becomes obvious how opinions from people in higher and responsible positions do matter and influence people.

It is unfortunate that the office of Ombudsman has not been adopted by other newspapers or media houses either individually or in a consortium in our country so far.

**Specialist / Guest Editor :**

Many a times newspapers and TV / Radio news channels specially invite celebrities, intellectuals, other renowned persons established in a specific field for writing a piece of article or feature or editing a special page as a token honour. This is also done for passing on the message to the masses that such an honourable and reputed person has also some sort of association with the newspaper or news house. In the unit on what makes news, you must have come across the saying that these categories of people definitely make news and they matter a lot in enhancing the newspaper or news channel's prestige amongst the masses. Hence this is a technique employed by them for endearing the masses to their news organization.

**Citizen Journalism :**

This is a new trend widely prevalent outside which is becoming somewhat popular in our country also. This is

nothing but a contribution of news and photographs to newspapers and channels, from time to time, whenever something interesting might happen at a place and moment when it is not possible to send a regular journalist to those spots. For example, a fire erupts at a certain locality in the city or any place at night when it will be difficult to send a reporter and photographer to the spot and collect the news and the photographs. At that moment, an alert resident of the neighbourhood takes some good quality photographs and writes a brief account of what has happened and if possible how it has happened and then transmits the same to the news organization's office. It will save a whole lot of time in the process and make it much more convenient for the news organization to publish the same after necessary editing. Besides, there are quite a few things happening all around us for whose coverage it is not possible to send a reporter or a journalist on every occasion.

This practice is termed as Citizen Journalism because the citizens are sought to be involved in the activity of news presentation. It basically serves two important purposes. First of all, masses or the readers / viewers / listeners will get more variety of news items to read and the news organization's credibility increases. Secondly, there is a lot of possibility that the news item sent in by a citizen is not normally sent to any other news organization. This will make it an exclusive publication for that news organization which again will enhance its credibility in the minds of the masses. And, as we know, credibility is a far more important cause in case of popularity of mass media in our world.

These are nothing but different examples of audience participation in news media or mass media as a whole. Taking the masses or the audiences into confidence is becoming far more significant now-a-days because of the increased competition in the mass media world. Because

of the increasing competition for capturing a bigger percentage of the existing market share, the news and other mass media organizations must create an impression in the minds of the target audiences and readers that the organization actually cares for them which in turn creates a sense of goodwill in the minds of the readers to stick to that newspaper or channel under any circumstances as long as it is possible.

So, to create this impression, the newspapers and channels have to involve and associate more and more representatives from the masses in every possible way. The impression that is sought to be created by the media is that it is the masses' very own newspaper or channel and they should support it by all means. In other words, the idea is to create a sense of belongingness so that the news organizations can enjoy the support of a 'dedicated target audience' for future development.

Another way of involving the public is to invite masses' opinions on certain issues of common interests and publish or broadcast the interesting and uncommon responses. This practice normally brings in a wide amount of responses from the masses because of two major factors - many of them seriously think about the issue and form an opinion which they believe is right and effective while at the same time it is a nice and thrilling experience to see one's own name published in the newspaper or magazine or discussion forum in the channel.

#### **Interactive Programmes :**

This is another style of involving the audiences into the programmes by the mass media. Let us cite the example of Radio and TV. You must have noticed that on quite a few occasions that entertainment programmes in these two mass media systems try to involve the masses or audiences in different ways. For example, a Radio centre

may have a special programme in which songs are broadcast on request from the members of the audiences to the extent possible. Or in case of some other programmes, Radio's anchor persons visit a specific organization, a school or college and send in live requests from the people assembled there to the studio for immediate broadcast of their requests. A similar programme may also be implemented for TV. It serves two purposes - it makes the programmes lively rather than one of passive listening or seeing normally experienced with Radio and TV. At the same time, it also involves more and more members of the audiences who feel elated at the prospect of his or her voice being heard from Radio or appearance broadcast by TV. Many a times, in such programmes the names and short addresses of the participants from audiences are announced which also enhance their 'feel good' factor to a big extent.

Similarly, in the Letter to the Editor column, many newspapers also publish grievances of the masses about some public affairs, deficiency in services by public utility services organizations or private organizations etc. This is a popular column published regularly by *The Hindu* almost every week. This is another way of involving the masses, particularly those in the places from where the paper is published, in the process of journalism by the media organizations. Also, when a personal grievance about service deficiency is published in such an open forum, the organizations or agencies responsible face humiliation and the scope of the grievance being settled becomes higher.

### **1.8 Let us Sum up :**

In the discussions above, we have gone through in brief what is an opinion and why it is so important for the mass media on one side and the masses on the other. Even though the cardinal principle in mass media is not to mix

up opinions and news items yet opinions do have their own significance and media must live up to peoples' expectations of offering adequate opinions whenever it is expected and even if it is not expected. Mass media is required to lead the society in every field, especially at times of crisis and when the nation may be at the crossroads being confused about which way to take up during the course of one's life. Opinions can be broadly classified into two categories. First of all the ones offered by the newspaper or magazine or TV or Radio channel themselves and Secondly, those offered by the individual persons or members of the masses or target audiences whoever might like to do so.

Mass media should be seen as a universal platform for any and every kind of issue which might erupt in the society at any moment of time and also as a forum for scholarly and learned deliberations on them focusing on positive, negative, neutral etc. all possible aspects of the issues. This helps immensely in informing, educating and persuading the masses into adopting a certain aspect or combining all of them to form an enlightened opinion after going through all the deliberations. This is more so in case of complex situations.

For example, the landmark verdict of the Delhi High Court in regard to the marriage between two male persons, controversy regarding the Armed Forces Special Powers Act, repeal of the IM(DT) Act, etc.; these are complicated issues with enough potential for having far-reaching impacts upon the masses. But as we cannot expect the masses to be enlightened enough to take a wise decision in these fields, opinions from the newspapers and mass media help him or her a lot in taking a final decision.

Besides, nowadays because of the intense cut-throat competition for survival among the mass media agencies and organizations, most of them are trying their best to

create an impression amongst the masses that they do really care about the people – their welfare. So the mass media is devising ever new initiatives and ways to endear the masses into their fold. A much more increased space in the Letter to the Editor column, public grievances column, citizen journalism, institution of Ombudsman's office and columns by that person, more and more interactive programmes, analysis of socio-political situations, encouraging involvement of the people in content development etc. are important among such measures.

### **1.9 Sample Questions :**

1. What is an opinion in the context of mass media ?
2. What is the significance of opinions in mass media for the masses ?
3. Write briefly about the innovations in the editorial page of newspapers and magazines over the years.
4. What are the steps being taken up by the mass media for involving more and more people or masses in the content development process. Why is it becoming so important nowadays ? Explain with examples.
5. Who is an Ombudsman ? What is the importance of this office ?

### **1.10 References/Suggested Readings :**

1. The Journalist's Handbook by M.V. Kamath
2. Journalism for students by M.S. Sharma
3. Professional Journalism by M.V. Kamath

## **Unit 2**

### **The Concept of The Edit Page**

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#### **2.7 References/Suggested Readings**

#### **2.1 Introduction :**

The importance and significance of opinion in journalism has been emphasized at length in the previous unit. You already know the fact as to why news media offers both news and views for the benefit of its readers. The news helps the people getting the information about events and issues and opinionated pieces help people form their own informed opinion about those events and issues. Hence, news media thrives to have a balanced content of news and views.



However, it is noteworthy, at this point that many of you, aspiring journalists, may have dreams of being a free lancer at any point of your life time and contribute to the shaping of society by way of your analytical writings. Or while at work, as a journalist, you may be required to write opinion materials like articles, columns, etc. and you should be equipped to deal with such kind of situation.

Therefore, along with learning the other skills, you should also be learning the techniques of writing sound opinionated pieces. Hence, in this unit we will deal with each one of the opinionated writings for your benefit.

## **2.2 Objectives :**

In the previous unit you have already been told about the importance of opinion in a newspaper or news channel. You have also been given an introduction about the various forms of opinion materials found in a newspaper.

In this unit you will be told about each one of the same in a more elaborate manner. After going through this unit you must be able to

- define an editorial, article, middle, column and reviews
- discuss the different forms of editorial writing
- differentiate between reviews, columns, articles and editorials
- analyze the importance of the letters to the editor column

## **2.3 The Edit Page :**

For a newspaper, the edit page is the opinion page. It is in this page that the opinions from various sources and platforms find reflection. The op-ed (opinionated editorial)

page is also used for this purpose along with the edit page by a number of newspapers. As you all know that in all other pages the newspaper publishes only news of different kinds, which calls for an objective approach of writing, the edit page and the op-eds are different. This means that as a writer the reporter is not supposed to mix facts with personal opinions while contributing to the news pages. However, as a human being and as a front runner in the matter of information collection the reporters are bound to have their own opinions and views on various matters and issues plaguing the society, formed in the course of their experience in the field. However, ethically speaking, their views should not find reflection in the presentation of facts. This amounts to violation of ethical norms eventually lowering the standards of journalism.

However, on the other hand, the edit page or the op-ed page is the only page in which the paper publishes all the views and opinions coming from various sources, including the paper's own views on matters of importance. Hence, if at all, the reporters or anybody wants to have their opinions published then they may very well write for these pages.

### **2.3.1 Significance of the Edit Page :**

You already have acquired some idea about the significance of the edit page in the previous unit. In continuation from the previous unit and to add on to your further understanding it may be said that the edit page is important in many ways.

#### **The Edit page reflects the policy of the Newspaper :**

As you all know, newspaper is a social entity. In this context we may say that the newspaper should also function like any other social institution. The social obligation compels it to act as an information provider and a platform for debates and discussion. The role of the fourth estate

is to keep a vigil on the society only and hence forth it should restrict itself to publishing only news and nothing else.

On the other hand, if we are to treat the media as a social organ then it must have a voice of its own. And as a matter of fact, the newspaper or a news media has a voice of its own which is exhibited in the edit page through the editorials. This voice is nothing but the opinions of the newspaper on significant matters of social importance. And as a matter of fact, this voice has always been shaped by the policy of an individual newspaper or news organization.

Now you might be wondering as to what a policy would be of a newspaper and even if you know what it is all about yet what you got to do by knowing it. But yet we cannot ignore knowing about it. Because, there cannot be any point of disagreement on the fact that the media has great influence in shaping our society and its individuals and in building public opinions when the society needs them most. In such circumstances, it is important to know the views and the character of the media that we are looking up to.

Let me elaborate it with an example.

Now, many of you, in your day-to-day lives, may be used to passing comments on individual newspapers and their stand on various issues. Or you might have also come across people being judgmental about paper's views on significant event. Here, more or less, we are talking about the character of individual newspapers. That character is shaped by the ideology it holds in front of the public.

Say for instance, some newspapers personify anti-establishment views. It means that the paper is critical about any political party that comes to power. Whereas

some are more inclined towards leftist's ideology and would criticize whichever rightist wing holds the power string. When a newspaper itself has inclination towards a particular political ideology then it would be moderate in its approach towards criticizing the party with that ideology. Moreover, a newspaper with a motive of business interest would criticize that policy of the government which has the tendency to mar its business interest and would encourage any move of the government that would ensure its growth in terms of business and profits.

For example, many of you might recall the time during 2002-2003 when the Indian media was tossing on whether to allow FDI (Foreign Direct Investment) in Indian media. The Government was also considering the pros and cons of allowing foreign media to operate in our soil. It was a time of hot debate and voices were coming from many quarters.

Apparently, there were divides within the media industry itself. Many of the media organizations were vouching for media freedom and yet many were very skeptical about the whole aspect of FDI concept in the media. Those newspapers which were very market savvy seemed to be supportive of the whole initiative of the government including some of the magazines publishers as well. Because they saw a different media emerging in the guise of FDI, they encouraged such initiatives through their editorials. They foresaw many business prospects popping up, hence were sort of starting a campaign in support of the government.

This is what we call the voice of the individual paper and this voice is ultimately shaped by the policy of the newspaper of being market driven and profit oriented. And the editorials must reflect the policy of the individual paper.

**The edit page is the Editor's page:**

The Editor of a newspaper is responsible for the entire editorial content of a newspaper comprising of news and views. Hence the editor is supposed to look after whatever has been going as editorial content, including news and views in an issue of a newspaper.

However, it is not humanly possible for an Editor to be personally dissecting each and every possible item being processed for publication. In this situation he is assisted by a number of personnel who help him discharge his duty as an Editor. He is assisted by people like Executive Editor, News Editor, etc., in looking after the news content of the paper. The Editor hardly looks into the matter related to news.

However, the edit page being an important page, all its contents are looked after by the editor himself. Of course a team of Assistant Editors help him with writing the editorials but the final content is always checked and rechecked by the Man himself as the editorials are supposed to personify the views of the paper on matters of importance. This page represents the policy of the paper. Hence any slackness anywhere means jeopardizing or tarnishing the image of the paper. Therefore the editor is extremely careful about the content of the edit page and gives direct attention to this page.

**Quality people read the edit page:**

The edit page is not a very exciting page to call for people's attention. In general this page is very drab looking page and personifies a very dull look. Rather than calling attention it repels people by its smudging outlook.

Also the contents of the edit page like articles, columns, etc., being so serious in nature, it robs the page of the

pleasure of reading. Hence a normal reader would not turn to this page unless some specific need draws him towards this page. Those who turn to this page are expected to be the ones who are willing to get in-depth understanding about issues and events and so on. Because, by nature, the edit page is an educative one and it educates the reader by elucidating from news that have appeared in all other pages. For this reason, only those people interested in getting knowledge would eventually read this page.

To be more precise, the edit page is the page of enlightenment, unlike the news pages. As it is supposedly a page of a variety of opinions and views, all meant for making the people aware of intricacies and complexities of issues and instances, the edit page helps people form their own opinions. We discussed at length in this regard in the previous unit.

Hence, it is assumed that only a handful of people of the masses would turn to this page and those who turn to this page are also the ones willing to be educated and enlightened.

#### **2.4 Content of the Edit Page :**

What all things do you see in a newspaper's edit page? Let us put them one by one.

In general you would find in an edit page-

- Editorials
- Articles
- Columns
- Reviews
- Middles
- Letters to the Editor

(It will be nice if you can have a look at the facsimile of a typical edit page)

In an edit page, normally there are 2-3 editorials published in the 2-3 columns in the left. These are called as Leaders as they lead the entire page. These leaders are followed by the leads, presented just above the middle of the page. In other words, the leads are the articles written by freelancers/experts who contribute regularly to this space. Just adjacent to the leads towards its right, many a times, special columns are published. These columns are written by famous people and are called as special columns.

Again, just at the middle of the page, the newspapers also publish an item which is different from all other writings in the page. Approached in a totally different manner, this piece of writing is also serious in nature and calls for reader's attention. Because of its presence in the centre of the page it is called as middle. Just below the middle and towards the bottom of the page you would find a column for publishing the letters written by the readers to the Editor of that particular paper.

(Now of course you can see how the edit page becomes the opinion page showcasing the opinions pouring in from various sources from the society thereby creating a common platform for debates.)

#### **2.4.1 The Leaders :**

As we have mentioned earlier, the editorials are the reflection of the policy of the newspaper and a statement of paper's views on matters of significance. A simple editorial is nothing but the critical evaluation of an event or issue representing the policy of the newspaper and meant for influencing the people towards its viewpoint. It is the opinion of the newspaper on a particular issue of importance plaguing the society which the paper arrives at after logical analysis of the same. Even though it is meant for endorsing personal judgment on important matters and motivating people to buy this judgment, yet it

is not expected that the readers would also have the same view point. Or, in other words, the newspaper's viewpoint may not coincide with the reader's viewpoint.

The editorials are written with lot of conviction and assertiveness so that the paper's views are established and sold to the readers. However, some of the editorials are descriptive in nature, meant just for enumerating the issues at hand, without perhaps showcasing any viewpoint of the newspaper.

The editorials which are critical in nature always seems to be criticizing a policy of the government, its machineries, functioning or other relevant matters of public interest. Sometimes editorials also deal with important matters in a lighter vein with a view to entertain the readers. It calls for a special writing skill to write such tongue-in-cheek pieces. Especially the third edit that appears at the bottom of the column is entertaining most of the time. People would not expect much enlightenment from such readings; rather the aspect of humour is more prominent and dominates the entire piece of writing. The facts are very cleverly interwoven with humour that may take many forms, a satire, a slapstick or otherwise.

One interesting aspect of editorials is that editorial writers have enough space to establish their point of views. However, the short editorials are more interesting and make crisp reading. An editorial is interesting as long as it is convincing and logical in its approach. Therefore, more space does not mean more content; rather it means more in-depth analysis, containing more supportive evidence to vehemently establish its point of view.

#### ***The Leader Writers :***

It is now an open secret that the editorials are not written by the Editor himself, rather by the Assistant Editors,



whose job is restricted to writing editorials only. The Assistant Editors not only write the editorials but are responsible for taking care of the other contents of the edit page too. They select, edit and make a matter worthy of publication in an edit page.

In general, every newspaper has an army of Assistant Editors each specialized in a certain area like politics, economics, sports, international politics, trade and commerce, etc. Hence, depending upon the need, the concerned person is engaged in the job. For instance, if the editorial is to be written on national politics, then the person specialized in that field is asked to write the editorial for the day and likewise. There is, usually a brief discussion between the Assistant Editor concerned and the Editor before the editorials are written.

Many organizations also have the policy of outsourcing Leader writers, meaning that they are hired for writing only editorials and get paid accordingly. It shows the importance that the edit page is endowed with. However, in smaller newspapers, the editor himself usually writes editorials when he has time and feels compelled to speak out on some issue.

#### ***Subjects of the Editorials :***

The subject of the editorial is decided in the morning. In every news organization a meeting is held in the morning between the senior members of an organization like the owner, the editor, the news editor, bureau chief and likewise. This is a very crucial meeting as it is in this meeting that the course of action for the day is decided, planned and actuated. In this meeting a post mortem is also done about the published issue and a stalk is drafted about the next issue. Along with the other important discussions the content of the editorials are also decided, mostly at least one editorial is reserved for the most

important issue of the day. And hereafter, the editor assigns the job to the particular Assistant Editor who is an expert and specialized on the subject to write the editorial. He is also briefed about the stand to be taken on the editorial or the opinion to be presented in front of the public.

Even though editorials are written on a range of topics under the sun, yet it may be mentioned that mostly editorials deal with the most current topic or concurring events. If there are more than one editorial published on a given day, at least one would be dealing with the most recent happening of the day or the past day. The current topic may be of any kind like politics, social, sports, or the likes. The idea is to remain abreast with day to day happening and keep the readers posted with the recent news/development and simultaneously the paper's views about it.

Another important point to be deliberated here is the aspect related to newspapers having multiple editions. When a newspaper has more than one edition, then the same editorial may be published in all the editions of the newspaper or may give separate editorials for separate editions. However, there is no any hard and fast rule that the same editorial should go into all the editions of the paper. Whenever something major breaks in the local place of publication then the newspaper has to carry an editorial on that event. Therefore, standardization of editorial matter is not possible.

Nowadays, many a times, the newspapers are seen publishing signed editorials in the edit page. This has been set to vogue ever since the newspapers are trying to explore with variations. Mention may be made that the signed editorials of the editor is published when the editor himself writes the editorials. On relatively lesser occasions the newspapers also publish the photograph of the editor

along with the write up. However, such variations are rare and hard to come by. Till some time back, publication of graphics, images, cartoon, photographs was considered taboo in the edit page. But in the recent past, the papers are trying with all these variations in order to appeal to the masses and do away with its boring appearance.

Also political matters continued to dominate the editorial contents in all the newspapers for a long period of time. However, a great amount of diversification is apparent in the last couple of decades. Perhaps, this diversification is seen as an attempt to appeal to larger masses unlike before and also to add little difference to the always boring edit page. Many a times, we get to see, apart from other materials, matters related to fashion, life style, spiritualism, travel and tourism, books, literature, etc. This creates more and newer readership base as not all readers are interested to read politics or economics or like wise.

#### ***Forms of Editorial Writing :***

The editorials may take many forms, depending upon the issue in question. Some of the editorials are critical in nature. When the particular newspaper wants to criticize a particular policy or project of the government or when the issue itself is such that requires the paper to take a critical viewpoint then of course the writing would be critical in nature.

On the other hand some of the editorials are descriptive in the sense that the writer merely describes the event or issue in concern, without taking any position or stand on the issue. Analytical editorials are also found in newspaper's edit page. The editorials are informative when the writer provides only information or data on a particular issue. Sometimes editorials are written with a view to entertain the readers, especially the third edit which

appears in the bottom of the editorial column, is most of the time, meant to be entertaining. Hence, the approach of writing of this editorial is somewhat different than other editorials in the page. The third edit mostly deals with off-beat topics like religion, sports, literature, language and so on and so forth.

Further, if the editorials are categorized on the basis of nature of content then the editorial may have forms like political, economical, cultural, social, legal, agricultural, civics, historical, scientific, travel and tourism, law and order, life style, fashion, spiritualism, environment, women and child, etc.

Moreover, if we further categorize editorials on the basis of area or region, then we may have forms such as national, international, local, regional, etc.

#### **2.4.2 The Leads :**

Articles are the lengthiest pieces on the edit page. As mentioned earlier in this unit, the articles are also called as the leads as they follow from the leaders. The articles are more elaborate piece as compared to all other contents in the edit page. As evident the writer has enough space at his disposal to establish his or her point of views.

Articles are written by free lancers and in some instances by senior journalists working in the newspaper itself. The writers are experts on the topic they are dealing with. With their experience and knowledge the writers attempt to make a judicious analysis of the subject on discussion. Even though the articles are supposed to represent the writers view on the said topic, yet the writings should be logical in its extreme. The writer should be able to judiciously weave facts with opinions.

Articles are mostly meant for educating or enlightening the people and opening up their horizon of knowledge.

The writer deals with the topic undertaken in a very in-depth manner. They are supposed to bring forth all the aspects to a particular issue in concern. Unlike the editorials, which are nothing but personification of the newspaper's views on something, the Articles are written on a sober style and the subject matter is treated in a scholarly manner. It is written on some broad subject, wherein the reader would find well documented facts. It may or may not express the opinion of the newspaper but certainly reflects the opinion of the writer.

### ***Freelance journalism :***

As mentioned earlier, a freelance writer contributes to the article column of a newspaper. The writer is an expert in a certain field. Freelancing actually means self employment. A freelancer is not tied to any particular organization; he is rather associated with a number of organizations at a time. He or she is not on a regular pay roll of a newspaper and gets paid according to the size and importance of the written matter. The writer may be writing for several papers simultaneously at a time. A freelancer mostly writes for the pay master of the time provided his or her matter is accepted for publication by that organization. So the highest bidder in the market would get a chance to use your talent as a freelancer. Therefore, that way the scope is there for a freelancer if he or she can prove his or her writing and analytical capability.

To become a freelance writer is not an easy task. Especially in the initial period of his or her career, the writer may have to be slogging for a long period of time as he may be rejected initially if he is not a known figure. In theory, anyone can call themselves a freelance journalist because there are no rules or qualifications for entry. However, one should have command over the subject in hand as the readers are looking up to him for necessary guidance

on crucial matters. Hence, the role of the writer is tremendous in shaping the mindset of the people.

However, freelancing is not a very lucrative way to make a living, especially in India. Because, the industry is not known to be good payers, rather the freelancing which is prevalent today calls for professionals who have other and consistent sources of earning. That makes 'freelancing' a side business in reality. Those who have some expertise on the subject, possess command over the language and have keen interest on making writing a hobby are the ones, in reality, who turn out to become freelancers.

Moreover, the initial slogging that a person has to go through to establish himself as a freelancer is enough to discourage many writers and force them to abandon the hope of making a career of glorious freelancing. Even though being an expert on a particular field should be sufficient to be a freelance writer, yet the industry as well as the readers also want the person or the writer to be a known figure in the society, which makes the situation even worse. In that way, not many people can make a mark in the race for popularity.

#### ***Writing Articles for Newspapers and Magazines :***

Writing articles for newspaper is totally a different experience than writing articles for magazines. As a common reader you must have also observed one simple difference is that the newspaper articles are not as lengthy as the magazine articles are. The magazine writer has more space at his disposal to write his or her piece. But in newspaper the volume of space is comparatively less which compels the writer to prove his point as briefly as possible.

On the other hand, the writing techniques for both newspapers and magazines are also very different. The

fact that the magazine writer has more space to make use of, that does not make him write fluffy pieces and club unnecessary data to fill the space. Mention may be made here that people are very demanding today. Couple it with the prevailing stiff competition between different media as well as intra-media competition that offer the people a variety of options. The result is that people would rather buy a particular magazine for its unique quality and for its specific use only.

Magazines are meant for elaborate and in-depth analysis. Hence, a magazine writer would fill the space with more in-depth facts, throwing lights to untouched angles. In fact a typical magazine piece would follow from the newspaper's analysis. It would go beyond from where the newspapers have left. The newspapers stop after they have presented some of the aspects of a particular issue. However, a magazine writer should be able to present more facts with much more orderly fashion and showing newer angles.

In addition to this, photographs are also integral part of magazine writings. Whereas in a newspaper's edit page there is no scope for such visual tools like photographs and images to make it appealing for readers.

One important point to be discussed here is that the aspect of difference in readership base for both newspapers and magazines. The newspapers cater to the needs of people having multiple interests and needs as the newspapers are read by people of all spectrum of the society. On the other hand, the magazines are more specialized and deal with readers having common interest most of the time. Therefore, the approach of writing differs in both.

#### **2.4.3 The Side Article :**

An edit page may contain more than one article on any given day. If only one article is published on a given day

then it is the only lead or the main lead of the page on that particular day. On the other hand, some papers carry more than one article on the edit page. This article is little smaller in size and would be occupying a single or two columns towards the right of the main article. This is called as the side article or the second lead or if there are more than to then third lead, fourth lead like wise. Hence there is no any standard rule for affixing the number of articles to be published in an edit page. It is very much individualistic and individual papers have their own way or style for dealing with the aspect of presentation of articles. But then, each paper has its own style and that does not change by the day.

The side articles do lend variety of reading in the page and adds on to individuality of the paper. Many a times, it works as a filler on the edit page, especially when the lead is small and is unable to occupy the entire columns of the page.

#### **2.4.4 The Middle :**

The middle space of the edit page is always occupied by a different kind of reading material, known as middle because of its position in the middle of the page. It is positioned exactly at the center of the page between all other matters in the edit page.

As compared with other contents, the middle is forms a different kind of reading. Hence, it calls for a different kind of writing technique. The writing has featuristic attitudes in many respects, yet is different from features. The subject matter of middles is treated in a very different manner, even though the subject itself is an important one for the readers. The writer takes a very different approach unlike articles, wherein the approach is quite scholarly.



The middles are written on a serious issue or relevant subject or on a very usual occurrence but are treated in a very lighter vein. It may be satirical, humorous, quite entertaining and many a times may be written on unusual experience, circumstances, etc. It may also be a personality sketch of some renowned person. Many a times the writer may also attempt to ridicule a government's policy or programme, or the government or a politician. The actions depicted in the write up must have some topical value. It may also attempt to bring forth some inconveniences faced by the people but written in a very stylistic manner rather than adopting the prosaic style.

The idea of having middle in the edit page is to offer some relief of reading to readers after heavy and serious readings in the edit page. The humour adds on to reading value in the edit page. The middles are meant for entertaining the readers of the edit page. The middle lends a breath of fresh air to the edit page. Because of their nature, all other contents of the edit page adheres volume to the page and turn the page into a monotonous whole. On the other hand the middles break this monotony and invite reader's attention to the page.

Middles are smaller in size as compared with the other items in the page. Even though the subject matter is relevant for the readers, yet the thrust is always on a specific point. There is no any standard technique in which the middles are written. The idea is to hold the attention of the readers until the last words or the point in which the crux of the story is revealed finally. The writer should be able to write interesting piece of reading that entertains as well as adds on to readers understanding about the issue in hand. Writing middle is not an easy task. It is an art as well as a skill and the ones that posses both are very few and far between. Hence, individual writer develops his or her own style of writing this kind of piece.

Some of the best known middle writers are Jag Suraiya and Arun Bhatia. Both of them write for The Times of India newspaper.

### **2.5 Let us Sum up :**

The news media offers us both news and views to its readers. The news are meant for informing the people about various events and incidents that are happening around us. On the other hand the newspapers also publish views or opinions of various people with an aim of educating the masses and enable them to have their own opinions formed on various matters and issues.

The edit page is an integral part of the newspaper. The edit page contains various elements like editorial, articles, middles, columns, reviews and letters written by readers to the editor of that particular newspaper.

The editorial is called as the 'Leader'. The editor takes extra care about the content of the editorials. This is because the editorial personifies the views of the paper on matters of importance. The policy of the newspaper is reflected through the editorial positions on significant affairs of the society. Hence the editor is extremely careful about what has been projected in the editorial columns of the newspaper. There are various forms of editorial writings. In general it is the job of the Assistant Editors to write the editorials. However, many a times the editor himself writes editorials when he or she feels compelled because of the nature of the event or he has time.

The articles are called as "lead". When there are more than one article published and the other article occupies the side position of the newspaper page then it is called as side articles. The articles are written by free lancers. Free lancers are the people who are not directly associated with a media organization but are contributing write ups

regularly to it. They are normally experts on the matters they are dealing or have in-depth understanding about the issue concerned. Their writings would be logical presentation of data and personal opinions of the writer himself.

The middles are different kind of writings. Mostly meant for entertaining the readers, yet the middles are dealing with a serious issue. Hence the writer has to device a technique which would make the reading intriguing as well as useful. Middles are also meant for breaking the monotony of the page.

### **2.6 Sample Questions :**

1. Briefly discuss the significance of the edit page of a newspaper.
2. Analyze the contents of the edit page.
3. What is a Leader? How would you differentiate between a leader and a lead? Write a short note on the 'Editorial' of the edit page.
4. What is a 'Middle'? What is the importance of having a middle in the edit page?

### **2.7 References/Suggested Readings :**

4. The Journalist's Handbook by M.V. Kamath
5. Journalism for students by M.S. Sharma
6. Professional Journalism by M.V. Kamath

**Unit 3**  
**Editor as an Opinion Leader**

**Contents :**

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**3.2 Objectives**

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Popularity and Circulation**

**3.4 Let us Sum up**

**3.5 Sample Questions**

**3.6 References/Suggested Readings**

**3.1 Introduction :**

By now, you must have become familiar with the role of opinions in mass media for the society as a whole. And also the role of the Editor and other Editorial staff under him or her in presenting a finely-balanced newspaper or magazine or news programmes in a Radio / TV channel anywhere in the world. In simple words, the role of the Editor in mass media is expected to be that of an efficient and expert leader of a big team of journalists engaged in the business of news presentation to the masses and

thereby even shape the destiny of the nation for the future. The Editor is the captain of the ship or aero plane cruising ahead in a frenetic pace. He or she has to be capable of taking momentous decisions, be foresighted so as to lead the team directly under him and also the society at times of crisis whenever the need may arise.

### **3.2 Objectives :**

After finishing this unit, you must be able to

- *discuss* the overall all-encompassing role of the Editor in journalism media
- *explain* why the Editor has to be a leader and pathfinder for the society at the same time
- *learn* how to boost the circulation as well as the popularity of the media

#### **3.3.1 Editor as Thinker :**

A newspaper as a comprehensive news vehicle is vital to our well-being as an informed and educated nation. It should be noted that at times, newspapers report such news items which their readers may not wish to know and also publish commentary that some readers passionately dispute. But news consists of the facts at hand, the truth at best as the journalists can manage to know. As for the times when the ideas expressed on the opinion pages contradicts that of the particular newspaper, it is necessary for the editor to remember that exposure to such viewpoints which challenge our own ones is vital to intellectual growth. This is why a good editor also allow diverse views to be presented in the newspapers.

Without a newspaper, how else will the people with various grievances be comforted and their plight focused or exposed for society's attention? How would we remain a community? (Excerpts from an editorial in The Free-Lance Star of Fredericksburg, Varginia, USA)

Let us cite an example from a different field. A scholar from an Indian institution of higher education visited a highly reputed university in the UK and had an opportunity to meet the Vice Chancellor there. He was surprised to see that the VC was writing a research paper in his office. When the surprised Indian scholar asked the VC what he was doing, the latter replied that a scholar who is heading such a reputed institution should not be wasting his or her time in doing routine office works. But his or her duty is to engage in, as well as encourage, scholarly works and thus work for the institution's improvement.

In the same way an Editor of a journalism media should not much be bothered with the routine works of sub editing or looking at language, etc., in minutest detail. Instead he or she should be far more concerned with the overall policy decisions of the paper or channel and what stand it takes up whenever any important issue arises in the horizon. However, it is not that the editor should completely detach himself or herself from the routine editing work also. The editor must keep a close eye on the language, grammar, common mistakes which occur in the day-to-day activities of the organization. Besides, the Editor must have a comprehensive understanding of all the upcoming issues, their implications, solutions, future impacts among others so that he or she can think of a way out of them.

An editor is an 'intellectual' who has a deep understanding of the society's various issues and studies the situations to be able to make adequate forecasts for the benefit of the masses.

We have seen that the government and other institutions are always working on providing various types of programmes, legislations, rules and regulations, etc., aimed at betterment of the society and furthering the development of the masses. However, unless these are

tested in the field we cannot be sure of their feasibility. And, there is also the much-needed discussion and debate on them to develop an insight how these are going to impact the society and influence the lives of people as a whole. At these crucial points we need the services of the editors of mass media – especially journalism media — to offer their valuable insights into them and show us the right path to be adopted in the near as well as distant future. Hence, the editor must be a thinker with an open and clear mind so that he or she can think of the issues from all possible angles and aspects not to leave any loophole in the process. It is important to have an open mind because a person of such a stature must not have any bias of any sort for anyone or anything in particular. Otherwise it will reflect the bias in his or her thinking process also and this will lead to a bad precedence in the society.

Newspapers and magazines are important sources of opinion making. Even though it is often said that quite a less number of people actually read the editorial write ups, it is to be remembered that these few people can make a noticeable change in the minds of the fellow human beings in the society by playing the role of 'opinion leaders'. This is because in general the intellectual people of a society are expected to read the editorials and also the articles published in the newspapers. These are the people who in turn influence the masses through various public forums to instill the messages into the minds of the people. There is an added advantage here. These opinion leaders and mediators further explain the messages which may be of a complex nature at times for the benefit of the masses.

### **3.3.2 Editor as Adviser :**

The function of mass media is to inform, educate and enlighten the masses. This is done by directly or indirectly directing the masses to adopt a certain course or

instructing them how to react or respond to a particular situation. This is why the editor of journalism media also dons the role of an honorary adviser to the masses in general.

For example, the illegal migrants issue has been a major sore point in the society and politics of Assam for a long time. Besides, there was the controversial act called the Illegal Migrants (Determination by Tribunal) or the IM (DT) Act which was implemented only for this state. This act was a highly biased one towards the illegal migrants and a few years back it was struck down by the Supreme Court of the country. Now, a reputed and popular English daily of the state has long been crusading against both these issues and trying to create public awareness. Similarly, during the famous Assam agitation against the illegal migrants from 1979 to 1985, a popular Assamese daily also took up the cause and dedicated its efforts for the issue.

In one of the earlier units we have already mentioned that the journalists, specially the persons at the editorial level are always dealing with various issues concerning almost all the walks of our life. This increases their understanding and grasp over all these issues to a very high level thereby allowing them the benefit of being able to think of the future course of action they are going to take. Thus, they can offer advises to the masses in the right direction. This is why an editor also has to act as an adviser to the nation, especially at times of crisis.

Besides, in case of events and issues where they may feel that they do not possess the adequate level of expertise, it is a normal practice to invite opinions from learned persons in the field and let the masses benefit from these opinions and form their own concepts.

There was a time, not many years ago, when the editor of a newspaper used to be kept in very high esteem by the



masses in general and whatever they would say were taken as the final say in the respective fields. Even though this position has been eroded to a big extent nowadays yet the position still retains a major portion of the prestige and trust. Even today we take their words seriously.

We all know that mass media is the fourth pillar of democracy which in turn means that it is expected to keep a close watch on the functioning of all the other three pillars of a democratic state. It is a watchdog of the society, especially in a democratic nation like that of ours. Hence, from the ever-widening experience, gained by keeping an eye on all sorts of activities from all quarters, the journalist develops a certain kind of expertise and insight into things which ultimately leads to the capability of being able to 'advise' the masses on various issues concerning our lives.

### **3.3.3 Editor as Sentinel of Issues Concerning Public :**

This is not the duty only of the editor. The mass media especially journalism media particularly has to live up to this role in the greater interests of the society or the nation. In a similar way like the academicians and intellectuals, an editor of a newspaper or magazine has to be able to think of newer developments, study and analyse trends of the society and be able to say with conviction how to face the future situations.

Mass media is the fourth pillar of a democracy. And who leads the individual mass media agencies or organizations like a newspaper or a magazine? Obviously, the editor. This is why he or she must play the role in a very cautious, studious manner so that there can be no room for faults.

In a previous unit of this course we have raised the issue of the vast prevailing illiteracy in India - to the tune of 35 %. That means, by the 2001 India census, 65 % of the

people of the country were literates. And the government definition of a literate person is someone who can just sign his or her name, no more. So you can well imagine the actual literacy situation of India which means out of the 110 crore of population about 40 crore are totally illiterates. Also, out of the literate population, just about half would be actually literates in the true sense of the term. Besides, a major portion of this illiterate population would be in an age group and such a financial condition that they cannot afford to enroll themselves in a formal institution for studies. Now who will take care of these people in the greater interests of the country. This is because if the country has to prosper and advance towards the future, we can't ignore the status of these people at all. They must also be carried along in the path towards development.

And at this crucial situation and problem, the mass media, more so the newspapers and magazines, must come forward to do the right thing necessary for improving their lot. So here again the role of the editor as a thinker, adviser and liberator comes to the fore once again.

Nowadays, the progress of a nation or society is judged by the convenience of access to adequate and the right kind of information for the masses in any place of the country. In such circumstances we can see that newspapers and mass media are the right and the most appropriate vehicles of information to the masses. And once information is provided to them, education and persuasion follow automatically. Hence, finally the outcome is that an empowered nation emerges from the scenario facilitated by the mass media.

Further, there are two kinds of education here. First, formal education like being taught how to read and write. Secondly, enlightening and informing people about the various issues and aspects of life concerning all the walks.

Mass media has to fulfill both these roles for the masses under the leadership of the editor.

We have said earlier also that in general the masses in most of the societies across the globe are a passive lot. Majority of them lack the access to adequate amount of in-depth information on any important issue and also do not like to take lessons from the past. This is why these masses need to be presented with the right kind and amount of information as well as encourage them to become active on certain important issues concerning their life and also the society as a whole.

And herein lies the greatness of the institution of the editor of journalism media. We have cited examples of one or two newspapers which have been very active during the famous Assam agitation against illegal migrants and also the IM (DT) Act.

The mass media must be able to strongly lead the nation at times of such crisis situations. And it must also keep itself ever ready to take up ever newer challenges whenever they might crop up.

Right at this moment we remember a famous slogan by a reputed English metropolitan daily from New Delhi in the 1990s'. It used to say, "the leader leads the nation" as an advertising slogan. Even though it was an advertising slogan the situation in fact is not very far from it. The mass media have to lead the nation any time of the day - whether it is at peaceful times or at crisis times.

We can say that the information, education and persuasion duties of the newspapers and magazines can be of two types. Let us examine how it is so. For example, all of you must be definitely aware of the '123 Nuclear Agreement' which was signed with the USA sometime back and which created a lot of controversy all over the world. The editor

of a newspaper or magazine has a responsibility to – first carry out an in-depth research about the various details of the agreement and a thorough analysis of its different clauses and provisions and their implications for our country's future. This should be done to create or develop what is called as the 'informed decision' or 'informed opinion' amongst the masses. It is a normal premise that only when we have all the relevant and adequate information in front of us the decisions we take can be expected to be just, balanced and logical.

Secondly, it is not merely enough just to provide the masses with the right kind of information in details. It is also the duty of the mass media specially the editor to present the benefits of his or her detailed analysis of the provisions. But the editor must present to the masses the implications and positive and negative issues which might erupt at any moment of time in the future.

Not only these. The editor must also promote diverse views on the whole issue from a cross section of learned people, intellectuals, experts, security analysts, etc., all concerned directly and indirectly with the issue so that even if some areas were unknown to the masses they could be explored and presented to them for their benefit.

The relationship between the masses or the readership and the mass media has to be a cordial and highly complementary one. Each of the sides should try its best to play a constructive and critical role aimed at improvement of the other. Thus, the mass media should do its level best to inculcate a fine sense of balanced and modern outlook and attitude to accept diversity of thoughts among the masses. The masses on the other hand should also keep a close watch on the functioning and trends of the mass media and whenever there might be anything not desirable, they must take it up with the media or point out the right path. Only such a cooperative and

mutually-balanced understanding can actually create a healthy situation in the society.

#### **Media Literacy :**

Extending the reference from the above sub chapter we can say that the mass media should also develop the sense of 'media literacy' as a special cause among the masses. This is a new term you must have encountered for the first time here. It means being able to know how to handle the mass media in the sense as to which of the contents are to be studied properly and which are to be avoided. In simple words, media literacy is nothing but knowing properly how to utilize the various contents of it in a comprehensive manner. This is also a major responsibility of mass media and indirectly that of the editor as he or she is the leader of the entire endeavour. Though this is a new subject for us in our country, in the developed western nations this has been an established activity undertaken seriously by the mass media. This kind of literacy helps the masses to treat the mass media in an educated and intellectual manner and never get carried away by anything and everything published or broadcast in it.

#### **3.3.4 Editor as Opinion Leader :**

You are already well-conversant with the concept of Opinion Leader in the Two and Multi-Step Flow of Information theories of communication that you have gone through in the paper - Introduction to Mass Communication. In the same manner the Editor is also the Opinion Leader of the society because he or she is the person who interprets the major happenings of the times and makes things convenient for understanding by the masses. Based upon his or her personal experiences, background research into the depth of issues, concern for a certain cause, etc., all make the editor to develop a deep understanding of a

majority of the issues and thereby can offer comprehensive judgments on critical issues.

In the earlier days, say until about two decades ago, it was quite common to find people or the masses waiting eagerly to read the editorial comments in newspapers and magazines so that they can form their own opinions based on the editorial writings. As the mass media, especially the print media used to be taken highly seriously by people during those days it was obvious that they looked forward to editorial comments on all important issues concerning the society.

This is true to a big extent even today. The editorial opinions count a lot among the readers these days also. It is already mentioned earlier that the mass media being such an important public service activity it can't escape from its responsibilities of leading the society in whichever way it can at any moment of time - whether it is crisis times or at peaceful times.

### **3.3.5 Editor as the Leader in Increasing Popularity and Circulation :**

Newspaper journalists balance business and social responsibilities according to their respective roles as editors, columnists and reporters. In practice, journalists must ensure newsworthiness, relevance to readers and access to sources in a context of daily deadlines. As generalists, journalists rely on researchers to be expert interpreters, although they find many researchers unavailable or unable to communicate with public audiences. Journalists (Editors) welcome the uncommon contributions of those researchers who cultivate relationships and spend time to communicate their research evidence on an ongoing basis.

The news media offer a window into the system of policy making. Their participation in the public policy process is

extensive, so much so that they are considered by some to be de facto political institutions. Specifically, the news media help set the policy agenda by focusing public attention on certain issues at the expense of others. The process of agenda-setting involves multidirectional influences among the public, policy makers and the news media as issues emerge and recede. Yet, there are limits to the media's influence. They may determine what the public and policy makers think about, but they do not necessarily determine what the public and policy makers think.

Even with the advent of radio, television and the Internet, newspapers remain influential as the medium of record. Historically founded as a partisan political forum, newspapers have become a vital communications medium for a small population dispersed across a large country.

#### **Journalists' Roles in Newspapers :**

As with any business, newspapers must generate profit to remain viable. Editors, in particular, assume responsibility for both the commercial and editorial success of newspapers. However, they are quick to assert their independence to create editorial policy: "The only model that works is to serve the readers first and worry about the advertisers second".

This is an important dimension of the newspaper industry. What happens here every day is a fight between commercial and information needs that which starts with the deadlines and ends with production of the newspaper. It's a chaotic environment where many people with different interests and different expertise compete for the relatively limited space in the newspaper.

Newspaper journalists led by the Editor also vigorously embrace social responsibilities: The "We still see ourselves

as having a social conscience" Driven editorial policy can cultivate an activist culture in a newsroom. If an editor "takes sides," then "politicians have to respond." Meanwhile, columnists and reporters can draw attention to "inequities that should be addressed by government." Many reporters engage in social activism based on a sense of responsibility to their sources and their readers: "As a human being, you want to save them; as a reporter, you're there to tell their story." Most reporters can, in fact, recall their news stories that "sparked of a debate in the legislature" or led to "direct changes in legislation."

Within the newspaper hierarchy, journalists balance their business and social responsibilities according to their respective roles as editors, columnists and beat reporters. Editors assume a central role, selecting stories to appeal to a diverse readership in order to sell newspapers, increase advertising revenue and ensure profitability. Prominent coverage usually reflects the editor's perspective: "If the word comes down that the editor is interested in something, you can be assured that it gets more and more coverage." Columnists and beat reporters also perform distinct roles. Columnists are distinguished by the autonomy they enjoy from routine news coverage. They consider it a privilege to "have the same assignment for 10 years," in which they can pursue interests beyond the nominal topic of their column and can employ their position to exercise persuasion: "One column can stop an idea from gaining power." Like columnists, beat reporters gain experience and autonomy, but they must still pitch their stories to editors who make the final news judgments.

It is not only sufficient to be a person of high intellect and talent for becoming a successful editor of a newspaper or a magazine and thereby lead the society in an indirect or direct manner. In today's modern, highly-competitive and liberalized environment the editor must be able to combine both intellect and a rare business savvyness or acumen



so as to be able to make the newspaper or magazine popular and commercially successful at the same time without diluting the seriousness of issues at stake.

This is because, quite often, it is the editor's name and personality on which a newspaper or magazine thrives in the society and becomes successful.

In simple terms, it needs to be said that the editor must be able to know the pulse of the readers thoroughly so that it becomes a success story both in terms commercial and intellectual aspects in the short as well as long term.

This has been necessitated as the mass media is mostly in the hands of private concerns and it must be commercially viable for a sustainable growth and support the personnel employed in them.

Another aspect in today's mass media world that has been posing a major challenge to the editorial independence is the mad rat race for attracting as many readers possible in the society to one's own fold at the cost of the others. While trying to do this, newspapers, magazines, TV and Radio channels are quite often resorting to gimmicks for catching the attention of the masses.

The situation has worsened with the coming of the round-the-clock Radio and TV news bulletins and entertainment channels which has left nothing to be termed as 'exclusive' or 'breaking news' for the print media or even the electronic media itself. It happens because even if a news channel comes to know about an event within minutes of its taking place, other channels also start beaming it and each one claim to be the first ones to have broadcast the news item to its viewers. This is still a problem only with the visual media.

Now, amidst such an intensive competitive market for grabbing attention of the masses, which mass media

will become more popular and remains a significant question.

Under such circumstances, only the media with a good editor at the helm who has the capability of making a judicious blend of popular features and news items with serious thinking will be able to become popular and successful in commercial terms also.

There is a condition here. An editor who has been successful in leading his or her team of journalists successfully and effectively into running a popular and much-published newspaper or magazine or a TV / Radio channel can only be expected to be able to lead the nation or society in an effective manner.

Thus we can see that the role of the editor both for the mass media agency in which he or she is employed as well as the entire society as a whole is of utmost importance. The editor has to play the role of being the friend, philosopher and guide of the whole of the society and the masses so that the society can be shown the right path at any moment of time; more so in times of a crisis. Hence, the significance of the editor is immense for the mass media and also the society.

Not only this, like any good leader of the society or any field of life, the editor also has to groom and develop his or her successors so that generation after generation, new leaders can take over the whole business of editorship. Only then the society will be able to enjoy a steady supply of able-minded mass media leaders to lead it through any crisis at any moment of time.

Many a times it also happens that a newspaper or a news channel in the electronic media becomes popular and achieve wider acceptance mainly because of the individual personality of the editor who is at the helm of the affairs.

It is he or she, who in reality, carries forward the entire organization on his or her shoulders rather than anyone else.

So, being an editor is a double-edged sword which has both positive and negative aspects like any other job or profession. The positive side is that depending upon the articulateness of the editor the media organization will have a smooth run and become popular or at least remain steady under any circumstances even in the face of stiff competition. And if he or she has been able to lead a fine group of journalists and groom them adequately, the popularity and acceptance of the newspaper / magazine or news channel will grow to newer heights every passing day.

At the same time the editor has to be ready to face adverse situations also whenever some mistakes or errors do occur. This is because even though he or she is not directly involved in editing each and every story or news items or writing of sentences, whenever anything goes wrong, it is the Editor who, as the head of the journalists' team, has to face the consequences.

So, when things are going fine the editor collects accolades and encomiums and when things go wrong it is he or she again who has to face the adverse situations. Yet, those editors who can face both the situations in an articulate manner will be successful in the long run and thereby be able to guide the team under him or her towards a successful destination.

#### **3.4 Let us Sum up**

From our detailed discussions above we can see for ourselves how the editor of a newspaper or magazine has to play a multi-faceted role of an intellectual, an opinion leader, a thinker, foresighted person etc. In short he or

she has to be a leader of the entire society or the masses as a whole. This is in addition to the editor's usual duties of leading the group of able-minded journalists in the media organization towards a better cause and sustainable growth. In short - the editor has to be the saviour of the nation much more than a political or other leader. In a way the responsibility of the editor - head of the fourth pillar of democracy of our society is even far more important and heavy than even the other three pillars of the society - Judiciary, Legislature and Executive. This is because it is the mass media who have to keep a close watch on the other three in addition to satisfactorily discharging its own duties.

An editor is not simply the head of contents in a newspaper / magazine or a TV or Radio news channel. He or she is also a person who enjoys an enormous capacity to influence public opinion on any issue. In addition to everything else, it is also the sacred duty of the editor to create a good taste among the masses in the long run. We have mentioned earlier that mass media is a universal platform and informal university for any and everyone where there is ample scope for detailed discussion on each and every issue deemed important for the society. Hence, as the guardian of the happenings and goings on, the editor must keep a close tab on all these issues confronting the society and thereby publish news items, views, organize discussions about various aspects of the issues concerned so that something positive can come out of the deliberations.

Simply, this can be said that in today's time, an Editor has to be a master of all like a true journalist who is good in almost everything but not exactly a master of all. On the other hand we can compare him to that of a thorough professional who is good in almost all aspects of his profession but at the same time highly specialized in one or two specific aspects of the same.

Under the beat system for journalists, especially in the major metropolitan news media organizations, a journalist can afford to be mastering a special area of his profession for long years. But when the same person becomes an Editor he or she must be able to handle all relevant aspects of the profession and know the basics of each of them. Only then an Editor would be able to be successful in the business. This is because he or she is both the intellectual as well as the business development leader of the newspaper or magazine which he is guiding.

### **3.5 Sample Questions :**

1. What is the role of an editor in maintaining the mass popularity of and commercial success of a newspaper or magazine?
2. Can we say that an editor is also the leader of the nation or society? If yes, why is it so?
3. Is the responsibility of mass media greater than that of the other three pillars of democracy?
4. Can we term the mass media as an informal university for the society?
5. What should be the ideal relationship between mass media and masses in general?

### **3.6 References/Suggested Readings :**

- The Journalist's Handbook by M.V. Kamath
- Journalism for students by M.S. Sharma
- Professional Journalism by M.V. Kamath

**Unit 4**  
**Study of The Edit Page**

**Contents :**

- 4.1 Introduction**
- 4.2 Objectives**
- 4.3 Columns**
- 4.4 Syndicated Columns**
- 4.5 Reviews**
- 4.6 Letters to the Editor**
- 4.7 Let us Sum up**
- 4.8 Sample Questions**
- 4.9 References/Suggested Readings**

**4.1 Introduction :**

The importance of the edit page was not overemphasized in the previous units. We have explained it over and again why and how the edit page is deemed to have such a status by the news organizations as well as the readers at large. The understanding of the profession of journalism remains incomplete without the comprehensive knowledge about the edit page of a newspaper. Therefore, this unit is designed so as to add on to your understanding about the importance, significance and forms of the edit page.

**4.2 Objectives :**

In the second unit of this course, you have learnt about

some of the contents of the edit page. You have also been told about the some of the other aspects related to this particular page. Already you are well versed with other forms of journalistic writings like editorials, articles, middles, side articles, etc., mostly found in the edit page or the op-ed page.

In this unit, we will deal with other forms of contents of the edit page which were not dealt with in the previous units.

After going through this unit you must be able to

- *explain* what column writing is
- *discuss* the concept of syndicated columns
- *distinguish* review writing
- *decipher* the role and importance of the letters to the editor column of the edit page
- *analyse* the distinction between the editorials of different newspaper

#### **4.3 Columns :**

Columns are an integral part of the edit page. Many of you might have come across insightful columns written by renowned people who often occupy media spaces. The newspapers often have columns in their edit page and in many newspapers columns are regular features of the edit page. More often than not many newspapers have special columns written by big people in the pages other than the edit page. Which means that it is not the just the edit page, the other pages may also have columns appearing in order to appeal to readers.

The magazines also carry columns in their pages. Nowadays, the supplementary sheets of the main

newspapers also do carry columns by revered people on specific matters.

Hence, in general, columns are part and parcel of the newspapers and magazines without which news media loses luster.

### ***What is a Column?***

Have you ever come across the writings of people like Ruskin Bond, Khuswant Singh, Kuldip Nayar, Shobha De, Sivanti Ninan, Anita Desai, Shashi Tharoor, Sunil Gavaskar, Ravi Shastri, Humen Borgohain and the likes? They are all column writers of class. They all have created a niche as successful column writers. But are they the only ones whose writings you see in the newspaper's or magazine's pages? You must have come across writings of many other people apart from the ones mentioned above. Then why we are not calling all as column writers and only handful of them are actually known as column writers?

Yes, not all writers can boast of being as column writers. The difference between a column and an article is that columns are written by known people whereas the articles are written by those who need not necessarily be known among the people. The article-writers are experts on the subject they are dealing or have in-depth understanding about the subject in concern. On the other hand the column writers need not necessarily be experts but are occupying a column in the newspaper pages primarily because of their standing in the society. And they offer their personal views on the subject in their columns.

A column is not a story or personal account of an individual's personal experience. Rather a column should be seen as a personal opinion of a famous or popular celebrity on the issue in concern. In fact people look up to his or her personal views on that particular issue. To be a



good column writer it requires more than just the ability to articulate an opinion. The opinion that one forms must make sense for the readers and be convincing. The writing should, at the same time, be able to provide insight into the subject matter and simultaneously be entertaining. Therefore, writing columns is not an easy task, despite the fact that being invited as a column writer in a particular newspaper itself speaks of substance and volume. It is of great responsibility and matter of pride for any writer to be a column writer.

Firstly, the columns have dedicated spaces in the page and dedicated readership. Once a column space is allocated for a particular kind of subject matter then that space becomes fixed for a long period of time, unless some extreme conditions arise for some alteration. The readers would look up to a particular column for a specific kind of content. When their expectations are not met with then they feel cheated and deprived. Hence, it amounts to moral obligation on the part of the newspaper to keep up with people's expectations and hopes.

Secondly, the column writer develops a chunk of followers in due course of time. People feel that they would gain knowledge, insight and entertainment from reading a particular writer. Hence they follow him invariably, no matter where he moves. In such situation, the onus lies on the part of the writer to show loyalty in response to the loyalty exhibited by the readers by following him or her. Therefore, the responsibility of a column writer is gargantuan and it is expected that as a column writer one should be able to fulfill the colossal wishes of the readers without fail.

On the other hand, it is a great honor to be a column writer. One becomes a column writer because of his or her social standing, and more appropriately it is a sign of acknowledgement, on the part of the media, of your social identity that they have assigned you with that colossal

responsibility and on the part of the audience or readers to have accepted you as their guide or mentor on specific matters. Therefore, it is indeed, a pride for any writer to have become a column writer.

The best columns are one of the newspaper's most important connections with the readers, a regular dose of personal insights with broad appeal. Hence, to be successful the writer should be able to connect well with the readers for which he or she should keep up with the reader's taste and needs. It is observed that many a times, newspapers and magazines are sold solely because of their popular columns by popular writers.

The columnists are like lawyers, presenting a particular viewpoint. One columnist might differ from the other on the same subject and interpret the same development differently. Reading all shades of opinion on a particular event or incident would help the readers to arrive at his or her individual conclusion and judgment. More often than not, the writer has a fixed style of writing. A column writer would generally write on a fixed subject and has a fixed point of view.

#### ***Writing Columns :***

As mentioned earlier writing columns is not an easy task. As a writer one should be on the toes all the time. He should have a fair understanding of the subject that he is writing about as well as the pulse of the audience. The writer should be writing for the people who are the likely readers of that particular column. For example, if it is a column dedicated for a career counseling purpose, then the writer should be focusing on matters related to career counseling only. The writing should talk about one or more careers depending about the space available and it should act as a guideline for the readers who go across that piece of writing.

On the other hand if it is a column dedicated for discussing about political matters then the hired columnist should be discussing about the recent political events and offer personal views as convincingly as possible in the column. He should refrain from beating in the bush as the readers want his or her personal judgment on the matter on discussion and would not like to read a shabby piece aimed at confusing the readers. As a writer, the columnist should be able to make a sense for the readers. Because it is seen that on many occasions the column writers views act as guidelines for the readers and they decide on important matters following the opinions of that particular columnist. Hence, the column writer should be careful while offering opinions as it has many effects and counter effects. Also the writer should be able to logically establish his point or opinion. In other words, there should be enough data supporting his or her opinion so that the highlighted points seem convincing and genuine.

Apart from the ones mentioned earlier some other best known column writers of the past era are M Chalapathi Rao, Pothan Joseph, Frank Moraes, M.V. Kamath, etc. On many occasions we have seen that the editor of a newspaper also writes columns, along with writing an editorial. In fact many editors have their special columns.

There are different types of columns found in newspaper pages. Feature columns, gossip columns, career columns, signed editorial columns, hodge-podge column, etc are some of the most common forms of columns found in most of the newspapers in general. Feature columns are those in which different writers write features on variety of topics under a common theme. Gossip columns, one of the most common and most popular columns, are the ones in which the writers gossip about popular people, celebrity, politician or any eminent personality or figures.

Career related matters are published in the career columns written by a range of experts on that field. Signed editorial

columns are like the editorials in form, but so personal that cannot be called as editorials. Most of the time it is a cross between an editorial and a column and the signature of the writer (the editor) is also a usual feature in such columns. Hodge-podge columns are also very popular among the readers, because of the presence of variety in such columns. The columnists present a hodge-podge of items of both significant and least significant topics in order to catch on the reader's attention. People like such columns because it offers variety and adds spice in life.

#### **4.4 Syndicated Columns :**

Syndication is pretty much a new phenomenon. You, as a reader must have come across articles written by a writer of national or international recognition appearing in your regional or vernacular newspaper's pages. Many a times, writings or articles of a writer of regional fame may also be found in a national or international newspaper's pages. How do you think this happens? Do you think that a writer who resides abroad or at a far flung place would be sending their writings to all these media organizations themselves? A writer residing in America or United Kingdom or else where may not have ever heard of a newspaper like Times of India, or Hindustan Times or Assam Tribune, Telegraph or like wise. Do you think that even if they send, it would be taken for publication if the writer has not been known or a famed one? Of course not, as a writer's identity or fame is what the newspaper capitalises upon. The readers are also interested to read pieces by known people. In such a situation how do you think we read articles by persons from far away lands?

All these are results of a process called syndication. Syndication is a process that is prevalent both in print and electronic media. Syndication helps the writers or producers of programs getting visibility in the media, which in usual circumstances would have had remote chances of getting published or broadcast. Syndicates provide fair

chances to unknown writers or program producers in lieu of a certain amount of money.

In other words syndicates are like agencies that have understanding with a big network of media organizations. They commission writers and producers and pay a certain amount for such commissioned writings or programmes. The commissioned materials are then sold to this entire network or to those in the network who are willing to buy the produced content against the payment of a hefty sum of money or specific sum of money. The independent writers and producers can also contribute their writings to such syndicates and get paid accordingly, provided they are members of that particular syndicate.

However, after receiving the money from the syndicate the writer has no say over the matter produced and no control whatsoever over where the matter would be published. The write-up becomes the property of the syndicate who purchased it from the writer and would sell it to whosoever is willing to buy it. Most of the time the price they charge from the publishers or broadcasters is higher than what they pay to the content developer and the content developer can not interfere in such matters. However, many syndicates also offer fair modalities by sharing half the price of the published articles with the writer.

Hence, syndication has both negative and positive aspects attached to it. Syndication helps the writers who otherwise would have never been able to get media publicity. It is not always possible for writers or content developers to personally establish contacts with huge network of media organizations the way a syndicate would do. When a writer would send a written matter to a newspaper or media organization then the chances are very remote of getting it published unless he or she has personal contacts in the organization. Also even if the writer decides to sell his master piece himself then

possibility is that he would send it to only a handful of organizations and probability is that he would send it to those organizations who are visible in front of him or is in close proximity with him or the newspapers that he or she is used to reading. And as it is that the writer gets paid only after the matter got published in the newspaper pages, most of the time the writer hardly gets paid. Hence, the writer's arena of struggle becomes limited and restricted.

In this regard, the concept of syndicate really helps. The syndicates provide a wide area of coverage for the producers. A remotely established writer or producer also gets a chance to get international acknowledgement and recognition, provided he or she has got real talent and produce admirable products.

Also once the writings or the programmes are accepted by a syndicate the content developer immediately gets the money for the content he or she has developed. Therefore, the concept of syndication is beneficial for freelancers or column writers who have fewer contacts in the media and have disability in operating in a bigger area of operation.

However, point may be noted that many a times it may also happen that the writer may not get what he or she actually deserves for the content that he or she has produced. Many excellent writers may be under-paid or many mediocre writers may be over-paid, especially when the rates for specific kind of materials are fixed in advance. It is observed that on many occasions the syndicates actively sell your newspaper column and keep half the fees.

***Self Syndication :***

Syndication is a process through which a writer sells his or her writings to multiple editors on a non-exclusive basis. On the other hand self-syndication means a way of

marketing his or her write-ups himself.

There are two ways to get syndicated. Either the syndicate itself chooses you as a writer or vice-versa; or you self-syndicate your content. Self-syndication is possible today because of the e-mailing facilities provided by the new media like Internet. Using this facility the writer can directly write to the chosen few or to all the syndicate editors. In all such instances, the newspapers publishing the article/column will also declare that it was syndicated. In other words, it is not exclusive to the particular newspaper/media organisation.

Self-syndication is possible in case of electronic media content as well. The producer himself or by outsourcing, may go for the process of self-syndication. Nowadays web-based syndicates are also there who can sell your product in the Internet medium as well. The Internet has offered a range of possibilities for content developers as well as the marketers.

#### **4.5 Reviews :**

You must have come across reviews on a range of subjects. Many a times, the newspapers or the magazines dedicate special columns for publishing reviews on different kinds of art forms. Reviews on books, cinema, dance, drama, etc are regular features in many newspapers and magazines.

Reviews are also a kind of opinionated pieces, mostly published in the edit page. The supplements that are published with the main newspaper also accompany reviews on different matters like books, movies, art, TV and radio programme, plays etc

Hence reviews are integral part of any printed media and require different technique of writing. Reviewers are critics who are apt on criticizing various art forms. Some

critics occupy special columns for writing reviews. Nikhat Kazmi is known as a film reviewer who writes regularly for Times of India newspaper and hence a special column is dedicated for accommodating his reviews especially after a film is newly released in the theatre.

***Review Writing :***

Reviews are mostly written on new releases, new launches, new publications etc. To write reviews one must have sufficient expertise on the subject matter. While compared with other types of opinionated pieces like articles, editorials and columns, the reviews are lighter in substance, yet providing useful information about the reviewed subject. Hence, it is expected that the writer has good understanding or study on the reviewed subject. The critic need not be a practising expert in a particular field, but should have sufficient background knowledge about the subject.

The reviewer in general, criticizes the subject as objectively as possible. However, being critical does not mean to be a negative critic, highlighting only the drawbacks or the negative aspects of the subject. The writer should not criticize just for the heck of criticism. It actually means healthy criticism, through which the critic would make judicious assessment of the art form, highlighting all the points, both strengths and drawbacks and positive and negative. The criticism should be logical, based on true judgment devoid of any falsehood. The writer should offer his or her viewpoint but should not spoil the matter by over valuing his personal opinions.

Reviewers, while reviewing anything, should always keep the readers in his mind. Because, ultimately it is the readers for whose benefit the reviews are done. The aim of any review is to introduce new product of art and recommend or not recommend the readers or viewers about the art form in concern. Hence, the level of criticism



should be of the level of the readers or should be done in the right perspective.

The reviewers, by way of his writing, tell the readers about the strengths or drawbacks of the book or cinema etc and whether they should go for watching the film or reading the book or not. You must have noticed that in most case of most of the newspapers film reviews are always carried on Sundays, on which people are probably deciding about whether to go or not to go for a newly released movie. So depending upon the ratings given by the reviewer the audience would decide whether they should go for the movie or not.

Same is the case with book releases. Going by the reviews that have appeared in the publicity media the readers decide whether they should buy the book or not. Hence, reviews form important reading materials for both readers and news media.

However, while reviewing one should always keep one thing in his mind that the review should not be done in order to malice somebody or settle personal scores with somebody by writing gloomy comments about somebody's masterpiece. A huge amount of money is spent in making a film and a huge amount of struggle goes into writing a book or making drama or theatre. Hence the reviewers should not spoil the efforts of such credentials by way of mere writing a stupid review.

#### **4.6 Letters to the Editor :**

It is another integral part of the newspaper's edit page. Without this column in the edit page the paper never get published. It is the column in which the newspaper publishes the letters written by the readers to its editor highlighting, may be an issue, any event or any grievances that requires redresses.

In other words, this is the feedback column for the newspaper in which the readers send in their feedback regarding published matters or public issues. The readers offer their personal opinions or judgments on any specific concern. The subjects of the letters are not pre-decided but range from any civic problem to personal inconvenience, national matters to local socio-political situations, petty altercations to any published matters in the newspaper and so on and so forth. The idea of writing a letter to the editor is just to highlight something which the individual paper may have ignored or have not thought about, bring forth the mistakes that have caught reader's attention or grievances relating to any subject under the sun that the newspaper needs to be redressed.

In many letters the writers take critical viewpoint, criticizing vehemently, about any policy of the government, a celebrity, politician, a news or write up that has been published in any of the newspaper's issue or so on and so forth. Through their letters, many a times, the writers also attempt to offer suggestions on many occasions or solutions to problems plugging the society at large.

These letters are important as far as individual newspaper's image is concerned. If taken seriously, these letters may act as guidelines for the newspapers as the letters actually reflect the views of the common people whom the newspaper aims to reach at. The letters are important tool for gauging the image of the newspaper among the public as well as the lacking on many important concerns. They also reflect the pulse of the people who are actually a newspaper's target readers. They may be very effective if the newspapers want to know the taste or need of the people and device content depending upon the call of the people. In that sense the letters are integral part of the edit page. Therefore, newspapers allocate sufficient space for publication of such letters.

However, mention may be made here about the fact that on any given day newspaper offices receive bulk of letters from the readers. But unfortunately, it is not possible for papers to accommodate all the letters in their columns. Hence many important letters get discarded in the selection process. Only the selected ones can make it to the newspaper's column. Hence, even though newspapers have substantial amount of space dedicated for this purpose, yet that space does not seem to be sufficient enough. Therefore, the writers should be careful while writing letters. The lengthier the letters are with repetition of facts and figures, more is the possibility of getting into the dustbin. The letters should be short, crisp, clearly written and highlighting points which are novel and new.

#### **4.7 Let us Sum up :**

Some of the integral parts of the edit page of a newspaper are columns, reviews and letters to the editor columns. The columns are different from articles or middles. Columns are written by famous people who have already established themselves in the society. They have social identity, unlike the freelance writers who write articles and get known with due course of time as freelancers.

Writing column is a matter of great responsibility and great pride. Column writers develop followers and these followers would follow the writer no matter where he or she moves. Because of such loyalty shown by the readers the column writing becomes a tricky task as you are imposed with expectations on the part of the readers. An article is a single piece of writing intended for a newspaper or magazine. On the other hand a column is a collection of articles that have a common theme.

Columns could be of various forms like gossip column, career column, humorous columns, sports column, signed editorial column etc.

Syndication is a process of selling contents to multiple editors in a non-exclusive manner. Syndication is done in both print and electronic media. The new media comprising of Internet, has also offered possibility of syndication in the web media. Many writers or producers of programs also resort to self-syndication through which they try to sell their products on their own. This is also a good way of marketing one's own product.

Another very integral form of opinionated piece is reviews on various art forms like films, books, dance, drama, painting, sculpture etc. The aim of a review is to introduce an art form, and recommend or not recommend the product to the readers and viewers. Therefore, the review should be a healthy one, logical and devoid of malice opinion about the writer or film maker or artists.

The edit page of a newspaper also carries a column where the letters of the readers written to the editor of that newspaper, are published. This slot of letters are important as through these letters the newspaper can gauge the feedback of the people.

#### **4.8 Sample Questions :**

1. What do you understand by a column? Explain how a column is different from an article?
2. Differentiate between a column and a review. Discuss the various aspects of review writing.
3. What, according to you, is the role of the letters to the editor column of a newspaper?
4. Write a review on any film that you have seen recently or on a book that has been published recently.

#### **4.9 References/Suggested Readings :**

1. The Journalist's Handbook by M.V.Kamath
2. Journalism for students by M.S.Sharma
3. Professional Journalism by M.V.Kamath