

## **Journalists' Reporting Efforts, Techniques and Trends during War and Crisis Scenarios**

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### **Abstract:**

Journalism in theory and real does not confide to closed spaces in the gamut of Journalistic studies. Instead, it remarkably reflects major themes opened to its surrounding. Journalism dealing with core issues has been witnessing tectonic shifts due to changing times in the fast moving world amidst the evolving modern marvels of science. Journalism involves detailed analysis of inextricable relationships between the causes and effects of human experiences. There is no prescribed protocol or predetermined frame of mind for a comprehensive work of journalism to be established. During Wars and Crisis, it requires courage and complete dedication to be part of it and survive efficiently. Journalists reporting on war and crisis often report from the harshest conditions possible known to mankind and sometimes stay over for years in unknown terrains to collate information and thereby keep the world informed. This paper attempts to trace the impact of Journalism and portray its significance on War and Crisis.

**Keywords:** Journalism, War, Crisis and Investigative Journalism.

### **Introduction**

Reportage across the world on War and Crisis has not been an easy job. It is by far one of the toughest assignments to be carried out in the world. Journalists covering events on War and Crisis often report from the toughest terrains known to mankind. Some of the terrains are highly

inaccessible and becomes almost impossible to culminate the required information.

Incidents and issues on war and crisis often exist on a long duration. They span from weeks to months and in multiple cases even years altogether. Wars are man made and incidents involving crisis are necessarily not. They happen due to

natural disasters as well. But, in both the cases there is a significant loss in human lives and damage often yielding in loss of property.

Articles and News dispatches reported either through print or media technology requires reporters on the ground. Journalists interact with the common masses on regular basis. And in order to acquire detailed information stemmed from their observation or from their presence around the vicinity, Journalists choose to stay over to complete their tasks. The horrors of 26/11 Mumbai attacks still haunt us today. Although not of that magnitude similar incidents continue to exist today. The attacks remind us on two important narratives. One, that the terrorists waged a war on innocent lives who died for the fault of not their own. And the second narrative is that an undue crisis soon followed once the incident began with thousands running directionless.

Daniel Pearl working as a South Asian Bureau Chief for *The Wall Street Journal* stationed in Mumbai was kidnapped by militants and was eventually executed on February 21, 2002. His primary duty at the time was to report incidents related to shoe bombing by the terrorists. He was subsequently captured and killed by his captors. He was one of the finest investigative journalists of our time.

**Men and Women armed with Pen and Mic**

A journalist reporting about the instances that occur at a place serve the readers and listeners not only around its vicinity but, also enable millions across around the world. Articles that appear in magazines and newspapers most often contain minute details of the events that were covered. This is attributed toward extensive reportage because of the long duration of the covering of events is usually involved. News Articles and Dispatches related to Wars do inform readers of the geographical locations where they are fought and brings to light the plight of the fallen soldiers and the innocent people who have lost their lives in the ensuing cross fire.

And for someone who held a pen and a mic, Robert Stimson, a BBC correspondent at that time, on his valedictory dispatch titled "Goodbye to India" in 10 March 1949 spoke of the horrors during the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi. And it appeared frightening to him because, he was almost just five yards away when the most dreadful incident in the history of Independent era had unfolded in front of his eyes. Stimson added, "*It was a pleasure to interview Gandhi because he had an instinctive understanding of news and was a master of simple colorful English*".

**Methodology**

In the research article, various news coverage reports and articles related to War and Crisis situations have been taken for consideration. The articles reported between 1959 and 2009 are primarily taken because tremendous tectonic shifts have taken place with respect to the evolution of media trends in the five-decade period.

In the first phase, Radio Dispatches have been focused. Second leg deals with newspaper reports and coverage and the third and final phase deals with Investigative Journalism. Significant aspects from these articles are highlighted and analyzed with respect to the style of reportage and the contribution made by the respective journalists. Key findings are recorded in the end to arrive at a clarified position.

### **Reportage on Wars**

Reportage on Wars is usually not that colorful. War veterans do celebrate courage, dedication and victory. But on parallel lines in the crossfire, innocent lives have been often lost for the fault of not their own. Battle lines are drawn only for the soldiers but the safety of the civilians still is a distant dream. Journalists reporting on war do focus on both its good and the evil aspects.

Edward W. Desmond's "War at the Top of the World" published in TIME Magazine on 17 July 1989 reads "*THE BLAST IS startling, and so is the reverberation that*

*echoes like a landslide. But the sound of artillery - the sound of war - fades quickly in the gigantic stillness of mountain and glacier*".

The minute details covered in the articles related to war also included abstract terms that can only be felt. Words like "national pride", "prestige" and "plight" usually dominate the scenario. They portray both the good and evil aspects of the war just like two sides of a coin.

In the context of Indian history, never before it has seen such steep rise in nationalism and patriotism. Much of it though spread around through community radio systems and by virtue of word of mouth, the world watched in with utmost attention.

One other incident that assumes significance is the Mumbai Terror Attacks of 2008, wherein; about 166 innocent people lost their lives. Terrorism in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is an international industry. And every type of weapon they imagine is available in the black market of the third world.

Adrian Levy and Cathy Scott-Clark were one of the key investigative journalists who covered the incident and published a book titled "The Siege: The Attack on the Taj". They depicted a scene about Will Pike (28) and Kelly Doyle (30) the couple from London who stayed in the Hotel who shut themselves behind closed doors when the siege by the terrorists was being undertaken.

Adrian and Cathy report, *“Explosions rolled down the corridor like a massed band. Glass splintered somewhere on the third floor and wood snapped. It sounded as if a boot had been planted through a partition wall and was now being twisted and flexed”*.

The details that are accumulated in the aforesaid lines do portray the horrors faced by the couple. Post the incident, the world not only stood in dismay but also it was captivating on helping India come out its menace. It echoed in one voice that the head of the viper should be cut before it had a chance to strike.

We have heard and read the heroic stories of the hundreds of the National Security Guards and the MARCO's who fought against the terrorists during the Mumbai Siege. One particular officer's story could be retold. Rakesh Maria of the Mumbai Police, who is the current Police Commissioner of Mumbai, ended his daily work and returned back home. Upon hearing the news through his mobile phone he got back to the police headquarters immediately. It is quite remarkably; one of the most courageous and arduous stories that demands our attention.

In the words of Rakesh Maria one of the police officers who took control of managing the crisis which Adrian and Cathy report: “They are coming for us. He broke out the last arms. He had to inspire them to stand and fight. He gathered everyone” And at almost after a few

minutes, his wife called asking whether his/her son could leave Mumbai for Ahmedabad. Adrian and Cathy report that his prompt reply was “Let him Go. God forbid if this whole city is finished, we are all finished, then there is someone in the family who will be safe”

### **Reporting Crisis and Disasters**

Disasters don't operate on their own. A chain of events triggers them and in their final moments they appear in a fatal blow resulting in massive destruction and most often followed by huge loss of lives. People suffering under the duress of disasters, tend to communicate and enquire of their loved ones.

The need for Centralized communication takes the center stage. All issues related to Grievances, Rehabilitation and Undertaking Measures are all confined to modes of Communication.

Pablo Bartholomew's coverage on the Bhopal Gas Leak Incident in 1984 shocked the world at large. It also depicted the horrors of an innocent child being buried after a leak of more than 40 tonne of highly toxic waste from the Union Carbide chemical plant in Bhopal, India, in 1984. A picture of a baby buried in the rumbles post the disaster spoke volumes of the brevity of the accident.

Sudip Mazumdar's article, which appeared on Newsweek, the Magazine in 17 December 1984, titled “It Was Like Breathing Fire” reported, *“Most of Bhopal*

*was asleep when disaster struck. After the leak started, as many as 200,000 people ran through the city streets, coughing, screaming and calling out to each other. At about 2 a.m., the pesticide factory's siren went off. Thinking a fire had broken out, hundreds rushed towards the plant – straight into the path of the deadly gas. The train station was littered with the bodies of railroad employees and red-uniformed porters. The junction was paralyzed for twenty hours, making it impossible for survivors to flee by train. Those wealthy enough to own cars gathered their families and tried to escape. But many drivers were blinded by the gas, and there were scores of accidents”.*

The article underscores two important narratives. The first narrative is that the title by itself is suggestive of the fact that a disaster unfolded. And when Swapan Saha, a sociologist was interviewed about the incident he mentioned *‘It was both a burning and a suffocating sensation,’* he further added that *“it was like breathing fire”*.

This aspect of assuming a major idea from which an article's content could be closely guessed based on its title itself makes Journalism a conducive medium for detailed information. From the interviewee's point of view, he was expressing his views with photographic memories when he had spoken to the interviewer.

*The Hindu* reported “On the morning of 26<sup>th</sup> December 2004, a new word entered

the dictionary of most Indians. It was ‘Tsunami’ ”. ‘Tsunami’ traditionally a Japanese word entered the lives of billions across Asia and the millions who lost their lives and who were affected by it. The unusual and ruthless force at large washed away and consumed millions of people across India, Indonesia and Thailand and many other countries around the world.

The world stood in horror and united under one banner for a common unified purpose in order to rescue and save millions stranded by it, in what was seen as one of the biggest rescue and rehabilitation operations in the history of mankind.

Due to extensive reportage and further to changes in the Indian context, the government formed the National Disaster Response Force” (NDRF) for the purposes of response, rescue and rehabilitation purposes because at the time it was missing in formation and action. Chennai, Cuddalore, and Nagapattinam in India suffered huge casualties and it tested the full brut force of India's recovering capabilities.

Journalism as a career and as a tool for expressing one's idea also rests with its consistency towards its sustainable existence at every stage of its evolution. To ascertain its merits and demerits it has become essential to report key findings.

### **Key Findings**

- Journalists reporting on War and Crisis are often placed in nail biting circumstances.
  - Journalists while reporting inhabit harshest conditions known to mankind.
  - They not only live those conditions but also relive them through their heavy dosage of memories it leaves them with.
  - The titles of the articles taken in the research paper are often kept direct indicating and informing the readers of its content. This in a way does not mislead the readers drastically unlike gossip reportage or reporting for the sake of increasing Television Rating Points (TRP).
  - Reporters if not reporting with clinical precision, they need to report verified information and thus minimizing rumors as it could lead to further civilian chaos.
  - Investigative Journalists record both aspects of good and evil just like two sides of the same coin. The time involved in this type of reportage is long and hence detailed coverage is accounted for.
  - Detailed interviews with need to be tasked and carried out while reporting on War and Crisis. This in effect assuages first hand information.
  - Due to extensive reportage and coverage, significant contribution has been made not only to inform the common man but also the government with respect to safety measures and unresolved issues.
- Reportage on Wars and Crisis also unleashes a whole plethora of information about geographical locations, the temperature of the immediate vicinity and the behavioral mood of the civilian and the military population.
  - The victims affected by the disasters are interviewed. This enables reporters to report their plights and consolidates their position for the need of aid and security.
  - During Crisis situations extensive reportage is handled both in terms of reporting detailed information and extending physical reach. Reporters are spread at innumerable places in order to cover from a 360-degree angle approach.
  - Both physical and mental strengths of the Journalists are tested while reporting on War and Crisis scenarios. These attributes make them professionally impregnable.

### **Conclusion**

Reportage as a medium available as a scope for employment is huge and rewarding. To gather the required skills, one could utilize the journalistic medium itself either through print media or the impact of television that dominates most of the first years in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Reportage on Wars and Crisis has helped in decoding the two sides of life belonging to the same coin. One side depicts on the goodness and the other ravaged by

disasters. Journalists of the 21<sup>st</sup> century should also be armed with ethics and certain values. Some values to be inculcated includes respecting one's privacy and not to be forcing information from someone who is unwilling to share that would yield in damaging his/her own life.

Speakers and Writers often need to undertake two points of view. One, from a 'Bird's Eye View' and the other, from a 'Worm's Eye View'. The Bird's eye view is common to most of us. In terms of comprehending information, it is from a general and outer perspective. It becomes important to analyze issues from a macro point of view while reporting. And the other, from a first person's view and accounts. And it is vital to analyze from a macro point of view.

Mass Media however immensely popular it has become, it requires men and women to be on the ground to report. And for news and information to be reported effectively, it is important for the journalists to verify it before tabling it. And more reporting skills do not necessary form the epicenter of journalism

Journalism as a medium not only serves to disseminate information to the common mass but also provides a platform for readers and listeners. Our current generation could greatly utilize the base of Journalism for not just enhancing their own lives and skills but it could also pave way for the next. Often referred to as the GEN NEXT!

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