

Future of Journalism in Odisha

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Present status of media in Odisha can be summed up in one sentence, with apology to Charles Dickens (*A Tale of Two Cities*): ‘It is the best of the times; it is the worst of the times’.

Looking from the reach, access and use the mood of media in Odisha is buoyant. In fact, news media in Odisha never had it so good. Odia Newspaper readership is growing at one of the fastest rate in India. There has been both horizontal and vertical growth. National Readership Survey (NRS) 2006 figures for Odia media reveal that the total readership has crossed 1 crore. Three leading papers: *Sambad*, *Samaja* and *Dharitri* together have close to 55-lakh readerships. *Sambad* leads the readership with 20.39 lakh readership followed by *Samaja* (18.97 lakh) and *Dharitri* (14.45 lakh) [Source: NRS-2005/v-3.00, NRS- 2006/V-1.00. Readership in lakh]. Number of newspapers and periodicals has increased substantially. At the end of 1964 there were 70 papers published in Odia language (four dailies, nine weeklies, 38 monthlies and 19 other periodicals). By end 2010 there were as many as 52 dailies approved by the I&PR Department of Odisha. Major newspapers of Odisha are on expansion spree. Almost all the major newspapers are publishing multiple and multi-location editions. New TV Channels are coming up. In 2009 as many as four 24x7 Odia satellite channels made their entry. Existing ones like Doordarshan, E-TV (Odia) and O-TV are beefing up their programmes. Net penetration, access and use are increasing. Number of web-based publications is also growing. Mobile phones are almost ubiquitous in all parts of Odisha. Media houses are embracing state of the art technology. Convergence of technology is fuelling diversification in existing media houses. Technology, increasing literacy and readership, greater competition and aggressive marketing are transforming the media scene in Odisha from placid

monochromatic frame to a hyperactive, techni-colour one at a rate never seen before. It is best of the times.

But looking from other angles — the quality of journalism, the issues being covered, the impact, financial status of the journalists, their safety and security, ethics, press freedom — the situation does not look rosy. Many believe it has deteriorated in comparison to say twenty years before. With media becoming more capital intensive and market oriented — the diverse voice is finding it increasingly difficult to survive. Serious issues are not finding their due space/time. News is being commoditized. Sensationalism is rampant. Trivialization is increasingly being accepted as the rule. With media ownership becoming increasingly monopolized, press freedom is in danger from within. Journalists are more insecure now. They face double insecurity — insecurity arising from the intimidation of outside forces irked by his/her report and job insecurity. More and more journalists are hired on contract now. Scarcity of job forces many to accept the contract on the owner's term. Envelope journalism (money for news) is rampant. Corruption, many veteran journalists say, has reached new low. It is the worst of the times.

In this situation it is difficult to crystal gaze about the future. However, here are some predictions based on the present and emerging trends.

1. Media in Odisha will be hyper local. This is a strategy most of the regional language media houses will adopt to reach more number of readers; and also advertisers. They will try to reach, what the modern management gurus term as 'the bottom of the pyramid'. This will at times create problem of 'clash of interest between the local and the regional or national'. Journalists have to walk on a tight rope balancing the local aspiration and national interest.
2. Journalists have to be professionally trained. Multi-tasking will be the norm for journalists. They will have to report on real time for different media, as media houses will operate several media. For example a single journalist will report for television, radio, print and web and mobile media. Different media demand different type of writing style. A journalist will have to know how to write for different media.
3. Mainstream media houses will be utility-oriented. Besides dissemination of information, they will try to position themselves as service providers and do-gooders. The major mainstream newspapers have already started in that direction. *Samaja* has

long been associated with relief activities. *Sambad* has started blood donation camps and write correct Odia (*Sudha Odia Likhana*) campaign. *Dharitri* has organized women empowerment campaign. *Prajatantra* regularly organizes intellectual discourse on several current issues. Others will also follow this trend.

4. Demassification will be the trend. Media houses will try to cater to 'niche' market.
5. More television channels and radio stations will be set up. With the growth in digital technology, setting up a television and/or radio station will be easier and cheaper.
6. More number of community radio stations will operate. But CSR will have to look for a viable business model.
7. Mobile phone will emerge as an important platform for dissemination of information. With the rapid growth in technology, live video streaming will be a common form of dissemination of news.
8. Working in media will require more skill set. Therefore there will be growing demand for training in this field. More hands-on training institutes will be set up. Or, the existing institutes have to align their syllabus to the growing need of the industry. There will be greater industry-academia interface.
9. With growing net penetration, internet will emerge as the principal information dissemination device. However, print version will be around for at least the next twenty years.
10. The revenue generation model of media houses will have to undergo a drastic change.

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