

The Alliance and the Media

The experience of Transforming Word/Firewords-Press

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(The journalists college of the Alliance is now more than two years old. It was earlier known as The Transforming Word. This title was later changed to Firewords-Press. This paper gives an analysis of the situation of the global media in relation to social responsibility. It also attempts to outline the journalists college of the Alliance).

Part 1

The insertion of the global media in relation to social alternatives.

Any discussion on the media would have to begin with an analysis of the dominant forces which determine the world we live in. What follows are some reflections on the social, political and commercial undercurrents that impinge on the media today, either enabling it to obfuscate the real issues and problems that confront our era or to highlight them.

For some the millennium was the year 2000, for others 2001. The 2000 celebrations were extravagant. Millions of champagne bottles popped in celebration, while billions of others woke up to their usual worries about food, health, education and shelter. Worries that the poor are fairly accustomed to, as Auden would have said. Yet we are witnessing a world of extraordinary advances in communication technology and unparalleled wealth for a few. Somebody recently stated that Bill Gates is rich enough to buy up forty of the poorest countries in the world. Ward Morehouse, the president of the Council for International relations in New York, says that a single corporation like Mitsubishi has an annual turnover equivalent to the GNP of India, a country with almost a billion people.

In response to the precarious nature of globalisation a Latin American friend offered this paradox. Half the people of his country, he said, could not sleep at night because they were hungry and the other half did not sleep because they were afraid. The rich are now barricading themselves against the 'criminal' activities of the poor. The expression 'gated cities' has gained currency to denote the security systems in place to ward off potential invasions by the disinherited. On the ecological front things have reached their limits. A United Nations report says that the per capita availability of water has gone down by fifty percent in the last twenty years and will go down a further 50% in the next twenty years. From all accounts we are already on the brink or hurtling towards it.

It's always difficult to know what words, what feelings and what interventions are relevant in a world where most of us feel increasingly powerless, where liberal democratic institutions are used to hasten the concentration of power and wealth in fewer and fewer hands. If old style social

analysis is not fashionable anymore what tools do we use to analyse the present situation. At least things seemed clear earlier on, where we knew that the ruling elites needed to manufacture ideological consent to keep the system going. Where we knew that the coercive mechanisms of the state, like the military, the police and the legal system, were to be used in case the ideological apparatus floundered and was unable to contain the tensions. But today there is a massive effort worldwide to justify market driven democracy with little space provided for critical rethinking. The big peddlers of globe-baloney like Rupert Murdoch, Ted Turner and their smaller counterparts in South Asia see the media as another economic enterprise with rich pickings, provided the content and the packaging are seductively displayed. To grow and prosper further they cannot afford to alienate those who provide them advertisement revenue. All this may be old hat to us and yet we cannot afford to sidestep the predicament on the grounds that we are not sure if there is anything to be done. Sadanand Menon has referred to this phenomenon as candyfloss journalism and Sasi Kumar, in one of his papers, cites Jon Tusa, the former head of BBC, to show the narrowing down of freedoms. Tusa points out that today's journalism has " more choice, but less diversity; more information but less knowledge; more action but less news; more gratification but less satisfaction; more viewers but fewer audiences; more entertainment but less engagement; more immediacy but less depth," and so on.

Objective, responsible and compassionate journalism is now rare, and journalists with integrity are sidelined or forced to quit. Yet there are valiant exceptions. *Le Monde* and *Liberation* in France, *The Guardian* in Britain and the *Hindu* in India are good mainstream examples. *Caravan*, the journal of the Alliance, is also a very important effort at alternative news and analysis on a global scale. Organisations like FAIR (Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting, New York.) and its journal are remarkable efforts to monitor the media and expose the biases and lacunae. An alternative magazine like *Humanscape* (India) is significant for both its seriousness and professionalism. What would some of us do without *Humanscape's* incisive articles, month after month, offering us the best and the brightest of alternative comment

To return to the 'manufactured consent' that we find ourselves in, what tools do we have to demystify this reality? Is it enough to state that we have no alternatives to globalisation and therefore the best we can do is to make the process more humane through struggles to defend human rights. Or do we insist that we are witnessing behavioral and attitudinal mutations that make the human being less compassionate and more lonely, manipulated by the information and consumer society. Not everybody is equally enmeshed in this phenomenon, however. Large sections of people are busy keeping their heads above water to meet the basic requirements of food clothing and shelter to worry too much about the hidden persuaders. But even the poor are fed dreams of becoming rich, and in the absence of meaningful political discourse and social movements, they often have little possibility to solve their problems and often resort to bravado acts of violence, that the system is more than happy to classify as 'criminal'. This is certainly the case in cities like Rio and Sao Paulo in Brazil, and the trend is likely to engulf South Asia as well unless the media and other agents educate people to critically reflect on the real structural causes of their poverty and cultural alienation. In reality the media is doing much less of all this now compared to previous times. Rocking the boat is not what the media wishes if the cost is losing government and corporate revenue. The NGO community, which in earlier times promoted critical awareness and interacted creatively with the media, is now largely immersed in pragmatic approaches like micro-credit and other development activities. Much of NGO work is donor

driven. With the collapse of the Soviet Union and the Eastern block, communism has ceased to be a threat and donors do not anymore see the need to shore up alternatives by supporting soft radical approaches like, for example, Paulo Freire's conscientisation.

Is class analysis dead? Is social democracy the way out to bring in a measure of justice and decency to public life? Going by the performance of Tony Blair, the current icon of social democracy, there is little cause for hope, for he has made social democracy the motor of neo-liberalism. Civil society is today another buzzword in many quarters. The way ahead, the argument goes, is for citizens to empower themselves through local associations and pressure groups. The more groups and associations there are the more vibrant the democratic process. Up to now too much attention has been placed on political leadership, governments and the private sector for the development and functioning of our social institutions. It is time that civil society came to the fore, for without that democracy would hardly mean much. Or so the reasoning goes. While there is considerable truth in this line of reasoning the de-emphasising of the state may unwittingly play into the hands of the transnational corporations who are bent on weakening the state and grabbing unbridled power. In many parts of the world the nation state exists only in name. The media has already blurred cultural distinctions by creating a homogenised 'global culture' that has further served to weaken the nation state, just what the WTO and transnational corporations need to allow unfettered access to markets. The nation state must eventually go, but not at the behest of the transnationals. (The twenty-first century is left with no choice but to cautiously move towards some form of global governance which simultaneously respects diversities.)

In the more prosperous countries 'deep ecological' movements are emerging which insist that the root of all problems lies in giving primacy to the human species. According to them, human beings are only ten seconds old on the geological clock, far, far younger than even the despised cockroaches. More to the point they insist that there must be a balance in nature between all species, and that human beings have far exceeded their limit. The radical ecologists insist that vast areas of the earth must be left as wilderness if we are to have a future at all. While there is some truth in this argument, it comes primarily from the richer countries, which in any case have small populations.

The grand old anarchist of this century, Mahatma Gandhi, seems increasingly relevant for 2000 and beyond for his advocacy of simple sustainable lifestyles. But Gandhism succeeds only if inner spiritual spaces are nurtured. These spiritual spaces may serve to powerfully resist the external world of consumer seduction. Sadly, the shrinking of these inner spaces is a disease of late modernity.

Most of us in Transforming Word were, in one way or other, concerned with shaping public opinion on social issues. Despite the odds against a more open media we still continued with our particular crusades. Speaking for myself, I have often asked why I persist with it. The answer is clear: I am in it not because I do not know what else to do, but because I believe that, with all my contradictions, I am doing things I largely believe in; or, should I say, somewhat believe in. I think this would probably be true of many of us in this room. I am certainly doing things without hugely oppressing myself and without an entirely altruistic purpose in mind. For I also matter and my convictions cannot flourish without my creative well-being. As Chief Seattle said, all things are connected. And the well-being of others must somehow be connected with our own well-

being. Words, the use of language and the visual image have the potential to take me to big highs and incredible lows. I am grateful for the highs and lows. When one likes doing what one is doing it is easier to keep going, whether or not one sees light at the end of the tunnel. Nishkama Karma, as Gandhi would put it. Action without attachment to the fruits of ones action. The workshop partly dwelt on this personal side of resistance, which is both dissenting and celebratory in nature. This was important, for we are all human beings motivated by the convictions and ambiguities we experience around us. It is not only ideology that motivates us, but compassion as well. And life in all its adventure and paradox. Which is why we don't crumble when our ideologies do.

If we have held meetings of journalists through the Transforming Word/Firewords programme it was in the hope that we could modestly, and collectively, help each other out. Perhaps we would hear words and experiences that might resonate within us, both personally and socially. We had hoped to mine a few nuggets that could give us some clarity, at least provisional. Thankfully we were not disappointed and the modest expectations were reached. Even if we did not go away with certainties we had enriched ourselves with stories of personal struggles and creativity. We were comforted that the struggles that took shape through our writings, films and other efforts at communication were not only social but also personal. For even the least of our efforts, when they carried some conviction, led us from one small hope to another. This was the era of small hopes and little nirvanas where the effort and fulfillment were as important as the intended results. In hindsight the century did not close with a whimper as far as we were concerned. The WTO fiasco in Seattle showed that things were far from being lost. As the French philosopher Edgar Morin put it, “ The twenty-first century began with Seattle.” Thomas Kocherry of the International Fishworkers Federation was in Seattle during the protests. He said, “ If the twentieth century will be remembered for de-colonisation then the twenty first century bids fair to free us from the shackles of the transnational corporations.” We look ahead with hope. The human spirit cannot be overpowered by the might of the transnationals or by the sophistry of the ‘candyfloss’ media.

But let us begin at the beginning: We reproduce below the first write-up on the Transforming Word:

Part II

“THE TRANSFORMING WORD - Writing to make a difference”

-social reporting that is reader-friendly, literary, stylish and deeply committed to social transformation.

“The Transforming Word- Writing to make a difference”, is an attempt to encourage social reporting that is reader-friendly, literary, stylish and yet deeply committed to social transformation. The Transforming Word has mobilized a network of well-known writers/journalists and promising young writers (from all over the globe) who combine literary skills with a concern for social issues. These writers have been commissioned to gather news/ write articles which take into account the concerns of the Alliance with a particular focus on the

significant political and cultural issues emerging in the coming millennium. The broad areas that this alternative news agency of the Alliance covers are :

- Cultural Action (street theatre, art, dance, literature, music, cinema, folk forms, craft, artisans)*
- Gender*
- Technology*
- Poverty, Hunger, Food Security*
- Ecological Action (implications of globalization, alternative economic - approaches, lifestyle choices)*
- Governance/culture/communities, civil society*
- Religion and Spiritualities*
- Education*

The need for such an alternative news agency:

Social reporting has been around for a long time but hasn't made the kind of impact it should have because our journals are ridden with jargon, our workshop reports are overburdened with statistics and our research papers are dry and analytical. There is a crying need for writing that can make a difference, given the magnitude of the social problems of our times. which in large measure stem from the flawed notions of development that prevail today.

Responsible media reporting could go a long way in promoting a more equitable and just society. The hidden costs of the media's apathy towards sustainable alternatives are too numerous to neglect. Even a percentage participation of the media in sensitizing the public and the powers that be can make a decisive difference. Then the media can fulfil its role as an agency of social change in being open to and highlighting experiments in sustainable alternatives. Media coverage can subtly boost the motivational levels of scattered and isolated efforts in sustainability, promoting a sense of solidarity between them and also contributing to the building of informed public opinion.

Towards a more socially responsible media discourse:

It is now a well-established fact that the dominant paradigm of development subscribed to by those who run the world's economies is fraught with deep contradictions. Owing to its lack of sensitivity to differences in worldviews and cultural configurations together with its largely indifferent attitude towards the ecological balance of our fragile planet this rhetoric of development has paved the way for gross inequalities in the distribution of wealth and accentuated problems like violence, poverty and large scale environmental devastation and damage to the integrity of local cultures. It has also become clear by now that no matter which end of the political spectrum one is concerned, be it the Right or the Left, there is no essential difference between them when it comes to their paradigms of development. Both are equally wedded to a worldview that sees development in terms of the large-scale exploitation of the earth's resources through the use of technologies and enterprises that are well beyond the human scale and wholly unsustainable . There is thus an urgent need to promote a countervailing worldview that visualizes development in terms that are both ecologically sustainable and protective of the rich cultural diversity of the varied peoples of the earth - in short a worldview that takes into account the integrity of the earth as a living organism.

Here is where the output of the media (especially the print media) as a potent influence on the minds of decision makers as well as the wider public becomes crucial. The reality that prevails today in this sphere is far from heartening. In fact one could speak today of a media that is in crisis. It wouldn't be far from the truth to say that the dominant voices that are heard through the media are those of the advocates of unsustainable development, and this has resulted in normalizing the discourse about vast impersonal global market mechanisms and reckless global capital, while marginalising all discourse that stems from the wisdom traditions of non-western peoples as well as discourse about sustainable lifestyles. One could reasonably conclude that the media has largely been co-opted into the mechanization's of those who implement the dominant paradigm, and is not much more than an adjunct to the titillating rhetorical framework of commercial advertising that is aimed at stimulating a culture of irresponsible consumerism. The dominant discourse that operates here is merely one of *logos*, or of linear, logical thought which is basically Eurocentric. It ignores the aesthetic (*Eros*) and the enabling metaphors of spirituality (*mythos*) that characterizes the rich discourse of the wisdom traditions of the myriad local cultures of the world now threatened by the homogenizing rhetoric of globalization.

The present project may be envisioned as a significant part of a campaign to actuate a much-needed paradigm shift in media discourse and enable it to move towards offering alternative scenarios that revolve around the idea of sustainable development. It attempts to wean the media, especially the print media, away from its present focus on a 'virtual' reality generated by a dominant worldview that is in the long run unsustainable. By focusing on responsible social reporting that is not just analytical (*logos*) but layered and nuanced through the incorporation of *Eros* and *Mythos*, through metaphors that have visualized the life of the varied people of this part of the world through millennia of sustainable living, this project will help generate countervailing worldviews that are so essential to resist the onslaught of the dominant paradigms that are laying waste our world.

The Transforming Word will also be put on the Net. We will have a separate website where features /interviews/ news from the *Word* will be regularly posted and maintained. Making these articles available on the Net gives the program wider accessibility, visibility and reach.

After the first six months of the programme these were our reflections on its future.

The TW has 4 components to it:

1. TW in Print
2. TW on the Net
3. TW – Features
4. TW – Networking

Reflections / Questions :

The most significant aspect of the programme has been that almost every journalist associated with the TW has expressed the need to be part of such an effort. From a recently held media workshop, writers and journalists from South Asia spoke of the space for social / alternative issues shrinking in the mainstream media, and how important it was for them to belong to a community of writers who could resist such advertisement/lifestyle driven journalism and even

challenge it. So the TW may be envisioned not just as an attempt to increase space for social reporting but as a significant part of a campaign to actuate a much-needed paradigm shift in media discourse and enable it to move towards offering alternative scenarios.

The TW in Print :

We have discovered since its inception that the programme has not always worked the way it was structured simply because it has varied from region to region, correspondent to correspondent. It has been more difficult, for instance, to identify suitable correspondents /writers from Europe and North America, while it has been relatively easier to locate writers from other regions of the world. Another factor to keep in mind is that these writers, by and large, cannot be full time journalists but free-lancers. And again, such free lancers are not easy to come by and when we do find them, it has not been easy for them to get the newspapers to credit the programme with a :Courtesy: “The Transforming Word” at the end of the article. We are also uncertain about the payment of each published article: should it vary from region to region or should there be a fixed amount and if so, how much?

The TW on the Net

More recently we have felt that the TW could make an even stronger impact on the Net as a portal offering good articles/views on various issues that are both important to the Alliance. This website would have new/fresh features written exclusively for the portal, a string of columnists from around the globe debating various issues and a substantial archive that covers large ground. This website is now active. Called firewords-press.org it features articles/news/ interviews on social, political, cultural and ecological issues from around the world.

TW Features:

Apart from the articles in print and on the Net, we thought it might be good to have a TW features service: three or four solid articles on social issues are printed (hard copy) and mailed to about five hundred people around the world – Alliance members, allies, journalists, activists etc. These articles could be original or reprints.

TW Networking:

To gather journalists / writers associated with the TW and bring them together once a year / once in two years. Or to meet region-wise. To form a E-mail Forum of correspondents to keep on-going reflection and interaction on The Transforming Word. And lastly to develop a group of writers/journalists who can critically interact and support each other. Since this proposal, the TW journalists from around the world met for a one week workshop in Bangalore, December 2000. What follows is a report of it.

Members of the Transforming Word/Firewords-Press network.

Sl. Name

1 ALISON CADDICK, Australia, Editor/Writer- Arena journal

- 2 **DARIO HERNAN RARIS, Argentina, Journalist**
- 3 **VALERIA PAOLA CORNELI, Argentina, Journalist**
- 4 **EDDIN KHOO BU-ENG, Malaysia, Journalist**
- 5 **DOHA ALI CHAMS, Lebanon, Journalist**
- 6 **CAMILE BEAULIEU, Canada, Journalist**
- 7 **SANDILE GEORGE DIKENI, Capetown, South Africa, Journalist/Columnist**
- 8 **SUSANNA NIEDERMAYR, Vienna, Austria, Radio Journalist**
- 9 **MARIA ZULMEIRA DE SOUZA, Sao Paulo, Brazil, Television Journalist**
- 10 **MUHAMMOD EKRAMUL KABIR, Dhaka, Bangladesh, Journalist**
- 11 **CRISTINE MARIE GONZALEZ, USA, Journalist, The Portland Tribune**
- 12 **RAJPAL MALINDA ABEYNAYAKE, Sri Lanka, Editor/Journalist**
- 13 **C.K. LAL, Kathmandu, Nepal, Journalist**
- 14 **FRED LEONARD WEIR, Moscow, Russia, Journalist**
- 15 **RACHEL SUYDAM COEN, NY, USA, Media Critic - FAIR**
- 16 **BETSAN PATRICIA MARTIN, New Zealand, Writer/Academic/Researcher**
- 17 **ODAJIMA TAKASHI, Japan, Journalist**
- 18 **INOUE JIRO, Japan, Journalist**
- 19 **MAIA DUERR, USA, Asst. Editor -Turning Wheel / Researcher**
- 20 **LAIA BOTEY, Spain, Journalist-Alliance**
- 21 **BENEDICTE MANIER, France, Journalist-Alliance**
- 22 **MAKARAND PARANJAPE, Delhi, India, Social critic**
- 23 **PANKAJ SEKHSARIA, Pune, India, Environmental Journalist; Researcher**
- 24 **RAJIB SARKAR, Bombay, India, Editor, Gentleman**
- 25 **SIDDHARTHA, Bangalore, India, Writer/Social critic-Alliance**
- 26 **Conrado de Quiros, Quezon city, Philippines, Columnist.**
- 27 **KOJI SATO, Japan-Foundation, Japan**
- 28 **PRADEEP SEBASTIAN, Bangalore, India, Film Critic**

Part III

The Transforming Word Workshop

In December 2000 The Transforming Word held its first international meeting of journalists. It was a very significant meeting and it would be worthwhile to carry below a brief report of the meeting as it reveals the potentiality of the programme if it is able to reach its full potential. This report was drafted by Benedicte Manier and Pradeep Sebastian:

We were 35 writers from around the world – journalists, poets, authors, essayists – and we had never felt more connected, inspired, motivated and challenged than on that last afternoon of the Transforming Word workshop. Over the course of the four day workshop, we had begun to realise that this coming together was an extraordinary opportunity to form a community of socially concerned writers. An alliance, a global network of gifted, experienced and strategically placed writers who could make meaningful and timely interventions in the mainstream media.

At the end of our deliberations, we resolved to critically interact and support each other across regions, to look into forming an alternative press agency (the long-term objective is to create an alternative international “news service”, providing informative data and articles to all medias both mainstream and alternative) and launch a website for the Transformers to address the concerns and issues of the Alliance. Since the workshop, we have formed a E-mail Forum of correspondents to keep on-going reflection and interaction on the programme and the website has just been registered as firewords-press.org and should be underway soon.

How did this come about? The Transforming Word programme had completed a year and we thought it crucial to have all the correspondents come together for a four day workshop in Bangalore from the 7-10th of December, 2000.

The workshop was to help assess the significance and impact of the programme and offer correctives where needed. Thus far the correspondents of the TW had been in touch only on e-mail and it had now become important that we meet in person.

The most significant aspect of the programme has been that almost every journalist associated with the TW had expressed the need to be part of such an effort. They all spoke of the space for social/alternative reporting shrinking in the mainstream media, and how important it was for them to belong to a community of writers who could resist such advertisement driven journalism and even challenge it. So the TW was not just to be an attempt to increase space for social reporting but to also be a significant part of a campaign to actuate a much-needed paradigm shift in media discourse and enable it to move towards offering alternative scenarios.

Looking critically at the media

Introducing the workshop, Siddhartha, said: “In the last eighteen months that we have worked on the Transforming Word we have realised that if there is one dimension that the media all over the world is progressively losing out on it is the critical spirit. It is almost as if there are some

givens that are to be taken for granted, shibboleths whose wisdom cannot be questioned. Some such words have to do with globalisation, structural adjustment and the pre-eminence of corporations in deciding the nature of our global economy and human well being...the media is now progressively becoming business and advertising revenues are more important than the profits that accrue from mass circulation. A large number of people all over the world are largely kept ignorant of the workings of the system by the media, despite the efforts of a few courageous journalists.”

The participants formed a panel of five each morning and afternoon and made their presentations in three modules: region wise, e.g.: South Asia, theme wise, e.g. :globalisation, media wise, e.g.: radio/T.V./print journalism. As each journalist made his or her presentation what became clear was not only the challenge and struggle each had undergone to continue focussing on social, cultural, spiritual and environmental reporting in the face of an indifferent, entertainment driven media but also the creativity, commitment and depth each journalist had brought to her/his reporting.

Transforming Word (since some participants had the feeling that the name “Transforming Word”, was hard to translate and might appear, in some cultures, as a “Christian fundamentalist group”, the name has now been changed to Firewords) wishes to contribute to a “different” globalization, with a social, economic, cultural, political, and spiritual alternative. This initiative comes from a critical vision of the mainstream media, which seems to dictate the nature of globalization today. With a critical eye, we examined the hyper-concentration of infotainment in the media: for instance, in just a few years, the number of groups which control most of the US media has come down from 50 to only 6 (AOL Time Warner, Abc-Disney, Murdoch, Universal Seagram-Vivendi.). Most U.S. cities now have only one daily newspaper belonging to one of these big groups. According to Rachel Coen of FAIR, 2/3 of the American population listen to radios which belong to only two large US media groups.

Consequently, journalism as a public service no longer exists and the trend is to make news more ‘profitable’. Infotainment is gaining ground because readers are considered as consumers –not citizens. Investigative journalism is losing ground under increasing pressure from ad contributors. Nike succeeded in getting a US journalist transferred to another post, Rachel explains, because she investigated sweatshops in Vietnam. Coca-Cola went even further, issuing a strategic document a few years ago, to say what kind of reports should be placed next to its ads in the media : no sex, no drug, no health or negative diet information (!), no politics, religion or environment stories.

To this Rajib Sarkar, editor, Gentleman magazine added: “And when 90% of the revenues of a media comes from ads, there is no real freedom to change the content of a magazine.”

With the emergence of “profitable” news came another trend : marketing service – which has begun to take over the newsroom, with the power of rejecting some articles and defining what must be published on the front page. Another new form of censorship is the presence in every newspaper of a team of lawyers who go over the copy: Fred Weir from Moscow recalled that “a story on the anti-union policy of McDonald’s was just cut to pieces by the lawyers of a US newspaper.” Growing conformism within the media seems to be another form of censorship. Newspapers, radios and TVs receive incredible volumes of information from the press agencies (AFP produces two millions words everyday, i.e. a story every second at peak hours) but only a small part (maybe about 5%) is published, and it’s always the same stories: the same political fact

of the day, the same financial news (companies benefits, Stock market), the same sports news and “people” news, two growing sectors of “infotainment”. For example, a story on the opening of a nudist beach in Moscow appeared in 47 publications in Canada, while a change of Prime minister got ... only one.

It is now obvious that only some issues pre-determined according to the supposed “interest” of the readership, but which actually concern only a minority of “happy few” in the world—monopolize almost all the information space. But topics concerning 95% of the world population (poverty, population issues, human rights, citizen’s movements) hardly appear. One of the participants pointed out that: “The mainstream media doesn’t even have a structure to cover poverty; there is a “business section” but never a “working class section”. As C.K. Lal from Nepal said: “This limited and stereotyped news offer doesn’t reflect a complex and plural world, and there lies a democratic problem. Democracy is about the rights of the last, the lost and the least”, those who never turn up on the front page.”

Systematically forgetting some topics can even lead to political manipulation: the year Mandela was released from jail, says Sandile Dikeni from South Africa, 80% of the South-Africans who only got information through the radio, had never heard of him before. Siddhartha mentioned a recent conversation during the US election campaign, with a NYC taxi driver, who was watching TV three hours a day, but had never heard of Ralph Nader. This growing conformism of the media also appears in the reproduction, in almost every country of the world, of CNN-like TV channels, which deliver the same business news to the same international business community, the most profitable audience. Finally, some participants denounced the “dictatorship” of “real time news” (specially in the media working 24H/24), and of “breakings news”. Speed is taking a growing importance in journalism, when investigating, information and source checking require time. There is a need to break this spiral of speed, and to come back to a journalism based on distance and analysis.

What do Journalists need?

What they perhaps need more than anything else is to break the vicious circle of loneliness and disillusionment. For instance, “journalists who keep trying to get their “alternative” stories published in the mainstream media inevitably lose heart after some time,” observes Cristine, a freelance journalist from Portland, USA. After a while, they are even unconsciously driven to compromising with the dominant spirit. They need help to “keep on believing” and the support of a network that could open up their horizon, and increase their possibilities of publishing. Alison underlines that Australian journalists from the dominant medias often publish (with pseudonyms) in *Arena* (her alternative magazine of socio-politic analysis) stories that could never be published in their own media.

Alison felt there was a need to have ‘alternative’ stories published across cultures and countries, widening one’s readership and increasing one’s motivation to write more.

There is also a strong need to break the rigid hierarchy of issues in the newsroom : politics, economics and diplomatic stories are the most career-boosting categories for journalists. But it is impossible to make a career when you cover social and citizenship issues. “You see the others go ahead, and you feel lonely”, says Ekram from Bangladesh. But according to Doha, a Lebanese columnist, “being published once in the foreign press (“*Courrier International*”) gave her a better image than in her own local newspaper.”

Open perspective

Journalists fighting for social and democratic issues need some hopeful perspectives, specially the more disillusioned professionals, who are becoming more and more cynical. Participants noticed that since the end of the cold war, the general feeling is that journalists don't believe in anything anymore: they just seem to be without a cause. No one could be more in need of consciousness raising than the Russian journalists, said Fred. "The "perestroika" years constituted an unprecedented time of freedom, when almost anything could be published. That model broke down because the country broke down, and crooks took over public property, including media. The journalists field is now extremely narrow, because the owner dictates what his media will reflect. Besides, journalists investigating about scandals get killed or threatened. There is no civil society to support them, and the Kremlin launched a recent policy to "restructure order", through indirect ownership/or control of the media. In this context, impoverished and demoralised Russian journalists really need some new perspectives and hope."

"There is a need," says Eddin from Malaysia, "for "alternative spaces" in the world of information, for "autonomy in journalism". Journalists motivated by their social and democratic convictions must work in a global network and be able to provide a kind of collective strength. Maria urged that "this meeting in Bangalore is an unique opportunity to set up a collective project, and this project must be more than a "network", it must be "team" and even a "community" of journalists."

Building a credible alternative

All participants agreed that there was a need for social writing to be imaginative, literary, personal. Modeled on a sort of "post-New journalism" and founded on a social and democratic commitment to "raise public awareness". The writing should be close to social reality, but also sensitive and full of emotion and far away from the stereotypes of sanitized journalism.

Several steps will be necessary to bring about such a network:

First, we agreed to begin with informal exchanges of data, information and articles by Emails. Camille pointed to the possibility of "a journalist investigating nuclear waste site for example can ask other journalists of the network to give him some information on this issue from their own country, since this issues cuts across countries." Maria, a TV journalist from Brazil said that she was a member of a network of about a hundred journalists working on environment issues, who exchange information by Email, and sometimes participate in common information sessions.

The second step could be a more structured exchange of articles. It would be part of the Transforming Word (Firewords) approach: "pooling" articles -either unpublished, or already published- so that the network members see what they can translate and publish in their own country, according to their possibilities. A standard remuneration like the one practiced by Transforming Word is open for consideration.

This idea of "pooling" articles naturally leads to the idea of a Website (now registered as firewords-press.org) in several languages, that would structure these exchanges by thematic sectors, and stand for a "shop window" to expose the philosophy of this network. It would include a definition of our alternative ambition in journalism, as well as an "appeal" to journalists wishing to join us. There are a lot of journalists in the world with the same commitments, and who practice this "post New Journalism or Literary Journalism" without even knowing it, and

“they must know that we exist”, Doha suggests. This Website could later become a portal, with links to existing alternative media (like Extra!, Arena, Feed), and of the different existing “media watches” (Acrimed in France, FAIR in the U.S...). A list should be defined.

On a longer term, our ambition is to create an alternative “news service”, an active media providing (selling) original articles, in-depth investigative stories (and features written simultaneously by several journalists of the network on the same topic). This service will be provided to the mainstream media as well as to the alternative ones.

One thing is clear anyway : the purpose is not to compete with the existing news agencies and produce the same content. Neither is it to build up a project based only on our opposition to the values of the rest of the profession. But there is a real need for a global alternative service, covering all kinds of topics, and all participants expressed great interest in it. It is necessary to invest a different “niche”, in an alternative space still quite empty, and cover a corpus of topics still hardly covered, in a constructive way, with serious news and analysis. Our aim is to invest the public information space with articles that the readership asks for, and deserves, but can hardly read in the mainstream media. Readers are certainly more saturated than we think about the excessive standardization of the media, and asking for a more independent journalism. Investing this space also means to build up a “critical mass” of alternative data/news in order to counterweight the news published in the mainstream media. “Why do we talk about changing the fundamental balance of power? Media is power”, stressed Lal.

How do we start this website/news service?

The discussion about this “news service”—that would be based on the Web — has to be done through an E-group within the network. A core group will be soon set up around Siddhartha and Bénédicte, in order to set up an agenda. The philosophy of this news service should be clearly defined—in a “charter” or a founding document. This media group should be totally independent from any political, religious and financial influence, but based on a obvious social and professional commitment, in the spirit of “the Alliance for a responsible, plural and united world “It should also have a strong identity”, a “trade mark” easy to recognize, to avoid any dilution of identity. A mechanism should be found to guarantee the independence, and avoid any “infiltration”. Why not set up a supporting group of personalities and/or recognized moral authorities to help? A name for this agency still has to be found : all ideas are more than welcome. Some first ideas about the type of issues covered: environment, social critic/debates, education, geopolitical analysis, population and development issues, poetry. Collaborating with existing alternative medias is to be considered. We should be careful not to focus on “ghetto” issues, and also avoid the old-fashioned “third-world-ism” tone which has been so much criticized. But we have to be modern and attractive. The launching will need a strong partnership (both professional and financial), that could include (first ideas) the Panos Institute, the Ford Foundation, the Rockefeller Foundation, the Unesco, the ILO (if there is a strong social content), universities, the Soros Foundation (this list has to be completed : all ideas welcome).

The idea to work with the free Linux software was discussed, but no decision was made to use to or not use it. (Linux might be a little complex). Our marketing policy should include early workshops with mainstream and alternative medias editors, in order to collect some ideas, have an idea of their needs, and publicize this project among them. Some articles already published or “copyleft” articles should be available freely on the Website of this news service for public

purpose. Siddhartha suggested that we leave the use of this news service free during the first year (though with a mention of source and copyright) and evaluate the first year before we go commercial. Everybody seemed definitely enthusiastic about this project, but several voices advised caution. It will also be necessary to define the “niche” clearly. We should be careful not to be too dogmatic, because even the most neo-liberal media (The Economist for example) are also able to produce well-written stories. Alison also stressed how difficult it was to maintain a left-wing social/political debate after the downfall of the left in front of die-hard-liberalism, and the influence of her magazine Arena remains limited (3-4.000 copies, with a decrease in 2000). Sandile also wondered if this agency has to be so structured. It is also necessary to see the situation of the alternative medias in order to not to repeat their errors (cf : analyze the current problems of IPS), he added. But it seems that there is no fatality of failure for alternative medias, as a specialized press agency like WFS (Women’s Features Service), based in India, is doing very well, gaining more and more clients in Asia. Bénédicte suggested we examine the elements of this success story.

To support this project —and more extensively all kind of progressive/ alternative media— participants suggested we set up a “circle”, a community or a “focus group” of readers, which would support us, bring ideas etc. Susanna, a radio journalist from Vienna, recalled that her FM radio is conceived like a platform of exchanges for a community of listeners, who meet in concerts and parties.

Finally, a last project was suggested : the creation of a training “academy”, with regular sessions/meetings for young or more experienced journalists. The purpose is not to teach any “doctrine” but to raise awareness among young professionals, teaching them how to report and write using the techniques of Literary Journalism. Sandile said that he has already been training teens in journalism in townships of South Africa. Siddhartha hoped that progressively, these sessions will constitute a permanent dialogue, an experience sharing, a “fellowship” between journalists from all over the world.

Part IV

Proposals

The journalists’ college of the Alliance is now more than two years old, having come into being in late 1999. It first started off as a forum to encourage journalists to contribute socially motivated articles to the press. Many important newspapers and journals in several countries participated in this programme. The programme was then called “The Transforming Word”. In December 1999, the first international meeting of the college of journalists met in Bangalore , India, and came out with a very meaningful analyses and a call for a e-mail forum, website and a news agency. At this meeting it was decided that the name Transforming Word was inadequate. After much consultation in the months that followed the name “ Firewords” was chosen to replace it.

At the moment Firewords has a website (www.firewords-press.org), an email forum for its journalists, and a programme to publish articles in the mainstream press.

Keeping in mind the seriousness of the situation in the media the following proposals are suggested. Efforts should be made:

1. to encourage journalists, publishers and producers to give greater attention to social issues and suggest solutions to them. Given the fact that we are in a new millennium the effort could focus on the responsibility of the media to tackle the issues which the 21st century is going to face- issues like governance (local and global), democracy, poverty, ecological sustainability, values and culture.
2. to isolate particular issues and problems which need to be given greater attention. Example: the problems posed by lack of information during a war, which allows the warring parties to commit human rights atrocities and genocide.
3. to explore the possibility of writers, journalists and social activists forming informal networks that may lobby politicians and bureaucrats to implement social programmes.
4. to reflect on the role of the media in creating a vibrant civil society where local groups and organizations play a major role in tackling local issues in a participatory and democratic spirit. To see the media as a humanizing and culturally energizing force that can generate hope and initiative among a large number of people.
5. to monitor the process of globalization in the interests of the poor and the marginalized peoples.
6. to run a socially conscious media business---by letting it be run by a Trust or non-profit organization. Collective ownership (readers, writers, institutions, NGOs etc) can bring in the credibility and social sensitivity that seems to be rapidly disappearing in the mainstream media.
7. to build a global horizontal portal (let's say--www.firewords.com or some similar effort) which could have four channels based on: socio-economic, socio-politic, environment and culture. Many socially sensitive writers could contribute articles here.
8. to find funding for special journalistic projects which should be published in the mainstream media later.

Part V

Appendix

We carry three extracts/articles in this section by journalists involved with The Transforming Word. Sashi Kumar analyses the electronic media while Sadanand Menon looks at the crisis in the print media. Rajib Sarkar looks at the powerful influence of the commercial side of the media and proposes alternatives.

Crisis in the electronic media – Sashi Kumar

Television's known and demonstrative role in rearranging our sense of time and space, fragmenting our cognitive faculty, is compounded, in this context, by literally pushing into oblivion the overwhelming reality of India –rural India—so that it becomes a dark mass that exists around and outside the four corners of the television frame. No voices from the darkness really register on this screen; conversely no concern or what goes on out there is allowed to disturb the cocooned relationship the viewer and the viewed have forged between themselves. The screen has become the wish-fulfilling touchstone of the appetites and aspirations of that burgeoning middle class.

Ben Bagdikian in his classic study *The Media Monopoly* shows how the ten top American corporations control almost everything we see, hear and read.

To counter this alarming trend Bagdikian urges grassroots activism and a return to public broadcast philosophy. The French scholar Pierre Bordieu in his slim but profound analysis *On Television and Journalism* points to the agenda-setting role of television and observes how we are getting closer and closer to the point where the social world is primarily described and in a sense prescribed-by television. He and others have also looked at television's innate tendency to be trivial and reductive, its complicity in bestowing counterfeit intellectualism on those unable to acquire that status by right or merit, its helpless dependence on the ratings game and the paradox of standardization and homogenization in content—rather than difference and variety—that competition engenders.

Much of this discourse on television and the media seems also in general to assume with Francis Fukuyama (in his latest book *The Great Disruption*) that the transition into the information society has already been made and the tenets of the new post-industrial age are operative. In this new economy, observes Fukuyama, services increasingly displace manufacturing as a source of wealth. Instead of working in a steel mill or an automobile factory, the typical worker in an information society has a job in a bank, software firm, restaurant, and university or social service agency. The role of information and intelligence, embodied in both people and increasingly smart machines, becomes pervasive and mental labour tends to replace physical labour. The Fukuyama characterization of modern society in terms of a Great disruption brings to a head a schematic train of thought that emphasizes rapture rather than continuity in history and society hazarded by empirical society-watchers like Alvin Toffler who, through a series of works since the 1970s, pushed the idea of a Third Wave of computer-using societies replacing the earlier industrial age, just as the industrial age itself displaced the preceding agricultural era; or Daniel Bell who in 1973 suggested that with the emergence of a new white-collar workforce the old industrial system is behind us; or again, the MIT Media Lab founder Nicholas Negroponte's dizzy vision of a digitally-taped-and-determined world. This new fangled post-industrial school of thought utilizes, as Dan Schiller (1996) points out, its exceptionalist premise (the uniqueness of information and its production) to invoke a comprehensive but undemonstrable historical rupture, and therefore to draw back decisively from the predominating social relations of production and into schematic and false models of social development. Information itself was given an aura of objectivity. In all of this discourse, moreover, one searches in vain for a linkage that incorporates predominantly rural societies into the new scheme of things.

With the perceptible, if unstated, shift by Doordarshan (Indian state run TV) from its public broadcast mandate to compete with this plethora of independent channels by imitating their formula of commercially successful programming and with the commercial channels all drawing from the same bag of programme mix, we have a near uniformity of fare across State and private-owned television that negates the pluralism that such a development should have engendered. Switching channels, one gets more and more of the same so that, by the law of diminishing returns, more begins to be less. The sameness is limiting, not only in terms of the audience addressed (a city-bred middle class) but also in terms of the horizon of information the media surveys. Under the identical pressure of ratings and raking in revenues, the competition between channels becomes a frenetic wild goose chase that throws up little that is new or different. Even news or that whole area we call television journalism is no exception to this behaviour; if

anything, peer pressure and a vying-for-the-same-story syndrome ensure that from the order of the headlines to what is center staged as current affairs over a given period of time no channel departs from the essential content of its competitors. It is, as Pierre Bourdieu (cited earlier) describes, “a circular circulation of information among the channels...a game of mirrors reflecting one another (that) produces a formidable effect of mental closure.” Insensitive extreme manifestation of such behaviour of course is the prerogative of the western, particularly American, media where hours days, weeks and months of prime television time are consumed on titillating coverage of an OJ Simpson case, or the romantic gore of Diana’s death, or la affaire Monica Lewinsky, even as mass scale starvation and death in Somalia, or the ravages of ethnic strife and war in Bosnia, or human suffering on a similar scale in any part of the world other than the first world pass them by, meriting only casual and certainly far less passionate attention. The electronic media in this part of the world too, however, avidly share this voyeuristic interest in, and trial by media of, persons who have little to do with the context or lives of the public here. This tailism is no doubt partly dictated by the one-way informational flow and the dependence on foreign visual news agencies, but also betrays the urge to belong to that metropolitan culture and its inner city preoccupations.

Where the intellectual community stands, or should stand, vis-à-vis the mass media is important not only because that is the reservoir of knowledge that can make sense of and, if necessary, intervene and counter the superficial excesses of information in the new era (one should hold steadfast to the distinction between knowledge and information in this new context), but also in terms of locating the media in the public sphere as against the private or reserved space intellectuals occupy. In his classic definition of the public sphere, which merits being quoted at length to appreciate the total concept, Jurgen Habermas (1974) calls it “a realm of our social life in which something approaching public opinion can be formed. Access is guaranteed to all citizens. A portion of the public sphere comes into being in every conversation in which private individuals assemble to form a public body. They then behave neither like business or professional people transacting private affairs, nor like members of a constitutional order subject to the legal constraints of a state bureaucracy. Citizens behave as a public body when they confer in an unrestricted fashion, that is, with the guarantee of freedom of assembly and association and the freedom to express and publish their opinions about matters of general interest. In a large public body this kind of communication requires specific means for transmitting information and influencing those who receive it. Today (1964) newspapers and magazines, radio and television are the media of the public sphere.

The way the mass media have actually turned out, however, their public sphere identity is putative rather than real, driven as they are by the market and catering as they do only to the concerns of this market-based consumer. This is even more so as the media becomes globalised and for those already functioning as such, like, say, CNN or the BBC World Service, the viewership size actually shrinks further to a minuscule elite across the world. The globalised part of the print media too is as elitist (and must know English, to boot), with studies showing that the average gross personal income of subscribers to the Financial Times outside of the UK numbering some 130,000, is \$120,000 and that of the 64,000 readers getting the Wall Street Journal Europe is a staggering \$ 196,000.

The odd attempts to realize the media as a democratized public sphere, even if they have been isolated instances at the fringe like the experiment with aboriginal TV in Australia or the ongoing

tussle between the indigenous Maori people and the government of New Zealand for control over the airwaves, become redeeming case studies to cling on to in this scenario. The community television initiative in Ernabella in southern Australia in 1985 was entirely by the local aboriginals who raised the funds among themselves (a surcharge of 10 cents on all soft drink sales by the local store raised a good part of the capital) and evolved a mix of programmes that reflected their folklore, magical rites and local problems which they produced on their own as well as other programmes relating to aboriginal issues acquired from media institutions specializing in this area or recorded off mainstream telecasts like the Australian Broadcasting Corporation. Although the success of the Ernabella model inspired other and larger schemes for an alternative aboriginal television regime in Australia, particularly under the Broadcasting in Aboriginal Communities Scheme (BRACS), they turned out to be accommodative in nature rather than a space for aboriginal assertion. A more ambitious scheme by the Central Australian Aboriginal Media Association (CAAMA) to intervene in the federal government's licensing of satellite television in the Northern Territory became, initially, a cause celebre of sorts, especially in the process of its struggle in the mid-80's to muster the \$6 million required for the licence fee. The *Imparja* service, as it was called, catered to over 60 per cent of all aboriginal groups and looked like the new hop of aboriginal articulation; but within a few years (and the beginning of the 90's) the hope had turned sour as the station was driven by the market into dependence on subsidy by the federal government and its programming staff and content became overwhelmingly white. As the cofounder and Director of CAAMA, an aboriginal woman who quit her post in 1991, summed up the experience, "Our original aim was to get some control over the satellite so that we could use it to suit our purposes... We wanted to see a lot of black faces, people speaking our local languages... We were especially interested in using it for educational purposes...but look at *Imparja* now, it's no different to any other commercial TV station. In a way it has become what we tried to stop."

In New Zealand the indigenous Maori people, who constitute 30 per cent of the population, are staking their claim for equal participation in, and control over, use of the airwaves with the whites, or Pakehas as they are called. Theirs is a larger and more original case, based as it is on their right under the Treaty of Waitangi of 1840 signed between their chiefs and the British Crown which gives them total authority over all their resources. The airwaves over a country, seems the interesting thrust of the Maori argument, are as much part of its people's resource as land or any other natural resource, and entitlement to it as automatic under the Treaty. Indeed the government of New Zealand is not about to buy this argument and had in fact sought to pre-empt any dilution of its control over broadcasting by a legislation which while talking about the need for representative public broadcasting, forbade resort to the judicial process to correct any distortions. The whole issue continues to be hotly contested in the Waitangi Tribunal and other courts and even though the Maori cause is an uphill task, their demand opens up a whole new possibility of a basic right to airwaves. In such redefinitions and reassertions seem to lie the clue towards renegotiating a truly democratic media space.

Crisis in the print media – Sadanand Menon

The post-Emergency spring thunder in 'investigative' journalism and the mushrooming of fresh media initiatives contributed to both glamorizing the profession as well as setting it up, at last, as big business. Besides becoming cash cows, the big media houses also became an open plaything

of specific political agendas, developing a candid nexus, and changing the very vision and direction of journalism in India. From idealism to secure careerism was a decade-long process. With cleverer investment strategies and circulation drives, with a scientific mopping up of ad revenues and with a brazen commoditisation of their 'brands' a new breed of newspaper proprietors emerged, who have in the last decade comprehensively corporatised the journalistic profession. They don't bat an eyelid today in the Madras edition of a prominent national daily when management circulates notes requiring journalists to wear 'sober ties' and 'closed shoes'. Along with individual perks, contracts, number-lock briefcases and swipe-card registration of attendance, the journalist today can easily pass off for a marketing executive or the front office manager of a five-year hotel.

The real 'censorship' (if it can be called that), the real curtailment of ideas/thoughts/expression today, in the era of 'open markets', is coming from another quarter – from private owners of media. The shifting of media monopolies from governments to private mavericks has led to a global 'Murdochisation'- the rapid and predatory cannibalization of a variety of forms of print media into stereotyped products of, not information, but entertainment. This certainly represents an extreme distortion of the idea of 'freedom of speech'. The supplanting of broadsheet content with tabloid content—what is being described as 'broadloidisation'—is truly an exercise by media monopolists in cramping mind and thought, quite unprecedented in the history of the print media.

When government exercised their awesome control and hold over news/newsprint/ads/taxes, journalists and their organization fought do-or-die battles to win major space for the cause of 'freedom of expression'. Today the media barons have taken over and are redefining media content in whimsical and vandalistic ways, reducing the profession to an extension of advertising. But now there is nothing the journalists or their associations can do about it. The battle for 'openness' and 'freedom' is, by definition, reserved against repressive state machineries with vested interest in decaying 'freedoms'. But when Johnny-come-lately media moghuls—who also now style themselves as editors-in-chief—get into the act to define the prime concern of their brands as "sunshine" or "froth", or "celeb leisure" stories, there is nothing journalists can do anymore except silently participate or equally silently opt out.

Freedom from advertising – Rajib Sarkar

Managing the media business is all about managing an unwieldy paradox. This is perhaps the only business where you have two distinctly different sets of consumers. One buys the contents. The other buys either time or space within the contents. The problem is that while the first set of consumers outnumbers the second by a huge margin, it contributes not more than 1/10th of the revenue garnered from the second. While editorially one focuses on the first set of consumers, the cost of doing so is met by the second. Modern businesses put 'customer satisfaction' at the

heart of their operations. In the media business, one has to decide which set of customers gets priority over the other, should there be a conflict. And there lies the rub.

Let's look at the business model, which has profit maximization as its primary objective. Since advertisement revenue contributes more than 90 per cent of the revenue in the present scenario, here one will have to orient the entire business towards increasing ad revenue as much as possible.

Advertisers seek customers who have the necessary purchasing power. That means, people with no or low disposable income add no value to the readership / viewership of a particular media vehicle. In fact, such readership without purchasing power adds cost in case of print publications. Simply because there is a marginal cost involved in selling one more copy of a print publication to somebody who has little or no commercial value to the advertisers. In other words, print publications lose profit margins when they acquire 'empty' circulations. For broadcast and webcast media, of course, the marginal costing is not a relevant issue.

As per this model, media vehicles are primarily carriers of advertising. The content they carry is there only to attract potential customers for their advertisers. There is a business of response generation for their advertisers, not news or views dissemination for their readers / viewers.

However, to generate more responses, you need more readers / viewers. To attract and retain readers / viewers you start giving them whatever they want. Or, whatever you think they want. Gratify them all. Cater to the lowest common denominator. Build your constituency around them. Exclude everything, which doesn't fit into this constituency.

Apparently this model is working quite well for some media houses. But for how long? Can you keep on guessing what the readers want to read? This business model is quickly degenerating into the mindless dispensation of infotainment, offering no real value to anybody. Not even to the advertisers. Because, if a product meant for the mind does not touch the lives of its audience in a significant way, it begins to lose its relevance for the audience. They start deserting the media vehicle. Advertisers start losing responses. Besides, fragmentation of readership and viewership within and across several media (TV, the press, the internet etc.) will ensure that total advertising revenue gets divided among more media vehicles of the same and different types. This will result in diminishing ad revenues for the individual market leaders in various media categories.

The good news is that there is another model of media business emerging: highly specialized, focused contents for a niche readership, with readers or viewers paying for the contents. The supply and demand curves determine price for any given market. Advertisement revenue will have little or no role in these media models. Pay channels on TV are an example of the shape of things to come. Pay channels earn their primary revenues from registration fees. Whatever advertising they get is their secondary stream of revenue and it rarely exceeds 50 per cent of the total revenue. Many Internet portals fall in this category. They earn their revenues mostly from registration fees and e-commerce. Banner and other ads contribute a tiny fraction of the total revenue. Even newspapers in the future will have several price points. Technical advancements are bringing down the cost of production of newspapers. Soon it will be possible to have daily

newspapers (both in print and in digital versions) specifically produced for farmers or medical practitioners or teenage students etc.

To truly realize the potential of the mass media as a constructive social force we need to liberate it from the present distortionary dependence on advertising revenue. We need to understand the new technology and align it against the vested interests to make this new model succeed economically and socially.