



# SCRIBES NEWS

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## Anonymous Liability

**R**ecently, a well-known political analyst from the Telugu states spoke about a closed-door political development allegedly relayed to him by an anonymous party source. The party reacted angrily and denied the information. A case was subsequently booked against the analyst, leading him to withdraw his statements and acknowledge that his source may have provided false information, bringing an end to the controversy.

One of the first lessons many journalists learn is that a good source is priceless. For decades, journalism ran on relationships built over years of trust. Politicians, bureaucrats, police officers, diplomats, intelligence officials and corporate executives often spoke to reporters on the understanding that their identities would remain protected, but not their information. In many newsrooms, sources were considered sacred. Reporters guarded them fiercely and, in some cases, would not reveal their names even to editors.

That culture still exists, but the environment around it has changed dramatically. Today, every anonymous source is viewed with suspicion. Readers want to know who said it. Governments want to know who leaked it. Courts can ask questions about it. Social media users demand proof and ask, "Source?" Rival political camps dismiss stories as agenda-driven if the source is not identified. In many high-profile cases, the debate is no longer about the information but about the identity of the person providing it.

News organisations still have protocols. Some international media outlets insist on multiple sources before publishing sensitive information. Editors often seek independent confirmation before relying on unnamed individuals. In many Indian newsrooms, however, trust between reporter and editor still plays a major role. A reporter's credibility can sometimes determine whether a story gets published.

At the same time, reporters are finding it harder to persuade sources to speak. Potential whistleblowers know that digital footprints can be traced, call records examined and messages recovered. The fear of exposure is greater than ever. We live in an age of unprecedented information, yet genuine insiders are often more reluctant to talk. Anonymous sourcing remains essential to journalism. Some of the biggest stories in history would never have been reported without confidential sources. Watergate, which led to the resignation of US President Richard Nixon, relied heavily on the confidential source known as "Deep Throat". The Panama Papers investigation began with an anonymous whistleblower known only as "John Doe". The Edward Snowden revelations also depended on secure communication between journalists and their source. But the threshold has become higher. Verification matters more. Documentation matters more. Editors are asking tougher questions than before. Perhaps the real challenge is not whether anonymous sources are disappearing. It

is whether newsrooms can continue to protect them in an era when everyone seems determined to discover who they are.

In today's environment, the trust between a source and a journalist is being tested like never before.

Free Frank Fearless



“

Our job is to  
put the best  
obtainable  
version of the  
truth out there.  
Period.

— **CARL  
BERNSTEIN**,  
*speaking at the  
White House  
Correspondents'  
Dinner, 2017*



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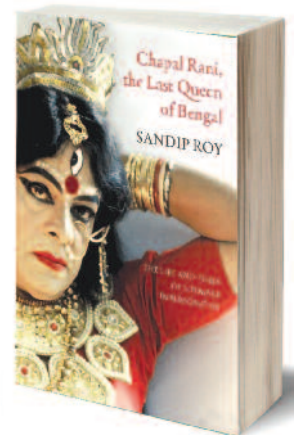
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*IJU President Balwinder Singh Jammu with members of the Punjab and Chandigarh Journalists Union.*

# Punjab and Chandigarh Journalists Union celebrates International Press Freedom Day



The Punjab and Chandigarh Journalists Union (PCJU) organized a seminar on the topic of "Freedom of Press and Role of Journalists" at the Chandigarh Press Club on the occasion of International Press Freedom Day.

Senior journalist Hamir Singh and former Deputy Director of the Punjab Public Relations Department, Dr. Ajit Kanwal Singh Hamdard, called upon journalists to play their role responsibly. They said that the freedom of journalists is not only the freedom of the media but also the freedom of the entire society. In a democracy, only when the media is free can society and the country move forward in the right direction.

Journalist Hamir Singh said that after politicians, people come to journalists with the hope of justice. People feel that by getting news published or raising their voice through the media,

they can get justice. The function was presided over by Punjab and Chandigarh Journalists Union President Jai Singh Chhibber, while Indian Journalists Union (IJU) President Balwinder Singh Jammu was specially present.

On this occasion, Hamir Singh said that over the last 25 years, media freedom has been under threat not only in India but across the world. Attacks on journalists are continuing. Article 19 of the Constitution gives citizens the right to freedom of speech, but those in power are finding various ways to suppress the media and prevent journalists from speaking freely. Still, some people continue to dare to speak and write the truth.

He said that as corporate houses have taken over various businesses in the country, the media sector has also not remained untouched. He claimed

**Jai Singh Chhibber**

*President,  
Punjab and Chandigarh  
Journalists Union*

that a major corporate house has directly or indirectly taken over the electricity and print media sectors and has a stake in about 72 electronic channels.

Dr. Ajit Kanwal Singh Hamdard said that it is the important duty of journalists to expose the problems faced by the people. He said that the media is very powerful and needs to recognize its strength so that the issues affecting society can be highlighted effectively. Dr. Hamdard appealed to media professionals to be insightful in their work.

Indian Journalists Union (IJU) President Balwinder Singh Jammu said that impartial journalism is going through a deep crisis. Media houses have increasingly come under corporate control. Under such circumstances, he said, it is necessary to strengthen journalists' organizations so that the voice of journalists can be effectively raised. He demanded the enactment of a Journalists Protection Act. He also said that the facility of free railway travel for journalists has been abolished and that the Working Journalists Act has also been scrapped.

Welcoming the journalists present at the event, Jai Singh Chhibber, President of the Punjab and Chandigarh Journalists Union, said that even when strong winds and storms are raging, some individuals and organizations continue trying to keep the lamp burning against all odds. He said that governments come and go, but raising the issues of the people remains the true duty of a journalist.

Senior journalist Jagtar Singh Bhullar said that the Facebook pages of journalists who speak the truth are being shut down and false cases are being registered against them. Union General Secretary Bhupinder Singh



*Punjab and Chandigarh Journalists Union organised a 'open seminar' on International Press Day'*

Malik said that a year ago, India ranked 151st out of 180 countries in terms of media freedom and has now slipped to 157th position.

#### **Nirmal Dhaliwal elected president of Ludhiana Rural unit**

The Ludhiana Rural district unit of the Union held a meeting at Mullanpur. Senior journalist Nirmal Singh Dhaliwal was unanimously elected president.

Addressing the meeting, Union Secretary General Santokh Gill expressed serious concern over the increasing attacks on journalists across the country and demanded the enactment of a special law for their protection.

The members also demanded free bus travel, pensions, plots at concessional rates, and the implementation of a health insurance scheme for journalists.

At the meeting, Amarjit Singh Dhanzal was unanimously elected district secretary and Vishal Sidana as treasurer, while journalist K. Gopal was nominated as patron. Satnam Singh Baraich was elected Senior Vice-President. Vinod Kalia,

Kanwarpal Singh Ahluwalia, Harpreet Singh Ladi Sidhu, Balwinder Littar, Gurdeep Malik and Jaswant Singh Salempuri were elected Vice-Presidents. Raj Jambhi, Dalwinder Singh Rachhin, Gurvinder Happy, Harvinder Singh Khalsa, Jasbir Shetra and Surinder Arora were elected Secretaries.

Apart from this, Jaswinder Chinda, Atul Malhotra, Davinder Lame, Malkit Singh and Gurcharan Singh Hunjhan were elected members of the executive committee.

#### **Banga subdivision marks**

##### **International Press Freedom Day**

The Union's Banga subdivision celebrated International Press Freedom Day. Jasvir Singh Nurpur, District President; Dr. Navkant Bharomjara, District General Secretary; Chet Ram Rattan, District Chairman; Narinder Mahi; Manjinder Singh; Rakesh Suri; and various other speakers called upon journalists to play their role responsibly.

On this occasion, appointments were also made to the Banga subdivision, Bahram town and Mukandpur town units. ❏

# NORWEGIAN JOURNALIST ATTACKED ONLINE AFTER REMARKS ON MODI



# N

orwegian journalist Helle Lyng, from the daily Dagsavisen, is facing a vicious cyber-harassment campaign and doxxing following her criticism of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's refusal to take questions from the press in Oslo on 18 May. Reporters Without Borders (RSF) is calling on the Indian authorities and social media platforms to put an immediate stop to this abuse, and to immediately restore her Instagram account, which has been blocked.

Her simple question sparked a storm. On 18 May, journalist Helle Lyng, from the Oslo-based daily newspaper Dagsavisen, was in attendance at a press conference in Oslo, the Norwegian capital, bringing together Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his Norwegian counterpart Jonas Gahr Støre. The two leaders had warned that they would not be taking questions from the media.

As they were leaving the stage, she challenged the Indian head of government: "Prime Minister Modi, why don't you take some questions from the freest press in the world?" Narendra Modi, who has never held a single press conference since he came to power in 2014, left the room without answering.

"I knew beforehand they would not take questions," she said when contacted by RSF. "I refuse the premise that a foreign leader can come to Norway and just do talking points and get off stage without answering questions from the press. Especially a leader as powerful as the prime minister of India."

The journalist later posted about what happened on X, citing the RSF World Press Freedom Index: "Prime Minister of India, Narendra Modi, would not take my question, I was not expecting him to. Norway has the number one spot on the World Press Freedom Index, India is at 157th, competing with Palestine, Emirates & Cuba. It is our job to question the powers we cooperate with."

Since that post, Helle Lyng has faced a barrage of hostile messages on social media, originating from accounts linked to the Hindu nationalist far right. Some posts have accused her of being a "spy," a "Chinese propaganda agent," a "Pakistani agent," a "prostitute," and a "jihadist," among other insults. A profile published shortly afterwards on the platform OpIndia - a key player in the online abuse targeting journalists in India - further fuelling the attacks against her.

The journalist also stated on X that her Instagram and Facebook accounts were suspended on 19 May: "Throughout all the day I have struggled to log onto my Instagram account. Now I have been suspended. It is a small price to pay for press freedom, but I've never experienced it before." She was finally able to log back into Facebook the following day, but her Instagram account is still blocked. Her phone number has also been circulating, and she has received threatening WhatsApp messages, including one wishing her family would get "naked." ❌

— Courtesy RSF

# 2 Indians Win Pulitzer for Graphic Report on Digital Arrest

*The prizes were announced Monday from Columbia University in New York.*

T

he Pulitzer Prize Board has awarded the 2026 prize for Illustrated Reporting and Commentary to Anand RK and Suparna Sharma, along with Bloomberg colleague Natalie Obiko Pearson, for trAPPED - a graphic investigation into a neurologist in India held captive by her own phone under what is known as "digital arrest".

Published by Bloomberg, the work uses visuals and narrative to illuminate the growing global menace of surveillance, online fraud, and the sophisticated psychological traps that digital scammers set for their victims.

The prizes were announced Monday from Columbia University in New York.

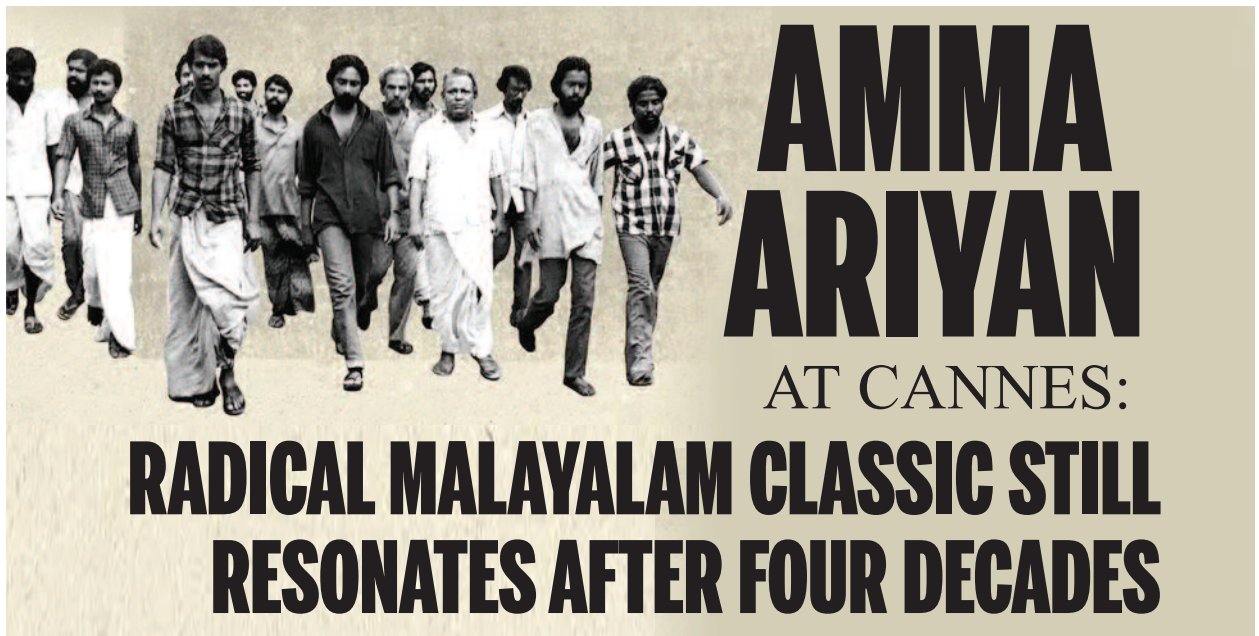
Anand RK, a Mumbai-based artist known for the graphic novels Blue in Green and Grafity's Wall, brought the story to life visually. Suparna Sharma, a Delhi-based freelance journalist, along with Pearson, Bloomberg's senior investigative reporter for Asia and a former India correspondent, anchored the reporting.

Widely regarded as the highest honour in American journalism, the Pulitzers recognise standout reporting, commentary and storytelling across newsrooms of all sizes.

This year's awards arrive at a fraught moment for press freedom. Since returning to the White House in January 2025, President Donald Trump has taken steps that have complicated journalists' ability to cover the government. Against that backdrop, the Investigative Reporting prize went to the staff of The New York Times for a series exposing how Trump has dismantled conflict-of-interest constraints and used the presidency to enrich his family and allies. ❏

— Courtesy  
Newslaundry





# AMMA ARIYAN

AT CANNES:

## RADICAL MALAYALAM CLASSIC STILL RESONATES AFTER FOUR DECADES

*Long regarded as one of India's finest films, John Abraham's 1986 Malayalam classic Amma Ariyan challenged not just cinematic language but the very process of filmmaking. Crowd-funded, people-driven and politically charged, the film has found renewed global recognition nearly four decades later with its restored screening at Cannes 2026.*



**Rajeshwari  
Kalyanam**

*The Writer is a senior journalist and founder of Fridaywall*

Amidst the parallel cinema wave of the '80s came one film that challenged conventions and every rule in the book of filmmaking. Hardcore cinephiles would be well aware of this film, which is considered one of the finest films from India; the 1986 Malayalam film Amma Ariyan directed by a young, radical filmmaker of his times, John Abraham.

One of the many unique aspects of the film was that it was made by the Odessa Collective that John Abraham founded along with his friends to raise funds through crowdfunding. He defied the traditional way of the filmmaking process and felt that financiers made films for profits and therefore dictated the content of films. He made Amma Ariyan as a film that was by the people and for the people. It was

not commercially released and was instead taken directly to people for screenings - the farmers and workers who had funded the film watched it. Unfortunately, John died just a year later in 1987 at the age of 49. Despite his limited filmography, the impact he has created with his experimental cinema has been immense.

Amma Ariyan was back in the news last month when it was restored in 4K by the Film Heritage Foundation under the aegis of Shivendra Singh Dungarpur, who took it to Cannes. Amma Ariyan went on to become one of the only two films officially selected from India for screening at the Cannes Film Festival 2026.

The film was screened in the presence of the film's editor Bina Paul and lead actor Joy Mathew before a houseful audience at

**Amma Ariyan was back in the news last month when it was restored in 4K by the Film Heritage Foundation under the aegis of Shivendra Singh Dungarpur, who took it to Cannes.**

Cannes. It was an exhilarating moment for the team when the film received a standing ovation and rave reviews. Evidently, even after 40 years, the film found a strong connection with audiences.

One of the reasons for this is perhaps the film's deeply political nature reflecting societal and human conflict. John, by his own admission, was inspired by his guru Ritwik Ghatak. But unlike the Bengali director, John Abraham's *Amma Ariyan* (Report to Mother) is not dramatic. John adopts a non-linear storytelling format that is documentary-like, combines fact with fiction, and arranges personal experiences with collective memories to create a canvas that defies genres.

*Amma Ariyan* is about the protagonist Purushan, who leaves his village to go to Delhi and, on his way, comes across a death by suicide. He feels he knows the deceased but fails to remember who he is and becomes caught up in an obsessive quest to find out his identity. Once he realises the dead person is Hari, a musician, he sets out to meet Hari's mother to inform her of his passing.

During this quest, he meets many others who join him, and it is through them that Hari is revealed to us. They remember him differently - some as a friend who remains elusive to them, some as a comrade, and others as someone they would rather not remember. For us, he becomes a symbol of disillusionment born out of unfulfilled hope and endless struggle.

Like Ghatak, and like many Left leaning youngsters of Kerala, John was a communist and definitely not an optimist. In his film, along with Purushan, we set out on a journey through Wayanad, Kozhikode, Beypore, Kodungalloor, Thrissur,



Kottapuram, Vypin and Fort Kochi. Beyond glimpses of culture and landscapes, *Amma Ariyan* takes viewers through prominent people's movements that left a mark on the region, political movements, extremism, the fallout of these movements, the dreams left behind, and the hopelessness that followed.

The recurring motif of the film is the "Mother". Purushan tells his mother at the beginning of the film that he will try and write to her. As he goes from friend to friend, he relates his feelings and experiences to his mother, and it is through his voice that we hear about class struggles, student protests in a medical college against the commercialisation of medical education, workers' union clashes leading to deaths, sys-

temic failure to contain hoarding of essential commodities and citizens' reactions, loss of work, and police atrocities. John Abraham packed a great deal into the film.

It is for the viewer to unravel, and my guess is that each viewing reveals a new layer, a new character trait, or a new statement. For instance, the opening scene sets the tone of the film, and reveals the central theme 'Mother' her strength, her identity and empowerment. A simple scene that says a lot and sets the ball rolling for the rest of the film.

For audiences of the time who are fed on violent and loud cinema, *Amma Ariyan*, which combines the emotionally rich Malayalam filmmaking ethos and the genetics of what was known as parallel cinema - amply redefined by the director - could be a difficult watch.

But once you begin watching the film, you are drawn inevitably into the world of John Abraham. You realise that while it resists labels and conventional definitions, *Amma Ariyan* is ultimately about all of us. It is about individuals navigating forces larger than themselves - society, politics, ideology and circumstance - and the hopes, struggles and disillusionment that come with it. ❏



# Journalism in Punjab's Border Areas: From the Dark Era to the Digital Age





**Santokh Gill**

Secretary General,  
Punjab and Chandigarh  
Journalists Union

uring the dark period in Punjab (1978-1993), journalism in the international border districts (Amritsar, Firozpur, Gurdaspur, Fazilka, etc.) had become a life-threatening profession. Caught between Khalistani terrorism and state machinery, journalists often became targets for both sides. During the dark period, journalists were instructed by terrorists to use a specific language and sing their praises. Due to the atmosphere of fear, most journalists were forced to accept it. Its shadow is visible even today. Militants targeted Lala Jagat Narain of the Hind Samachar group (1981), Ramesh Chander, and several others to force the media to portray their activities favourably. On the other hand, the police also targeted journalists like Ram Singh Billing (1992) and Bhola Nath Masoom (1993). In that era, the scope of journalism was extremely limited. There was a constant threat to life while reporting, along with widespread censorship and intimidation. Reporting on smuggling, arms trafficking, and covert activities in

the border regions was almost impossible. From 1978 till date, dozens of journalists in Punjab have lost their lives, most of them during the dark days of militancy. According to sources like the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) and Wikipedia, more than 30 killings were recorded during this period, along with several cases of serious injuries. The number was particularly high in border areas due to intense clashes between militants and security forces.

***Covering smuggling and covert border activity was extremely risky. Since 1978, dozens of Punjab journalists have lost their lives, with over 30 killings reported during the militancy years.***

In the present times, the trend has changed significantly. Digital media and YouTube channels have made journalism faster and more widespread. Reporting on the drug mafia, smuggling, the agrarian crisis, and political corruption in border districts has increased. However, challenges have not diminished. Threats from political factions, false police cases, social media trolling, and legal harassment have become common. Since 2020, attacks on and targeting of journalists have been reported during the farmers'



movement and other issues. The attitude of governments (both central and state) has often been oppressive; frequent internet bans, account blockades, and police cases have become routine. The risks are immense: armed attacks by drug syndicates, threats from political groups, surveillance by security forces, and the extreme danger of reporting on matters linked to Pakistani elements. While cases of serious injuries and murders have decreased, economic pressure and censorship have increased.

Journalists must adopt several precautions: rigorous fact-checking, the use of anonymous sources, digital security measures (VPNs and encrypted apps), coordination with local police, strengthening journalists' organisations, insurance coverage, and legal support. The Punjab and Chandigarh Journalists Union (PCJU) has played a significant role in this matter. It has consistently raised its voice against attacks on journalists, struggled for the

Journalists' Safety Act and a Media Commission for journalists, and provided legal assistance as needed. The union has strongly protested attacks on Caravan reporters and false police cases and has fought against state pressure.

Social media and AI have accelerated journalism but have also increased fake news, deep-fakes, and targeted harassment. AI helps in fact verification but also contributes to spreading misinformation. The future is challenging; journalists will need to become technically proficient while maintaining credibility and trustworthiness. Governments must take concrete steps to protect journalism so that the fourth pillar of democracy remains strong. The future of journalism in Punjab's border areas can only be bright when there is a proper balance between security and freedom. Unions like PCJU need to be further strengthened, and journalists must remain prepared for fearless reporting. The battle for truth is never easy. ❑

## IJU CONDEMNS MURDER OF ANDHRA JYOTHI JOURNALIST, SEEKS THOROUGH PROBE

The Indian Journalists Union (IJU) has strongly condemned the brutal murder of journalist Jagan Mohan Reddy, a senior reporter with Andhra Jyothi, at Venkatagiri Kota in Andhra Pradesh's Chittoor district.

In a statement Issued last month. IJU President Balwinder Singh Jammu and Secretary General D. Soma Sundar said the horrific incident took place in the early hours of April 28 while the journalist was on his morning walk.

According to the statement, unidentified assailants attacked Jagan Mohan Reddy with knives, killing him on the spot.

The IJU noted that the journalist had recently published reports on the sandalwood mafia operating in Chittoor district.

Expressing serious concern over the murder, the journalists' body demanded a thorough investigation into the incident and the immediate arrest of not only the perpetrators but also those who allegedly masterminded the crime.

The IJU also urged the Andhra Pradesh government to enact a separate law for the protection of journalists and take measures to prevent such incidents in the future. ❑



*Jagan Mohan Reddy*

# Dear local news: Here's why funders say no

*There's a lot of resistance inside many philanthropic organizations that's largely invisible. Here's what to know, and how to get to yes.*



**Megan  
Griffith-Greene**

For newsrooms looking for philanthropic support, you've probably heard a lot of advice about how to talk to funders. Communicate your value. Talk about your impact. Build the relationship instead of just making the pitch.

But sometimes, it fails. You don't get the grant, you aren't able to make the relationship warmer. And the reasons why may remain completely invisible.

The fact is this: Even when you have built trust with your contact at a funder, deep-seated internal doubts remain in their organization, particularly if it hasn't traditionally supported news. And tension, misinformation or negative perceptions - particularly on boards - can derail your best efforts.

So as a news organization, you don't just have to make your own case in a pitch. You need to understand the doubts that exist, and anticipate and actively counteract them. That may mean equipping your contact at an organization with the information they

need to get buy-in with their board.

The examples that follow are not hypothetical. These are all real examples of internal resistance we've heard in our workshops for local news funders. We've broken them into five categories, and have a few suggestions of how you can counter each narrative.

We've also created an open-source doc for strategies that address these concerns. Take a look and add your own.

The context here is pretty obvious: Over the past year, community needs have skyrocketed, and many funders feel stretched thin. When funders believe that local news is scope creep, not a core part of their work, it makes it easy to say no.

Getting to yes: Countering this perception means bridging your work and a funder's mission. Help a funder connect the dots: How your work

directly serves the community, raises the profile of their issues to policymakers, complements the other funding they do. Funders need to understand how your work is essential, not extra, to their priorities.

These concerns are driven by fear. Funders' work depends on

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***The context here is pretty obvious: Over the past year, community needs have skyrocketed, and many funders feel stretched thin. When funders believe that local news is scope creep, not a core part of their work, it makes it easy to say no.***

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relationships, and in our political climate where news is under attack, some funders fear that supporting local news could make them a target, or damage their reputation with donors.

Getting to yes: If you suspect that this is a concern, you might try a few different tactics. Talk about local news as a community builder, and the broad utility your work plays in the community. Emphasize the difference between local and national news organizations. Pitch projects that aren't content focused or that have tangible local benefits (such as building fundraising capacity, newsroom training, emergency alerts, events calendars, technological transformation, community events, etc.). Help funders see your work as of and by your community, of service and benefit to all.

It's also a good practice to have an ethics policy for funding, that defines the boundaries of the relationship and guardrails that protect your journalistic independence. A policy like this communicates clearly that funders have no say in the editorial decisions you make, and protects both parties.

This is an unfortunate byproduct

of research on news deserts. Yes, it's important to chronicle the crisis that local news is facing. But it's also created the perception that news is a dying industry, which doesn't always inspire philanthropic investment. In some cases, funders feel that a declining for-profit model falls outside of what philanthropy is for; in other cases, risk-averse funders may want to wait and see until there are more proven interventions.

Getting to yes: One way to counter this narrative is to talk about it head on. What is your organization doing to diversify your revenue streams? How do you see a plan where your organization isn't reliant on funder support? As newsrooms, we tend to talk about our content goals and diminish our ambitions for a sustainable business model. Funders can help news organizations get there, but we should be prepared to show that it's a place we are trying to go. While some funders may be concerned about the decline of local news, others - and it can't be overstated - may just not know much about it at all.

Getting to yes: As a news organization, telling the story of what's happening to the industry - not just

your organization - may be an essential part of the work. There may need to be a lot of education in their organization about why local news is important to the community. (Just be careful that you don't lead with the narratives that will lead you to the problems above.)

This is a tough one, and inevitable in communities small enough where everyone knows each other.

Getting to yes: Working on this - like many of the above concerns - might be slow. Building trust isn't done in one meeting, and may take time before the work bears fruit. And some of these perceptions may not be insurmountable; it may make sense to move on or wait until there are changes on the board.

This list is not exhaustive. But it's a useful guide to what your connections at a funding organization may need to answer internally.

Making the case - for your organization and for local news funding more broadly - can be a lot of work. But over time, building this muscle can help you build relationships that last longer than one grant.

— *Courtesy Poynter.50* 

# US and China Trade Journalist Expulsions in Tit-For-Tat Moves



**Didi Tang  
And Matthew Lee**

The Trump administration has revoked the visa of a Chinese national working for the state news agency Xinhua in the United States, in an apparent reciprocal act to Beijing's decision to expel a New York Times reporter.

A person familiar with the matter confirmed the visa had been revoked. The person spoke on condition of anonymity because the matter involves visa privacy. A State Department official confirmed there was a plan to revoke the visa.

The tit-for-tat move by the Trump administration has followed the expulsion by Beijing of Vivian Wang, a China correspondent for The New York Times, apparently over the appearance of the Taiwanese leader in a DealBook event in which Wang had no role. It was a rare occasion of the U.S. government directly retaliating against Beijing's expulsion of American journalists.

The Times, which first reported the reciprocal move by the Trump administration, said the newspaper does not ask governments to revoke media credentials or otherwise interfere with the

work of any journalist. On Friday, the paper issued a statement calling for Wang to be reinstated as a credentialed journalist in China and urging both governments to "reverse this deterioration in journalist access."

"The Chinese government's decision to expel Vivian Wang is wrong," Joseph Kahn, the paper's executive editor, said in a statement published on the

Times' corporate website. "Her expulsion will make it even harder for our global audience to get accurate, independent and in-depth reporting about the world's second largest economy at a critical time."

The Chinese embassy in Washington did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Wang is leaving China when the presence of U.S.

media is already thin after previous rounds of disputes over journalistic credentials, leaving several U.S. news organizations with skeleton staffing in their China bureaus.

"The number of correspondents from American media outlets allowed to work in China has now fallen to an alarmingly low level, at a time when the

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***Her expulsion will make it even harder for our global audience to get accurate, independent and in-depth reporting about the world's second largest economy at a critical time.***

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need for people everywhere to understand China is greater than ever," Kahn wrote.

Beijing moved to expel Wang, a China correspondent for the newspaper since 2020, after the media group's DealBook Summit 2025 featured Taiwanese President Lai Ching-te in a recorded interview with host Andrew Ross Sorkin. Sorkin called Taiwan a country, and Lai warned of Beijing's aggressive behavior in the Taiwan Strait and vowed that "Taiwan will do everything necessary to protect itself."

The Chinese government claims sovereignty over Taiwan, which split from the mainland in 1949 after Mao Zedong's communists won a civil war. In the latest summit with President Donald Trump in Beijing, in mid-May, Chinese President Xi Jinping warned that China and the U.S. could "collide or even clash" over Taiwan if the issue is not handled properly. The decision against

The New York Times also has created unease among other Western media that might interview Lai, giving the self-governed island a voice, at the risk of losing their abilities to report within China.

All foreign journalists must be accredited by China's foreign ministry to report in China, and Beijing has used the accreditation and visa policy to expel or keep out foreign journalists whose work has upset the Chinese leadership or to show displeasure with what Beijing views as unfavorable or malicious coverage of China. In 2020, for example, the Chinese government expelled three Wall Street Journal correspondents after the financial newspaper ran an opinion piece titled "China is the Real Sick Man of Asia" following the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic.

As U.S.-China relations soured, the U.S. State Department in 2020 designated some major Chinese

news groups as "foreign missions". Xinhua, for example, is tasked by the ruling Chinese Communist Party to serve as the mouthpiece of the party and the government, which includes distributing their official news.

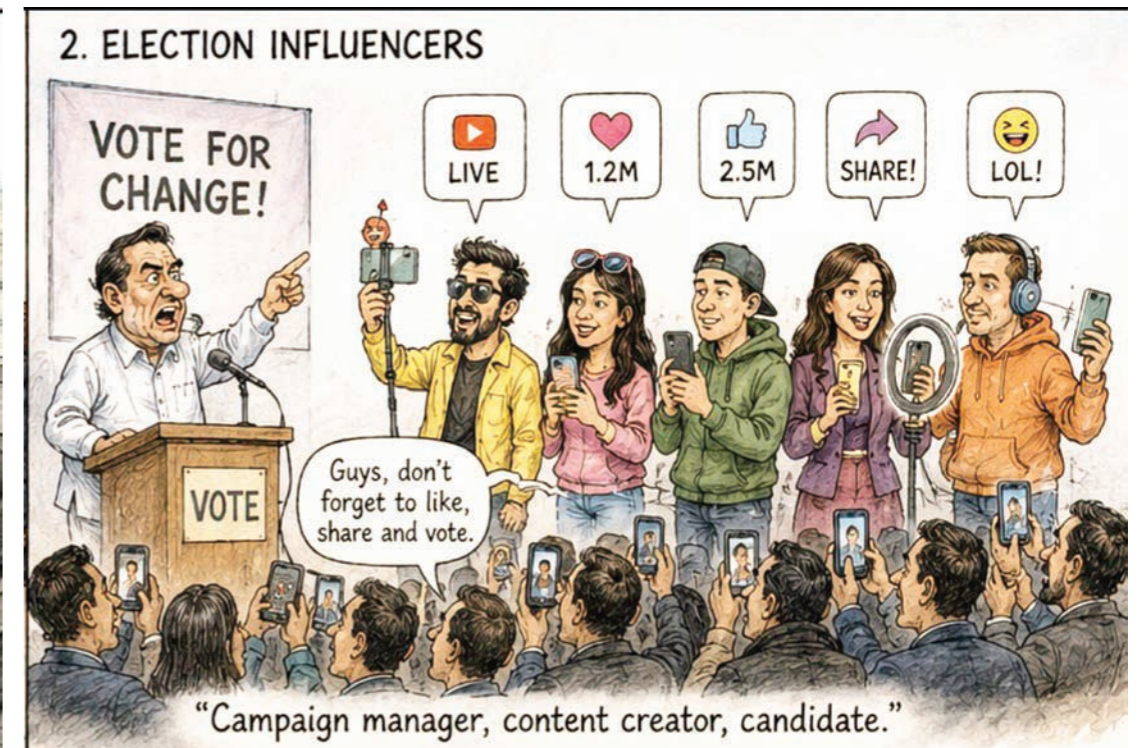
Beijing in turn drastically limited visas for journalists working for U.S. media.

In total, at least 18 foreign journalists working for The Washington Post, The New York Times and The Wall Street Journal were expelled in the first half of 2020, according to the Foreign Correspondents' Club of China. Many others were given short visas ranging from one month to three months, according to the group's annual survey.

The two governments later reached a one-time agreement that allowed U.S. media to send in a small number of correspondents to mainland China. Wang was one of them. ✘

— *Courtesy AP*

CARTOONS  
OF THE MONTH





*'The Good Reporter' will have readers reflect on what it means to be a 'legitimate' reporter and the extent to which that understanding is shaped by prejudicial ideas about gender, caste, class, education, and geography, as well as how the very notion of 'legitimacy' is often shaped by exclusion*

P

**Akshita Prasad**

icture a journalist. Are they someone from an urban, middle-class background? Someone who possesses a degree (or several) in journalism? You may have pictured a man, an 'upper'-caste one, sitting behind a desk in a studio, facing a camera, waxing eloquent in English. And what does this journalist's audience look like? Perhaps not very different from him - English speaking, urban, middle class, and 'upper'-caste.

Many mainstream journalists fit that mould; however, that's not true of all journalists. Journalism exists beyond urban, English-speaking newsrooms helmed by people with considerable socio-economic, caste, and class privilege. The audience for journalism also extends beyond the urban, English-speaking milieu.

The Good Reporter: A Memoir of Journalism in the 21st Century is here to remind us of just that. The book, which is a collective biography of Khabar Lahariya, challenges this limiting idea of who a journalist is or who they ought to be to be considered 'legitimate'

reporters. And in the process, the book challenges our deep-seated notions, shaped by gender, caste, class, and geography, of what journalism is, who practices it, and who consumes it.

Originally conceptualised in 1993, Khabar Lahariya formally started in 2002 in the hinterlands of eastern Uttar Pradesh. The fortnightly newspaper, founded by Kavita Bundelkhandi, Meera Jataw, and Shalini Joshi, was initially published in Bundeli and Hindi. The all-women newsroom consisted mainly of reporters from marginalised communities - Dalit, Muslim, and other marginalised castes. Everything from reporting in the field and writing stories to editing, printing, and selling the newspaper was handled by the small team itself.

Over the years, the newspaper spread to other districts in Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh. The paper also went from being fortnightly to weekly. The number of pages increased, the area of reporting widened, and the team grew. And, ultimately, Khabar Lahariya

took a plunge into the world of digital media.

In 2015, Khabar Lahariya went entirely digital and eventually decided to end publishing the newspaper. This transition from a small rural newsroom confined to one geography to a larger newspaper spread across states in North India, and eventually to an all-digital newsroom, came with its own set of challenges, learnings, and successes, and *The Good Reporter* lays it all bare.

Often, stories like Khabar Lahariya's, when narrated by outsiders, are shaped through an outside-in gaze, one that is, more often than not, also directed downwards. What this produces is a novel, feel-good story in which nuance and complexity are traded in for a simplistic narrative, and the individuals behind the story are flattened into a singular, monolithic identity.

*The Good Reporter* is written by Disha Mullick, along with Geeta Devi, Harshita Verma, Kavita Bundelkhandi, Lakshmi Sharma, Lalita, Meera Devi, Nazni Rizvi, Shyamkali, and Suneeta Prajapati, who currently helm the newspaper-turned-digital media platform. By becoming the authors of their own story, they reject this outside-in gaze that reduces their collective stories to a single narrative.

By virtue of being co-authored, the book also centres the voices, experiences, and lives of the numerous women behind Khabar Lahariya and makes room for their diverse realities. The women behind Khabar Lahariya do not always agree or get along, and there are, at times, annoyances and grievances. Diverse caste, class, and educational backgrounds, combined with differing geographic realities, create friction. Yet *The Good Reporter* also reveals a sense



*Khabar Lahariya* journalist Meera Devi reporting from Ayodhya during the 2022 Uttar Pradesh Legislative Assembly elections.

of family and camaraderie, with colleagues showing up for one another beyond work and bonds forged by a shared commitment to rural, feminist journalism.

Khabar Lahariya's story is neither straightforward nor simple, and any attempt to present it as such would do a disservice to its subjects. That is why *The Good Reporter* is not interested in offering a sanitised version of what it takes to run a digital feminist newsroom for, and by, those who are often invisible in mainstream narratives.

With remarkable honesty and deep reflection, *The Good Reporter* is an account of the grit, commitment, and resilience that go into this work. The rise and success of Khabar Lahariya is not a feel-good story, as reducing it to one erases the everyday labour and intentionality that go into the feminist newsroom they are continually in the process of creating.

Power is shared at Khabar Lahariya in unconventional yet equitable ways, where its feminist politics truly shine. Editorial decisions are made through open conversation; hierarchies are less rigid, and decision-making power is decentralised. Everyone is not only given a seat at the table, but a voice.

However, *The Good Reporter* also reveals how Khabar Lahariya's feminism extends beyond the newsroom and editorial processes. Its recognition of, and accommodation for, the lived realities of its reporters is central to its feminist praxis.

The book discusses at length the many dangers that come with reporting, especially for its rural, Dalit, and Muslim journalists, whose gender identity, along with their caste-class locations and religious affiliations, make the very act of reporting a transgression of accepted patriarchal and caste norms. Women undertaking risk, occupying public spaces, and being highly visible are all considered transgressive in a patriarchal society. Reporters have had to face everything from familial hostility and condemnation from their communities to sexual harassment and grave threats to their lives on the field. In our current media and political landscape, this serves as an especially potent reminder that, as journalists, the work we produce and the impact it has on the world are not separate from who we are. We are, therefore, forever accountable for the impact we create, especially when it is undesirable and in the service of the powers that be. ❏

— *Courtesy FII*

# JOURNALISTS AND THE HUMAN IMPACT OF IMMIGRATION ENFORCEMENT

*Poynter's Beat Academy offers guidance and resources for reporting on children and families as immigration actions tighten*



In the latest twist, the Trump administration's new policy on green cards adds to the uncertainty families face as they make their way through the immigration landscape.

The most common use of green cards, aka permanent legal residence, comes when an American citizen hopes that their spouse, children or parents will be able to stay in the United States. Often, those people apply while they are in America. The new policy says that except in "extraordinary circumstances," people will need to apply from their home country.

How this will play out is unclear, because the government might focus on other kinds of applicants. Green card seekers come in many shapes and sizes and not all of them are close family members.

Still, immigration lawyers and advocates are concerned that a non-citizen parent might have to leave while the government considers their case.

There's good reason to worry. Immigration enforcement has already imposed a heavy toll on children and families. For any reporter who has to tackle the constantly evolving immigration scene, this is essential context.

Providing that background is the reason Poynter created the Beat Academy training track. With help from the Annie E. Casey Foundation, Beat Academy recently dived

into the data and personal stories of children and their parents.

By one estimate, over 200,000 children have had a parent in detention since Trump took office. The administration re-opened a family detention center in Dilley, Texas. On any given day, it houses about 250 people; the typical stay is about a month. Some detainees are deported, but as Univision reporter Lidia Terrazas said during a recent the Beat Academy webinar, even the families allowed to stay in the U.S. can emerge into chaos.

"Parents lost their jobs, kids couldn't go to school," Terrazas said. "They couldn't pay the rent, and so, one of the families that I covered while they were detained, when they were released, they found themselves living in their car."

Reporters should expect that it will be very difficult if not impossible to get many details about what is taking place inside detention centers. Access is strictly limited, but a team from the Women's Refugee Commission and Physicians for Human Rights took another approach.

About 50 miles north of the Honduras capital of Tegucigalpa, the La Lima Reception Center is the place to be if you want to connect with people deported from the U.S. to Honduras. Every deportee passes through this one center, and it's where interviewers from the Women's Refugee

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**Jon  
Greenberg**

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Commission parked themselves to talk to the men and women who stepped off the ICE chartered flights from America. They had lengthy conversations with over two dozen parents, and high on their list of questions was what happened when they were arrested and held. Under ICE policies, the moment they detain someone, they must ask if they are taking care of a child. They have to make sure that there is someone to watch over those children. And if someone is deported, they must be asked if they want their children to stay in the U.S. or come with them.

"The vast majority of people we spoke to experienced a violation of one, two, or sometimes all three of those policies," Zain Lakhani with the Women's Refugee Commission said in the webinar.

There's another key element to watch for as part of covering this story. The quick tempo of arrest, detention and removal outstripped parents' ability to prepare. One man told Lakhani and her colleagues that when he didn't come home after being stopped by ICE agents, a babysitter stayed with his 3-year-old for two weeks. He said he asked and was denied the chance to call and explain his situation to her.

Churches, neighbors and community groups have brought parents together to help them get their legal documents ready just in case. Without signed legal guardian papers, a child can end up in limbo. An aunt might be able to care for her niece, but if she lives in another school district, she won't have the authority to register the child in the local school. She won't have the power to approve care at a doctor's office.

Reporters would do well to build trust and contacts at local schools.



A policy shift early in the Trump administration has had particular implications for school-aged children. For decades, ICE agents have been told to use discretion around schools, churches and healthcare centers. The Biden administration tightened the rules. On Jan. 20, 2025, a Homeland Security memo gave agents a longer leash.

"It is not necessary ... for the head of the agency to create bright line rules regarding where our immigration laws are permitted to be enforced," the memo said.

Reporters should have a sense of the legal guardrails for what agents can do in schools. The Fourth Amendment requires a search warrant signed by a judge. The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act bars schools from sharing personal student information with agents. Under a U.S. Supreme Court ruling, a child has a right to an education regardless of their immigration status. But agents have been reported in the vicinity of bus stops for students. Broadly, their presence in immigrant neighborhoods and at immigration courts has made residents afraid that agents could be anywhere.

"Fear is a big factor here," said Julie Sugarman, an education researcher at the Migration Policy Institute. "If families don't feel safe, they're not going to send their children to school."

Sugarman points to studies that document how learning suffers and the mental well being of students deteriorates under the pressure of immigration enforcement. Hard numbers for any particular school district are scant; the best bet for a journalist might be a rising count of absences. Sugarman says conversations with school teachers, counselors and local church leaders are often the best access points to gain a picture of what's taking place.

Above all, the Beat Academy panelists urged reporters to use extreme care when interviewing parents and children.

"I try to be very careful with the questions that I ask," said Terrazas. "I do know what they're going through from their mom, but there are things that I purposely don't ask, because I don't want to put them in a situation where it's going to re-traumatize them." ❏

— *Courtesy Poynter.50*

# When 'Not For Sale' Is Advertised



**Nava Thakuria**

Have you ever seen or heard of a front-page advertisement, published by the management of a particular daily newspaper, saying it's not for sale? Grabbing the most important space for news (meant for valued readers) with all arrogance, the owner of The Assam Tribune propagated the advertisement on 26 May 2026, asserting that the acclaimed daily would not be sold. But the question that arises is why the Tribune's current managerial authority preferred to take such an unusual step while refuting some rumours on social media? Can one read it as an overreaction to something appearing in the alternate media, or was the management actually trying to hide something very significant?

The strongly worded disclaimer with the sturdy line THE ASSAM TRIBUNE IS NOT FOR SALE claimed that the widespread speculation on social media regarding its alleged sale was unjustified. "For the past 88 glorious years, The Assam Tribune has stood as an independent, credible and responsible institution committed to serving the nation and the people with integrity, courage and journalistic excellence," read the advertisement, adding that the management reserves the right to initiate appropriate legal action against any individual, group or entity found involved in creating, spreading or promoting such baseless and defamatory content.

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*"For the past 88 glorious years, The Assam Tribune has stood as an independent, credible and responsible institution committed to serving the nation and the people with integrity, courage and journalistic excellence,"*

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Earlier, on its verified X handle account, the newspaper pointed out that the rumour was amplified by prominent personalities and even media outlets, many of whom apparently felt verification was an unnecessary formality. No official confirmation. No credible source. No due diligence. Just pure confidence and a share button, it added. "For nearly nine decades, The Assam Tribune has remained committed to preserving the trust of its readers, and it will continue to do so in the years ahead.

In an era where everyone claims to value journalism and fact-checking, it's fascinating to see how quickly baseless speculation can be repackaged as 'news' simply because it trends online," stated the newspaper.

The issue gained momentum when rumours on social media spread in the fourth week of May 2026, apprehending that the prestigious newspaper was already sold to industrialist Gautam Adani (chairman of Adani Group)

for around Rs 421 crores. Soon it was amplified by many prominent personalities, who made various claims that the management failed to pay the employees of Assam Tribune regularly for quite some time and that over 75 ex-workers of the Tribune group are yet to get their legal dues that compelled them to approach the competent court. However, most of the respondents on social media expressed their pain at the degrading financial status of the trusted

newspaper.

That the oldest media group in northeast India was facing a financial crisis got reflected in the official statements of the Assam Tribune Employees' Union, which alleged delays in regular salaries and other due post-retirement benefits. The union organized a series of demonstrations at the office premises and even addressed a press conference claiming that a huge amount of money (advertisement revenues) was pending at the Assam government's information and public relations department. The management also echoed similar versions, stating that it was expecting those pending millions of rupees urgently.

Amid all disturbing developments, the management handed over the responsibility of Dainik Asom, a sister publication, to a separate media house owner. The new owner, while taking leadership of the Assamese daily on 17 September 2025, denied taking liability for over 75 employees (who were associated with Dainik Asom). The old management was supposed to clear all the dues for the ousted employees at the earliest, but it did not happen. Finally, they knocked on the doors of the legal fraternity and reportedly the court had recently asked the Tribune management to pay them off.

The Guwahati-based media house was recognized as an honest news entrepreneur across the region. The Tribune group implemented the recommendations of the Majithia Wage Board in 2010 for the first time in the country. Just before evading the responsibility of Dainik Asom, the current batch of owners silently put their seven-decade-old tabloid Asom Bani to die silently. The mainstream weekly was merged with Dainik Asom as a Sunday supplement. However, the buyer didn't own the weekly and thus it faced an unceremonious death. Asom Bani was last published on 12 September 2025 as a supplement, but the Tribune management did not issue any statement on its demise.

The media group, which witnessed and reported various important socio-political developments of the trou-

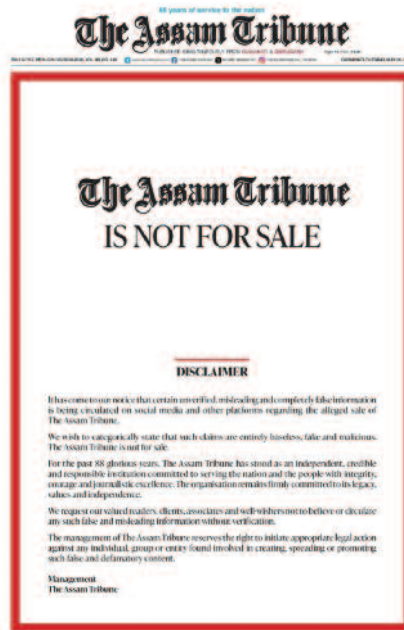
ble-torn region like the medium school instruction movement, anti-influx agitation, sudden rise of separatist militancy, common social unrest, emergence of regional politics, etc., with commitment to the indigenous population. Soon after the Covid-19 pandemic, all newspapers in Assam faced an existential crisis because of a drastic fall in circulation and revenues. Media observers note that the Tribune house historically maintained credibility in disseminating information, editorials and articles, but in recent years these principles were largely compromised.

Assam Tribune extensively covered the anti-Citizenship Amendment Act movement in 2019, providing significant space to public protests against the Union government's initiative to politically persecute Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist and Christian families from Muslim-majority Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan. The coverage fuelled weeks of unrest in Assam's Brahmaputra valley, with the narrative suggesting that the new citizenship law would undermine the Assam Accord that ended the anti-foreigner agitation in 1985.

Moreover, the people of Assam remember a series of biased media reports prepared for The Assam Tribune on the eve of a city press club election six years ago. Those low-credibility reports were full of personal attacks against the then secretary of Guwahati Press Club,

which ultimately put its hard-earned reputation at stake. Shockingly, the newspaper killed an important news item relating to the secretary even when he won an international award in 2021 from Geneva.

While the current financial status of Assam Tribune is dire, it was not solely created by the pandemic, but the habit of exercising editorial liberties without accountability by some of its ill-motivated news-desk workers made the situation worse. In reality, those media professionals enjoying all benefits but fomenting disorder inside the institution invited colossal troubles when the management remained a mute spectator, for reasons best known to them only. ❏



'LUKKHE' REVIEW:

# A BOLD SHOW ON DRUGS, RAP AND CRIME HAS ITS HIGHS

*The eight-episode series is out on Prime Video.*



**Udita  
Jhunjunwala**

Set against the restless, neon-tinged underbelly of Chandigarh and soundtracked to Punjabi rap, *Lukkhe* wants to be many things at once. The Prime Video show created by Agrim Joshi and Debojit Das Purkayastha is a rap saga, a crime thriller, an addiction drama and a story about broken young people trying to regain their footing.

Intoxication, violence and tragedy are embedded in this world. Remorse, revenge and redemption follow.

The eight-episode series opens on a hockey field, an appropriately Punjabi image. In Punjab, drugs are apparently never far away, including for college hockey player Lucky (Lakshvir Singh Saran). But one heady night leads to tragedy and sets Lucky on the path of repentance and rehabilitation.

Sanober (Palak Tiwari), his recovery buddy at the rehab centre, is tackling her own demons. Support gradually turns into attraction. Back to reality, Lucky

gets sucked into rap music and drug peddling, while balancing delicate relationships with his single mother, Sanober and a cop (Raashii Khanna) focused on making Punjab drug-free.

The enmity between two rival rappers Badnaam (King) and OG (Shivankit Singh Parihar) impacts the lives of all those around them, particularly Lucky and Sanober. The collision of these lives and subcultures places Lucky in increasingly dangerous situations.

The writing isn't sensitive enough to the complexities of deaddiction, missing an opportunity to explore how recovery remains fragile when people return to toxic environments. Instead, *Lukkhe* treats psychological wounds superficially.

It also seems unlikely that two recovering addicts would drift so quickly back into nightclub culture and emotionally volatile spaces without greater consequence.

Director Himank Gaur

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explores how music and narcotics co-exist and attempts to examine an ecosystem in which rappers, gangsters, addicts, businessmen and police all feed off one another. In such a scenario, how much space is there for righteousness and honesty?

To the show's credit, its visual language understands this duality better than its screenplay. Every time the narrative slips into intoxication, emotional triggers or psychological delirium, the palette shifts into blues, pinks and purples. The lighting becomes hallucinatory, almost dreamlike.

Lakshvir Singh Saran's Lucky emerges as the soul of the series. He carries guilt and emotional responsibility with sincerity.

There is immense pressure on Lucky to hold together the lives around him while barely surviving his own recovery. Saran brings restraint, vulnerability and thoughtfulness to the role. His scenes with his mother (Gitikka Ganju) are among the few moments that feel genuinely emotional.

Raashii Khanna's portrayal of officer Gurbaani, who has her own reasons for wanting a drug-free Chandigarh, forms another solid pillar. At the other end of the spectrum is MC Badnaam/Nihal, played with deadpan stillness by King.

Nihal's hunger, ego and self-destructive instincts position him as both friend and threat. The "drug family" of Nihal, Sanobar, Paddy (Kritika Bharadwaj) and Jazz (Nakul Roshan Sahdev) is held together by circumstance, music, loneliness and loyalty. As Jazz memorably says, they are not bad people, they simply do bad things. That line carries more nuance than much of the screenplay around it. Rap music dominates the soundtrack, which is a natural fit.



There is also a great deal of it - some staged as live performances, some as recording sessions, and others filmed like romantic ballads. While the soundtrack effectively captures the emotional and performative culture of rap, several sequences feel indulgent, occasionally diluting the suspense and narrative urgency.

*Lukkhe* undermines its own potential through simplistic writing and genre tropes such as corrupt cops, narco queens and comedic hitmen. Too many plot turns occur conveniently. Characters ambush vehicles, steal chemicals, and navigate dangerous situations with little believable planning.

Several supporting characters are reduced to familiar archetypes: the corrupt senior cop perpetually eating while enabling rot around him; the growling chauvinist uncle; the impulsive female inspector constant-

ly barging in to make arrests only to be restrained by male superiors. Even Nihal's childhood is sketchily written, with its emotional complexity largely glossed over.

*Lukkhe* is intermittently compelling because of the sincerity in Lucky's arc and the show's recurring idea of biological ties and found family. The contrast between Lucky and Nihal becomes the show's clearest moral framework. Lucky represents accountability and the possibility of rebuilding after failure. Nihal represents the danger of self-mythologising. Sanobar symbolises innocence and the weight of baggage.

There are a few moments of stillness, humour, warmth or normalcy that allow the characters to exist outside crime or substance abuse. As a result, the show's inner world can feel exhausting and detached. ❏

— *Courtesy Scroll.in*

# 'CHAPAL RANI': CHRONICLING CHAPAL BHADURI, THEATRE, AND JATRA

*Sandip Roy's book is an invaluable addition to the history of theatre and the queer movement in India.*



**Anchita  
Ghatak**

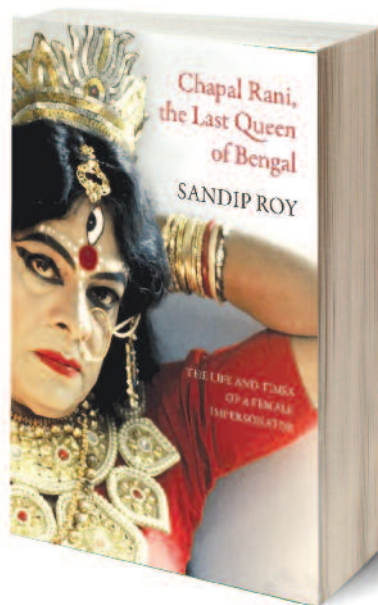
*The Writer is a  
literary translator  
from Bengali into  
English.*

any of us in Kolkata first learnt of Chapal Bhaduri through Naveen Kishore's documentary, *Performing the Goddess: The Chapal Bhaduri Story* (1999). Of the many hats that Kishore wears, the best-known one today is, perhaps, that of publisher of Seagull Books. So, it is not surprising that he suggested that Sandip Roy write a book on the life and times of the actor Chapal Bhaduri, a jatra artiste who mainly performed as a woman. And so, we have *Chapal Rani, the Last Queen of Bengal: The Life and Times of a Female Impersonator*.

It would be wrong to say that the book is only about Chapal Rani. Roy captures the many facets of Bhaduri's astonishing life in this biography - the young boy from an illustrious theatre family who becomes a jatra queen, enjoys immense fame but finally has to leave the stage, a person who was probably India's first openly gay actor, an actor who plays Ma Sitala for countless devotees, and later in life, also becomes a queer icon. Roy skilfully brings together the contradictions, complexities, highs and lows of Bhaduri's life in a well-researched, eminently readable book.

Born in 1939, Chapal, originally named Bhabesh, then Chapalesh, was one of many siblings. A sister was born several years after him but she died after a few months. Bhaduri's mother, Prabha Devi, was a star of stage, screen and radio. She bought a three-storey house in Dalimtala Lane in north Calcutta in 1950 for Rs 14,000 and then renovated it completely with her own money.

Not only was Prabha Devi a



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renowned performer and the bread earner for her family, but she was also an accomplished cook and deft with her needle. Her home was full of articles she had stitched and embroidered. Bhaduri says that the story of his childhood is largely the story of his mother. She was a disciple of Sisir Bhaduri, a revered theatre personality of Bengal. After she parted from her first husband, she met and married Tara Kumar Bhaduri, Sisir's brother, a widower.

Prabha Devi died in November 1952. She was 48 years old. The theatres were shut in mourning. After she died, her family fell on hard times. Several cinema production houses owed her money. Some, like Kanan Devi, paid without even being asked, but most refused to. Bhaduri's formal education, too, came to an end. As did his dance lessons. Tara Kumar Bhaduri started drinking heavily and it was as if everyone forgot about the young son.

In 1955, Bhaduri first went on stage as a woman, playing Morjina in *Alibaba* for a recreation club of the Indian Railways. His brother-in-law, a railway employee, helped to bring this about. A week after this, he was employed by the Indian Railways as a chainman earning Rs 75 a month. Since there were many departments in the Indian Railways with their own recreation clubs, Bhaduri became a sought-after dancer for their shows. Subsequently, advised by his friend, Subrata, he learnt to do his own make-up.

After his stint with the Railways was over, Bhaduri worked in amateur theatre. He needed an income and got an offer to join Natta Company to play women's roles. In his meticulous and detailed introduc-



tion to the book, Roy tells us that despite its glorious history, jatra, like queerness, always existed on the fringes of respectability in Bengal. Bhaduri's family was dedicated to theatre and to people like his father, jatra was lowly. He was not enthusiastic about Bhaduri joining.

Bhaduri joined Natta Company as a "change artiste" on a salary of Rs 100 in 1958. He was replacing Chhabi Rani, their renowned female impersonator. Natta Company was established in 1869. For the first eight years in Natta Company, Bhaduri filled in the roles that had been Chhabi Rani's. Finally, in 1964, Brajendra Kumar Dey, the playwright of the troupe, wrote *Chand Bibi* with Bhaduri in mind. This play raised Natta Company to new heights, as it did Bhaduri, who finally became Chapal Rani, earning the coveted accolade of female impersonators.

Bhaduri left Natta Company in 1967. His salary then was Rs 6,000. He joined Nabaranjan Opera and his first role was of Jahnvi, the mother of the poet, Michael Madhusudan

Dutta, in the play *Michael Madhusudan*. The play was a huge hit and the company toured with it for several years. And in Nabaranjan, Bhaduri also got a chance to play a man on stage in *Raktalekha*.

As women began joining jatra, the demand for men to play women's roles declined and in 1974, when Bhaduri was playing the heroine's mother in a *Kamala Opera* production at a college in Uttarpara, someone threw a clay cup on the stage. They wanted real women and not impersonators. Bhaduri was 35 years old and left the stage.

When Bhaduri was 18, he began a relationship with a 22-year-old man who is referred to as X in the book. X, unlike Bhaduri, was well educated and spoke fluent English. The relationship with X continued for a long period and we get a vivid account of the twists and turns and power dynamics of the relationship.

When Bhaduri's jatra career was coming to an end, he was offered the role of Goddess Sitala, who wards off smallpox. He was expected to go from one low-income settlement to

another, appearing as the goddess to her innumerable devotees. Chapal Rani, the fading queen of jatra, had initially thought that such performances were beneath him and refused. However, when he remained jobless for a long period, he sought out his friend, Raju, and asked to play Sitala. When he finally began playing Sitala, he realised that it paid very little and was both physically and intellectually demanding. The players had to know the details of the mythological stories they enacted and the audience often asked them questions; and if they couldn't answer the questions, the audience was disappointed and annoyed.

Bhaduri met Naveen Kishore in 1999, when Kishore and Samik Bandyopadhyay came to interview Bhaduri's sister, the actress Ketaki Dutta. Kishore watched Bhaduri's performances, photographed him and finally, helped to take his Sitala off the streets and into theatres. Bhaduri developed a show called Ekmukhi Sitala. This was followed by Kishore's documentary on Bhaduri.

Helped by Seagull, Bhaduri's luck turned. He participated in a festival in Canada called A Dialogue with India. The new century saw Bhaduri back in demand on the stage, and finally, on television and in films. He also continued playing Sitala. He worked with director Kaushik Ganguly in two of his films - Ushnatar Jonno and Arekti Premer Golpo, and a television serial Ghare o Baire.

In Arekti Premer Golpo, Rituparno Ghosh was the hero. Bhaduri felt used by Ghosh during the making of the film. The Rituparno of Arekti Premer Golpo was certainly different from the host of Ebong Rituparno, who had inter-



*Author Sandip Roy. Photo by the Jaipur Literature Festival.*

viewed Bhaduri. Interestingly, Ganguly says that acting with Bhaduri impacted Ghosh deeply and points out the significant influence the encounter had on Ghosh's subsequent works.

Roy says that this book emerged slowly over weeks, months and finally years, after many conversations with Bhaduri. He spoke not just to Bhaduri but to many others who could add to his understanding of this remarkable man and his times. Roy's detailed Introduction gives us a vivid picture of early 20th-century Bengali commercial theatre, as well as the world of jatra. There is also an analysis of Bhaduri's relationship to the LGBTQI+ movement, where he has managed to carve out a place for himself and doesn't get fazed by the growing complexity of gender politics.

Bhaduri's queerness is upfront in Roy's telling of his life story. It is not written as a footnote or an interesting sidelight. It is intrinsic to the story of a man who played Sultana Raziya, Queen Kaikeyi and Goddess Sitala, cooked up a storm for friends and acquaintances, and managed his lover's home for more than a decade. "Chapal Bhaduri was queer in an

older sense of the word," writes Roy, "The proverbial square peg in a round hole. ... He was a queer survivor."

Roy's research is rigorous but doesn't drag the story down. This book about Bhaduri and his times is truly a page-turner. The structure of the book plays an important part too. The Introduction and Prologue are followed by 13 chapters and an Epilogue. Each chapter is in two parts: there is the subject matter followed by an Interlude. The Interlude provides more features and angles on the subject matter and enhances the reader's knowledge and understanding.

Chapal Rani, the Last Queen of Bengal, is appropriately a part of Seagull Books' Pride List and an invaluable addition to the history of theatre and the queer movement in India. The stories of many male queens of jatra, as well as those of other performers, have been lost. In fact, there are no books about Bhaduri's mother, Prabha Devi or another actress of her time, Kankabati. It is indeed creditworthy that Chapal Rani's story has been recorded for posterity. ❏

— *Courtesy Scroll.in*

# Raghu Rai: The Person Who Built India Through Photography



THE LAST PAGE



By  
**S N SINHA**

*The writer is a senior journalist based in Delhi and former President, Indian Journalists Union*

he passing of pioneer photojournalist who gave respect and recognition to Indian photojournalism is a big loss to the fraternity of working journalists. Veteran lensman Raghu Rai left us last month at the age of 83, leaving behind a tireless body of work chronicling modern India over the last six decades.

I met Raghu Rai first in 1968-69 at the residence of another legendary photojournalist, Kishor Parekh. As I became inspired by Kishor Bhai and joined the profession of photojournalism in 1972, I got a chance to work in the field with Raghu and used to go to him at The Statesman office, where he was heading the photo section of the newspaper. Whenever I asked for his advice, his answer was to go on shooting and create your own style. His gurumantra was to not follow or imitate anyone and make your own space in the world of photojournalism.

Raghu, born in 1942 in Jhang in Pakistan, was trained as a civil engineer and came into photography because of

his elder brother, another veteran photojournalist, S. Paul, at the age of 23. Once in the early 1960s, he visited his brother S. Paul in Delhi and was introduced to the medium of photography. One of his first photographs with his brother's camera was in a Haryana village, showing a donkey gazing straight into his camera. The donkey image

impressed S. Paul, who sent it to The Times, London, which published it, earning Raghu not only prize money but also changing his career in photography, which he pursued till his last breath.

After this he joined The Statesman as its chief photographer in 1966, later worked with Sunday, and then India Today. His career as a photojournalist stands as

a testament to the many moments that shaped India's socio-political landscape over the decades. The newsroom gave him speed, access, proximity and, importantly, a front-row view of unfolding history.

Raghu was awarded the Padma Shri

***Raghu was awarded the Padma Shri in 1972 for his coverage of the Bangladesh refugee crisis, showing the refugees' hunger and displacement during the Indo-Pakistan war for the liberation of Bangladesh.***

in 1972 for his coverage of the Bangladesh refugee crisis, showing the refugees' hunger and displacement during the Indo-Pakistan war for the liberation of Bangladesh. Among a number of other national and international awards and honours, he received the Photographer of the Year award in the United States of America for his photo story on Human Management of Wildlife in India, published in National Geographic.

According to Magnum Photos, in 1977 he was nominated to join the most prestigious photo agency in the world by his protégé Henri Cartier-Bresson, the master of the decisive moment. His photo stories over the years were also published in renowned international publications like Time, Life, The New York Times, The New Yorker, National Geographic and The Independent.

He was a juror for the World Press Photo Awards three times and served on the jury of UNESCO's International Photo Contest twice. I also got the privilege twice after Raghu to work as a juror on UNESCO's International Photo Contest. The government of France conferred upon Raghu the 'Officier des Arts et des Lettres.'

Raghu Rai's countless images chronicled the soul of India and stood as a testimony to a country where everything, from the corridors of political power to the bustling streets of Old Delhi, had the potential to reveal itself as an act of discovery.

His portraits of leading figures such as Indira Gandhi included his iconic frame in which a group of politicians, all men, stand around the table while Indira Gandhi, the only woman in the frame, remains seated, a reflection of how power can outweigh gender.

His black and white photo, "Burial of a Child", became one of the most haunting images of the 1984 Bhopal Gas tragedy.

He also captured India's social, cultural and spiritual life through portraits of leading figures such as the Dalai Lama, Mother Teresa, Satyajit Ray, Bhimsen

Joshi, Hari Prasad Chaurasia and Bismillah Khan, taking rare and intimate perspectives into their lives.

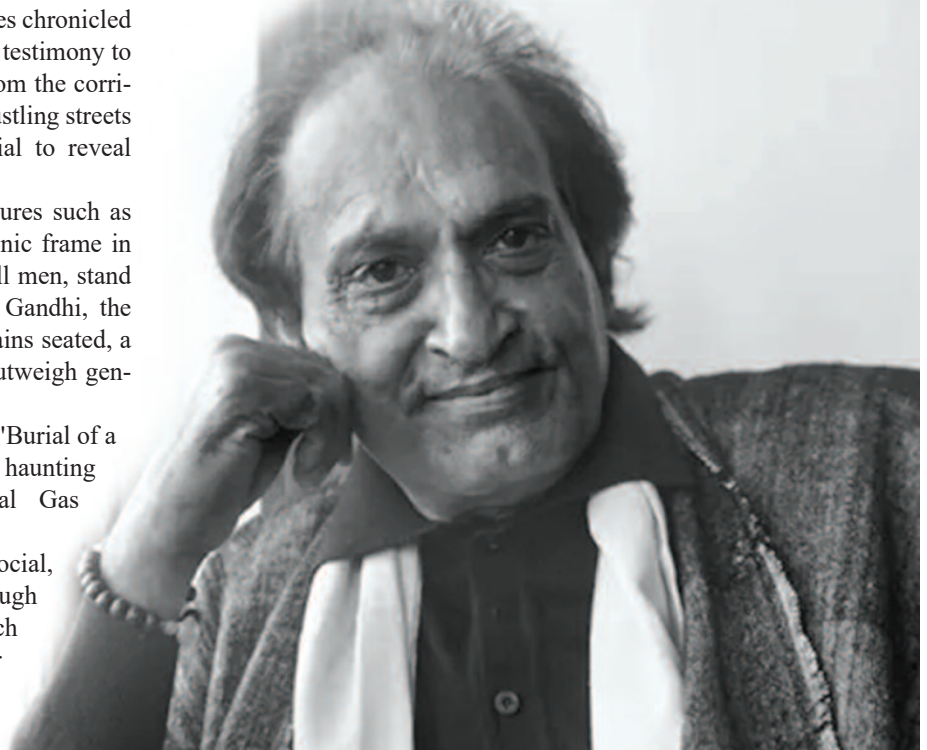
He also left behind 56 books, including "Raghu Rai's India: Reflections in Colour and Reflections in Black and White", A Day in the Life of India, Picturing Time, The Sikhs, Delhi etc., and was working on his 57th book before his death.

The art connoisseur Radhakrishna Ganeshan wrote about Raghu: "Rai did not capture Banaras. He translated it."

All journalists' bodies, including the All India Working News Cameramen's Association (WNCA), held a remembrance meeting to celebrate his work and life, including a screening of the film Raghu Rai, an Unframed Portrait, directed by Avani Rai, his daughter.

We have to remember his words, which inspired generations of photojournalists: "Without my camera, I am nothing. Indeed, without a memory, a human being is like a ripple in the river; when and where it starts, where it ends, nobody knows. For me, photography started as a bid to freeze memories." ❏

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