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Revisiting the state of journalism and journalistic education in India

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Abstract

The formation and development of journalistic education in India in the conditions of fast-growing media sector is a topic that has not received sufficient disclosure in the Russian science studies. In the background of existing problems in the field of freedom of journalism as a social institution, the rights and position of journalists in this Asian country, the contemplation of the journalistic personnel training system has an undoubted research interest. Indian journalism education is a unique phenomenon which is heterogeneous in its structure, goals and objectives. The article examines and analyzes the key provisions of the system of professional training of journalists in India, the role and place of a journalist in the country, the problems of its security and social protection. Author also pays attention to professional ethics and qualifications of media workers. In general, it is concluded that Indian journalists are poorly qualified, and the editorial policy does not sufficiently reflect the social and economic realities of the country. In March 2013, the Press Council of India decided to create a committee to determine the minimum journalistic qualifications. The idea was rejected by media practitioners who claim that journalism is a vocation, but the question is still open. The work of a journalist in India, as in the rest of the world, is increasingly moving away from objectivity and impartiality, turning into a profession of a lobbyist and a PR manager, aimed at obtaining benefits mostly.

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Keywords

India, journalistic education, Indian media, freedom of Mass Media, the rights of journalists, professional ethics, journalistic responsibility, journalist qualifications.

Introduction

India is a unique country with a 5,000-year-old civilization and it has been building its democracy for almost 70 years with its distinctive national color, unlike other countries of the world.

According to its Constitution, modern India is a sovereign socialist secular republic, which consists of 29 states and 7 union territories, where the population speaks 22 officially recognized languages already. The geographic, geological, climatic, cultural and linguistic diversity of the country is so great that it is very difficult for the government to build an adequate national policy; however, it is currently successfully coping.

The originality of the country has determined the development of the national journalism and the media industry in total. If private business controls the press, radio, filmmaking and the transnational television industry, government initiatives dominate the national segment of Indian television and the Internet.

The modern Indian media industry has great power, wide markets (in terms of multilingualism), representing the interests of almost all segments of the population.

Main Part

The print media of India today is in private ownership actually, state ownership in this market segment is no more than 2%. In 2011, the daily cumulative circulation of the print media reached 330 million copies (with 1.3 billion people), over the past 10 years, the cumulative circulation of the Indian press market grew by 288% [Press in India, www].

Nowadays there are about 100,000 registered print media, 850 government television channels (413 of them are news and 437 are entertainment) in India, also there are state broadcasters Doordarshan (Public TV) and Akashvani – All India Radio (AIR).

There are many privately owned FM radio stations and radio stations owned by academic institutions and non-governmental organizations in India. In terms of the number of Internet users, India ranks the second place in the world (462 million), the first and the third places belong to China (721 million) and the United States (286 million), respectively [Internetlivestats, www].

The training of journalistic personnel in India began even before the country gained independence (1947) in the philological faculties of universities, where only the purity of language and journalistic responsibility were emphasized, however, the owners of newspapers absolutely did not pay attention to these points. After independence there were business interests in the first place (the newspaper had to be sold), which also ignored the norms of professional behavior of a journalist. Only in the 1990s Mass Media began to create their own schools of journalism.

Today in the field of journalistic education in India, there are several players, ranging from state universities and media houses that own educational institutions for the training of media workers, to journalistic pedagogical associations and unions working with enterprises and non-profit organizations. Journalist training in India is a subset of specialties and specializations in the field of mass communication. In India, there are about 700 universities that train specialists in the field of Mass Media with programs of any level and volume. Moreover, there are two state universities dedicated exclusively to journalism and education in the field of mass communication, and the national university with the School of Journalism, including the latest media disciplines.

Each university includes hundreds of colleges offering highly specialized additional programs in the field of journalism and mass communication for bachelors and even graduate students. However,

only 10-15 Indian universities can offer PhD programs, because really high-grade researches can be conducted only in English language (from 22 officially recognized ones), and Indian scientists who have been educated in the UK are mostly unable to create adequate and relevant training media programs because of the linguistic, sociocultural, resource, etc. differences [Murthy, 2011].

It is important to notice that majority of educational programs in the field of journalism was initiated by Indian scientists who trained in the United States of America. So, their approach to journalistic education was more Western, not local. This western orientation is still ongoing, along with the lack of standard curricula throughout India. Often, curricula are completely dependent on the decision of the teaching staff (I read what I want), not on such variables as institutional needs, importance and relevance of content, students' preferences. India does not conduct monitoring and evaluation of journalism programs. The National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) focuses only on the general quality of education in high school, college, etc.

The participation of the private sector in the training of Indian journalists is great – there are hundreds of commercial institutes and training courses for journalists, including programs with foreign participation. The American College of Journalism, located in the largest city of India Mumbai (Bombay until 1995) is especially popular in India, despite the fact that until recently there were government bans on the participation of foreign capital in Indian media.

Although private educational institutions are able to satisfy the needs of Indian media market and requirements of employers for their staff, the cost of training in such institutions is high and most students from middle-income families are unable to pay for them. In addition, there is a huge difference in the programs of private and public educational institutions. Today, many Indian media groups have created their own training schools, some of which are available for a wide audience. For example, the owner of a large Eenadu publishing group Ramoji Rao created a school for training journalists in Telugu language on the base of his media holding, where he even assigns scholarships to students. In reality, these scholarships are paid for publications prepared by students for the editions of the holding. At the same time, the son of media magnate was sent to study journalism abroad [Ravindranath, 2005, 102].

According to the World Free Press Index, India currently ranks 136 out of 180 countries included in the rating [2017 World Press Freedom Index, www], which indicates an unsatisfactory position in the field of media independence, the quality of legislation and the protection of journalists in this Asian country. The Indian Union of Journalists reports that 47 journalists have died in India since the early 1990s. For example, in 1997, 7 journalists were killed, and 9 in 2015. Very often pressure is put on media workers, mostly for political reasons.

Over the past few years, journalists who criticize Hindu nationalist movements and their leaders have been attacked in social networks, they are also threatened with physical violence, as for women journalists, as a rule, they are threatened with rape [Russian BBC, www].

On September 5, 2017, journalist Gauri Lankesh was shot dead. The woman was the editor of an Indian tabloid who often criticized Hindu extremists. In November 2016, Lankesh was accused of defamation because of an article published in 2008, where she called the member of Bharatiya Janata Party (remark – the ruling party) Pralhada Joshi a corrupt. In December 2016, the journalist gave an interview to online media and stated that “as a citizen of India, I oppose the fascist and communal policies of Bharatiya Janata Party”. She accused the ruling party of distorting the ethics of Hinduism and declared herself an opponent of the caste system, which she described as “dishonest, unfair, and discriminatory on the basis of sex”.

According to the International Committee of Journalists Protection, since 2013 there have been

three similar contract killings of secularists and rationalists in India, whose investigations have not progressed far. Death of Lankesh became the fourth crime.

The Committee regularly publishes a ranking of countries based on the so-called Impunity Index, based on the percentage of contract killings of journalists remaining undisclosed. In the last publication, India ranked 13th.

In turn, the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) also reports that journalists who openly criticize Hindu nationalists are regularly threatened with rape and beatings, and the ministers of the ruling party call them “presstitutes”, a mix of the words “press” and “prostitute”.

Nowadays a special bill is being drafted in India, which will have to provide journalists with the same rights of protection as other state employees.

Prejudices against women continue to exist in many Indian editorial staffs, very often the employers do not want to hire them, even though they have diplomas with honors. The problems of the caste stratification also did not disappear, although in 1950 the Constitution of India recognized equality of castes and their legal full rights. Anyway, you will not see representatives of lower Sudras and Dalits (untouchables) in top news programs [Rajpurohit, 2014].

The Indian Press Council also notes all sorts of violations of professional ethics by Indian journalists. Mostly it is an obtaining personal benefit from their materials. Indian journalists are compromising themselves by accepting all kinds of services from those about whom they need to write positively, whether they are hiring relatives, getting housing benefits, or simply accepting an envelope with “bonuses”. It is noteworthy that the editorial leadership often does not prevent it, on the contrary, it may even participate. This is especially seen in election campaigns [Secretariat, 2013]. The bribes received by the media, the Government of India regards as a real threat to democracy and tries to take measures to eradicate corrupt practices, which is officially announced from high tribunes.

In 1955, the so-called “Working Journalists and other Newspaper Employees (Condition of Service) and Miscellaneous Provisions Act” was accepted, according to which the Ministry of Labor and Employment of India established six special commissions designed to protect the working conditions of journalists and guarantee stable and decent wages. But in 1993, media owners developed and introduced a system of media contracts, which had virtually canceled these guarantees. The trade unions of Indian journalists claim that nowadays media workers, especially newcomers, are mercilessly exploited by this system, considered as temporary “disposable” employees [Tambat, 2012].

Despite the pressures and challenges the journalistic profession faces in India, it is still honorable and prestigious.

The number of people willing to be a professional journalist is not reduced, as evidenced by the growing number of students in media schools annually, while future journalists express a desire to work primarily in the electronic, not in the print media, since the Indian Internet boom provides many alternative career paths.

In 2006, media researcher A. Balasubramania surveyed 835 journalists working in 11 languages in 14 Indian states for their vocational education. Only 35% of respondents had a formal journalistic education [Balasubramanya, 2006, 45-49]. A study by V. Gupta in 2009 showed that 68% of the employees in the electronic media of the most populated city in India, Mumbai, received journalistic training [Gupta, 2009].

Despite the presence of media schools and the training of journalists in universities, the Indian media industry recognizes the lack of professional staff, especially in the field of press. There is also some concern about the quality of teaching at journalism schools [Power of a billion..., 2013]. For example, the state universities of Pune and Nagpur still offer a one-year training program for journalists

[Barve, 2007], while the bachelor's degree should not be only practical, but also give the student an idea of the economic, socio-political and cultural environment, where the national media system exists.

Conclusion

In general, Indian journalists are poorly qualified, and the editorial policy does not sufficiently reflect the social and economic realities of the country. In March 2013, the Press Council of India decided to create a committee to determine the “minimum journalistic qualifications”. The idea was rejected by media practitioners who claim that journalism is a vocation, but the question is still open.

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Обзор состояния журналистики и журналистского образования в Индии

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Аннотация

Формирование и развитие журналистского образования в Индии в условиях быстрорастущего медиа-сектора – тема, которая не получила достаточного раскрытия в российских научных исследованиях. На фоне существующих проблем в области свободы журналистики как социального института изучение системы подготовки журналистских кадров вызывает несомненный исследовательский интерес. Индийское журналистское образование является уникальным явлением, которое неоднородно по своей структуре, целям и задачам. В статье рассматриваются и анализируются основные положения системы профессиональной подготовки журналистов в Индии, роль и место журналиста в стране, проблемы их безопасности и социальной защиты. В целом делается вывод о том, что индийские журналисты имеют низкую квалификацию, а редакционная политика недостаточно отражает социальные и экономические реалии страны. В марте 2013 года Совет прессы Индии принял решение создать комитет для определения минимального уровня журналистской квалификации. Идея была отвергнута специалистами по СМИ, которые утверждают, что журналистика это призвание, но вопрос все еще остается открытым. Работа журналиста в Индии, как и в остальном мире, все больше отдалается от объективности и беспристрастности, превращаясь в профессию лоббиста и менеджера по связям с общественностью, нацеленную главным образом на получение выгод.

Для цитирования в научных исследованиях

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Ключевые слова

Индия, журналистское образование, индийские СМИ, свобода СМИ, права журналистов, профессиональная этика, журналистская ответственность, квалификация журналиста.

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