

I. ARUL ARAM

Challenges of communication as a discipline in India

Introduction

India did not lag behind the developed countries in introducing mass communication education. Annie Besant, founder-editor of *New India*, started mass communication training in Madras in 1920. The first university mass communication school was tried out in Aligarh Muslim University in 1938 to be followed by a regular communication school at Punjab University then located in Lahore in 1941, well before the country got independence from the British rule. Today there are over 100 mass communication schools at the universities, and twice that much outside the university system. Most mass communication programmes are at the postgraduate level, which is more suited to impart the necessary skills. But unfortunately mass communication education is still in its infancy. The mass communication schools in India have been focussing on print media for a long time. This is because print media came first and it requires minimal infrastructure to start an academic programme. But gradually mass communication education encompassed all media including electronic media and the Internet which require greater infrastructure. No more practice sessions on reporting and editing can be done on a pen and a piece of paper, even for print media in this digital era. This calls for (i) full-time faculty members inclined to constant updating of knowledge, and (ii) linkage between universities and media organisations.

Media Education as such is making the media more accessible and useful to society by making people (i) critically evaluate the media text and (ii) learn the media production skills so that the process of media creation is better understood. Communication

departments in universities, church schools and non-government organisations conduct Media Education courses. In India, Media Education finds no mention in school and college programmes in general. The hype about Media Education is confined to a few media seminars and conferences. The initiatives on ground are scattered and isolated. Keval Kumar (2004) defines Media Education as a teaching methods that uses formal, non-formal and informal approaches to impart a critical understanding of various media to lead to greater responsibility, greater participation in the production of media as well as to a greater interest in the sales and reception of media.

Having said this much about the status of Media Education and Communication studies in India, the paper examines the studies on media that convey critical awareness of media and enable people to take an active part in production rather than remain as passive consumer.

Dual focus

Mass communication education has two aspects, (i) to train someone to be a media practitioner and (ii) to comment on media. This is unlike the study of literature which is confined to the second aspect (literary criticism), wherein the students are taught only to comment on literature (and not to write literature). A literature student is not expected to become a creative writer. So literature schools do not try to make their students *litterateurs*. But mass communication schools aim at making one a media practitioner, and not a mere commentator of media. Joseph Pulitzer once said, "Journalists are made, not born". Only based on this assumption, alone that mass communication schools have been set up.

Unlike creative writing, journalism is not an inborn talent and the skill can be taught to anyone who wishes to learn it. But then, the teacher who teaches journalism should have the skill in himself/herself. Just because anyone can learn swimming, it does not mean a non-swimmer can teach someone to swim successfully. More so, a student of swimming cannot learn to swim without getting into water and trying to swim. For learning to be a journalist too, both these requirements must be met. First, the teacher of journalism should be a journalist himself. Second, he should provide practical training to students.

According to Vincent D'Souza (2001), mass communication should focus on (i) language skills (with the schools having

sacrificed proper training in English language studies), (ii) news sense (or else, the growing pop news domination of the media could give the youth vague and mixed news sense), (iii) rounded knowledge (classes in history, social and cultural studies, politics and economics are needed), and (iv) multi-skills (for instance, TV reporters are now encouraged to carry video cameras themselves). To achieve this, mass communication teaching resources should consist of a mix of in-house and guest faculty, supported by visiting professors. Professionals should be drawn from reputable media establishments. Field visit and workshops should supplement lectures.

As I said earlier, mass communication schools also teach students to comment on media. In this aspect too, mass communication academics in India are weak but they assert that they combine both professional training and media criticism aspects in the syllabus. The irony is that the academics hardly undertake research under the pretext that the focus of their programmes is on professional training. It should be noted here that media schools particularly in the U.K. and the U.S.A. make a clear distinction between professional training and media criticism. For instance, the City University, London, offers two programmes on mass communication – one M.A. in International Journalism training students to be professional journalists and another M.A. in Communication Studies training students to be media critics. In fact, the two form part of two different schools – the one dealing exclusively with professional journalism and the other with sociology. In India, we combine both the streams and do scant justice. In the liberation era, the trend of media programmes round the globe is to move towards professional journalism. Nobody wants to critically analyse the media beyond a point and end up hating the media! The famous Leicester school of communication that has churned out scholars with the political economy thought has folded up. Leicester's political economy approach is on the wane. A mix-up of academic and professional inputs is good for employability particularly in developing countries. So it is nothing wrong on the part of Indian communication schools to mix up both professional training and media criticism. In fact, the former fetches more jobs. But as a specialisation, the student should be able to opt for a particular aspect of professional media training or media studies.

About research, although M.Phil. and Ph.D. programmes are offered by several mass communication schools, only a few standard

books or research articles have emerged from such schools. Journals in circulation like *Media Asia* and *Vidura* carry hardly any contribution from media academics from India. Even the academic papers come mostly from professionals. Worthwhile researches are also conducted by audience research bureau of TV stations, marketing agencies, advertising agencies, and NGOs involved in communication. Even academics with a Ph.D. do not find the need to carry on further research. Researches that are carried out in academic schools often have outdated methodologies and rely on outdated theories. Communication research in India is yet to take advantage of developments in methodologies in social sciences and behavioural sciences. Discarded communication theories such as 'magic bullet theory' are still given credence by the researchers without knowing the later developments. Even the exchange of ideas through seminars and conferences among the mass communication schools is rare.

Given the nature of the developing society and employability, the focus of mass communication education in India should be more on professional training. But such a professional training should go beyond bare journalistic skills, taking into account the needs of the developing society. Discussing about a successful journalism workshop in a developing country, Eric Loo (2001) said, "Participants were briefed on the general concepts of communication, community-oriented journalism, civic functions of journalists in developing societies, and processes of news production. Reporting conventions discussed were adapted from the 'development-oriented' journalism model" (2001).

Few teachers who come from schools like Leicester have development orientation but they do not fit in comfortably in the media academic environment in India which has a heavy tilt towards professional training as against media studies. There may not be much wrong about Indian media schools opting for emphasis on professional training, given the nature of the job market; but there is a need to have teachers who have had prior experience in the media as professionals so that professional training is meaningful.

Faculty recruitment

Most mass communication schools have faculty members who have never been media professionals or who do not contribute to the media even occasionally. Probably, those mass communication alumni of universities who did not get a job in the media continue

to hang around the mass communication schools doing some part-time teaching or research, and later fall into full-time academic positions without any journalistic experience. Such mass communication faculty members do not also encourage professionals taking part-time classes. They consider professionals as a threat as they fear that their ignorance of the professional aspects would stand exposed and that academic jobs would be lost to professionals.

According to B.S. Thakur (1988), it is almost impossible to lay down a set of qualifications and experience which would be foolproof and would ensure selection of only the right personnel. People have often taken somewhat extreme positions – some overstressing the academic achievements such as master's degree, M.Phil. and Ph.D., and some blowing up the virtues of long experience in the media. The tragedy is that the master's degree holders from substandard schools are now seeking – and at times getting – the lecturer's appointment. This poses the gravest threat to the credibility of communication education. Rightly speaking, the teachers need both academic and professional credentials. All one can say is that the teachers should have a wide and sound educational background, first-rate professional training and some media experience. Also, it has to be verified whether the person has the ability to teach, and to impart skills and techniques. For the recruitment to be foolproof, the requirements specified in the advertisement for the academic posts should specify academic qualification as well as media experience.

All the best mass communication schools the world over have professionals as members of full-time faculty. The schools do not go by mere academic qualifications. But, of late, in several Indian universities, there is a tendency to select 'pure' academics as faculty members. In simple terms, such purity means you have not been touched or 'polluted' by any practical knowledge of media and knowledge of other related academic disciplines! If you are not a professional yourself, you cannot make another person a professional, however bookish you are. Even in the government sector, you need to have professional experience in media for media-related jobs such as those of public relations and information service. So if universities continue to recruit teachers with no professional experience, they would definitely lack credibility in the industry. A mass communication teacher who has never been a professional cannot stand in front of students and inspire the students to be professionals. Except for a few schools including

to hang around the mass communication schools doing some part-time teaching or research, and later fall into full-time academic positions without any journalistic experience. Such mass communication faculty members do not also encourage professionals taking part-time classes. They consider professionals as a threat as they fear that their ignorance of the professional aspects would stand exposed and that academic jobs would be lost to professionals.

According to B.S. Thakur (1988), it is almost impossible to lay down a set of qualifications and experience which would be foolproof and would ensure selection of only the right personnel. People have often taken somewhat extreme positions – some overstressing the academic achievements such as master's degree, M.Phil. and Ph.D., and some blowing up the virtues of long experience in the media. The tragedy is that the master's degree holders from substandard schools are now seeking – and at times getting – the lecturer's appointment. This poses the gravest threat to the credibility of communication education. Rightly speaking, the teachers need both academic and professional credentials. All one can say is that the teachers should have a wide and sound educational background, first-rate professional training and some media experience. Also, it has to be verified whether the person has the ability to teach, and to impart skills and techniques. For the recruitment to be foolproof, the requirements specified in the advertisement for the academic posts should specify academic qualification as well as media experience.

All the best mass communication schools the world over have professionals as members of full-time faculty. The schools do not go by mere academic qualifications. But, of late, in several Indian universities, there is a tendency to select 'pure' academics as faculty members. In simple terms, such purity means you have not been touched or 'polluted' by any practical knowledge of media and knowledge of other related academic disciplines! If you are not a professional yourself, you cannot make another person a professional, however bookish you are. Even in the government sector, you need to have professional experience in media for media-related jobs such as those of public relations and information service. So if universities continue to recruit teachers with no professional experience, they would definitely lack credibility in the industry. A mass communication teacher who has never been a professional cannot stand in front of students and inspire the students to be professionals. Except for a few schools including

that in Osmania University in Hyderabad, mass communication schools at universities do not have faculty members with prior professional experience in media. This is despite the notification of the University Grants Commission – the apex body for higher education in India — to equate the number of years of experience in the media for the direct selection into the faculty or even higher-level posts such as Reader and Professor.

Also, it is said that a professional loses his/her advantage of being a professional when s/he becomes a full-time teacher. This is true to some extent. The fact is that once you learn cycling you would not forget it even if you do not keep going on cycling expeditions; may be you will not win a cycling contest. Likewise, as a professional you should be able to teach at least basic professionalism, and inspire students to become professionals. Practising professionals should be invited as guest faculty for supplementing full-time teachers, to be in tune with the changing media trends.

The latest trend in India, that is, to go in for self-financing education has a tremendous impact on communication education. Many media programmes have been started in several colleges. Some new programmes are B.Sc./M.Sc. with nomenclature such as Visual Communication and Electronic Media. Visual Communication includes drawing and photography whereas Electronic Media includes media technological aspects too.

Several institutions started these fancy programmes without having enough infrastructure. Even the teachers have little experience either as academics or professionals. They are also underpaid. These new brand of teachers do not have job permanency, and so being ‘birds of passage’ they lack commitment. One advantage is that at least here there is a possibility of a few professionals having lateral entry into teaching.

Syllabus overloaded

Usually, the syllabus of journalism or communication programmes is overloaded. There is a tendency to include all media in a single syllabus. For instance, a master’s programme in mass communication would comprise print media, radio, TV, cinema, the Internet, media laws, advertising and public relations. In the process, the student learns basics of every media and lacks specialisation in any one of them. But already private institutions (as contrasted with universities) offering one-year diploma programmes have

specialisations such as (i) print media, (ii) electronic media, (iii) new media (Internet), (iv) advertising and (v) public relations. Universities too are slowly moving in the same direction. For instance, the mass communication programmes of Jamia Millia Islamia (New Delhi) and the University of Hyderabad are specialising in TV. But in universities where there are varied optional papers, often only one option is offered due to lack of qualified staff or lack of infrastructure, and hence the advantage of providing the optional papers is lost.

I remember telling a mass communication professor some years ago that for the sort of syllabus we have (comprising a little of every media) for the two-year master's degree programme, it would be enough if the student reads a single, simple book *Mass Communication in India* by Keval J. Kumar. Mass communication schools at the postgraduate level find it convenient to stop with the basics as there are only a few bachelor's degree programmes having journalism as a component. So most students who undergo postgraduate programmes are new to the media as an academic discipline. But this is no more the case, with several undergraduate programmes offering journalism, electronic media, visual communication, multimedia and the like cropping up.

Academic-industry link

Mass communication schools should have a strong tie-up with the media. Particularly in rural areas, such a tie-up with a local newspaper or a community radio station can contribute much to the growth of the media itself. In urban areas with media saturation, academics may not have an upper hand; but they have a wonderful opportunity to update knowledge.

Why have not the universities thought of sending media academics for in-service training in the media for a month or two, at least once in two years? This may not find acceptance among my academic friends. But think of the world that is fast jumping into the privatisation bandwagon. If you do not have the vibrancy of the private sector, you may no longer attract the best students. Remember that the private sector too has taken to mass communication education. Students show preferences for such diploma programmes which do not even offer a master's degree. No more does the glamour of a university master's degree compensate for quality professional education.

As already told, academics are allergic towards professionals and, more often than not they do not invite professionals for guest lectures. At times, when there is shortage of staff due to non-appointment of full-time faculty members, professionals are invited for guest lecturers. Even the University of Madras which has one of the early mass communication schools has been running with a single full-time mass communication faculty member for several years in the recent past, but continued to offer M.A., M.Phil. and Ph.D. programmes! So is a highly-funded science communication school run by a single full-time faculty member for several years. Such schools invite professionals to teach various subjects. But when too many professionals are invited to teach even core subjects as a stopgap arrangement, each professional deals with his/her area of interest and the students find it difficult to assimilate the disparate lectures. There is no continuity in the lectures, and the lecturers fail to give deeper insight into subjects. But academic rigidity and lack of openness to the academic-industry linkage have prevented mass communication schools from having professional resource persons as a healthy supplement to regular academic inputs of full-time faculty members.

Publication of lab journals and trial audio and video production are done with poor quality. This is despite most mass communication schools offering postgraduate degree programmes have one or two months of internship in each year of the programme. This is a wonderful opportunity for the students to equip themselves professionally. But here too, there are drawbacks: (i) university internees are not taken seriously by the big media organisations and many a time they are left to fend for themselves without guidance; and (ii) in small media organisations which offer much scope for training, at times the internees suffer from superiority complex and they fail to take advantage of the knowledge of veteran media practitioners who lack postgraduate degrees. Of late, with a glut in media schools there is a tendency to cut short the internship period, or eliminate it altogether in the undergraduate programmes, as it is difficult to find a place as an internee. This trend should be curbed given the fact that the media training compensates for several pitfalls in communication education.

Although during the last decade interaction between the profession and the media academics has increased substantially, there still remains a need to establish the credentials of the media education systems in terms of providing adequately trained and educated personnel. Perhaps, one has to follow the model of

medical education where there is a perfect harmony between the medical colleges and the hospitals. Similar arrangement between media schools and the media organisations is the need of the hour. This arrangement shall prove more beneficial to media organisations and there are indications that such initiatives are in store in the not too distant future (Kuthiala 2001).

The media organisations are indifferent to the academic programmes, particularly at the university level. For them, anyone with quick intelligence, knowledge of English, and a master's degree would do. There is no need for a mass communication academic qualification. Even when they insist on a qualification, a part-time diploma qualification is enough. Institutes offering part-time one-year diploma programmes have an added advantage. These diploma programmes could offer admissions to anyone without insisting on high marks unlike the universities so that well-connected persons or those with media inclination can easily get in. Also, even wards of journalists and media barons undergo such part-time programmes. So whether or not such programmes are better off than those of the universities, those doing such programmes get better employment opportunities. This logic behind employability is conveniently forgotten when such diploma programmes handled mostly by retired, out-of-date faculty members are ranked higher than those of universities. Leaving aside such considerations, emphasis should be laid on practical training.

Practical production by students is growing in importance – mostly because of the dissemination of information and communication technologies (ICTs) – but it remains marginal in the large majority of cases, particularly where funding to establish production facility is limited. The recent assessment of media education shows that many syllabi, even if they are related to production, have not identified skills and competencies that are expected at different levels and of how they are to be assessed (Buckingham 2001). As computers have revolutionised communication, it is now possible to get training in newspaper layout or video editing on a computer system.

To ensure effective practical training, even the selection process for enrolling students into mass communication programmes should test media ability and aptitude rather than memory. Weightage should be given to writing for school/college magazines, contributing to 'letters to the editor' columns, contributing articles to newspapers, participation in radio/TV programmes and the like.

Non-university institutions such as the Asian College of Journalism, Chennai; the Indian Institute of Mass Communication, New Delhi; the Indian Institute of Journalism and New Media, Bangalore; the Kerala Press Academy, Thiruvananthapuram; the Film and Television Institute of India, Pune; the Ad Club, Chennai; Xavier Institute of Communication, Mumbai; Mudra Institute of Communications, Ahmedabad; the Symbiosis Institute of Mass Communication, Pune; and the Chitrabani, Kolkata run successful Diploma programmes in Communication.

Of the full-time diploma programmes, that offered by the Indian Institute of Mass Communication (IIMC), New Delhi, is still the best. The IIMC's enrolment is based on an all-India test, its programme is subsidised. It being located in the national capital New Delhi, the students have the best media environment. Whatever be the teaching facilities the IIMC offers, its students get good job placement due to the above reasons. The Asian College of Journalism, Chennai, the Xavier Institute of Communications, Mumbai, the Indian Institute of Journalism and New Media, Bangalore, and the Symbiosis Institute of Mass Communication, Pune, are self-financing institutions, and they have also made their marks. Professional forums such as the Tiruvanthapuram Press Club also offer standard diploma programmes, as they naturally cater to the needs of the industry. Of late, the university programmes have also realised the drawback of the lack of linkage with the industry, and a few universities have made arrangements with media organisations so that their students can do some productive work in the media organisations as and when they find time. For instance, a Communication school in Manonmani Sundaranar University, Tirunelveli, has tied up with a regional language daily. Such a linkage is much needed for mass communication schools located in semi-urban areas where only some small media offices are located. In such cases, academics could also take a lead and guide the news organisations.

Professional experience would also help researchers to frame appropriate methodologies for a given research problem. No wonder, media studies programmes specialising in media effects and media research in American and European universities prefer candidates with media experience. In-service training is imperative to gain knowledge of the new developments. For instance, most of the senior teachers of mass communication schools would have had least to do with TV media, as the field was at its infancy when they were mass communication students. But they are now forced to

teach TV, or times specialised programmes like M.Sc. in Electronic Media. If teachers with prior experience in media were recruited, they would have least problems in catching up with the later media developments. The in-service training for university/college teachers offered through the Academic Staff College of the select universities should cover teachers of self-financing programmes too, and professionals should be invited as resourcepersons for the training.

Problem of language

Today we could hear the public say that even the best of the English newspapers are full of mistakes. One reason could be due to the predominance of technology that has led to paperless newspaper offices and dispensing with proofreaders. But the main reason is that with the English-dominant colonial past receding into the background, English standards have also taken a backseat. So media schools should pay special attention on developing language skills.

The newspapers, or even electronic media, do not offer lucrative jobs, any more. With the liberalisation and the growth of the corporate sector and computerisation, the best of the brains do not take to journalism. So by and large, news media now attracts mostly average people 'average intelligence'. Such a situation should be capitalised by university programmes on mass communication to train effectively the students who have willingly opted for master's programmes – either a two-year master's degree programme or a one-year postgraduate bachelor's followed by a one-year master's. The universities could also offer specialisations in lucrative areas such as advertising and corporate communication. A peculiar situation prevails in new media (Internet), where anyone at ease with computers is given a job – rather than for the competency in journalism. Here, knowledge of the English language is not given importance, and so is the knowledge of journalism ignored. Some of the reports on the Internet are written in atrocious English. The new media content writers do not follow the time-tested inverted pyramid structure [most important aspect first and the story written in the descending order of importance] due to sheer ignorance of the technique. It should be noted here that the inverted pyramid structure which forms the basis of print journalism is all the more important in new media, where the visitor is trigger happy with his hand on the mouse and at a hurry to quit the page.

The lack of focus on content is one of the reasons for the folding up of several 'dotcom' companies.

Students of English journalism should be given an opportunity to undergo a couple of specialised inter-disciplinary courses offered by English language schools. These courses could also incorporate the study of prominent stylebooks such as those of Reuters and Associated Press. (Stylebooks are no-nonsense guides to correct English and consistency in usage.) This is the need of the hour as the English media looks for candidates with language skills. If mass communication schools do not cater to this need, those who have come from public schools and those who have higher education in English literature would be preferred to those having mass communication degrees. So is the need for computer education as part of mass communication programmes as even print media has gone in for a paperless, online production.

Mass communication programmes specialising in the Indian languages are yet to take off, the reason being Indian language media are not good paymasters and they are not fond of recruiting those with mass communication degrees/diplomas. But a beginning has been made by IIMC in New Delhi (besides its specialisation in English journalism), Sourashtra University in Rajkot and Makhanlal Chaturvedi National University for Journalism in Bhopal.

Web journalism

Communication schools need to equip themselves to teach new courses such as online journalism. The media in India needs multi-skilled people with an understanding of the nature of information and well-versed in the new communication technologies. People skilled in media production as well as critical thinking in relation to information and communication technologies (ICTs) are needed. This calls for a curriculum with a mix of practical media production (including Internet publishing), media effects, political economy, cultural studies, and internships.

ICT has transformed industries like newspaper publishing, but syllabi of many media schools lag on this front. And those that have good media labs face other challenges in servicing and maintenance facilities. The induction of new technology like computers and the Internet in the media sector suggests that familiarity and working knowledge of ICT should be part of syllabi. Many educators feel their role is not necessarily to meet the manpower needs of the industry, but to meet broader holistic social

goals and non-media roles as well. Communication schools should not just follow guidance from the government, but take inputs mainly from the industry.

The range of Internet skills needed include hypertext publishing, graphic design and cyberlaws. Despite the IT bubble burst, new media is still relevant. News is now broken on the Net first and delivered through a variety of media including mobile phones.

Media awareness courses

Media awareness workshops are being conducted by various institutions such as the Culture and Communication Centre, Loyola College, Chennai; the United Theological Seminary, Bangalore; the Newspapers in Education project, *The Times of India*, New Delhi; and the Centre for Media Studies, New Delhi. Media institutions have the aim of promoting their media. Church institutions may like to point to the morally destructive character of the media. Non-government organisations may look at the media's undemocratic aspect of neglecting some disadvantaged groups.

These programmes promote skill training and media criticism. But except for the courses run by media institutions which have expertise in dealing with professional aspects, most other courses are theory oriented. Theory-oriented courses are not much appreciated by students. Students are mostly after skill-based professional courses. A little bit of sermonising does not matter much; but too much of it is rejected.

At times of crises such as when a few children have taken to bizarre acts as an impact of a tele-serial, institutions such as the Centre for Media Studies, New Delhi, have organised workshops involving parents, teachers and social activists. Such workshops have made the people aware that violence is bad even if it is done to triumph over the evil. In a country with a religious tradition that hails triumph over evil through violence, this is a major achievement. A decade earlier, there was a lot of hype about introducing Media Education as a subject in schools and colleges. There was a move sponsored by the University Grants Commission to introduce a Visual Literacy course at the undergraduate level in select colleges throughout the country. This is based on the logic that with the vast expansion of television there is a need to make the youngsters understand the visual language and its possible manipulation. But however, the course never did materialise.

The problem is, where will you fit in the Media Education course if it has to be introduced as a full paper in schools and colleges? Already there is a non-major paper on Moral Education. There have been demands for a Value Education course too. The demand for Value Education course started in the National Policy of Education, 1986, which got a renewed vigour with a spiritual tint when Hindu nationalism emerged as a political force in the 1990s. In the late 1990s, demand for another course surfaced – it is Human Rights Education. So the question is, should schools and colleges incorporate every aspect of these in Moral Education itself or chose to have independent courses on Moral Education, Value Education, Media Education and Human Rights Education? As it is, students do not take Moral Education seriously.

Another argument is that Media Education need not be confined to a separate paper but it should be incorporated along with other subjects. (The same argument holds good for Value Education and Human Rights Education.) For instance, Media Education can be successfully taught as part of subjects like English or other languages by teaching language skills through media texts, or Social Science by commenting on the effects of media. Teachers have the mission to sensitise students to the happenings in the real world. For incorporating Media Education effectively in other subjects, the teacher needs to have creative ability and also proper training.

Students of today live in a media-dominant environment. It is said that media programming washes away values learnt in schools. Schools can no longer ignore media and remain insulated from the media content. Students take to media with ease than taking to books. So teaching through media is not only a challenge but also a great opportunity. In language classes, newspapers could be used as an effective textbook for learning 'language through newspapers' similar to the widely-prevalent approach of learning 'language through literature'. Radio and television can be effectively used as educational media either with syllabus or enrichment programming. Educational radio and educational television for school and college students in India have failed to succeed in a large scale because of the apathy of teachers. Teachers have considered it a waste of time to allocate time for viewing or listening to educational programming. In fact, such educational programming can also serve as a launch pad into Media Education. If these programmes are effectively used, teachers would also develop a positive approach to the power of media. Thus Media Education helps students and

teachers to have control over the media environment rather than be dominated by it.

The messages of the media can be informational, educational and cultural. So schools and colleges cannot ignore understanding of the media, at least when they have facilities to impart such a course. Of late, several autonomous colleges that offer degree programmes in Journalism, Visual Communication and the like, offer non-major optional courses for students from other majors. Some of the students of these courses at the undergraduate level have later taken to master's degree programmes in Communication. Some others have entered media as professionals. A few B.Ed. programmes too offer a course on Media Studies; this could lay a good foundation for the introduction of Media Education as a course at least in select schools.

Conclusion

Mass communication schools should have a strong bond with media. They should invite media organisations to sponsor their various activities. Despite various diploma programmes offered by private institutions, two-year master's degree programmes of universities are comprehensive. But they need to reorientate themselves to the changing media trends. In India, management and computer education at the university level succeeded whereas mass communication education failed because of a weak academic-media link. Instead of crowding the syllabi with all media, specialisations should be offered at least in the second part of the programme. Likewise, there could be two streams: one focussing on professional training and the other on media criticism. But both the streams should have something of each other. Full-time academics involved in professional training should have had media experience. The syllabi should have a strong input on language — the flair for language being a must for media professionals.

All these would not materialise unless the University Grants Commission (UGC) formulates and enforces specific guidelines for mass communication education throughout the country. But the UGC too has limited powers in enforcing its guidelines, the universities being autonomous bodies. In fact, a few mass communication schools have made a mark under a Special Assistance Programme of the UGC. Special lectures by eminent professionals, computers with Internet connectivity, an electronic media lab, a photo lab, an audio lab, a lab journal production facility,

a library with books on communication subjects, and subscription to newspapers and academic journals have been provided under such an assistance. Feedback from media on the academic requirements should be given at frequent intervals; as when AMIC-India undertook one such study on mass communication education under the guidance of B.P. Sanjay in 2002.

Provision should also be made for constant updating of the syllabi. Communication schools should follow a uniform curriculum with the initiative of the UGC, while allowing flexibility to meet the regional needs and to give scope for creativity. Subjects such as human rights reporting, war reporting, disaster management coverage and violence on media could also be included. The UGC guidelines should be based on the industry requirements. Emphasis should be placed on preparing the students for the entry-level jobs in the industry as well as for mass communication research. There should be a uniform nomenclature for the degrees offered: M.A. Communication. Just as in management wherein MBA has different specialisations such as Finance and Industrial Management, so can the Communication degrees with the same nomenclature offer different specialisations. When a programme is called 'Journalism and Mass Communication' it appears that journalism is not a part of mass communication! Uniformity would ensure easy updating of the latest developments throughout the country, with a support system for faculty in-service training. The advances like 'streaming media' in the Internet should have formed a part of the syllabus by now. 'Mass communication education' is not the 'history' discipline where things would remain the same for a long time to come. It ought to change in tune with the fast-changing media trends.

As argued in this paper, Media Education as a separate subject in schools and colleges in India is still not feasible. But to protect the students from the harmful effects of media and to take advantage of the beneficial aspects of media, Media Education has to be introduced at least as components of different subjects. As part of language classes, the media – particularly newspapers – could be introduced. When language teaching has a component 'language through literature' why not 'language through newspapers'. Evaluating the media text would help students to develop their analytical and critical thinking skills, which are integral to education. Media Education courses could be introduced on a trial basis in select schools and colleges.

Alumni of Communication schools who are into media profession too could be involved in the conduct of Media

Education workshops. They would have the advantage of being professionals, besides possessing a background of media studies. The Media Education syllabi need to be updated frequently to serve the changing media requirements. Students must be imparted skills, passion and professionalism for developing a proper 'news sense'.

Dr. I. Arul Aram, Ph.D., is Chief Sub-Editor with 'The Hindu', Chennai. He is author of the book 'Television in Education' (Orient Longman). He is a visiting faculty member in Madras Christian College.

Author

Buckingham, D. 2001. *An Invitation to Media-Education* (unpublished). Paris: UNESCO.

D'Souza, Vincent. 2001. "Back to Basics, Back to Ethics." Paper presented at AMIC-India conference on 'Communication Education and Media Needs in India Today' at Chennai on 26-27 November.

Kumar, Keval J. 2004. Quoted in *Media Education in India* by Mailin Thomas. <http://www.unics.uni-hannover.de/mediempaed/303.htm>

Kumar, Keval J. 1981. *Mass Communication in India*. (revised edition). Mumbai: Jaico Publishers.

Kuthiala, B.K. 2001. "Mass Communication Education – Trends and Challenges." Paper presented at AMIC-India conference on 'Communication Education and Media Needs in India Today' at Chennai on 26-27 November.

Loo, Eric. 2001. "Journalism Training: Are You a Coach or a Player?" *Media Asia*, Singapore, Vol. 28, No. 1, pp. 23-29.

National Curriculum Framework for School Education. 2000. A Discussion Document. New Delhi: National Council of Educational Research and Training.

National Policy on Education. 1986. Programme of Action. New Delhi: Government of India.

Sanjay, B.P. 2002. *Communication Education and Media Needs in India*. AMIC-India: Chennai.

Thakur, B.S. 1988. "What Ails Journalism Education?" *Vidura*, New Delhi, July-August. pp. 3-7.

Reference