

**ON THE MARGINS OF THE ‘JOURNALISTIC FIELD’:
AN ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY OF STRINGERS IN
INDIAN-LANGUAGE NEWSPAPERS**

A Thesis Submitted to
University of Hyderabad
In Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in Communication

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December, 2020



DECLARATION

I, Ramakrishna Bhargav. N, (Registration No.: 10SNPC03) hereby declare that this doctoral thesis, titled **“On the Margins of the ‘Journalistic Field’: An Ethnographic Study of Stringers in Indian-language Newspapers,”** submitted by me to the Department of Communication, University of Hyderabad, India, in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the degree of *Doctor of Philosophy in Communication*, is a record of research done by me under the supervision of Professor Vinod Pavarala. This is a *bona fide* research work and has not been submitted in part or in full for the award of any degree or diploma at this or any other University or Institution.

Additionally, this work has cleared the Plagiarism Check at the Indira Gandhi Memorial Library, University of Hyderabad, India. A report bearing the plagiarism statistics from the University Librarian is enclosed at the end of the thesis.

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In addition, the student has the following publication and conference presentations:

1. Nimmagadda, B. (2020). “*Telugu sāhityamlō patrikāviluvala citrīkaraṇa: oka vimarśanātmaka parisīlana*”. *Bhavaveena*, Vol. 17, No. 5, pp. 51-56.
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Further, the student has passed the following courses towards fulfilment of the coursework requirement for Ph.D.:

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2.	CC - 802	Advanced Research Theory	4	Pass
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CONTENTS

	PAGES
A note on translation, transliteration, language, and style	ix-x
List of tables, maps, and figures	xi-xii
Andhra Pradesh and Telangana State in the political map of India	xiii
Abstract	xiv
 CHAPTER 1	 1-22
Introduction:	
Studying Small-town Stringers in Indian-language Journalism	
 CHAPTER 2	 23-68
Ethnography, Field Theory, and Journalistic Field:	
A Self-reflexive Research Exploration	
 CHAPTER 3	 69-114
Society, Polity, and Journalism:	
A Conceptual Understanding from the Field	
 CHAPTER 4	 115-170
Dispositions of Agents and Recruitment Patterns in the Gendered	
Telugu Journalistic Field	
 CHAPTER 5	 171-220
Understanding Roles and Hierarchies:	
Towards Logic of Local Journalistic Practice	
 CHAPTER 6	 221-267
Tracing Informality and Forms of Precarity:	
Towards an Understanding of News Labour	
 CHAPTER 7	 268-294
Conclusion:	
The Pursuits and Purposes of a Stringer	
 BIBLIOGRAPHY	 295-326

A note on translation, transliteration, language, and style

All translations are mine unless otherwise mentioned throughout the thesis. Most of the time, the craft of translation and syntax in English is compromised to highlight the context and culture-specificities. Sometimes, due to how intonation happens, a single transliterated Telugu word becomes a full sentence when translated into English. Transliterated text is in italics immediately followed by its translation.

Transliteration is done from the voice-records of the interviews and may not follow the literary or standardised Telugu. The variant of Telugu, which respondents and people in Gannavaram (coastal Andhra) usually talk has elongated vowels, in case of Medak (Telangana) people use short or ‘normal’ vowels. In standardised Telugu and the variant of the language spoken in Gannavaram, most of the words end with vowels or the consonant ‘m’ (in Telugu). It need not be the case with the Medak variant. English words in Telugu prose quotes, proper names along with accepted non-English words are in Roman script to avoid confusion. I did not use diacritics for Hindi, Dakhni, and Urdu language words or sentences. I followed the convention of using diacritics for the Telugu language prescribed by Krishnamurti (2003).

Macrons are used for elongated vowels ($\bar{a}$ = aa; $\bar{e}$ = ee; $\bar{i}$ = ii; $\bar{o}$ = oo; $\bar{u}$ = uu).

Pronunciation:

Vowels

a = u in nut

$\bar{a}$ = farm but for longer duration

e = e in pet

$\bar{e}$ = above e for twice the duration

i = i in pit

$\bar{i}$ = ee in feel

o = o in oak

$\bar{o}$ = above o for longer duration

u = u in put

$\bar{u}$ = oo in food

Consonants

k = k in king

g = g in good

c = ch in chair

j = j in judge

t = th in width

ʈ = t in tonne

d = Article 'the' before a consonant

ɖ = d in den

ɳ = retroflex the tip of tongue while saying na

ñ = pronounced as 'nya' (nasal), when used as a combination (Ex: Hindi word Gyan becomes Gnyana in Telugu, similarly pragya becomes pragnya in Telugu).

r = r is always strong like r in tree.

ɽ = rolling r; when used as combination it is pronounced as ru with rolling r.

ɭ = retroflex the tip of tongue while saying la

s = s in sea

ʃ = sh in shine

ś = pronounced with flat tongue with a hiss

Alphabet 'h' next to k, b, c, ʈ, d, ɖ make them aspirates.

Style:

I followed the American Psychological Association (APA) sixth edition style sheet for in-text citations and references. However, I compromised on line spacing of the main text (1.5 instead of double) and block quotes (1.15) to reduce the page count. Block prose quotes are indented by 0.63 centimetre on both sides. Bigger excerpts from my field notes journal are indented except in places where I fully integrate them into the main text.

Text is justified except in footnotes and bibliography to accommodate hyperlinks. I gave an extra one-inch width on the left-hand side (bookbinder's margin). The map on p. 188 is in landscape orientation. I wrote the main text in the past tense. However, while making a theoretical statement, generalised comment based on data, and describing the thesis or chapter, I use the present tense.

LIST OF MAPS, TABLES, FIGURES

CHAPTER 1

Table: 1.1	Highest circulated newspapers across languages	p. 20
Table: 1.2	Highest circulated Telugu dailies	p. 20
Table: 1.3	Readership figures of Telugu dailies	p. 20

CHAPTER 2

Graph: 2.1	State-wise numbers of accredited journalists and registered publications in India	p. 57
Map: 2.1	Krishna district political map	p. 58
Map: 2.2	Gannavaram mandal map	p. 60
Map: 2.3	Medak district political map	p. 64
Map: 2.4	Sangareddy mandal map	p. 66

CHAPTER 3

Table: 3.1	Region-wise representation of women MLAs in AP before bifurcation	p. 106
Table: 3.2	State-wise representation of women MLAs in AP & TS	p. 106
Table: 3.3	Details of MLAs elected from Gannavaram – Caste & gender (1955-2019)	p. 107
Table: 3.4	Details of MLAs elected from Sangareddy – Caste & gender (1962-2019)	p. 107
Table: 3.5	Details of MPs elected from Machilipatnam – Caste & gender (1952-2019)	p. 109
Table: 3.6	Details of MPs elected from Medak – Caste & gender (1952-2019)	p. 109
Table: 3.7	Details of Chief Ministers of united AP – Caste, gender, and region (1956-2014)	p. 112
Table: 3.8	Details of Chief Ministers of AP & TS – Caste, gender, and region (Post-bifurcation)	p. 112
Table: 3.9	Caste and category composition of MLAs in AP – 2019	p. 113
Table: 3.10	Caste and category composition of MLAs in TS – 2018	p. 113

CHAPTER 4

Table: 4.1	Accredited Telugu and English language print journalists in AP & TS	p. 125
Table: 4.2	Education: Stringers and staffers	p. 140
Table: 4.3	Workshops attendance	p. 141
Table: 4.4	Previous work experience	p. 142
Table: 4.5	Land owning pattern	p. 143
Table: 4.6	Other sources of income	p. 144
Table: 4.7	Category of reservation	p. 145
Table: 4.8	Religion	p. 145
Table: 4.9	J-Schools run by newspapers	p. 151
Table: 4.10	Recruitment pattern	p. 161

CHAPTER 5

Table 5.1	The stringer and the staffers: Roles and responsibilities	p. 177
Table 5.2	Newspaper ownership details	p. 206
Figure: 5.1	A mapping of news gathering and production relations	p. 188
Graph: 5.1	Social, professional, and newspaper hierarchies in the field	p. 202

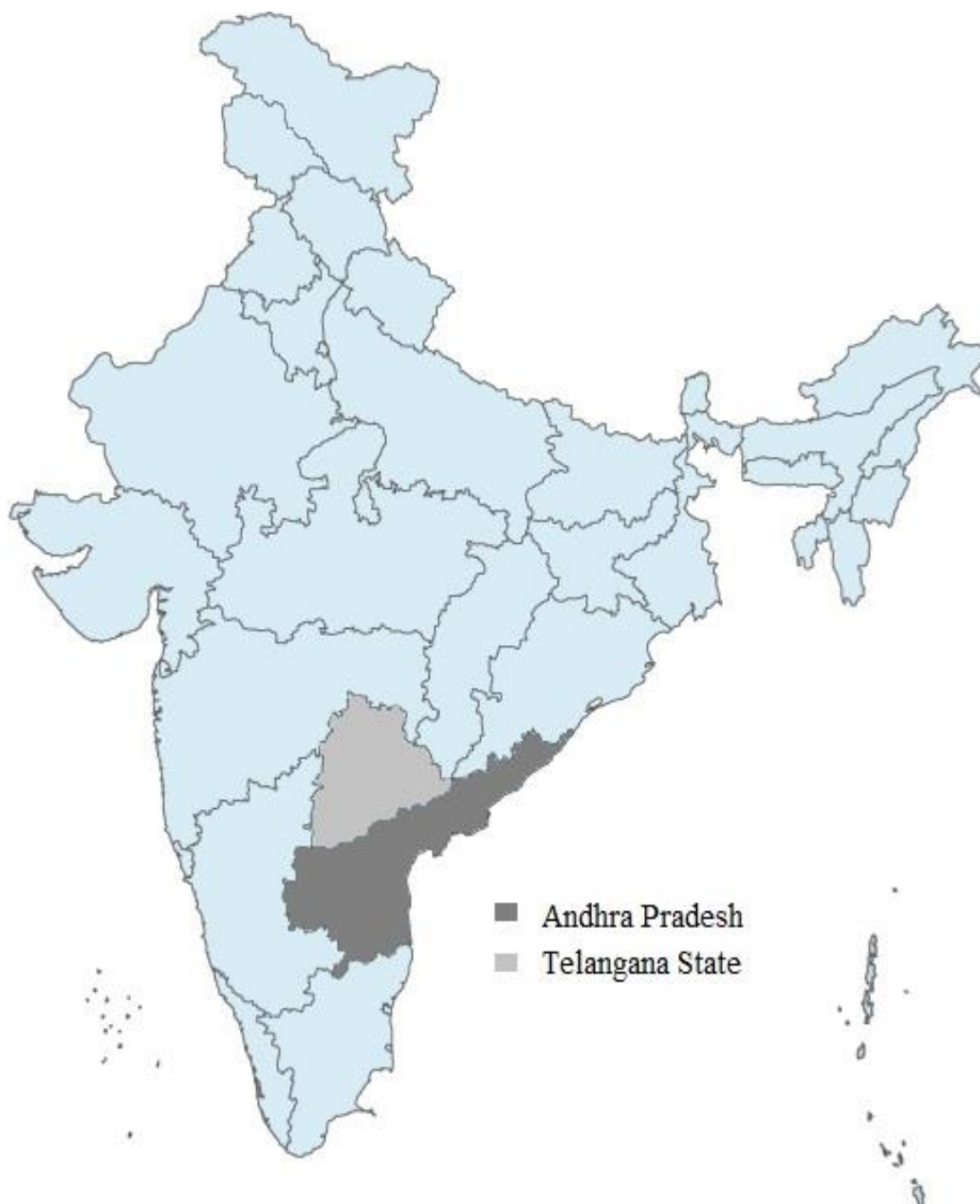
CHAPTER 6

Figure: 6.1	Stringing news; earning respect: A stringer's report in <i>Andhra Patrika</i>	p. 234
Figure: 6.2	News from countryside: <i>Golkonda Patrika</i>	p. 236
Table: 6.1	Lineage amount stringers ought to receive from newspaper establishments	p. 240
Table: 6.2	Informal news networks of selected Telugu dailies	p. 246
Table: 6.3	State-wise accredited journalists in India	p. 266

CHAPTER 7

Table: 7.1	Types of meal, code and actual practice	p. 285
Figure: 7.1	Journalistic capital or the donor's hand reversed	p. 288

Andhra Pradesh and Telangana State in the Political Map of India



Source: Ministry of External Affairs, India. <https://www.mea.gov.in/india-at-glance.htm> [Last accessed on 20 Dec. 2020]

ABSTRACT

This research attempts to address the relatively under-explored issue of ‘labour’ in news and cultural production within communication(s) studies in general and the sub-discipline of journalism studies in particular, with a specific focus on stringers.

Stringers are local news contributors, not on the payroll of the organisation for which they work. Most of them function as part-time journalists and are paid based on the number of lines or word length of their published contributions. They are often recruited informally with little job security.

Instead of addressing a specific problem in society and polity through the lens of media or forms of communication, this study combines Bourdieu’s field theory and Ambedkarite social philosophy to highlight issues within the field of journalism, such as: marginality, social organisation, division of labour, precarity, and informality. It also attempts to supplement the research on media producers and their working-lives in communication studies in the Indian context.

In order to strengthen the formulations and conceptualisations emerging out of the ethnographic observations, this study employs life-story method, archival research, and survey of secondary literature on journalists (journalists’ union journals, biographies, and autobiographies), reports of government commissions and boards.

This research is significant as the shaping of the idea, ethnographic fieldwork, and writing were carried out between two great global recessions in the 21st century, which had a considerable impact on the media workers along with the overall economy of the world. The first one was the great recession or global financial meltdown (2008-09) and the second one is the on-going global pandemic due to the novel Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19).

More importantly, this could be one of the last field-based studies on Indian-language journalism focusing on the working lives of stringers and journalists, when the Working Journalists and other Newspaper Employees (Conditions of Service) and Miscellaneous Provisions Act, 1955 was still in vogue. This Act was scrapped and included in the Wage Code Act, 2020.

Keywords: Stringers, Bourdieu, Field theory, Ethnography of journalism, Media sociology, News labour, Telugu journalism, Journalistic field, Precarity.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION: STUDYING SMALL-TOWN STRINGERS IN INDIAN-LANGUAGE JOURNALISM

Our cities are not India. India lives in her seven and a half lakhs of villages.

– Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi (1921), cited in Jodhka, 2012, p. 48.

[Let this city be] “symbolic of the freedom of India, unfettered by the traditions of the past ... an expression of the nation’s faith in the future”.

– Jawaharlal Nehru on the planned city of Chandigarh (1950), cited in Kalia, 2006, p. 143.

The mofussil correspondents, still the Schedule Caste of Indian journalism, are slowly coming into their own, but too slowly.

– Manikonda Chalapathi Rau, 1968, p. 23.

Introduction: Setting up the research context

When this study was still in an embryonic stage in 2009-10, I was working as a reporter with an English language national daily. On the one hand, the demand for a separate Telangana state was at its peak, which resulted in creating a divide among journalists on regional, and, thereby, political lines, especially in the Indian language media. And, on the other hand, the Great Recession or the global financial meltdown resulted in job cuts and insecurity across all sectors, including the media industry.

While on the hunt for news stories, ‘spot’ reporting, and press meets at the ‘usual places’ [Desoddharaka Bhavan in Hyderabad and Hyderabad Press Club, Somajiguda], stringers of Telugu news dailies always made their presence felt. When I enquired with fellow journalists about them and their role, I often heard two extreme responses: a) unethical and immoral creatures ‘who tarnish the reputation of the press’; and b) a near down-and-out figure on the margins of the Indian-language press, who struggles to make ‘his’ ends meet.

The more I tried to find about the character called the ‘stringer’, the more elusive and enigmatic it became along with related issues and concerns, which demanded a

rigorous enquiry. However, book racks in university libraries that stacked up literature on journalism and communication studies did not have much to offer on the working lives of journalists at that time. Whereas, researchers in sociology departments were working on the professional lives of lawyers, medical professionals, farmers, and IT workers (sociology of professions and related aspects of professionalisation) focusing on a range of issues. But the question is: what about studies on newswriters or media professionals? I realised that this topic fell in the no-man's/woman's land between the established departments and disciplines such as economics, sociology, social anthropology, and communication studies before deciding to pursue it in a formal manner.

At a general level, this study attempts to understand the existing 'practices' in the field of local journalism and the role of newswriters with respect to markers of domination and resistance such as caste, gender, class, ability, and region/space. And while doing so, it also presents a field-based narrative on the less-explored aspect of labour of news production and the precarious lives of newswriters in Indian-language newspapers.

At a more specific level, this research outlines the caste, gender, class, and region-based biases in the material and non-material (symbolic) conditions of production in Indian-language journalism with a specific focus on stringers working in Telugu dailies in small towns or 'mofussil' areas¹ of Andhra Pradesh (AP) and Telangana (TS) states in South India.

Stringers are local news contributors, not on the payroll of the organisation for which they work. Most of them function as part-time journalists, and are paid on the basis of the number of lines or word length of their published contributions. They are recruited in an informal manner with little job security. The term 'stringer' can be traced back to a time when part-time news reporters were paid by the column-inch or column-centimetre. Instead of receiving a set compensation for each story written, a stringer

¹ Mofussil is an important term/entity for this study. It loosely means any area that falls outside of the district headquarters or sometimes state capital. If not the same, it is an equivalent to the English word 'province'. Yule & Burnell (2008), in their Anglo-Indian glossary noted, "The provinces — the country stations and districts, as contra-distinguished from 'the Presidency'; or, relatively, the rural localities of a district as contra-distinguished from the chief station, which is the residence of the district authorities" (p. 275). Mofussil and small towns would be used interchangeably throughout this research.

would use a piece of string to measure the amount of newspaper space occupied by his/her writing. The stringer would then provide the newspaper with her/his string, cut to the appropriate length.

The newspaper would make a payment to the stringer based on the length of her/his string that is published in district editions (A3 size supplements) of Telugu dailies. At the time of research and writing, the payment was INR 2 per column-inch or column-centimetre (lineage) and for a published photograph; they were paid around INR 10-15. Newspaper establishments maintain an unofficial account for paying the stringers, which is known as 'line account'.

These stringers are present in every mandal (administrative division comprising a block of villages) in the districts. While there are stringers in urban areas too, the focus of my study is primarily on those who work in mofussil areas. Apart from contributing news to the organisations for which they work, most stringers are also responsible for generating revenue by procuring local advertisements, boosting circulation, along with informal work assigned to them by the heads of reporting/editorial bureaus and managements. Importantly, apart from not having regular salaries, stringers do not have any specific work timings, medical and life/accident insurance, holidays, weekly-offs, among other perks to which formal workers usually are entitled. They are referred to as mofussil correspondents (MC), rural contributors (RC), and part-time correspondents. They introduce themselves as stringers or MCs or RCs, mentioning the name of the news establishment for which they work.

In the world of Anglophone journalism studies, there has been consistent scholarship on issues concerning the work of foreign news correspondents in which stringers or 'fixers' were mentioned as a passing reference (Hannerz, 2004; Aufderheide, 2004). Recent studies emerging since the 2010s on the role of stringers and fixers highlight the cultural differences in international reporting (Palmer, 2016) and deal with the informal settings and labour issues associated in the process (Palmer, 2018), the role of 'local-national' stringers in covering a particular international crisis (Bunce, 2011), and how stringers and fixers were increasingly becoming organised in the scene of international reporting (Murrell, 2019). Noticeably, most of these studies emerged in the wake of the 9/11 attacks in New York.

I will confine myself to the topic of the stringer in India, which was brought to light by Robin Jeffrey (2000/2010) in his pan-Indian study and by Sevanti Ninan (2007) in her informative work on local news gatherers in *Headlines from the heartland*. These works will be discussed shortly, along with the limited literature on journalism studies in India.

There is a huge difference between the roles of fixers, freelancers, and stringers. In the Indian context, a fixer is expected to be a translator (*dubashi*), organise and schedule meetings with local officials or industry players or other stakeholders and ‘subjects’ for the journalist visiting from outside the state/region/country.²

In contrast, a freelancer in a news organisation offers her/his work at will; either she/he has to ‘deliver’ the requirement or should be in a position to ‘sell’ their write-up or work. But, for a freelancer, especially in the print media, having a name or established credentials in the industry is considered essential. This aspect will become more obvious when we consider the historical meaning of the term ‘freelance’ in the Oxford English dictionary (Simpson & Weiner, 1989):

A term used by writers denoting one of those military adventurers, often of *knightly rank*, who in the Middle Ages offered their services as mercenaries, or with a view to plunder, to belligerent states; a ‘condottiere’, a ‘free companion’ [Italics mine].

[...] In recent usage, a person working for himself [herself] and not for an employer.

Freelancers are offered payment based on industry standards and also keeping in mind the credentials of the person involved in freelance work. This, however, is not the case with stringers, as I will discuss in the following chapters.

The emergence of the stringer as a character in communication discipline is in itself interesting and an understanding of the same provides the theoretical base for the

² In the role of a fixer, I accompanied a journalist working with a reputed Dutch newspaper on the issue of suicides associated with the micro-finance sector in the then Telangana region in 2010. In another instance, I worked as a fixer for an English-language magazine reporter from New Delhi who was covering the issue of cotton farmer suicides in 2007 in the united Andhra Pradesh (Warangal and Guntur). I was paid an amount of USD 100 for the 2010 assignment and in the second mentioned instance; I received two invaluable books of my choice (in kind). But this experience is not universal. See, Dixit (2017) and Borpujari (2019) who presented a range of issues associated with the work-life as a ‘fixer’ in India.

present research. While writing about the relation between technology and public opinion in the United States, one of the founding figures of Canadian communication thought, Harold Innis observed a shift in the nature of work and roles in newswork in the newspaper 'industry' with the coming of the telephone and telegraph. He (1968) noted:

The linotype with at least five times the typesetting speed of the compositor was introduced about 1886 and was followed by a marked increase in the use of typewriters. It made possible the modern newspaper. The régime of the tramp printer came gradually to an end. The telephone supplemented the telegraph for local news and *the reporter saw his work divided between the leg man who visited the sources of news and the rewrite man to whom he telephoned his information* and who prepared it for the paper (p. 173) [Emphasis mine].

By mentioning the role of a 'leg man', Innis not only anticipated the emergence of the stringer in the US context, but also the changing nature of news labour with the advent of the then new technologies, such as the telegraph and the telephone. This observation will become more apparent in the writings of American communication studies scholar, James Carey while writing about technology and culture/ideology in one of his key works. In a chapter dedicated on the topic of telegraph and its implications for the communication and journalism field, Carey (2009) wrote:

[T]he telegraph eliminated the correspondent who provided letters that announced an event, described it in detail, and analysed its substance, and replaced him with the stringer who supplied the bare facts. As words were expensive on the telegraph, it separated the observer from the writer. Not only did writing for the telegraph have to be condensed to save money—telegraphic, in other words—but also from the marginal notes and anecdotes of the stringer the story had to be reconstituted at the end of the telegraphic line, a process that reaches high art with the news magazines, the story divorced from the story teller (pp. 162-163).

For Carey, the coming of the telegraph service not only separated the observer from the writer, but also resulted in distinguishing the words, 'communication' and 'transportation'. Literary and cultural theorist, Raymond Williams presented a more nuanced understanding of the difference between communication and transportation. He (1988, pp. 72-73) suggested that a mere one-way transmission technology

(telegraph) did not eliminate the synonymous relation; but it was the two-way transmission (telephone), which brought about the distinction.

But what was the case in the Indian sub-continent or for most of South Asia, where the telegraph service and network did not penetrate as much as it did in the case of the advanced western countries? Even though the transatlantic oceanic cable (1858) and British India cable (1870) from the United Kingdom were laid out roughly with a time gap of a little more than a decade, the penetration of telegraph into the North American continent was not as much as it did in the case of the Indian sub-continent for varied historical, linguistic and cultural factors.³

In retrospect, it appears that these were the reasons for Innis to author key works, such as *Empire and Communications* (1986) and *The Bias of Communication* (1968) with a particular focus on the role of technology, capital, and statecraft, and later, by another key communication thinker McLuhan (1997) to come up with ideas like the ‘global village’ and “the medium is the message” in the North American context.

However, in the South Asian context, it can be argued that the telegraph technology did not directly result in the emergence of the stringer or local news reporter or information gatherer, as social communication was contingent on social, economic, and historical factors. British historian, C. A. Bayly’s work, *Empire and Information*, which provided a historical account of the social communication and statecraft in India during colonial rule, is an attestation to the previous claim (1999, pp. 315-337). One obvious cultural and technological difference between the West and the dominant culture in the sub-continent was the literacy/orality factor. Moreover, South Asia in general and the Indian sub-continent, in particular, are distinct for their social, cultural, religious and linguistic plurality. The inseparable relationship between the cultural and social factor of caste and the concept of communication in Indian society, from the known and documented history to the present day is another case in point.

The social and cultural aspects in understanding ‘communications’ were as important as the advancement and introduction of communication technologies in this part of the globe. At this juncture, Williams’s (1969) differentiation between communication and

³ Thomas (2019) offers a lucid work on the complex history of telecommunications in India, from the colonial to the present times.

communications would be pertinent to recall. For him, “communication meant the process of transmission and reception”, whereas “communications meant the institutions and forms in which ideas, information, and attitudes are transmitted and received” (p. 17).

Predominantly, the focus of communication studies has been on three Ms: Media, Message, and ‘Masses’. Most of the time, focus on ‘media’ tends to deal with issues such as, access and rights issues, efficiency, and ownership/control and formal aspects, which are crucial for functioning of a democracy. Research on the second ‘M’ has provided rich textual and contextual analyses on political, economic, and social issues by looking at the content present/absent on media and communication platforms. Even the early audience studies which unquestionably considered and addressed audiences as the ‘masses’, recent scholarship on reception studies made critical contributions that were important in understanding media in society in which the audience were no longer mere consumers, but actively interact and involved in meaning-making process.⁴

To use a camera analogy, media workers often were ‘out-of-focus’ in the above-mentioned approaches and research directions, whereas the present study finds itself in research works that attempt to bring them into focus.

This study embraces the cultural materialism approach proposed by Williams (1974, 1977, 1980 & 1995). This approach attempts to understand culture not only “as a social and material productive process and of specific practices” (1980, p. 243), but also “as the *signifying system* through which necessarily (though among other means) a social order is communicated, reproduced, experienced and explored” (1995, p. 13).

The defining words for studying communication from the perspective of cultural materialism were written by Williams (1977, pp. 50-63) in his short, but theoretically, a landmark, essay – “Means of communication as means of production”. He wrote:

As a matter of general theory it is useful to recognise that means of communication are themselves means of production. It is true that means of

⁴ Within these studies there were many schools, turns, and trends, which need not be discussed here. And since this is a cautious generalisation, I avoid listing out the vast corpus of literature to make the point.

communication, from the simplest physical forms of language to the most advanced forms of communications technology, are themselves always socially and materially *produced*, and of course *reproduced*. Yet they are not only forms but means of production, since communication and its material means are intrinsic to all distinctively human forms of *labour and social organisation*, thus constituting indispensable elements both of the *productive forces and of the social relations of production* (p. 50) [Emphasis mine].

Williams (1995), in his work, *The Sociology of Culture*, also suggested that a general signifying system or communications in the cultural materialism approach includes “not only the traditional arts and forms of intellectual production but also all the signifying practices – from language through the arts and philosophy to journalism, fashion and advertising” (p. 13).

The terms and concepts such as labour, social organisation, forces and relations of production, and cultural production are crucial for this study, which seeks to understand the conditions of news production, social background, and role of stringers in Indian-language journalism.

Statement of research problem and significance of the study

This research attempts to address the relatively less-explored issue of ‘labour’ in news and cultural production within communication(s) studies in general and the sub-discipline of journalism studies in particular.

Instead of addressing a specific problem in society and polity through the lens of media or forms of communication, this study attempts to highlight issues within the field of journalism, such as division of labour, informal labour, precarity, marginality, and social organisation.

I arrived at this research problem based on my own lived-experience in the journalism industry (print) as well as the academic literature that has been insisting that there is a vacancy in the research on media producers and their working-lives in communication studies.

This research is significant as the shaping of the idea, ethnographic fieldwork, and writing were carried out between two great global recessions in the 21st century,

which had a significant impact on the media workers along with the overall economy of the world. The first one was the great recession or global financial meltdown (2008-09) and the second one is the on-going global pandemic due to the novel Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19).

One of the salient features of the research is that it captures the transformation of newswork of stringers who used to send their news articles and reports through state-run bus services and later migrated to latest technologies such as the Internet and mobile phones to file stories and send photographs. More importantly, this could be one of the last field-based studies on Indian-language journalism focusing on the working lives of stringers and journalists, when the Working Journalists and other Newspaper Employees (conditions of service) and Miscellaneous Provisions Act, 1955 was still in vogue. This Act was scrapped and included in the Wage Code Act, 2020.

‘Locating’ the research

The radically different visions propagated by Mahatma Gandhi and Pandit Nehru – village as an ‘existing ideal space to be rediscovered’ and the city as a ‘space of becoming or aspiration’, respectively – continue to dominate not only the political enunciations and populist rhetoric by leaders even in the twenty-first century, but also in the lived and present reality. The permeation of such ideas happens through government schemes and media narratives, which seem to have a clear demarcation of the ‘urban’ and the ‘rural’.

The Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission (JNNURM) and Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MNREGA), 2005 introduced under the erstwhile United Progressive Alliance government and the 100 Smart Cities Mission and Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Gram Jyoti Yojana (rural electrification scheme) by the National Democratic Alliance are cases in point.

Even as the Constitution of India (Part-I) stated the name of the Republic as “India, that is Bharat”, the immediate and popular ideated spaces that get associated with India and Bharat are urban (urban India) and rural (*grameen* Bharat) respectively. But the ‘intermediate space’ - small-town - has not garnered the deserving attention both

in the communications and journalism scholarship as well as popular media until the 2010s in mainland India.⁵ The work of media practitioner and researcher Sevanti Ninan (2007) stands tall in this aspect, as she takes the readers to ‘*kasbahs*’, ‘*ganjs*’, and ‘*purs*’ (suffixes of small towns in Uttar Pradesh) in her writing on local journalism.

But in reality, the number of small towns is growing at an unprecedented rate in India. The Census of India (2011) documented that 2,774 new geographical entities were listed as either statutory (242) or census towns (2,530), whereas the 2001 Census noted an increase of 500 towns in the country. This increase was “unprecedented in the history of the Indian Census” (Kundu, 2017, p. vi).⁶ Economists, urban planners, geographers, population studies scholars, anthropologists, and policy scientists realised the importance of understanding the rise of the small town phenomenon (both existing/thriving and new/emergent ones) in the late 2010s (Denis, E & Zerah, 2017; De Bercegol, 2017). In their introductory article – “Reclaiming small towns” – Denis & Zerah (2017) stressed on the need to capture the dynamics of ‘ordinary’ towns in India and pointed out: “Small towns need to be studied for themselves, as sites of urbanity, economic activities and social transformations and for their place in urbanisation, rural-urban linkages and the global economy” (p. 2).

On similar lines, this study began as an attempt to understand Indian-language journalism culture with specific focus on stringers in small towns. The choice of the idea of space is a conscious one and was inspired by the works of geographers such as David Harvey (2001, 2007), Doreen Massey (2005), and Edward Soja (2011). These works, in turn, helped me understand the notions of space intrinsically present in the works of communication thinkers with varied ideologies and approaches like Williams, Carey, Innis, and McLuhan.

⁵ India and Bharat also carry religious and linguistic connotations. For a perceptive commentary on the Indian Constitution on these aspects, see Austin (2013, pp. 145-179; pp. 330-383).

⁶ Statutory towns are notified under legislation by state or union territory governments and have civic bodies such as municipal corporations/committees, cantonments, regardless of population, population density or nature of work (agricultural/non-agricultural workers). For a geographical place to be listed as a census town, it needs to have a minimum population of 5,000 with a population density of at least 400 per sq. km and at least 75 per cent of the male main working population engaged in non-agricultural work. The number of census towns rose from 1,362 to 3,892, while the number of statutory towns increased from 3,799 to 4,041. See, https://censusindia.gov.in/2011-prov-results/paper2/data_files/india2/1.%20data%20highlight.pdf [Last accessed on 15 December, 2020].

The primary reason for choosing small towns to carry out ethnographic work was not to present a ‘fresh’, exotic narrative about stringers. But it was based on the fact that most of the atrocities committed against mofussil journalists and stringers take place in small-town India (Seshu & Sarkar, 2019, p. 4). This has been the case with small-town correspondents since the 1990s and India ranks 142 (out of 180) in 2020 in the press freedom index compiled by ‘Reporters without borders’ (*Reporters sans frontières*).⁷ The remark made by one of the luminaries of Indian journalism, Chalapathi Rau in the late 1960s about mofussil correspondents as the ‘scheduled caste’ of journalism continue to hold relevance even in the 21st century in many spheres. The implication of striking an analogy between them and the Scheduled Castes (SCs) will be presented in a full blown analysis in the core chapters of this thesis.

Though attacks and atrocities on journalists and issues concerning their safety were not the primary focus of this study, it was one of the factors that led to the conscious decision of carrying out research in mofussil areas. I narrowed down on the mofussil areas, while keeping an implicit caveat proposed by feminist geographer Massey, (2005, pp. 123-125), who suggested that while studying social relations, materiality of practices, and culture in/of ‘space’, one needs to be wary of nostalgic emotions and utopian ideals.

The present study benefitted considerably from the book-length academic works on print media or on topics based on print journalism published in the 2010s in India, such as Anup Kumar (2011), Per Ståhlberg (2013), Ranu Tomar (2017), Sahana Udupa (2015), Tabarez Neyazi (2018), and Ursula Rao (2013). Notably, most of these research works acknowledged the role and presence of stringers. Apart from the theoretical offerings, these studies helped me concretise my decision to move away from urban spaces of journalism, such as the Lutyens area in Delhi or Glass House on Mahapalika Marg in Mumbai or Desoddharaka Bhavan in Hyderabad, and seek the ‘fleet streets’ and ‘grub streets’ of small towns.

⁷ See, <https://rsf.org/en/india> In 2002, the country was ranking 80 (out of 180), as the reported threats and deaths of journalists and mediapersons continued to rise. See, <https://rsf.org/en/ranking/2002#> [Last accessed on 15 December, 2020].

The works of sociologists and social anthropologists, Rao, Ståhlberg, and Udupa suggested the interdisciplinary rigour required to undertake journalism studies in this part of the globe. Media practitioners and researchers who followed the 42-day *Sakala Janula Samme* (All People's Strike) in September 2011 that set the tone for the Telangana movement will be able to comprehend the complexities in the making of a popular movement, as unravelled by Kumar. Especially the geographical/spatial distinctions such as, *Pahari/Maidan* (Hill/Plain) in Uttarakhand and *Jungle/Maidan* in Telangana, bear a heavy load of political connotations. Often this kind of engagement with the idea of political geography does not figure in journalism studies in which most of the time, the idea of space is reduced to a mere location of research operation.

This prompts one to examine some of the classical works within sociology of journalism and news production and ethnographic studies of newsrooms. These offer insights on news-making practices, relationships among agents in the journalism field, limitations and constraints involved in news production, along with a wide range of perspectives on the functioning and organisation of the news machinery. Even as some of the studies which will be discussed here deal with broadcast journalism, they hold great relevance in print news production analysis in the context of the present research.

Molotch & Lester (1974) examined the “relationships between different kinds of news needs and how it is that news needs of people differently situated *vis-à-vis* the organisation of news work produce the social and political knowledge of publics” (pp. 101-102). While White (1950, pp. 383-390) presented the gate-keeping mechanisms (biases) of an individual (anonymised as ‘Mr Gates’) in a news organisation in selecting and rejecting stories, Gieber (1955) dealt with the complex array of relationships between the sources and reporters well within the gatekeeping framework of understanding the news production process. Gieber's study broke the notion of gatekeeping role which was earlier reduced to the handiwork of any single individual in a given news organisation by bringing in the issues of race and civil liberties in the US context.

Another strand in the academic literature on understanding news production is that of the social control and socialisation of journalists. Breed (1955) was one of the first scholars to provide a functional analysis of a news organisation and suggests that the

‘fate’ of a news story is not only determined keeping in mind the editorial policies, journalistic norms and values, but also by several social factors and normative behaviour (as opposed to deviant) among those who take part in the news production process (pp. 326-335).

This study is directly related to some of the issues raised by stringers about the ‘fate of their stories’ once cleared by the bureau or rural in-charge concerned and ends up at the editorial table. However, the socialisation and social organisation aspect that was discussed in Breed’s study needs to be elaborated and grounded with a finer analysis keeping in mind the issue of caste and social background, which are singular to the Indian context. Especially, the presence/absence of underprivileged communities and categories in journalism, such as the Dalits (SCs), the Bahunjans (Other Backward Classes [OBCs]), the Adivasis and the Lambadas (Scheduled Tribes [STs]), along with women, were crucial markers of newsroom diversity.

British sociologist, Tunstall (1970, 1971) took the aspect of socialisation among journalists in news organisations in his sociological accounts to a higher level by presenting the dynamic relations and interactions of journalists with the politicians and bureaucrats. Also, a key aspect in both these works was the competitor-colleague relationship among reporters working not only for different organisations but also within the same news organisation (1970, p. 86; 1971, pp. 205-217). Tunstall’s observations on considering journalism as an occupation in comparison to other dominant professions in the society were crucial in developing a sociological understanding about this field (1973, pp. 87-101).⁸

In the same decade, sociologist and communication studies researcher, Schlesinger (1978) built on the aspect of social control in one of his early works on BBC by examining how a big news channel network like BBC controls its journalist workforce. He also presented the issues of journalistic autonomy, judgement of news, and editorial policy of the news organisation in his book, *Putting Reality Together*.

For the present research, works of both these sociologists offered a nuanced sociological understanding of news production in terms of social control and work

⁸ Tunstall’s (2008) observations on the Indian media were perceptive with respect to caste, class, and regional disparities.

culture among stringers. Most of the issues hovering around ‘monitoring,’ ‘control,’ ‘decision-making’ power of editorial staffers, and maintenance and execution of ‘editorial policy’ at the ground-level were discussed in these studies.

Moving beyond the function and structure of the news production process, German communication scholar Donsbach (1983, p. 48), through his survey on journalists in Germany, suggested, “It is possible to demonstrate that the professional role has indirect influence on matters such as the journalist’s chances for participation in the political process.” One of the objectives of this study was to assess the occupational status of journalists in the country. Some observations that he made in this work, which are crucial for the present research were:

Intensive social contact with the political elite and a shared consciousness of the powers of the media in many instances brings about a kind of ‘power-sharing’ between journalists and those who are partners to their interactions (1981, p. 48).

[T]he extensive and often nonspecific activities which characterise the image of journalists’ work lead many authors to the conclusion that the occupation either cannot be professionalised at all, or at best may achieve the status of a ‘quasi-profession’ (1981, p. 57).

These observations on the status of journalists prompted an understanding about the perception of journalistic roles in news production as well as the image of the profession in the society, as perceived by journalists themselves. Janowitz (1975) dealt with this subject and pointed out that there were two models in which journalists categorise themselves: a) the gatekeeper model; and b) the journalist-advocate model.⁹ Stressing that the resolution of the dichotomy between the two models rested in a clear differentiation of the roles as opposed to a mechanical synthesis, he wrote:

The underlying issue in the professionalisation of journalism rests in assessing and juxtaposing the functions and consequences of the two competing models. The gatekeeper can be considered as the ideal of the enlightenment of the mass public; the advocate, as the ideal of the lawyer and almost that of the politician (p. 626).

⁹ Even as Janowitz did not explicitly acknowledge, this formulation arose during the cold war period and more importantly towards the end of the Vietnam War. This was the period during which the US had to deal with both external (diplomatic) and internal (anti-war movements) pressures.

Three landmark studies that set the tone for newsroom ethnographies in journalism studies were Tuchman's *Making News*, Gans's *Deciding What's News*, and Fishman's *Manufacturing the News*.¹⁰ Gans (1978) identified a range of themes concerning news production, such as: the method of story selection, news sources; objectivity, values, and ideology of journalists, profits and audiences of news organisations, and censorship issues. By proposing the concept of "paraideology" – enduring values, conscious and unconscious opinions, and reality judgments – in news production, Gans (1978, p. 203) suggested that there is a great possibility that the *values and judgements journalists held originate from outside of the profession*. In that study done on *CBS Evening News*, *NBC Nightly News*, *Newsweek*, and *Time*, Gans (1978, p. 61) demonstrated that news "reflected upper or upper middle-class white male social order" even as some of these organisations took the side of African-Americans and women.

Meanwhile, American sociologist, Tuchman (1972; 1973) argued that objectivity in news production was being used defensively as a strategic ritual by journalists and routinised news work could be seen as a prerequisite in typifying news events. She suggested:

The construction of reality through redefinition, reconsideration, and reaccounting is an ongoing process. The newsmen's typifications indicate that it might be valuable to think of news not as distorting, but rather as reconstituting the everyday world (1973, p. 129).

Fishman (1980), based on his ethnographic research on journalists covering the crime news beat in New York City suggested that the very manner in which newsgathering takes place in news dailies, in the form of what he termed as "phase structures" -- *routinisation, organisation of news practices and schemes of interpretation* -- brings about the ideological character of news and serves as legitimating functions. This study is a crucial development in journalism research as it emerges at a time when a majority of media and cultural studies researchers were rigorously analysing "texts" with "ideology" as the paramount concept.

¹⁰ These research works are fascinating contributions to the sub-discipline of journalism studies not only for the findings they offer but also for the methodological trajectories they have charted. However, I discuss here only those findings and suggestions that are relevant for the present research purposes.

Building on Tuchman's concept of routinisation, Fishman (1980, p. 51) argued:

The journalist's view of the society as *bureaucratically structured* is the very basis upon which the journalist is able to detect events. Such a perspective on the newsworld provides the reporter with a means for *locating knowledge* of particular happenings in the society that have already occurred. ... [T]his perspective of a bureaucratically structured society provides the journalist, in advance of any particular occurrence, with a map of *relevant knowers* for any topic of *newsworthy* happenings [Emphasis mine].

Fishman's epistemological explanation of news production, when he noted that "*the world is bureaucratically organized for journalists*," is important for the present research on stringers (1980, p. 51; emphasis original). However, taking the ethnographic experiences during the fieldwork into account, this epistemological explanation required to be augmented with the social hierarchies that come into play in the newsworld along with the professional hierarchies. In the present study, the habitus of the agents is as important as the professional standing, as practice is the result of the dynamic relationship between the individual habitus and various forms of capital in the field of action. In the journalistic field, it appeared that the question was not about bureaucratic organisation or social organisation, but a combination of both, as they were intertwined.

Of utmost relevance to the present research is the work of Zelizer (1993), who pointed out that viewing journalism merely as a profession restricts the understanding of journalistic practice. Instead, she suggested that there is a need to "consider journalism not only as a profession but as *an interpretive community, united through its shared discourse and collective interpretations* of key public events" (1993, p. 219; emphasis mine). Zelizer's work seamlessly combined the earlier arguments of professionalisation and discussions on schemata of interpretations employed by journalists within the sociology of news production conundrum. She also opened up a fruitful way of understanding the binding factors among journalists. If not readily replicable or a comprehensive frame to understand the journalistic practices at the *mofussil* level, this work offered many ways of understanding the work of stringers for the present research.

Media studies scholar, Cottle (2000), while providing an overview of ethnographies and sociology of journalism, suggested that most of the above mentioned studies can be classified “into ‘early formative studies’ of news processes (many conducted via interviews across the 1950s and 1960s), ‘substantive ethnographies’ (conducted, for the most part, across the 1970s and 1980s)” (Cottle, 2000, p. 34). Emphasising that there was a necessity for a second wave of news ethnography in the twenty-first century due to advancements in both theory and practice, he noted:

It is now time to re-enter the ‘field’ and build on the undoubted successes of the first wave of production studies. Only on this basis will one be in a position to better understand the nature of our ‘new(s) times’ (Cottle, 2000, p. 34).

Interestingly, renowned book historian Darnton (1975, p. 176) stressed the importance of understanding the cultural determinants of news production along with the analysis of standard factors such as: a) the environment of newsroom; b) relations to primary reference groups (sources, editors, reporters, peers); c) occupational socialisation or hands-on training. Based on his first-hand experience as a working journalist in *The New York Times*, among other newspapers, he wrote:

Sociologists, political scientists, and experts on communication have produced a large literature on the effects of economic interests and political biases on journalism. It seems to me, however, that they have failed to understand the way reporters work. The context of work shapes the content of news, and stories also take form under the influence of inherited techniques of story-telling (Darnton, 1975, p. 192).

Some of these suggestions by Cottle and Darnton were realised to a great extent by scholars working in the journalism and media studies area from the perspective of ‘field theory’, which forms the core of lifetime works of French sociologist Pierre Félix Bourdieu (Benson & Neveu, 2010; Neveu, 2007, Kunelius & Ruusunoksa, 2008; Hellmueller, Vos, & Poepsel, 2013; Dickinson & Memon, 2012; Moon, 2019; Wolfgang, 2019). An engagement with the academic works of Bourdieu and his conceptual tools – field, habitus, and capital – and their relation and relevance to the present topic on stringers will be presented in the following chapters.

Before proceeding to present the structure of the thesis and chapterisation of the dissertation, the following section outlines the elements of the Telugu newspaper.

Some important elements and key aspects of Telugu newspaper

Telugu is a prominent Dravidian language, widely spoken in two states in India – Telangana and Andhra Pradesh – and a large sprawling diaspora, by about a population of over 81 million (8.1 crore), as per the latest Census of India report. Rated as the fastest growing language in the United States and ranked as fifteenth widely spoken language in the world.

Circulation figures of the top 20 dailies that include Indian-languages as well as English were tabulated to present the standing of Telugu newspapers in the country (Table: 1.1). Also, circulation figures of the top-three Telugu dailies were tabulated along with readership base of the same newspapers in AP and TS in Table 1.2 and 1.3.

Since the focus of the study is on stringers working in daily newspapers, this section presents some of its key components and elements. Almost all Telugu dailies have two parts, a) broadsheet, often called as ‘main paper’; b) tabloid, known as zilla or district edition or mini. The zilla edition (tabloid size) is a 6-12 page pull-out tucked in the folded broadsheet, which in turn comprises 8-14 pages depending on the circulation and readership of the newspaper (and thereby advertisement revenue).

Apart from the regular state, nation/world, edit, business and sports pages, there is a page dedicated to ‘women readers’ (commonly referred to as ‘family page’) and a cinema page. Those dailies that had lesser number of pages compromised mostly on nation, world, and sports pages, but not on family/cinema and business pages. Some newspapers had family/cinema and business pages in one standalone centre page (a single two-paged leaf and not a centrespread). The logic of advertisement positioning is the same as any language newspaper in the world, that is, preference to place them on the odd-numbered pages for visibility purposes and edit page is usually positioned on an even-numbered page, which does not have ads.

The organisation and structure of zilla editions is more complicated than the main page. Similar to that of the main page, even the zilla edition has a front page, specifying the location, where every stringer of that particular district wants ‘his’ story or news item to get published. This front page in mofussil areas is of two types: city edition and rural edition. The second page usually is filled with crime news from

all parts of the district. The centrespread of the tabloids is designed at the newspaper headquarters and is common for all districts, again on an average and normal day. Every newspaper has a special booklet on Sundays.

Every district page has a sheet, which covered the overall Legislative Assembly constituency news on one side and news from the constituent mandals on the other side. This effectively meant that some parts of the district edition were hyper-local, published exclusively for that particular Assembly segment. And readers outside of that segment would read different pages (their own locality news). The only way to access the pages from other Assembly segments was through the free e-paper on the newspaper websites.¹¹ At the time of fieldwork, there were 10 districts in Telangana and 13 districts in AP.

These aspects will be understood when I present the profile of the districts and mandals in the following chapter. Apart from the edition centres located within the two Telugu speaking states, some newspapers have metro editions in New Delhi, Mumbai, Chennai, and Bangalore catering to the Telugu readership in those cities.

¹¹ After the COVID-19 lockdown in the last week of March, 2020, except *Sakshi* daily, almost all newspapers stopped printing the district tabloids. Instead of a separate pull-out, they started including one extra broadsheet page for local news of that particular area. Some newspapers shut down operations altogether.

Table: 1.1

Highest circulated newspapers across languages

Sl. No.	Publication	Language	Circulation in 000s
1	<i>Dainik Bhaskar</i>	Hindi	4,579
2	<i>Dainik Jagran</i>	Hindi	3,614
3	<i>The Times of India</i>	English	2,880
4	<i>Malayala Manorama</i>	Malayalam	2,308
5	<i>Amar Ujala</i>	Hindi	2,262
6	<i>Hindustan</i>	Hindi	2,221
7	<i>Rajasthan Patrika</i>	Hindi	1,788
8	<i>Eenadu</i>	Telugu	1,614
9	<i>Daily Thanthi</i>	Tamil	1,473
10	<i>The Hindu</i>	English	1,416
11	<i>Daily Sakal</i>	Marathi	1,264
12	<i>Mathrubhumi</i>	Malayalam	1,231
13	<i>Punjab Kesari</i>	Hindi	1,106
14	<i>Patrika</i>	Hindi	1,095
15	<i>Hindustan Times</i>	English	1,073
16	<i>Sakshi</i>	Telugu	1,065
17	<i>Anand Bazar Patrika</i>	Bengali	1,047
18	<i>Divya Bhaskar</i>	Gujarati	792
19	<i>Dinamalar</i>	Tamil	768
20	<i>Vijayavani</i>	Kannada	757

Source: Audit Bureau of Circulations (2019a)

Table: 1.2

Highest circulated Telugu dailies

Sl. No	Publication	Circulation in 000s
1	<i>Eenadu</i>	1,614
2	<i>Sakshi</i>	1,065
3	<i>Andhra Jyothi</i>	664

Source: Audit Bureau of Circulations (2019b)

Table 1.3

Readership figures of Telugu dailies

Sl. No.	Publication	State	Readership in 000s
1	<i>Eenadu</i>	AP	6,391
2	<i>Eenadu</i>	Telangana	5,149
3	<i>Sakshi</i>	AP	5,756
4	<i>Sakshi</i>	Telangana	2,593
5	<i>Andhra Jyothi</i>	AP	3,056
6	<i>Andhra Jyothi</i>	Telangana	1,565
7	<i>Namaste Telangana</i>	Telangana	1,616

Source: Media Research Users Council, India. (2020, p. 41)

Chapterisation and structure of the thesis

Including the present chapter, the thesis has a total of seven chapters. While chapter 2 and chapter 3 deal with the methodology and conceptual framework for the study respectively, chapter 4, 5, 6 form the core chapters of the thesis. Chapter 7 offers concluding remarks.

Chapter 2 presents the vacillations between theory, research objectives, and the field and back throughout the study in a self-reflexive manner. Apart from describing the stringer in action on the field, the chapter also discusses the theoretical and methodological dilemmas and some of the barriers to fieldwork due to the prevailing political conditions. The chapter addresses some questions about the locations of research and rationale for moving beyond a mere interview/life-story method to field-based ethnographic research on the ‘tribe of scribes’ to realise the objectives of the study. Apart from presenting the sources of primary and secondary data, the chapter also provides the demographic and socioeconomic profiles of the locations of research.

One of the features of carrying out a field-based ethnographic study on news production, as opposed to newsroom ethnography, is the realisation of the relatively less autonomous nature or heteronomous nature of the journalistic field. In chapter 3, I develop a conceptual understanding of the dynamic relationship between the journalistic field with the social and political fields by way of ‘thick description’. Apart from elucidating the nature and practices of agents in journalistic, social, and political fields, this chapter develops a vocabulary, which is used consistently throughout the work while discussing the central concerns in the following core chapters. More pointedly, the chapter also augments Bourdieu’s field theory with Ambedkarite social philosophy to deal with the issues of caste and related social hierarchies, which are crucial in understanding the fabric of Indian society and polity.

What is the social background of stringers? And, how do they get recruited or enter the journalistic field? Chapter 4 attempts to address the following. Firstly, the unused column in the demographic details sheet during the fieldwork was gender/sex of stringers and reporters, as almost all the stringers were male. The near-complete absence of women as stringers and their meagre presence in other full-time staffer

roles in the Telugu print journalism compelled me to gather official data to ascertain the gendered nature of the field. The ethnographic experience from the field laced with the secondary data unravelled the masculine domination of the journalistic field. Secondly, the chapter presents the demographic details of stringers and staffers (both editorial and reporting) before presenting the patterns of recruitment in the field. Thirdly, it also explains the concept of relegation which hints at how social reproduction takes place in the field.

Chapter 5 elaborately discusses the nature of newswork in local journalism. This chapter picks up the concept of relegation and extends it to the issue of delegation of journalistic work. Firstly, I encapsulate the roles of stringers, editorial staffers, and reporters and detail multiple hierarchies that have dynamic interaction with each other in the process of newswork and journalistic practices. Secondly, with the help of field theory, I build on the political economy, fusing it with cultural and social aspects to present the logic of local journalistic practice. Cracking this logic helps in understanding how stringers negotiate the complex multiple hierarchies that exist within the field and outside of it on a daily basis while carrying out newswork.

Chapter 6, firstly, points out how the understudied and under-theorised aspect of news labour is crucial in understanding journalism as a profession. Secondly, I argue that even as the localisation strategy of Telugu newspapers has resulted in the democratisation of the field to an extent, the same has resulted in heightened informalisation by flouting wage board recommendations, which has become a norm. Thirdly, based on life-stories of stringers, ethnographic observations, and secondary data; I present the forms of precarity associated with the field. The chapter suggests that the symbolic aspects of precarity were equally important as the economic precarity in local journalism in mofussil areas. Finally, the chapter outlines the role of unions in securing rights of newsworkers and in bargaining with the state for procuring some benefits for journalists.

The conclusion chapter summarises the key findings, arguments, and discussions of the study. It also presents the limitations of the study and concludes by indicating some new trajectories of research that this study could offer.

CHAPTER 2

ETHNOGRAPHY, FIELD THEORY, AND JOURNALISTIC FIELD: A SELF-REFLEXIVE RESEARCH EXPLORATION

If you go to the field with a problem, the challenge of possible failure, contrapuntal to the assurance of usefulness and success, is there, too. Any field may prove to be the wrong place to do the problem you have come to do. But there is also the certainty that if you surrender fully enough to the culture, this will itself inform your further choices and provide new problems, home-grown for the fieldworker's perception.

– Margaret Mead, 1977, p. 282.

The sociologist is thus saddled with the task of knowing an object—the social world—of which he is the product, in a way such that the problems that he raises about it and the concepts he uses have every chance of being the product of this object itself.

– Pierre Bourdieu & Loïc Wacquant, 1992, p. 235.

Introduction: Arriving at the research problem

This chapter details the career and journey of this research work from the idea-level to the ethnographic fieldwork conducted in Gannavaram, Krishna district, Andhra Pradesh and Sangareddy, Medak district (old), Telangana¹, along with archival work done from 2012 to the end of 2014.

The central character – ‘stringer’ – of this study entered my professional life-world during my stint as an education correspondent for a leading English national daily in Hyderabad. On the job, I came across stringers from Hindi, Urdu and Telugu language newspapers on many occasions.

¹ At the time of fieldwork in Gannavaram mandal and Vijayawada in Krishna district (2012), Andhra Pradesh was not bifurcated. Also, my fieldwork in Sangareddy mandal and Medak district happened after the bifurcation of the state. At the time of fieldwork in Telangana (2014) had 10 districts, which were divided into 31 districts on ‘Dasara’ October 11, 2016. Due to this redistricting move, Medak is trifurcated into three districts: Medak, Sangareddy, and Siddipet. See, <https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/news/national/telangana-to-have-21-new-districts-from-today/article9207329.ece>. [Last accessed on 15 December, 2020]. Subsequently, two more districts – Narayanpet and Mulugu – were carved out to increase the number of districts to 33. See, <http://www.newindianexpress.com/states/telangana/2019/feb/17/telangana-gets-two-new-districts-as-state-government-carves-out-narayanpet-mulugu-1939867.html> [Last accessed on 15 December, 2020].

During my three-year experience as a journalist, I observed the presence of stringers in most of the press coverage events, incidents and conferences on a regular basis except when I did exclusive interviews and attended events by invitation. On the job, sometimes I was required to cover some stories related to police and crime incidents. Stringers used to be there at the crime spot before any English newspaper reporter or police could reach as they were based in that particular locality in the city. They proved to be valuable sources of local information for reporters of English dailies, as the latter may not be fully knowledgeable about the local angle of the story.

Whenever there were any incidents that took place in areas where our bureau reporters were not employed or developing stories in the late hours of the night, senior reporters used to call stringers in that particular district and file an exclusive story for the newspaper just before the late night city edition was put to bed.

Senior reporters used to file their stories by using phrases like ‘sources in so and so locality told this correspondent/newspaper’ or ‘live witnesses told this’ among other ways of breaking the news for readers the next morning. Most of the senior reporters earn/command their credibility in the reporting circles by relying on ‘trustworthy’ stringers/sources.² Approaching stringers is a common and prevalent practice whenever there are any incidents such as police ‘encounters’ of Maoists, tremors felt during late night, accidents on highways, murders of non-resident Indians (mostly in the United States of America), and incidents related to software engineers in districts and areas where there are no designated reporters for the English newspaper.

Also, whenever there was any high-profile dignitary like the President, the Prime Minister, Union ministers, and Governors visiting any place outside of the headquarters of language newspapers, stringers will be given ‘orders’ only to cover ‘sidelights’ of the event, while the reporters cover the ‘highlights’. While on the job of a reporter, I had first-hand experience of witnessing designated reporters giving instructions to stringers of that particular locality not to evince any over-enthusiasm

² Assessment of credibility and the trustworthy nature of stringers is dealt with briefly by Jeffrey (2010, pp. 146-148). In the present study, this issue will be dealt with in chapter 5 concerning roles and hierarchies in the Telugu press.

while reporting the event and told to restrict their coverage to the interest of their locality.

Most of the stringers in language newspapers, when asked, used to reveal that they are contributors to newspapers and carry out other jobs, businesses and works to earn a living. Essentially, they underlined that this is not their primary job to earn a living but are continuing in this activity as a ‘passion,’ as they did not get any salary from the newspaper organisation for which they work.

On the other hand, part-time contributors in English dailies often referred to as freelancers, who contribute on a regular basis or whenever they were asked to contribute, got their payments on time. While there was at least a mention of freelancers in the communication and journalism degree curriculum in the writing courses, there is rarely any reference to stringers and their mode of work.

Having finished an M.Phil research programme from a Central University and working as a journalist, out of curiosity I tried to search for academic literature to understand the role and presence of stringers in print media specific to the Indian context. Some questions that stimulated my curiosity were: a) Who are these stringers? b) What did these stringers in the language press do and how do they take part in news production?

At this juncture, a focused reading of *India's Newspaper Revolution* by Robin Jeffrey (2010) proved to be very fruitful in understanding the Indian-language press in general and its reach, spread, and growth in particular. This present study, which began as an attempt to understand the role of stringers in Telugu language newspapers and has witnessed many turns due to the then agitation for separate statehood for Telangana, does not restrict itself to stringers; it also deals with their negotiations with other players in the field like the editorial staff, staff reporters, and other English language newspaper journalists.

Most of the stringers double as circulation agents and also strive to bring advertisement revenue for the newspapers. Noted journalist P. Sainath (2010, Para 11) said, “Expanding newspaper chains had already evolved a practice of making

correspondents and stringers in smaller towns and districts responsible for advertisements and circulation too.”

There were other important reasons for newspaper managements employing stringers. Firstly, newspaper managements and editorial boards recruited stringers to cover stories that staffers were unable to cover due to lack of access to remote places. Secondly, the stories offered by stringers were used to fill spaces on days when they were short of advertisements or ‘news’. On such occasions, a stringer would provide editors with much-needed copy before the deadline. Finally, the presence of stringers for any newspaper in villages, mandals, and small towns was crucial to build and expand readership.

Most of the stringers were assigned ‘beats’ or spaces like markets, transport stations, *dharnas* (protests), police stations, local educational institutions, primary health centres, government and panchayat offices, and places of worship. These idiosyncratic roles of the stringers provided them with a sense of power in the localities in which they work, while, at the same time, shaping the ‘common sense’ in/about that particular area. Stringers were not on the payroll of the media organisation that they were working for and functioned as ‘precarious’ labourers. But they played a crucial role in the functioning of language newspapers despite belonging to the lowest rung in the organisational structure.

While the role of a stringer could be a curious research topic in any part of the country, undivided Andhra Pradesh state held a special significance for such a study (Also, see Graph: 2.1). Documenting the development of news networks in Telugu language journalism, K. Ramachandra Murthy (2003, p .23) noted that the idea of having permanent reporters in the rural areas was followed in right earnest by Ch. Ramoji Rao, the founder editor of *Eenadu*. Murthy observed:

By 1988, mofussil news came to occupy two pages. Eenadu introduced tabloids in 1989. To meet the demand for local news, it developed a network of hundreds of rural reporters (stringers) who were paid small sums for the news published. By then the district headquarters had full-fledged offices with teleprinter, teleprinter operator, reporter etc. (p. 24).

Even as the practice of employing contributors who write for newspapers occasionally is extant, stringers came to the fore only with the launch of district editions by Telugu language newspapers in the 1980s and have created a niche for themselves, so much so that the government established the Press Academy of Andhra Pradesh (PAAP) solely to bring in ‘professionalism’ for these stringers by mid 1990s.

The PAAP portal maintained:

With the launch of district editions by the Telugu dailies, there has been a virtual explosion in the dissemination of news from the rural areas of Andhra Pradesh. For the first time in recent years, rural correspondents, called ‘Stringers’, ‘Contributors’ or ‘Part-time Correspondents’ emerged on the scene of journalism in the state, because the Telugu Newspapers recruited them at mandal level i.e., a cluster of 15 to 20 villages. Most of these correspondents did not have any professional background of journalism. Some of them were self-taught and picked up the threads of journalism in short time, while a large majority of them required a little help by way of professional advice and guidance. There was need to provide them access to professional inputs on various topics of journalism, such as the Law of libel, the law relating to the privileges of the members of Assembly and Parliament, the concept of Code of Ethics in journalism etc. It was with this need in view that the Andhra Pradesh Union of Working Journalists (APUWJ) proposed setting up of a Press Academy of Andhra Pradesh at its annual conference in Suryapet of Nalgonda district in the year 1992, a demand readily conceded by the then Chief Minister Sri N. Janardhan Reddy.³

This indicated a certain kind of burden on the part of regular journalists (staffers) as well as that of the government to contain stringers by offering professional training to them. Reflecting on the rise of stringers or local contributors, senior journalist Sevanti Ninan (2007, p. 114) pointed out: “The rapid plunge into localisation led to a democratisation of news gathering which encompassed the citizenry at large. It turned local lawyers, teachers, shopkeepers and busy bodies into citizen journalists.” This kind of localisation of news enhanced the access to media production to the commoners and circumvented the traditional ‘gate-keeping’ functions of the media organisational structures. During my stint as a working journalist, I also observed that stringers for newspapers also took up the job of providing video footage for Telugu and national news channels. This phenomenon compels one to understand this kind of

³ See, <http://www.pressacademyarchives.ap.nic.in/introduction.aspx>, Para 2 & 3, [Last accessed on 15 December, 2020].

reporting and editorial practices that are prevalent in the production of news at the local level in the journalistic field.

Oscillating between method, literature and field

With an idea to explore the role of stringers in news production, reporting and editorial practices and their relationship, their entry into the profession, and material conditions in which the news work is being carried out, I framed a research design that included qualitative and quantitative research, with data collection techniques such as, basic demographic survey of respondents, life-story method, participant observation, and ethnography.

I wanted to carry out a participant observation approach to understand the specific process of collecting and gathering news by the stringers in their ‘natural’ setting. This approach helps researchers to take

part in everyday activities related to an area of social life in order to study an aspect of that life through the observation of events in their natural contexts. The purpose of participant observation is to gain a deep understanding of a particular topic or situation through the meanings ascribed to it by the individuals who live and experience it (McKechnie, 2008, p.598).

Following this method, I was able to make observations on daily routine of stringers and their interactions with editorial staffers, local officials and politicians along with social and political settings in the sites of research. The field notes written up at the end of the day proved to be useful to identify discrepancies between what respondents said and what they actually did at the time of research.

With the help of life-story interview method, I wanted to document the biographical details of stringers in Telugu journalism, along with details concerning their entry into the profession and experiences. I opted for this as life stories “seek to provide accounts and analyses of how people make sense of their lived experience in the construction of both individual and social identity” (Gough, 2008, p. 484). The intention was to find out significant contributions and achievements of stringers, their experiences in the profession, and perceptions about their work in everyday life. By

using this method for primary data collection, I conducted in-depth interviews based on a guide of questions with the aid of a voice recorder.

At the end of fieldwork, I found out that this method has complemented my field observations to a great level along with providing a better understanding of the dynamic interplay of individuals and culture in the field. Even though I had the experience of interacting with journalists and stringers as a working journalist, studying and understanding the ‘world out there’ was new to me.

I decided to carry out a pilot study to assess the feasibility and practicality executing a larger scale project; understand the methodological setting; explore the nature of respondents and size of research sample; and, locate sites to carry out research.

Entering the ‘journalistic field’

My pilot study began in Vijayawada city, also known as Bezawada, in Krishna district of Andhra Pradesh.⁴ Before plunging into the fieldwork, I familiarised myself with the city and located important places such as the municipal corporation office, the Court complex, the Government General Hospital, Kanaka Durga Temple, the Krishna District Press Club, and, more importantly, major newspaper offices and their publishing centres.

I familiarised myself with the history of the city and the district with the help of secondary literature. Vijayawada was considered to be the transport capital of united Andhra Pradesh due to its location on arterial National Highway – 16 (NH-16), connecting Chennai and Kolkata, while the Railway Station is one of the busiest railway stations in the country.

Located on the banks of the River Krishna, the city has witnessed many bloody episodes of caste-based violence in the 1980s and 1990s. Even though it is a part of rich and prosperous region with higher literacy rate and presence of educational institutions, casteism can be witnessed in everyday life. Vijayawada was a bastion of the Communist parties till the 1980s but soon became an arena for show of strength

⁴ At the time of carrying out this pilot study at Gannavaram (March-April 2012), Samaikya Andhra movement was brewing in the coastal and Rayalaseema regions of the then undivided Andhra Pradesh, as a response to the separate Telangana movement.

between two dominant castes – the Kammas and the Kapus (Balagopal, 1989, pp. 227-229). Public places were inundated with political banners and ‘cut-outs’ invoking caste and community ethos. Even cinema complexes transform into sites of domination with these caste groups supporting Telugu cinema heroes from their respective castes.

Spending time at some ‘happening’ spaces, interactions with people at public places helped me grasp the meanings of everyday interactions before venturing to understand the dynamics of the area of study I intended to carry out. During the same time, I surveyed both Telugu and English dailies in the city to map out places where press conferences happen regularly along with popular places where protests take place and socio-cultural spaces where festival-related events are organised.

I tried to meet reporters/stringers on my own by attending press conferences at the Krishna District (urban) Press Club, offices of political parties, and in public places where protests/events take place. I used to introduce myself as a doctoral researcher and inform them about my topic of research. However, when asked for their appointment they would say that they are occupied with their work and have little time for me. Some of them used to mention time and place and never used to pick up calls on their mobile phones. This continued with different stringers at different places for close to three weeks. I used to give ‘business cards’ comprising my contact details and university affiliation to everyone I met during the fieldwork.

Getting a foothold in the field was not an easy task. Especially, my initial efforts to build a working relationship with stringers without putting into use my network and contacts in journalism circles produced no favourable results. To start with, identifying stringers and reporters (staffers) in the field itself was a challenge. Having worked as a journalist, I decided to approach stringers and reporters, who usually gather at press clubs of any given town/city.

The Krishna District (Urban) Press Club at Hanumanpet is a meeting point for journalists, politicians, activists, not-for-profit organisations, and teachers’ unions, among many other groups. The conference hall in the three-storeyed building serves as a venue for hosting press conferences, meet-the-press, and other media related programmes at an affordable rate. On the other hand, Hotel Ilapuram, which is located

nearby, serves as a high-end or elite place to meet reporters at press conferences that are followed by lunch, dinner or high-tea. Most of the press meets that are held at the hotel are exclusive and only on invitation.

In order to get in touch with stringers and reporters, I used to be at the Press Club by 9:30 A.M. I managed to strike a relationship with the in-charge of the Club. After knowing the purpose of my visit he would allow me to wait in the study room, which had a spread of Telugu and English newspapers and magazines. He also used to give me details about the press conference schedule at the club for the day.

The place had an old table on which Telugu and English daily newspapers were spread and visitors would drop by this study room to quickly glance through the newspapers before setting out for their day's work or in between press conferences. The club also serves as a pit-stop for journalists during their daily work of hopping from one office/spot/press conference to other. Also, it serves as an assembly point or common point for journalists to be picked up in a bus or van for large-scale political gatherings, launch of government schemes by dignitaries, industrial visits, and inauguration of real estate projects among others. My attempts to approach journalists at the Club were unsuccessful, as they repeatedly told that they do not have time to interact with me at that point. A standard reply from them would be: "We are very busy today. Come tomorrow when we have time. We will talk."⁵ The next day would be a repeat of the same unless they avoided me completely or did not recognise me at all.

Nevertheless, I started visiting press conferences following the schedule available at the Club to gain a foothold in the field. I found out by trial and error method that it was easier for an outsider to attend press conferences held at the offices of political parties than those organised by business organisations or educational institutions.⁶ On one occasion I managed to get permission to enter Andhra Ratna Bhavan, the Congress Party office in Vijayawada, where there was a press conference on the eve of the forty-first Foundation Day celebrations of the National Students Union of India

⁵ Even when I interacted with a single individual, the response from that person would begin with 'We'. At this point, I could not tell if it was a sign of self-respect or an indication of collectiveness or we-ness of journalists.

⁶ I purposely did not use my journalist accreditation card, which was given to me during my stint as a journalist on such occasions.

(NSUI). As the party was ruling in the state, there were reporters, photographers and cameramen from most of the print and broadcast media organisations. Some channels even gave live feed from the venue, as a local Member of Parliament (MP) and a couple of Members of Legislative Assembly (MLA), along with other party leaders, addressed the conference.

Once the briefing and question and answer session was over, tea was served along with biscuits. At this time, I approached a middle-aged print reporter and introduced myself. He called another elderly reporter and introduced him to me and pointed me to talk to him. When I told them that I was interested in researching on stringers, he replied, “Every one of us knows about stringers. What is new to study more about them? They are a disgrace to journalism and you are wasting time to do research on them.” He continued, “Do you get any scholarship amount?” And when I replied “yes”, he looked disappointed and murmured about falling standards in central universities (Field notes, 7 April 2012). They finally declared that they will not be of any help. They also suggested me to change the topic of research for my own benefit.

The arm-chair or the imaginary field envisioned while framing the research proposal and questions sometimes would prove to be a stark contrast to the ‘world out there’. On one instance, I expected to find respondents of my preference or at least someone who can guide me to get a hold in the research field and the outcome was completely different. I visited an opening ceremony of a book exhibition by a publishing house concerning Telugu literature and tried to interact with some persons present on the occasion. I expected that these elderly people wearing ‘*kurta* and *pyjama*’ with books in their hands would introduce me to the who’s who of local journalists.⁷ They evinced interest in my research work right away. For a while, they recalled their memories about *Andhra Patrika*, the glorious days of journalism, and the history of Vijayawada. At the end of the interaction, which lasted for more than two hours, they took my mobile number and promised to call me back after identifying some stringers in their vicinity.

⁷ This is a clear case of my presumptions that Bourdieu explains the relationship between field and habitus, which exists in the form of bodily-hexis. In this case, instead of observing with an open mind, I jumped into a conclusion that elderly male body wearing a *kurta* and holding books in his hand at a book exhibition must be a man of letters or an experienced journalist.

There were some journalists who said that it was a ‘great topic’ for research, as the plight of stringers was not known to many outside of their profession. One incident in the pursuit of familiarising myself with stringers and their work made me stop the ‘groping-in-the dark’ approach and seek help from my contacts.

On 9 April 2012, I was on my way to the Press Club from Guntur. As I entered Vijayawada via Prakasam Barrage, there was a huge gathering at the Police Control Room area with Communist Party of India (CPI) party workers bearing red flags at Chandra Rajeswara Rao statue. The day marked the death anniversary of Chandra Rajeswara Rao, who served as General Secretary of CPI. As party leaders were garlanding the statue, news reporters and photographers were busy in chronicling the event.

On the sidelines of the event, I tried interacting with a couple of reporters. As they were about to leave, I rushed through the crowd and introduced myself as a researcher. One of them identified me and told that he saw me at the Press Club on a couple of occasions. He took my business card and told me to note down his number. He instructed me to call him the next morning at 7:30 A.M. without fail. I made a call on that number only to realise that it belonged to a local politician.

With my earlier unsuccessful efforts to approach Telugu newspaper offices directly, I decided to meet a senior reporter PLR⁸ working with a National English daily and placed my situation before him. He asked me to meet him on a given day and time.

By the time I reached his office located at Suryaraopeta near Eluru Road, he was busy talking over the phone at work. Between calls he told me that there was a Tsunami alert and there were reports from many places on the coastal line that there were tremors. Before I could realise, he gave me the office mobile and asked me to note down what the person, who was a journalist, on the other end tells me. I jotted down the points told over the phone from the person, who I figured out is from Machilipatnam. PLR asked me to translate and type the piece of information to be used as part of a story, as he is busy compiling other such reports to send them to Chennai at the earliest. Considering the urgency he was in, I agreed to do the needful.⁹ In half an hour,

⁸ Respondents will be referred in similar fashion to mask their identity throughout the work.

⁹ This incident that happened at a very early stage of the fieldwork made me aware of my interventions in the field. I refrained from prompting stringers with my ‘knowledge’ or ‘expertise’ to improve their copy or taking an active part when a stringer is filing a report of an event or any

he mailed a story taking inputs from Prakasam, Guntur and Krishna districts that come under Vijayawada edition centre of his newspaper and sent them to headquarters copying the same to Hyderabad office. After this, he gave me a patient ear and allowed me to explain my situation. “Did you know that you just spoke to a stringer?” he asked and explained that English print journalists rely on stringers in such emergency situations. He also spoke at length about how to ascertain trustworthiness of stringers over a period of time before promising that he will introduce me to bureau chiefs and working journalists of Telugu dailies on the following Sunday (Field notes, Vijayawada, 11 April 2012).

As promised, he arranged an interaction with two print reporters and a broadcast journalist. During the interaction, which lasted for an hour in the evening, I learnt about the duties of reporters in the edition centres and also in mofussil areas. Taking contacts from them, I visited over several days Kanchikacharla, Tiruvuru, Machilipatnam, Nuzivid, Gannavaram, Penamaluru and Mailavaram mandals of Krishna district and interacted with stringers working there. I conducted interviews with two stringers, one from Penamaluru and the other from Gannavaram, before heading back to Hyderabad.

After studying the topography and assessing accessibility issues, I decided to conduct my main fieldwork in Gannavaram mandal. The rationale for choosing Gannavaram over other mandals was as follows.

It is located at the centre of the district unlike other mandals, which have proximity to other districts; it is a town, mandal, village and a Legislative Assembly constituency all at once; it is highly accessible, as it is located on a highway. It is well connected by road through public transport; it is located on the outskirts of Vijayawada city with a suburban character, and yet retaining its agrarian and rural nature; most of the Telugu dailies have a zone page allocated to Gannavaram mandal in Krishna district pull-out tabloid supplements.

campaign activity keeping the editorial stance and policy in mind. I was cautious about my involvement or detachment on such issues instead of presuming my role during research as a ‘fly-on-the-wall’ methodological dualist or an ‘action anthropologist’. Founder of Action Anthropology, Sol Tax (1975, p. 515) defines it as, “an activity in which an anthropologist has two coordinate goals, to neither one of which he will delegate an inferior position. He wants to help a group of people to solve a problem, and he wants to learn something in the process. He refuses ever to think or to say that the people involved are for him a means of advancing his knowledge; and he refuses to think or to say that he is simply applying science to the solution of those people’s problems”.

Recalling an event that happened during my pilot study, in the process of convincing myself on opting for ethnographic method for the present research purpose, helped me to a great extent. The following is an extract from my field notes of the relevant day:

On a humid and hot summer morning YSR¹⁰ received a call on a rather routine day for him at work to visit *Grama Sachivalayam* (Village Assembly) of Veerapanenigudem, where scores of people were present to discuss their problems with the Village Revenue Officer (VRO). In a minute he concluded the chat we were having till then at the Gannavaram Police Station and Court complex and offered to take me to the 'spot'¹¹ on my motorcycle, which I readily agreed.

As soon as we reached the 'spot,' YSR approached the person who called him to find out about the situation as I strolled towards the Village Assembly office. The officials were carrying on with their work taking down the complaints from the farmers of the village in a casual manner.¹² While the officials were working in the *verandah* of the office building the VRO was present inside the building notwithstanding the presence of a crowd in the office premises.

In some minutes, YSR entered the office and went into the room in which the VRO was present. The crowd which was seemingly agitated but cool-headed so far suddenly became insistent and vociferous with support from an ex-sarpanch, who was shouting at the top of his voice against the laxity of the officials. As soon as YSR ended his discussion with the VRO and reached the *verandah* outside the office taking pictures of the event, then the farmers stood-up on their feet blaming the officials who stalled their work. The local correspondent managed to calm down the crowd and started negotiating with the officials, who explained to him that nothing was in their hands. Then he told the ex-sarpanch to write a representation as per his earlier consultation with the VRO, which was duly done. The officials too shared their problems with the stringer explaining their limitations. Once this was done, they asked the villagers if there were any other problems which they faced apart from the sand quarrying issue. Meanwhile, some villagers (from an influential community of the village: Reddy) urged YSR to take note of leaking water

¹⁰ Abridged name of a middle-aged stringer, who looks after rural beat for a leading daily in Gannavaram. Not to be confused with late former Chief Minister of AP Y. S. Rajasekhara Reddy.

¹¹ 'Spot' is a term used by journalists to refer to a site which has some potential to gather news. In other words, a place where some unplanned event takes place, unlike the case of press conferences, political gatherings, inaugurals, masjid/ temple/church events and planned protests among others. Sub-editors insist the stringers to inform them over mobile, while in the spot. In this instance, the spot was the Village Assembly of Veerapanenigudem, an upland area, which was seven kilometres from the Court complex. This will be discussed in chapter 5.

¹² The problem which I found out later was about digging their fields for gravel in order to use it for their own building construction purposes. The officials acting upon the orders by the then district collector S.A.M. Rizvi did not permit the villagers from doing so. This was the time when sand quarrying mafia was being dealt seriously by the state government of (United) Andhra Pradesh.

pipeline in the third ward of their village (mostly inhabited by people from Reddy community). I followed him, as he noted down the details of the problems, took quotes along with the respondents and finally took photographs of some of them. He quickly turned to me and suggested that we need to return to Gannavaram. After having lunch with a local politician (I was also included), he filed both the reports and sent a fax to the edition centre by 5:30 pm and informed the edition in-charge (Field notes, Gannavaram, 16 April 2012).

In this instance, this particular news gatherer did not confine himself to the role of a reporter. He performed many roles as a negotiator, pacifier, and solution provider in this specific case. He interacted with officials, who were the representatives of the State and its subjects – citizens – before filing a report, which was an invitation to a variety of agents into the journalistic field. Given the social background of this journalist, who happens to be from an Other Backward Classes (OBC) community, calling the shots in a traditionally upper-caste village prompted me to understand and theorise on ‘journalistic capital.’

Also, the above detailed event substantiated my claim that it was possible to map the role of journalistic activity in a different way by identifying and understanding different agents extant in the bureaucratic, political and social fields hinging on the work of Pierre Bourdieu. However, the fact that both the reports did not get published in the next day’s paper further encouraged understanding the interactions/relations/hierarchy, daily routine of the news desk (editorial and managerial department) within the ‘journalistic field.’

Without going into the details, there were instances where one PCB, who used to handle rural beat for another leading newspaper, helped a staffer from Vijayawada (edition centre), when the latter wanted to get a piece of land registered on his name in Gannavaram Mandal Revenue Office (MRO). This is the same organisation, which had sacked ARP accusing him of too much indulgence in ‘brokerage’ and ‘blackmailing’ (Personal communication, 7 May 2012). There were stringers who used to write speeches for local politicians at the time of research. These political connections along with relationships with local businessmen and elite were important for stringers to meet the advertisement target set by newspaper organisations.

These experiences in the field have convinced me to carry out an ethnographic research to understand the autonomous and heteronomous character of journalism in a Bourdieusian sense of enquiry. As I progressed in the fieldwork, I was able to make cultural interpretations of newswork from the perspective of stringers, which is considered as the crux of ethnography. Ethnographic method helped me to a great extent in understanding and then writing about news production at local-level from an emic (phonemic) perspective with an emphasis on everyday language of stringers. I was also convinced to be self-reflexive throughout the research, interaction and interviewing process of respondents, classification of the primary data, and writing.

Familiarising myself with the method, field and agents

Despite having prior work experience as a journalist, the process of observing agents in the field, understanding the nature of work in everyday life within the time and space, and explaining (writing) as an ethnographer was a very gradual and time-taking process. I started my fieldwork in Gannavaram on 2 May 2012 and went on till the end of June. My daily routine involved travelling from Guntur to Gannavaram, interacting with stringers and visiting places in and around the mandal in their presence. My day in the site of research would begin at 9 A.M. and would end by 6:00 – 6:30 P.M., which was the deadline to file stories for most of the stringers.

Sometimes my respondents used to specify timings the previous night itself in case of any interesting planned event is scheduled the next day. On a routine day, I would ride along with journalists to ‘spots’ and programmes for coverage. Rest of the time, I hung out with my respondents at their workplaces. Press notes, invitations and related information got passed on to the correspondents at these places. Even local political leaders, business people and officials, including AP State Intelligence personnel frequented these offices on a regular basis. I would wait till the reports were sent to the edition centre (6-6:30 P.M.), unless I was interviewing a respondent. From there I used to go back to my base in Guntur, where I would write the field notes for the day. Also, I used to make it a point to collect all the available newspapers (both English and Telugu) of that particular day. Since stringers did not have a weekly-off, even I

followed their schedule.¹³ This exercise helped me to a great extent in mapping the daily routines of the stringers and in understanding what eventually goes into print from the work of stringers.¹⁴

My self-reflexive approach for this research draws largely from Bourdieu's seminal essay – "Understanding", in which he stated:

A reflex reflexivity based on a craft, on a sociological "feel" or "eye," allows one to perceive and monitor *on the spot*, as the interview is actually taking place, the effects of the social structure within which it is taking place (1996, p. 18). [Emphasis original]

Throughout the fieldwork, I tried to practice this principle to the best possible extent. Before I set out to jot down my observations during the fieldwork, I used to inform respondents and agents about my project and even basic personal details. It is not only at the time of writing but also during the interactions in the field, I used "to make explicit the intentions and the procedural principles" (Bourdieu, 1996, p. 18) which were put into practice at that time. Practicing the 'non-violent form of communication' suggested by Bourdieu, especially while interviewing respondents and interacting with different agents in the field benefitted me during the course of research. I ensured that there was a flow of information from both sides, rather than being completely one-dimensional.

Many times, during our interactions stringers used to ask about my experiences as a journalist working in the capital of the state (Hyderabad) and for my opinions on political affairs. Expressing my views or opinions about separate statehood for Telangana during fieldwork in Krishna district and Vijayawada proved to be a difficult task. Instead of taking an absolute position on the issue, I used to talk about the perils of uneven development and disadvantages of having a 'primate city'¹⁵ in any region.

¹³ The issue of holidays and weekly-offs for stringers will be discussed in the chapter 6 that deals with news labour.

¹⁴ This schedule was almost replicated during my fieldwork in Sangareddy district, Telangana. The only difference was: I used to travel from Hyderabad to Sangareddy and nearby villages on a daily basis. The work schedule of stringers and mine was almost similar.

¹⁵ Primate City is a concept used by geographers, population and migration studies researchers to talk about uneven development. Any city which is twice the size of population and extent of any city in

This topic used to surface at least once a day during the course of my fieldwork in that site. The issue of the status of Hyderabad (shared or common capital) in case the state was bifurcated used to get pointed to me during the course of interaction with locals who were present along with stringers. I would never give a definitive opinion on such sensitive issues.¹⁶

More importantly, I would never get into arguments or impose my ideas when any respondent or local person made insensitive remarks on the basis of caste, gender, religion, and ability/disability during my interaction with them or outside of it. And at the same time, I would never make such remarks or use abusive words. This clearly would defeat the primary purpose of me being there as a researcher. On the other hand, it would be a clear case of imposition of my ‘moral high ground’ on respondents.

Moreover, as Bourdieu & Wacquant (1992, p. 16) noted

A field consists of a set of objective, historical relations between positions anchored in certain forms of power (or capital), while habitus consists of a set of historical relations “deposited” within individual bodies in the form of mental and corporeal schemata of perception, appreciation, and action.

During the course of my fieldwork, I noticed that the acts of respondents using abusive words in casual conversations, while talking to family members, relatives, friends or private (especially financial) issues over phone in my presence, referring to third person (especially local elite like politicians or businessmen or editorial people in case of stringers and vice-versa) in singular pronoun are considered to be a sign of taking me into their circle of confidence. Even though hesitant in the initial phases, I started picking up calls on my mobile phone in their presence. Mostly, I used to get calls from my family members, friends in Hyderabad and Guntur. Sometimes they used to even express their concern in case they overheard the conversation or when my tone turned serious. A conscious effort to allow myself to be observed, while I made observations about respondents and the field, facilitated in building-up of trust and open-ness in the relation as opposed to a top-down or unequal relation.

a nation/region is called a primate city implying its economic, social and political affairs. While proposing laws of primate city, Jefferson (1939, p. 226) pointed out, “A country's leading city is always disproportionately large and exceptionally expressive of national capacity and feeling.”

¹⁶ These problems never arose during my fieldwork in the next phase done at Sangareddy district.

Moreover, due to my training in social sciences along with vocational training as a journalist, and working under the supervision of a trained sociologist, I was aware of the fact that even my position as a social researcher was an object to be understood and unravelled not only at the time of writing but also at the level of data collection process. This critical awareness of my own position got internalised in the entire process of research.

Theorising about the symbolic efficacy of language in the construction of reality in the social world, Bourdieu (1991, p. 105) wrote:

By structuring the perception which social agents have of the social world, the act of naming helps to establish the structure of this world, and does so all the more significantly the more widely it is recognised, i.e. authorised. There is no social agent who does not aspire, as far as his circumstances permit, to have the power to name and to create the world through naming: gossip, slander, lies, insults, commendations, criticisms, arguments and praises are all daily and petty manifestations of the solemn and collective acts of naming, be they celebrations or condemnations, which are performed by generally recognised authorities.

I would consciously start recording personal interviews of stringers only after establishing familiarity with them and with their consent. During the initial phases of interaction most of the respondents tried to converse in ‘official’ or standardised Telugu or the language used in writing. Usage of local dialect or slang while talking to me or while responding to my questions during the interview process is a key indicator to establish that there is a sense of familiarity. This act of using everyday language from both sides, I realised, is an acknowledgment of mutual respect.

As stringers would agree to ride along with me on my bike to any place of their choice while covering news, I used to get ample amount of time to have conversations, which sometimes did not have any direct relation to the topic of my research or any specific enquiry. But these times I spent with them in their own social and professional world gave me opportunities for us to gain knowledge about each other. On the way to ‘spots’ they used to talk about many issues within and without the purview of my research. Most of the time, halting at tea shops in the villages or on the highways, and having lunch with them provided chances to interact with new people, sometimes

stringers from other mandals and editorial staffers from the city.¹⁷ As an ethnographer, this process allowed me to develop relationships with informants who would help me to gain access to the events and behaviours taking place.

The usage or choice of words, adages, proverbs, ways of addressing a person, and expressions used by stringers in presence of other agents in the field did, as Bourdieu (1992, p. 106) said, “imply a certain claim to symbolic authority as the socially recognised power to impose a certain vision of the social world, i.e. of the divisions of the social world.”

Once the task of collecting the primary data and allied secondary data was completed, I returned to Hyderabad. I had neither reached a saturation point in the fieldwork nor felt any redundancy during the process of ethnographic research, as each day provided an opportunity to learn more about the practice of journalism and the field itself. However, in the process I have interviewed all the stringers who were actively working in Gannavaram. Also, as part of the fieldwork in Gannavaram, I appeared for a written exam conducted for recruitment of stringers in a leading Telugu newspaper in Guntur and also attended a district-level meeting of APUWJ.

My initial primary data included field notes for the initial three months of my fieldwork, demographic profiles and life-story narratives of 18 stringers, and voice records. Secondary data comprised daily newspapers, local magazines, photocopies of press notes, and newsletters of journalists’ unions, among others.

The field notes became elaborate descriptions of interactions, events, information about places and people. They also contain some reflections about the theoretical framework of the research. On the other hand, the demographic profiles and life-story narratives in the form of semi-structured interviews (voice records in Telugu language) proved to be valuable documents for the research.

The recorded interviews were transcribed, taking care to retain the everyday language and dialect of Telugu used by the respondents. Even my ‘interventions’ during the

¹⁷ Repeating this exercise, consciously or unconsciously, was successful in Sangareddy mandal, Sangareddy district in Telangana also.

interviews were also transcribed.¹⁸ Once this process was completed, I sifted through the organised field notes, semi-structured interviews, and secondary literature for triangulation purposes.

A reading of the field notes and transcripts presented a void in understanding the entire journalistic process and practice due to absence of editorial and institutional version. The relation that stringers have with bureaucrats, local politicians, businessmen, police, and farmers on the ground was evident in the data from the viewpoint of stringers. But their relation with editorial staffers and managements, who also are an intrinsic part of news production, was not established. Also, the account of English language news reporters, who have a working relationship with stringers, was not taken into consideration. I realised that the location or position of the stringer in the journalistic field cannot be identified without considering the perspectives of editorial and management personnel. Moreover, the absence of such accounts would obscure the basic understanding of the journalistic field itself. The lack of such accounts proved to be an avoidable lacuna.

More importantly, Bourdieu (1992, p. 96), while having a dialogue with French sociologist Loïc Wacquant on the logics of fields, stresses that to think in terms of field is to *think relationally*. He elaborated:

A field may be defined as a network or a configuration, of objective relations between positions. These positions are objectively defined, in their existence and in the determinations they impose upon their occupants, agents or institution, by their present and potential situation (*situs*) in the structure of the distribution of species of power (or capital) whose possession commands access to the specific profits that are at stake in the field, as well as by their objective relation to other positions [domination, subordination, homology, etc.] (1992, p. 97).

I then set out for Vijayawada, which was the edition centre for Krishna district, to carry out research with the editorial staffers, bureau chiefs, and mofussil in-charges of Telugu dailies, along with reporters and bureau chiefs of English newspapers. Recording the life-story narratives through the semi-structured interview process was

¹⁸ Care is taken to ensure that sometimes monosyllable expressions were transcribed, as they can be an indicator of comfort or discomfort in relationship to a particular topic and can be an important point of analysis.

a relatively easier task than in the case of stringers, where I had to build familiarity with the latter.¹⁹

Most of the offices were empty during the daytime. Only the key editorial staff and chief reporters meet in the morning to discuss important news or events from the rural areas in the district and city for the day; review of other newspapers to check on the stories they failed to carry; any grievances about non-performance or complaints on reporters; and review of factual mistakes from reporting wing.²⁰

City reporters who spend the whole day in the field start coming to their workstations only after 5:30 – 6:00 P.M to file their stories. Unlike their rural counterparts, city reporters or reporters working in edition centres have the privilege of filing stories till 10 – 11 P.M. In case of emergencies or sudden events, their deadline extends depending on the gravity of the developing news story. For the editorial department, work begins from 5 P.M. till all the editions, including zone pages are put to bed by midnight on normal days.

I have conducted interviews of seven editorial staffers working in Telugu newspapers and two senior reporters working in English dailies in Vijayawada. The significant differences between the responses of stringers and editorial staffers were that the latter often tended to drift towards issues such as exposing corruption in society, falling standards, values and ethics in society and journalism, taking the side of the management/organisation, changes in stylistics of Telugu language in newspapers, technological advances in the field, and the glorious past of Telugu journalism.

One of the advantages that I had while interacting with editorial staffers in Vijayawada is that they already knew about my presence, while I was doing my fieldwork in Gannavaram through stringers. Another advantage was that due to my prior fieldwork experience, I was able to specifically ask certain questions or give a

¹⁹ Editorial and reporting staffers talked about their own caste, caste of stringers, and even enquired about my caste and identity in a very open manner. But during the interviews, some of them said that caste or religious and regional identity did not matter in journalism profession. Some even spoke at length about reporters as '*viśwa māṇavulu*' (global citizens).

²⁰ Editorial in-charge of *Eenadu*, GB in Krishna district and Vijayawada, said, "We receive phone calls from readers in case of any errors in facts from reporters' end in the early morning itself" (Personal communication, 12 September 2012). Getting feedback from readers is a definitive edge for already existing large-scale newspapers to maintain certain editorial standards.

cue to editorial staffers, whenever it was necessary, when they were drifting away from the main point in discussions/interviews.

I realised that my fieldwork with stringers, experience as a journalist, and acquired knowledge through academic literature proved to be beneficial. This first-hand access to the field helped me understand the domination, power relations and structures within the profession. However, they provided me with valuable information about the journalistic field apart from the ‘official’ or ‘idealised’ accounts.

After completion of fieldwork in Vijayawada, I planned to go for another round of fieldwork, either in Telangana or Rayalaseema, as soon as I completed the transcribing process and organised the field notes. But the political situation prevailing in the state was not conducive for fieldwork in any part of the then undivided state. There were protests in coastal and Rayalaseema regions against bifurcation of the state, while in Telangana, people took to the streets fighting for their long pending demand for a separate state.²¹

My idea to do another leg of fieldwork in Rayalaseema did not materialise, as the situation in that region was also volatile. There were many protests demanding for a separate statehood for Rayalaseema or seeking a merger with Telangana instead of remaining with residual Andhra Pradesh.²²

Earlier, following the official announcement, the Government of India had appointed a ‘Committee for Consultations on the Situation in Andhra Pradesh’, more popular as Srikrishna Committee on Telangana, under the aegis of Justice B.N. Srikrishna. The committee submitted its report in December, 2010. One of the ‘options’ suggested in

²¹ Even as the Congress led Union Government has made a clear announcement on the issue, there were fears in the minds of Telangana people and politicians about separate statehood becoming a reality. For full text of the then Union Home Minister P. Chidambaram’s speech, see <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/Full-text-of-Chidambarams-statement-on-Telangana/article16836037.ece> [Last accessed on 15 December, 2020].

²² The idea of studying the role of stringers in socio-political movements as a case study, especially with respect to Telangana movement and Samaikyandhra agitation did occur to me. At that juncture, the idea did not appear to be realistic and feasible for me, as it would have meant drifting away from the key focus of the present study. Moreover, the Telangana movement has a long history after the formation of Andhra Pradesh under the States Re-organisation Act, 1956, while the Samaikyandhra agitation which brewed up after the announcement by the Government of India on December 9, 2009 appeared more of a reactionary move and ephemeral. However, in the context of Uttarakhand, Anup Kumar (2011) succinctly captures the relationship between the print media and social mobilisation.

the report (2010, p. 444) – “Bifurcation of State into Rayala-Telangana and coastal Andhra regions with Hyderabad being an integral part of Rayala-Telangana” – flared up the political situation in both Rayalaseema and Telangana.²³ Even new political outfits like Samajika Rayalaseema Porata Samiti, Rayalaseema Vimochana Samiti, and Rayalaseema Parirakshana Samiti were floated by politicians to fight for the cause of the region.²⁴

However, controversy erupted in the following years, as the committee had not disclosed a section of the eighth chapter in its report, which offered certain ways to forge or divert public opinion on the bifurcation issue. Reporting on the issue, Madabushi Sridhar (2011, Para 4) noted:

In the secret note Justice Srikrishna had suggested to the Home Ministry that media should be managed to build opinion against separate statehood for Telangana. In this note the committee explained the regional links and interests of the media houses and advised that these be exploited. The former judge even went to the extent of recommending the use of Government advertisements as an inducement to the media to turn the opinion in favour of a united Andhra Pradesh.

Further, the media management techniques baffled journalists from Telangana region working in newspapers and media houses owned by people from coastal Andhra. Even certain sections of media organisations faced discrimination on the lines of regional sentiment.²⁵

²³ See, <http://www.newindianexpress.com/states/andhra-pradesh/2012/sep/23/rayala-telangana-in-the-offing-408822.html>, <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/opinion/et-commentary/rayala-telangana-is-a-crude-attempt-to-maintain-reddy-dominance/articleshow/21475176.cms?from=mdr>, <https://www.indiatoday.in/india/telangana/story/rayala-telangana-congress-andhra-pradesh-107087-2012-06-26>, <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/andhra-pradesh/jc-reiterates-demand-for-rayala-telangana/article3255279.ece> [Last accessed on 15 December, 2020].

²⁴ <https://www.thehansindia.com/posts/index/Andhra-Pradesh/2013-11-25/SRPS-opposes-Rayala-Telangana-proposal/77841> [Last accessed on 15 December, 2020].

²⁵ The text of the secret note by the committee cited in Sridhar, Madabushi (2011, Para 6) read: “(i) Andhra Pradesh has got about 13 Electronic Channels and 5 major local Newspapers which are in the forefront of moulding the public opinion. Except for two Channels (Raj News & Hmtv), the rest of them are supporters of a united Andhra Pradesh. The equity holders of the channels, except the above two, and the entire Print Media are with the Seemandhra people. The main editors/resident and sub-editors, the Film world etc. are dominated by Seemandhra people. A coordinated action on their part has the potential of shaping the perception of the common man. However, the beat journalists in the respective regions are locals and are likely to capture only those events/news which reflect the regional sentiments. (ii) Hyderabad city, which is expected to be the center of most of the agitations, is generally covered by journalists who are votaries of a separate Telangana. Hence a lot of media hype on the Osmania University Students agitation, self-immolations, etc. may be created. Therefore, media

There were instances when it appeared as if the governments, both at the centre and state, were following the suggestions mentioned by the committee in the secret note by barring journalists from certain media houses to cover an event.²⁶ Adding to this, the division between people of coastal Andhra, Rayalaseema and Telangana appeared to have permeated into everyday life due to certain ‘assertions’ made by political leaders.²⁷

It was very much evident that this period was clearly not a congenial time for me to get into fieldwork. Even as there was no antagonism between people of both regions on the ground, politicians and more importantly, journalists and journalists’ unions were split on regional lines. Elaborating on the split among journalists in united Andhra Pradesh, Subbarao (2017, p. 99) mentioned that the dominance of Andhra politicians and journalists can be opposed only by forming Telangana Journalists Forum to lend their support to the movement.²⁸ There was total chaos in the state with members of the Legislative Assembly and Council from Andhra Pradesh submitting their resignations opposing the formation of Telangana.²⁹ The Telangana bill was passed in the Lok Sabha on February 18 and was approved in the Rajya Sabha two days later before the President of India attested it on 1 March, 2014. Subsequently, 2 June 2014 was declared as the Appointed Day for Telangana to be declared as a separate state in India.

To mark the celebrations of formation of Telangana, journalists in the to-be-formed state have formally announced the change of name of their collective from Telangana

management assumes critical importance to ensure that the reality is projected and no hype is created. In the immediate past, it is observed that the media coverage on the issue has shown a declining trend resulting in a lower intensity of the agitation. Each of the media houses are affiliated to political parties. In the print media the major newspapers are owned by Seemandhra people and the Regional contents published by them play a vital role.”

²⁶ Journalists working in media houses owned by Telangana people were denied entry to a global convention in which the Prime Minister was giving an address. See, <http://asu.thehoot.org/media-watch-briefs/separating-separatists-6379> [Last accessed on 15 December, 2020].

²⁷ There were some comments on Andhra politicians and employees by Telangana political leaders, which were ‘caustic’ in nature. See, <https://www.dailypioneer.com/2013/sunday-edition/kcrs-acerbic-tongue-fans-andhra-turmoil.html>, https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/hyderabad/Seemandhra-govt-staff-will-have-to-leave-Telangana-KCR/articleshow_b2/21564032.cms?mobile=no, [Last accessed on 15 December, 2020].

²⁸ Senior journalist Allam Narayana said that the Telangana Journalists’ Forum was a collective formed by journalist-activists on 31 May 2001 (Field notes, Nampally, 10 March 2014). One of the slogans for the Telangana Journalists’ Forum is ‘Telangana Journalists for Telangana Movement.’ This forum was rechristened as Telangana Union of Working Journalists after bifurcation.

²⁹ See, <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/andhra-pradesh/demanding-united-andhra-congress-mla-resigns-from-assembly-party/article4952371.ece>. [Last accessed on 15 December, 2020].

Journalists' Forum to Telangana Union of Working Journalists (TUWJ) in a state-level meeting (*journalist jatara*) held at the Exhibition Grounds in Nampally on 10 March 2014. I attended the meeting and recorded all the proceedings as part of my data collection along with taking informal interviews of senior journalists and editors present on the occasion (Field notes, Nampally, Hyderabad, 10 March 2014).

Following the declaration of a separate Telangana state (TS), the Chief Minister resigned and President's Rule was imposed until elected governments were formed in both states.³⁰ Under President Rule, the Assembly elections were held in both states along with the General elections on April 30 and May 7 in 2014. Election results were announced on May 14. The Telangana Rashtra Samithi (TRS) secured a simple majority to form the government in Telangana, while Telugu Desam Party (TDP) won the Assembly elections in AP and formed the government in alliance with the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP).

Getting back to fieldwork

The site I chose to carry out fieldwork in the newly formed Telangana was Sangareddy, formerly known as Sangareddy Pet in Medak district.³¹ This was a decision taken soon after the official declaration of Telangana was made. Even though there are many contrasts to this site of research with that of Gannavaram, Sangareddy fits into the description of a mofussil town due to its proximity to the capital of Telangana, Hyderabad. More importantly, it is a town, mandal, and village at the same time.

Accordingly, I conducted a feasibility tour of Sangareddy, before starting my full-scale fieldwork, to establish contacts with stringers and editorial staffers working in Sangareddy. Most of the connections were established during the journalists' *Jatara* held in Hyderabad on 10 March 2014, where I could meet with stringers, reporters, and staffers from Medak as well as from other districts in Telangana.

³⁰ See, <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/andhra-pradesh/talk-of-presidents-rule-as-kiran-quits/article5705139.ece>, <https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/news/national/after-41-years-ap-comes-under-presidents-rule/article20732889.ece> [Last accessed on 15 December, 2020].

³¹ At the time of research, bifurcation of Medak district did not happen. In 2016, the Government of Telangana has bifurcated Medak into three districts: 1) Sangareddy district. 2) Medak district. 3) Siddipet district.

Sangareddy is located about 68 km from Hyderabad zero milestone situated opposite the Telangana State Assembly. Located on the Hyderabad-Sholapur National Highway (NH-65), this once idyllic town and mandal is one of the fastest developing sub-urban localities in Telangana. As one takes a turn from the highway into the town, the district collectorate complex greets with the Sangareddy zero milestone. The nearest railway station is at Shankarpally, which is at a distance of around 25 km from the town. The bus stand, located at the heart of the town, has '*palle velugu*' buses that connect interior villages of the district with the town along with inter-city luxury buses plying to and from Sangareddy to Hyderabad.

There is only one two-lane main road that runs through the entire town and all important offices and places like the Town Police Station, the District Police Station, the Collector's Bungalow, the Postal office, the district jail, newspaper offices, government district hospital, educational institutions, and movie theatres are located on either sides. The road curves around Mahboob Sagar, a water body which makes an extensive tract in the area cultivable, and splits into two. One road connects with NH-161, after crossing the River Manjeera, connecting Sangareddy to Narayankhed, Andole, and Jogipet towns to Nanded in Maharashtra, while the other connects the town to Doultabad and Narsapur towns.

My fieldwork in Sangareddy began on 4 August, 2014 and continued till October 14. The daily schedule maintained during my fieldwork in Gannavaram was repeated, as I travelled from Hyderabad to Sangareddy on a daily basis. I used to jot down running notes while on the field and would come back home in Hyderabad and type out the more elaborate version. Most of the major newspapers published in Andhra Pradesh edition centres had their presence in this district. However, another major inclusion was the *Namaste Telangana* newspaper, established in 2011, which focused mainly on issues concerning Telangana region and its people.

Even as Sangareddy served as headquarters for the district, there was no separate editorial office set-up in the town whereas the Krishna district mandals had one in Vijayawada city. While the reporting work in Medak district is done with Sangareddy as the base, most of the editorial production work happens in Hyderabad due to its proximity. Stringers and reporting heads said that it was not economically viable to maintain a separate designing and printing section for the district, which is well-

connected by road. And hence, the entire district edition is produced and distributed from Hyderabad itself.

Most of the offices were based in ‘shutter shops’ (cast-iron roller shutters) in small two-storeyed buildings located on the main road of the town. Most of the stringers were accessible to the public, as their numbers were painted on signboards in front of the offices and on the rolling shutters of the shops.

Based on my rapport that was built much before I started my fieldwork in Sangareddy, I began to interact with stringers and travelled along with them to villages, while they were assigned on ‘duties’ by their higher-ups and spot events among others. Most of the journalistic activity concerning development and agriculture issues centres on the district collectorate office, as district administration officials are housed there.

Stringers, after collecting data from the officials, cross-check the facts on the ground before using them to file any news story. At the time of my research, the district collector used to conduct a meet-your-collector programme to receive complaints and grievances from the public across the mandals in the district. Medak district rural in-charge of a Telugu daily, MMR said:

This programme helps us to assess efficiency and work of stringers in corners of the district. Stringers cannot continue to bluff about lack of public issues in their villages and mandals. I always want to keep them on the run for stories instead of filing routine stories (MMR, Personal communication, 9 October 2014).

Most of the stringers are always on the run with minor and major accident cases getting reported on the national highway, which is a major route for pilgrimage in the entire state. There was heavy vehicular traffic on this highway as it connects major Hindu pilgrim centres located in Maharashtra like: Shirdi, Tuljapur, and Pandharpur. Apart from these, devotees pay visits on a regular basis to the Hazur Sahib at Nanded and the Medak Church, which is a major attraction in this region.

In addition to the above, issues and news emerging from the Indian Institute of Technology-Hyderabad at Kandi, the International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics (ICRISAT) at Patancheru, Manjeera Wildlife Sanctuary at

Sangareddy, make it to the main edition of both Telugu and English newspapers on a regular basis. The Manjeera Barrage on the River Manjeera and the Singur Reservoir, both located in Sangareddy, are of utmost importance, as the drinking water needs of the twin cities are met by pumping water through pipelines.

Unlike in the Andhra region, caste has not become commercialised in the form of caste-based fan associations for cinema actors. Despite having movie halls, there are no gigantic cut-outs of movie stars to show-off strength. But there is a clearly visible awareness over caste in the form of associations and federations of various Backward Classes (BC), Scheduled Castes (SC), and Scheduled Tribes (ST), along with religious minorities, in order to secure their rights.

But the reference of caste in order to identify people is very much evident in daily interactions not only among the public but also in case of stringers. Without use of the caste marker, people did not understand about whom one is referring to even during polite conversations and enquiries. Along with the caste or family name, location of house in the village along with ability/disability of that particular person is some other markers in identifying a person.³² During the fieldwork, I observed that a stringer from a dominant upper caste would be referred to as ‘patel’³³ in a respectful manner on par with government officials sometimes, while it is not the case with stringers from ‘service castes’.

In another incident that happened in Doultabad mandal, which is roughly 20 km away from Sangareddy, I had a first-hand experience of why Medak is placed on the ‘Red Corridor’³⁴ by police officials.

Based on information procured over mobile, rural in-charge of a Telugu daily from Andhra Pradesh, VVR decided to go to Doultabad as there was a search party from Bhubhaneswar looking for an alleged Maoist. He agreed to take me along with him to the spot. It turned out that a National Investigation Agency team has come to Chetlanarsampally village to gather details about the alleged Maoist from villagers. They enquired his mother who, on the other hand, went

³² Location markers will be based on distance to important places like temples and wells, among others.

³³ Despite the abolition of Patel-Patwari or Jajmani system in the early 1980s, people continue to use those terms in everyday language even today.

³⁴ Red Corridor is the name given to the region where there is high-incidence of the banned Maoist groups’ activity.

on pleading them if they have seen her son. They left the place leaving the villagers in a state of fear (Field notes, Sangareddy, 17 September 2014).

In fact, one of the earliest journalists to face a charge under the Terrorists and Disruptive Activities (Prevention) Act happens to be from Medak district in the year 1990. The journalist S. Ramalinga Reddy, reportedly, was tortured by the police and was detained for months in an undisclosed location (PUDR, 1992, p. 3). However, he went on to win an election as a Member of Parliament from Dubbaka of Medak district in 2014 and 2019 General Elections representing the TRS.

In the initial phase, after venturing into the field as part of research work in Sangareddy, I expected that there would be a sense of insecurity among stringers of newspapers whose managements or owners hail from or had roots in Andhra Pradesh. This anticipation arose from the aggressive stance taken up by the newly formed government in Telangana under the leadership of K. Chandrasekhar Rao of TRS, who publicly condemned the nature of content broadcast by two Telugu channels: TV9 and ABN Andhra Jyothi.³⁵

In a ‘newstainment’ bulletin, one of the channels had mocked Telangana legislators (across parties) for fumbling with words during oath-taking ceremony as MLAs in Telangana Assembly. This did not go well with the ruling party and, subsequently, the Multi-System Operators (MSOs) stopped airing these channels in Telangana. Journalists’ unions across the country protested against the government alleging that TRS was behind the MSOs in banning the channels and thereby curbing the ‘freedom of press’.³⁶

While I was in the field, the Telangana Chief Minister K. Chandrasekhara Rao made a remark stating that he will bury the media 10 km under the earth if they did not mend their ways and start respecting Telangana culture. This statement came in as a shocker to journalists across the country.³⁷ Much later, the ‘unofficial’ ban by MSOs was

³⁵ In a programme, a television anchor reading out a prepared script without any pauses mocked the Telangana legislators saying that they must have consumed toddy without brushing their teeth before taking part in the oath-taking ceremony in Telangana Assembly.

³⁶ See, <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/telangana/tv9-programmes-stopped-in-telangana/article6117539.ece>, <https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/news/national/abn-amp-tv9-ban-in-telangana-scribes-held-for-protest/article23120606.ece> [Last accessed on 15 December, 2020].

³⁷ <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india/will-bury-media-if-they-insult-telangana-kcr/story-Wuxvj01N9deWtZdwj5wsI.html> [Last accessed on 15 December, 2020].

lifted due to mounting pressure from across the country. In the following year, names of two noted newspapers of Communist Party of India (Marxist)'s *Prajasakti* and Communist Party of India's *Visalaandhra* changed their mastheads (title names) to *Nava Telangana* and *Mana Telangana* respectively. This measure, reportedly, was taken up to respect the wishes of their readers in Telangana.

However, even as stringers in Sangareddy and other mandals in Medak district were aware of these issues, they said that it had nothing to do with their work. "It doesn't affect my work directly. As long as I do my work as told by my newspaper's rural in-charge, I'm in a safe zone. Those are very big issues for us," replied PR, when asked about insecurity in the profession on a daily basis (Personal communication, 6 September 2014).

This response alerted me to make observations without any prejudice and more importantly to observe the profession from within the culture in which it is being practiced. More importantly, my identity as an outsider, especially as a person coming from the seemingly antagonistic region and settling down in Telangana, was left open to the discretion of stringers and bureau in-charges, as I was trying to observe their work and getting to know about their background.

Until the stringers took me into their confidence, I did not start the process of interviewing. The ways of knowing about establishing confidence among both parties was similar to that of the exercise in Gannavaram, as discussed earlier.

Highlighting that the entire process of interviewing as a spiritual exercise, Bourdieu (1996, p. 22) explained:

The sociologist may be able to impart to those interviewees who are furthest removed from her socially a feeling that they may legitimately be themselves, if she knows how to show them, both by her tone and, most especially, the content of her questions, that, without pretending to cancel the social distance which separates her from them (unlike the populist vision, which is blind to the reality of its own point of view), she is capable of *mentally putting herself in their place*. [Emphasis original]

I interviewed eight stringers and seven rural/bureau in-charges along with one English daily correspondent at different points during my fieldwork in Sangareddy and Medak

district. I attended one state-level meeting of working journalists across Telangana on 7 October, 2014 held at a private function hall (Pragnya Gardens) in Gajwel, Medak district. This programme provided me an opportunity to meet with stringers from other mandals of Medak and other districts.

Even in Sangareddy, most of the bureau in-charges talked about the language and culture aspects of Telangana. This was strikingly similar to those views expressed by the editorial and reporting staff in Gannavaram, with slight variation in tone. While stringers talked about the hardships they faced as part of the newswork, bureau in-charges stressed on the need to improve Telangana language while reporting for newspapers. Almost all of them expressed that it was high time they safeguarded their own language and culture, as some of the newspapers continued to use words which were from another region under the pretext of using standardised and ‘acceptable’ Telugu.³⁸

During one of the interactions, stringer and literary figure, SAK remarked:

Usually, short stories from Andhra region talk about fantasies like *company owner or boss reaching office in car as big as a ship, donning a suit and cigar in hand and so on. We* neither relate to such stories and incidents nor have any problem if *they* continue to live in such fantasies. We want to tell our own story (SAK, Personal communication, 1 October 2014).

He went on to explain me the politics of standardisation in/of language through newspapers by citing a commonly used headline in Telugu newspapers: *rājamundry central jail-lo khaidi parār*. Pointing out that there is not even a single Telugu word in the above headline, SAK said:

Rajahmundry is an anglicised version of Rajamahendravaram and central is an English word. The remaining words – *jail* (prison), *khaidi* (prisoner), and *parār* (escape) – are borrowed from Urdu language. *They* (Coastal Andhra people in general and Krishna district in particular) projected that theirs is authentic Telugu and *ours* is a dialect.

The field notes and observations supplemented the interviews and vice-versa to a great deal. These observations, just like I did in Gannavaram, helped me in

³⁸ Most oft-cited example is the case of buffalo. In Andhra region, a buffalo is written as ‘*gēde*’, while in Telangana it is spoken and written as ‘*barre*.’ One senior reporter lamented that a particular newspaper still insists on using ‘*gēde*’, while referring to buffalo in the main edition. This issue was discussed even in the journalists meet at Gajwel.

understanding: hierarchy in the journalistic field palpable in the everyday language; tacit coordination skills of stringers with their sources and ‘bosses’; processes of decision-making at the ground-level to zero in on a lead for a story; discretion and control that rural in-charges had over stringers, and many other things that may appear to be trivial for a stringer on a day-to-day basis.

The voice records of the interviews conducted during fieldwork were duly transcribed. After completing fieldwork at Sangareddy, I was convinced that the ethnographic method, which I was hesitant to adopt initially, is the only systematic process of study by observing the journalistic field on a first-hand basis. At the end of the fieldwork in Sangareddy, my primary data consisted of field notes, transcripts of interviews, profiles of 40 stringers, reporters, and editorial staff members, and transcripts of selected speeches by senior journalists and politicians in various journalist meetings held at Gajwel in Medak district and Nampally, Hyderabad. The secondary data included manuals prepared by the Press Academy of AP and Telangana for stringers, copies of working journalists’ unions and federations’ magazines such as *Working Journalist & Pratispandana* (Telugu, AP & TS), *Scribes News* (English, national) and biographies and autobiographies of Telugu journalists.

Coding and categorising data: A grounded theory approach

As the study is qualitative in nature, I took up the Grounded Theory (GT) approach to classify the data. GT is a methodology developed by Glaser and Strauss in which,

[T]heory is developed from close observation of the world. In contrast to formal or abstract theory, which is developed by deducing (according to logical rules) hypotheses which are then tested against observations, the Grounded approach argues for inductive theory building: that is, developing theoretical ideas from observation of data themselves (Marshall, 2004, p. 265).

This approach allowed researchers to develop a theoretical account of the general features of a topic while grounding the account in empirical observations or data. It involved a detailed, rigorous, and systematic method of analysis, which had the advantage of reserving the need for the researcher to conceive preliminary hypotheses. Accordingly, I followed the procedures outlined in this approach and

firstly administered open coding, followed by axial coding, and selective coding and finally organised the data into thematic categories.

Open coding in GT is an “analytic process through which concepts are identified and their properties and dimensions are discovered in data” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 101). Accordingly, I began the coding procedure, initially, with line-by-line analysis of the transcripts of interviews. As some of the responses were not logically falling in place, I decided to code the data by paragraphs and sentences that reflect certain phenomena. Since the idea was to build theory from the data, care was taken to avoid naming the codes based on existing or already informed theoretical concepts in this phase. GT suggested that labelling codes with borrowed concepts can have a grave disadvantage. More importantly, it should be noted that even after systematically breaking, some of the codes are not watertight.

Axial coding is the “process of relating categories to their subcategories, termed “axial” because coding occurs around the axis of a category, linking categories at the level of properties and dimensions” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 123). Following this process, the data was organised in new ways after open coding to make connections and finally come up with thematic categories by integrating the codes. In this part, the data (both field notes and interview responses) was organised as per the codes. Wherever necessary, the responses were translated into English (for convenience), mentioning the source (respondent name) and time of interview.

Finally, the axial codes are integrated into thematic categories, which formed the core chapters of this thesis. This procedure allowed me to travel between data and theory multiple times in an organised manner than getting lost in the data mine, which was earlier in the form of transcripts and unorganised field notes.

Rationale for choosing Gannavaram (AP) and Sangareddy (TS)

As mentioned earlier, after completing a pilot study in Gannavaram before venturing into full-fledged research work, I had decided to focus on mofussil areas to understand the work of stringers. There were some changes in the administrative boundaries of states and districts, which I mentioned throughout this chapter.

Fieldwork in Gannavaram was done before Andhra Pradesh was bifurcated into two states: Telangana and Andhra Pradesh (residual). At the time of fieldwork, even as it was not official, the bifurcation of Andhra Pradesh was imminent. However, I chose to carry out research at Gannavaram, as it is a mofussil area located just outside the city limits of Vijayawada. Moreover, regardless of the bifurcation, Vijayawada was considered as ‘print capital’ of undivided Andhra Pradesh with all major Telugu newspapers and publishing houses having edition centres and headquarters in the city.

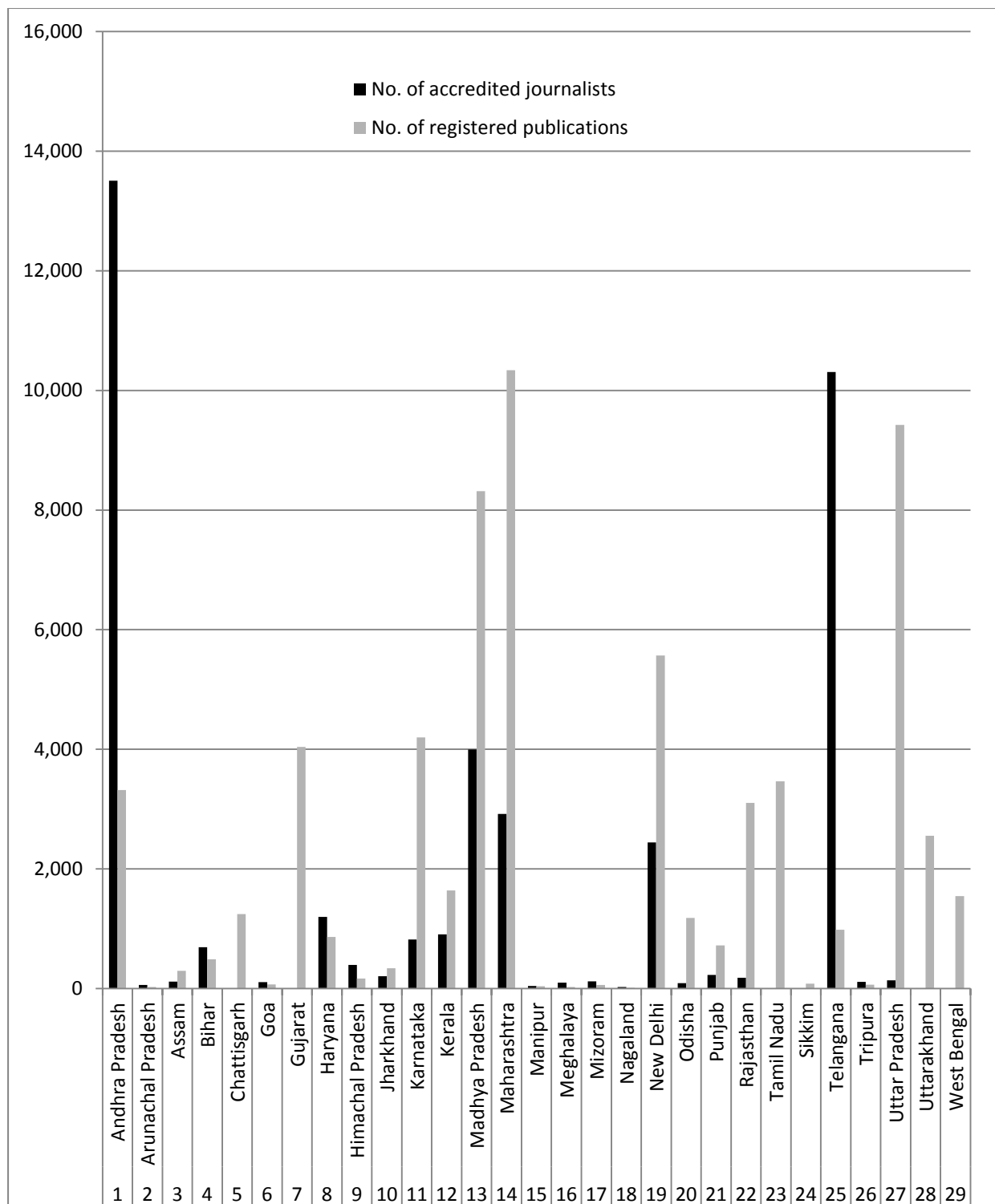
Even after the bifurcation of the state, Hyderabad was declared as ‘common capital’ for both the states. However, the Andhra Pradesh government has passed the Andhra Pradesh Capital Region Development Authority Act, 2014, which came into force from 30 December, 2014 (GoAP, 2014). Subsequently, the AP government announced – Amaravati – a new capital for the state (GoAP, 2015). Even after having considered these developments in Andhra Pradesh, the rationale for choosing Gannavaram, as a mofussil site to conduct research holds good, due to its location.³⁹ Coming to the site of research in Telangana, at the time of fieldwork, Medak district was not trifurcated. As part of my ethnographic work, I travelled across Medak district with stringers and reporters. Even as the district was trifurcated, the rationale for choosing Sangareddy as a mofussil area holds good. Given these developments, throughout this work, I will mention Medak and Sangareddy districts interchangeably.

More importantly, AP and Telangana were ranked one and two respectively for having the most number of accredited journalists in the country (See, Graph: 2.1). The issue of accreditation is crucial in understanding stringers and their news labour, and thereby it will be discussed throughout the study in detail.

³⁹ From Amaravati, Gannavaram is located at a distance of 37 km. However, in January 2020, GoAP has passed a legislation trifurcating the AP capital: Amaravati: legislative capital; Visakhapatnam: executive capital; Kurnool: judicial capital (GoAP, 2020).

Graph: 2.1

State-wise numbers of accredited journalists and registered publications in India.



Source: Various state government websites & Registrar for Newspapers of India website.

Note: The reasons for the abnormal numbers of accredited journalists in AP and TS, numbers, and sources will be explained and presented in chapter 6. Details of the accredited journalists in Chattisgarh, Gujarat, Tamil Nadu, Sikkim, Uttarakhand and West Bengal were not available.

Demographic and socioeconomic profile of Gannavaram, AP

Krishna district came into existence in the year 1859 in the composite Madras state which was then known as Masulipatnam district since Machilipatnam (Bandar) is the district headquarters. According to the Census 2011 report (DCO, Krishna District, 2011a, p. 8):

Krishna district derived its name from the mighty river Krishna which is also known as the “Blue Nile of the Deccan.” The river Krishna has profound bearing on the cultural and economic life of people living in its delta. Since the residuary Krishna district did not undergo any major jurisdictional changes except in a minor way in 1925, 1950 and 1959. In 1959 Munagala Paragana which was abridged to Krishna district in 1950 was transferred to Nalgonda district for administrative convenience.

The district is located on the eastern side of Andhra Pradesh on the Coromandel Coast of the Bay of Bengal with 88 km coastline. It is bounded on the East by the Bay of Bengal and West Godavari district, South also by the Bay of Bengal and Guntur district. On the West, it is contiguous with Guntur and Nalgonda districts and on the North by Khammam district. The district is divided into four major revenue divisions. They are: Bandar, Gudivada, Vijayawada, and Nuzivid.

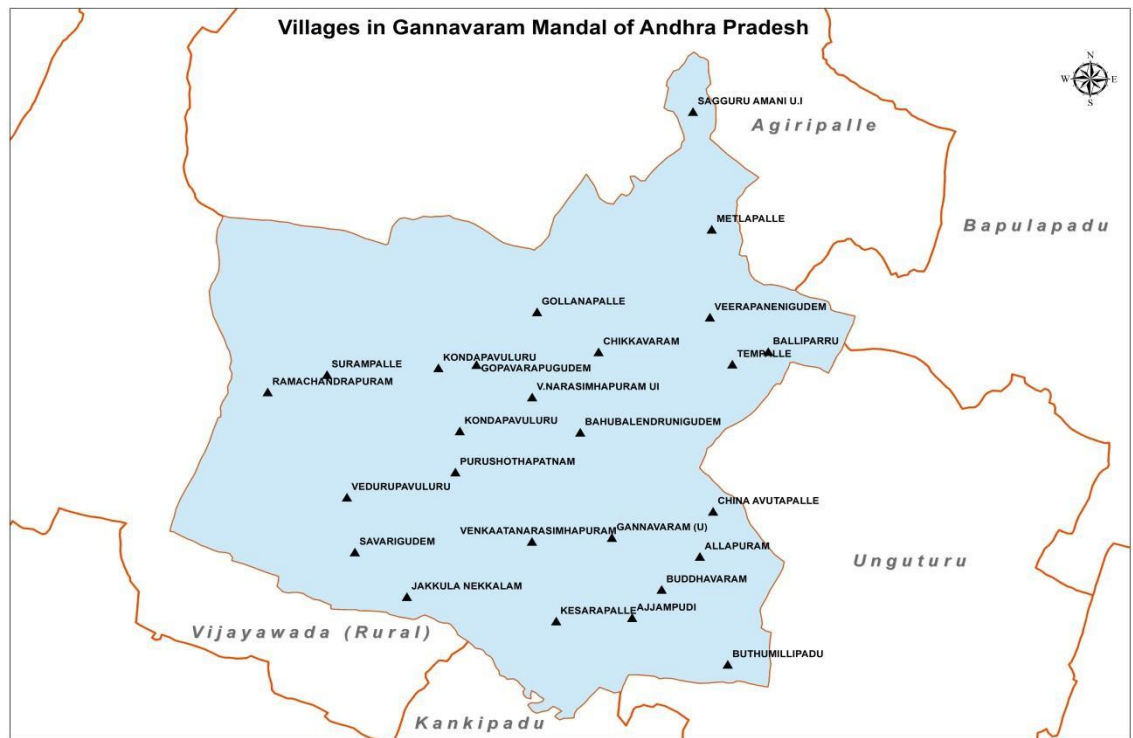
Gannavaram – a mandal which falls under the Nuzivid administrative division in Krishna District, Andhra Pradesh – is located on the arterial National Highway-5 (Chennai-Kolkata). Roughly 16 km away from Vijayawada city, it is one of the fastest developing assembly constituencies in the district. There are 23 villages and one hamlet (Savarigudem) in this mandal with an estimated population of 87,027 (DCO, Krishna District, 2011, p. 460). Gannavaram is surrounded by Agiripalle mandal on the North and Vijayawada Rural on the West. Bapulapadu and Kankipadu mandals surround Gannavaram on the East and South respectively.

The NH-5 divides the mandal with upland (*metta*) area on one side and delta area on the other. The Gannavaram Airport, built during World War II, is located on the upland side in Kesarapalli village. However, Gannavaram never witnessed industrialisation, except for one small-scale industrial estate at Surampalle, due to strong presence of left parties and labour unionism. Other major commercial activities apart from irrigation and quarrying are aqua culture, sericulture, and hatcheries.

GANNAVARAM MANDAL (VILLAGES)

Map 2.2

Source: Centre for Economic and Social Studies, Hyderabad.



There were efforts in the early 1980s to establish an industrial estate, under the aegis of Andhra Pradesh Electronics Development Corporation Limited (APEDCL), to catch up with the then electronics or semi-conductor boom on the lines of Electronics City in Bangalore. But this initiative never took off in this part of the state. “With a view to achieve balanced Regional Growth APEL is developing industrial estates at Gannavaram near Vijayawada and Karakambadi near Tirupati and Toopran near Hyderabad,” read an advertisement in the *Economic and Political Weekly* in 1992 (APEDCL, 1992, p. 778). However, the corporation’s operations were under liquidation.⁴⁰

Residents of the upland area are completely dependent on the Brahmayya Lingam cheruvu that has a storage capacity of two thousand million cubic feet (TMC) nestled

⁴⁰ See, profile of the APEDCL in <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/company/andhra-pradesh-electronics-development-corporation-ltd-/U32100TG1980SGC002852> [Last accessed on 15 December, 2020].

in the middle of the mountains. This massive natural water tank with an area of more than one thousand acres has an ayacut of nearly 10-12 thousand acre. Located by the side of Brahmayya Lingam cheruvu, was another naturally formed tank by name Sagguru amani, with a water spread area of 200 acre. As there was no presence of any settlements or hamlets near the lake, the lake is pristine. In and around 30 towns rely upon this lake water for their development, including for agriculture.

Cotton, groundnut, vegetables and mango orchards are the major crops in this part of the mandal. This part of the mandal is one of the most sought-after real estate areas in the district, as an IT park on the lines of Hitec city (Hyderabad Information Technology and Engineering Consultancy City) of Hyderabad is established. Stone quarrying is also one of the important commercial activities. Across the highway, the delta part of the mandal, which gets water from Eluru canal on a regular basis, is a paddy-rich area. Farmers will have a minimum of two crops of paddy in *rabi* and *khari* seasons of the year.

Perhaps there is no better way to put it than how K. Balagopal describes the towns on the NH-5 in the coastal Andhra region. Capturing the essence of political economy of the region, he (1984, p. 1901) noted:

On either side of the route are villages laid end upon end, many of them really small towns; with neatly thatched and tiled houses, and quite a few good buildings, they do not seem to be part of this land of the wretched; but the pride of place is taken by the twin symbols of coastal Andhra: cinema halls that look like rice-mills and rice-mills that look like cinema halls, give or take a chimney stack. The resemblance will no doubt offend any decent architect, but it is true to its salt, for all the surplus that is generated by the delta agriculture goes in exactly two directions: agro-based industry and trade, and film production, distribution and exhibition.

On the political front, Gannavaram was a bastion of the Communist Party of India (Marxist) till the advent of Telugu Desam Party (TDP) in 1983. From then the political contest has been between Congress (I) and TDP with CPI (M) playing a crucial role in forging alliances. However, left parties are fast losing their hold in this area.⁴¹

⁴¹ Puchalapalli Sudarayya, the chief architect of the contestable political geography *Viśālāndhra* (not to be confused with the newspaper *Visalaandhra*) was elected thrice (1955, 1962, 1978) for the

It was obvious that a lion's share of wealth got generated from agriculture and allied businesses in this part of Andhra Pradesh. Explaining about the accumulation of wealth by a particular dominant caste, which he labelled as 'propertied class', Balagopal (1984, p. 1901) further noted:

This wealth resides in a class, a class that is predominantly (but by no means exclusively) Kamma by caste and agrarian in its origins, which came of age in the period of the nationalist movement and the agrarian struggles against the Zamindars and the British Raj. These struggles that attended its birth have also given it the largest share of participation in radical movements; socialism, rationalism, atheism, communism, and Radical Humanism — you name the heterodoxy and they have seen it. Over the period, they have also grown substantially rich, and have multiplied their riches since the Green Revolution. But while wealth has come their way, they have been systematically kept out of the prime seats of power at Hyderabad. They lost it symbolically when they had to concede the name Visalandhra (in favour of the Hindi-ised Andhra Pradesh) for the state for which they fought the hardest, and had to simultaneously concede their demand for making Vijayawada the capital city: and they lost it substantially as part of the general 'Congress culture' of keeping the economically dominant classes and communities in the states away from the seats of political power.

Even though both Gannavaram mandal and constituency are traditionally dominated by Kamma community leaders, there was a strong numerical presence of Yadava, Muslim, Christian, Mala and Madiga communities. The percentage of population of Scheduled Castes was 25.93 per cent, while Scheduled Tribe population comprised 2.25 per cent of the total population (DCO, 2011a, p. 84).

The mandal recorded a very healthy sex ratio with a number of 1,016 for 1,000 males (DCO, 2011a, p. 68). Gannavaram mandal had an average literacy rate of 74 per cent. While the percentage of male literacy is 78, female literacy percentage is 70 (DCO, 2011a, p. 94). This figure was slightly above the average literacy in Krishna district, which stands at 73.74 per cent. The percentage of male literacy was 78.3, while female literacy is 69.18 per cent (DCO, 2011a, p. 96). The biggest village in terms of area was Vedurupavuluru with an area of 2,903 hectare, while the smallest was

AP Legislative Assembly from Gannavaram. Notable luminaries from Gannavaram include former People's War Group leader and revolutionary poet K.G. Satyamurthy (popular as *udyama nelabāluḍu*) and modern Telugu poet Viswanatha Satyanarayana.

Buthumillipadu with an area of 97 hectare (DCO, 2011a, p. 460). Bus service was available to all villages within a distance of 5 km.

Major religious centres in this mandal were Mustabada Mosque, Joseph Thambi Church at Peda Avutapalli village and Brahmayya Lingam Temple at Chikkavaram village. The NTR College of Veterinary Sciences is located in Gannavaram. The mandal has many private, aided and government schools (including social welfare hostels) at the primary and secondary education levels. Apart from aided degree colleges, the mandal had medical, dental, nursing, veterinary and engineering private professional colleges.

Local issues that frequently made their way into the newspaper were: political, irrigation and agriculture, real estate ventures, dignitaries at the airport, the airport, highway accidents, crimes, protests, *rasta roko* (block the road) and Brahmayya Lingam cheruvu.

Demographic and socioeconomic profile of Sangareddy, TS

The district derived its name from Medak, the then headquarters town of taluk of the same name. Medak was originally known as Methukudurgam which subsequently changed into *metuku* (rice) due to the growth of fine rice in this area. Medak district became part of the Kakatiya Kingdom to the Bahmani Kingdom and later the Golkonda Kingdom. Finally on the fall of the Qutb Shahi dynasty it was annexed to the Mughal Empire. During the formation of Hyderabad State by Asaf Jahi, this district was detached and included in the Nizam's Dominions (DCO, 2011b, p. 4).

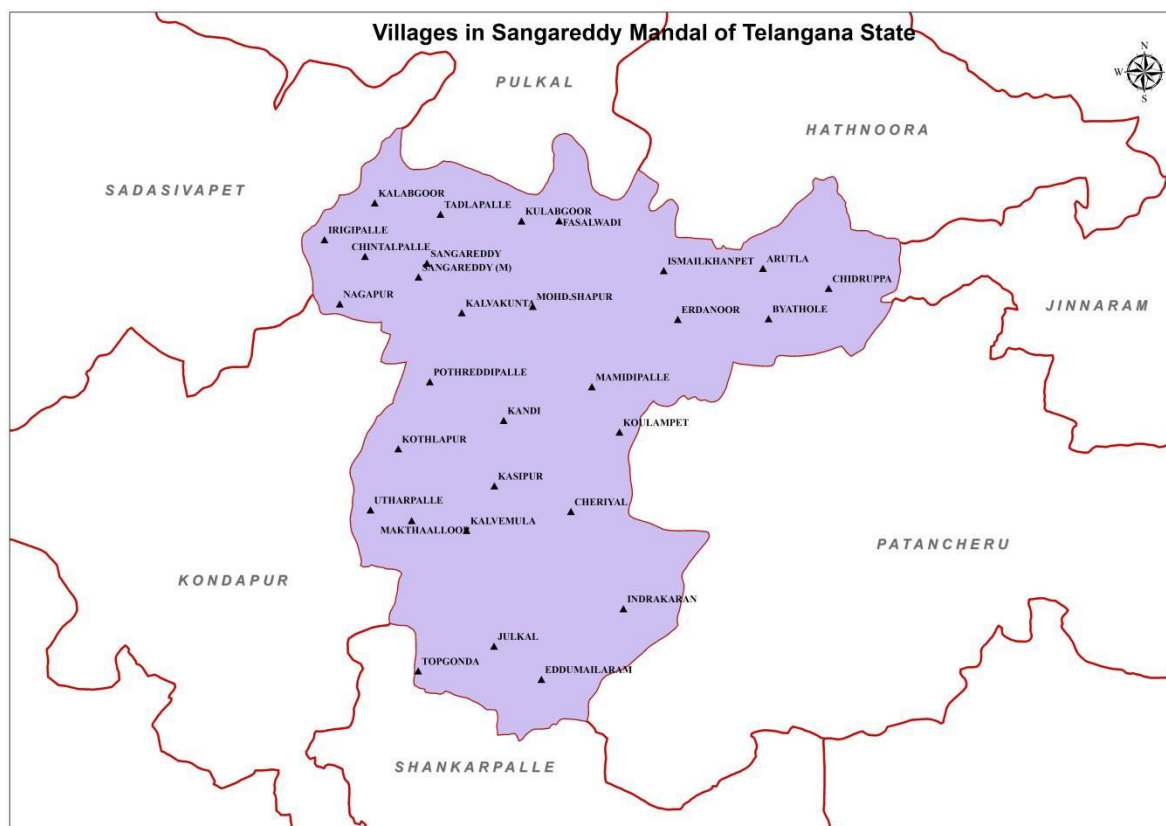
The Nizam's dominions became a part of Indian Union in 1948 as Part-B State and in 1956 during the reorganisation of States, the Hyderabad State was trifurcated, with the nine predominantly Telugu speaking districts of Mahbubnagar, Hyderabad, Medak, Nizamabad, Adilabad, Karimnagar, Warangal, Khammam and Nalgonda (known as the Telangana region) were transferred to Andhra Pradesh. Major portions of predominantly Kannada speaking districts of Raichur, Gulbarga and Bidar were transferred to Karnataka State, while the Marathwada comprised the five districts of Aurangabad, Osmanabad, Bhir, Parbhani, Nanded and a portion of Bidar which was predominantly Marathi speaking and was transferred to Maharashtra State. These changes were effected on 1 November, 1956 under the scheme of Re-organisation of States (DCO, 2011b, p. 2), subsequently became part of Telangana with effect from June 2, 2014. The district was further trifurcated into Medak, Siddipet, and Sangareddy districts in 2016. Accordingly, Sangareddy district has three revenue divisions – Sangareddy, Narayankhed, and Zaheerabad. Sangareddy mandal, with 25 villages, comes under the Sangareddy division.

Sangareddy district has an inter-state border with Karnataka on the West. The neighbouring districts of Sangareddy are Kamareddy, Medak, Medchal, Rangareddy, and Vikarabad in Telangana. Sangareddy mandal shares a boundary with Pulkal and Hathnoora mandals on the North, Jinnaram and Patancheru on the East. Sadashivpet and Kondapur mandals share boundary with Sangareddy on the West, while Shankarpalle mandal is on the South of Sangareddy mandal. The total population of Sangareddy district stands at 15, 27, 628, with a Scheduled Caste population of 18.13 per cent and Scheduled Tribes 5.67 per cent (GoT, 2016a, p. 1).

Map 2.4

SANGAREDDY MANDAL (VILLAGES)

Source: Centre for Economic and Social Studies, Hyderabad.



The sex ratio in Sangareddy mandal stood at 955 females for 1,000 males. Sangareddy mandal had an average literacy rate of 75.16 per cent. While the percentage of male literacy was 83.55, female literacy percentage was 66.77 (DCO, 2011b, p. 93). This figure was above the average literacy in Sangareddy district, which was at 64.08 per cent. The percentage of male literacy is 73.02, while female literacy was 54.84 per cent (GoT, 2016a, p. 1). The biggest village in terms of area was Kandi with an area of 1,790 hectare, while the smallest was Koulampet with an area of 102 hectare (DCO, 2011b, p. 890).

Manjeera, a tributary of the River Godavari is an important drainage flowing in the district on which the Nizam Sagar dam was constructed. The other important streams are Haldi and Kudalair which flow in the Eastern half of the district (DCO, 2011b, p. 16). While on a drive on the National Highway – 65 or Hyderabad-Sholapur Highway that connects Hyderabad to Sangareddy, the moment one crosses Bharat Heavy

Electricals Limited at Ramachandrapuram, he or she enters one of Asia's largest Special Economic Zone (SEZ): Industrial Development Area (IDA), Patancheru. One cannot miss the ubiquitous presence of pharmaceutical, industrial chemicals, forest produce, ceramic, polymer, pipes & tubes, wires & cables, and alloys industries among others on either side of the highway.

The 'other side of industrialisation' in the IDA, Patancheru or Patancheru SEZ, is quite depressing, to say the least (Vijay, 2003, pp. 5026-5030). Talking about the perils of development that resulted in Patancheru after giving permissions to establish industrial units that flout environmental guidelines in this part of Sangareddy district, former civil servant E. A. S. Sarma lamented:

The industrial units in an SEZ would not only drain surface and groundwater resources at the expense of the local communities, but also their effluents could pollute the local water bodies. The industrial estate at Patancheru is a standing example of what could happen, if stringent environmental norms are not enforced (Sarma, 2007, p. 1901).

The civil servant went on to say that this was a clear attitude of "Help the Rich, Hurt the Poor" on the part of successive governments that made Patancheru one of the most dubious cases of perils of 'development.' He (2007, p. 1901) opined that SEZs are imposed on the local people without any prior consultation. Whenever the displaced persons opposed the location of an SEZ, their dissent had been termed "anti-development" and crushed mercilessly with the iron hand of the developmental State.

Talking about the environmental pollution that pharmaceutical companies have created in this part of the world, Stan Cox in *Sick Planet: Corporate Food and Medicine* observed:

Clearly, the drug companies have no intention of calling off their quest to accelerate the growth of pill-popping. That means more trouble ahead, and not just for the patient. In recent years, the pharmaceutical industry has become so tightly integrated across the planet that a patient in Madison, Wisconsin is connected directly through doctors, pharmacists, and sales reps from companies based in New Jersey or North Carolina or Switzerland to ingredient suppliers in India and China, and through them, to workers and farmers in some of the world's most impoverished and polluted places. One such place is Patancheru, India (2008, p. 33).

Perhaps, the best possible way to describe the sorry state of affairs about the IDA in Patancheru, which was just 23 km away from Sangareddy zero milestone, in Cox's (2008, p. 37) own words, was: "The word "Patancheru" has acquired multiple meanings: a lake, a town, a region, and, in more recent years, an ecological catastrophe."

While the situation on the eastern side of Sangareddy district is described in Kafkaesque prose, around 62 km on the NH-65, Pastapur village in Zahirabad mandal, which is on the western side of Sangareddy, presents a poetic voice for struggle against globalisation and for autonomy over food production, seeds, natural resources, market, and, more importantly, community media by a women collective (*Sangham*), under the aegis of Deccan Development Society (DDS) for more than three and a half decades.

Established in 2008, the Sangham Radio at Pastapur is India's first community-owned and community-operated radio station managed, principally, by a group of Dalit women.⁴² The Pastapur Declaration (2000), which happened to be a watershed initiative in the annals of community radio movement in India, took shape in Sangareddy (erstwhile Medak) district. The declaration urged Government of India "to take the current government policy of freeing broadcasting from state monopoly to its logical conclusion by expanding the available media space and permitting communities and organisations representing them to run their own radio stations" (Pavarala & Malik, 2007, pp. 281-282).

Local issues that frequently make it to the district as well as main editions of newspapers include: development and workers' union issues surrounding IDA, news and press releases from the district collectorate including government initiatives, accidents and deaths on NH-65, agriculture and irrigation, school education, health and sanitation, and fauna in and around the Manjeera Wildlife Sanctuary among others. Most of the events or developing news emerging out prestigious institutes like Indian Institute of Technology-Hyderabad and ICRISAT were covered by special correspondents from Hyderabad, while stringers from Sangareddy either follow up the next day or cover 'sidelights' of such news stories.

⁴² See, <http://www.ddsindia.com/www/default.asp> [Last accessed on 15 December, 2020].

CHAPTER 3

SOCIETY, POLITY, AND JOURNALISM: A CONCEPTUAL UNDERSTANDING FROM THE FIELD

A field is a structured social space, a field of forces, a force field. It contains people who dominate and others who are dominated. Constant, permanent relationships of inequality operate inside this space, which at the same time becomes a space in which the various actors struggle for the transformation or preservation of the field.

– Pierre Bourdieu, 1998a, p. 40.

Those were the days when I was struggling to establish myself as a journalist. They used to call me Universal Correspondent since I had no authority to represent any particular publication. Still, I was busy from morning till night, moving about on my bicycle or on my neighbour Sambu's scooter. I was to be seen here and there, at municipal meetings, magistrate's court, the prize distribution at Albert Mission, with a reporter's notebook in hand and a fountain pen peeping out of my shirt pocket. I reported all kinds of activities, covering several kilometres a day on my vehicle, and ended up at the railway station to post my despatch in the mail van with a late fee – a lot of unwarranted rush, as no news-editor sat fidgeting for my copy at the other end; but I enjoyed my self-appointed role, and felt pleased even if a few lines appeared in print as a space-filler somewhere.

I did not have to depend on journalistic work for my survival. I belonged to one of those Kabir Street families which flourished on the labours of an earlier generation. We were about twenty unrelated families in Kabir Street, each having inherited a huge rambling house stretching from the street to the river at the back. [...] This sort of existence did not appeal to me. I liked to be active, had dreams of becoming a journalist, I can't explain why. I rarely stayed at home; luckily I was a bachelor

– Rasipuram Krishnaswami (RK) Narayan, 2010, pp. 3-4.

Introduction

Stringers with whom I interacted during the course of my fieldwork did not have the conflict and struggle-free lifestyle that one enjoyed in celebrated Indian novelist and literary figure R.K. Narayan's work mentioned above – *Talkative Man*.¹ As

¹R.K. Narayan himself was a stringer/contributor based in Mysore city in Mysore state (now Karnataka). He used to dispatch his reports to The Justice, an English language newspaper run by the

documented in the previous chapter, most of the stringers came from modest backgrounds and joined the profession to eke out a living. They did not have the lofty ideals that the talkative man narrated about his journalistic work in a conflict-free and idyllic fictional small-town Malgudi, as he soliloquised: “The journalist has to be in the thick of it whatever the situation – he acts as the eye for humanity” (Narayan, 2010, p. 31).

For most of the stringers, the profession served as a means of subsistence rather than a leisure activity to make the world a better place. However, the notion of “journalist has to be in the thick of it” along with fidgeting editorial personnel and their interventions held appropriate during my observations in the field, as newswork involved stringers negotiating with different agents in the society (immediate locality), interacting with reporting staffers/heads, and editorial person in the work day. An understanding of newswork by stringers requires an assimilation of the knowledge of cultural settings, social contexts, practices, and structures from within and outside of the field. This framework draws from Carey (2009, p. 12), who conceptualised the study of communication processes that focus on the cultural aspects as “ritual view”.

Reflecting on ‘thick description’, borrowed from Gilbert Ryle, while doing ethnography and analysing ethnographic data, cultural anthropologist Geertz (1973, p. 10) wrote:

What the ethnographer is in fact faced with except when (as, of course, he must do) he is pursuing the more automatized routines of data collection – is a multiplicity of complex conceptual structures, many of them superimposed upon or knotted into one another, which are at once strange, irregular, and inexplicit, and which he must contrive somehow first to grasp and then to render. And this is true at the most down-to-earth, jungle field work levels of his activity: interviewing informants, observing rituals, eliciting kin terms, tracing property lines, censusing households . . . writing his journal . Doing ethnography is like trying to read (in the sense of “construct a reading of”) a manuscript – foreign, faded, full of ellipses, incoherencies, suspicious

Justice Party, dedicated to fighting for the rights of non-Brahmins in the former Madras state (now Tamil Nadu). Narayan was a Tamil Brahmin and extended his support to the Justice Party in Tamil Nadu (Pandian, 2002, pp. 1735-1741; Ramanan, 2014, pp. 68-91). I thank Prof. Mohan G. Ramanan for pointing me towards this short novel, which he suggested was a semi-autobiographical account of Narayan himself.

emendations, and tendentious commentaries, but written not in conventionalised graphs of sound but in transient examples of shaped behaviour.

This reflection served as an invaluable guiding principle while doing ethnographic research in the field, sorting out the primary data, triangulating various data sets for analytical purposes, and even while writing. Accordingly, this chapter provides an analysis of the process of newswork, social and material conditions in which it took place using descriptive primary data, interviews, and secondary literature.

The following was an ethnographic sketch of some of the people, places, languages, and situations that I encountered in the field. This description was considered necessary before presenting an understanding of the journalistic practices of stringers in small towns addressing the research questions: What are the social hierarchies in the spaces in which stringers operate? How do the various forms of hierarchy manifest in everyday life? What are the political forces that stringers constantly negotiate in their everyday work?

In the process of answering the above questions, this chapter simultaneously offers a conceptual basis for understanding the issues of: a) social identities and recruitment practices; b) discrimination within and without the journalistic field; c) ownership patterns and their relation to the news production; d) material conditions of news labour. These will be discussed in the remaining part of this work.

Understanding physical space and social space in the field

On the way to Gannavaram from Vijayawada on the NH-16, there were vast sheets of green farmlands at a distance on either side of the highway along with state- of-the-art automobile showrooms and service centres that have mushroomed in swanky commercial complexes situated closer towards the highway. There were private engineering & junior colleges, and a Best Price-Walmart wholesale store and occasional '*dhabas*' (eating joints on highways) on the way. After crossing the Medha IT Park and the NTR College of Veterinary Science on the left and the Vijayawada International Airport² at Gannavaram on the right, I took a left after reaching Gandhi

² At the time of research, the airport was a domestic terminal with four flights per day. The airport was refurbished and renamed as an international airport in 2017. The veterinary college was named

Bomma (statue) Centre to reach Gannavaram centre. If the IT Park, multinational FMCG store, commercial complexes, and an airport were considered signs of globalising India, the story of neo-liberal modernity ended at the Gannavaram centre, as a statue of Gandhi with his walking stick welcomed the passers-by to the mandal.³

The Gannavaram mandal or town, referred interchangeably, was neither urban nor rural in its character. If one were to associate modernity with the principle of egalitarianism, the town was not modern, as the residential localities and housing patterns were divided on caste lines. Each caste tended to occupy a solid block of contiguous houses in a lane or locality. The forward castes named their colonies as Ram Nagar colony, Raya Nagar colony, Srinagar colony, and Subba Rao Nagar colony.⁴ And there was another VN Puram colony in Kesarapally village, in which forward caste people resided. The rest of the villages were inhabited on the basis of castes classified under Backward Castes (BCs) or Other Backward Classes (OBC) category with a handful of forward caste houses at the centre of villages near a school (*baḍi*) or temple (*guḍi*), while the Scheduled Caste (SC) colonies and Ambedkar colonies were scattered on the fringes of villages in the mandal. There was one Savarigudem in Gannavaram mandal that was exclusively inhabited by the Sugali (Scheduled Tribe) community.⁵

It was not only the housing and residential localities that were differentiated on the basis of caste and community but also the places of worship. There were Ramalayams (temple of Lord Rama) for each caste in different villages and localities. The notable ones were Kammavari Ramalayam, Tagarula, Yadavula, Razakula, Kapula, and Gouda Ramalayams in the villages of Gannavaram mandal and town. The Kodanda Ramalayam was the oldest temple in the mandal, which does not have any caste-tag attached to it. There was Kanyaka Parameswari temple, which was open to everyone but built by Vysya community persons. Similarly, the foundation plaques of all these

after late chief minister of Andhra Pradesh, founder of the TDP, and thespian Nandamuri Taraka Rama Rao (NTR).

³ Notably, in most villages Ambedkar and Jagjivan Ram statues are found in 'SC colonies' or 'labour colonies' or 'Ambedkar colonies', as they were referred to as, in the Telugu speaking states.

⁴ It was interesting to note that the names of residential localities ending with 'Nagar' (which translates as city; space or abode for civilians) were most of the times inhabited by affluent and forward castes. The words *nagaram*, *nāgarikata* (civilisation), *nāgarikulu* (civilised persons or civilians) share a common root word: *nagar*.

⁵ There was one Sagguruamani in Gannavaram, which was a revenue village. Only during the daytime agricultural labourers worked there and left by evening as there were no residential houses.

Ramalayams revealed that they were built by raising donations with a significant contribution made by an affluent person(s)/family from that particular community. Even the churches were said to be differentiated on the basis of class and caste in Gannavaram. Unlike in the case of temples, there were no visible caste-based markers of churches in the form of plaque or names. During the time of research, I could observe that a majority of Christians converted from forward castes such as Brahmin, Kamma, Kapu, and Reddy to Roman Catholic Missionary (RCM) churches, while Christians from the Dalit (mostly the Malas and the Madigas belonging to SC category) and Bahujan (OBCs) communities frequented Lutheran, Telugu Baptist, and Pentecostal churches (not necessarily in the order mentioned).⁶

The case of Sangareddy in Telangana appeared similar in terms of segregation of geographical locations on the basis of social differentiation but the castes and communities were obviously different from that of Gannavaram. While the multinational pharmaceutical companies along with regional, national and international institutes of research and education indicated influx of global capital, the social geography of the town mirrored the differentiations based on the lines of religion. If the religious minority (not in numbers but in terms of stakes in various spheres) community in Gannavaram was Christian, it was the Muslim community in Sangareddy. Even as most of the residential colonies had people from various communities and castes, the town was divided into two parts: old and new. And it was the new bus stand that stood at the centre dividing the town.

Ahmed Nagar was the biggest colony in ‘older’ (*pāta*) part of Sangareddy,⁷ which was associated with the Muslim community, while Shanti Nagar was the biggest colony in the new Sangareddy town. The Muslims from lower economic strata were

⁶ I thank Santhi Swaroop Sirapangi, a doctoral researcher from the department of political science, University of Hyderabad for pointing this aspect to me. He was carrying out fieldwork on the topic – “Caste, Religion, and Discrimination: The Case of Dalit Christians in Coastal Andhra Pradesh” – at the time of my fieldwork. For more details on the aspects of caste and tribal issues within Christianity, see Robinson and Kujur (eds) (2010); Webster (2012); Kumar (2015).

⁷ Medak *Subedar* (revenue inspector) during the sixth Nizam rule, Framurz Jung’s (1909, pp. 36-40) description of physical features of the Sangareddipet (previous name of Sangareddy) was relevant and valid even after a century since the time of writing, especially the court complex, medical dispensary, police station, revenue building in the ghurry (*gaḍi*) walls. A ghurry (stone structure) or *gaḍi* was the power centre of provincial administration during the Nizamian rule and had loaded feudal tone associated with it in popular and political parlances. The physical traces of the *gaḍi* walls were still visible at the time of research.

located in Nalsabgadda and Meeda (Upper⁸) Bazaar areas, while the rich and upper middle class households from the same community were scattered across the town.⁹ Most of the masjids (Islamic worship places) were located in the older part with the biggest and oldest being Jama Masjid. On the other hand, temples were located in both parts. There were colonies bearing caste names such as: Brahman Wada, Mudiraj Colony, Golla Gudem, and Vaddera basti (colony).¹⁰ Middle-class Hindu households were, predominantly, located in Bhavani Nagar, Ram Nagar, Prashanth Nagar, Sanjeev Nagar, Someshwarwada, Veerabhadra Nagar, and Shivaji Nagar.

Moreover, I observed a strong presence of *śaivism* (Shaivite; worship of Lord *śiva*) tradition with statues of Lord Basaweshwar (seen with a sword riding on the back of a white horse) at the entrances of villages in and around Sangareddy mandal and town areas.¹¹ There were many temples of Lord Shiva at different places in the town itself reinforcing the tradition. These temples and statues appeared to be powerful reminders indicating the proximity of the region with Karnataka.¹² There was a considerable population of the Lingayats, who act as priests in some temples, in this region (Robinson, 1988, p. 65).

⁸ This should not be confused with the Uppara (also known as Sagara) caste, which was classified under OBC category. *Mīda* (*meeda*) in Telugu means on top/on/over/upon (depending on the context); here in this case: 'upper'. Locals referred to it as Meeda Bazaar, while the official records documented it as Upper Bazaar. See, <https://www.cdma.telangana.gov.in/election/GO%20158%20-%20SANGAREDDY%20MUNICIPALITY.pdf> [Last accessed on 15 December, 2020].

⁹ Even though the buildings (posh independent ones and multi-storeyed) belonging to affluent persons from Muslim community were located next to the Hindu houses, one striking similarity about the houses were the presence of strong grilled-gate made of iron screened with fibre or metal sheet. This could be seen as a move to 'secure' or 'fortify' their house in case of any religion based clashes. Sangareddy had a history of communal violence with the latest such incident occurring in the month of March, 2012.

¹⁰ Mudiraj, Vaddera, and Golla/Kuruma (often used Yadav as last name) castes were classified under OBC category.

¹¹ Also known as Basavanna, Lord Basaweshwar along his wife Neelambika propagated the message of equality by raising voice against the gender and social discrimination in society by spreading *śaivism* in 12th century A.D. The Lingayat saint's social philosophy and life story was documented by one of the earliest Telugu poets Palkuriki Somanatha (Rao and Roghair, 1990).

¹² Karnataka was carved out of the Hyderabad State, Maharashtra (Bombay Presidency), and Mysore princely state. Even now regions in Karnataka were referred to as: Hyderabad Karnataka (Kalyana Karnataka), Bombay Karnataka, and Mysore Karnataka. The Hyderabad-Karnataka region shares a border with Sangareddy district. North Eastern Karnataka Road Transport Corporation (*īśānya Karnataka sārige*) buses plying on NH-65 was a common sight at any given point of the day/night.

As part of the Saivite tradition, there was a strong feminine worshipping cult in the form of Renuka Yellamma¹³, Nalla Pochamma, Chowdamma Thalli, and Katta Maisamma (deities that ward off evil spirits and diseases, and secure water bodies). The Edthanur *tandā* (hamlet), located on the outskirts of Sangareddy, had two temples of Chowdamma (a descendent of Lord Shiva) one each for the Mala and the Madiga castes. Kanyaka Parameswari temple located at Sadashivpet was built by Vysyas, as the goddess residing in the temple is their *kula daivam* (caste deity). On the other hand, the relatively new religious structure Sri Vaikuntapuramu Temple along with Goshalas (Hindu cow shelters) located outside the Sangareddy town that was related to the *vaiṣṇavam* (Vaishnavite tradition; worship of Lord Vishnu).¹⁴

This aspect of location on the basis of social stratification (caste and religion) in Indian villages, a Deccan village to be precise, was dealt with in detail by social anthropologist S.C. Dube in his classic work: *Indian Village*. Even though the study (1967, pp. 161-166) focused on the hierarchical (social and economic) differentiations in the village of Shamirpet in Ranga Reddy district (now Medchal-Malkajgiri district) of Telangana, parallels could be drawn with the same in the case of small towns (Gannavaram and Sangareddy) considered in this study.

At both locations of research, I found that the names of the villages that ended with (suffix) –uru/or, -palle/-pally (small village), and puram/pur had significant forward caste population or the land was owned by them. While -peta/-pet (residential locality

¹³ The Renuka Yellamma Temple located in the Fruit Research Station witnessed a huge gathering during the Bathukamma festival cutting across the sections and castes in the Hindu society to offer Bonalu (Cooked rice mixed with milk and jaggery/sugar offered in pots). Noticeably, women from well-to-do class offered Bonam in sparkling golden yellow brass vessels, while devotees from modest strata offered in clay pots (ranging from reddish-brown to black hues).

¹⁴ There were important in understanding the social and religious fabric of Sangareddy (Medak) in particular, Telangana and India in general as noted political scientist Ilaiah wrote an article in *Andhra Jyothi* newspaper blaming the ruling Telangana CM K. Chandrasekhar Rao for reviving the Brahmanical *vaiṣṇavam* furthering the ideology of ruling BJP at the Centre. This article, critically questioning the democratic nature (or the lack of it) of Hindu gods, triggered a controversy in Telangana. Subsequently, a case was filed against him for hurting sentiments of a dominant religion. See, *telangāṇa ippuḍu vaiṣṇavāndhra* (Telangana is now Vaishnavandhra, 11 March, 2015, *Andhra Jyothi*) <https://www.andhrajyothy.com/artical?SID=91482&SupID=26%20telangana%20ippudu%20vaiṣṇava%20-%20kanca%20ilaiah> [Last accessed on 15 December, 2020]. Also, see: <https://scroll.in/article/743651/kancha-ilaiah-neither-the-sangh-parivar-nor-the-telangana-government-can-arrest-my-pen> [Last accessed on 15 December, 2020].

Within the Hindu religion, the dynamic and warring relationship between the Shiva and Vishnu traditions was a complex and often controversial subject of academic research in ancient history. For more on the interactions between these two traditions and with the Muslim religion in this part of the globe, see: Thapar (1996, pp. 3-23).

on the fringe of a major town)¹⁵, -gudem/-guda or khed (hamlet), -kal/-gal/-kallu (rock/hillock)¹⁶ was the case with agricultural labourers from the Dalit (SC) and the Bahujan (OBC) communities. These observations on space and social stratification in the towns on villages at both research locations seemed appropriate and relevant to the present work after a re-reading of Ambedkar's (1948/1990) essays – “Untouchability among Hindus” and “Problem of Habitat” – in one of his crucial interventions on Indian society: *The Untouchables*.¹⁷

It was not only in villages but also in the town areas, that caste mattered the most in the space, everyday life, and language of people.¹⁸ On most of the occasions, when I tried asking for the address of a person in Sangareddy, the locals required *mārpēru*¹⁹ of the person for identification purposes. The *marpēru* would bear the caste of the person or geographical location like (groundwater well, temple, school) or age or physical attributes (fat/lean, tall/short, fair/dark) including physical ability. Even in Gannavaram, the locals would ask for caste or religion marker or occupation or surname (the last two could supplement the caste and religion in some cases) to identify a person.

Restaurants, eateries, and food-joints (referred to as hotels in Telugu) reflected to a great extent about the cultures present at the location of research. For instance, on the

¹⁵ It was received wisdom in Telugu speaking states (and in most parts of Tamil Nadu) that a ‘peta’ was where commoners or public lived, while a ‘koṭa’ (fort) was the house of rulers or administrators. Similarly, places ending with the suffix -konḍa (hill) housed the ruling community, while -kal/gal, -kallu/gallu (hillock) belonged to the ruled. Suffixes –kal/gal [such as Jukkal in Kamareddy district, adjacent to Sangareddy district, (old Medak district)] and Wargal in Medak district), -kallu/gallu (such as Guntakallu (Anantapur district), Kapugallu (Nalgonda), Orugallu is a variant of Warangal) in Telugu, Kannada and Tamil languages meant rock or stone or hillock. Otherwise, *kallu* as a standalone word meant ‘toddy’ in Telugu.

¹⁶ One may find Warangal (-gal), the capital of the Kakatiya rulers, as an exception to this classification. It should be noted that Hanumakonda was the first capital of the Kakatiya kingdom and it was shifted to Warangal or Orugallu for “rapid and aggressive program of expansion” by Rudra Deva in 1195 AD (Talbot, 2001, p. 75, p. 128, p. 140).

¹⁷ Cháirez-Garza (2014, pp. 37-50) brilliantly unravelled the notion of space in Ambedkar's works concerning social philosophy.

¹⁸ For a historical understanding of land-owning patterns on basis of caste, related power structures, and modes of domination in Telangana region, see: Thirumali (1972, pp. 477-482).

¹⁹ *Mārpēru* was a prefix to the name. If the person's name was Yadaiah, then the question would be which Yadaiah? Some of the markers were Golla Yadaiah (Yadav), *gavaḷḷa* or *gaonḍla* Yadaiah (Goud), *kunṭi* Yadaiah (limp/physically challenged), *bakka* Yadaiah (lean), *bāyi kāḍa unḍē* Yadaiah (residing near the well), *cinna* Yadaiah or *pedda* Yadaiah (*cinna* here meant younger and *pedda* meant elder or older; age as a marker) and so on persons from the dominant and influential castes in the area such as: the Reddy and the Velama were both referred as *paṭēlā* or *paṭel sāb*. Brahmins were referred as *bāpanōllu* and *bāpanaina* (singular) and a person from the Vysya (traders) community and any business person (regardless of caste) would be referred as *kōmaṭaina* and *sēṭhu* or *sēṭh* respectively.

Sangareddy town main road itself there was a Kalyani Biryani²⁰ point and there was another one at Pothireddipalli village, adjacent to the town. There were the usual tiffin centres (places offering breakfast or snacks), which were mushrooming in the town.²¹ Reportedly one of the largest meat-exporters in the country, the Al Kabeer group's mechanised slaughterhouse (abattoir) was located at Rudraram village near Sangareddy. It was always in the news for dumping animal waste in the nearby localities.²²

While there was an increasing presence of tiffin centres in Sangareddy, there were many Hyderabad Biryani food joints in Gannavaram along with a couple of places offering 'Irani chai.' Unlike in Sangareddy, sale of uncooked and cooked beef was not a public or commercial affair in Gannavaram. Those who consumed it did it surreptitiously and chose not to make it a public affair. However, the absence of the food variety, which was an affordable source of protein, in commercial spaces communicated the hegemonic nature of society.²³ Gannavaram had a government-run bacon factory, which was converted into a veterinary sciences college in 1998. The college premises located on NH-5 had a centre exclusively for fattening and breeding of pigs, at the time of fieldwork.²⁴

²⁰ It is a Biryani variant in which finely cut buffalo meat cubes are used instead of the usual mutton or chicken meat. The name Kalyani comes from the Kalyani region (erstwhile Hyderabad Karnataka). Most of the working class people consume this as early lunch before setting out for the day's work or very late in the afternoon (in between work). See, <https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/a-tale-of-two-biryani/article7838496.ece> [Last accessed on 15 December, 2020].

²¹ While having a cup of tea at one of the tiffin centres in the town, one stringer sarcastically remarked with a grin: "This is Andhra people's contribution to this region." Traditionally, cuisines in both regions (Coastal Andhra and Telangana) vary to a great extent. Since the mid-1990s there has been a heavy intermixing of cuisines that was taking place in both regions.

²² Almost all stringers in Sangareddy agreed that this was a major problem in the area. Villagers in the Edthapur *tanda* were the most suffered lot due to this slaughterhouse.

²³ In a different context, Gundimeda (2009b, pp. 127-149) outlined the complex dialectical matrix of the food and caste hierarchies before constructing an argument around democratisation of the public sphere from a human rights perspective.

²⁴ The old bacon factory, as it was referred to by locals and stringers, was established for the benefit of the Yerukala community. The Yerukalas, who were now classified under Scheduled Tribe category, were earlier declared as a criminal tribe in 1911 by British colonial administrators (Radhakrishna, 2000, p. 2553). An ex-zilla parishad territorial constituency president Kadiyala Raghava Rao (KRR) said, "They were known for their robberies and wild ways on the highways. Gannavaram used to be referred as "*dongala* Gannavaram" because of their activities. In 1960s or 1970s they were provided livelihood at the factory and were located at a colony on the outskirts of Bezawada" (Personal communication, 2 June 2012). The Telugu word *dongala* means thieves. Stringers from other mandals (Unguturu, Ramavarappadu, and Hanuman Junction) often made fun of Gannavaram stringers based on this reference.

There were two courts in Gannavaram with the principal junior civil court complex located near the gram panchayat office and additional junior civil court complex located adjacent to the sub-registrar's office. The Gannavaram sub-jail and the Gannavaram police station were located in and around the MRO office area. Constables walking the accused from the police station to produce them in the courts was a common sight. The district and sessions court at Sangareddy was commonly referred to as the court complex. Even the Sangareddy jail was a huge one. Being the headquarters of the district, the court complex was always abuzz with activity with people from all corners of the district visiting the court. This was a good resource point for stringers to file stories of human interest.

Sangareddy was considered a communally volatile area with the latest such major incident occurring in March 2012.²⁵ Police were seen on an alert mode every Friday during the *Jumma* (early afternoon congregational Namaz practiced in Islam) and it was the only occasion when they were lenient on triple riding on bikes, as Muslim youths rushed to the Jama Masjid – the oldest worship place in the area.

In Sangareddy, apart from the regular duties to maintain law and order along with allied responsibilities, police were faced with three major concerns: a) communal tensions; b) close observation on Maoist activities; c) *Ganja* (Marijuana) cultivation.²⁶ In the case of Gannavaram, the police had to deal with issues such as: a) illegal sand business; b) land dealings and settlements; c) caste frictions and conflicts in villages among other issues of concern. Apart from one or two specific issues, most of the issues that the police had to deal with in both the towns boiled down to communal/caste based groupings and political affiliations.

This pen-sketch of socio-geographical map of both locations was given to emphasise that the factors of caste and religion along with other factors permeated into most of

²⁵ Newspapers reported that an objectionable online post resulted in communal clashes in the town injuring several persons and causing property damage. See, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/hyderabad/Online-post-sparks-Sangareddy-riot/articleshow/12474746.cms> and <https://www.deccanherald.com/content/238435/communal-clash-medak-over-morphed.html> [Last accessed on 15 December, 2020].

²⁶ At the time of fieldwork, Medak district was declared in the “red corridor” – areas that had Maoist presence. However, the latest reports from the Union ministry of home affairs removed the district from the list of Maoist-affected areas. See the updated list at, <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleaseIframePage.aspx?PRID=1562724> [Last accessed on 15 December, 2020].

the aspects in the life-world in these parts. The very fact that caste happened to be a crucial factor in differentiating places of residence and worship indicated it pervaded most of the spheres of public activities that took place in these parts.

The relatively less autonomous Telugu journalistic field

Two unrelated incidents that took place during the course of my fieldwork at different locations and times need to be mentioned to show the significant relationship between the social, political, and journalistic field. In one instance at Gannavaram:

In a bid to publicise Rajiv Yuva Kiranalu – a state sponsored scheme for the benefit of unemployed youth by the then Congress government – a person (LC Babu) equipped with a microphone and loudspeaker set on a moped went around the villages in Gannavaram playing a pre-recorded announcement about the schedule of the programme. (Field notes, 8 May 2012). With a towel wrapped around his head to protect himself from the scorching summer heat, Babu on his gearless two-wheeler bike used to carry out such publicity for most of the public activities taken up by the government such as: grievances regarding rural employment scheme (MNREGA), health awareness messages, important announcements regarding agriculture and related activities (Field notes, 17 May 2012). Babu, who was quite popular among stringers and used to inform them (while on the go) about the latest happenings in the nearby village he just visited, belonged to the Madiga community (Field notes, 8 May 2012).

During the by-polls in Medak parliamentary constituency after it was vacated by the Telangana Rashtra Samithi president K. Chandrasekhar Rao, a similar incident highlighting the relationship between caste and social communication took place at the time of fieldwork in Sangareddy.

The contestants (both belong to the influential Reddy caste) for parliament by-polls from the Telangana Rashtra Samithi (TRS) and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) took out separate rallies as part of door-to-door political campaigning at different times of the day. Rallies of both political parties, which were more of processions, were led by a small group of drum beaters. While one group was playing *dappu* (drum) slung over their shoulders to garner public attention, another group of dancers were dancing to the beats. *Nava Telangana* stringer PR revealed that the persons playing the instrument belonged to the Madiga community and it was a common practice during elections. The stringer also mentioned that they make quick money during occasions like these (elections). (Field notes, 10 September 2014).

It was noteworthy that on both occasions for public and political announcement purposes, persons from the Madiga community played a key role. After pointing that there was an intrinsic and organic relationship between the *dappu* and the Madigas since ancient times, Ilaiah (2009, p. 45) noted:

The *dappu* is used to make public announcements (*dandora*); it was the only mode of announcing the dates of village functions, official announcements by the government, and so on. Thus it was/is an instrument of music and mass communication. Village folk working in the fields or grazing their cattle in nearby pastures and forests could figure out from the sound of the *dappu* whether it was celebrating a wedding, mourning a death or making a proclamation. [Emphasis original]

Even as the person in Gannavaram town did not use the traditional *dappu* to carry out publicity activity by replacing it with modern paraphernalia, the very fact that he belonged to the same community that had been involved in such activities (*dandora*) strongly indicated a very clear and internalised presence of caste in everyday life. It was more obvious in the case of the Sangareddy political rallies.²⁷

Responding to my observation that the loud-speaker has replaced *dappu*, but that the ‘mass communicator on two-wheeler’ was performing the age-old role that their caste-men did, a senior stringer DD pointing towards PCB (a stringer from Madiga caste, who was working with *Eenadu* at the time of research), who was present on the occasion, jovially said, “*ēm māriddi sār? ēmi mārada. ippudu mā PCB gāḍu kammollaki vāḷḷa paperlo dappu kottatlēda? vādiki vērē option ēmannā undā?*” (Nothing will change, Sir. What great job was PCB *gāḍu* doing in his paper? He was playing *dappu* to the Kammas in his reports. Was there any other option?)²⁸ With a smile PCB told DD to shut his mouth (Field notes, 9 May 2012). In Sangareddy town, in a very casual tone MPR too expressed that it (Madigas playing *dappu* in political rallies) was a very common sight in Telangana. These observations and responses from stringers, on the nature of their work along with internalisation of hierarchies

²⁷ From a Dalit-Bahujan perspective, Ilaiah (2009, p. 46) noted, “Even the Communist school of thought, dominated as it was by the upper castes, deployed the *dappu* for political propaganda and cultural movements but never thought it important to attempt to bring about a change in the social value of the maker [of the *dappu* instrument] and the player.”

²⁸ Even as both DD and PCB belong to SC category, DD occasionally bosses around with the latter due to his seniority. “*mā PCB gāḍu*”, in this context, was a way of expressing a cordial relationship. However, this ‘resigning to fate’ expression emerged out of an incident that happened on the previous day, which will be discussed in detail in chapter 5.

and dispositions in the social world in which they operate in, resonated Bourdieusian notion of ‘habitus’, “which organises the perception of the social world is itself the product of internalisation of the division into social classes” (Bourdieu, 2005, p. 170).²⁹

Some of these observations on the location (space), caste and social hierarchies, politics, and other allied markers helped in shaping an understanding of the newswork by stringers in their everyday life and their own perspectives on the profession, society, and conditions of which they were a part.³⁰ More importantly, the connections and fluid dynamics between the journalistic, social, economic, bureaucratic and political fields became apparent, while attempting to understand the newswork in the field. Delivering a lecture on the nature of political, social science, and journalistic fields, which was later translated and published, Bourdieu (2010a, p. 33) noted:

One of the questions that has to be asked about a field is that of its degree of autonomy. [...]he journalistic field is characterised ... by a high degree of heteronomy. It is a very weakly autonomous field, but this autonomy, weak though it is, means that one cannot understand what happens there simply on the basis of knowledge of the surrounding world: to understand what happens in journalism, it is not sufficient to know who finances the publications, who the advertisers are, who pays for the advertising, where the subsidies come from, and so on. Part of what is produced in the world of journalism cannot be understood unless one conceptualises this microcosm as such and endeavours to understand the effects that the people engaged in this microcosm exert on one another.

The ethnographic experience resulted not only in breaking down preconceived notions about the nature of newswork of stringers in Telugu print medium but also allowed me to introspect my own role as a journalist in a national English news daily. My initial and preconceived idea was to present the role of stringers as unrecognised and under-theorised subaltern figures in capitalist-run language media houses (cogs in the capitalist machine).

²⁹ *āllekapōtē rally gādu, yē function naḍavadi* (Without their presence not only this rally, most social gatherings never took place) (Field notes, 10 September 2014).

³⁰ There were many such incidents during the fieldwork but I chose to present keeping the responses in mind as most of them happened in the initial phases of research work at those particular sites. It was very obvious that they would not respond in similar fashion spending a great deal of time in the mandals, villages, and towns.

Fresh from having had a first-hand experience in the journalism profession, when I started formulating a framework for the present study, I found the question posed by Schudson (2010, pp. 215-223) – “from the perspective of democratic theory, just how autonomous should journalism be?” – initially to be *digressing* and then to be *engaging*; especially in the context of understanding newswork by stringers in Telugu mainstream print medium.

The reasons for finding it (Schudson’s question) *digressing* could be due to the nature of the English daily (organisation) I was working in, which was not corporatised or commercialised, as per the senior staffers, who in between tea-breaks used to apprise me about the role of the press as a watchdog and narrate tales about legendary journalists during the political emergency period of the 1970s. Tales of reporters carrying out their profession with an already signed resignation letter without mentioning the date in their pocket was one story no journalist missed to hear from old-timers.

The then resident editor of the newspaper that employed me would often repeat the words: “freedom,” “autonomy,” and “uncompromising” during the internal meetings with reporters. The reporting and editorial sections were on the first floor of the office building, while the advertising and scheduling departments were placed on the top (fifth) floor. The features section, personnel department, and circulation manager’s office occupied the rest of the floors in ascending order. More importantly, advertising department personnel were not allowed on the first floor under any circumstances. Even the executives from public relations agencies had to visit either the chief of the news bureau or the resident editor. Apart from interviews of celebrities, film-stars, award winners, and achievers in tabloid and metro supplements along with sports page, reporters were refrained from taking interviews for publishing purposes. It was strictly the editor-in-chief or resident editor’s call to interview prominent/eminant personalities from political and economic fields that too on the office premises.

During my journalistic stint, and around the time, the then Congress government in Andhra Pradesh consistently attacked two newspapers – *Eenadu* and *Andhra Jyothi* – in the both houses of the state legislature. Another important incident that happened around the same time was the attack on *Andhra Jyothi* newspaper office by Madiga

Reservation Porata Samiti (MRPS) activists (Krishna, 2015, pp. 764-770). The newspaper had written a front-page banner item *bāḍuga nēṭalu* (rented out politicians) aimed at MRPS president Manda Krishna Madiga with sub-headings such as: *svīya samkshēma vādi* (a self-welfarist), *vīri schedule vēru* (their schedule³¹ is different), *ūsaravellula nāyakatvamlō kula udyamālu* (chameleons leading caste movements).³² The lead story without taking any names argued that the sub-categorization movement was being misled by political leaders for their own interests and benefits.

Enraged over the story lampooning their leader, the MRPS activists vandalised the newspaper's office located in Jubilee Hills. The newspaper reacted and responded to the violence by publishing the same story in the inside pages with the headline – *bāḍuga nēṭalu...indulō tappēmiti* (rented out politicians.... What's wrong in this)?³³ On the top margin of the page, the news daily carried a quote by former president of the United States of America Thomas Jefferson's quote in Telugu: "If I had to choose between government without newspapers, and newspapers without government, I would not hesitate to choose the latter" (Translation mine).

The MRPS leader Krishna Madiga filed a complaint against both the managing director and chief editor of the newspaper V. Radha Krishna and K. Srinivas respectively alleging that they abused him by caste prompting the police to arrest them under SC/ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act. Journalists' unions gave a call against the attacks on journalists and press freedom to which the MRPS leader publicly warned that he will complain against those who issue statements in favour of the arrested.³⁴ The police arrested both of them on June 24 and were released the following day from the Chanchalguda jail after getting bail.³⁵ Except the ruling Congress party, almost all political parties rallied behind journalists and unions

³¹ This was a word play mocking the agenda of MRPS, which has been fighting for sub-categorisation issue within scheduled caste reservation quota. In the undivided Andhra Pradesh, the demand for sub-categorisation of scheduled caste quota was raised long ago in 1972 (Balagopal, 2000, p. 1076), pointing out that the reservations were being availed by the Malas leaving behind the remaining castes that fall under the SC category. The MRPS led by Manda Krishna Madiga was seen as the face of this reservation demand fighting for their due in the quota. Balagopal (2005, pp. 3128-3133; 2000, pp. 1075-1081) had extensively written about the issue from a socio-legal perspective.

³² *Andhra Jyothi*, 26 May 2008, page 1.

³³ *Andhra Jyothi*, 27 May 2008, page 9.

³⁴ *Eenadu*, 29 May 2009, page 1.

³⁵ <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/hyderabad/Andhra-Jyoti-editor-held/articleshow/3162055.cms> and <https://www.outlookindia.com/newswire/story/editor-journalists-of-andhra-jyothi-granted-bail/583618> [Last accessed on 15 December, 2020].

condemning the attacks on press freedom. Even the Press Council of India (PCI) took *suo motu* cognisance of the incident of violation against media persons and threats to press freedom (PCI, 2010, p. 9).

Soon after this incident, the press in Andhra Pradesh had to face adverse responses from the police during the separate statehood movement for Telangana, which I have explained in the previous chapter. Journalists reporting about the Osmania University students' agitation were initially blocked from entering the campus and those who were present on the campus were beaten up on 13 and 14 February, 2010.³⁶ Embedded in the role of a reporter covering the education beat of a state bureau, I was fully convinced that the 'fourth estate' should be fully autonomous without any political pressures.

This inherent idea of being autonomous (free from economic, State [the governing body], and political pressures) appeared to be essential and foundational in the field. The immediacy factor, both in temporal and logical sense, associated with the journalism profession in the process of filing regular reports, chasing special stories for bylines made it difficult to meditate on the questions of autonomy along with the conditions, routines, and functions involved in the craft.

Moreover, my reading of the political economy literature in media studies (McChesney, 2003 & 2008; Herman & Chomsky, 2008; Mosco, 2009; Chomsky, 2008) had only reinforced the notion that journalism should be fully autonomous in a democratic society. Even before I set out for fieldwork, I had a set of questions that appeared to be sound enough to carry out research work. More importantly, I had definitive answers for those questions from within a pre-set theoretical model or

³⁶ I was on the Osmania University campus on February 13 to file a report on the student agitation. The police started beating up journalists even as they were showing their professional identity cards. I was 'deployed' to cover the agitation as I was handling education beat at that time and nobody had any clue about the events that would take place. However, it was on February 14 that the journalists reporting on the campus had to face brutal police violence. The crime beat reporter from my organisation was sent to the campus to cover the agitation. He along with other journalists locked in the OU Arts College building as they ran for cover in the late evening and could not come out of the campus as the police surrounded the building. I had to take inputs from the reporter over the phone and filed a story on the situation prevailing on the campus at later than 1 A.M. for the late city edition. A fact-finding committee was appointed by the PCI on the incident and a report – "*Charges of Police Brutality on Journalists of Print and Electronic Media in the Osmania University, Hyderabad-Assessment Committee Report*" was submitted, which was duly adopted and published as a separate chapter in its annual report. See, PCI (2010, pp. 91-108).

framework. In such a situation, the question posed by Schudson would appear to be digressing from the topic.

However, the initial pilot study and re-reading of some of the key texts prompted me to do away with a deterministic approach towards the topic of research. At this juncture, a reading of Rajagopal's (2009, pp. 1-28) introduction to a collection of essays in *The Indian Public Sphere* helped me realise the pitfalls in replicating the political economy framework and the Habermasian notion of the public sphere "without any extensive revision".

The collection of essays – on issues dealing with colonial/post-colonial (Nehruvian) media orders, free-market driven media forms, localization strategies and the expansion of Indian language media, and alternative media among others – helped me understand Schudson's question on the heteronomous nature of journalism to be *engaging* while examining the journalistic practices of stringers. This entire section that described the nature of social, political fields and their influence on the journalistic field was provided to demonstrate the heteronomous nature of the field.

Ontological and epistemological considerations on journalistic practice

Views of two significant personages in the modern history of India seemed to have offered two different approaches to understand the press/journalism. Those views were of Jawaharlal Nehru and B. R. Ambedkar, who had the experience of running their own dailies and periodicals to carry out their respective objectives.

In his address at the All-India Newspaper Editors' Conference held in New Delhi on September 17, 1952, the first Prime Minister of independent India Jawaharlal Nehru (1954, pp. 464-465) questioned:

What exactly is the press? Whatever it may be, the money involved, the owner and the proprietor of that money are major factors. Does the freedom of the press ultimately mean freedom of the rich man to do what he likes with his money through the press? [Emphasis mine].

On the same occasion, Nehru recollected how one editor came up to him and said that he was being forced to write against the government by the proprietor to "increase the sale of the paper (p. 467)." On the issues of growing interest in newspaper ventures by

established business groups during his times, Nehru reportedly scorned at a section of newspapers as ‘jute press’ and ‘steel press’.³⁷

An ardent follower of Nehru, M. Chalapathi Rau (1965, p. 71) furthered the argument:

There has been a tendency to concentration of ownership, though it is difficult to say how much there is of it. The Registrar of Newspapers says that six newspapers owned by big business enjoyed a monopolistic position. Big business has been operating in the newspaper industry powerfully since the war. [...] The increasing concentration of newspaper ownership is seen as a threat to the democratic process.

The First Press Commission addressed the themes – ownership and control and competition and monopolies in chapter 15 and 16 (GoI, 1954, pp. 265-312) and suggested that there should be a separate commission or committee to inquire on “what measures if any are necessary to deal with the monopoly”.

This concentration of media ownership was addressed even in the *Report of the Monopolies Inquiry Commission* (GoI, 1965). In a note of dissent, one of the committee members, expressed that the Report (p. 205) has not suggested “ways and means to achieve this object [of having more independent newspapers and journals free from sectional affiliation should come into existence and prosper].”³⁸ Goyal and Rao (1982, p. 124) in their preparatory study for the Second Press Commission of India in one of their suggestions stated that in order to “delink the press from big business was the public takeover of the top eight newspaper establishments.” Not surprisingly, the main chapters of the report focused on concentration in the Indian Press and Ownership and Control of Press (pp. 10-124). Even the suggestions offered

³⁷ Journalist and political commentator Vinod Mehta (2014, pp. 66-67) noted that Nehru’s remarks – “jute press” and “steel press” – were pointed towards *Times of India* (ToI) and *Statesman*. Reportedly, *ToI* was then run by the Sahu-Jain family, who controlled the New Central Jute Mills in Calcutta (now Kolkata), while the Tata group (iron and steel was one of their many business interests) owned the *Statesman* before an ownership transfer. This was an oft-used reference by old-timers in press clubs and working journalists’ union meetings across the country. However, Rajagopal (2016, p. 10) pointed that it was socialist and freedom fighter Ram Manohar Lohia in a speech in parliament, actually called it the ‘jhoot’ press - the lying press - and somehow *jhoot* became jute.

³⁸ The report (1965, p. 137), earlier, assessing the scale of monopoly observed, “Birlas have their *Hindustan Times* and along with it a financial paper *The Eastern Economist*; the Sahu Jain Group the *Times of India* and the *Economic Times*; the *Statesman* is now owned by a combination of industrial interests. But even apart from the ownership or control of newspapers, some business houses in India spend considerable amounts in lavish advertisements which is at once the envy and despair of smaller people” [Names of newspapers italicised].

by the Report of the Committee on news agencies (GoI, 1977) seemed to have provided little respite in ending monopolies of the press in India.³⁹

If the political economy of the media, as a mode of inquiry, was concerned about the ownership patterns, control and concentration, policy regulations, the question posed by Nehru – What is the press? – has been addressed by a range of economists, communication scholars, and media practitioners even as the Indian economy transformed from central command economy (licence-raj/permit-raj) to mixed economy. Some of the arguments and discussions made following the political economy approach on the circuit of production-consumption-distribution decades ago continued to hold relevance in the present context of ‘corporatization or Murdochization of media’ as India embraced neo-liberal reforms.⁴⁰ In the recent past, the issue of ‘cross media ownership’ in the country had allowed a discussion hinging on the political economy approach.⁴¹

While Nehru’s concern was on the ownership pattern and their increasing intervention in editorial policy of newspapers and thereby stifling the freedom of journalistic activity, Ambedkar’s observations around the same time foregrounded the social aspect in the press as an institution.

Regarded as the father of the Indian Constitution, Ambedkar (1945/2014, p. 200) in one of his seminal essays – “A plea to the foreigner” – wrote,

³⁹ Reddy (1977, pp. 1705-1709) found that the composition of the committee itself was problematic and critiqued the committee’s suggestion to rely on government funds for news agencies reliance. This aspect will be elaborated in a separate section in chapter 6, while addressing the issues surrounding news labour.

⁴⁰ The *Economic and Political Weekly* republishing an article written in 1978 ‘as it was’ in the “glimpses from the past” section was a case in point regarding the relevance of such arguments. The magazine in 2014 retained the title of the article with a note: “The article grapples with issues like media ownership and collusion with big business, resonant with present debates over the growing corporate power over media and dwindling press freedom.” See, Nireekshak (1978/2014). Listing out the articles dealing with the political economy of media in the Indian context would be a daunting task. For a list of such articles, see: <https://www.epw.in/engage/article/selling-fourth-estate-how-free-indian>

⁴¹ The draft report on the cross-media ownership in India by the Administrative Staff College of India (ASCI, 2009, p. 156) suggested two options to restrict cross media ownership: 1) The jurisdiction of Telecom Disputes Settlement and Appellate Tribunal (TDSAT), which already covered cable television and broadcasting, may be extended to print media; 2) Setting up of a separate Broadcasting Regulatory Authority. The Centre for Study of Developing Societies has conducted a plenary addressing this issue. For the plenary report, see: <https://www.cds.in/sites/default/files/Seminar%20Report.pdf> [Last accessed on 15 December, 2020].

The Untouchables have no Press and the Congress Press is closed to them. It is determined not to give them the slightest publicity. They cannot have their own Press. It is obvious that no paper can survive without advertisement revenue. Advertisement revenue can come only from business and in India all business, both big and small is attached to the Congress and will not favour any Non-Congress organ. The staff of the Associated Press of India, which is the main news distributing agency in India, is entirely drawn from Madras Brahmins—indeed the whole of the Press in India is in their hands and who for well-known reasons are entirely pro-Congress and will not allow any news hostile to the Congress to get publicity.

Even as Ambedkar began with what would seem to be an ontological (orthodox political economy) inquiry, he appeared to have posited a sociological question in his observations on the regional and social background of the staff working in the news agency at that time.⁴² He was writing this after having run a Marathi newspaper – *Mooknayak* (Leader of the voiceless or the silent hero) – that was founded in January, 1920 (George, 2020; Kumar, 2015, p. 110).⁴³

The present study found that there was presence of Dalits and Bahujans in the Telugu language journalism and in the previous chapter I also outlined how some of the stringers from these communities felt relegated to the *lowest* position (stringer) in the newspaper's organisational hierarchy. In fact, stringers were outside of the organisational hierarchy of most of the newspapers, as they were not even part of the rank and file.

In the context of presenting the discrimination faced by the Dalits in matters of service or work settings, Ambedkar (1948/2014, pp. 108-109) pointed out:

Discrimination against Untouchables in the matter of securing land, credit, jobs exist in the most rampant form. It is in service that discrimination shows itself most strongly. Though there are no regulations, there are well-recognized rules which govern the entry and promotion of the Untouchables in

⁴² Israel's (1994, pp. 99-155) description of profiles of staff working in news agencies in his account of the role of agencies during the freedom struggle would only corroborate the observations made by Ambedkar.

⁴³ Aishwary Kumar (2015, pp. 13-14) traced out a dialogue between Ambedkar and Gandhi regarding the former's pivotal work – *Annihilation of Caste*. After pointing out that the work in its third edition appeared with appendix of Gandhi's criticism, which was published in a series of articles in *Young India* and *Harijan* (Gandhi's newspapers in English and Hindi language respectively), Kumar remarked that Ambedkar seemed like an editor, while Gandhi appeared to be a fanatical reader.

the matter of service. Most often an Untouchable will not get an entry. Whole departments are closed to them. [...]

To put it concretely, the only field of service in which there is no discrimination against the Untouchables is scavenging. There is no need for discrimination in this field because the whole of it is made over to the Untouchables and there is no competition from the Hindus. Even here discrimination steps in the matter of higher posts. All unclean work is done by the Untouchables. But all supervisory posts which carry higher salary and which do not involve contact with filth are all filled by Hindus.

Symbolic violence, which for Bourdieu (1992, pp. 167-168), was a non-material form of violence that enabled certain individuals and groups to occupy privileged positions to maintain dominance over *others* in a field.⁴⁴ There could not be a better manner to explain the symbolic violence that happens in the form of caste-based hierarchy than that of Ambedkar's observation. It seemed as if he preceded Bourdieu in identifying that the caste-based discrimination (a form of symbolic violence) could not be dealt with even through the rights discourse ("well-recognised rules").

The observations of Ambedkar on the problem of discrimination, in both aspects of press in particular and society in general, seemed to have raised more serious and challenging epistemological questions that were crucial for the present study. In a way, Ambedkar seemed to have offered an open invitation to understand the epistemic complexities (such as symbolic violence and discrimination) in the journalistic field.

While for Nehru the ownership pattern and freedom of press (political economy) were *the* issues, for Ambedkar those were *also* some of the concerns, with the real issue being the social. While Nehru's concerns could be seen as ontological questions, Ambedkar seemed to have posed epistemological queries that were central to most of the sociological studies.

From my observations to understand the journalistic practice of stringers revealed that there was a dynamic interplay of social, political, bureaucratic, and economic forces in the journalistic field. The political economy approach was essential to present some of my arguments in a larger context, but it was of little help when it came to

⁴⁴ In Bourdieusian field theory, the issue of domination not always fell in the dialectic of dominant vs dominated unlike in articulations that sprang up from orthodox or reified Marxism in form of class antagonism or class conflict.

specificities and particularities in understanding journalistic practices. Especially the idealised role of the fourth estate—free from social, political and economic pressures, by acting as a watchdog monitoring the performance of the legislature, the executive, and the judiciary—did not seem realistic.⁴⁵

Also, I had in mind what Benson and Neveu (2010) mentioned while outlining the differences between organisational ethnographies and studies based on the theoretical framework of field theory. They pointed out:

Methodologically, many field case studies seem closest to the Anglo-American tradition of newsroom organisational ethnographies (although any complete examination of the field necessarily involves historical and statistically-informed institutional analysis as well). Organisational studies emphasise the bureaucratic constraints imposed on journalists by their employing organisations and by the official agencies who serve as their chief sources. Field theory shares with the organisational approach a highly empirical approach and interest in the everyday practice of journalism. Where field theory, at least in principle, differs from the standard organisational literature is in its more systematic attempt to incorporate empirical data on individual journalists, news beats, and media organisations into progressively larger systems of power (2010, pp. 10-11).

Even as I will be *thinking with Bourdieu* in presenting the understanding of journalistic practice in accordance with his (2005, p. 101) formula: [(habitus) (capital)] + field = practice, I resort to Ambedkar to ground Bourdieu's concepts to understand the universe of hierarchies in a very particular environment of the stringers' life-world.

Bourdieu (2005) outlined the concept of habitus as:

The habitus is not only a structuring structure, which organises practices and the perception of practices, but also a structured structure: the principle of division into logical classes which organises the perception of the social world

⁴⁵ Schudson (2008, p. 57) distanced himself from political economy approach when he wrote: "Political Economy, meant to conjure up a nineteenth-century intellectual breadth in which the study of economics was not divorced from moral philosophy, in practice has been a term adopted by left-leaning scholars critical of neo-classical economics." Elsewhere, he (Schudson, 2000, p. 4) mocked the work of Chomsky and Herman (*Manufacturing Consent*) as misleading and mischievous. Benson (2017, pp. 1210-1217) apprised Schudson's theoretical position that consistently attacked studies that had an overarching emphasis on the aspect of commercialism and market forces. For the present study, market or economy was *also* one of the crucial factors in understanding journalistic practices.

is itself the product of internalisation of the division into social classes. Each class condition is defined, simultaneously, by its intrinsic properties and by the relational properties which it derives from its position in the system of class conditions, which is also a system of differences, differential positions, i.e., by everything which distinguishes it from what is not and especially from everything it is opposed to; social identity is defined and asserted through difference. (pp. 170-172).

In *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, Bourdieu (1989) initially formulated habitus as: “a system of lasting, transposable dispositions which, integrating past experiences, functions at every moment as a matrix of perceptions, appreciations, and actions and makes possible the achievement of infinitely diversified tasks” (pp. 81-82). He went on to augment the formulation as “an infinite capacity for generating products – thoughts, perceptions, expressions and actions – whose limits are set by the historically and socially situated conditions of its production” (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 55).

While in the field, my observations and primary data revealed that the news production by stringers involved an inseparable integration and simultaneous operation of their social identities (caste, region, and religion) with ownership patterns, political orders (political parties and the State), internal hierarchies and orders within the journalistic field and its own constraints and conditions, interests of dominant groups (both social and economic), bureaucratic interventions, and wage-labour issues among other factors.

Based on the data and my reading and re-reading of Bourdieu’s work, habitus could be seen as a *capacity* that an individual engages herself/himself with *lasting, transposable dispositions* in socially and historically situated conditions and at the same time, serves as a *principle* to generate practices, perceptions, and actions.

More importantly, field theory was often described as work-in-progress (as opposed to a definitive theoretical model) and Bourdieu himself was against the view of considering his work “as theoretical treatises meant solely to be read or commented upon” (Bourdieu, 1993a, p. 271). The concept of habitus was crucial in understanding upward mobility or the lack of it not only among individuals but also for certain communities.

Even as I engage with Bourdieu's concepts, the attempt was to enrich the arguments that field theory makes in the context of journalism studies by foregrounding questions of caste and other factors that have been foundational in understanding most of the social and political phenomena in India. At the same time, this exercise helped me traverse between the particular and the general aspects of the journalistic field.

And to carry out the exercise, I will be presenting the hierarchical nature of the field. Even as some of the hierarchies overlapped in the field, for the sake of convenience in presenting the arguments, I will be discussing the hierarchies within the journalistic field along with social and political fields in the present chapter and reserve the discussion on bureaucratic and economic fields in the following chapters.

The heteronomous (relatively weaker autonomy) nature of the journalistic field would be a consequential outcome of this chapter along with the following one, while understanding the journalistic practices of stringers in their everyday life.

Social and political factors and the journalistic field

Caste appeared as a crucial factor in understanding local journalism at the inception of the fieldwork itself. The ideas surrounding caste, roles, and hierarchy got concretised while coding my primary and secondary data along with the academic literature, following the Grounded Theory approach.

More importantly, I never faced any awkward or uneasy situations while asking questions about caste, religion, gender, region, and identity issues in villages, towns, and cities during the course of my fieldwork.⁴⁶ Most of the stringers, reporters, and editorial staffers openly spoke about the issues related to caste in society and journalism.

⁴⁶ In the month of August 1943, during his fieldwork noted social anthropologist M.N. Srinivas was asked to leave the place by a local person. The social anthropologist mentioned:

I was chased out of a middle-class club in Vijayawada by a fat walking-stick-wielding lawyer who thought I was planning to do a Katherine Mayo on the august culture of the Telugus. I was asking questions about caste, kinship, festivals, fasts and fairs when the angry lawyer lunged at me and said, 'get out, we have no customs' (M.N. Srinivas cited in Deshpande, 2003, p. 10).

It was in the same Vijayawada that a considerable part of my fieldwork was carried out and the locals as well as agents in the journalistic and political fields were quite vocal about caste.

Caste, community, and the field

Since the focus of this study is not about caste, instead of providing a thoroughgoing description of the career of the concept – caste – in academic literature, I would briefly present the dominant schools of thought and major ideas associated with it. Caste studies, a significant sub-discipline within sociological and social anthropological research in and on India, engaged with the idea of caste from both textual and field perspectives (text-view and field-view).

Two major conceptions emerged from the text-view: “caste as hierarchy” (Dumont, 1999) and “caste as colonial construction” (Dirks, 2001).⁴⁷ Even as there were differences within this tradition, they engaged with the idea of *varṇaśrama dharma*⁴⁸ that suggested classification of Hindus in the order: 1) Brahmana (priests); 2) Kshatriya (kings & royals); 3) Vysya (traders, traditionally large-scale farmers); 4) Shudra/Śudra (peasant castes and productive labouring communities). There were many studies that pointed out that this classification was done based on occupation or purity or ritual status among many other considerations. Susan Bayly noted (1999, p. 9), “Most Indians who would classify themselves as Hindus are likely to be at least broadly familiar with two distinct concepts of corporate affiliation: the *jati* (birth group) and the *varna* (order, class).”

More relevant to the present study was the field-view, which engaged with caste as a reality in the society. In the field view of caste, some of the dominant conceptions were: “caste as power/dominance” (Srinivas, 1959 & 1960), “caste as association” (Rudolph & Rudolph, 1999; Shah, 1975), and “caste as discrimination/emancipation” (Ambedkar, 1916/2014; 1944/2014; Omvedt, 2010).⁴⁹

Outside of this four-tier classification were people who were labelled earlier as untouchables (SCs or Dalits) along with many people who live in forests or on hills (STs or Adivasis). This classification was based on centuries old code or text:

⁴⁷ Both these authors did not endorse the archaic social stratification in their works. Studies that emerged out of the text-view time and again proved the ambivalent grounds on which present day’s apparent social identities were based on in history.

⁴⁸ The Telugu equivalent term for this is *cāturvarṇa vyavastha* (four-tier classification system).

⁴⁹ I mentioned only some of the foundational works that were read for the present study. Jodhka (2018) provided an excellent empirical account of emerging and contemporary manifestations of caste in India delving into a range of issues including hierarchies, citizenship, economy, social mobility, and mobilisations.

Manusmriti. The usage of the word untouchables and practice of untouchability was outlawed as per the Constitution of India. The fact that the *Census of India* (2011) report compiled that more than 25.2 per cent (SC – 16.6 and ST – 8.6) of the country's population belong to these communities and groups that fall outside of the above stratification indicated its highly exclusive nature of the *varṇaśramadharmā*.

There was relatively lesser ambiguity when it came to the understanding of the top-3 categories in the *varṇa* system. The category *Shudra* or *Śudra* (Telugu) along with *Panchamas* - the excluded sections of population from the hierarchical Hindu code of classification (fifth category or the category that lies outside of the classification) needed to be understood before proceeding to get an understanding of the social positions of agents within and without the journalistic field.

Gundimeda (2016, pp. 322-323) suggested that there were four types of nomenclatures were associated with the *Panchamas*. They were: 1) Depressed classes or Scheduled Castes (imposed by colonial authorities); 2) *Ati-Shudras* or *Harijans* (attributed by social reformers, such as Jyotirao Phule and Gandhi respectively, striving for the upliftment of those communities); 3) Dalit (politically aware individuals and leaders identifying themselves as ex-untouchables in contemporary India); and 4) Jati (self-description of Dalits in specific local contexts such as Madiga, Mala, Chamar, Pariah).

During the interactions and while carrying out interviews for the present study, most of the Dalits referred to themselves as: *Mādigalu* or *Mālalu* (depending on their caste), *Daḷitulu* & *SClu*.⁵⁰ This was how they described themselves during general descriptions and conversations. While talking about the oppression they faced in society and profession, they used terms such as: *kindi kulālu* (downtrodden castes), *takkuva jāti* (lower by birth), *aṇagārīna kulālu*. On the other hand, forward caste stringers, editorial & reporting staffers, and locals referred to Dalits as SC *vallu*, SC-

⁵⁰ As per the list of state-wise Scheduled Castes updated up to October 26, 2017, there were 61 castes in Andhra Pradesh and 59 in Telangana in the category. For complete list of castes, see: <http://socialjustice.nic.in/writereaddata/UploadFile/Scan-0001.jpg> (Andhra Pradesh) and <http://socialjustice.nic.in/writereaddata/UploadFile/Scan-0026.jpg> (Telangana) [Last accessed on 15 December, 2020]. Out of these communities, most of the persons falling under the SC category that I interacted during fieldwork were from Madiga, Mala and one person from Relli caste.

STlu, *dēvuni biḍḍalu* (children of god),⁵¹ *mādigōḷḷu* or *mādigalu*, *mālōḷḷu* or *mālalu*, *Daḷita kulāla vāḷḷu*, and *Daḷitulu*. While asking questions or interacting, I used the term Dalit or *Daḷitulu* both in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana.

The fourth category in the *Varna* classification – the *Shudras* – was highly contextual and region specific. Without presenting a general picture of the variations in this category, which was beyond the scope of this study, I would list out the names of castes (Hindus) that agents from the journalistic field belonged to *Shudra* category. They were: 1) Kamma; 2) Reddy; 3) Velama; 4) Kapu (Delta region of Andhra Pradesh); 5) Goud; 6) Padmasali; 7) Nayi Brahmin; 8) Rajaka; 9) Chakali; 10) Mudiraj. There was one person from the Madiga caste who converted into Christianity (BC-C) and the remaining were Muslims (3), who belonged to religious minorities. There were no stringers or reporters or editorial staffers from Vysya and Kshatriya (Telugu Rajus) castes at the time of research in both Sangareddy and Gannavaram.

Persons belonging to communities such as Goud or Gouda (toddy tappers), Padmasali or Padmashali (weavers), Nayi Brahmin (barbers), Rajaka and Chakali (washermen), and Mudiraj (soldiers and fishing community members) in Andhra Pradesh and

⁵¹ There was an evident symbolic violence while referring to Dalits as *SC-STlu* or children of god. Even as there were no persons from Scheduled Tribes (ST) category in picture, forward caste members club SCs and STs as if they were one and the same. And when it came to the utterance or reference *dēvuni biḍḍalu* (children of god), there was a palpable condescending pun involved in it. There were two observable reasons for this. They were: 1) Some of the Dalits follow Christianity and hence were labelled as children of God; 2) Dalits and STs & Adivasis were protected by law under SC, ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989, which some of the members from influential castes found unaccommodating to use their language, which was discriminatory at least from the perspective of Dalits. “Even if we talk freely there could be a case against us,” a stringer based in Gannavaram who hailed from Kamma community said (Personal communication, 1 June 2012). In other words, “talking freely” meant using ‘upper-caste’ language that appeared ‘neutral’ to them and was highly casteist and objectionable for many, especially for the Dalit communities. I would elaborate on this aspect in the following section on everyday usage of language, where caste hierarchies were visibly manifested. This was one of the problems, a majority of the Dalits had with the label – Harijans (People of god) – coined by Gandhi. Most of the time, it was the *śudras* belonging to influential communities who used such expressions. At the same time, there was only one stringer from Dalit background who did not belong to Madiga or Mala castes in both Krishna and Medak. He belonged to the Relli caste that falls under SC category. But fellow stringers in Gannavaram used to mock him as *konḍōḍu* (Hillman). This was one of the reasons why the MRPS, Dalit and progressive intellectuals were arguing for sub-categorisation among the SC communities. See, Balagopal (2000; 2005) and Gundimeda (2006).

Telangana are categorised as the Backward Classes and fall under the *shudra* category at the same time (Ilaiah, 2009; Swamy, 2019, pp. 90-115).⁵²

The remaining castes in the *shudra* category were Kammas, Reddys, Velamas and Kapus. All these castes were land-owning and agrarian communities in the Telugu speaking regions: Telangana, Andhra, and Rayalaseema. Harrison (1960, p. 209) noted that *Sat-shudra* (sat = good) status was accorded to Kammas, Reddis, Velamas, and other Telugu peasant castes to distinguish them from less affluent *shudras* in the Census of India, Madras Presidency in the year 1901.

Kamma, Reddy and Kapu caste persons were in most cases referred as *kammōru*, *reḍḍu*, and *kāpulu* in Gannavaram, Krishna district respectively. Velamas in Sangareddy were infrequently addressed as *velama doralu* and often as *velmalu* or simply *velmās*.⁵³ Stringers and locals from Dalit-Bahujan background, while responding to my questions, addressed those influential caste groups as *agrakulālu* (upper castes), *dōṇḍidārulu* (exploiters), and *unnata kulālu/vargālu* (higher castes/classes) in Gannavaram, while in Sangareddy those caste groups were addressed as *patelōḷḷu*, *doralu*, and *peddōḷḷu*.

Ambedkar's observations on these communities noted in *Thoughts on Linguistic States* were very perceptive. He observed, "Take Andhra—there are two or three major communities spread over the linguistic area. They are either the Reddis or the Kammas and the Kapus. They hold all the land, all the offices, all the business" (1948/2014, p. 134).

What Ambedkar foresaw as perils for democratic functioning of the state way back in the late 1940s turned into a reality sooner than later. He went on to write,

In a linguistic State what would remain for the smaller communities to look to? Can they hope to be elected to the Legislature? Can they hope to maintain

⁵² This handbook provided lists of all Backward Classes (state level), Other Backward Classes (OBCs), and Most BCs. Galanter (1978, pp. 1812-1828) provided an exhaustive mapping of the career of OBCs from colonial times till late 1970s. His article continued to hold relevance, at least from the policy initiatives perspective, even in the wake of the recent reservations for the economically weaker sections under the OBC category.

⁵³ All these references were in their absence and referring to communities as a whole. I would explain the singular person references in the section on manifestation of hierarchy in everyday language.

a place in the State service? Can they expect any attention to their economic betterment? In these circumstances, the creation of a linguistic State means the handing over of Swaraj to a communal majority. What an end to Mr Gandhi's Swaraj! Those who cannot understand this aspect of the problem would understand it better if instead of speaking in terms of linguistic State we spoke of a Jat State, a Reddy State or a Maratha State (1948/2014, p. 134).

Many decades later, Susan Bayly (1999, p. 287) while reflecting on this phenomenon on a pan-Indian scale noted,

The other crucial factor here was the creation from 1956 of the new linguistically defined state boundaries which were drawn up so that individual states became zones of high numerical concentration for the members of only one (or at most two or three) of the broad *sat-sudra* 'peasant' jati blocs. In Bihar, these numerically predominant cultivating populations are those whose members use the titles Koiri, Kurmi and Ahir-Yadav. Their counterparts in Karnataka are Vokkaligas and Lingayats; in Haryana and Gujarat the equivalent 'communities' are Jat and Kanbi-Patidar, while in Andhra most clean-caste 'peasants' identify themselves as Kammas or Reddis.

While Kammas, Reddys, and Velamas 'attained' *Sat-shudra* status, sociologists labelled the Kapus of coastal Andhra as intermediate agrarian caste (Chennur, 2019).⁵⁴ The Godavari-Krishna Kapus were numerically and economically strong especially in the delta region of coastal Andhra but were never able to compete with the Kammas and the Reddys in the political field.

The Kapus started a demand for including them under the OBC quota after the bifurcation of the state under the leadership of a Kapu leader from East Godavari district, Mudragada Padmanabham. The bill was tabled in the AP Legislative Assembly and Council before sending it to the President of India for approval through the Governor of the state (GoAP, 2017). In Bourdieusian terms, the mobilisation strategy or scheme of action for Kapus to gain political recognition happened to take place in the form of social movement for reservations.

⁵⁴ The Telugu word *kapu* means protector or cultivator. They use the suffix – Naidu – in the East and West Godavari, Krishna, and Guntur. However, in Rayalaseema region, the Reddys in their caste certificate (*kula dhṛvikaṛaṇa patram*) usually are classified under Kapu community. Also, the title Naidu in Rayalaseema is used by the Kammas. Also, some Kammas along with Velamas, and Kapus shared the suffix – Rao. This sharing of titles and caste names suggested the similar or common roots that most of these land-owning and agrarian communities shared in the past.

The Kapus in the Telugu speaking states do not form a neat homogenous category, as it comprises castes such as Kapu, Telaga, Balija, and Ontari among many other variants. The backwardness or forwardness of the caste varies from region to region. Sometimes, the status of Kapus in the list of state-wise lists of Backward Castes varies from district to district (Swamy, 2019). However, the Krishna and Godavari delta Kapus in Andhra Pradesh claim the status of *Sat-shudras* by tracing their lineage to Vijayanagara king Sri Krishnadevaraya and claim Kshatriya status.⁵⁵ Despite having economic status, numeric strength, and cultural capital, the Kapus of the delta regions in coastal Andhra could never manage to get a chance to become chief minister of the then united Andhra Pradesh (Table 3.7). This could be seen as one of the reasons why a Kapu leader from Godavari region attempted to mobilise the community persons to fight for the cause of securing OBC status for the community.

Caste and communication: Solidarities, assertion, and discrimination

Even as caste remained a crucial factor in everyday life both in Krishna and Medak districts; the way it was articulated in public places was starkly different. Caste articulation in Vijayawada and Gannavaram by the influential communities was supremacist in nature, while in Sangareddy and Medak district it was more of expressing solidarity or communal camaraderie among their caste and religious groups.

There were offices of caste associations such as Mudiraj Sangam, Telangana Goud Sangam, and Yadava Sangam in and around Sangareddy town. These caste-based welfare associations had marriage function halls that also served as convention centres (during off-season for marriages) for income generation purposes.⁵⁶ They rented out these places at discount rates (priority would be given) for marriages from the same caste, as a way of expressing caste based solidarity.

⁵⁵ The Kammas followed the same strategy during the late 1930s and wrote their history projecting themselves as Kshatriyas and have fallen from that grace (Chowdhary, 1939/1989, pp. 38-169). At the time of data collection in Vijayawada in 2012, controversy erupted between the Kapus, the Kammas, and the Yadavas over a Telugu movie *Krishnadevaraya*, which was yet to be released. The Kapus and the Yadavas held press conferences in Vijayawada in their association offices (Field notes, Vijayawada, 10 September 2012). The release of the movie was delayed due to these controversies.

⁵⁶ The Hindus consider certain months as auspicious. This marriage calendar (*pancāṅgam*) for the Hindus varies from region to the other and for communities/castes too.

In the case of Vijayawada and Krishna district, the thin line between caste based solidarity and assertions got blurred, as caste forced itself into every sphere of life. As mentioned earlier, Vijayawada was a dubious arena for show of might between the Kammas and the Kapus. The habitus of these castes was visible at movie theatres, political publicity material (giant flexi-posters, wall posters, pamphlets and so on), and even on their vehicles.

The Kammas took pride in labelling themselves as ‘Royal Chowdarys’ in general and Nandamuri fans at theatres, while the Kapus proudly asserted ‘Royal Kapus’ taglines in public and ‘Mega fans’ when it came to cinemas. While ‘Nandamuri fans’ denoted an umbrella of fan associations of ‘Tollywood heroes’ from NTR’s family (sharing the surname Nandamuri), the ‘Mega fans’ tag was about heroes from the family of ‘Megastar’ Chiranjeevi (Srinivas, 2009; Gundimeda, 2009a).

‘Caste feeling’, as most of the locals articulated the assertion of one’s own caste, was relatively higher in Vijayawada and Krishna district compared to Sangareddy and Medak. This caste feeling was prevalent even in job fairs in some of the caste *sangams* (associations) in and around Vijayawada city. Most of the *sangam* offices have a hostel attached to them and also served as marriage function halls and offered vocational training for unemployed youths and homemakers. Advertisements for these programmes were published in district editions of newspapers along with posters stuck on the walls at public places. These training centres and hostel facilities along with marriage halls appeared to be spaces of social capital for persons belonging to that particular caste, as discussed in the previous chapter.

Unlike in Sangareddy, the manifestation of caste in the public arena was not restricted to a mere expression of solidarity among caste and community persons in the Krishna district. In some instances, it transcended to the level of being exclusive in nature. In one such instance:

I noticed that a ‘job mela’ (fair) was being conducted exclusively for graduates from a Kapu caste at an engineering college, owned by persons belonging to the same caste, located on the outskirts of the city (towards Hyderabad). Pamphlets for the same were distributed at most of the public places in Vijayawada. It was clearly mentioned in the hand-out that only persons belonging to Kapu, Balija, Telaga and Ontari castes were eligible to apply.

When asked, Sakshi newspaper metro stringer MRB said that it was a regular practice (Field notes, Vijayawada, 21 September 2012).

I followed up the caste-based job fair issue and learnt that it was declared as an official event by the TDP-led government in 2016 and was held under the aegis of the AP Kapu Welfare Corporation. In the welfare corporation website, it was mentioned that Reddys, who were issued caste certificates by *Tahsildars* (MROs) were not allowed to appear for the job fair.⁵⁷ The timing of this ‘official consecration’ to the event was striking as the reservation movement by the Kapus turned violent and resulted in the burning of a train at Tuni in East Godavari district.⁵⁸

Students of various engineering and degree (graduate) colleges in Krishna and Guntur districts publicly followed a particular form of social stratification, which was visible in the flexi-banners and cloth-banners near colleges. As gathered from the locals and the information provided on the banners, students were stratified into ‘C’ and ‘non-C’. While C stood for Chowdary, non-C classification comprised the rest of the students who were not from the Kamma caste. Even the freshers’ and farewell parties were organised on the basis of this stratification (Field notes, Vijayawada, 3 October 2012).

Banothu (2019) provided a first-hand account of such discrimination she faced in a private engineering college located between Guntur and Vijayawada. She even outlined the strategies employed by the influential caste students in order to find out the caste background of the newly-joined in the colleges. Pointing out that even trivial fun like going to movies or making friendships and relationships centred on the issues of caste in such colleges, Banothu (2019) recalled:

There were two groups in the engineering colleges in Vijayawada and Guntur. The “Chowdary Group” and the “Non Chowdary Group”. C-batch, NC-batch. Every caste that is not Chowdary including Brahmins fall in the NC-batch. I explode internally when I think of this concept.

⁵⁷ See, <http://www.kapucorp.ap.gov.in/New%20folder/index.html> and <https://www.news18.com/news/india/at-kapu-job-mela-in-andhra-pradesh-turn-up-only-if-you-belong-to-that-caste-1303499.html> [Last accessed on 15 December, 2020].

⁵⁸ The Tuni train burning incident as part of the Kapu reservation agitation happened at the end of January, 2016 and this official Kapu job *mela* was held on October 21, 2016. See, <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/andhra-pradesh/Protest-at-Tuni-railway-station-turns-violent/article14030483.ece> [Last accessed on 15 December, 2020].

The C-batch doesn't mingle with anyone else. [...] When an NC is seen talking to a C, they beat them up. They first warn the person though. But if the person continues to talk to the C despite the warning, they either disown the C, or target the NC for the rest of his/her college life.

The neighbouring city, Guntur presented an extreme case of relation between caste and educational institutions. Most of the influential castes and religious communities had their own educational societies (ES) that run colleges.⁵⁹ This caste discrimination faced by students barely found space in the newspapers unless a major untoward incident happened. Suicide of an undergraduate architecture student at the Acharya Nagarjuna University (ANU), M. Rishiteswari due to caste, region, and gender based discrimination was an example.⁶⁰

A visit to the university to collect some secondary and archival material provided me an understanding of the forward caste domination that was present there. When I made a visit to the campus library (Ambedkar Memorial Library), posters of Open Category Students' Federation (OCSF) were pasted on already existing posters of 'other' student bodies that fight for the rights of Dalit and Muslim students on campus during admission time of the year (Field notes, 13 August 2012).⁶¹ However, succumbing to political pressures from the TDP-led government in the aftermath of

⁵⁹ In Guntur, the first college to be established during the colonial period was Andhra Christian College. This was followed by the establishment of the Hindu College by an educational society (ES) run by Brahmins and caste-Hindus. Soon caste and community based colleges, such as, Jagarlamudi Kuppaswamy Chowdary College (ES run by the Kammas), Tellakula Jalayya & Polisetty Somasundaram College (ES run by the Vysyas), Sri Gorla Hanuma Reddy & Mettu Chinna Malla Reddy College (ES run by the Reddys), Dasari Chitti Babu Naidu & Nanduri Koteswara Rao Junior College (ES run by the Kapus), Andhra Muslim College (ES run by the Muslims), were established (Not in the chronological order). This could be a departure for further research on the relationship between caste/religious community and institutes of higher learning in this region.

⁶⁰ She was an 18-year-old belonging to a BC community from Warangal, Telangana and took the extreme step due to ragging and harassment by her fellow students on campus on 21 July 2015. Even a faculty member was found involved in the case and was suspended. The final verdict on the case was still awaited at the time of writing. See, <https://www.thenewsminute.com/article/no-one-should-lose-kin-ragging-i-did-mother-guntur-university-victim-speaks-32599>; <https://www.newindianexpress.com/states/andhra-pradesh/2015/jul/30/4-member-Panel-Begins-Probe-into-Rishiteswaris-Suicide-788337.html>; <https://www.thenewsminute.com/article/rishiteshwari-suicide-case-second-diary-found-detailing-harassment-and-ragging-seniors-33525>; <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/andhra-pradesh/Rishiteswari-case-ANU-principal-named-accused/article13976908.ece> [Last accessed on 15 December, 2020].

⁶¹ Persons or students who are from forward castes/communities most of the time label themselves as OC, which means open category. This category is also referred as general category, and it is open for any person (including caste, class, and gender) to apply for a job or admission in case of employment and education respectively, and can contest in elections. General category is open for those who hail from reserved categories too. A sociological understanding of the general category can be found in Deshpande's (2013) essay: "Caste and castelessness".

the Rishiteswari suicide, the university administration passed on a draconian circular by banning all student organisations on campus on August 8, 2015.⁶²

This discussion on the presence of caste in everyday life at these locations of research in both Andhra Pradesh and Telangana provided an understanding of the social field in which stringers operated. This description provided the nature of social hierarchies that served as mode of discrimination and dominance at various levels along with the expression of solidarities by certain castes and communities.

To understand the nature of caste based solidarities, assertions, articulations, and discrimination in the social order, Bourdieu's (1986, pp. 241-258) conception of various forms of capital was very appropriate in the context of the present study. His notion of capital forms the triad of field theory along with field and habitus. The French sociologist's conceptualisation offered a fresh lease of life to the otherwise reified Marxist and also economic deterministic conception of capital by augmenting it with the academic works of Weber (cultural roots of capitalism) and Durkheim (social order; forms of solidarity: mechanical and organic).

Elucidating on various forms of capital, Bourdieu (1986) noted:

Depending on the field in which it functions, and at the cost of the more or less expensive transformations which are the precondition for its efficacy in the field in question, capital can present itself in three fundamental guises: as *economic capital*, which is immediately and directly convertible into money and may be institutionalised in the form of property rights; as *cultural capital*, which is convertible, in certain conditions, into economic capital and may be institutionalised in the form of educational qualifications; and as *social capital*, made up of social obligations ("connections"), which is convertible, in certain conditions, into economic capital and may be institutionalised in the form of a title of nobility (p. 243). [Emphasis original]

The concepts of social capital, cultural capital, and economic capital help not only in understanding the issues in Telugu journalism that this work deals with in the next chapters – patterns of recruitment, non-journalistic and journalistic practices that were involved in news production, and various forms of exchanges and rituals prevalent in

⁶² See, <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/andhra-pradesh/anu-student-unions-condemn-ban/article7576701.ece> & <https://www.thequint.com/news/india/i-hate-all-men-reveals-ap-students-diary-who-committed-suicide> [Last accessed on 15 December, 2020].

the field -- but also in understanding the whole of the heteronomous journalistic field in relation to social, political, and economic fields. Also, while using the concepts of cultural capital and social capital, the variations within these forms – embodied, institutionalised, and objectified, and networks, social connections, consecration, and reproduction respectively – will be discussed in the following chapters.

This conception of capital along with habitus and field helps in understanding the presence and role of caste associations (*sanghams*) and their representation in media, proliferation and celebration of family surnames as brand names both in polity and economy, provision of education and employment opportunities exclusively to certain castes among a wide range of issues surrounding caste.

More importantly, the *formal conversions* of capital from one to the other(s) were central to the understanding of the journalistic field. Bourdieu's field theory and its conceptual triad was crucial to this study, as it helped in comprehending the particularities of issues in the sites and individuals (micro-level) and at the same time allowing to provide an analytical understanding of the social, political, and economic orders at the macro-level (society, polity, media economy, states). Field theory served as a mezzo-level tool to connect the micro and macro-levels of analysis (Benson, 2006, pp. 187-202).

Having considered that, ethnographic observations on the manifestation and articulations of caste in the semi-arid and industrialised Medak district appeared to be different from commercial crop and paddy-rich coastal river delta region of Krishna district. These regional and geographical variations were also crucial in understanding the social order following the anthropologist and historian Cohn's (1987) suggestion that regions and regionalism are important to the study of Indian society. In an essay discussing the subjective and objective aspects of understanding regions, he wrote,

The relationship between the rise of regional élites and their role in selection and standardisation of symbols and values from the regional stock of symbols and values is a very complex one, relating to technology, education, access to civil and political roles, and the accidents of history and policy (p. 130).

This observation is essential in understanding the political field that shares a dynamic relation with the journalistic field, which will be discussed in the following section.

An idea about the political orders is as important as the social ones to understand the practices in the heteronomous field of journalism.

Political field in the Telugu lands: A masculine *Sat-shudra* game of thrones

The obvious relationship between the journalistic field and the political field while carrying out newswork by stringers would be dealt with in the following chapters. But in this section, I present some observations and events that took place at both sites of research, which necessitate an understanding of the political field in itself, which was brimming with activity since the inception of my fieldwork in 2012.

Apart from the Telangana movement that kept newswriters in both regions on their toes, another development that took place around the same time was the establishment of a new regional political outfit – the YSR Congress in 2011. This resulted in the conduct of by-elections as 18 Congress MLAs resigned from their positions and party to join the YSR Congress. Even though there were no by-elections for the Gannavaram Assembly constituency, the political atmosphere was tense due to the arrest of YSR Congress supremo Y. S. Jagan Mohan Reddy on 27 May 2012. This arrest was made a couple of weeks before the scheduled by-elections in Andhra, Rayalaseema and Telangana regions.

On that day, there was a state-level meeting of APUWJ at Kanchikacharla. The speakers at the working journalists meeting from the morning were hinting at the possible arrest of the leader, which became a reality by evening. The timing of this meeting could not be missed as the accounts of *Sakshi* newspaper were frozen on 8 May 2012. The following day the paper printed a half-page with a headline – Black Day – in Telugu and two-line text that read: *sakshi patrika, sakshi TV accounts stambhimpacēsina CBI; kalālaku.. gaḷalaku sankeḷḷu!* (CBI freezes Sakshi daily and TV accounts; pens and voices chained!).⁶³

Many journalists attended the meeting, as the organisers promised that there would be elections for the office bearers of the district unit of the Union. Much to the shock of stringers and reporters from other newspapers the entire meeting turned out to be an

⁶³ The remaining half page carried two advertisements by leading tractor manufacturers offering ‘special discount’ in the *kharif* season that starts in June every year and there were titles of three op-ed pieces marked with page numbers and headlines for two stories (turn-to-page items). See, *Sakshi*, p. 1, 9 May 2012, Krishna edition.

expression of solidarity to the arrested leader. Many stringers expressed that YSR Congress is going to topple Congress in the 2014 General Election. (Field notes, Kanchikacharla, 27 May 2012).⁶⁴

This was one of the many instances that suggested the close relationship between the journalistic field and the political field. The union meeting instance was particularly presented to highlight the relationship at a larger level than that of the usual proximity or relationship that stringers maintained while going about their reporting work. On the same lines, two years later, I attended the inaugural meeting of the TUWJ organised at the Exhibition Grounds, Nampally in Hyderabad on 9 March, 2014. With the then Chief Minister of the state resigning from the post on 19 February, 2014 in protest against the Union government's decision to bifurcate the state in favour of Telangana, President's rule was imposed on 1 March 2014.

Telangana political cutting across parties attended and spoke the journalists' meet. However, the preferential importance given to TRS president KCR by the Telangana journalist leaders was obvious and could not be missed. With some journalists publicly announcing their political ambitions, in the 2014 Assembly elections, some TUWJ leaders intervened to remind that the meeting was about journalists' welfare in the soon-to-be formed state and not an avenue to discuss electoral politics.⁶⁵

Having made these observations, I realised the need to gather details about the caste background of legislators who won from Gannavaram and Sangareddy constituencies to get an understanding about the political field, which seemed to share a considerable amount of affinity with the journalistic field.

⁶⁴ In the by-polls, YSR Congress almost decimated its parent party and went on to win 15 Assembly seats (Andhra and Rayalaseema) and gave a very tough fight to the TRS in Telangana region, which eventually won the single seat. Congress managed to secure only two seats (Andhra) in 18 incumbent Assembly constituencies. Many commented that this feat will be repeated in the Assembly and General elections in 2014 (Iyer, 2012).

⁶⁵ Eventually, some journalists managed to get tickets from various parties to contest in the elections.

Table 3.1

Region-wise representation of women MLAs before bifurcation in united AP

Year	Andhra+Rayalaseema MLAs - 175 (%)	Telangana MLAs- 119 (%)	Total - 294 (%)
2004	13 (7.4 %)	10 (8.40 %)	23 (7.82 %)
2009	19 (10.85 %)	16 (13.44 %)	36 (12.24 %)

Source: AP Assembly archives

Table 3.2

State-wise representation of women MLAs in AP & TS

Year	Andhra Pradesh - 175 (%)	Telangana - 119 (%)	Total - 294 (%)
2014	18 (10.28 %)	9 (7.56 %)	27 (9.18 %)
2019	14 (8 %)	6 (5.04 %)	20 (6.80 %)

Source: AP and TS Assembly archives

The data was procured from senior editor and political analyst Kommineni Srinivasa Rao (2014a & 2014b), who publishes and updates a handbook comprising the details of candidates in both states, along with the data that I collected during the course of my fieldwork and Assembly archives of both states. The data suggested that the political field is an ‘arena of the *Sat-shudras*’ in both AP and Telangana. The provision of reservations in Assembly constituencies is applicable to SC and ST categories and not for persons from the OBC communities and women. In effect, in both states, open category Assembly and parliamentary seats are most of the times won by persons belonging to castes such as Kamma, Reddy, Kapu, and Velama.

Sheer numbers of women representation in the Assembly from Seemandhra and Telangana regions before bifurcation along with AP and TS Assemblies after bifurcation presented the masculine nature of the political field in the Telugu speaking regions. The highest percentage of women representation was recorded in the 2009 Legislative Assembly since 2004. Apart from that elected house, the percentage of women representation was reduced to single digits indicating the masculine domination in the political field (See, Table 3.1 and 3.2). The situation worsened in the post-bifurcation scenario.

Table 3.3

MLAs elected from Gannavaram – Caste & gender (1955-2019)

Year	Name	Political Party	Caste	Gender
1955	Puchalapalli Sundarayya	CPI	Reddy	Male
1962	Puchalapalli Sundarayya	CPI	Reddy	Male
1967	Velivala Sitaramayya	Congress	Kamma	Male
1968	Kakani Venkatratnam	Congress	Kamma	Male
1972	Tappata Sarojini Ananda Bai	Congress	Scheduled Caste	Female
1978	Puchalapalli Sundarayya	CPI	Reddy	Male
1983	Musunuru Ratna Bose	Congress	Kamma	Male
1985	Mulpuru Balakrishna Rao	TDP	Kamma	Male
1989	Musunuru Ratna Bose	Congress	Kamma	Male
1994	Gadde Rammohan	Independent	Kamma	Male
1999	Dasari Balavardhana Rao	TDP	Kamma	Male
2004	Muddaraboina Venkateswara Rao	Independent	Yadav (OBC)	Male
2009	Dasari Balavardhana Rao	TDP	Kamma	Male
2014	Vallabhaneni Vamsi Mohan	TDP	Kamma	Male
2019	Vallabhaneni Vamsi Mohan	TDP	Kamma	Male

Source: Rao (2014a); Fieldwork

Note: Congress (I) and Indian National Congress were listed as Congress for convenience.

Table 3.4

Details of MLAs elected from Sangareddy– Caste & gender (1962-2019)

Year	Name	Political Party	Caste	Gender
1962	Patlolla Ramchandra Reddy	Congress	Reddy	Male
1967	Narasimha Reddy	Independent	Reddy	Male
1972	Patlolla Ramchandra Reddy	Congress	Reddy	Male
1978	Narasimha Reddy	Independent	Reddy	Male
1983	Patlolla Ramchandra Reddy	Congress	Reddy	Male
1985	Patlolla Ramchandra Reddy	Congress	Reddy	Male
1989	Patlolla Ramchandra Reddy	Congress	Reddy	Male
1994	K. Sadasiva Reddy	TDP	Reddy	Male
1999	K. Satyanarayana	BJP	Scheduled Tribe	Male
2004	Turpu Jayaprakash Reddy	Congress	Reddy	Male
2009	Turpu Jayaprakash Reddy	Congress	Reddy	Male
2014	Chinta Prabhakar	TRS	Padmashali (OBC)	Male
2019	Turpu Jayaprakash Reddy	Congress	Reddy	Male

Source: Rao (2014b); Fieldwork.

Note: Congress (I) and Indian National Congress were listed as Congress for convenience.

In order to highlight the male dominance in the field, I indicated the gender of the winning candidates in all the tables along with the caste and community details. What was striking was the meagre presence of women candidates in the state Assemblies was similar to that of women representation in the journalistic field, to be discussed in the following chapter. While Table 3.3 presents the details of elected legislators from Gannavaram, Table 3.4 details the same about Sangareddy. Results of the latest Assembly elections held in Telangana, 2018 (Table 3.10) and Andhra Pradesh, 2019 (Table 3.9) clearly demonstrate that the MLAs from the *Sat-shudra* and forward castes can form a government in their respective states.

The situation of marginal communities in Telangana, where the incumbent TRS party won, appeared to be slightly better than their counterparts in AP, where YSR Congress party toppled the Telugu Desam party (TDP). The top-3 *Sat-shudra* caste MLAs (91 out of 175) in AP can prove their majority in the house without any other community's support. In case of Telangana, this category MLAs (55 out of 119) will fall short of simple majority by two seats even after taking support from three forward caste MLAs. There are eight legislators from the Muslim religious minority out of which only one MLA was elected outside of Hyderabad hailing from Bodhan in Nizamabad. In case of AP there were four Muslim legislators and all of them represent YSR Congress in the Assembly.

The caste matrix and composition of legislators is openly talked about not only in Telugu newspapers but also in English national dailies (Reddy, 2018; 2019). The political field in both AP and Telangana appeared to be a '*sat-sudra* arena' keeping Bourdieu's conception of these terrains of power as fields of combat sport between influential castes and how caste serves as a source of symbolic and social capital. Some of the conditions that were considered 'essential and natural' to take part in the political field ("rules of the game") in these states clearly demand certain volumes of capital (money, credentials) and habitus, to which every person may not be entitled.⁶⁶ Interviews with stringers about the political field at both sites revealed that most of the time, an open or general category Parliamentary seat (Lok Sabha; lower house) is offered to business persons.

⁶⁶ Social geographer, Jeffrey (2001, pp. 217-236) demonstrated the importance of caste dominance in the reproduction of social inequality in the context of Uttar Pradesh.

Table 3.5

*Details of MPs elected from Machilipatnam– Caste & gender (1952-2019)**

Year	Name	Party	Caste	Gender
1952	S. Buchikotaiah	CPI	Kapu	Male
1957	M. V. Krishna Rao	Congress	Kapu	Male
1962	M. Venkataswamy	Independent	Kapu	Male
1967	Y. A. Prasad	Congress	Kamma	Male
1971	M. Nageswara Rao	Congress	Kapu	Male
1977	M Ankineedu	Congress	Kamma	Male
1980	M Ankineedu	Congress	Kamma	Male
1984	K. Sambasiva Rao	Congress	Kamma	Male
1989	K. Sambasiva Rao	Congress	Kamma	Male
1991	K. Peda Reddaiah	TDP	Yadav (OBC)	Male
1996	K. Satyanarayana	TDP	Kapu	Male
1998	K. Sambasiva Rao	Congress	Kamma	Male
1999	A. Brahmanaiah	TDP	Kapu	Male
2004	B Ramakrishna	Congress	Kapu	Male
2009	K Narayana Rao	TDP	Gouda (OBC)	Male
2014	K Narayana Rao	TDP	Gouda (OBC)	Male
2019	V Balashowry	YSRCP	Kapu	Male

Source: Rao (2014a)

Note: * Gannavaram village/mandal/town falls under Machilipatnam parliamentary constituency

Table 3.6

*Details of MPs elected from Medak – Caste & gender (1952-2019)**

Year	Name	Party	Caste	Gender
1952	N.M. Jayasurya	PDF	N.A	Male
1957	P. Hanmanta Rao	Congress	Brahmin	Male
1962	P. Hanmanta Rao	Congress	Brahmin	Male
1967	S. Laxmi Bai	Congress	Yadav (OBC)	Female
1971	Mallikharjun Goud	TPS	Goud (OBC)	Male
1977	Mallikharjun Goud	Congress	Goud (OBC)	Male
1980	Indira Gandhi	Congress	Brahmin	Female
1984	P. Manik Reddy	TDP	Reddy	Male
1989	M, Baga Reddy	Congress	Reddy	Male
1991	M. Baga Reddy	Congress	Reddy	Male
1996	M. Baga Reddy	Congress	Reddy	Male
1998	M. Baga Reddy	Congress	Reddy	Male
1999	A. Narendra	BJP	Padmashali (OBC)	Male
2004	A. Narendra	TRS	Padmashali (OBC)	Male
2009	M. Vijayasanthi	TRS	BC-Kapu	Female
2014	K. Chandrasekhar Rao	TRS	Velama	Male
2014	K. Prabhakar Reddy	TRS	Reddy	Male
2019	K. Prabhakar Reddy	TRS	Reddy	Male

Source: Rao (2014b)

Note: * Sangareddy village/mandal/town falls under Medak parliamentary constituency.

PDF = People's Democratic Front (a left-leaning political outfit). Telangana Praja Samithi (TPS) was floated by former CM Marri Channa Reddy during the first wave of Telangana agitation in 1969 and it was merged into Congress after the General elections in 1971.

And these candidates will have to ‘take care’ of the financial needs of the Assembly contestant from the same party falling under the Parliamentary constituency (See, Table 3.5 and 3.6).⁶⁷ In the case of Medak parliamentary constituency, there are seven Assembly constituencies including Sangareddy, and the number of Assembly constituencies in case of Machilipatnam parliamentary constituency is the same, including Gannavaram Assembly constituency.

This is the preferred scheme of operation by most of the political parties in picking parliamentary candidates for Lok Sabha. A cursory look at their profiles would reveal that most of them are into business before venturing into politics. As per a report compiled by the Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR, 2019a, p. 35-36), as many as seven candidates from AP and one from Telangana figured in the top-10 list of richest contestants in the first phase of General Elections conducted on 11 April, 2019.

Various political parties seemed to have selected candidates for the Assembly constituencies on the basis of caste equations (*kulam*), money (*artha balam*), and muscle power (*anga balam*).⁶⁸ Most of the times, it ‘happened’ that all the above forms of capital were wrested in the hands of males from certain castes in most parts of the country, while in the present case it was *Sat-shudras*. The list of chief ministers elected by the winning party in each term reveals the dominance of masculine *Sat-shudras* in the political arena from the inception. Out of the 16 chief ministers of united Andhra Pradesh, as many as nine of them were Reddys (all Congress), three CMs were Kammas, while a person each from Mala, Velama, Vysya, and Brahmin castes were chosen for the top political post in the state (See, Table 3.7).

Political scientist Carolyn Elliott, based on her research in Andhra Pradesh during the decade after the linguistic formation of states, was one of the first scholars to have pointed out that the Reddys and the Kammas were exerting their dominance through traditional structures of power at various levels. Elliott (1995, pp. 133-134 & pp. 151-

⁶⁷ However, in case of reserved parliamentary constituencies, it is vice-versa. The MLAs contestants need to pool in resources for their party’s parliamentary candidate.

⁶⁸ At least two out of the three Telugu words were used by almost all respondents at both locations while interviewing and interacting during the course of fieldwork. In Sangareddy, where considerable and decisive amount of Muslim population was present, some of the respondents used religion along with local/non-local factor also.

152) succinctly pointed out how Reddys from Rayalaseema and Telangana regions began to bolster their dominance in the political arena through kinship ties.⁶⁹

While in Telangana the practice of having one family member in each political party is not prevalent, in the case of coastal Andhra, Uttarandhra (north-coastal Andhra), and Rayalaseema regions it was very common. The commonality in both the states is having more than one family member in active politics. Commenting about the familial ties and politics in AP, Balagopal (1995, p. 2482) likened the situation to politics as property run by a Hindu joint family. Barring one or two CMs of united AP, everyone had at least one more member from his immediate or extended family in active politics. Most of them either passed on their political legacy or ‘inherited’ one. This practice, which could be seen as a transmission of social capital, holds good cutting across regions in both states and parties even after bifurcation.⁷⁰

While explaining this kind of transmission of social capital, Bourdieu (1986) noted:

[S]ocial capital accruing from a relationship is that much greater to the extent that the person who is the object of it is richly endowed with capital (mainly social, but also cultural and even economic capital), the possessors of an inherited social capital, symbolised by a great name, are able to transform all circumstantial relationships into lasting connections (p. 250).

This practice of family politics or dynasty politics is not restricted to AP and Telangana alone, as it was visible in almost all states and regions throughout the country (Vaishnav, 2015 & 2017). For the present study, this practice is very much prevalent in the political field of both Sangareddy (Medak district) and Gannavaram (Krishna district). More importantly, there is a visible exertion of dominance of the *Sat-shudras* in the political field at both locations.

⁶⁹ Srinivasulu (2002) and Suri (2002) provided an excellent overview of social and electoral politics in Andhra Pradesh (united).

⁷⁰ At the same time, there were many instances when persons from the same family were contesting against each other representing different political parties. But as a stringer in Gannavaram pointed out: “In the end, the seat will remain within the family” (PCB, 28 May 2012)

Table 3.7

Details of Chief Ministers of united AP – Caste, gender, and region (1956-2014)

Term	Name of CM	Party	Caste	Region	District of birth	Gender
1956-60	Neelam Sanjiva Reddy	Congress	Reddy	Rayalaseema	Anantapur	Male
1960-62	Damodaram Sanjivayya	Congress	Dalit/Mala	Rayalaseema	Kurnool	Male
1962-64	Neelam Sanjiva Reddy	Congress	Reddy	Rayalaseema	Anantapur	Male
1964-71	Kasu Brahmananda Reddy	Congress	Reddy	Coastal Andhra	Guntur	Male
1971-73	P.V. Narasimha Rao	Congress	Brahmin	Telangana	Warangal	Male
1973	Jalagam Vengala Rao	Congress	Velama	Telangana	Khammam	Male
1973-78	Marri Channa Reddy	Congress	Reddy	Telangana	Atraf-i-Baldah	Male
1978-80	Tanguturi Anjaiah	Congress	Reddy	Telangana	Hyderabad	Male
1980-82	Bhavanam Venkatrami Reddy	Congress	Reddy	Coastal Andhra	Guntur	Male
1982-83	Kotla Vijaya Bhaskara Reddy	Congress	Reddy	Rayalaseema	Kurnool	Male
1983-84	N.T. Rama Rao	TDP	Kamma	Coastal Andhra	Krishna	Male
1984	Nadendla Bhaskara Rao	TDP	Kamma	Coastal Andhra	Guntur	Male
1984-89	N.T. Rama Rao	TDP	Kamma	Coastal Andhra	Krishna	Male
1989-90	Marri Channa Reddy	Congress	Reddy	Telangana	Atraf-i-Baldah	Male
1990-92	N. Janardhana Reddy	Congress	Reddy	Rayalaseema	Nellore	Male
1992-94	Kotla Vijaya Bhaskara Reddy	Congress	Reddy	Rayalaseema	Kurnool	Male
1994-95	N.T. Rama Rao	TDP	Kamma	Coastal Andhra	Krishna	Male
1995-99	N. Chandrababu Naidu	TDP	Kamma	Rayalaseema	Chittoor	Male
1999-04	N. Chandrababu Naidu	TDP	Kamma	Rayalaseema	Chittoor	Male
2004-09	Y.S. Rajasekhara Reddy	Congress	Reddy	Rayalaseema	Kadapa	Male
2009	Y.S. Rajasekhara Reddy	Congress	Reddy	Rayalaseema	Kadapa	Male
2009-10	K. Rosaiah	Congress	Vaisya	Coastal Andhra	Guntur	Male
2010-14	N. Kiran Kumar Reddy	Congress	Reddy	Rayalaseema	Chittoor	Male

Source: Rao (2014a; 2014b)

Note: Congress (I) and Indian National Congress were listed as Congress for convenience.

Table 3.8

Details of Chief Ministers of AP & TS – Caste, gender, and region (Post-bifurcation)

Term	State	Name of CM	Party	Caste	Region	District of birth	Gender
2014-19	AP	N. Chandrababu Naidu	TDP	Kamma	Rayalaseema	Chittoor	Male
2014-18	TS	K. Chandrasekhara Rao	TRS	Velama	Telangana	Siddipet	Male
2018-	TS	K. Chandrasekhara Rao	TRS	Velama	Telangana	Siddipet	Male
2019-	AP	Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy	YSRCP	Reddy	Rayalaseema	Kadapa	Male

Source: Rao (2014a; 2014b)

Table 3.9

Caste and category composition of MLAs in AP Assembly - 2019

Caste	Category	No. of MLAs	Percentage (%)
Reddy	SS	50	28.6
Kapu	SS	24	13.7
Kamma	SS	17	9.7
Baliya	SS	2	1.1
Velama	SS	2	1.1
Vysya	FC	4	2.3
Kshatriya/Raju	FC	4	2.3
Brahmin	FC	2	1.1
Dalits	SC	29	16.6
Adivasis	ST	7	4
Turpu Kapu	OBC	7	4
Yadava	OBC	6	3.4
Koppula Velama	OBC	5	2.9
Setti Baliya	OBC	4	2.3
Gavara	OBC	1	0.6
Rajaka	OBC	1	0.6
Kalinga	OBC	2	1.1
Reddika	OBC	1	0.6
Muslims	RM	4	2.3
Matsyakara	BC	3	1.7
Total		175	100

Source: AP & Telangana BC Welfare Association, Hyderabad

Note: SS = *Sat-shudras* FC = Forward castes; RM = Religious minorities.

MLAs party-wise break up: Total seats – 175. YSRCP - 151; TDP: 23; Jana Sena Party (JSP) - 1.

Table 3.10

Caste and category composition of MLAs in TS Assembly – 2018

Caste	Category	No. of MLAs	Percentage (%)
Reddy	SS	40	33.6
Velama	SS	10	8.4
Kamma	SS	5	4.2
Brahmin	FC	2	1.6
Vysya	FC	1	0.8
Muslims	RM	8	6.8
Dalits	SC	19	16
Lambada	ST	7	6
Adivasi	ST	5	4.2
Munnuru Kapu	OBC	8	6.8
Yadav	OBC	5	4.2
Goud	OBC	4	3.4
Vanjara	OBC	1	0.8
Mudiraj	OBC	1	0.8
Perika	OBC	1	0.8
Lodha	OBC	1	0.8
Gangaputra	OBC	1	0.8
Total		119	100

Source: AP & Telangana BC Welfare Association, Hyderabad

Note: MLAs party-wise break up: Total seats -119. TRS - 104; All India Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen (AIMIM) - 7; Congress - 6; BJP - 1; TDP - 1.

The history of politics in united Andhra Pradesh, if political ideologies are kept aside, could be seen as an arena where the Reddys and the Kammas clash with each other. This situation has even appeared to have concretised after the bifurcation of the state. And a sociological understanding of Telangana state politics revealed that the first-past-the-post system of elections provided an opportunity for a numerically weak *Sat-shudra* caste (Velama) to hold power in consecutive elections by patronising and appeasing all sections of the society. On the whole, a Bourdieusian field theory perspective of the social and political orders in both the sites of research suggested the *Sat-shudra* dominance.

This chapter, by way of understanding the social hierarchies and their forms of operation in the geographic spaces in which stringers work, provided a conceptual basis from the ground with the help of Bourdieusian field theory. It can be conveniently proposed that the social is clearly inscribed on the polity at various levels and even the economy, as most of these influential castes control the landholdings and businesses in these areas. Also, the triad of field theory concepts – field, habitus, and capital – proved to be crucial in understanding the dynamic nature of the society, polity, and journalism at these locations.

The thick descriptions and observations offered a picture that displays continuous conversions of capital from one form to the other. In this scenario, a pertinent question that arises from these observations is: Given the heteronomous nature of journalism, as discussed earlier, what would be the nature of the journalistic field and the agents or players in it?

In the process of answering the above question, the following chapter discusses the social identities (gender and caste) and educational qualifications of stringers, reporters, and editorial staffers along with the recruitment practices that exist in the Telugu journalistic field.

CHAPTER 4

DISPOSITIONS OF AGENTS AND RECRUITMENT PATTERNS IN THE ‘GENDERED’ TELUGU JOURNALISTIC FIELD

A field is a field of forces and a field of struggles in which the stake is the power to transform the field of forces. In other words, within a field, there is a competition for legitimate appropriation of what is at stake in the struggle in the field.

– Pierre Bourdieu, 2010a, p. 44.

The journalist belongs to a sort of pariah caste, which is always estimated by ‘society’ in terms of its ethically lowest representative. Hence, the strangest notions about journalists and their work are abroad. Not everybody realises that a really good journalistic accomplishment requires at least as much ‘genius’ as any scholarly accomplishment, especially because of the necessity of producing at once and ‘on order,’ and because of the necessity of being effective, to be sure, under quite different conditions of production.

– Max Weber, 1958, p. 96.

Introduction

Not often it happens that foundational texts and literature of the discipline/sub-discipline, methodological ideals, and situation in the field overlap to a great extent and push the researcher in one direction with clarity. Firstly, it was the chance reading of the translation of German sociologist Max Weber’s outline of a proposed survey on the press, which helped me in formulating some research questions for the present study. Some of the topics Weber wanted to cover in the survey (1910), which never materialised, included: “Social background, previous education, means of recruitment, conditions of appointment and payment, the ‘career’ of journalists (if possible by questionnaire) [...]” (Weber, 1998, p. 116).¹

¹ Weischenberg (2013) provided an excellent appraisal of Weber’s proposed study, which continues to remain relevant even in the present day media scenario. After going through the two Press Commission of India reports and the reports of various (six) wage board committees, which will be discussed in chapter 6, I felt as if the persons concerned with these reports followed the template offered by the German classical sociologist in this proposed survey (Weber, 1998, pp. 111-120).

Secondly, it was the ethnographic ideal proposed by Malinowski (2005), who suggested that the ethnographer needs to give a clear and firm outline of the social constitution of the field of study. While describing the proper conditions for ethnographic work, he noted,

This ideal imposes in the first place the fundamental obligation of giving a complete survey of the phenomena, and not of picking out the sensational, the singular, still less the funny and quaint.

The field Ethnographer has seriously and soberly to cover the full extent of the phenomena in each aspect of [...] culture studied, making no difference between what is commonplace, or drab, or ordinary, and what strikes him as astonishing and out-of-the-way (2005, pp. 8-9).

Thirdly, some observations that I made in the field helped me realise the intent of what could be called as one of the foundational text for the sociology of the press and journalism along with the methodological (ethnographic) ideal in the initial stages of research. The following is one such excerpt from my field notes of an observation session with stringers:

I reached Gannavaram before 9 A.M., earlier than usual time to avoid travel in the heat. Both the ‘shutter shops,’ which served as workplaces for stringers to file stories were locked from outside. These shops were located on either side of the highway. The one located adjacent to Krishna Zilla Parishad Library was referred to as KP (stringer) point. Earlier, it used to be a public call office or public telephone centre with subscriber trunk dialling (STD) and international subscriber dialling (ISD) facilities. Another one located near the Gannavaram Mandal Revenue Office (MRO) used to be a photocopy centre before ARP (*Eenadu* stringer) converted into his office on a rental basis. I went to *grāmastula viśranta grūham* (rest house for villagers) to read newspapers. Usually, elderly people, who did not need to go for daily labour or any job, gather at this place to spend time reading newspapers, watch television (when there’s power), and have discussions on various issues.

This facility is provided to the villagers by a former Mandal Parishad Territorial Constituency (MPTC) member who “retired” from active politics after the accidental demise of former Chief Minister Y.S. Rajasekhara Reddy. DD (stringer) entered the building after seeing my bike parked outside the building. We headed out for a cup of tea near the MRO building. He was complaining about a bus driver who did not deliver his news items the previous day, as told to him by the newspaper desk in-charge. “Those were “important” items and our newspaper did not carry them,” he said. As he was talking about the importance of the items to get advertisements, especially

with May Day (International Workers' Day celebrated on May 1) fast approaching, YSR (stringer) parked his vehicle and joined us for tea. Sipping tea, he said, "There's a small *panchāyati*² today at MRO office. Let's go there." As we reached the premises of MRO office, there was a gathering of local residents (men and women). One middle-aged person greeted DD and YSR before walking towards them briskly with some papers in hand. He handed out a handwritten copy each to the stringers and asked if the content was 'okay.' He gave me a copy too. It was a written complaint they wanted to submit to the MRO against construction of cell phone tower in Sri Ram Nagar, a residential locality in Gannavaram.

The complaint was against a proposed construction of a cell phone tower of a private mobile network on top of a residential building in their colony, owned by a person belonging to Dalit community. The complaint, addressed to the MRO, read: "We are not against the interests of the owner of the building. But we are against the construction and contractor. The Sri Ram Nagar Welfare Association members are concerned about health and environmental hazards that could result due to the location of construction." It is also mentioned in the complaint that the welfare association meeting was headed by a Dalit, who proposed the idea to stall the construction and a Muslim person seconded it before arriving at a 'group conscience.' As the stringers were going through the copy of complaint, another elderly person clad in pristine white khadi full-sleeve shirt and white trousers approached them and asked, "*Māvāḍu inkā rālēdā?* (Where is *our man*?)" DD replied that the person in question must be on his way. The gathering was organised by this elderly person, who belongs to the Kamma caste, while the complaint was written as if the idea is proposed by a Dalit.

Upon asking YSR told me that the *māvāḍu* in this context is ARP, *Eenadu* stringer. Soon, CVR and SSS reached the office together on a bike, followed by ARP. The *Eenadu* stringer's entry at the location was noticed by everyone. A couple of locals along with the elderly person had a quick talk with him before the gathering met the MRO and submitted the complaint. Immediately, after that they went and submitted another copy to the sub-inspector of police. The elderly person posed for the camera, while meeting the officials on both occasions. Women, who were present in one corner, the Dalit person, who headed the meeting, and the Muslim person, who seconded the decision, were not so prominent in the photographs that were published the following day (Field notes, 26-27 April 2012).

² *Panchayati* is a term used for: issue related to public or dispute. It is derived from Hindi with root word being *pānch* (Five). "A council (properly of five persons) assembled as a Court of Arbiters or Jury; or as a committee of the people of a village, of the members or a Caste, or what-not, to decide on questions interesting the body generally" (Yule & Burnell, 2008, p. 355).

Chances of an incident of this kind getting published in any English language newspaper would be very low. But Telugu dailies carried a report the following day. People who took part in submitting the complaint to officials met with the stringers after the news was carried in the zone pages and local tabloid district editions.

Pointing out that the publication of such micro-level issues or incidents by language newspapers is a result of the localisation strategy employed by the newspaper organisation, Ninan (2007, p. 20) wrote:

In addition to more traditional notions of public space in small town and village India where both public issues and private scandal were discussed, you now had newsprint-enabled and advertising-supported civic square where local gentry, local governance and local crime competed for attention.

She (2007, p. 116) also suggested that the stringer “became the local gentry’s passport to figuring in the newspaper.” While the localisation strategy employed by the newspaper organisation was an undeniable reality on the ground, what captured the attention from an ethnographic perspective were the processes through which the strategy played out in the field. Writing about the relationship between the journalistic field and caste, Udupa (2015, p. 173) noted, “Within the news field, the influence of caste practices can be registered through various vantage points, potentially growing into separate theses on their own.”

Here in this particular context, the interplay of hierarchy based on caste identity, building familiarity with stringers, and ‘owning up’ newspapers by the local gentry was striking. It was evident in the entire sequence: positioning of a Dalit person in the front and projecting another person from a religious minority person by the local elite while lodging a formal complaint against the interests of another Dalit person; taking the lead on ground and posing for the camera during the ‘photo op’ by sidelining women and minorities; referring to one particular newspaper stringer as *māvāḍu*.

These observations left me with more questions than answers about the social background of stringers and their relationship with other agents in the field along with local publics, and officials. The ethnographic approach helped me understand certain

patterns related to complex hierarchies and the agency of various newswriters along with their relationships with the social, political, and bureaucratic agents.

Coming back to the choice made in the usage of a Telugu word – *māṇḍu* – by a person belonging to an influential caste (Kamma), while referring to a person from a different caste is too striking to give it a miss. What is the commonality or binding factor for the utterance: *māṇḍu*? Usually, in Telugu *māṇḍu/manavāṇḍu* (our *man*), *manavāṇḍu/manōṇḍu* (our *men*) are used to refer to person(s) belonging to the same community based on caste, religion, regional, national, and linguistic identities, depending on the situation.

In this context, these commonalities did not hold any relevance. More importantly, at the time of this incident, ARP, who belongs to a Bahujan community (OBC), was working with the *Eenadu* and was sacked by the newspaper management on the basis of a complaint about his ‘misconduct’ reported by some locals to the bureau in-charge and editorial head. PCB, who belongs to the Madiga caste (Scheduled Caste), replaced ARP. Soon after the replacement, the local gentry, who belong to Kamma caste referred to PCB as *māṇḍu* on different occasions (Field notes, 4 May, 8 May, and 22 May, 2012). In case of ANR, who worked for a medium-scale newspaper, belonging to Kamma caste, the reference – *māṇḍu* – appeared to be self-explanatory.

The most likely commonality in question, which emerged logically, was that the owner of *Eenadu* newspaper, Cherukuri Ramoji Rao, is a Kamma. Even as the newspaper had a readership base cutting across sections and castes in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana, it is claimed by the Kammas with a sense of pride.

The anticipation of the arrival of the *Eenadu* stringer by the locals need not be restricted to caste-based identity alone, as it was the most widely circulated newspaper not only in Andhra Pradesh but also in Telangana. Elaborating on the *bhasha* (language) journalism in the context of Karnataka, Udupa (2015, p. 173) proposed, “Caste acted in tandem with language ideologies as a maximising strategy for the journalists... It was a key currency for masculine sociality, affective ties and trust groups in the news field.”

Having considered the above factors, it can be said that to understand the processes of local news production one needed to know the social background of agents in the journalistic field, such as, stringers, staffers, rural in-charges, bureau in-charges, and editorial members. In this chapter I present the demographic profiles of stringers, staffers, and editorial members, followed by a discussion on the process of recruitment, and nature of newswork in the journalistic field at the ground-level. The demographic factors that were considered to come up to present the profiles were: sex, education, age and experience, land owning, sources of income, religion, region, and caste.

The masculine journalistic field

The most striking feature while doing fieldwork at Gannavaram and Sangareddy was the absence of women in the workforce of print media houses. “Overall, the presence of women in Indian-language newspapers was scant, though no doubt growing,” observed Jeffrey (2010, pp. 172-173) before adding, “In working on this book I met only one woman reporter on an Indian-language newspaper.” It must be noted that these were the observations he presented based on his interviews conducted in the early 1990s. The optimism he expressed about the presence of women in Indian-language newspapers could not be remotely matched with the situation, at least in the Telugu speaking states, at the time of my fieldwork done decades later.

Encountering the issue of gender diversity

While carrying out the ethnographic research in the field, the question on absence/presence of women in Telugu journalism began as a faint whisper which turned into an alarming siren that could not be missed.

The following excerpts from my field notes present an understanding about gender exclusivity and allied issues in the Telugu journalistic field that this paper discusses in the subsequent sections.

I reached the venue at 8:40 A.M. where the annual meeting of Andhra Pradesh Union of Working Journalists (APUWJ) was organised at Kanchikacharla mandal in Krishna district on 27 May 2012 (Sunday). A wedding hall located amidst open fields on the arterial Vijayawada-Hyderabad highway (NH-65) served as the venue, which was attended by hundreds of working journalists

from nearby districts along with Vijayawada/Krishna district journalists. I identified myself with the organisers and took their permission to audio-record the proceedings of the meeting, which started at 9:15 A.M. The meeting assumed significance as the bank accounts of a leading Telugu daily – *Sakshi* – were frozen in a disproportionate assets case related to the then Member of Parliament (Kadapa), president of YSR Congress party, and chairman of the daily – Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy. The speakers on the occasion termed the incident as an attack on press freedom. They were also speculating that the YSRCP president could be arrested any moment (He was arrested on the same day). As journalists in the audience were listening to the speakers who were driving home the point that they should stand united to fight for the rights of journalists. [...] There was a tea break for half an hour at around 11 A.M. and everyone rushed to the washroom, which was full. I walked out of the hall and strolled towards the office room of the function hall to check if there were any other washrooms on the premises. The manager was watching *Satyamev Jayate* programme on a Telugu news channel and took a while to notice my presence. Without uttering a word, he raised his eyebrows enquiring what I want. I asked him in Telugu that I was looking for a washroom as the one inside the function hall was full. He replied: ‘Best thing... Go outside’ (*bestu... bayatikellandi*). I walked across the highway only to notice that scores of attendees at the meeting dashed in different directions already to find a bush or a tree to relieve themselves in the open. The en masse relieving session blocked the traffic on the highway. An AP Road Transport Corporation bus stopped and male passengers got down to ease themselves, while their womenfolk stayed on board. It was only after looking at the stranded women passengers that I realised that *there were no women in the APUWJ meeting. They were not only absent on the dais but also in the audience section.* (Field notes, 27 May 2012, Kanchikacherla, Andhra Pradesh) [All translations mine].

The above incident happened at the initial stage of my six-month long fieldwork carried out at Gannavaram, Krishna district and Vijayawada. This incident forced me to be sensitive towards the question of absence/presence of women in the Telugu journalistic field.

The following is another excerpt from my field notes from a TUWJ meeting organised at Gajwel (Chief Minister K. Chandrasekhara Rao’s [KCR] constituency), Siddipet (old Medak) district in the next phase of fieldwork in Telangana right after the formation of the new state and government in 2014.

The exuberance among the journalists present at the first TUWJ meeting after achieving statehood was palpable at the venue. Giant posters and banners

hailing the first Chief Minister of Telangana KCR and his party leaders were erected at the venue organised in a wedding hall. A Gajwel local DJ remix version of a popular song during Telangana movement: *O gosh, these Andhra colonisers... looted wealth of our Telangana....* I entered my name and purpose of my visit and took permission of the organisers to record the proceedings. The meeting had a delayed start. This time around there was one woman guest of honour on the dais along with TUWJ office bearers, ministers, and local political leaders. She was the first Deputy Speaker of Telangana Legislative Assembly M. Padma Devender Reddy. Speakers on the dais spoke at length about the issue of language, culture, Andhra domination [...] When her turn came up to speak, the Deputy Speaker came straight to the point after extending greetings to one and all: “*Annalū, mirantā sakkaga Telangana bhasha gurinci maṭladirru. Kāni endanna okka āḍa biḍḍa ledu iḍa. Yiha mana Telangana vaccināka gūda aḍōḷḷa paristhiti gintēna?*” (Dear brothers, you spoke at length about Telangana language and culture. But there is not even a single woman in this meeting. Is this how the situation of women is going to be even after securing our own state?). As Reddy pointed out, she was the only woman present on the occasion as a dignitary. However, women sweepers were there busy clearing the plastic cups and paper plates thrown on the ground near the snacks counter. *There were no women journalists at the meeting.* (Field notes, 7 October 2014)

As mentioned earlier, various stakeholders, including union leaders, politicians, journalists, and intellectuals who were present in the meetings were oblivious to the fact that women journalists were missing. This situation reminded me of a seminal article by Sen (1992) – “Missing women” – that argued that there is a wide gap in the gender ratio in Asia and North African countries (p. 587). However, the status of women journalists in Telugu journalism appeared to be appalling to say the least, as I started collecting data pertaining to journalists in AP and TS.

Women journalists: Missing in action

I found that this absence (of both data and women) was not only restricted to the journalistic field, but also in academic and research fields in India. Needless to mention that there were some studies focusing on topics such as, ‘portrayal of women’, ‘(mis)representation of women’, and ‘sexualising/commoditising the female body’ among others. This absence was succinctly pointed out by in the pioneering work of Joseph and Sharma (1991) as,

Although several women, within and outside the media, had written and protested about the more blatant forms of sexism found in the media, there

seemed to be a paucity of empirical and analytical studies which explored the more subtle distortions that tend to occur when the media focus attention on women (p. WS-75).

Mullick (2015) documented and analysed the experiences of small-town women reporters working in a Hindi newspaper (*Khabar Lahariya*) in north India and the oppressive power-play in the media field at the district level. In another study done in Madhya Pradesh, Tomar (2017) captured the hardships faced by women journalists in the journalism profession along with the manner in which women negotiated gendered hierarchies and power relations at the workplace from a feminist standpoint. Both these studies focused on women journalists working in *Khabar Lahariya* in the Hindi belt of north India.

Bourdieuian perspective furthers some of the arguments made by the afore-cited works from feminist standpoints by suggesting that the principle of masculine domination in the field of study is predominantly outside that particular field and especially in agencies such as “the educational system or the state, and in their strictly political actions, whether overt or hidden, official or unofficial” (Bourdieu, 2001, p. 116). Adhering to this foundational proposition made by Bourdieu, I set out to explore various kinds of data such as handbooks, biographies, and official statistics along with my ethnographic observations to present the status of women journalists in AP and TS.

In the process, I struggled to find studies that focused on gender diversity in Indian-language print journalism or newsrooms of television channels. Jeffrey (2010) in his monumental work dealt with the presence or absence of women and Dalits in the news organisation in India. Pointing out that newspapers needed women readers but most of the news organisations considered them to be a nuisance to avoid if possible, Jeffrey noted, “Even the estimate that women held 8 per cent of jobs on Indian newspapers distorted the picture on Indian-language newspapers” (p. 172). This was based on his extensive survey across the length and breadth of India in the 1990s.

The *Worlds of Journalism* scholars (Hanitzsch, Hanush, Ramaprasad, & de Beer, 2019, p. 56) estimated that the population size of journalists in India as 700,155 between the years 2013-2015. Based on a sample size of 527 out of the total population, they estimated the percentage of women as 27.6. As per that study done in

67 countries across the globe, India ranked 62 in gender representation (p. 81). However, the authors had not mentioned the detailed basis of the estimated figure regarding the population size in carrying out the study in India.

Also, some studies (Bhagat, 2004; Murthy & Anita, 2010) that focused on the gender diversity issue along with the working conditions of female journalists (both reporting and editorial) revealed a sorry state of affairs. Moreover, it needs to be noted that these were the figures and studies related to full-time women journalists working in media houses and were not about women working as stringers in any part of the country or state.

Without going into the qualitative aspects of the work of women journalists in the country or state, it is difficult to find studies that offer data on gender representation among the journalists working in Indian-language newspapers as well as English print and broadcast media. It appeared that obtaining figures of gender representation is as difficult as getting the number of working journalists in the country. Even veteran journalist, the late Kuldip Nayar (2005), pointed out in a national roundtable that there was a serious lack of data on journalists in India and suggested that there should be a register for journalists as in other professions such as law and medicine (p. 39).

After my own observations in the field along with a re-reading of the anthology of articles in *Missing: Half the Story – Journalism as if Gender Matters* by Sharma (2010) and Joseph and Sharma (2006) prompted me to collect data about gender diversity in AP and Telangana. These works helped in carrying out a research that resulted in explicitly pointing out that women reporters and stringers are *missing* in mofussil areas in the Telugu speaking states and their physical presence, on the whole, in the field is *marginal* (see Table 4.1).

The prospect of women journalists bringing to light biases and cases of inequality in society appeared to be bleak as the data collected from government (official) sources and journalists unions presented a grave situation of gender diversity in Telugu language print journalism.

GENDERED JOURNALISTIC FIELD

Table 4.1

Accredited Telugu and English language print journalists in AP & TS

Language	State	Editorial		Reporting		Total	
		Men (%)	Women (%)	Men (%)	Women (%)	Men (%)	Women (%)
Telugu	AP	241 (93.7)	16 (6.3)	233 (94.3)	14 (5.7)	474 (94)	30 (6)
English	AP	22 (75.8)	7 (24.2)	53 (96.3)	2 (3.7)	75 (89.2)	9 (10.8)
Telugu	TS	290 (81.7)	65 (18.3)	325 (91.8)	29 (8.2)	615 (86.7)	94 (13.3)
English	TS	96 (73.3)	35 (26.7)	105 (89.7)	12 (10.3)	201 (81.1)	47 (18.9)

Source: (GoT, 2019) and (GoAP, 2019)

Notes: Total number of state-level accredited journalists (all languages including Urdu, Hindi, Telugu, and English and media forms including print, online, and Television)

AP: Men: 1,497 (94.9 per cent), Women: 80 (5.1 per cent), Total: 1,577

TS: Men: 2,609 (89.9 per cent), Women: 295 (10.1 per cent), Total: 2,904

Getting to know the absence and presence of women journalists in general and women stringers in particular, was a relatively easier task at the sites of research (Gannavaram and Sangareddy) , when compared to eking out the same data in larger units like districts and states. There is no census of stringers or working journalists done by any industry-related body unlike in other formal and informal sectors. Even the labour department did not have the data related to working journalists in both states.³

In the course of my fieldwork, I figured out that the best possible way to find out about the presence/absence of women journalists and their status is to go through the lists of accredited journalists issued by the various levels of government. The accreditation cards were issued at three levels in both the states. They were: 1) Mandal revenue office (MRO); 2) District public relations office (DPRO); 3) Information and public relations (I & PR) departments of respective state governments. Accreditation cards issued by these government bodies serve as

³ This was the same experience that Kumar (2011, p. 65) faced while studying the Hindi press in the Uttarakhand movement.

passports to various welfare schemes, including travel passes, health insurance for journalists, land or housing schemes among others.⁴

The MROs provide the details of mandal level-reporters (stringers), while DPROs and I&PR departments list out the details of district-level and state-level accredited journalists. Both these offices do not provide any information about the number of stringers at district and state levels. The information provided by APUWJ and TUWJ cannot be considered as authentic for two reasons. They are: a) Not every stringer or journalist is a member of the union; b) The union leaders themselves informed that they do not maintain records of such data (TUWJ and APUWJ leaders Virahat Ali Khan & M. Somasundar, Personal communication, 1 December 2019).

The latest lists I procured from the MROs at both mandals by the end of year 2019 revealed that there were a total of 18 stringers in Gannavaram mandal and 24 stringers in Sangareddy mandal working in print news dailies. All of them were male. *There was not even a single woman working as a stringer in both these mandals.* This situation had not changed from the inception of my research in these sites.

The latest lists (2019) at the district level procured from DPROs indicated that there were 169 accredited Telugu print journalists (including 25 photojournalists) and 144 accredited Telugu print journalists (including 14 photojournalists) in Krishna and Sangareddy districts respectively. Krishna district's accredited list had two women journalists working as editors in separate small-scale newspapers in 2019. Sangareddy had no district-level accredited woman print journalist working in the Telugu dailies.

The data related to accredited women journalists in Telangana was sourced through the lists present in I & PR government website, which was last updated for the financial year 2017-2018 (GoT, 2019). The relevant data in AP was procured from I & PR website which was updated till 2 November 2019 (GoAP, 2019). The data comprised status of women working in other languages such as Hindi, Urdu, and English, along with Telugu. This data also included women journalists working in magazines, periodicals, television, dailies, and news agencies. Table 4.1 shows the number of accredited journalists working in English print medium, along with the

⁴ <https://telanganatoday.com/all-journalists-in-telangana-to-get-health-cards-soon> [Last accessed on 15 December, 2020].

total numbers across media and languages in both the states. It offers us a comparative perspective and throws light on the overall situation of women journalists.

There was no specific data about women working as stringers in both the states. But the guidelines provided in the government orders revealed the gendered nature of journalism at the mandal and district levels in both AP and TS. The guidelines for the constitution of the district media accreditation committees did not have any women representatives. And there were no guidelines for mandal media accreditation committees. The Telangana government included two women representatives in the state-level committees, while the AP government continued to follow the old system in which such provision did not exist (GoT, 2016b; GoAP, 2006). This appeared to have impacted the inclusion of women in the accreditation lists, as presence of women journalists in Telangana was higher compared to their counterparts in AP (see Table 4.1). Also, the Telangana government provided 33 per cent reservation (affirmative action) for women (per organisation) in providing media accreditation.

The total number of state-level accredited women journalists working in Telugu print organisations was 30 and represented a meagre 6.0 per cent of the total accredited journalists (504) in AP. And in TS, the total number of state-level accredited women journalists was 94 accounting to 13.3 per cent of the total accredited journalists (709). The number of women journalists in the English print media was nine (10.8 per cent) and in AP and 47 (18.9 per cent) in TS. The percentage of women out of the total number of state-level accredited journalists (1,577) in AP, which includes all languages including English, Hindi, Telugu, and Urdu and media forms including print, online, new agencies, and television, was 5.1 per cent. The corresponding figure in TS was 10.1 per cent for a total of 2,904.

The data revealed that women occupied editorial or desk positions more than the reporting or field jobs. Both the numbers and percentages concerning women working in the editorial sections were relatively higher compared to that of those working in reporting sections (see Table 4.1). These numbers indicated that the women journalists were employed in certain editorial or desk sections. A closer look revealed that even in some kinds of desk jobs like cartoonist, visual artist, and page designing, there were no women in both the states (GoAP, 2019; GoT, 2019).

After going through the sets of data, I found out that there was only one woman photojournalist in both the Telugu speaking states. There were around 96 photojournalists in TS print media, while there were 50 photojournalists in AP. The only woman photojournalist was working in a Telugu print daily based in Hyderabad, Telangana.

Few women headed the reporting and editorial operations in daily newspapers, which could be an important reason for the meagre numbers of women in the accredited lists. More importantly, for any journalist or stringer to get accreditation, the editor or chief of the news bureau of that particular media organisation had to forward the application to the accreditation committee (GoAP, 2006; GoT, 2016b). The policy decision taken in 2016 by the Telangana government to mandatorily include two women representatives from the field in the media accreditation committee, combined with the reservation policy of including women in the accreditation lists boosted the numbers of women across the media forms and languages.

The percentage of women included in the accreditation list in Telangana has almost doubled in a couple of years since the policy intervention. In the list compiled by I & PR of the state during the financial year 2015-16, there were 113 women out of the total 2,195 accredited journalists amounting to 5.14 per cent (GoT, 2015a; 2015b). Accreditation figures for 2019 mention the number of women in media in Telangana to be 10.1 per cent of the total (GoT, 2019).

There was a sustained effort on part of the women journalist groups and networks based in Hyderabad for the policy to get formulated and implemented in Telangana. A senior editor/journalist and women rights activist C. Vanaja, who was part of the accreditation guidelines committee, along with the Network of Women in the Media in the state had to fight against those resisting the inclusion of more women.

Recalling these efforts, the rights activist and journalist said:

We had to fight against journalists' unions and managements to push our case. Apart from a handful of senior journalists, there was no support from any quarter. We ensured that women with desk roles also were included in the accreditation list" (Personal communication, December 2019 & 15 March, 2020).

Also, women journalists in Hyderabad fought against discrimination in membership to the Press Club. They raised an online petition to end the discrimination pointing out that of the 1,500 members of the Press Club, the number of women was less than 100 (Kalyanam, 2017). This sort of concerted efforts and negotiations with the state government and journalists' bodies resulted in an increase in the number of accredited women journalists in Telangana, which was missing in the case of AP.

Even though the lists of accredited journalists or applicants for accreditation may not give the exact picture of the entire workforce at mandal or district or state levels, it seemed to be the only possible way to ascertain the status of women journalists in the field. And the data clearly pointed out the masculine domination in the journalistic field.

Masculine domination in the Telugu journalistic field

While pointing that women journalists were doing well in the English print media houses located in urban Maharashtra, Sule (2004a) noted, "At the Pune office of an English newspaper, women journalists jokingly ask their woman editor to recruit a guy for a change" (p. 39). This could also be the case in the metro section or city supplements of most of the English dailies in Hyderabad. She (2004b) added:

However, it is not so in language media. Here women are generally discouraged from taking up this profession by raising the bogey of odd hours and late night work. In the language press, especially in smaller cities, preference is given to male candidate over a better female candidate (p. 101).

Pointing out that the work conditions in small-town newspaper offices were harsh and unhygienic, Sule (2004b) observed:

Women journalists share with their male colleagues whatever inadequate infrastructure is provided by their employers. By and large, there is no consideration for providing any basic facilities for women. Often you come across separate toilets for men, women and officers, but within officers there is no division of men and women which implies officers are expected to be only male (p. 96).

My own ethnographic observations revealed that the working conditions of stringers in both sites of research were physically and culturally not conducive for women to carry out news work. There were no offices to which they could return and file stories

at the end of the work day. Most stringers were out at various locations in the mandals and villages during the day and filed their stories sitting under trees or in the shutter shops at many makeshift media points. There were no facilities such as public toilets in small towns and villages. Even in most of the government offices, schools, and hospitals, the sanitary conditions were not congenial for women. And most of the stringers did not hesitate to attend to nature's call in corners of streets or farmlands.

Coming to cultural issues, the everyday language used by locals, businessmen, clerks, constables, news sources and stringers themselves was abusive (frequent use of cuss words) at both the sites of research. This was not to suggest that women did not use abusive language in the sites of research.⁵ But some situations were not suited, especially for educated women to face, as part of their work.

This can be better explained through Bourdieu's work on *Masculine Domination* in which he (2001, p. 47) suggested:

[T]he sexual division is inscribed, on the one hand, in the division of productive activities with which we associate the idea of work, and more generally in the division of the labour of maintaining social capital and symbolic capital which gives men the monopoly of all official, public activities, of representation, and in particular of all exchanges of honour - exchanges of words (in everyday encounters and above all in the assembly), exchanges of gifts, exchanges of women, exchanges of challenges and murders (of which the limiting case is war).

When asked about the absence/presence of women as stringers, the agents in the field gave varied responses that ranged in tone from the sympathetic to the sexist. While questioning about the recruitment pattern of stringers, I asked editorial and bureau in-charges about the absence of women as stringers and their response was negative. In fact, the language is such that the reference to a stringer was always a default 'he' or 'him' in Telugu language. This was the case even while referring to an abstract situation involving a non-existent stringer.

⁵ Local women use abusive language in their day-to-day affairs too. At one instance, I was waiting for a stringer at Sangareddy Highway bus-stop and a labour contractor was distributing daily wages among labourers. As he was distributing among male construction workers, women stepped in and yelled, 'These guys have ample time to drink and come back home. We have to go home and cook something for kids and these idiots'. The contractor sheepishly smiled and started clearing wages to the women after side-lining men. [Field Notes, 4 October 2014]. I translated most part of the utterance in parliamentary language to convey the sentiment.

While surveying biographies of veteran Telugu journalists for my doctoral research, I found one instance where a senior editor Venkateswararao (2015) mentioned about recruiting women in a mainstream newspaper (*Eenadu*) in the year 1975. He was one of the founding editorial members of *Eenadu*, which was established in 1974. While recalling about the recruitment and training process he oversaw in the newspaper, he wrote:

For the first time in the history of Telugu newspapers, we have recruited five women as sub-editors. I took great care regarding the safety of women journalists. I was almost like the head of the family. Even now when I see them (decades later), the feeling of being a proud father comes to the fore (p. 119).

Even as this quote sounded patronising and invoked a familial notion, this was the sentiment that most progressive men seemed to have held on to in newsrooms. Jeffrey noted a similar response about a woman journalist working in an Urdu daily based in Hyderabad, where she “seemed to perform her tasks to the satisfaction of her editor and colleagues, who treated her presence as special – like having a daughter or sister working with them” (p. 173).

These accounts have a striking resemblance to the Bourdieu’s observations on the masculinity masquerading as nobility when he pointed out that “[t]he world of work is full of little isolated occupational milieux functioning as quasi-families in which the staff manager, almost always a man, exercises a paternalistic authority” (2001, p. 58). Also, Bourdieu’s field theory allows us to look at this patronising nature as, “Masculine domination, which constitutes women as symbolic objects whose being (*esse*) is a being-perceived (*percipi*), has the effect of keeping them in a permanent state of bodily insecurity, or more precisely of symbolic dependence” (p. 66).

The editorial in-charge of a leading Telugu newspaper based in Vijayawada, said that they tried ‘experimenting’ by recruiting a woman as a stringer in Machilipatnam and it ‘failed’, as the woman quit the profession in a very short time (GB, Personal communication, 12 September 2012). A bureau in-charge of the Medak district edition at Sangareddy, VRK said that in his experience (of more than 24 years), he had not seen any woman from Sangareddy willing to work as a reporter or a stringer in the district mandals. “Those who were educated and passionate about journalism

look for opportunities in Hyderabad instead. No intelligent/sensible woman (*telivaina āḍapilla*) would want to work as stringer”, he said (VRK, Personal communication, 10 October 2014).

“There were many women working in the editorial department of our newspaper. In fact, we have the most number of female employees than any other newspaper. But the number of women working as stringers was not known”, CR, rural in-charge of *Visalaandhra*, Vijayawada pointed out and added that both the leftist newspapers (the other being *Prajasakti*) had considerable number of women as working journalists (Personal communication, 13 September 2012).

Talking about the business and logistics part of recruiting, Krishna district rural in-charge of *Sakshi* newspaper, NS said:

We always recruited people on the basis of their abilities. If a woman was ready to work as a stringer, we never stopped her. But it would be very tough for women to travel alone or along with male stringers in villages to file stories or cover issues. That was the reason for the absence of women in this field. (Personal communication, 17 September 2012)⁶

Explaining the nature of the peer group in the field, a stringer in Sangareddy, PSR said, “*ī baṭṭebājgāḷḷatō āḍoḷḷaki sōpati geṭlaitadi sāru? batuku āgamaitadi. iḍa panijēshuḍu anta easy kādu* (How can women maintain a working relationship with these uncouth fellows? Women’s lives will be spoilt, as this is not an easy job to do)”. He also pointed out that sharing of information related to local news or dealings with government officials, businessmen and politicians was not possible with women in the journalism field at this level (Personal communication, 29 September 2014).

Apart from these structural and cultural issues, the nature of work of stringers was very demanding with no fixed time or schedule on any given day. Even though women were allowed to do hard labour in farmlands and construction sites and at the same time it was considered normal for them to work in soft professions like running small-time shops, roadside eateries, *balwādi* (rural pre-school set-up) and *anganwādi*

⁶ This response was similar to what an *Eenadu* manager told Jeffrey (2010, p. 173) way back in 1993.

(rural childcare) centres; it was suggested by the respondents that this field was masculine and it was too hard for women to work on a daily basis.

The respondents also felt that it was not expected from an educated (literate) woman to enter this hard field in which one was required to interact with a cross-section of people in the local areas, while dealing with financial, political, and crime-related issues as part of reporting duties. A senior journalist explained that instead of heavy-duty reporting, many newspapers encouraged women to contribute or work in the family, women, and Sunday supplement sections of Telugu newspapers.

This situation of the journalistic field resonated with what Bourdieu termed as spaces of honour or manliness while studying Kabyle people (2001):

Women are excluded from all the public spaces, such as the assembly or the market, here the games ordinarily considered the most serious ones of human existence, such as the games of honour, are played out. (p. 49)

When asked about why women were recruited more in desk jobs, a Telugu adage that was repeated by many stringers, staffers, and editorial at multiple locations and instances was: *tirigi āḍadi tiragaka magādu cheḍatāru* (A woman turns bad by wandering and a man by not wandering). More surprisingly, a handbook for journalists (Reddy, 2016, p. 286) written in Telugu on similar lines rephrased the above adage while describing the essential characteristics of reporter or stringer as: *journaliṣṭu tiragaka cheḍatāḍu* (A journalist turns bad/useless by not wandering). Notably, the gender of the journalist in the description was masculine.

Another crucial aspect of the gender issue in the journalistic field at mandal-level or small-town reporting was the non-applicability of the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013. The primary reason for the non-applicability of the Act was that stringers were not on the payrolls of the media organisation. Another reason was that there was no workplace as such for stringers since they were in the field most of the time.

Addressing this aspect, Seshu (2011) wrote:

The sexual harassment women journalists face isn't just at the work-place, inside newsrooms, with colleagues or bosses. It happens even when

journalists, especially reporters and correspondents, go out to work – in the field, during interviews or meetings with sources who hold out the promise of an exclusive tidbit. Women journalists are now increasingly in the field and covering a range of issues – from politics, war, conflict, corruption, business etc. Even as they report on sexual harassment elsewhere, they are as vulnerable to it at the work-place. They experience a low-level sexual abuse that they often ignore, not wishing to jeopardise a good assignment or be treated differently from their male colleagues (Para 1 & 2).

The tone of male stringers and reporters, while talking about women across sections, while on or off assignment, in the field appeared to be derogatory and demeaning most of the time. The sensible ones, in both AP and TS, minded their own business or remained silent during the gossip sessions in which stringers used to take part, while between assignments, over a cup of tea, smoke or lunch.

During the course of research, I observed that stringers and sometimes even reporters would be nice and cordial towards women if they happen to be a victim or in a helpless position on varying degrees ranging from non-payment of monthly pension to untimely or accidental death of a woman's husband. Girl student-achievers or women folk playing during *batukamma* festival (mostly upper-caste women) were some of the sections that commanded respect of stringers.

On many instances, I accompanied stringers while they were interacting with women from different sections like: officials, school teachers, nurses, wardens, and local entrepreneurs among others. Most of the stringers appeared to be focused on the job and were 'dignified' (in their own parlance) during the interaction. Passing an uncalled-for or lewd remark right after their work got done was witnessed especially in case of relatively younger stringers.

In one instance:

I was with PR, a stringer in Sangareddy, who was in his early thirties, while he was at animal husbandry wing of the district collectorate building on a Monday morning to collect data related to a story on new breed of disease-resistant chicken that the government was promoting for the benefit of poultry farmers in the district. The official concerned was a woman, who had been avoiding phone calls from PR and was not available to other stringers, as she was on the field inspecting various poultry farms in the district at that time. The discussion between them began with the lady official stating that she was

busy the previous week and could not respond to any calls. PR conveyed to her that it was understandable in an obedient manner. The obedience was visible not only in his speech and salutation but also in his body language. Before I could say anything, he introduced me to her as a reporter from Hyderabad on some work in the collectorate office. He gathered the required information from her about the poultry chicken story and thanked her. During the interaction, she was very considerate and even showed images of the farms on her mobile phone, which she took during inspection. We took leave from her and headed towards the media point in the same building. He informed the bureau in-charge of his newspaper that the story (centrespread) would be ready by evening. At the media point, we bumped into another stringer to whom PR narrated the entire episode and said: “She’s new to the place and does not know about me. She made me wait for more than a week to give this information. I know how to deal with her. Wait for some time. You will witness for sure” (Field notes, Sangareddy, 5 October 2014).

On the face of it the entire episode seems to be loose talk based on masculine pride/ego. But in the field, interactions such as these helped me understand the character of the profession at the ground-level from the perspective of stringers. Here in this instance, PR, who was referring to the lady official as madam, started calling her names in her absence while talking to another stringer. And the manner of reference suddenly changed from plural to singular. In Telugu, any person of respect would be referred to in plural form (*mīru*).

In another instance at Gannavaram, I observed that a newly recruited woman horticultural officer was patronised by stringers while on her visit to assess the crop damage caused by untimely rain in the summer season.

The local landlord (*pedda raitu*) had organised a SUV for stringers to visit his mango orchard, where a horticultural officer along with her staff was on a visit to assess the damage in this part of district due to the rainfall. One of the stringers, DD, was informed about the officer’s visit by the MRO staffer. He in turn alerted the landlord by 11 A.M. so that the landlord can make transport arrangement for them in the evening from Gannavaram centre to the farm, which was located at a district of around 12 km. I travelled along with the stringers to the orchard in the four-wheeler. DD mentioned that the officer was on her way from Agiripalle to Gannavaram and before that she was in Nuzvid (a mandal in Krishna district known for Banginapalli and Chinna Rasalu varieties of Mango).

Another stringer casually inquired DD, “Anna, how do you know about all these details”? DD replied, “The clerk told me that a new lady officer was appointed and I pulled some strings in the Vijayawada office to know her schedule”. From that moment, they started referring to her as *kotta piṭṭa* (new bird; colloquial usage for woman) in her absence. After reaching the spot, stringers took photographs of labourers picking up damaged fruits from the ground and the act of picking up fruits, as the not-so-well-dressed landlord was overseeing was repeated till every stringer got a publishable image.

The officer reached the farm in a jeep (horticulture department vehicle) and inspected the farm along with nearby ones. Stringers took photographs of the officers. When she was about to leave, stringers surrounded her and were asking details about the official assessment of the damage incurred to crops and compensation to farmers. The officer said that it was too early to talk about the compensation at that point, as she had to consult other horticulture and agriculture officers after reaching Vijayawada.

At this point, one of the senior stringers in the lot, ANR, intervened and said, “Madam, you are new to this job. Reporters in Vijayawada do not care about agriculture issues. We cover these issues in detail and you might need our help too. Share some details with us”. The officer dispassionately shared the details and answered some of the queries and left saying that she needed to leave before it got dark. On the way back to Gannavaram centre, the stringers were all giggles when a stringer, pointing towards ANR, remarked: “*Sār ki ladies button ekkāḍa nokkālō ekkāḍa vadālālō bāga telusu*”. (Sir knows how to tame new officers especially ladies). (Field notes, 7 May 2012)

The above-mentioned instances were two of the many ethnographic observations made during the fieldwork at Gannavaram and Sangareddy that were presented here to demonstrate how gender-insensitive the journalistic field was at the ground level. More importantly, both the incidents involved women government officials who are new to the location or the job.⁷ One can easily imagine the hardship a woman would face if she were to work along with stringers at village and mandal level. Most of the times, stringers attended news events and spot news coverage together and it may be extremely difficult for women to be in the company of such peers.

Apart from the cultural and social issues that were discussed earlier, even the everyday language of various agents was very sexist that would make women

⁷ Stringers commanded a considerable amount of power at the mandal or village level and tended to bully new officials in general and new women officials in particular. Moreover, the women officials that I mentioned wielded modest power when compared to higher government officials like the district collector or district education officer. Such higher officials knew the means to tackle stringers by reporting their misbehaviour to editorial in-charges or bureau chiefs sitting in the district headquarters or head office.

uncomfortable if they were to work in the journalistic field. When asked about how the situation would be if women were working as stringers, a stringer of a medium-scale newspaper, BMP in Gannavaram remarked, “*baguṇṭadi sār. ādolḷuṇṭē māku kūda kāsta entertainment unṭundi rōju*” (It will be nice, Sir. Women will bring about a daily dose of entertainment in our everyday life). (Field notes, 22 April 2012). This shocker of a reply that I got in the early stage of my fieldwork mirrored the gendered nature and masculine domination in the journalistic field.

My ethnographic observations and responses that were gathered as part of the semi-structured interviews suggested that the gender issue in the journalistic field was in itself a larger study that was waiting to be done.⁸ These observations were presented not to demonise the character of some of the stringers with whom I interacted during the course of my fieldwork but to highlight the women-unfriendly nature of the work culture in the field.

After examining and understanding the responses, reasons, and discourses among its agents, the doxa of the journalistic field – set of inherent values and principles that were considered essential and foundational in the field – tended to be masculine.

This issue of gender diversity cannot be understood in itself, as it appeared to be an important factor to understand the nature of the field mirrored in journalistic practices, ownership patterns, caste and class background of the agents, and news labour issues. The gender nature of the journalistic field will be clearer while dealing with the concepts such as ‘symbolic annihilation’ and ‘precarity’ in chapter 5 and chapter 6 respectively.

The following section focuses on the social profile of stringers and the recruitment aspect of stringers in the Telugu journalistic field.

⁸ Tomar (2017) had done a study exclusively on small-town women journalists in Madhya Pradesh from a feminist standpoint perspective. Also, see: Mullick’s (2015) study that documented and analysed the experiences of women reporters outside the metro cities in Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Bihar.

Social constitution of agents in the journalistic field

Before explaining the process of recruitment, it may be useful to examine the basic demographic details of the agents (stringers, reporting and editorial staffers) like education, age, marital status, and sources of income other than journalism.

Most of the professionals in society, such as engineers, doctors, lawyers, and teachers were required to have a corresponding professional education and/or certification. Even for most of the occupations such as police, army, civil services, bureaucracy, and so on require a certain degree or level of education. This prerequisite held good for a majority of government and private employment opportunities. Journalism, as a profession, from its inception never had any such requirement or mandatory eligibility for entry.

Moreover, the first Prime Minister of India, Jawaharlal Nehru (1954, p. 466) famously remarked: “To some extent, politicians and newspapermen or journalists have much in common. Both presume to talk too much, to write too much, to deliver homilies; both, generally speaking, require no qualifications at all for their job.”

Most of the manuals and textbooks written by journalists (Bhaskar, 1981; Reddy, 2016, Rao, 2017) mentioned names of veteran journalists to drive home the fact that there was no need for any specialised education to enter journalism. On similar lines, the prescribed literature/syllabus for training and educating journalists framed by the Press Academy of Andhra Pradesh did not mention educational qualifications required for any role in the field of journalism.

I would briefly present a sketch of one of the doyens of journalism in this part of the globe, whose career started during the British Raj and ended just about a year after India got its independence. Varadachari et al., (2011, pp. 8-9) captured some glimpses of the career and life of Kotamraju Punnaiah (b. 1885-d. 1948) in these words:

Punnaiah was a tall figure in ‘Indian’ journalism. Known for his uncompromising attitude towards division of Indian nation on the lines of religion and caste, Punnaiah ran away from his native village, Bapatla of Guntur district after failing to clear matriculation exam. He went on to do odd jobs in Bombay and was spotted by the proprietor of Amrutanjan Company, famous for its medicinal balm, Kasinathuni Nageswara Rao and employed him

in the company. After establishing *Andhra Patrika* Telugu newspaper, which was published and circulated from Bombay, Rao took Punnaiah as a trainee. Once the paper was shifted to Madras, Punnaiah was elevated as sub-editor. There was no looking back for Punnaiah from that point. He went on to become the founder editor of English daily, *Humanity* in Madras (1916) and joined *New Times* in Karachi (now Pakistan) as an editor. Even after *New Times* merged with *The Sind Observer*, he worked as associate editor and later went on to become full-fledged editor of the same. He relocated himself from Karachi to Bangalore (now Bengaluru) in the year 1937 and continued to be a key member of the All India Newspaper Editors' Guild till his death in 1948.

Even seven decades after his death, Punnaiah's name was cited by a couple of senior stringers in Gannavaram as well as by a number of reporters and editorial staffers in both the sites of research. Many agents in the field suggested that journalists and editors who were considered as pioneers and doyens of journalism did not have any formal education.

However, my ethnographic observations pointed out that educational qualification did play a crucial role in determining an agent's position in the journalistic field, as it constituted what Bourdieu termed as cultural capital. Out of the 42 respondents (including two English print reporters) in my study, 27 were stringers and the remaining 15 were editorial and reporting staffers. A total of 28 respondents had graduate and above graduate-level education and 14 were not graduates. Fewer than 50 per cent (13) of stringers had college education and there was a lone rural in-charge in Krishna district, whose education was not even matriculation. Among the 13 stringers with less than college education, eight had studied till intermediate (10+2) and the remaining five could only study till tenth standard (See, Table 4.2).

Most of the editorial and reporting staffers were at least graduates, except one as mentioned above, who was a rural in-charge. Two stringers, one each from Gannavaram and Sangareddy, were post-graduates (both M.Com). A bureau in-charge from Krishna district, who did master's programme in entomology (study of insects), enrolled for Ph.D. in Lepidopterology (study of moths and butterflies) and discontinued the programme to become a journalist in Telugu print media.⁹

⁹ He asked me to spell the word – lepidopterology and made fun of me after I got the spelling wrong.

EDUCATION: STRINGERS AND STAFFERS

Table: 4.2

Responses of stringers, reporters, and editorial staffers regarding their education

Respondents Designation: Place	Educational qualification	
	Not a graduate	Graduate
Stringers: Gannavaram	10	8
Editorial and reporting staff: Krishna District	1	6
Stringers: Sangareddy	3	6
Editorial and reporting staff: Medak District	0	8
Total no. of respondents	14	28

Source: Fieldwork

On the whole, only two respondents had journalism education (diploma course in Mass Communication and Journalism); one was working as the bureau in-charge of *Visalaandhra* and the other was the district edition in-charge of *Eenadu*. Both of them were working in Krishna district, at the time of my research.

Based on a survey done in Scotland, Frith and Meech (2007, p. 152) observed that a journalism degree was effective preparation for a successful journalism career. However, they did not elaborate whether or not such journalism education helped respondents break certain class, region, and gender barriers.

In the case of Telugu journalism, any person with language proficiency and journalism education would be offered a full-time position in small and medium-scale newspapers. Such candidates were regarded as potential employees even in large-scale newspapers, as they may have to fulfil some additional criteria singular to each newspaper.¹⁰ During my interactions, editorial persons said that they will not have the burden of training and looked forward to recruiting such candidates. Even in the field, stringers with vast experience were humbled by the presence of young staffers, who had a journalism degree.¹¹

¹⁰ This issue would be discussed in the next section concerned with recruitment in this chapter.

¹¹ In one instance, a trainee reporter from *Eenadu* was assigned duty as contributor in Ramavarappadu (adjacent mandal to Gannavaram) in lieu of the regular stringer. During his visit to Gannavaram, he involuntarily commanded respect not only from *Eenadu* stringers but also from those working in other newspapers. This may be due to the fact that the trainee reporter could be their boss (higher-up) in the near future.

Table: 4.3

Responses from stringers and staffers about workshops conducted by the PAAP

Respondents Designation: Place	Workshops attended	
	Yes	No
Stringers: Gannavaram	3	15
Editorial and reporting staff: Krishna District	5	2
Stringers: Sangareddy	4	5
Editorial and reporting staff: Medak District	3	5
Total no. of respondents	15	27

Source: Fieldwork

For stringers, who usually did not have any formal exposure to journalism education, the Press Academy of AP and Media Academy of Telangana conducted workshops on a regular basis. As part of these workshops, stringers and reporters would be exposed to topics such as: press laws, ethics of journalism, code of conduct prescribed by the Press Council of India, personality development classes and latest trends in the field around the globe.

Most of the stringers did not show interest in the workshops and instead relied on their higher-ups in the organisations or senior members in their peer group. Many of the stringers, reporters, and editorial staffers who responded positively to these workshops were seniors in the profession and attended as local instructors or facilitators to those experts or professionals coming from Hyderabad or elsewhere. Most of the stringers expressed that such workshops would eat into their time and preferred not to attend (See, Table 4.3). The average age of stringers, at the time of writing, was 44 years and 6 months, while the average age of editorial and reporting staffers was about 49 years. The range of age among stringers was: 33-56 and in case of editorial and reporting staffers, it was 37-59.

Experience of the respondents was another major criterion one needed to take into account in order to understand journalistic practice in the field. Statistically it is difficult, at this point, to establish a direct relationship between age and experience with the influence a stringer had in the field. But logically it was understandable that the more experienced a stringer was; the more influential or prominent he was in the field, which will be discussed in the following chapter.

Table: 4.4

Responses from stringers and staffers about their previous work experience

Respondents Designation: Place	Previous work experience	
	Yes	No
Stringers: Gannavaram	12	6
Editorial and reporting staff: Krishna District	7	0
Stringers: Sangareddy	8	1
Editorial and reporting staff: Medak District	7	1
Total no. of respondents	34	8

Source: Fieldwork

The average experience of stringers at the time of research in Gannavaram was about 10 years, and the same for their counterparts in Sangareddy was close to 13 years. On the whole, the average experience of stringers in both places taken together was about 11 and half years. The range of experience of stringers among the respondents was one year to 26 years.

In the case of staffers, the average experience in Krishna district from the collected sample was about 18 years and in Medak district it was about 19 years. The average experience of staffers on the whole was very close to 19 years, at the time of data collection. The range of experience in both places for staffers was: 9 years to 29 years. It was very evident that a majority of staffers had relatively higher work experience than stringers in both places. The position as staffers, in both reporting and editorial department, coupled with the work experience at the headquarters or organisation directly, gave them an upper-hand over stringers in the everyday newswork.

The data was tabulated after collecting details about their previous work experience (See, Table 4.4). More intricate details were also collected about previous experience, which would be presented in the descriptions across this research work, wherever needed and necessary. At the time of research, except a couple of stringers (one each from Gannavaram and Sangareddy), everyone was married. Out of the total respondents in both areas, 37 had at least a two-wheeler (scooter/motorcycle) and five did not have any vehicle.

Table: 4.5

Responses from stringers and staffers on land ownership under journalists' housing scheme

Respondents Designation: Place	Land owning	
	Yes	No
Stringers: Gannavaram	14	4
Editorial and reporting staff: Krishna District	6	1
Stringers: Sangareddy	8	1
Editorial and reporting staff: Medak District	7	1
Total no. of respondents	35	7

One stringer in Gannavaram had two seven-seater auto-rickshaws, which he rented on a daily basis or sometimes drove himself. If stringers in the mandal needed to go collectively in case of any emergency, they hired or used his auto.¹² However, he did not have a two-wheeler.

Ownership of land was another crucial indicator of efficiency and influence of stringer or reporter in his area. In the case of stringers, they would at least strive to secure a plot of land with an area of 60-80 square yards in the mandal they work. Most of the time, the land to accredited mandal-level stringers was allocated as part of the government rural housing scheme for homeless persons below poverty line (BPL).

In Table 4.5, the land owning pattern was tabulated for stringers who secured a plot through such government schemes and not pre-owned or ancestral property. Same was the consideration for editorial and reporting staffers. However, they were allocated land through the journalists housing scheme after taking membership in the working journalists' housing society (See, Table 4.5).¹³

Another important factor to understand the financial background of stringers was the source of income other than the job or profession of journalism. This certainly was a descriptive category and would be dealt at length in the next chapter, while discussing the rituals, roles and performance of agents in the journalistic field.

¹² This auto proved to be handy for stringers to cover accidents on highways or when required to go to Gannavaram airport in case of any celebrity/state dignitary/politician's unexpected visit to Vijayawada.

¹³ This issue will be discussed in the following chapters in which it would be running theme along with the source of income of stringers other than the profession.

Table: 4.6

Other sources of income for stringers

Private money lending	Real estate agent	Grocery store	Advertising & printing	Photo & video studio	Electrician	Ratio n shop dealer	Daily wage farm worker	N G O	Local cable operator	Temple priest & teacher	Photo copy centre	Did not specify	Total
2	4	2	3	3	2	1	1	1	1	1	2	4	27

Even as most of the stringers were responsible to collect advertisements and generate circulation, the ones that were specifically mentioned in the category of advertising and publishing in this table happen to be those who have a specialised network or business that is concerned with collecting advertisements and running a publication. Most of these sources of income complimented their newswork and vice-versa in both Gannavaram and Sangareddy. The respondents who stated that there were no other sources of income were either from large circulation newspapers such as *Eenadu* and *Sakshi* or persons working in the local offices of political parties (See, Table 4.6).

The most important factor in understanding the social background of agents in the field was caste. As mentioned in the previous chapter, almost all stringers were very open while talking about their own caste in relation to other agents. However, some staffers (mostly who did not fall under the reserved categories, often labelled as general category or unreserved) did not want to mention their caste and limited their response to identifying themselves as belonging to communities that did not enjoy the constitutional privilege of reservations in jobs or education given to lower-caste communities. Accordingly, in order to maintain homogeneity, I tabulated the social background of the agents in terms of the category they belong to, even as I collected the specific caste information from the stringers and most of the staffers.

While responding to this particular query, staffers, especially the ones who were working as bureau in-charges and editors avoided the usage of the term *kulamu* (caste in Telugu) and referred to it as *sāmājika vargam* (social class).¹⁴ However, stringers referred to it as *kulamu* or caste without any inhibition.

¹⁴ This phenomenon of senior journalists in a state of denial about ‘caste’ and specifically the editorial persons who digressed – the word and issue – *kulamu* by replacing it with *sāmājika vārgam*

Table: 4.7

Reservation category under which stringers and staffers belonged to

Respondents Designation: Place	Category				
	General	SC	ST	BC	Religious minority (OBC)
Stringers: Gannavaram	3	5	0	8	2
Editorial and reporting staff: Krishna District	6	0	0	1	0
Stringers: Sangareddy	3	3	0	2	1
Editorial and reporting staff: Medak District	6	1	0	1	0
Total no. of respondents	18	9	0	12	3

Source: Fieldwork

Table: 4.8

Religion of stringers and staffers

Respondents Designation: Place	Religion		
	Hindu	Muslim	Christian
Stringers: Gannavaram	16	1	1
Editorial and reporting staff: Krishna District	7	0	0
Stringers: Sangareddy	8	1	0
Editorial and reporting staff: Medak District	8	0	0
Total no. of respondents	39	2	1

Source: Fieldwork

Most of the time, persons from influential castes considered *kulamu* as a crude and rustic word and appeared to use sugar-coated Telugu phrase *sāmājika vargam*. On the whole, *kulamu* or *jāti* was used to describe Dalits on most occasions and Bahujan communities to an extent. But *kulamu* became *sāmājika vargam*, while describing persons from influential castes by editors and bureau in-charges.

Table 4.7 presents the data of the specific categories that the agents belong to. There were three respondents who belonged to religious minorities like Christians (one) and Muslims (two), who availed reservation under Other Backward Classes (OBC). Even as the respondents indicated that they belonged to the general category, it should be noted that it meant forward castes. However, there were no journalists from

was crucial in understanding the dynamics in which agents operated in the hierarchical structure of the field. This was examined in the next chapter.

Scheduled Tribe (Adivasi and Lambada) communities at any level at the time of fieldwork.

The demographic data collected from stringers suggested that a majority of them belonged to Backward Classes (13) and Scheduled Castes (8). Only six members from the general category were working as stringers. On the other hand, the presence of general category or forward caste members (12) working as staffers was very high in both districts. Only two members from BC (one each in Krishna and Medak) and a lone SC person were working as full-time or regular staffers in the places of research out of the 15 staffers interviewed at the time of collecting data. Similarly, a majority of the agents were Hindus (39 out of 42) with relatively insignificant presence of persons from religious minorities in the field (See, Table 4.8).

These primary data sets, collected at the time of fieldwork, not only presented the social background of the agents in the journalistic field but also helped in understanding the recruitment process, which would be described in the following section.

Recruitment and/in the journalistic field

A typical job notification for recruitment of stringers for Telugu newspapers advertised in the local editions read as:

Wanted contributors for _____ Newspaper (Logo)
 Brief description about the newspaper (two lines)
 Job description: Candidates need to have: interest in news reporting and Telugu language proficiency.
 Vacancies in the following centres:
 Candidates may contact over the phone or visit our office:
 Mobile number(s) and Address:

Most of the small and medium-scale newspapers displayed the same template whenever there were vacancies in their newspapers. Whereas, notifications to fill up vacant stringer/part-time contributor positions in largely circulated newspapers, apart from the usual ‘interest in news reporting’ and ‘proficiency in Telugu’, featured additional details such as eligibility conditions and some more caveats. There was no mention of a written test or interview.

Mandatory eligibility requirements mentioned in those notifications were: a) Minimum education qualification: Degree; b) Knowledge of Telugu typesetting; c) Must be residents in the advertised area or locality. Preference: Candidates with experience will be given preference and those who applied for the same positions earlier need not apply. Caveats: Candidates must bring their bio-data, certificates, and a proof of residence (driving licence or power or telephone bill) to appear for the written test at a specified time and location.

Upon coming across one such notification for the position of stringer/part-time contributor in one of the leading Telugu newspapers, I decided to appear for the written test to get a first-hand understanding of the recruitment process. The following is an excerpt from the field notes on the day of written examination scheduled at 10 AM on a Sunday morning:

I was there at the newspaper office building located at Arundelpet in Guntur city, Andhra Pradesh at 9:30 P.M. The newspaper office shared office space with a chit fund¹⁵ company that belonged to the same business group. I ‘dressed up’ for the occasion wearing a drab formal trouser, a plain off-white half-sleeve shirt, and leather sandals. I avoided my usual clothing to look like one of the ‘aspirants’. By the time I reached the office, there was already a queue of candidates, who were getting their certificates verified and filling forms before appearing for the exam. I filled the job application form (in English) that asked for details: a) Full name including surname; b) Educational qualification; c) Address; d) Area in the city that I wish to work for (within the specified vacant ones). Only after submitting I realised that everyone else had filled in the application in Telugu. The person who was overseeing this form filling procedure smiled at me after going through the details and said (in Telugu): “You are supposed to write the exam in Telugu. I hope you know that.” There were around 20 candidates at the venue. We were sent into the adjoining chit fund office, which had a larger room comprising cubicle workspace that could accommodate more than a score of employees. A middle-aged newspaper staffer was in-charge of the examination and ordered us to either switch off our mobile phones or put them in silent mode. The

¹⁵ According to the Andhra Pradesh Chit Funds Act, 1971: “Chit means a transaction, whether called chit fund, chitty or by any other name, by which its foreman enters into an agreement with a number of subscribers that every one of them shall subscribe a certain sum of money or a certain quantity of grain or other commodity, by instalments for a definite period and that each subscriber in his turn, as determined by lot or by auction or by tender or in such other manner as may be provided for in the agreement, shall be entitled to a prize amount, whether payable in cash, kind or any other article of value” (GoAP, 1971). This was a very popular mode of savings and borrowing by middle-class families in South India to purchase goods or properties.

candidates obeyed the instructions from him with military discipline. Once everyone was seated, there were no vocal sounds in the hall and the only noise one could hear was from the vehicular traffic on Sunday morning through the windows. We were handed out question papers and specifically told not to write anything on them. The answer papers provided to write the examination were used newsprint (one sided). The exam was for 25 marks and the duration given was one hour. There was a compulsory 10 mark question asking the problems faced by public in Guntur city and a five mark question to which the candidate had to state the reasons to get into journalism. For the remaining 10 marks, there were objective questions such as: present cabinet ministers in the state government from Guntur, number of wards in the corporation, who's who of the municipal corporation and district. There were a couple of questions about specific pages/sections of the newspaper to judge the reading habits of the candidate. I had a tough time giving my answers in handwritten Telugu. Moreover, I had no clue about the who's who of the Parliament, Assembly constituencies and Municipal Corporation despite being a native of Guntur, as I left the place and was residing in Hyderabad for more than a decade. I handed over the answer sheet and started interacting with fellow examinees. They enquired about my details and reasons for applying to this job. I had to tell them that I worked as a reporter in Hyderabad (without giving more details) and was trying to look for opportunities in Guntur. Most of the candidates I interacted had prior experience of working as stringers in other newspapers. The reasons they stated for applying for this job was the brand value of the newspaper and the remuneration it offered. One aspirant said that he could not appear for this examination on earlier occasions, as he did not have a graduation degree on hand. The examiners announced that the selected candidates would be intimated about the result over phone (Field notes, Guntur, 15 April 2012).

I waited for two days and did not get any call from the newspaper office. However, the following day, I showed up at the office in the morning and was told to visit them in the evening, as there were no staffers concerned. I headed to Krishna district and returned early to meet the newspaper staffers the same evening. The middle-aged staffer was present in his open-door cabin sorting out a pile of news reports on his antique-looking bureau. He recognised and greeted me instantaneously. After introductions, upon asking about my performance in the written test, he (SR) replied, "The selection process for recruitment was over. You were over-qualified for this job." He said that they knew about my background and casually asked me about the purpose of appearing for the exam and I had to reveal a part of my topic of research. SR, who was the edition in-charge of the newspaper's district edition, had some encouraging words for my research and said that he did not come across any such study in Telugu journalism. The edition in-charge revealed that the newspaper did a thorough background check of candidates before recruiting

persons at any level in the newspaper. Before getting back to his work, in a very confident tone without looking into my eyes, he said, “We would not be in this top position without taking such mandatory precautions while recruiting since the paper’s establishment” (Field notes, Guntur, 18 April 2012).

I did not realise the significance of two issues in the recruitment process of stringers – a) The differences in the specifications of eligibility criteria for recruitment in the job notifications of small and medium-scale newspapers and the large-scale ones; b) mandatory background checking procedure that was followed in the recruitment process in large-scale newspapers – till I started interacting with and interviewing stringers, reporting staffers, and editorial personnel, as part of fieldwork along with my ethnographic observations.

Recruitment patterns of editorial and reporting staffers

I will discuss the recruitment process for full-time staffers (reporting and editorial) before detailing about the same in case of stringers. This process, which was relatively easier to understand than that of stringers, was broadly classified as: Type I: Direct recruitment in either editorial or reporting sections of newspapers after getting trained in an in-house journalism school. Type II: Graduating into reporting staffers after proving his mettle as stringer over a period of time. Type III: Joining in the editorial section with higher educational qualifications or by recommendation using personal contacts or political affiliations. Type IV: Usual migration from one newspaper to the other or one role to the other or promotion or better salary in the same role.

Type I: Fresh recruits from J-Schools

Most of the newspapers have their own in-house journalism schools and regularly roll-out admission notifications.¹⁶ These schools conduct entrance examinations for diploma courses with duration ranging from 6-12 months. The selected candidates were given stipend during the training period and apprenticeship. Aspirants must be below 30 years of age in case of general (Open Category) and there was a relaxation of 5 years in case the candidates belonged to SC and ST categories. The following was a tabulated data of such journalism schools compiled after going through the newspaper websites.

¹⁶ *Eenadu* was the pioneer in taking up such an initiative in Andhra Pradesh and started Eenadu School of Journalism in 1991 (Ramu, 1999, 126).

Some schools (of large-scale newspapers) had a mandatory rule that successful candidates after completion of the course must work with the school's newspaper for 3-4 years. However, there was no such rule in case of medium and small-scale newspapers' journalism schools.¹⁷ Apart from these schools there were some more Hyderabad-based private J-schools, run by veteran and senior Telugu journalists, such as: Rachana Journalism College, AP Journalism School among others.

This appeared to be the easiest way to gain a place in the field for candidates who can afford another year of education after graduation without taking up a job immediately. GB, who was Krishna district edition in-charge of *Eenadu*, at the time of research, was one of the earliest students, who honed their journalism skills at EJS. While informing about his entry into the profession, GB, who had more than two decades of work experience in *Eenadu*, said,

I joined as a clerk in the advertising department of *Eenadu* in 1989. I developed interest in journalism. At that time, EJS was established and without any second thought I joined it in 1991 (year of establishment). After graduating from EJS, I joined as a trainee sub-editor in the same paper. Even though all of us were trained in reporting and editing skills, I preferred to join the editorial wing (Personal communication, 12 September 2012).

In other words, by establishing a newspaper run J-school to cater to its own needs, *Eenadu* signalled an institutionalisation of journalism education. This was a move, which the members of the First Press Commission of India (1954, pp. 195-200) did not anticipate or wrote about in their recommendations to improve journalism education and training, who insisted on public university education with components in the first year of the three year undergraduate professional programme "devoted to the study of history, sociology, economics and politics", which was reiterated in the report of the Second Press Commission (1982a, Para 29, p. 179).

¹⁷ See, <http://www.eenadupratibha.net/Pratibha/OnlineDesk/Eenadu-Journalism-School/eenadu-journalism-school-notification-2019.html>; <http://www.navatelangana.com/JournalismCollege/Notification>; <http://www.prajasakti.com/Journalism>; <http://m.navatelangana.com/JournalismCollege/Contact>; <https://www.sakshieducation.com/ssj/JStory.aspx?nid=228133>; <http://apcj.in/> [Last accessed on 15 December, 2020].

Table: 4.9

Journalism schools run by newspaper establishments

Sl. No	Newspaper	Journalism Training School/Institute
1	<i>Eenadu</i>	Eenadu Journalism School (EJS)
2	<i>Sakshi</i>	Sakshi Journalism School (SJS)
3	<i>Andhra Jyothi</i>	Andhra Jyothi Journalism School (AJJS)
4	<i>Vaaritha</i>	Vaaritha Institute of Journalism (VIM)
5	<i>Nava Telangana</i>	Nava Telangana Journalism School (NJS)
6	<i>Prajasakti</i>	Prajasakti Journalism School (PJS)

Source: Newspaper websites; Murthy (2003, p. 80).

Type II: Climbing up the professional ladder

Climbing up the professional ladder from stringer or sometimes trainee sub-editor without any salary to staffer and even higher positions was the most respected mode of getting employed as a full-timer in newspapers. In a bid to explain the gruelling journey from stringer to staffer, one experienced (19 years, at the time of research) stringer in Sangareddy, GG, likened this scaling up the professional journalism ladder to workforce in the construction field. He said:

This field (journalism) is very similar to construction field, where *kūloḷḷu* (unskilled daily wage labourers) were picked up from the *aḍḍā* to construct a house. There will be *beldar mēstri* (mason who handled hoe to plaster walls) and *pedda mēstri* (head or supervising mason). The chances of a construction labourer reaching the position of *pedda mēstri* were very less. Similarly, it was very tough for a stringer to become chiefs of news bureau or senior-level editors in journalism. Most of the times, they became staffers and stagnated in that position (Personal communication, 27 September 2014).

The beauty of the comparison was: Stringers (generalists without any beat) were likened to daily wage labourers (unskilled), while the reporting staffers (a specific beat) were described as *beldar mēstri* (skilled labourer) and the editorial personnel were positioned as *pedda mēstri* (supervising mason). More importantly, labour in the construction industry was a highly informal one, which arguably was the case of the journalism field too, which will be discussed at length in chapter 6.

There were many legends and factual stories of individuals who joined as stringers and made it to the top most positions in the field. This was the case with a majority of Telugu journalists and editors before formal journalism education courses along with

in-house J-schools began to function.¹⁸ From Gannavaram mandal, Kommineni Srinivasa Rao who started his career as a trainee in *Eenadu* (1978) went on to become editorial board member in the same organisation before joining *Andhra Jyothi* (2002), as chief editor. He played a crucial role in the setting up of a full-fledged news network of stringers for *Eenadu*. At the time of writing, he was serving as honorary editor (working) in Sakshi Television and also was active in internet-based journalism.

However, in this type of recruitment, caste and education (after joining the field) played a crucial role, many respondents revealed. The Bureau in-charge of a leftist daily in Sangareddy, MMR pointed out that most of those who made it big in the field after starting from the scratch belonged to forward castes (Personal communication, 6 October 2014). Noted Telugu journalist M. Satish Chandar was one of the most popular exceptions to the point MMR made. Born in a Dalit family, Chandar started his career as stringer and went on to become chief editor of *Andhra Prabha* (2004-2006 and 2017-2017) before having served in various capacities in different Telugu newspapers.¹⁹ In Sangareddy, a literary figure belonging to religious minority (Muslim), SAK faced the same situation when he began looking for a job in journalism. Despite having published short-stories and poems in Telugu newspapers, SAK was not offered a staffer position but had to join as a stringer to prove his mettle. He later worked as a staffer in various newspapers and quit working as a full-time reporter due to health reasons. At the time of writing, he continued to work in the field as a freelancer and running a non-governmental organisation in Medak district.

Type III: Proven 'ability' or manōḍu/manavāḍu

This type of recruitment, based on candidates' educational qualifications and literary credentials or through known contacts and references, was a tried and tested practice, which is as old as the profession itself. Most of the 'accidental journalists' along with those who made it big in the profession cut their teeth in this fashion. There seemed to be three broad categories within this type of recruitment.

¹⁸ For profiles of such journalists, see Varadachari et al. (2011, pp. 27-136).

¹⁹ See, http://satishchandar.com/?page_id=58. Chandar founded the AP College of Journalism churning out hundreds of journalists every year and also ran the Indian Institute of Political Leadership for the benefit of 'aspiring' politicians.

Firstly, staffers were recruited keeping their educational qualifications in mind. Most of the time, this recruitment happened due to the candidate's proven language proficiency either through a higher or research degree in Telugu literature or having published acclaimed popular literature. Many Telugu literary luminaries, including legendary poet and Soviet Land award recipient Srirangam Srinivas (popular as Sri Sri), had a parallel career in journalism field (Varadachari et al., 2011, p. 67). In Medak, many journalists took pride in recalling that Makhdoom Mohiuddin, who was one of the tallest Marxist thinkers from this part of the country during his times, was one such literary genius who worked in various Urdu newspapers including Hyderabad (Deccan)-based *Siasat*. It should be noted that Satish Chandar, despite publishing one of the most widely read literary works – *Panchama Vedam* (An Anthology of Dalit Poems), had to start as a stringer, unlike other forward-caste literary persons.²⁰

Secondly, newspapers run by left-leaning political parties in AP and Telangana, such as: *Visalaandhra* and *Mana Telangana* (CPI), *Prajasakti* and *Nava Telangana* (CPI), recruited their party cadres wherever necessary.²¹ At the time of fieldwork, all the staffers in these newspapers including bureau in-charges, CR in Vijayawada (*Visalaandhra*), MMR in Sangareddy (*Mana Telangana*), VS in Vijayawada (*Prajasakti*), and YP in Sangareddy (*Nava Telangana*) were affiliated to CPI and CPI (M) at various levels.

Thirdly, some candidates were recruited directly as staffers due to their proximity to the newspaper owners or familial connections. Relatives of journalists in higher positions or management personnel were recruited in this manner and often considered to be part of the core team. Even though these recruits were formally assigned reporting or editorial roles in the newspapers, they tended to blur the

²⁰ This work was included as part of the curriculum in many Telugu departments in universities across the country.

²¹ Notably, there were no such newspapers for established right-leaning parties in both Telugu states. This could be a departure for further research. Some senior journalists, especially working journalists' union leaders pointed out that any newspaper blatantly supporting regional parties, while in power, could be viewed as pro-establishment and thereby right-leaning. Tracing a discourse of politically motivated relationships between newspapers and political parties could be a point of departure for further research. Noted political analyst and senior journalist, Telakapalli Ravi (2011) compiled a volume on similar lines in the context of popular politics in Telugu speaking tracts in the country during a very dynamic and turbulent period: 1940-1955.

distinction between managerial work and newswork. Many stringers expressed their discomfort with such recruits as staffers in both places of research.²²

While these were my observations made in the field, interestingly, the members of the First Press Commission (Press Commission, 1954, pp. 193-194) in their report wrote way back in 1954 about the issue of nepotism and political favouritism at length in Chapter XII: “Working Journalists”.

Type IV: In search of greener pastures

This was an obvious and self-explanatory mode of recruitment and happened with mid-level and senior-level staffers, who left the earlier job over a range of issues, such as: geographical relocation, personal reasons, professional and opinion-related differences, switching from reporting to desk and vice-versa, better pay-package or better newspaper (in terms of visibility and circulation).

On the whole, regardless of their mode of recruitment, there appeared to be two predominant reasons for journalists migrating from one organisation to the other in order to shift from reporting to editorial role or vice-versa. On the other hand, one of the predominant reasons, leaving aside health and allied personal issues, for switching from reporting to editorial was: the quest to reach the highest possible level in the profession, i.e., becoming editor-in-chief or chief editor of an established newspaper. Traditionally, journalists working as reporters had very few chances of claiming the top position in the professional hierarchy in a newspaper set-up. This has been the case with almost all editors of Telugu newspapers, except those where the owner himself claimed the post of the editor-in-chief.

²² At the time of interview, working as a stringer in Gannavaram for a Telugu daily re-launched in early 2000s, SSS said that he never had any complaints about rural in-charge of his newspaper but faced non-journalistic, work-related ‘harassment’ from one of the staffers in the headquarters. “He (replaced an abusive word with a pronoun) called me to delegate domestic work. Even though I told him that there was an important event to be covered, he would not relent or listen. Complaints to the rural in-charge made things worse for me,” SSS said (Personal communication, 4 May 2012). He added, “*vāḍu* owner *gāriki vēlō kālō viḍicina tammuḍu avutāḍanta. nāku cukkalu cupincēvāḍu.*” (The staffer concerned was a distant relative of the newspaper’s owner). On my visit to Gannavaram in 2016, SSS told me that he left the newspaper and joined *Eenadu*. In Telugu kinship relationships (mostly in coastal Andhra), the expression *vēlu viḍicina* suggested a very far and distant relationship like sons/daughters or grandsons/granddaughters of cousins. In some parts of Telangana, it was called as *bīrakāyapīcu cuṭṭarikam*.

During my fieldwork, senior staffers said that stagnation point for growth in reporting came very soon at the district-level, where after a point it was merely a shift in geographic location even as the nature of work remained the same. They cited examples of senior reporters, who were transferred to state capitals, metros such as Bangalore and Chennai (where considerable Telugu speaking population and readership for Telugu newspapers existed), and New Delhi to report on national issues and developments for Telugu readers.

Explaining his own experience of this situation in an interview,²³ former editor-in-chief of *Andhra Jyothi* and chairman of Mahaa News Television, I. Venkata Rao said:

I started my career as proof reader in *Andhra Patrika* and moved to *Andhra Jyothi*, initially as sub-editor (at Vijayawada in 1973). The then editor-in-chief and management of *Andhra Jyothi* suggested me to work in the reporting section, where I remained till 1979. Then I got transferred to Hyderabad as the chief of the news bureau for the entire state (United AP). Usually, that was the highest position for any journalist in reporting. It was purely a decision taken by the management to promote me as resident editor (1989) and then appointed me as the editor-in-chief of the newspaper (1994). Even though there were many instances at Delhi-level (English news dailies), where reporters went on to become editors of newspapers, that kind of culture was not common in mainstream Telugu journalism. Earlier, they (the managements) used to appoint literary persons, intellectuals, and men of letters to the top position. But things have changed and owners started preferring experienced individuals who have the ability to: judge news, carry out teamwork. At that time, my counterparts in English dailies (reporters) admired that I achieved a rare distinction.

At one level, it appeared as humility on part of the reporter-turned-editor when he gave credit for his professional achievement to the management (or owners) of the newspaper. But breaking an age-old practice by appointing a senior reporter instead of an editorial person was unheard of in mainstream Telugu dailies.

In retrospect, this development seemed to have had its roots in an event in Telugu journalism – *Eenadu*. Ramoji Rao – the proprietor of *Eenadu* – had set a trend by having his signature on the editorials of the newspaper, a development even the First Press Commission could not anticipate. While stating that the owner or proprietor had

²³ See, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dG1qhAvtj8s> (Uploaded on YouTube by Telugu Popular ET on 30 January 2018; [Last accessed on 15 December, 2020]).

his basic right to have his point of view expressed through the paper, the members of the Commission (GoI, 1954, p. 335) said, “What we are anxious to avoid is, however, the transformation of the editor into the *literary agent of the proprietor*, as one political leader has phrased it” [Emphasis mine].

After taking an interview of a stalwart editor in Telugu journalism, A.B.K. Prasad, Robin Jeffrey (2010, p. 151) noted:

Owner-editors were sometimes ridiculed and deplored as crass capitalists wishing to enjoy not only profits but literary prestige too. An old foe of Ramoji Rao asserted that the owner of *Eenadu*, though incapable of writing anything for himself, revelled in having the paper carry his signed editorials, written by someone else.²⁴

Many journalists viewed these developments as a clear case of degradation to which editorial policy and staffers were reduced. A luminary of Indian journalism and advocate of Nehruvian thought M. Chalapathi (1964) Rau would definitely have detested such a development in the editorial room.²⁵ But the editorial team members of *Eenadu*, Balu and Murthy (1999, p. 46) substantiated:

We had only one thing to say to all those who belittled our chairman’s intervention in editorials. Every word in the editorials that were published echoed his emotions and sensibilities. The raw materials for these editorials were his: a keen interest in public good, stance against ill-doings of the government, a strong will to fight social evils, and concern to safeguard the welfare of people. The best of editorials took shape when he inspired us while writing and not when we tried to comprehend his emotions and sentiments.

²⁴ A.B.K. Prasad, reverentially referred to as ‘ABK gāru’ in the journalist fraternity, was one of the six-member editorial team that headed *Eenadu*, when it was established. The other five members were: Rambhatla Krishnamurthy, Potturi Venkateswara Rao, Chalasani Prasada Rao, V. Hanumantha Rao, and T.V. Krishna. Due to his uncompromising editorial stance, A.B.K. Prasad left the newspaper and his tussle with Ramoji Rao formed a legendary story between an editor and owner in the annals of Telugu journalism.

²⁵ Writing about the values of the press that the late Prime Minister had in mind, Rau (1964, p. 1249) lamented: “Jawaharlal Nehru wanted all editors to have the freedom necessary to function freely, to develop character, and impress their character on the paper they edited. It was partly from this point of view that he disliked the new developments in the press, the passing of crucial centres of the press to a particular class from Marwar, the growth of chains, the degradation to which editorial staffs were reduced by proprietors, interested primarily in other industries, through managers, who were not fit to manage anything but factories. [...] What are chains, groups, multiple units, or single newspapers for? Jawaharlal Nehru did not like chains; he did not like press barons or any other barons; he did not like editors who served only baronial interests. He wanted newspapers to be equal to their responsibilities; it means free operation, absence of restrictive and unfair practices, and a high degree of editorial ability and integrity.”

Even though we were designated as leader writers, we had to accept that we were only writers. Our chairman was the true leader. [Translation mine]

The case of A. B. K Prasad who famously walked out of the portals of *Eenadu* office was not a one-off instance. A large number of journalists at various levels and places did the same at different points of time raising objection over the interference of the owner in their domain. Another prominent and notable example of such a case was that of Kommineni Srinivasa Rao, a senior journalist. Despite having worked in the editorial department of *Eenadu* for a considerable amount of time (more than two decades) at different levels and places, he was transferred to New Delhi as special correspondent at a very late stage of his career, that too, after having served for years in the organisation as an integral part of its core team. He did not rule out any proprietorial intervention in his transfer to New Delhi. As mentioned earlier, he joined as chief editor of *Andhra Jyothi* in 2002 and later moved on television news channels.²⁶

I presented these notable instances to give an idea about the dynamics of recruitment at a much higher level in the journalistic field and these corroborate with the thick data that I collected from the agents (editorial and reporting staffers) during my fieldwork.

Going back to the shift from editorial to reporting, some of the staffers were of the opinion that a majority of working journalists made such a shift for better economic security. They said that reporters had a greater scope to gain financially due to the nature of work, which allowed them to interact with a range of people from businessmen to politicians (elite sections) in the society.

While sharing his experience about the recruitment process, CR said:

Initially, many youngsters were keen to join in any role offered to them. They did not make any specifications at that point due to their unemployed situation. *Beggars do not have a choice*. After gaining experience and having realised that being a reporter had many lucrative incentives, they moved from desk to

²⁶ When he left the print medium and joined a television channel (NTV) in 2006, his salary was a hot topic of discussion at that time.

field (*rekhaloccina piṭṭallā egiripōtāru*) (Personal communication, 13 September 2012).²⁷

Without ruling out the motivation of younger staffers to experience the ‘real kick’ of journalism, some of the reporters, rural in-charges, and editorial staffers I interviewed, admitted that they made this switch from the desk to the field in search of greener pastures.²⁸ The thick data on the recruitment process collected from the agents in the field, complemented by secondary data, presented a larger view on the character of the journalistic field and its dynamics.

The journalism education offered by media houses with a profit motive, as against the holistic pedagogy sensitising students on various issues in a secular and democratic university set-up, marked an institutionalisation of the field and its entrants. This institutionalisation seemed to have resulted in the reproduction of market values, and political and financial interests of the newspaper organisations and their owners.²⁹

More importantly, proprietorial interventions and interference in the editorial section and in deciding the norms (or breaking them) of recruitment suggested, what Bourdieu called, a shift from ‘autonomous to heteronomous pole’ within the journalistic field. Also, after understanding the recruitment patterns, the specific logics within the field suggested that the field itself was moving or aligning itself towards economic and political fields highlighting the heteronomous nature of the field.³⁰ The entrants into the profession preferring reporting to editorial roles, a

²⁷ He likened the situation to: Birds that flew out of the nest after their wings were fully-formed. This was a typical middle-class expression used by elders from all walks of life, while referring to adolescents or inexperienced persons, in a variety of situations.

²⁸ The expressions used by staffers while explaining such cases were: *dīpam unḍagānē illu cakkabeṭṭukovāli ani veḷatāru; nālugu rāḷḷu venakesukundāmani veḷatāru*. Close equivalents of English sayings: Make hay while the sun shines and In search of greener pastures.

²⁹ The aspect of journalism education, in both university and industry-run J-schools, from a Bourdieusian perspective could be a topic of further research.

³⁰ The journalist union leaders in both the Telugu speaking states often repeated, in working journalist meetings, a legend about an eminent editor Kotamraju Rama Rao, who famously carried the editorial in one pocket and a resignation letter in another (7 October 2014, Gajwel, (then Medak district), Telangana). While talking about the status and respect editors commanded in the so-called ‘golden days’ of journalism, senior journalists in the meetings pointed out that some editors used to refuse to stand while the National Anthem was being played, as they (editors and reporters) could not be restricted to barriers like nations and regions (27 May 2012, Kachikacharla, Krishna district, Andhra Pradesh). It was interesting to note that Telangana journalists’ union leader brought up this issue when they were talking about how some of them resigned from their jobs in the ‘oppressive’ media organisations by ‘*sīmāndhra valaśavādulu*’ (Rayalaseema and Andhra colonisers). On the other hand, the second example of the ‘universal’ respect commanded by journalists was mentioned by union

reporting head (chief of news bureau) being appointed as editor-in-chief, increased managerial and ownership interference in the content and form of newspaper were cases in point to support the heteronomous nature of the field.

This was the typology of recruitment for both reporting and editorial staffer positions. But what are the patterns and procedures for recruitment for mostly unpaid newswriters in the journalistic field and what would be the criteria for the recruitment process? The next sub-section attempts to answer these questions.

Recruitment patterns of stringers

In the year 1991, as India embraced neo-liberal reforms initiated by the then Prime Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao-led Congress minority government, a significant development happened in Telugu journalism. The eight-decade old *Andhra Patrika*, a newspaper established with Gandhian principles and a nationalist zeal went out of press months before the Indian economy and administration did away with the permit-raj or licence-raj.

It was in the exact same year *Eenadu* established its journalism school.³¹ That the advent of *Eenadu* newspaper served as a starting point for innovations in Telugu journalism was a notion everyone seemed to have believed in and spoke about; on the contrary, it could be seen as the culmination of age-old traditions in the Telugu journalism field, for good or bad, when it came to the editorial policy, production and distribution of news, and training and, more importantly for this research, recruitment of journalists and stringers.

It was in the 1990s that many newspapers, despite struggling to keep up with the pace at which *Eenadu* was functioning, had to go for colour pages and recruit stringers at the mandal (sub-district)-level. A majority of staffers and editors that I interviewed during my fieldwork got recruited in this period along with some stringers in Gannavaram and Sangareddy, who remained in the same position at the time of interviews.

leaders from Andhra Pradesh at the peak of Telangana separate statehood movement. For more details on Kotamraju Rama Rao, see, Shrivastava (2002) and Rastogi (2008, pp. 90-94).

³¹ A journalists' union leader GA said that the *Eenadu* group established this school anticipating the opening up of the satellite television market in the wake of neo-liberal reforms. The union leader said that given his business acumen, Chairman Rao would never leave anything to chance.

The procedure for recruitment of stringers, on the face of it, appeared to be a simple case of ‘hire and fire’ policy put into use by the management of newspapers based on the performance of stringers in boosting circulation, increasing advertisement revenue, and providing content at the same time.

While these were definitely some of the considerations, the ethnographic data revealed many layers to the process of recruitment, especially with regard to the agents up in the order of hierarchy along with the standing of a particular newspaper in the journalistic field. The thick data collected did not reveal any particular typology in the recruitment process of stringers, as it did in the case of staffers. However, a close analysis of the data revealed some interesting patterns, which will be discussed here.

At the time of research, I found that a majority of the newspapers with large and medium circulation figures followed a recommendation by the First Press Commission by placing an advertisement in newspapers (GoI, 1954, p. 194). However, it was word-of-mouth based announcement and recruitment in case of small newspapers. As mentioned in the beginning of this section on recruitment in the field, there were variations in the notifications for recruitment of stringers based on the circulation of newspapers. This was evident in the content of the notifications that got published in newspapers that look for employees on a regular basis.

The data on the procedure for recruitment of stringers, reflecting their mode of recruitment for the first time when they sought employment is tabulated in the Table: 4.10. The directly appointed candidates (5) became stringers either through personal contacts or through political party connections. While MMB and SSS of Gannavaram worked as ‘apprentice stringers’ (assistants to stringers) before becoming full-fledged stringers, another stringer NS from the same mandal got into the field through recommendation by a local Communist trade union leader, who was his relative.³²

³² Gannavaram had strong left-oriented trade unions and political parties, which were active even at the time of research.

Table: 4.10

Mode of recruitment for stringers

Respondents Designation: Place	Mode of Recruitment		
	Written test and interview	Interview only	Direct appointment
Stringers: Gannavaram	9	6	3
Stringers: Sangareddy	4	3	2
Total respondents: 27	13	9	5

It should be noted that a majority of stringers with experience did not need to write any exam to shift from one newspaper to the other. *Eenadu* and *Sakshi*, which were very particular about their recruitment procedure, subjected stringers to a written test. Gannavarm stringers MMB and SSS had small-time photography and videography studios in the mandal and used to accompany stringers of established newspapers such as *Eenadu* and *Vaaritha* to take photographs whenever needed. After honing writing skills and gaining experience they joined as “full-time” (in SSS’s own words) stringers in newspapers. In Sangareddy, while MPR of *Nava Telangana* (formerly *Prajasakti*) joined as a stringer through left party connections, MKG of *Andhra Bhoomi* joined as stringer without any test, as the management had an immediate requirement in the mandal.

The version offered by stringers who joined in left-leaning newspapers was validated by the bureau in-charges who work in similar newspapers. *Prajasakti* staffer VS working in Vijayawada said:

As and when the need arose we recruited stringers in mandals. The procedure involved advertising the position in our newspaper. We scrutinise the profiles of interested candidates and inform our local party cadre or existing stringers in surrounding areas to know more about the candidate, if required. Once we get an approval, we select the candidates and put them on probation before finalising the recruitment process (Personal communication, 23 September, 2012).³³

³³ Medak bureau in-charge of the same party’s newspaper in Telangana (*Nava Telangana*), YP shared the same process. Interestingly, while VS of Vijayawada did not rule out the possibility of caste factor in recruitment, YP asserted that the caste background of the candidate did not matter at all while recruiting (13 October 2014).

On the other hand, the candidates who told that they appeared for the written test and interview, in both mandals, had cut their teeth in ‘big newspapers at the time of their joining.’ They informed that they, subsequently, were never required to appear for such tests while migrating to other newspapers.

When asked about the changes in recruitment process in the field, ‘veteran’ stringer (*pramukha grāmīṇa vilēkhari*), eminent rural reporter, as he was jovially referred to by his peers) DD said that apart from big newspapers (*pedda patrikalu*), nobody followed any pattern in recruiting from the time he joined as a stringer (in 1988). “If they (staffers and management) felt the need that the existing stringer should be changed, he will be replaced with a new one. Sometimes, they would not inform the stringer after firing him,” DD revealed and reminded that this was not a government position to give any warning or show cause notice (Personal communication, 8 May 2012, Gannavaram).

Bureau in-charge of *Andhra Prabha* at Sangareddy, VRK echoed the same about recruitment of stringers. Stressing that educational qualification of aspirants to become stringers did not matter anymore, he said:

It (recruitment) was a major problem for us. In the past, even to recruit stringers we scrutinised the educational qualifications, command over language, a deeper understanding towards the society in general and the district and state in particular. Even the behaviour of the candidate was assessed in the interview. This is a thing of the past now. Also, recruitment (of stringers) used to happen at Hyderabad. Now we started recruiting stringers at zone and mandal level. This is the case with most of the newspapers. Nobody bothers to take educational qualifications into consideration while recruiting a stringer. About 60-70 per cent of stringers do not have any educational qualifications (VRK, Personal communication, 10 October 2014, Sangareddy).

He did not mention the salaries of stringers, even when asked, but maintained that stringers got commensurate salary (*taginanta jītam vastundi*) in his newspaper. Notably, only the newspapers, which paid a definite amount to stringers, had strict norms of recruitment. These aspects will be discussed in chapter 6.

After addressing the issues of minimum wage requirement for working journalists in their report, the members of the Press Commission (GoI, 1954, p. 196) suggested:

It will obviously be impossible to prescribe standards of qualifications for different branches of the profession. But as we are suggesting elsewhere a provision being made for a minimum wage, it is obvious that in order to be entitled to that minimum wage the entrants to journalism should have some minimum qualifications also.

Over a period of time, a majority of newspaper owners seemed to have succeeded in doing the ‘exact reversal’ of the suggestion made by the First Press Commission. Since the management was not willing to pay minimum wages to stringers, they started going easy on the educational qualifications along with the other suggestions by the Commission. Some of the considerations that were suggested by the Commission members (GoI, 1954, p. 196) included: “psychological equipment of the candidate, *his* general aptitude for practising the profession of journalism, *his* flair for writing and nose for news” [Emphasis mine].

Many bureau in-charges told me that they checked if the candidate had the ability to write something about the issues and happenings in his own locality. “What educational qualifications?” MMR counter-questioned with a frown, when asked about the criterion for recruiting stringers. Saying that this job (stringer) was not a civil service position, he said:

Anyone who can write was allowed to work as a stringer for newspapers, if there was a requirement in a particular mandal. Newspaper organisations think like this: If there is a stringer in that particular area, our paper will reach all the nearby villages. Written test and interview they conduct is a farcical affair. Some stringers do not even know how to write. They (stringers) call their staffer over the phone and give strings of information (*nāl-mukkala vārta mokhana goḍtaru*)³⁴ about an issue. Sometimes they grudgingly passed on that information that too only when asked. It was the headache of the staffer to collect relevant and additional information to present it as a news story in the newspaper (Personal communication, 9 October 2014).³⁵

Many bureau in-charges and editorial staff felt that their role in recruitment of stringers was getting minimised by the day, and the management, advertising and circulation heads had more ‘say’ in the process. DD, who was active in the working

³⁴ Literally meant: They (stringers) threw bits of information on our faces.

³⁵ This description by MMR was almost on the lines of what James Carey observed about how the emergence of new communication technology replaced the reporter with the stringer in the US context, as mentioned in the introduction chapter.

journalists' union, pointed out that these departments forced stringers to deliver newspapers, collect advertisements, and assigned them many more non-journalistic tasks. "If they (management) wanted stringers to do these kinds of work and that too with irregular salaries, how could they be particular about the qualifications of candidates at the time of recruitment?" asked the joint secretary of APUWJ-Krishna Rural unit. He added that the owners of small and medium newspapers only assess if the stringer can meet their 'revenue targets,' while recruiting (Personal communication, 8 May 2012, Gannavaram).

On the whole, there was a clear disparity in the recruitment process and the responsibilities assigned to stringers between the big newspapers and the small and medium newspapers. In both states, apart from the 'Big-3' newspapers in each state, most of the newspapers did not pay or paid very meagre amounts to stringers in an irregular manner. "Anyone can enter this field now. There was no *hisab-kitab* (Urdu term for account-ledger) in recruitment and payment in *cinna patrikalu* (small newspapers)," YPR concluded the interview.

Reminiscing about developments in Telugu journalism, a retired senior reporter, GSR lamented that the field has 'gone to the dogs' with the emergence of the stringer-system and television news channels. He said:

Every Tom, Dick, and Harry owns a newspaper or channel or both these days. They (owners) do not have the passion, experience, and ethics to run any media organisation. Capitalist, casteist and regional feelings have ruined this field beyond repair. It was Ramoji who institutionalised news networks across the state and other newspapers, without any alternative, were forced to follow suit. This has resulted in deterioration of standards in journalism. There are committed persons who joined as stringers and became good journalists. But a majority of them are 'lumpen' characters (Personal communication, February 2016, Hyderabad).³⁶

Unlike the small and medium newspapers, big newspapers paid great attention to the background of the stringer before recruiting him. During my fieldwork, some stringers mentioned that both *Eenadu* and *Sakshi* newspapers were very particular

³⁶ GSR, who started his career as a reporter in *Visalaandhra*, passed away in the year 2018. His description of stringers as 'lumpen' character fell in line with a literary figure and former EJS principal late Boodaraju Radhakrishna who labelled stringers as "Class One blackmailers" (quoted in Jeffrey, 2010, p. 147).

about the background checks and, especially, likened *Eenadu*'s background verification process to that of Passport verification done by the police.

Elaborating on the recruitment policy of *Eenadu*, Krishna district editorial in-charge, GB said:

If the performance in the written test and interview was satisfactory, we conduct a background check before recruiting. We do not recruit anyone with criminal cases, chit fund organisers, private money lenders, alcoholics, and gamblers (*pēkāṭa rāyulḷu*). Private school teachers, advocates, and literate farmers were given preference. Minimum education qualification was graduation. We do not compromise on this aspect (Personal communication, 12 September 2012).³⁷

These considerations appeared obvious after knowing the history of the newspaper. Ramoji Rao established *Eenadu* after tasting success in the chit fund business (Margadarsi) and Priya pickles (agri products). Unlike English newspapers, greater preference was given to agriculture and agri-business related issues in the newspaper and even achieved great success in creating space for advertisements for those areas (EQC, 1999, p. 66-67). Agents of The Margadarsi Marketing Private Limited (MMPL) were crucial in boosting the circulation of the paper (EQC, 1999, p. 137). The newspaper carved out a niche readership among farmers, small-scale agri-business persons at the zone-level and had special columns written by experts on farming issues (EQC, pp. 66-67 & pp. 155-157). Many stringers who joined the newspaper after the launch of district editions were teachers.³⁸ *Eenadu*'s role in the anti-arrack movement in Andhra Pradesh was widely popular (EQC, 1999, p. 152).³⁹

³⁷ Gannavaram stringer ANR was selected in the written test and interview but was not offered a position in *Eenadu* after carrying out the mandatory background check, as he was a private money lender. Initially, he applied for a reporter's position and got rejected after they found out his business occupation. ANR tried to bargain for a stringer position but was denied despite having strong support from his community (Kamma) and political backing in the mandal (Personal communication, 2 May 2012, Gannavaram).

³⁸ See EQC, 1999, p. 136 for one such case study of a school teacher turned contributor.

³⁹ There was another take on the women-led Anti-arrack movement supported by Telugu Desam Party's supremo and thespian late N.T. Rama Rao. *Eenadu* carried a separate page – *sarai pai samaram* (War on liquor) – to educate the masses against the social evil of drinking. Jeffrey (2010, pp. 14-15), after gathering a version provided by freedom fighter and NTR admirer Vavilala Gopalakrishnaiah and *Eenadu*'s version, stated that such a "campaign could not have happened without the newspaper revolution." The point he missed, however, was the bitter media war between *Eenadu* and *Udayam*, the latter owned by a "liquor baron" and Congress MP Magunta Subbarami Reddy from Ongole. A major part of the investment in *Eenadu*'s fiercest competitor *Udayam*, under the editorship of A.B.K. Prasad,

On similar lines, rural in-charge of *Sakshi* daily in Krishna district NS said that he handpicked stringers at the mandal-level after personally cross checking the background of selected candidates. However, stringers in both states suggested that persons belonging to the Reddy community were appointed as reporters, while the rest (non-Reddys) were offered positions as stringers.

Caste may not be the only factor for recruiting a stringer, as newspapers (regardless of their circulation size) focused on catering to immediate requirements. But it seemed to have played a major role in journalists being able to climb up the professional hierarchy in newspapers.

Even as there were many studies that suggested the lack of diversity or under-representation of persons from Dalit (SC), Bahujan (BC), and religious minority (OBC) communities, there was adequate representation from those communities at the mandal-level as stringers in Telugu newspapers. In fact, persons working as stringers from SC and OBC communities in Gannavaram and Sangareddy were over-represented than the constitutionally and legally sanctioned quotas of 15 and 27 per cent, respectively for SC and OBC categories, in government education and employment sector. And the general category candidates were relatively fewer.

The state of affairs in the Telugu language newspapers, on the face of it, looked better than the Hindi heartland experience. Ninan (2007, p. 114), after surveying the ‘local news gatherers’ in the Hindi belt, noted, “The rapid plunge into localisation led to a democratisation of newsgathering which encompassed the citizenry at large. It turned local lawyers, teachers, shopkeepers and busybodies into citizen journalists.” She found out from her survey that “most stringers in Mirzapur belong to the Brahmin community. Most of the land mafia were also Brahmins” (Ninan, 2007, p. 129).

Commenting about the rise of Hindi journalism and how it was serving the purpose of one community (Hindu), Gupta and Sharma (1996) pointed out that even *mahants* (priests) are said to have served as newspaper stringers during the darkest days of the

came from the liquor business (Balagopal, 1992 pp. 2457-2461). Many considered that Ramoji Rao masterminded this campaign and successfully achieved fruitful results: 1) TDP coming back to power in 1994 elections with its liquor prohibition policy; 2) *Udayam* was closed down after running into losses with no capital generated from the owner’s liquor business which was shut down. See, Donthi, 2014. *Eenadu* did not have any competition till *Sakshi* was launched in 2008. Earlier, *Vaaritha* was seen as a potential competitor to *Eenadu* but lost out very soon due to various reasons.

Babri Masjid crisis. This essentially meant that there were not many stringers in the Hindi heartland for whatever reasons. However, Jeffrey (2010, p. 163) noted that:

“[L]ack of qualifications” was often given as a reason for the absence of Dalits from newsrooms. “Scheduled Castes and lower castes are not that much qualified over here,” said an editor in Gujarat. “In the journalistic class, very few backward classes are there.”

While the experiences in the Hindi belt suggested that Brahmins dominated the scene even at the stringer-level journalism, the version from Gujarat was lack of education among Dalits meant lack of presence in the newsroom, as stated by the journalists. Another recent study conducted (Oxfam India, 2019, p. 24) presented a grim picture about lack of diversity or constitutional representation in Hindi language media. It said, “Not one Dalit, Adivasi or OBC journalist held a leadership position across the seven Hindi newspapers chosen for this study – *Dainik Bhaskar*, *Amar Ujala*, *Navbharat Times*, *Rajasthan Patrika*, *Prabhat Khabar*, *Punjab Kesari*, and *Hindustan*.”

In a more recent survey and research, Harad (2020) pointed out that the relatively lesser number of Bahunan journalists in English newsrooms, compared to their upper caste counterparts, makes it difficult for them to challenge cultural biases and caste-based discrimination. He (2020, p. 18) noted:

India’s English media newsrooms remain urban-centric, upper class, upper caste, and ignorant to the realities of vast swathes of Indian masses. The entry of SC, ST, and OBC journalists in newsrooms is essential to bring vigour to output, to make them more representative of Indian society [...]

Coming to the present case of stringers in Telugu language press, it would be a gross mistake if one validates her/his hypothesis that these numbers about Dalits and Bahunan stringers means a democratisation of the journalistic field or that of the news media. There is no space to rationalise such a claim as they were ‘relegated’ to the position of stringer, with no further growth, despite having considerable experience in the field. They complained that mediocre candidates belonging to forward castes were selected as reporters and opined that the forward caste candidates were backed by journalists who were already working in the field.

When asked about the reasons why he did not become a reporter, in spite of having experience, *Namaste Telangana* stringer in Sangareddy said that he did not have the “network” or support system in the higher-ups of the field.⁴⁰ This was a clear response about the lack of cultural or network capital on the part of the stringer. More importantly, many stringers responded that they did not have “proper support in the field” [*fildulō telisinōllu lēru, saraina contacts lēvu, pedda positions lo manollu evarunnaru saar*] (Field notes, 8 May & 7 June 2012; 9 October 2014).⁴¹ They rationalised that this could be the reason for their lack of growth in the profession.

This *relegation* of persons from socially disadvantaged and marginal communities to the lowest rung appeared to be the ‘doxa’ of the field. This was the experience even as they tried applying for a full-time journalist’s position in a newly-launched paper or different media organisation due to what the Press Commission (GoI, 1954, p. 194) called as “parochial” considerations. It seemed as if the parochial considerations that the Commission stated more than half-a-century ago meant casteist and communal (both caste and religion) markers.

⁴⁰ There seemed to be a well-oiled network in place for persons belonging to forward castes (Brahmins to be precise) at the beginning of the 20th century itself. During the 1920s, the founder of *Andhra Patrika* Kasinathuni Nageswara Rao (referred as *pantulu gāru*; *pantulu* meant Sir in Telugu and *gāru* is a suffix used by Telugus as a mark of respect) employed students, who approached him for help to pursue education in Madras, as sub-editors. Rajagopalrao (2004, pp. 72-73) noted: “*Pantulu gāru* helped needy students who wished to study law and other courses in Chennapatnam (formerly Madras and now Chennai). He appointed them as sub-editors in *Andhra Patrika* and provided accommodation in the office. He helped such students gain self-respect and self-sufficiency. The newspaper office was a dharmasala and functioned as office for Andhra Vidhyarthi Sangham (Andhra Students Association).” [Translation mine]. The founder of the newspaper was a Brahmin and in those days it was a common practice for Brahmin boys or students to seek help from other Brahmin families or persons (sometimes even if they were unrelated or unknown) for education purposes. One of the famous such cases was that of freedom fighter, lawyer, journalist, and first Chief Minister of Andhra State (1954), Tanguturi Prakasam. Also known as Prakasam *pantulu*, he was one such needy Brahmin student. In his biography, he (1972, p. 11 & p. 22) wrote that his teacher Hanumanta Rao Naidu (a non-Brahmin) made special arrangements for his lunch in a Brahmin family during the course of his education, as Brahmins did not eat meals in non-Brahmin homes or ate ‘outsiders’ food. Prakasam *pantulu* became a celebrated barrister and even went on to establish a newspaper *Swarajya Patrika*. Other forward and agrarian castes from the Telugu linguistic community like the Reddys and the Kammas built such networks for themselves too (Upadhya, 1988b, pp. 1433-1442). These were very important in understanding the nature of the field, as the who’s who of the field – be it editorial or proprietorial – belonged to these castes and communities, as discussed in the introduction chapter.

In Bourdieusian terms, these social and cultural relations provided the transfer of one form of capital to the other for dominant communities and this was not the case with the marginal and even intermediary castes and communities.

⁴¹ These meant: do not know any key persons in the field; do not have proper contacts; where are our people? (There are no persons from our caste/community/region in the field).

When asked why they continued to work in the field, most of them (experienced ones; not the new entrants) said they had no alternatives. It was about this situation or condition that Bourdieu (2005, p. 471) talked about as ‘doxa’ – a realisation of the restricted options available for the agents in the field with relatively lesser levels of capital (economic and cultural). Most of the stringers seemed to have unconsciously accepted their position and continued in the field.

The *Sakshi* stringer in Gannavaram, YSR said that he got fed up with the lack of growth and opportunities and left the field for six years to join as a full-time worker in a national political party. YSR informed that he tried finishing his discontinued under-graduation programme in order to pursue law as a career option only to shelve the idea. He joined *Sakshi* when it was launched in 2008 and continued to work there.⁴²

During a conversation, in between ‘assignments’ for the day, YSR gave an analogy between the journalistic field and police department regarding appointments in the presence of an intelligence department inspector Ravi (name changed).

YSR: We (stringers) are not the only ones suffering. Situation of constables in the department (police) was similar. I know constables who were happy when they got a government job and continued in the same position until retirement. Only lucky fellows got promoted as head constables. Take the case of NS and DD. NS managed to get promoted as rural in-charge. But DD never got the chance. Even in the department, growth was not the same. Those who got recruited as sub-inspectors got very few chances to become superintendent of police (SP). Most of them stop at ASP (superintendent of police) level. Reporters and sub-editors who got direct appointments at the maximum became bureau in-charges or district edition in-charge. That’s the end of the road for them. Candidates with a journalism degree and get appointed right after their education, like the *Eenadu* trainee reporter, who visited us the other day, were like Indian Police Service (IPS) officers.⁴³ In my experience, they

⁴² He was taking care of Gannavaram urban and rural areas for the newspaper, at the time of writing in 2019.

⁴³ IPS officers were recruited at Union (central) level, while the state police get appointed locally. There was a huge variation in the recruitment procedure of police between the state and central cadre. Home guards and orderlies were recruited at the district level. Throughout the country, orderlies and home guards were at the lowest rung of the hierarchy in the department and many a time subjected to carry out menial jobs. Jauregui (2013, pp. 643–669) addressed the issue of caste and ranks in the police department in her ethnographic study.

For more information on the issues surrounding the orderlies and home guards: See, <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/tamil-nadu/high-court-frowns-upon-use-of-orderlies-by-police-officials/article23297013.ece>, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/hyderabad/Cook-wash-clean-babysit-Day-in-life-of-a-home-guard/articleshow/53193976.cms>

(journalism graduates) continued to go up in the profession unless they were dolts (abuse changed). That's the matter. What else did you want to research about this profession?

Me: What about those who worked as assistants to stringers?

YSR: [Responded spontaneously]. Those fellows (abuse changed) were like orderlies and home guards in the department. They used to ask me how to become a stringer quickly. [He burst into laughter and looked for appreciation from Ravi and myself, as he 'fitted' the model with that of police to a T.]⁴⁴

Such an understanding and providing a "sense of one's place" and "organisation of image of the social world" (Bourdieu, 2005, p. 471) and comprehending his own position in relation to others in the field and from other fields had posed many more questions such as: Why stringers continued in the field, considering their position in it and how? An understanding about social and professional divisions in the field was required to address the questions. The next chapter attempts to address the issues of hierarchies and roles in the field.

⁴⁴ For an understanding of ranks and issues in the police department: see, the works of Rao & Rao (1980) and Jauregui (2013, pp. 643-669) writing about/in different contexts.

CHAPTER 5

UNDERSTANDING ROLES AND HIERARCHIES: TOWARDS LOGIC OF LOCAL JOURNALISTIC PRACTICE

The sole means of successfully evaluating objectively the division of labour is first to study it in itself, in an entirely speculative fashion, investigating its utility and on what it is contingent – in short, to form for ourselves as adequate an idea of it as possible. When this has been accomplished, we are in a position to compare it with other moral phenomena and perceive what relationship it entertains with them

– Émile Durkheim, 2013, p. 37.

Tāḍini tannēvāḍu untē vāḍi talanu tannēvāḍu inkōduntāḍu (If there's someone who can reach the top of a palm tree, there is always someone else who can scale greater height).

– Telugu proverb, Author, Date, Unknown.

Introduction

The above proverb was uttered by a stringer, when asked about the hierarchies in his organisation and how he deals with them as a part of his daily work. The context in which he mentioned the proverb encodes a meaning to the effect that “if there's someone smart, there will always be someone else who can outsmart the smart person.” The stringer in question was hinting that it was the only way to survive in the field.

The most interesting aspect of the journalistic practices was the conflation of multiple hierarchies, the strategies of agents in their respective social spaces, and the division of labour which was implicitly based on the background of the agents in the journalistic field. The ethnographic observations and primary data collected during the course of this research reveal that there was an apparent relationship between dispositions of the agents and the positions occupied by the agents in the field. What was challenging was to map the relations between agents, structures, and strategies involved in the process of news production on a daily basis.

Responding to a question on the existence, functioning, and boundaries of a field, Bourdieu pointed out:

[T]he field as a structure of objective relations of force between positions undergirds and guides the strategies whereby the occupants of these positions seek, individually or collectively to safeguard or improve their position, and to impose the principle of hierarchisation most favourable to their own products. The strategies of agents depend on their position in the field, that is, in the distribution of the specific capital (Bourdieu's response to Wacquant, 1989, p. 40).

This chapter elaborates on the issue of relegation not only in the positions but also in practice before presenting multiple forms of hierarchies within and outside of the field that are crucial in understanding the local journalistic practices. In doing so, the positions occupied by the agents in the social space, their social capital, and professional roles are mapped out in order to locate their positions in the heteronomous journalistic field. This mapping of the relations between the dispositions, capital, and professional roles of the agents in the field is presented keeping in mind the relationship between habitus, capital, and field in understanding the logic of practice (Bourdieu, 2005, p. 101). In the process, this chapter attempts to address the question: What is the relevance of social/ethnographic/class background to the production practices of language journalism?

Understanding journalistic roles in local news production

Sipping chai right in front of a roadside café located opposite the Sangareddy 'Zero Milestone', GG with more than eight years of experience as a stringer declared on a Monday morning (29 September 2014): "No matter what we write, news is decided by the ignorant desk person placed above us. I thought that they will publish it on Sunday or Monday. *Bardāsh t aitaledu...*" (Not able to tolerate this...).

GG wrote a special story on a specially-abled (hearing and speech impaired) person from a village in Sangareddy, who fought all odds to complete his intermediate education along with vocational training, got placed in a chain hotel group in Hyderabad. The stringer told me that the specially-abled person attended a job fair organised at an educational institute for persons with special needs in Hyderabad on September 23. He informed that this job fair was part of the international week for the "deaf and dumb" and was going to

file a story, which he thought will be a genuine “human interest” story...
(Field notes, Sangareddy, 25 September 2014).

The story was not carried and the stringer was upset as he believed that it was a ‘success story’, which may inspire persons with similar background in the immediate locality. He also pointed out that lack of space was not the reason, as the newspaper he works for carried reports filed from Hyderabad in the Medak district edition. GG came to a conclusion that his story was ‘spiked’ without giving any reasons and was annoyed with the distant and anonymous editorial person.

More than with the person concerned in the desk, GG seemed to be livid at himself for not being able to comprehend the *logic of rejection* of his special story by the editorial staff. He told me that the bureau in-charge cleared the story and sent it across to the desk for publication. This was a regular affair with stringers regarding their stories. In the case of Medak, there was no chance of direct contact or establishing a relationship with the person concerned in the editorial section for feedback or to check the status of the news item. Even the job of the bureau in-charge and rural in-charge ends after sending the story to the head office located in Hyderabad, where the pages are made.

The initial disappointment of GG was not surprising as this happened on a number of occasions to some stringers during my fieldwork in Gannavaram. On one occasion, a stringer said, “*mēmu pātradhārulemē kāni office vāḷḷu asalu sūtradhārulu*” (We are only role players, [desk and reporters] office persons are the real directors).¹

In the case of Gannavaram, unlike in Sangareddy or Medak, there was a district edition centre for all Telugu news dailies located in and around Vijayawada. Sometimes, the stories filed by stringers get ‘picked’ or ‘lifted’ by reporters working in the edition centres. However, a majority of stringers in both Gannavaram and Sangareddy in their interviews complained that their stories were lifted either by reporters or rural in-charges without giving any credit to them. The following is an excerpt from my field notes about one such instance on an exceptionally long Friday in the field along with stringers at work in the blazing hot sun in Gannavaram.

¹ This aspect of role players and directors will be discussed in a later section of this chapter.

SSS, a stringer working for a top Telugu daily, noticed that streetlights were switched on during the day in Buddhavaram, Kesarapalli, and Chinna Avutupalli villages for two consecutive days. Near the MRO's office he managed to meet the electricity lineman and enquired about it. The stringer learnt that due to technical snag, the electricity lines have become direct and they were not able to turn off the power supply. He met the assistant engineer (AE) of the local electricity office and got confirmation. The stringer even put a headline *gannavaramlō pagati velugulu!* (Lights during the daytime in Gannavaram!). Pointers for the story were catchy too. They read: *adhikārula nirlakshyam* (careless officials); *vrđhā avutunna vidyutcakti* (wastage of power). He emailed the story to the edition centre along with photographs of the streetlights taken in the morning with an alert stating that more reports will follow soon (8 June 2012, Gannavaram).

The story did not appear in the Gannavaram zone page the following day (Saturday) and SSS was confident that the desk might be thinking of taking it on Sunday (10 June 2012), which also did not happen. However, much to our shock, the story appeared as the anchor story on the front page of the district tabloid on Tuesday with Vijayawada dateline. While SSS's story focused only on Gannavaram, the reporter who wrote the published article gave an overview of the situation in the entire district with quotes from Machilipatnam (headquarters) and Vijayawada electricity officials.

By the time I reached the reading room on Tuesday morning, fellow stringers already started pulling his leg saying that the district reporter had indulged in 'lift irrigation'. Lift irrigation was a common expression used among stringers and reporters in Telugu journalism, when a story gets picked up by either another reporter from the same paper/news organisation or by another newspaper.

When reporters cannibalise stories filed by stringers in the same organisation, the latter is deprived of credit in both financial and literal sense. The story getting published with a different dateline means loss of money for stringers and at the same time the 'credit' for his news story idea goes to someone else. SSS called up the rural in-charge who replied that he was not on duty on that particular day and gave advice not to make it a big issue. When I asked him about the possibility of taking this issue to the bureau in-charge or editorial in-charge, as he has enough proof of filing the story and sending the photographs in emails, the stringer said: "*Vāḍi torture vaddu ippuḍu* (I do not want to face any 'torture' from the reporter now).

There were also instances when the bureau/rural in-charges gave a perspective to a ‘bare news report’ (spot report) and helped stringers come up with a comprehensive news article. In one such instance at Sangareddy:

A stringer of the second largest Telugu daily in terms of circulation reached the newspaper office before lunchtime, while I was interviewing the bureau chief, to file a news report about an abandoned girl child near a temple at Angadipet in Sangareddy mandal. After going through the report filed by the stringer, the bureau chief took some time off from the interview. He sat the stringer down and told him that the story is much bigger than a single-column sized report. The stringer was suggested to go through last month’s newspaper to find out more such abandoned cases (totalled 10) and asked to come up with a broader report taking responses from local integrated child development services (ICDS) officer, doctors, and *anganwadi* workers. The single column news item turned into a special story after the bureau chief gave a final shape to the rough item filed by the stringer. It was marked “checked and cleared” by him (usual practice) and sent to the desk based in Hyderabad through email. He turned towards the stringer, who was standing next to him all this while, and said, “This is how you need to convert news into special stories.” Three of us broke for lunch (Field notes, 1 October 2014).

The following day, the special story on abandoned girl children was carried on the front page of Medak district edition occupying four out of six columns of the half page alongside a two-column standalone picture of Goddess Durga during *Bathukamma* festival. The story flowed into the second page of the edition occupying another four columns (2 October 2014) with another box-column prominently carrying the quote of the ICDS officer.

The above ‘selected’ observations are presented in order to highlight the interactions between agents occupying different positions and performing roles demanded by those positions in the professional hierarchy within the organisation. In the instance of the human interest story, there is an unquestionable and inaccessible editorial desk that holds the decision making power whether or not to carry a story filed by a stringer, even as it is cleared by the reporting head concerned.

In case of the picked-up (“lift irrigation”) story, there is a clear and visible preponderance of the reporter over the stringer so much so that the latter is not in a position to claim his right over the story that was cannibalised. Observations in the field revealed that this sort of practice happens to stringers, who email their stories to

the desk directly as opposed to handing over the handwritten stories to bus drivers, who dispatch them to the nearest bus stop of the edition centre. Along with such ‘malpractices’, there are ‘healthy’ practices through which seniors at work guide, shape, and train stringers (subordinates) to file better stories, as in the case of the stringer who got the opportunity to convert a tiny spot news report into a special story on his own date and credit line.²

The above incidents highlight the roles and the relationships among the various agents in the newspaper organisation. The selection and rejection of articles mentioned above do not have any apparent political (realpolitik) overtones or ideologically or monetarily driven intentions behind the separate reportages.³ These descriptions not only mention the roles in news production but also the weight those roles hold on to along with some arbitrary understanding or doxa (“rules of the game”) present in the field.

Interestingly, the Press Academy manual addressed this issue to educate stringers understand the nuances of the field, and the code of conduct that they should maintain in the profession. A part of the manual (Chakradhar, 2011, p. 19), which appeared like an excerpt from the Code of Hammurabi read:

Ensure that you are in the good books of desk persons so that they may consider your stories for publication. As a stringer, you need to maintain a cordial relationship with the staff reporter too. Having an amiable working relationship with staff reporters and the desk workers is highly beneficial.

The aforementioned observations along with some suggestions such as the above prompts one to further understand the relationship between the agents carrying out specific (sometimes non-specific/general) roles and responsibilities in the local news production process. Before dealing with the issue of roles and relationships among the agents in the journalistic field, the nature of roles and responsibilities of stringers, reporting and editorial staffers are presented in a tabular form (See, Table: 5.1).

² Credit line specifies the location of the news item and at the same time confers the monetary and authorship credit to the stringer/reporter. Based on the length of the report and photograph used, a corresponding amount of money will be credited to the stringer’s account based on this credit line.

³ At a theoretical level, it is possible to see the political in all the above mentioned incidents on the lines of disability (marginalised), bureaucratic misadministration (politics of efficiency/inefficiency), and gender discrimination (abandonment of *female* infant) respectively.

THE STRINGER AND THE STAFFERS: ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Table: 5.1

Stringer	Reporting staffer	Editorial staffer
• Not salaried (<i>precariat</i>) • Diurnal • Field • Workplace: No • No by-line • Part-time • Zone page (a leaf in district tabloid edition) • Generalist (no beat) • Credibility • Handwritten reports/email/ WhatsApp • Writing • Facts, quotes, pictures for stories • News incident, event, press conference • <u>Qualities</u>: Dynamic, objective, gregarious • <u>Feedback</u>: Sources, peers, locals, and readers • <u>Weekly-off</u>: No • <u>Duties</u>: News gathering, reporting; coordinating with staffers, bureau in-charge, editorial, advertising & scheduling department, and management; procuring advertisements; boost circulation • <u>Role</u>: News gatherer cum photographer, newspaper circulation agent, ad revenue generator • <u>Mode of payment</u>: Credit line account, commission from advertisements	• Salaried (<i>salariat</i>) • Diurnal • Field and office • Workplace: Office • By-line (exclusive stories; occasionally) • Full-time • District edition (tabloid), main edition • Beat (Specific) • Credibility • Email/ WhatsApp /news writing software • Writing • Facts, quotes, assigning duties • News incident, event, press conference, special story • <u>Qualities</u>: Dynamic, objective, gregarious • <u>Feedback</u>: Sources, peers, editorial staff • <u>Weekly-off</u>: Yes • <u>Duties</u>: News gathering, reporting, writing special stories, monitoring stringers (bureau and rural in-charges) • <u>Role</u>: News gatherer, aggregator, supervisor • <u>Mode of payment</u>: Salary account	• Salaried (<i>salariat</i>) • Nocturnal • Desk (office) • Workplace: Office • No by-line • Full-time • Zone/District/ Main editions • Specific pages • Honesty • WhatsApp/Email/ news writing and page design software • Rewriting, editing, sourcing • Prioritising, highlighting, playing down stories • Language, layout, grammar • <u>Qualities</u>: Patience, prudence, clarity • <u>Feedback</u>: Peers, senior staffers, readers • <u>Weekly-off</u>: Yes • <u>Duties</u>: Editing, translating, designing, coordinating • <u>Role</u>: News processor • <u>Mode of payment</u>: Salary account

Source: Field notes and interviews

Understanding of the roles and responsibilities of various agents as division of labour in newswork emerged from field observations and interviews that were carried out during the fieldwork. Even as there are various designations within the reporting and editorial sections of newspapers based on experience, there is not much variation in their primary nature of work. While designations in the reporting section include: reporter, senior reporter, chief reporter, rural in-charge and bureau in-charge; in editorial section, they were: sub-editor, senior sub-editor, chief sub-editor, deputy news editor, news editor, and district edition in-charge.

Most newspapers have a functional mechanism in place to address the issue of weekly-off for staffers, as there will always be a second-in-command for the top roles. Also in the editorial section, especially in Krishna district, allocation of mandal and zone pages to sub-editors is based on a rotation policy, so that there will not be any possibility of building up a nexus between the page in-charge and the stringers in various mandals of the district.⁴ In case of the reporting section, at least one person out of the bureau in-charge, the rural in-charge, and one chief reporter must be on duty to ensure that there will be enough stories to take out the district edition.⁵ In case of any extreme situation in which all the reporting staffers are absent, the editorial section will carry reports from nearby district/edition centre with bare minimum local reports (mostly press releases) to ensure that advertisement commitments will be honoured for that particular day.

Even as Jeffrey (2010, p. 147) pointed that “the line between a stringer and a staffer could blur,” there is a huge difference between the work culture and organisation of the two roles at the mofussil or district edition level. After probation or training (for a period of three to six months), every reporting staffer would be given a specific territory and beat. While a territory could comprise legislative and administrative regions or units, such as: metro (city), assembly constituency, parliamentary

⁴ One district edition in-charge likened this policy to that of public sector banks and insurance companies in which employees will be transferred from one location to the other or at least from one branch to the other on a regular basis to avoid fraudulent activities while issuing loans or clearing claims by their customers (VS, personal communication, Vijayawada, 23 September 2012).

⁵ Edition in-charge of a leading Telugu daily, CBRP informed me that they encountered such a problem in 2008, when almost the entire reporting staff including stringers and a majority of editorial staff resigned *en masse* and joined a newly launched newspaper. He said that with bare minimum workforce, they continued to take out the district edition till they recruited new staff with most of the editing and page layout work done at the headquarters located in Hyderabad till then (CBRP, personal communication, 17 September 2012).

constituency, and district headquarters among others, the beat for reporting staffers could involve covering issues related to politics, crime, agriculture, health, education, business, lifestyle, district collector's office, municipal office and corporation, sports, and courts of law.

While Vijayawada and Krishna district editions of Telugu dailies had almost all of these beats and territories for reporters (in some cases more than one dedicated reporting staffer for crime and political beats), Sangareddy and Medak district had reporters handling more than one beat. Even as the total area of erstwhile Medak district was bigger than Krishna district and both have two parliamentary constituencies each, the presence of a large city like Vijayawada within the district limits factored in having separate urban and rural editions.

Senior reporting staffers are expected not to just carry out their own responsibilities but oversee the work of junior reporters whether they are performing their roles or not. These seniors or higher level reporting staffers (city/district/rural bureau in-charges) also assign duties for that particular day to the reporters. And the reporters are expected to complete these tasks along with covering their beat, for which they are solely responsible. From the point of view of reporting staffers, the physical space in which the administration and assignment of reporting activities take place is referred to as office (workplace) and the bureau is the organised work process of a particular beat. Each reporter literally has a 'bureau' (here, computer table) of their own or at least shares it with one more reporter by taking turns at the time of filing reports.

This sort of an organised space of work (office) or process of work (beat and bureau) is something a stringer doesn't have access to. The workplace, residence, office, and space of operation most of the time are indistinguishable. Their work culture becomes part of the social surrounding or the world of everyday life. Unlike the reporters, who return to their offices to file reports, stringers do not have such distinction.⁶ In Gannavaram and Sangareddy, stringers gossip, hang out, kill time, invite local elite to discuss and file reports from the same place (like the media point or rest house discussed in earlier chapters).

⁶ This holds true for most of the English daily reporters working in mofussil areas too. For instance, two such reporters working for separate English national dailies converted a room in their home as their office or workspace.

However, this is not the case with the editorial staffers, as each of them has a niche (cubicle) of their own in the office.⁷ Within the editorial section, they too have designated and assigned pages to deal with for the night. Editorial staffers most of the time did not have direct contact with either stringers or reporters and even if they needed to clarify with them regarding any copy, they would have to go through “a proper channel.” This proper channel means that they need to inform their superior, who is ‘privy’ to talk to the reporting bureau in-charge or rural in-charge, who in turn contacts the stringer or reporters. Many senior editorial staffers expressed that this bureaucracy is necessary to avoid ‘nexus’ or ‘give and take’ between page sub-editors and stringers or reporters. Some pointed that the bureau or rural in-charges or senior reporters have a better understanding about the news event (history and context) than them and any which way they do not want to take a chance. However, in emergency situations or in case of developing stories, editorial staffers are allowed to call stringers in order to take input or information directly before the edition is put to bed.

Having considered the differences in the nature of work of reporters, stringers, and editorial staffers, the conceptions of time and space of the editorial and reporting (including stringers) needs to be understood. In most of the descriptions of newswork in manuals for journalists (Rao, 2011; Reddy, 2011; Rammohanarao, 2011; Venkateswararao, 2011), this aspect went unnoticed.

A glance at any print morning daily subtly revealed that there were two different time zones in it. Most of the time, it may not appear loud enough to grab the attention of newspaper readers, but it is evident for an ethnographer as understanding the logics of time and space is foundational for this form of research. The news event or incident happens on a particular time of the day and the stringer/reporter files the story at a different time of the day (say by evening) with the date and place of reporting, dateline and credit line respectively. For the desk person, the workday begins by changing the date on the top corner of the page (in most of the dailies) she/he edits to the following day and the location happened to be the location of edition centre regardless of locations from where news was reported and pages such as: zone, district, metro, nation, world, edit, op-ed, sports, and movies among other pages.

⁷ The editorial staffers in Vijayawada during my fieldwork make themselves feel at home by eating at their workplace and sharing food. They have their own set of friends within the same office with whom they take tea or smoke breaks.

In effect, there is a narrative about newswork that unfolds in between the gap in time when an incident happens and the time it becomes a report filed by a stringer or reporter (interactions/negotiations with agents from other fields) and the time it is finally printed (interactions and negotiations, and thereby communication between stringers, reporting and editorial staffers).

This understanding of relationships and communication between agents in the field is crucial if one were to ethnographically grasp the production practices. This approach is inspired from the ritual view and definition of communication, which is

[...] linked to terms such as “sharing,” “participation,” “association,” “fellowship,” and “the possession of a common faith.” This definition exploits the ancient identity and common roots of the terms “commonness,” “communion,” “community,” and “communication.”

If the archetypal case of communication under a transmission view is the extension of messages across geography for the purpose of control, the archetypal case under a ritual view is the sacred ceremony that draws persons together in fellowship and commonality (Carey, 2009, p. 15).

The interactions and negotiations among the agents within the field and factors that lie outside of it are crucial in examining the relations of production in the journalistic field. This understanding also helps in knowing the scope and limits of the roles of agents operating within the field.

Understanding relations of news production between agents

This section presents an understanding of the relations of news production, which was developed during my fieldwork at both sites of research. Some of the arguments presented in this section were culled out from interviews, field notes, as well as from the incidents that took place at the time of research.

A major complaint on part of stringers was the lack of opportunity to write any story the way they perceive it. They were very well aware of the social and political relevance of events that took place in their immediate surroundings. They were aware not only of their environment but also had a good understanding about the background of events. But they had little opportunity to write new articles and report comprehensively on such events.

Most of the stringers charged that reporters and rural or bureau in-charges most of the time did not allow them to write full reports and were given the responsibility of gathering 'sidelights' or trivia denying them the task to report on events or issues that had broader social significance, as perceived by them. Stringers pointed that some reporters regularly picked-up stories filed by them and get it published from Vijayawada dateline without giving any credit.

Stringers in both states complained that while the reporting and editorial staffers restrict themselves to journalistic work most of the time, the newspaper management personnel 'assign' and put additional non-journalistic work on them. They said that the management dictates terms on what to report and what not to report about certain businessmen, politicians, and political parties pushing their 'advertisement interests'.

While stringers in Medak district pointed that with some parts of the district being industrial hubs, stories on some companies and firms that flout norms were repeatedly rejected. In the case of Krishna district, the complaint was about the 'nexus between politicians, real estate businessmen, and the newspaper management'. They informed me that newspaper management and firms have a very good understanding. Since there was no direct access to the desk persons, most of the time it was the management persons who had the final say in publishing or rejection of stories rather than reporting heads. In the case of Krishna district, most of the stringers expressed that some reporters shared good rapport with the local politicians and businessmen and ensured that there will not be any negative reportage against such local elite. They also informed that the desk and management persons get involved in ensuring that there are no reports filed against a particular political party. Some of the stringers suggested that there was a heavy 'caste-based bias' (*Sat-shudra*) involved in selection or rejection of reports in Gannavaram. This caste-based gatekeeping will be evident while presenting some events in the section on logic of journalistic practice.

Explaining about the ways to avoid hardships in the profession, stringers in both states (especially the experienced ones) indicated there will not be any problems for them if they follow and adhere to what the management and reporting heads told them to do pointing that 'caste, money, and political power decide news' in their respective location. Most of the time, the caste background of a stringer came to the fore,

whenever the local politicians, businessmen, and bureaucrats among others complained against them to the newspaper management, before they were sacked.

Some stringers revealed that, on most occasions, they restricted their roles to that of merely sending strings and pieces of information and details in their reports so that the desk persons stitch them into a news story, which sticks to the editorial and newspaper management policy. And they even pointed out that this way of reporting created problems locally, as some politicians questioned why their statements were distorted in the story. They said that it was the responsibility of stringers to strike a balance between the local elite or news sources, rural or bureau in-charges, and management persons.

Elaborating on the caste issue, stringers who are from the Dalit and the Bahujan communities explained that the reporters and reporting in-charges belong to influential castes (both *Sat-shudras* and *Savarnas*) in the society and the journalistic field. They (stringers) averred that the reporting and editorial heads routinely edged out stories that highlighted the neglect of marginalised communities by the government, officials, police, and politicians. Stringers alleged that even though there was ample space in the district editions, desk persons preferred to publish items from nearby cities (Hyderabad or Vijayawada datelines) and not take such items. Instead they preferred to carry reports filed from Vijayawada or nearby mandal over the news articles or special articles filed by local stringers. When asked about the reasons for rejecting such articles, some of the questions posed to the stringers by the reporting or editorial heads were (as posed to stringers): “How many people from that community (caste or tribe) read our newspaper? What is our circulation in that village?”⁸

At the same time, some of the stringers and reporting heads at both locations revealed that most of the times the *kismet* (fate) of a story making its way to the printing press was not determined by keeping the readers in mind or the organisational or professional (unprofessional) structure. Instead, track record (*habitus*) of stringers as observed by editorial staffers became one of the factors while selecting or rejecting special stories.

⁸ These queries were confirmed by desk and reporting in-charges while explaining about their nature of work during the interactions and interviews carried out as a part of the fieldwork.

The editorial persons stressed that news organisation (firm), editorial policy, and principles come before individuals, while carrying out journalistic work on a daily basis. Most of them indicated that in case stringers deviate from it (the policy), they will initially try to ‘get them into their groove’ (*dārīlōki teccukunṭāmu*) and warn them later. In case stringers try to tamper with the editorial and management policy despite repeated warnings, they will be fired, editorial persons in Krishna district said.

Most of the editors suggested that they reminded stringers to write stories keeping in mind the editorial policy as well as the readership base in mind. They said that they took help of bureau and rural in-charges along with reporters to know about the background of the stringer who filed the reports for that day. Editorial staffers said that they pose a set of questions to themselves before getting convinced to select a story or spot news event for publishing, such as: a) Who is filing the report? (Social background and history of the stringer) b) what is the relevance of the news report on that particular day? c) Was there any possibility of vested interests on part of the stringer in filing the story (especially negative ones against the local elite)? They also indicated that they acquired the knowledge of assessing the nature of a report (whether manipulative or not) over a period of time in the job or role of an editor.

Rural in-charges in both states expressed that the decision-making power regarding selection of stories is vested in the hands of sub-editors. In case the editorial staff express any doubts regarding stories, they said that they cross-check the veracity of the news item through their own sources from the locality where it was filed. They said that with decades of experience in the field, they developed their own network across the district and most of them stated that they could easily identify the intention and motive of a stringer in filing certain stories.

Bureau in-charges too maintained that the stringers have many vested interests, as they did not have a proper salary. They pointed out that this was the main reason why they file certain stories seeking monetary and non-monetary⁹ benefits setting aside ‘professional ideal of serving the public’. Stressing that monitoring stringers was a ‘necessary evil’, rural in-charges maintained that lack of such mechanism would not

⁹ They hinted that non-monetary benefits could include getting a licence for fair price shops, concessions or discounts from small-time businessmen, gaining political benefits and so on.

only put the reputation of the newspaper at stake but also result in ‘degradation of the noble profession of journalism’.

Ethnographic observations in the field on the issue of monitoring revealed that a way of monitoring stringers at mandal level was by prominently highlighting a helpline mobile number on the mandal or zone page asking the public to inform them about civic issues and related problems they face in their locality. Through this medium, the locals along with officials, businessmen, and small-time political leaders forwarded their complaints about the local stringer too. In most of the dailies, this number was handled by management personnel, who informed the editorial or reporting heads about the misconduct of the stringer(s) working in their newspaper.¹⁰

Also, some news organisations seemed to have a training system in place for the sub-editors to understand the editorial policy of the newspaper, ‘taste’ of readership base, and before all the relevance of the report. Editorial heads informed that ‘common sense’ and ‘nose for news’¹¹ came first before any other criteria while selection or rejection of news filed by stringers or reporters. As a part of the training system, some organisations had a practice in which sub-editors were required to file news reports once or twice in a month so that they understand the issues and problems faced by reporters and stringers. Such measures were in place for top-circulated newspapers and those who had a long standing in the field. The editorial heads said that these measures helped in building a better relationship between the editorial and reporting sections of the newspaper.

The editorial heads also pointed out that there were some editors, reporters, and stringers who formed a nexus and abused the newspaper by publishing stories as per their will and wish. They said that working in tandem with management personnel they monitored such issues on a regular basis with the help of their own ‘sources’ at the mandal and district level. Editorial heads informed that with this mechanism they also monitor efficiency of stringers, who were callous on their duties and miss out on stories which were of importance to the newspaper along with activities of stringers

¹⁰ At the time of research, only the mobile number was given. Soon most of the newspapers provided ‘WhatsApp’ facility to the same, which also served as a platform for the locals to send photographs and video-clips about the civic issues they face in their locality.

¹¹ These expressions were in English during the interactions and recorded interviews in both states.

who purposely avoided reporting on issues in order to guard influential persons in their locality by benefiting monetarily.

All these observations raised questions on a range of issues and categories, such as, monitoring the workforce, editorial policy and control, bureaucratic structure within the organisation, gatekeeping, socialisation among newswriters, and more importantly, the division of labour extant in the news production process. Given the ‘generalist’ role of a stringer, as mentioned in Table 5.1 while discussing the roles and responsibilities of agents, it is important not only to map the relations between agents within the field but also outside of the field.

In order to do so, I had to be on the field with stringers as they interacted with agents within the field and from other fields of power. Essentially, as discussed in the introduction and methodology chapters, this ethnographic observation method of stringers at work in the field was starkly different from that of ‘newsroom ethnographies’ or ‘organisational approach’ to understand news production or journalistic practices.

Following the Bourdieusian framework, which is built on the works of Weber and Durkheim, this research too looks at fields as “structured systems of social relations. They are the meso-level environments – between the organisational and societal level – that structure social action” (Neveu, 2007, p. 336). Most of the time, the strategies employed by stringers differ significantly from that of other agents (reporting and editorial staffers) due to their very nature of work, i.e. not having a specific beat, even a regular salary from the organisation, location of work (social setting) in which they are an intrinsic part. The position stringers occupy in the structure of the journalistic field and in the social setting or field needs to be ascertained along with their modes of engagement with other stringers, local elite, and public in order to understand the news production practices in the local journalistic field. Mapping these kinds of struggles and relations that are present in the process of journalistic and non-journalistic work would not be possible with either newsroom ethnography or organisation approach alone.

Based on my ethnographic observations during fieldwork, a map of the relations is presented below with the stringer at the centre (Figure: 5.1). This map portrays the

relations between stringers, reporters, bureau/rural in-charges, management personnel, and editorial staffers along with the district edition in-charge.

The two-way arrow indicates that there is an interactive relationship between the agents, while one-way arrow suggests a top-down relationship, which most of the times happens from the offices of either district edition in-charge or bureau chief (reporting head) of the district. In these cases, the stringer on his own cannot interact with such top brass of the newspaper he works for. At the same time, anyone calling from the 'office' (mobile number or landline) means the stringer is going to hear 'his master's voice' (Bureau or editorial in-charge).¹²

Also, there is an interaction between agents from economic, legal and police, political, and bureaucratic fields extant at the local level with agents within the journalistic field, who sometimes are situated in the district headquarters. Most of these relations with the other fields from the headquarters are maintained to monitor and ensure control over stringers by reporters, reporting in-charges and the newspaper management. In case of any complaints about the local stringers, the local elite approach reporters and rural in-charges and inform them about 'behaviour' or 'character' of the stringer, as presented in the cumulative memo.

Interactions between stringers and agents from other fields take place not just for journalistic purposes but for advertisements, circulation, and allied non-journalistic purposes, which include conversion of capital in Bourdieusian sense.¹³ The map laying out the interactions and exchanges between agents within the field and with other fields of power is an attestation of the semi-autonomous nature of the journalistic field, as discussed in chapter 3.

As Neveu (2007) pointed out:

Understanding the map of a field also requires paying attention to the variety of forms of cultural capital, and to the importance of social capital... This variety of "capitals" relates to the diversity of their combinations in the structure and volume of resources owned by different participants in a field (Neveu, 2007, p. 337).

¹² In the case of Medak and Sangareddy, a call from the Hyderabad office often rattles up stringers and reporters alike, as a call from head-office always meant emergency work or something of top priority. This is the same case with English dailies, where I worked.

¹³ The non-journalistic interactions and exchanges will be discussed in the following chapter.

ROLES, FIELDS, AND RELATIONSHIPS

A mapping of news gathering and production relations

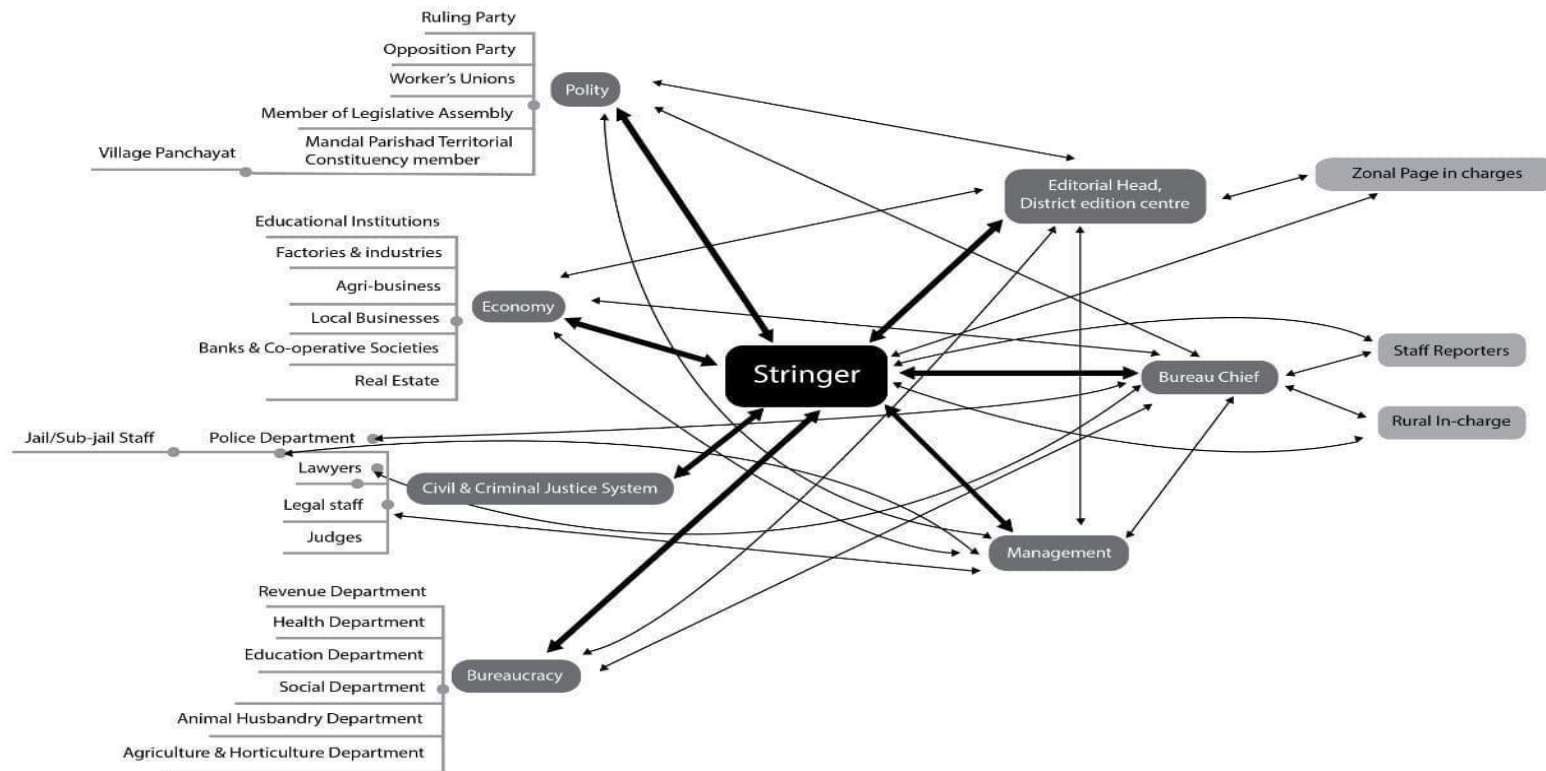


Figure 5.1

Having explored the relations of news production among agents in the journalistic field, the following section details some factors, based on my ethnographic observations, that need to be considered before understanding the logic of journalistic practice in the social and cultural settings in which the present research is carried out.

While presenting these factors, Bourdieusian field theory is employed along with Ambedkarite social philosophy that helps in dealing with caste and related social issues. These factors that play an important role in news production at the mofussil level are present in the form of hierarchies, power structures, and priorities. Also, even as I present these factors in separate sub-sections for the sake of clarity, they are not water-tight divisions and every aspect in the field of production is fused with the other inseparably.

Hierarchies and structures: Reproduction in the journalistic field

One of the quintessential elements of Telugu newspapers is the hierarchical organisation of news items in pages, which in most cases reflects the editorial policy of a particular paper. The lead story (banner item) on the front page will have a visibly bold and bigger sized font to make the story prominent with the remaining stories on the page placed as per the editorial team's or editor's selection.

Even as there is an increasing trend to use flashy pointers to highlight the important elements of the news stories along with graphics, the text of the news is written in the good old inverted pyramid model. While this is the case with the writing style, the structure of the workforce of journalists (both editorial and reporting) at the district edition level reflects a pyramid with editorial in-charge at the top followed by bureau/rural in-charges, editorial and reporting staffers.

Essentially, the world of stringers in mofussil areas appeared to be a hierarchical one. It was palpable in the language and expression they used, not only when they talked about their work but also in their descriptions about persons in their immediate life-world. Very often they used expressions such as: boss is always right, *peddōḷḷu* (influential people), *pedda sāru* (person commanding respect), *peddā-cinnā tēḍā teliyaḍam* important/*mukhyam* (realising the importance of a person's status is

essential), and *evaḍu cēsē pani vāḍu cēyāli* (know your limits while going about work) among others. More importantly, recognition for a stringer in the locality in which he operated was based on the newspaper he works for, i.e., political affiliation of the newspaper and circulation.

Having considered these issues it is very important to understand the local journalistic practices and to be able to answer the question: What is the relevance of social/ethnographic/class background of stringers in the production of news at the mofussil level?

One of the advantages of doing ethnographic field analysis, as opposed to organisational approach or newsroom ethnography, is that it allows the researcher to map the interaction between individuals and fields at the same time. Also, on most occasions the conversions of capital, in the Bourdieusian sense, and dynamics between fields of power and within the field could be captured overtly (Champagne, 2010, pp. 48-63; Darras, 2010, pp. 156-173; Benson, 2010, pp. 85-112). This section presents these dynamics, which are in the form of hierarchies and impositions of the political, economic, and social fields on the semi-autonomous field of journalism, along with their manifestation in everyday language and culture.

Work hierarchies: Water is not ‘holy’, unless it be poured into the conch

The very constitution of the bureaucratic structure of any given newspaper or media outlet reflects the hierarchical nature of work. Most of the time it appears to be very obvious and doxical, keeping in mind the functions each part of the structure are ‘assigned’ or supposed to deliver. If one looks at the structure of the news organisation based on the functions (expected results), a major part of it appears to be a flat or lateral hierarchy. For the basic fact that newswork is the result of teamwork and that it cannot be accomplished without the contribution of each and every individual involved in the process, ranging from the editor-in-chief to the sub-editor; from the chief of news bureau to the stringer; from the publisher to the printer in the factory; from the advertisement scheduling department to the image scanner of advertisements; from the circulation manager to the newspaper boy who delivers the product at the doorstep and so on.

Theoretically, this appears to be universal. But my ethnographic observations revealed that the nature of hierarchy in the Telugu language newspaper is far more complex. Comparing the hierarchies in the work cultures of English and Hindi dailies in Lucknow, Ursula Rao (2013) noted that “the flat hierarchies and substantial independence for journalists in the English press contrasts against the elaborate hierarchies and networks of patronage in the Hindi-language organisations” (p. 33). The complex hierarchical nature of news organisations was felt only in the journalistic practices in the field.

A legendary story that is oft-repeated by senior journalists (old-timers) working in English newspapers is that of an editor of *The Times* during the golden age of the Fleet Street, who converted a casual conversation with a doctor about climatic conditions into a front page story about the appointment of Lord Northbrook (Thomas Baring) as the new Viceroy of India. The biographer of Delane (the then editor of *The Times*), while narrating the incident, expressed that “such conversation had a professional as well as epicurean value”.¹⁴

Even in the Indian context, there were many such ‘legendary’ instances where a journalist used his or her presence of mind and exhibited immense ‘olfactory’ skills in unearthing news scoops.¹⁵ The scale of sensation and importance of some scoops or news stories written by Telugu language reporters in the districts may not be as big as some of these ‘legendary’ reporters, but they do churn out impactful stories.

Sangareddy bureau in-charge of a Telugu daily, VRK, in a personal interview narrated how he landed up in the position from that of being a senior reporter based in Hyderabad, thanks to a news item he wrote for his newspaper in the mid-2000s.

¹⁴ The editor in this incident was John Delane. Walter Lipmann (p. 340) mentions this incident while talking about the nature of news in his seminal work: *Public Opinion*. Cook (1916) in his biography on Delane wrote about this incident which took place in London, 1872: “Meeting his doctor, Sir Richard Quain, one afternoon at the Athenaeum, he [Delane] talked, I suppose, of the weather, and the conversation passed different climates and their effects on different constitutions. At any rate, the doctor chanced to say that he had just been telling Lord Northbrook, in reply to an inquiry, that a hot climate might suit a delicate girl very well. The next morning it was announced in *The Times* that Lord Northbrook had been appointed to succeed Lord Mayo. The new Viceroy of India received at once many congratulations, which he had to declare quite premature: “how *The Times* got hold of it I cannot imagine, for no one but myself and Gladstone [the then British Prime Minister] have even discussed it”” (Cook, 1916, p. 175).

¹⁵ There are many such examples in the Indian context, some of which can be found in the works of senior journalists: Kuldip Nayar (1977; 2006; 2012), Coomi Kapoor (2015) and Vinod Mehta (2014).

According to him, he visited Medak district on some personal work and happened to see that the wooden doors of some *pucca* houses were missing. Sharing about his journalistic work that helped him climb up the professional ladder, VRK said:

Out of curiosity, I enquired about it. Women started revealing the extortionist strategies of microfinance companies' personnel in recovering the loans that the women took. As they failed to pay the instalments, the agents of companies started taking away household items and it reached a point where there was nothing left to take from home and finally they took away the doors. I noted down all the details and filed a report, which was published in the front page. My editor and the chief of the news bureau encouraged me to write a series of articles on the adverse effects of microfinance institutions in rural Medak," he said (10 October, 2014, personal communication, Sangareddy).

At the same time, stringers working in both mofussil and urban areas have access to a mine of information about local public, the elite, the institutions, and local happenings. During my fieldwork, most of these stringers interact with drivers (*chauffeurs*), domestic helps, and even security guards (*watchmen*) of local politicians on a daily basis during lunch hours or innumerable *chai* (tea) breaks. They literally keep an eye (surveillance or *nigah*) on the local people and places of importance and acquire tonnes of information.¹⁶

English news daily reporters PLR and RS in Vijayawada admitted that they rely on some 'credible and trustworthy' stringers on most occasions to write about incidents and developments that take place in interior parts of districts, as such places are beyond their reach and their reporting workforce is miniscule when compared to the networks of Telugu newspapers. English daily reporters informed that they develop rapport with stringers over a period of time and sometimes the hard way by making some factual errors in their reportage. However, they acknowledged their dependency

¹⁶ Even state government intelligence department constables or inspectors cross-check the veracity of their own pieces of information with that of stringers before filing daily reports in Gannavaram and Sangareddy. These intelligence department persons were required to cover three to five mandals each, unlike a stringer who at the maximum covers two mandals or two newspapers. In the case of Gannavaram, the intelligence officers were more concerned with the political developments and movements of the Opposition leaders, while priority was given to Maoist and communal issues in the case of Sangareddy. More importantly, any press releases (handwritten) by the banned Maoist organisations and their allied front organisations will be religiously passed on to bureau in-charges or sometimes sent directly to the head office in Hyderabad to avoid trouble from the local police. Presenting the mutual trust/distrust aspects of the relationship between police and stringers at the local level is beyond the scope of the present study. However, some issues will be discussed in the following chapter.

on stringers in the news gathering process for certain stories from the hinterlands, which even senior editorial and reporting staffers admitted.

However, in most cases and situations, a stringer cannot convert this information into a news article, the way a Delane or a Kuldip Nayar or even a reporter from the headquarters, like VRK, does. Sometimes even as a stringer hints at a developing story it does not get its due. In one of the many such instances in the field:

PSR wrote a ‘special story’ on the state of affairs with the cotton farmers during Kharif (autumn) season. Apart from the usual reporting, he did ‘legwork’ especially for this story that talks about how cotton farmers were tangled in a web of debts from private money-lenders despite generating a good yield before the harvest season. His main point was that the delay in sanctioning of loans prompted farmers to borrow from private money lenders at high interest rates. The stringer gave a catchy headline with rhyming agrarian words: *puttaḍi telangāṇalō cittāḍi avutunna patti raitu* (Cotton farmers swamped in golden Telangana). He emailed the story along with mugshots of farmers to the desk in-charge. He was visibly upset with the way his story was treated by the desk, as he was not pointing fingers at anyone specifically (not highlighting names of money lenders or officials) and has only presented the state of affairs. I managed to meet him on Monday in Sangareddy after three days, as he was busy travelling to villages for this story (Field notes, 25 August 2014).

The story never saw the light of day during my fieldwork period, which lasted for close to four months and came to an end by the third week of October, 2014. However, by the last week of the month, almost all newspapers started writing about the plight of farmers and their debt-ridden lives despite the government’s plan to implement the loan-waiver scheme, which was announced as part of their election promise.

Finally, a revised version of PSR’s story along with a ground report on a farmer suicide case was published on the front page of the Medak district tabloid edition of his newspaper on 24 October, 2014 followed by a big front page article in the main edition, filed by a special correspondent (*pratyēka pratinidhi*) from Hyderabad and an editorial on 26 October, 2014.¹⁷ By this time, due to the influx of stories in all

¹⁷ The headline for the story filed by PSR was: *bangāru telangāṇa anṭe.. raitula balavanmaraṇālenā..?* (Does golden Telangana mean farmers’ suicide?). Headline for the editorial was: *raitu atmahatyalu... parishkāram ekkaḍa?* (Farmer suicides... where’s the solution?).

newspapers in various languages including English language dailies, the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) intervened and took up the issue.¹⁸

It appeared as if the information or news stories filed by stringers at village or mandal level did not have value in themselves unless and until a staffer picks up the story or a correspondent from the headquarters files a story on the same issue. In the field, such occurrences were a regular affair and suggested that strings of information, which a stringer collected, acquired *legitimacy* and *sanctity* when filed by a reporter before finally getting *consecrated* by the desk. As a result, while the news or story gets consecrated, the role of a stringer gets ‘invisibilised’ in the process.¹⁹ This entire process seemed as if professional standing in the field is a necessary condition for the news story to make its way to the edit table before finding a place in the printed newspaper the following day.

When asked about the difference between the ways in which a stringer and a reporter filing the same event based on the same information, an experienced stringer in Gannavaram YSR remarked, “*basic-gā śankhamlō pōstēgāni tīrtham kadannaṭṭu, adantē*” (Basically, it is like the way how water does not become holy, unless it is poured into a conch. That’s the way it is).²⁰ While the remark ends on a casual note *adantē* (that’s the way it is), it speaks volumes about the unwritten rules of the game based on which the journalistic field operated. This resignation from coming to terms with one’s own position (*doxa*) could be seen as a sign of maturity and it comes with experience.

While this appears to be an emic perspective, Bourdieu, while elucidating on the sociology of cultural production, which could be applicable to journalism, made an important observation about these unconscious strategies that take place in the field.

¹⁸ For reports on the farmers’ suicides issue in English dailies and websites, see: <https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/news/national/farmers-tribe-to-knock-nhrc-doors-with-more-data-on-suicides/article23155909.ece>; <https://www.newindianexpress.com/states/telangana/2014/nov/26/2014-686838.html>; <https://www.thenewsminute.com/telanganas/177>. [Last accessed on 15 December, 2020]. Here, I am not suggesting that these reports were ‘picked up’ from Telugu dailies or stringer reports.

¹⁹ This aspect of stringer’s role being ‘invisibilised’ is mentioned following Bourdieu’s commentary on the gay and lesbian movement (Bourdieu, 2001, p. 119)

²⁰ In temples *tīrtham* (holy water) is offered to devotees in a conch or shell which is placed at the idol’s feet in the *sanctum sanctorum*, which is considered auspicious by the Hindus. This is a brahmanical expression often used in political, bureaucratic, and journalistic circles to refer to either consecration or to mean “from the horse’s mouth”.

He noted:

All relations among agents and institutions of diffusion or consecration are mediated by the field's structure. To the extent that the ever-ambiguous marks of recognition owe their specific form to the objective relations (perceived and interpreted as they are in accordance with the unconscious schemes of the *habitus*) they contribute to form the *subjective* representation which agents have of the *social* representation of their position within the hierarchy of consecrations (Bourdieu, 1993b, p. 133) [Emphasis original].

This observation by Bourdieu is not just limited to the position of agent(s) within the field but also from outside of the field in question. As mentioned earlier, the professional hierarchy present in the field cannot be simply understood in itself, as it is a relational aspect in news production and it will be dealt with in the following section on social hierarchies.

Also, extant in the field is the visible predominance of the editorial and reporting staffers over stringers, who fall outside of the organisational structure. This superiority and highhandedness is expressed in an overt manner. In most of the cases, when reporters from headquarters or edition centre visit mofussil areas to cover some high profile visit or event, stringers are given specific instructions to 'just' accompany them or will be reduced to the role of an acolyte.²¹

In one instance, during my fieldwork in Gannavaram, the president of the then Opposition party (BJP), M. Venkaiah Naidu visited Gannavaram village after alighting a flight. His visit was announced earlier and reporters from Vijayawada rushed to the airport. I was along with PCB (who is relatively inexperienced in the field), as he was interacting with his senior reporter from the Vijayawada centre. The latter casually asked PCB if he had any particular question in mind to which he replied: I want to ask him (Venkaiah Naidu) about the party's stance on bifurcation of the state. The reporter immediately said: Over action *cheyagāku. Avannī mēmu cūskuntāmulē gāni nī pani nuvvu cūsko* (Do not try to be over smart. Be in your limits and mind your own work). Shortly, during the media interaction organised at a local BJP leader's home, the reporter asked the same question to the former BJP president for which he got a curt reply: "*Telangana gurinci māṭlāḍatāniki idi saraina samayam,*

²¹ Even the handbooks written for the benefit of stringers prescribe them to play second fiddle to reporters in such instances (Chakradhar, 2011, pp. 19-21).

sandarbham kādu sōdarā” (This is not an appropriate time and occasion to talk about Telangana issue, brother) [30 April, 2012, Gannavaram airport]. The following day, a single column brief appeared in the inside pages of the main edition filed by the reporter mentioning that BJP president was in Gannavaram. In effect, PCB got to know the ‘limits of his actions’ (scope and role) in the field. Also, in effect, along with the routine news item getting published from Vijayawada dateline, the professional hierarchy got reproduced unconsciously among the agents involved in this particular instance. Even his peers made him *understand the rules of the game* in their own way by mocking PCB.²²

Given the fact that there is no training or journalism education for stringers, incidents such as these necessitate them to acquire knowledge about the rules (official and unofficial; written and unwritten) in which the field operates. For Bourdieu, in the field of cultural production, this cultural literacy is foundational to accumulate cultural capital. This aspect is crucial in understanding the logic of local journalistic practice.

Having examined the professional hierarchies present in the field, the following section addresses the social hierarchies which are intertwined inseparably with the professional ones and are crucial in understanding the news production process.

The ubiquity of social hierarchies

One rarely misses a chance to enquire about the caste background of a person in the delta region of Andhra Pradesh. Most of the time, this defines the relationship at the workplace, educational institutions, and place of residence. The issue of caste in Telangana is not as important as it appeared to be in the delta region at the first instance but nevertheless identity markers, such as caste, region, and religion are as ubiquitous as in other parts of the Telugu speaking regions.

Coming to the journalistic field, these identity markers become crucial in the news production process at individual, organisational and societal levels. While presenting

²² Once the battery of stringers returned from the airport to the usual media point to file stories, ANR (controlling his laughter) told PCB, “*ērā cinnā, Gannavaram grāmīṇa vilēkharigā unṭū front page story rāsi dillinē upeddāmanukunnāvā? Anta scene ledurā*” (What champ, being a Gannavaram rural reporter do you want to rock Delhi by filing a sensational story on the front page in the main edition? We do not stand a chance). This mocking session went on till PCB left the place for the day [Field notes, 30 April 2012, Gannavaram].

the ‘working hierarchies’ in Hindi-language journalism, Ursula Rao (2013) suggested, “Three principles govern relationships at *Hindustan* and *Dainik Jagran*: 1) formal and informal designations, 2) performance, 3) seniority” (p. 31). The last two principles are obvious and simple to understand. However, by formal and informal designations in the organisations, she meant those who have rank and file and those who do not.

However, my field observations revealed that for stringers especially, even the working hierarchies within the organisation and also in the localities where they operated, social identities matter the most right from the time of recruitment to upward mobility in the profession, as mentioned in the previous chapter. The very fact that editorial staffers, as part of their daily work, probe into issues such as – who is filing the story and what could be the motive behind the story – testifies that the social background of the stringer (or sometimes even reporters) is considered before ‘subbing’ and clearing the copy.

Based on her survey in the Hindi heartland, Ninan (2007) succinctly noted:

When stringers did the reporting themselves, many complexities coloured their output. How well he reported had to do with whether or not he also collected advertising, what his caste and professional background was, why he had come into the profession and how much gumption he had as an individual (p. 121).

Essential point here is that the social background is, if not the defining factor, a very crucial and foundational principle in understanding the working hierarchies of a news organisation or the field itself. The working culture of language news journalism is in stark contrast with that of journalistic practices in the advanced West or even in the English dailies in India itself. While writing about the issues surrounding the beat of a reporter and her/his identities, Fishman (1980) pointed out:

Insofar as the person is a reporter, the beat is theirs to be covered. Insofar as a reporter is anything else (a single woman, a grandfather, a gourmet), it is inappropriate to use that beat in connection with those other identities. The beat is an office in Weber’s sense (p. 28).

This observation held little relevance when it is applied to the context of local journalism and especially with the nature of work of the stringers. The inverted pyramid model of journalism overlaps or gets superimposed with the caste, region,

and religion based social pyramid (See, Graph: 5.1). The very fact that a stringer was part of his community, social setting, village, occupation (for subsistence), and also part of the journalistic field by working in a particular news organisation suggested dynamic interplay of hierarchies and identities at various levels, which needed to be unravelled. Capturing these struggles at the individual, organisational, field, and societal level forms the primary objective of field theory as a meso-level of analysis in understanding journalistic practices.

During the interactions and in the recorded interviews, editorial and reporting staffers talked about the social and *(im)moral* background of stringers as a matter of fact and said that “stringers need to be tamed”, “they are unscrupulous”, and “unethical” (MMR, 9 October, 2014, Sangareddy; VRK, 11 October, 2014, Sangareddy; NS, 17 September, 2012, Vijayawada). Even in the existing academic literature, senior journalists were cited labelling stringers as ‘corrupt’, ‘uncontrollable’, and ‘blackmailers’ and as people “known to file stories that are either untrue or inaccurate” (Jeffrey, 2010, p. 147; Rao & Malik, 2018, p. 6).

On the face of it, the barrage of terms and expressions uttered by mid and entry-level journalists echoed ethical concerns along with falling standards and morals of the field. But a sociological understanding of the entire issue entailed a *caste and class nature* of the arguments not only on part of editorial staffers but also the reporters. An understanding of the roles of agents in the journalistic field (Table: 5.1) and the field dynamics (Figure: 5.1) would only reveal the voluminous amount of journalistic and non-journalistic work a stringer has to engage in on a daily basis. For which, on most occasions, responses from the editorial and reporting staffers would be: “He’s supposed to do it”.

This phenomenon was what Bourdieu theorised as ‘misrecognition’, a concept which is closely linked with the aspect of symbolic violence in a given field. For Bourdieu, it is a process in which the agents, in this particular case, the staffers, fail to engage or acknowledge the existing nature of social reality in which they are part of or take the ‘rules of the game’ for granted in the fields of power.

Basing on French philosopher Merleau-Ponty's work on phenomenology of perception, Bourdieu elucidated²³:

The agent engaged in practice knows the world but with a knowledge which [...] is not set up in the relation of externality of a knowing consciousness. He knows it, in a sense too well, without objectifying distance, takes it for granted, precisely because he is caught up in it, bound up with it; he inhabits it like a garment or a familiar habitat. He feels at home in the world because the world is also in him, in the form of habitus (Bourdieu, 2000, pp. 142-143). Social reality exists, so to speak, twice, in things and in minds, in fields and in habitus, outside and inside of agents. And when habitus encounters a social world of which it is the product, it finds itself "as fish in water," it does not feel the weight of the water and takes the world about itself for granted (Bourdieu cited in Wacquant, 1989, p. 43).

The manner in which some of the salariat class agents in the field talked about stringers appeared even more problematic during my fieldwork in Vijayawada (Krishna delta version of Telugu). Their 'casual' remark when asked about the heavy workload on stringers from different departments in their organisation, they merely expressed: *mari cēyaka? castāḍā?* Or *evaḍi kōsam cēyaḍu* (What else can he do? Isn't he supposed to do the work?);²⁴ Even as these were blatantly supremacist in nature, even the softer and milder versions of their arguments too were problematic, as most of the times, *casteist and classist prejudices and biases are masked in the form of ethical and moral concerns about the field.*²⁵

The division of labour, in the form of professional hierarchies, existing in the organisation resulted in bringing about both solidarities and discordance among the agents. A majority of stringers suggested that belonging to the same caste or community as that of rural in-charge or bureau in-charge was beneficial in the field. Even some of the reporting in-charges admitted the presence of favouritism on caste lines in the field but it does not happen in their organisation.²⁶ These social

²³ Bourdieu acknowledges the contributions of Merleau-Ponty on both occasions.

²⁴ This is a loaded and discriminatory expression in the delta version of Telugu. The expression suggests that it is the end of it if he doesn't accomplish the task.

²⁵ The ethical aspects of journalistic practices will be discussed briefly in the final chapter.

²⁶ As mentioned earlier, many a time editorial and reporting staffers were in denial about the aspect of caste. Even when some of them talk about it, they mention that it exists in other organisations but not in theirs. This kind of narrative reminded me about *Charles* – a short story by American author Shirley Jackson. In the story, the principal character Laurie, who is a school kid, narrates mischievous

hierarchies coupled with professional hierarchies play a crucial role in the journalistic production.

As mentioned earlier, when stringers attempted to report some human interest story or a burning issue about a development in remote villages or in areas which are inhabited by persons from modest and underprivileged backgrounds, reporting in-charges most of the times spike the story stating that the newspaper does not sell there or that there is no readership in that village or area.²⁷

Regardless of the justification that newspaper is a commodity and the organisation is a capitalist enterprise, the omission of certain news stories about regions and spaces amounts to what Gerbner (1972) termed as symbolic annihilation. He noted, “Representation [...] signifies social existence; absence means symbolic annihilation” (p. 44).²⁸

When asked about these issues, the most articulate response was:

Journalism is a field that excels at maintaining double standards. The profession is about fighting in democratic spirit against social evils. But this field is rampant with ‘caste feeling’. To survive in this profession, we have to shut our senses and do what is required. Had I not followed this principle, I would not have been able to continue in this profession for close to three decades (Personal communication, DD, 11 May 2012, Gannavaram).

An aspect he did not mention was about his own stagnation in the lowest rank of the field for more than two decades, at the time of research. In order to present the dynamics and struggles between agents in the field, I present a visual representation (Graph: 5.1; below) by amalgamating various hierarchies that were in operation. The issue of *relegation*, as discussed in the previous chapter, is evident and could be understood easily. The concerns Ambedkar (1948/2014, pp. 108-109) raised about caste-based discrimination faced by the marginalised communities in matters of service or work settings could be witnessed in the Telugu journalistic field.

deeds of one Charles in the same class. However, in the end Laurie’s mother gets to know that there is nobody in the entire school with the name Charles.

²⁷ Some newspapers in both regions give strict instructions to stringers not to report on issues in certain villages and areas for various reasons.

²⁸ Tuchman (2000) furthered this argument in her seminal essay on women representation in the mass media in the US context.

Hierarchies of newspapers and ownership patterns

Often hailed as vehicles for enlightenment and as heralds of change in their hagiographic descriptions, newspapers too have hierarchies of their own. These ranks are usually based on the market logics (readership, availability, and circulation), the sheer volume of the newspaper (number of pages and special editions or pull-outs), and political affiliations.²⁹

However, what was interesting in the field is the reproduction of the social order in the journalistic field with newspapers being categorised even by the public on the basis of caste and region, at least in the Telugu speaking states. As part of the semi-structured interview I carried out in Sangareddy, the lone Dalit bureau in-charge in Medak district gave an overview of the hierarchies in newspapers as follows:

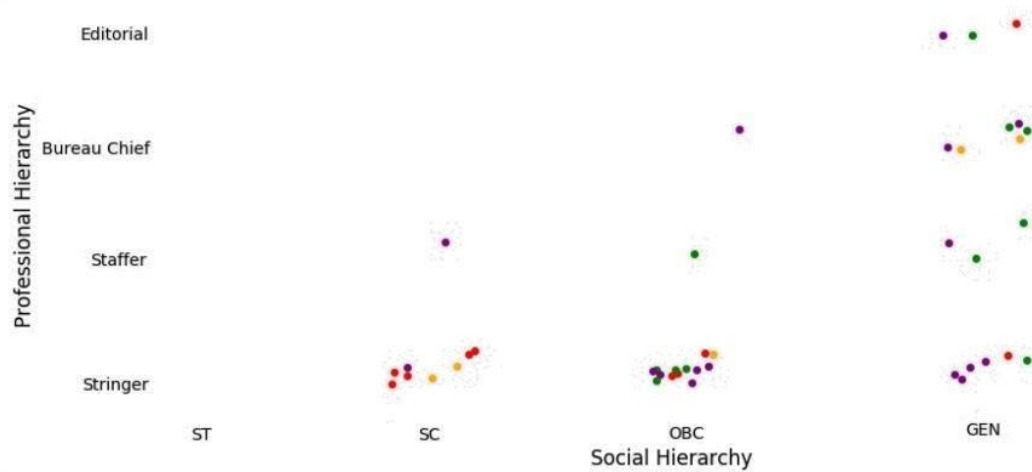
There is a visible hierarchy among newspapers in terms of circulation and political affiliation. Similar to that of caste in society, which is discriminatory in nature, there is a distinction of small or big newspapers in the field. Along with that, affiliation of a newspaper to the ruling party or opposition or politicians is an important factor in this profession (1 October 2014, MPR, Sangareddy).

²⁹ The phenomenon of newspapers aligning with a political party existed since India became independent and has a well-documented history even during the struggle for freedom. In independent India, the issue of political party ownership was elaborately discussed in the First Press Commission report (GoI, 1954, pp. 265-312). A staunch Nehruvian, Chalapathi Rau expressed his concerns about the same, when he noted:

The Congress with twenty-nine newspapers commands only a circulation of 27,483, the Communist Party with twenty-five newspapers commands a circulation of 82,920 and the Socialist Party has a few newspapers with little circulation (Rau, 1965, p. 71).

SOCIAL, PROFESSIONAL, AND NEWSPAPER HIERARCHIES IN THE FIELD

Relegation aspect in the journalistic field



Graph: 5.1

Notes: This is an amalgamated representation of social, professional, and newspaper hierarchies in the field.

Scheme: On the Y-axis, the professional hierarchy of the agents is taken, which comprises the rank of the agent along with experience in the field. On the X-axis, social hierarchy is taken, which comprises the social identity of the agent along with education. The red, purple, orange, and green colours represent small-scale, medium-scale, large-scale, and very large-scale newspapers. The rationale for this classification will be explained in the sub-section on ownership patterns and newspaper hierarchies. Some of the values are very close to each other and overlapped as the agents shared commonalities in the parameters considered in this particular representation.

Analysis: Agents belonging to Scheduled Tribe category are completely absent in the field at both Gannavaram and Sangareddy. There were no persons from the Dalit and the Bahujan communities working in the editorial sections of newspapers. Even outside of the sample of profiles I collected as part of the research, senior and old-timer journalists expressed that the Dalits and the Bahujans were absent at that level in mainstream Telugu dailies. Agents from these communities occupying the positions of staffer reporter and bureau/rural in-charge were also less compared to general category (*Sat-shudra* and *Savarna*) and most of them are relegated to the position of stringers. Agents belonging to the general category could be seen spread across all professional positions in the field. It suggests that there is precedence of agents from the general category to emulate, which is lacking for persons from marginal communities. Needless to mention that it becomes more difficult for them to climb up the professional ladder compared to general category agents. This is a clear case of possession of ‘social capital,’ in the form of a professional network within the field.

The conflation of caste, class, and political orders was evident in the description and without recognising their existence; it is not possible to understand the journalistic practices. Along with the local elite, even bureaucrats and locals refer to newspapers as *cinna patrika* or *pedda patrika* (small or big newspapers) based on their circulation. What was missing in the description was the regional aspect of the newspapers. At the peak of the Telangana movement, even the media houses were divided on the lines of regional identity.

Even the State (governing body) classified news dailies on the basis of circulation, which is essential for two purposes: a) Deciding on government advertisement rates; b) Allotment of accreditation cards to working journalists. This classification holds good for Andhra Pradesh, as the logic of classification is as per the recommendation by the Registrar of Newspapers of India (GoT, 2016b). As per the official classification, “Big Daily means Newspaper having circulation above 75,000 per day; Medium Daily means Newspaper having circulation between 25,001 to 75,000 copies per day; Small Daily means the Newspaper having a circulation up to 25,000 copies per day” (p. 2).

For the purpose of the present study, I classified newspapers following three aspects: 1) Number of pages dedicated for local news (some newspapers had two pages, while some had one or half a page, and others did not have a dedicated page for the mandal-level content); 2) Number of publishing centres or edition centres (This aspect covers the scale of newspaper); 3) The standing of the parliamentary political party to which a newspaper is affiliated to. These are tabulated in order along with relevant details in Table 5.2.

It is pertinent to answer one key question: How is the hierarchy of newspaper related to news production or what effect does the scale of newspaper (*cinna* or *pedda*) have on the newswork of a stringer? One oft-heard advice to rookie reporters from the seniors was: “News stories do not land at your doorstep. You have to chase them.”

But in the case of stringers or reporters working in very large and large newspapers, news stories did land at their doorstep – “the-come-and-give-your-news principle” – in mofussil areas (Ninan, 2007, p. 119). Even in the case they missed a development or some interesting story of the day in the immediate locality, often stringers working

in smaller newspapers brought the issue to the notice of the stringer working in big dailies. This seemed to be mutually beneficial for them, as the *cinna patrika* stringer's story got acceptance and legitimacy when a *pedda patrika* stringer files the same story with minor changes. On the face of it, this appeared to be working in favour of the *pedda patrika* stringers. But this phase appeared to be ephemeral and would not work in the longer run, unless he did not do his legwork, as there was a danger of losing his job to the same stringer who earlier was helping him.

Working in *pedda patrika* could have its own negative impact, as the stringers are perennially under the surveillance of locals, government officials, political leaders, and the public. A single wrongdoing results in loss of the job. Also, locals who own up the newspaper thinking that it is their community or caste person's newspaper will immediately reach out to the headquarters and complain about the stringer if he does not report in their favour or does not agree to do reporting in the manner that appeases them.

There were some benefits for stringers working in *cinna patrikas* too. Those news items, related to charity, social service, and garlanding of statues of eminent persons on their birth and death anniversaries among others, which appeared in the news-briefs column or single column in *pedda patrika* had chances of finding a three-four column space along with photographs in the case of a *cinna patrika*. Despite their smaller readership and visibility, such paper cuttings from these small newspapers had their own life after getting published, as the donors or local politicians who took part in such programmes were seen displaying those news items in their offices.³⁰ They seemed to have a shelf life even in the digital age.

Coming to the ownership patterns of Telugu newspapers, an attempt is made to consider cultural and social aspects along with the dominant political economy indicators. The issues of caste background of the ownership is considered in order to negate the notion that ethnography privileges only culture, while it is economy or nature of ownership in the case of political economy. This attempt is made after carefully examining the ground realities and with the understanding of cultural

³⁰ One budding politician from Fasalwadi area of Sangareddy has a well-documented archive of paper clippings about his participation in political events from 2001 (Year of establishment of TRS party). Some big newspaper clippings rest on his office desk between a royal blue *makhmal* (velvet) cloth and broken-but-fixed transparent glass.

materialism approach proposed by Raymond Williams (1974; 1977; 1995). While proposing the cultural materialist approach to study literature, culture, and society, Williams not only distanced himself from crude economic analysis but also rescued Marxism from deterministic analysis. He would only approve Bourdieu's observations, when the latter wrote:

Journalism is a microcosm with its own laws, defined both by its position in the world at large and by the attractions and repulsions to which it is subject from other such microcosms. *To say that it is independent or autonomous, that it has its own laws, is to say that what happens in it cannot be understood by looking only at external factors. That is why I did not want to explain what happens in journalism as a function of economic factors.* What happens on TF1 cannot be explained simply by the fact that it is owned by the Bouygues holding company. *Any explanation that didn't take this fact into account would obviously be inadequate, but an explanation based solely on it would be just as inadequate – more inadequate still, perhaps, precisely because it would seem adequate.* This half-baked version of materialism, associated with Marxism, condemns without shedding light anywhere and ultimately explains nothing (Bourdieu, 1998a, p. 39) [Emphasis mine].

As mentioned earlier, Ambedkar's writings on culture and society served as the Archimedean point in the process of understanding the dynamics in fields of power. A majority of the newspapers are owned by persons belonging to *Sat-shudra* category (5), followed by Vysyas (*Savarna* category; 2). Persons belonging to Dalit and Bahujan communities own one newspaper each.³¹ The leftist newspapers did not have any specific caste affiliations. There was only one woman running a mainstream Telugu newspaper.

Having considered the dispositions of the agents, the positions they occupied in the journalistic field, and the official and unofficial rules of the game, sometimes which certain agents are forcefully made aware of, along with the relations between agents at various levels, there seems to be a visible correlation between the journalistic practices within the field and the social order, "which is based on the principle of graded inequality" (Ambedkar, 1989/2014, p. 101).

³¹ *Prabhata Velugu*, owned by Dr G. Vivek Venkatswamy was established on 5 October 2018 and hence, it was not operational during my fieldwork. It is included in order to not miss out on a crucial detail about emerging ownership patterns in Telugu newspaper industry.

NEWSPAPER OWNERSHIP DETAILS

Table 6.2

Newspaper (Year of establishment)	Owner/ promoter/ director	Caste	Political affiliation	Other business interests	Region(s)
<i>Eenadu</i> (1974)	C. Ramoji Rao	Kamma (<i>Sat-shudra</i>)	TDP	Finance, hospitality, food process units, media, film city, shipping, school education	AP & Telangana, Delhi, Mumbai, Bengaluru, Chennai
<i>Sakshi</i> (2008)	Y.S. Bharati	Reddy (<i>Sat-shudra</i>)	YSR Congress	Cement, real estate, power, infrastructure and media	AP & Telangana, Delhi, Mumbai, Bengaluru, Chennai
<i>Andhra Jyothi</i> (1945; relaunched 2002)	Vemuri Radha Krishna	Kamma (<i>Sat-shudra</i>)	TDP	Power project, real estate, media	AP & Telangana, Bengaluru, Chennai
<i>Vaaritha</i> (1996)	Girish Kumar Sanghi	Vysya (<i>Savarna</i>)	BJP; former Congress	Textiles	AP & Telangana
<i>Andhra Prabha</i> (1938)	Mootha Gopalakrishna	Vysya (<i>Savarna</i>)	Janasena (Present); Former Congress, former TDP	Infrastructure, oil field services, logistics, sewing threads, media services	AP & Telangana
<i>Andhra Bhoomi</i> (1960)	Deccan Chronicle Holdings Ltd.	Reddy (<i>Sat-shudra</i>)	Former Congress	Not available	AP & Telangana
<i>Surya</i>	N. Surya Prakasa Rao	Koppula Velama (<i>Bahujan</i>)	Former TDP, former Congress	Infrastructure, housing, film Production	AP & Telangana
<i>Namaste Telangana</i> (2011)	D. Damodar Rao	Velama (<i>Sat-shudra</i>)	TRS	Broadcasting and marketing	Telangana
<i>Prabhata Velugu</i> (2018)	Dr. G. Vivek VIL Media Pvt. Ltd	Mala (<i>Dalit</i>)	BJP; Former Congress; former TRS.	Manufacturing, investment, finance	Telangana
<i>Prajasakti</i> (1981)	CPI collective	--	CPI	Publishing	AP
<i>Nava Telangana</i> (2015)	CPI collective	--	CPI	Publishing	Telangana
<i>Visalaandhra</i> (1952)	CPI(M) collective	--	CPI (M)	Publishing	AP
<i>Mana Telangana</i> (2015)	CPI (M) collective	--	CPI (M)	Publishing	Telangana

Source: Shaw (2017); Damodaran (2008); Jeffrey (2010); Murthy (2003); Venugopal (2009; 2011); Simhadri (2017); APSEC [AP State Election commission] (2006).

Notable is the aspect of the already privileged agents occupying higher positions in the field and taking it for granted as if it were ‘natural’ (misrecognition) in an overt manner and further indulge in symbolic violence under the garb of ethical and moral concerns. With the graded inequalities getting reproduced, the inscription of social order on the journalistic field is clearly visible as bold letters of the banner item’s headline in newspapers.

Closely linked to the aspect of relegation is the practice of delegation, which is crucial in understanding the logic of journalistic practice and will be addressed in the following section.

Towards logic of local journalistic practice

Setting aside the moralistic and ethical concerns that some agents occupying privileged positions in both journalistic, social, and economic fields, have about stringers who are on the margins of society, economy, and the profession, the immense potential and contributions that these ‘men’ have made in the localisation and democratisation of media access in some marginal spaces in urban areas along with rural and small towns in India must be recognised (Jeffrey, 2010; Ninan, 2007).

Having considered the roles, multiples hierarchies, and structures, which consistently reproduced graded inequalities, this section attempts to theorise the practices in the local journalistic field by answering two questions: a) How do these men located on the margins of the field operate in the field? b) What are their strategies and struggles in the societal and organisational structures, and resistance against such structures, which heavily reproduce graded inequalities?

Some scholars seemed to be constructing a Bourdieusian universe well within the sub-discipline of journalism studies by mechanically augmenting core concepts of field theory such as: “‘editorial habitus’, a ‘reporter habitus’ or an ‘intern habitus’” and even argued that it was theoretically possible to differentiate the concept of habitus “‘based on journalistic genres such as a ‘foreign correspondent habitus’, an ‘investigative reporter habitus’; forms of habitus according to media ‘magazine habitus’, ‘newspaper habitus’, ‘television habitus’” (Schultz, 2007, p. 194; Willig, 2012, p. 8) and so on about the concepts of capital and doxa. Such works based on

Bourdieu's field theory seem to be doing practice of (field) theory, as opposed to coming up with a theory of practice, which the French sociologist persistently advocates throughout his vast body of work.

Thinking with Bourdieu, in this section, I attempt to understand the logic of local journalistic practice based on the quotidian practices of stringers by discussing some of the many events that I came across during my fieldwork. In doing so, I will be using some terms that emerged from the ground and were used by stringers and reporters in the field.

One of the ways that stringers understand their own work is by using dramaturgical terms, as mentioned earlier, such as *pātradhārs* and *sūtradhārs*. When broken down, *pātra* means role; and *dhār* means to wear. *Pātradhār* means the one who gets into the character or role in a play/drama. On the other hand, *sūtra* or *sūtr* means principle or formula. In theatre arts, *sūtradhār* means the narrator or director of a play or simply showman.

However, there is a hierarchy associated with these two terms. *Sūtradhār* is usually privileged over *pātradhār*, as the former holds the principle or schemes things around as per his/her wish and 'controls' the latter. Essentially, agents in the field strive to be in an advantageous position, i.e., being *sūtradhār*.

Both these words are borrowed from Sanskrit language and are widely used in the language written in Telugu newspapers. I purposely use these Sanskrit words, as they reflect the language and culture that exists both at the workplace and in the newspaper in most of the news organisations.

Events, newspaper logics, journalistic practices

In this section, some of the events concerning journalism that took place in Sangareddy and Gannavaram will be presented in order to present the newspaper logics and journalistic practices in the field. In an ideal case scenario, one of the effective ways to understand the news production process is to be a participant observer along with stringers or reporters and then procure a copy of the filed reportage before proceeding to the edition centre, for newsroom ethnography purposes, where the editorial department in consultation with the reporting takes a call

on the report and then cleans the copy and edits it (language, gatekeeping, and censoring by the editorial aspects), and assigns a value (placing and designing) to it.

Theoretically speaking, it is possible. But at the end of the day, it could be done for only a single newspaper at the most even if one were to attempt this extremely cumbersome exercise. Even as I thought about it many a time while on the field in Gannavaram, it reminded me of Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle articulated (1927) by the German physicist Werner Heisenberg, that "the position and the velocity of an object cannot both be measured exactly, at the same time, even in theory. The very concepts of exact position and exact velocity together, in fact, have no meaning in nature".³²

Event 1: Replicative news reporting

Context: A meeting was organised by the district education officer (DEO) inviting all mandal education officers, teachers, teacher MLCs, teachers' union leaders, and mediapersons for consultation purposes on 'rationalisation' of government primary schools in the district on 30 September, 2014 (Tuesday).

The DEO made an announcement about this meeting as per the directive issued by the district collector. This meeting was held a week ahead of the scheduled day for public grievances, a regular monthly affair in the districts organised at the district collector's office in Sangareddy.

The idea behind the rationalisation initiative was to maintain a healthy teacher-student ratio (one teacher for 30 students). In the process, schools (not per classroom or standard) that are running with strength less than 19 students will be merged with a nearby school. Accordingly, teachers will be transferred and reposted within the mandal/block.

However,

Only two stringers turned up at the meeting organised at 3 P.M. (post-lunch); one from *Namaste Telangana* and the other one from *Eenadu*. As we were having chai outside the office premises, *Andhra Bhoomi* stringer joined us and took the details from the two stringers. Apart from the Sangareddy municipal

³² http://abyss.uoregon.edu/~js/21st_century_science/lectures/lec14.html

council meetings in the morning (followed by lunch), there was nothing great for the day, the stringers felt. (Field notes, Sangareddy, 30 September 2014).

The reports filed by the three stringers were published the following day. The *Eenadu* and *Namaste Telangana* reported the official version of the story.³³ The *Andhra Bhoomi* stringer merely mentioned that a review meeting happened on the issue.³⁴

However, the remaining newspapers carried news items on the issue, even without their reporter or stringer's presence at the meeting. Except *Sakshi* and *Andhra Jyothi* dailies, the remaining newspapers carried the same content with change of names of leaders and political parties opposing the initiative. While *Sakshi* mentioned that "various teachers' unions and student bodies opposed the move," *Andhra Jyothi* carried a news item from Hyderabad stating that a "former TDP MLC from Medak district met the education minister at Telangana Secretariat on Tuesday to discuss the matter..."³⁵ [This particular leader joined the ruling party in a week's time].

Left-leaning dailies *Prajasakti* and *Visalaandhra* reported more or less the same content opposing the move. However, while the former highlighted Telangana State United Teachers' Federation leaders affiliated to CPI, the latter took the School Teachers' Federation of India and Student Federation of India (SFI), affiliated to CPI (M), as the lead for the story.³⁶

District leaders of Telangana Tribal Students' Joint Action Committee (TTS-JAC) and Dalita-Bahujana Front (DBF) were prominently featured in *Surya* and *Vaaritha*

³³ *Eenadu*, (Rationalisation data comprehensive) *pakkagā hētubaddīkaraṇa vivarālu*: DEO; Box item: *tandāllō pāṭhasālalanu nilapaṇḍi* (Safeguard schools in tribal hamlets), p. 11, Medak edition, 1 October, 2014; *Namaste Telangana*, (Rationalisation of schools gains pace) *pāṭhasālala hētubaddīkaraṇa vēgavantam*, p. 2, Medak edition, 1 October, 2014.

³⁴ *Andhra Bhoomi*, Review on rationalisation of schools, (*pāṭhasālala hētubaddīkaraṇapai samīksha*) [sic], p. 7, Medak edition, 1 October, 2014. The desk persons misspelt the Telugu word for school in the headline, which was a major blunder. Instead of *pāṭhasālala* (schools) they wrote *pākasālala* (kitchens or cooking places).

³⁵ *Sakshi*, Closing down schools incorrect (*prabhutva pāṭhasālala mūsivēta sarikādu*), p. 11, Medak edition, 1 October, 2014; *Andhra Jyothi*, Revaluate rationalisation policy (*pāṭhasālala hētubaddīkaraṇapai punahsamīkshincāli*), p. 12 Medak edition, 1 October, 2014.

³⁶ *Prajasakti*, Closing down schools inappropriate (*pāṭhasālala mūsivēta tagadu*), p. 8, Medak edition, 1 October, 2014; *Visalaandhra*, Withdraw rationalisation orders: SFI (*hētubaddīkaraṇa uttarvulu upasamharincāli*), p. 7, Medak edition, 1 October, 2014.

dailies.³⁷ Also, *Andhra Prabha* carried a report with Hyderabad dateline quoting the ruling TRS party leader, Ramulu Naik, who in the report, ensured that interests of Tribal students was of utmost priority. Apart from that paragraph, the rest of the report remained more or less the same like the rest of the newspapers.³⁸

Barring one or two news dailies, every newspaper highlighted its political affiliation even in what was supposed to be a report on a consultation meeting held by an important official in the district. Firstly, even as the DEO was discussing and reviewing the move adopted by the government (initiated by the previous Congress government and continued by the TRS government), most of the newspapers published reports as if the policy is being implemented. Secondly, the content along with suggestive headlines was consistently replicated by most of the newspapers changing names of the local leaders. Thirdly, some news dailies published the related news item with a Hyderabad dateline. Fourthly, and notably, none of the teachers' unions or student bodies bothered nor any subsequent reports and special stories on the issue bothered to write about the consequences girl students may face due to the rationalisation policy move in Sangareddy.

The phenomenon of replicating the content with change of names and photographs of leaders or local elite is widely practiced in Telugu local journalism. For the present purposes, this phenomenon can be called as *replicative news reporting* and the adverse effects of it in local journalism: *replication crisis*.

This phenomenon is different from 'churnalism', which is "the high-speed repackaging of press releases and wire stories with little time for fact-checking or additional research" (Marthoz, 2016). Replicative news reporting happens in the manner discussed above even if stringers or reporters attend or 'cover' a press conference, protest, and festivals.

However, a question Event 1 raises is: Why is it that even in the case of events or developments that happen in remote places the political and social affiliations or

³⁷ Vaartha, Schools closed to deny education for Dalits, (*Dalitulaku vidyanu dūram cēsēndukē pāṭhasālala mūsivēta*), p. 7, Medak edition, 1 October, 2014. Surya, Regulation of schools unconstitutional (*kramabaddīkaraṇa rājyāṅgaviruddam*), p. 3, Medak edition, 1 October, 2014.

³⁸ *Andhra Prabha*, Closing down schools must be stalled (*pāṭhasālala mūsivēta viramincukōvāli*), p. 5, Medak edition, 1 October, 2014.

interests of the newspaper management gets reflected? This question will be discussed in the last section of this chapter.

The following event gives a picture about how it is done at the mandal-level.

Event 2: Stringer on a delegated task

Context: The management of one of the top leading Telugu dailies, owned by the influential Kamma caste (*Sat-shudra*), decided to come up with an advertorial supplement, as part of the anniversary celebrations of the district edition. This coincided with the inauguration of a new office building and printing facility. For this purpose, they delegated the task of writing a “*manci*” (good) story on an old age home to the newspaper’s Gannavaram rural stringer in two days, who belongs to the Dalit community. (Field notes, Gannavaram, 19 April 2012).³⁹

The following day, both of us went to the old age home located in Telaprolu village by 9 A.M. The intention was to finish the task in one hour and proceed to Davajigudem, where a state government programme was scheduled to start at 10:30 A.M. However, the watchman denied entry even as the stringer showed his card. The stringer tried reaching to the person whom he was supposed to meet and finally managed to enter. I was told to wait outside the building premises. He returned after interacting with the person(s) for more than half an hour. On our way to Davajigudem, he was explaining that it was about elderly couples, whose children reside in the USA and this place is providing a comfortable stay for them unlike in their villages, where they reside. And it was also about the facilities provided in the old age home emphasising its proximity to Gannavaram airport.

He did not see any story as he was of the ‘opinion’ that the role of newspaper is to highlight issues such as poverty and discrimination. More importantly, he pointed out that the elderly person was very rude towards him throughout the interaction and did not even let him see some parts of the premises, which he felt was discriminatory. The stringer recalled that he was treated in a better manner when he was working as a videographer before joining journalism. He told me that he was not going to file the story. [More than the younger lot, elderly persons in villages speak highly coarse and discriminatory language.

³⁹ What the management person meant by *manci* story was to write a feel-good or feature article on how these millionaire elderly persons are leading a happy and peaceful retirement life faraway from maddening crowds and traffic jams, which I figured out during my interviews with the editorial staffers. What is of interest for sociological research is that this is the story about those sons in the families of those who remained in rural areas to safeguard agrarian properties of certain castes after Green Revolution, as some sons around that time migrated to towns for higher education or business purposes (Omvedt, 1981; Upadhyay, 1988a, 1988b). This issue is partly answered by Benbabaali (2018), while addressing a different issue.

Also, the locals, especially the elderly influential caste persons assess the caste of a person based on their looks.] (Field notes, 20 April 2012).

The following day, he got a dressing down by the management person as well as by the rural in-charge for not working on the advertorial item and missing out on a detail, which was considered to be very important by the editorial, in the press conference held by a local TDP leader. The newspaper management assigned the task to a trainee reporter from Ramavarappadu. The Gannavaram stringer was told to accompany the person and learn from him, as the trainee was a product of the in-house J-school (Field notes, 22 & 24 April 2012).

During my interaction with this particular newspaper's editorial staffers in Vijayawada, I learnt that they are trying to cater to the 'tastes' of the Telugu diaspora in the US. Apart from that, Gannavaram was experiencing a boom in real estate due to the separate state demand and some were trying to project Vijayawada as the capital of Andhra Pradesh, in anticipation of the state bifurcation, which eventually happened.

The stringer's response to the entire episode, during my interview, was revealing. His articulation was an eye-opener, when he said: "*paper vāḷḷadi, endukante owner vāḷḷōḍu kabatti. Kāni panicēsē mēmu maṭuku eppaṭiki bayaṭivāḷḷmē*" (They (influential castes) feel the paper is theirs because the owner belongs to their caste. But people working in the newspaper were always considered as outsiders by them) [Personal interview, 24 May 2012, Gannavaram].

The stringer clearly communicated his thought that people from his own community (Dalit, Madiga) were relegated not just in the society and the social order but also in the profession, which could be seen as an experience of symbolic violence, to take the stringer's side.

This aspect of relegation along with delegation – "the ability of the dominant to exist and to act at a distance through the agency of representatives, deputies and employees" – is crucial in understanding the logic of journalistic practice (Bourdieu, 2018, p. 110). However, the stringer got to learn about various types of articles in newspapers from the trainee, who explained the stringer about the differences between news reports, spot news, features, conference reports, and advertorials among others.

Some staffers, in Sangareddy and Gannavaram, delegate tasks or duties to stringers in such a manner that their reputation (image in stringers' parlance) remains intact, while the latter take the brunt. If cultural literacy of agents makes one realise the rules of the game, the work of this sort of *conditioning* by the hierarchical structures in the field on their habitus seems to make them believe that it is indeed their position in the field, as if there were no other options.

Event 3: Symbolic annihilation

Context: "Ambedkar's statue was demolished by someone. Go to our spot (villagers' rest house) directly. Our people are there," ARP stopped me on the highway near his *dhaba*, and broke the news. By the time I reached there, the regular set of stringers assembled there along with some elderly locals who were busy talking about the incident and politics in Andhra Pradesh (Field notes, Gannavaram, 9 May 2012).

The statue was located at the centre of the Gannavaram village. The incident happened at a time when there were a series of cases in which Ambedkar statues were desecrated starting in the month of January, 2012. Members of a fact-finding committee that visited Amalapuram of East Godavari district to probe into the "politics fuelling the continued desecrations and the vested dominant caste interests protecting the accused" gave an interview to Round Table India (2012a, 2012b). Convenor of Dalit Sthree Sakthi, G. Jhansi, who was part of the committee, stated that this could be a possibility due to the "conflicts between Dalits and the Kapus that run as a constant undercurrent".

She also mentioned:

Four statues were first desecrated in Amalapuram, and then another in Dhavaleswaram. The next one was in Medchal in Ranga Reddy district. Yes, it was not confirmed, only a finger was reportedly damaged. Then there was the Jalalpur incident in Nizamabad. The last known desecration was in Siddhantam in West Godavari district, where one finger and an ear were damaged (2012a).

Most of the stringers who were present at the reading room-cum-rest house in Gannavaram were aware of the series of Ambedkar statue desecration episodes. They tried to reach some politicians concerned, but could not. More importantly, they also were talking about the by-polls in both Andhra and Telangana regions of united

Andhra Pradesh, which were scheduled in the month of June (Field notes, Gannavaram, 9 May 2012).

The following day, only two newspapers published the report. Following are translations of full reports that were published in district tabloid editions, the following day. These two were the only ones to shed light on such an important issue at a crucial time in AP politics.

Tractor dhikoni... dvamsamaina Ambedkar vigraham
(Ambedkar statue demolished as tractor collides)

Gannavaram, Newline, May 9: The Ambedkar statue installed at the road divider located near Mandal Revenue Office was demolished after being hit by a hay-laden tractor on Wednesday, according to the locals. The statue was installed at the Gannavaram - Agiripalli roads and buildings highway about a year ago by local TDP leaders. At that time, they were not given any approval by the police and revenue officials.

TDP leaders SKMM Kalam and other local leaders rushed to the spot soon after getting to know about the incident. They shifted the demolished statue within minutes fearing backlash from Dalit organisations. Local YSR Congress leaders demanded a police probe into the incident. However, police officials remained silent over the issue.⁴⁰

Ambedkar vigraham kulcivēta
(Ambedkar statue vandalised)

Gannavaram, Pra.Vi., May 9: Unidentified miscreants vandalised the Ambedkar statue located at the local Revenue Office in the early hours on Wednesday. Tension prevailed in Gannavaram village for a brief time due to this incident. Local political leaders reached the spot soon and placed the debris of the statue to the nearby villagers' reading room, according to locals. Dalit community leaders demanded action to be taken against the miscreants. No case is registered.⁴¹

The words 'observer,' 'chronicle', 'mirror', 'express', and 'times' are often associated with reputed dailies and tabloids to reflect the character of the medium. This seems to be a case where the primary purpose of a newspaper, which is to report, took the backseat. Anyone who wishes to do a media construction of an important issue such as the desecration of Babasaheb's statues in 2012 may not be able to find sufficient material related to this incident in daily newspapers. *However, some stringers sent*

⁴⁰ *Sakshi*, Krishna Rural, 10 May 2012, p. 5

⁴¹ *Prajasakti*, Vijayawada, 10 May 2012, p. 6. Pra. Vi. means *Prajasakti Vilekhari* (journalist).

*their reports to Dalit magazines published from Vijayawada and Guntur respectively.*⁴²

It was difficult to find out the reason behind the omission of this report filed by stringers, which most of them did and even gave them to RTC bus drivers or faxed the items. But the role of caste was irrefutable in the news production process, which consciously or unconsciously favoured certain ‘trivial’ news items to get published; while at least a ‘bare mention’ of an attack on a symbol of Constitutional Rights was denied ‘space’.

Those who vandalised the statue for political reasons must have had a problem with the statue being located at the centre of the town/mandal and desecrated it making a caste-supremacist non-verbal statement that the icon belongs to labour colonies or SC colonies or simply put in *Velivada* (Dalit Ghetto) and not in the mainstream.

Even worse form of injustice was meted out on Dalit and Bahujan stringers by ‘teaching’ them the hard way that the newspaper medium was ‘theirs’ and not ‘yours’ by the omission of the news filed news report. As Gerbner (1972) suggested, omission means symbolic annihilation; and in this case it happened to reportage on desecration of a statue of a man, who wrote *Annihilation of Caste*. Is it a case of editorial judgement or caste-bias from the editorial desk or management? How do stringers negotiate or resist such highhandedness on part of the editorial or reporting staffers working from the district edition centre offices?

The following section attempts to answer the questions raised at the end of each event presented above.

Being *sūtradhār*: Surviving in the field

The three events discussed earlier may not have fully presented the scope and intensity of capillaries of domination in the journalistic field. But they appeared to be pertinent to forcefully suggest that the aspects of caste, class, gender, region and ability, which are usually seen as markers of an individual’s identity, appeared to be

⁴² MNR and KP sent their reports to *Dalita Kantam*, 15 May 2012, Vijayawada, RNI: APTEL/2010/32829 and *Dalitha Pragathi*, 18 May 2012, Guntur APTEL/2012/59550. Both are weeklies. DD, who was the then vice-president of Krishna District Union of Working Journalists, got the issue published in *Krishna Zilla Journalist*, a bi-monthly magazine run the union.

the modes and channels through which power operates in the relationships between the dominant and the dominated. Some of the caste-based supremacist utterances of agents that I cited throughout the study are an attestation to this point.

In this section, along with a discussion on the above-mentioned events, I present some of the possible ways to understand the nature of the field. Considering various forms of capitals that agents possess or in the process of accumulating, their dispositions, relationships between agents occupying various positions, and structures that are in operation within the field, it is possible to argue in the manner that is suggestive of *Brahmanical and Sat-shudra staffers and Dalit-Bahujan stringers* pattern in Indian-language journalism. This argument is based on one of the most original contributions in the area of epistemology of social sciences in India by Gopal Guru (2012). He argued how the hegemonic practices imposed by the privileged top of the twice-born (TTB) academics over Dalit-Bahujan scholars resulted in what he called as “*a pernicious divide between theoretical Brahmins and empirical Shudras*” (2012, p. 10) [Emphasis mine].

Employing the concept of habitus, he continued:

As an intellectual force this kind of hegemonic practice would lead to caricaturing of the Dalits or Bahujans as epistemologically dumb, push them into empirical ghettos, or confine their intellectual or theoretical ambitions to the dominant methodological modes to a significant degree (p. 13).

By looking at the ownership patterns, which suggests that a majority of newspapers are concentrated in the hands of persons belonging to the dominant *Sat-shudra* category, and the journalistic practices that consistently reproduce graded inequality (Brahmanical version of social order), it is possible to frame an argument suggesting that there is a concurrence of *Sat-shudraisation of media economy and Brahmanisation of media work culture* in Telugu journalistic field, especially since the Green Revolution.⁴³

⁴³ This formulation is drawn from the works of Aloysius (2010); Washbrook (1993); Bayly (1999) in different contexts.

The field-based ethnography of news gathering, keeping in the habitus of agents, professional roles, and multiple hierarchies laid out the caste-based gatekeeping which otherwise would be difficult to establish in newsroom ethnographies.

Unlike the textual narratives weaved by journalists in their own autobiographies or biographies on legendary editors about their ‘uncompromising attitude’ with the newspaper management, ‘fearlessness in bringing truth to light’ and ‘adverse situations’ they faced in the process, the reality appeared to be as respected journalist and editor Murthy (2003) rightly and impartially pointed out in his research work: “Management or chairman of the board of directors are placed at the top of the organisational hierarchy” (p. 106). This is an undeniable fact.

Just like a press card bestows social capital to stringers in their mandals and small towns, running a media organisation helps in converting and consolidating (in some cases) economic capital into cultural and social capital for the owners. It gives them a passport to enter politics and help in pushing their economic interests and thereby accumulate more economic capital and in order to gain social standing (See, Table 5.2).

The singular contribution of *Sat-shudraisation* appeared to be the breaking down of the previous rigid *Brahmanical* and *Savarna* order in the journalistic field, which was exemplified in some newspapers – *Andhra Patrika* and *Krishna Patrika* – in the form of editor-publisher dual role, which earlier was held by the Telugu Brahmins. It democratised the entry into the field like never before, despite the discriminatory and casteist practices associated with it.

While Ninan (2007) demonstrated the impact of localisation strategy on the Hindi media with their meticulous research, Jeffrey (2010) highlighted, besides with the localisation strategy adopted by the language media, the shift in the ownership patterns, which resulted in the usage of everyday language and the presentation of news reports in a more democratic manner.

What I attempted to capture in the chapter is the congruence of the media economy and culture that was prevalent in the field, which is crucial in understanding its nature. However, *Sat-shudraisation of economy and Brahmanisation of work culture* in

newspapers appears to be a contingent proposition. Even as there are certain apparent logical connections in the proposition, it needs to be examined on a larger scale, which is beyond the scope of the present study.

And even as the dichotomous proposition of *Brahmanical and Sat-shudra staffers and Dalit-Bahujan stringers* appears to be valid if one were to do a demographic survey of Telugu language journalists, stringers, and editors across the Telugu speaking states, it will not help in understanding *how* stringers continue to work in such highly exploitative, oppressive conditions in which they are subjected to symbolic violence.

Some of the ways in which stringers from Dalit and Bahujan background take control of the situation was presented in the earliest description of the role played by YSR in the Gannavaram Village Assembly. Over a period of time, stringers develop a solid idea about the ‘editorial preferences’ and push their stories in such a manner that they appeal to the ‘editorial sensibilities.’ To be fair to the editorial staffers in both Gannavaram and Sangareddy, due credit should be given to them for not letting *replication crisis* to happen by not publishing certain irrational and communal rumours that find place in news dailies.⁴⁴

As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, even as stringers, who remarked that they were mere role-players, knew well how to position themselves in the field in such a manner that they became *sūtradhārs* instead of the desk person or rural in-charge. The crucial factor of experience in the field was realised to a great extent by senior stringers in Sangareddy and Gannavaram. Even as they work in small and medium newspapers, they implant stories (public good or personal gain or for both) in big dailies by befriending stringers working in them.⁴⁵

Even in the case of the editorial blunder made by their newspapers by omitting reports on Ambedkar Statue desecration incident, stringers with experience (MNR, KP, and DD) ‘successfully’ managed to push their stories to different magazines and made their voices heard and even documented, which could be seen as a way of negotiating

⁴⁴ While rumours that spread in Sangareddy were about an abattoir (September 2014), in Gannavaram a rumour that spread like wildfire was concerning mothers who have a ‘single son’ should do 108 circumambulations to a tree and break a coconut at a Sai Baba Temple located near Kesarapally for his safety.

⁴⁵ Some rural in-charges of very large and large news dailies warn their stringers not to interact with them.

with the issues related to social hierarchy and the editorial staffers in the field. This transformation from being a *pātradhār* to becoming a *sūtradhār* could also be understood as a result of journalistic capital, a form of social capital, acquired by these stringers over a period of time.

As Portes (1998) pointed out, “there is little ground to believe that social capital will provide a ready remedy for major social problems, as promised by its bolder proponents” (p. 21), as in the process of becoming a *sūtradhār*, the stringer is inadvertently becoming a part of the process of social reproduction in the field by trying to editorial preferences and sensibilities, which were based on the editorial and management policy (rules of the game).

Observing and documenting the dynamics of multiple hierarchies in the field and the roles of agents on the ground, inscription of the social was clearly visible on the field. This sighting appeared to be a reversal of that of Ståhlberg (2002; 2013), when he presented “how a Hindi newspaper constructs society or writing society through media in his ethnographic study on Lucknow.”

CHAPTER 6

TRACING INFORMALITY AND FORMS OF PRECARITY: TOWARDS AN UNDERSTANDING OF NEWS LABOUR

Ask not what your country can do for you — ask what you can do for your country.

– John Fitzgerald Kennedy (JFK), Inaugural Address at Washington, D.C., January 20, 1961 (cited in Podell & Anzovin, 2001, p. 689).

[T]he misery of being exploited by capitalists is nothing compared to the misery of not being exploited at all.

– Joan Robinson (1974, p. 46)

Introduction

The untimely death of a young Dalit reporter Nagaraju Koppula (34) of the New Indian Express due to cancer in 2015 sparked off a debate on the informal character of employment and precarity of news labour in the journalism field. It also exposed the casteist discrimination coupled with the denial of mandatory medical insurance by the employers. The episode is also linked to the thriving contractualisation issue in journalism.¹

¹ The following write-up was a reconstructed narrative from multiple sources acknowledged below:

A postgraduate in history from the University of Hyderabad, his journey from the margins of the society (first generation Madiga [Dalit] born in a village in Khammam) to file stories in the front page of a mainstream English national daily was highly inspirational.

He joined NIE as a trainee-reporter (without salary) and later inducted into the Hyderabad bureau as a reporter with a consolidated salary of INR 15,000 in the year 2011. Earlier, he added a journalism degree to his CV along with a J-school scholarship. Despite dealing with ineffable symbolic violence (especially caste-based) at the workplace in the form of tasks delegated, lesser pay compared to his colleagues with similar experience and education, he filed stories on a wide range of issues in Hyderabad and united Andhra Pradesh, which made it to page one [sometimes in all editions of the newspaper].

Suffering from a persistent cough, he (non-smoker) visited a government hospital where the doctors treated him for Tuberculosis in October 2012. He did not receive any financial assistance or relief from his employer even after repeated pleas. Raju returned to his native place to avail *Aarogyasri* health scheme (for BPL families), where his condition deteriorated further. It was all over for the reporter when doctors at a private medical facility declared that he was diagnosed with lung cancer (stage-IV) on 1 April 2013. With the support of his friends, journalists, and scholars from across the globe, he underwent chemotherapy and fought a losing battle with cancer for two years. He breathed his last on 12 April 2015 (Trivedi, 2015; Nagarajan, 2015; Sheth, 2015; Thakurta; 2015 & Pande 2015).

Journalists' unions held protests in front of the newspaper offices across the country. Following a condolence meeting held at New Delhi, the members of Delhi Union of Journalists (DUJ) in a statement,

resolved to fight for justice against the *casteist discrimination* and *contractual exploitation* meted out to him by his employers... (who) underpaid him, *denied health benefits...* *provident fund* and other monetary rights pushing him to death (DUJ, 2015) [Emphasis mine].

The NIE denied these allegations concerning caste-based discrimination and issued a legal notice to the DUJ demanding the source of such accusations.² An examination of the legal notice revealed that they did not deny allegations concerning the medical benefits and emoluments, as much as they did with the caste aspect (Pande, 2015).

If this was the state-of-affairs with a full-time reporter, who was on the pay-roll of a reputed English national daily, what would be the case of stringers, who are not even on the pay-rolls? Most of the stringers do not even have the guaranteed minimum wages that the NREGA promises for manual labourers.

The regular coverage of protests and strikes by various groups such as contract teachers, contractual labourers in factories/firms, anganwadi workers, and state-transport employees for minimum wages by the stringers in both Gannavaram and Sangareddy was a constant reminder for me to ponder about their wages, informal labour in the journalistic field.

A striking response from a Gannavaram stringer, YSR, when asked about the wages and salary issue of stringers in newspapers, helped me in deciding to research into the issue of informal news labour of agents in the field. Inadvertently reminding and rephrasing the words of the President John F. Kennedy, he said:

Major Chandrakanth *sinimālō NTR dialogue unṭundi telusā? Nīku dēśam ēmi cēsindi annadi kādu, dēśāniki nuvvu ēmi cēsavu anēdi mukhyam. Alānē mana patrikala vāḷḷu, mēmu nīku iccēdi ēntayya, nuvvu māku ēmi istunnāvu anēdi* important. (Do you remember NTR's dialogue from the movie Major

² A copy of the legal notice can be accessed at: <https://www.newslaundry.com/2015/04/27/the-life-and-death-of-a-dalit-journalist>; for an obituary on Koppula by the NIE, see, <https://www.newindianexpress.com/states/telangana/2015/apr/13/Journalist-Nagaraju-Passes-Away-741889.html>

Chandrakanth? NTR says that what is important is your contribution to the country and not vice-versa. Even newspapers respond in the same fashion when stringers ask about salaries. They say ‘don’t ask what newspapers ought to give you, show what you can do/give to the newspaper’. That is important) [Personal communication, Gannavaram, 29 May 2012].³

In his introductory textbook on economics for Indian students, Omkarnath (2012, pp. 219-220) labelled manual labourers, workers involved in illegal activities, orderlies in private and public establishments, casual labourers in medium and large industries, and sex workers as informal workers in *petty production in urban economy*. In effect, there are certain grounded ways to conceptualise and understand manual labour involved in petty production in both rural and urban economies as part of ‘employment accounting’ in labour economics (Omkarnath, 2012, p. 233). But a majority of print journalism dailies and even media houses (Television channels) seemed to be functioning well within the organised sector of Indian economy, and the very fact that the Goods and Services Tax (GST) applies to this sector is a case in point. Specifically, the newspaper as a ‘good’ invites no tax, but as a service (sale of advertisement space) was taxed at 5 per cent (Government of India [GoI], 2017a, p. 11; 2017b, p. 22).⁴

How does one understand the labour of stringers in villages, small towns, and urban areas, who actively take part in the news production process but are not present on the payroll of the organisations in which they work? What are the existing employment norms and pay-scales or how to understand the lack thereof?

This chapter, firstly, presents the informal labour associated with the functioning of Indian-language newspapers and suggests that the journalistic field was marked by informality from its inception. Secondly, it attempts to outline the process of informalisation becoming a ‘norm’ in the Telugu journalistic field, with organisations flouting the rules and suggestions prescribed by various wage board committees. In the process, the relationship between the informality and social hierarchy would be

³ Even though NTR does not utter this dialogue in the movie, this quote by the late American President is popular in the Telugu speaking states and gets mentioned very often in the speeches during the Independence Day or Republic Day celebrations in schools and educational institutions.

⁴ Also, services by way of transportation by rail or a vessel or a goods carriage from one place in India were not taxed (GoI, 2017b, p. 7); however, newspaper printing was taxed at 5 per cent (GoI, 2017b, p. 22).

highlighted by discussing concepts like casualisation, contractualisation, flexploitation, and double informalisation, which were crucial in understanding the precarious nature of the field. Thirdly, this chapter further probes into the concepts of precarity and attempts to move beyond the purely economic aspects. Fourthly, it attempts to formulate some rudimentary forms of precarity pertinent to the journalistic field, based on life-stories documented from the field, followed by an examination of the role of unions in securing rights through collective bargaining strategies.

Understudied topic of news labour

The localisation strategy successfully administered by *Eenadu* in the 1980s and replicated by other newspapers within Telugu speaking regions and in other parts of the country was the brightest possible version of the story. The strategy did result in the democratisation of news and broke the barriers for many sections of society to enter the field. But it seemed to have resulted in the violation of wage structures prescribed by various wage boards for working journalists leading to precarious news labour in certain roles of news organisations. Even the professionalisation aspect was compromised with some news establishments delegating non-journalistic work to journalists and thereby compromising on journalistic standards.

While searching for academic literature concerned with the issue of news labour in the Indian context, I was faced with blank broadsheets of material. This aspect appeared to be one of the blind spots in the overlap of sub-disciplines such as sociology of journalism, journalism studies, and the political economy approach to understanding the media industry.

On several occasions and various platforms noted journalists underlined the disappearance of ‘labour beat’ in mainstream newspapers over the past few decades. The same appears to be the case with the academic literature emerging out of journalism studies or concerning news media.⁵ However, one work that stands tall about the aspect of labour in the newspaper industry was that of Samaddar’s (1994) earlier academic contribution – *Workers and Automation* – in which he provided a detailed analysis of union responses to technological change in the production process of newspapers. Building on Burawoy’s formulations on ‘politics of production’,

⁵ Sainath stressed on this fact in a distinguished lecture – The Media: Another Kind of Convergence – organised at University of Hyderabad, 20 July, 2011.

Samaddar argued that the de-unionisation in the newspaper industry could be seen as an outcome of strategic use or the introduction of new technologies by managements in the Indian context along with changes in recruitment policy. Even as the book primarily focused on the trade-unionism of workers in the printing factories, the impact of automation on journalistic work was captured in parts, especially during the 1980s.

But there was a glaring lack of literature when it came to an understanding of the issues hovering around journalistic labour or news labour. Even the accounts provided by famous journalists and editors were of very little help as those works were concerned with their accomplishments and achievements during their prime. Most of the biographies and autobiographies succeeded in providing insights into the political and economic conditions prevailing at the time of their work (see, e.g., Chintamani, 1937; Bommareddy, 2003; Nayar, 2012; Dutt, 1956; Krishna, 2019; Kapoor, 2015).

The narratives provided in some such works were top-down rather than providing any details of quotidian routines of journalistic work. Although these works helped in providing an understanding of the scope and nature of print journalism in India, they did not open any windows on the contributions of journalists as news labourers. Many of these works appeared as bookends to the existing populist political history of the country. More importantly, descriptions of the working lives of women journalists or reporters were also missing in most of these accounts.⁶

This missing narrative of the working lives of journalists and journalistic labour is an area of concern not only in the Indian context but also some parts of the advanced West. In a call for papers given in 2019, the organisers lamented in the concept note that after reviewing “all the volumes of three key academic journals devoted to the study of journalism, namely *Journalism Studies*, *Digital Journalism*, and *Journalism Practice*,” they could only find “a limited number of studies that deal with journalists’

⁶ Some of the biographies, autobiographies, and journalistic accounts in Telugu and English languages, which were consulted during this research include: Bommareddy (2003), Chintamani, (1937), Dutt (1956), Kapoor (2015), Krishna (2019), Krishnanand (2010), Mehta (2011; 2014), Menon, (1993), Narayanarao, (1940), Nayar (1977; 2006; 2012), Prakasam, (1972); Prasad (1986), Purushotham (2007), Rama Rao (1965), Rajagopalrao, (2004); Reddy, (1989); Sharma (1992), Swamy (2010), Prasad (2010), Udayawarlu (2018), Venkateswararao (2015), and Valliswar, (2019). However, Umrigar (1949) apart from presenting a commentary on press laws and acts elaborated at length on various issues surrounding the working lives of journalists during the colonial times in India.

working lives and these tend to focus on the impact of technological change and economic pressures. The studies also tend to focus on the US and the UK, with occasional research on Nordic countries”.⁷

In the twenty-first century, even at the peak of the cultural turn in humanities and social sciences, the works of communication studies scholar Hanno Hardt held significance for bringing the issues of labour and work relationships in the media and culture industry to prominence. Hardt (1999, pp. 175-183) suggested that there was a need for reshaping research agenda to the study of intellectual labour of journalists, locating and identifying the boundaries and limits of journalism as a profession which is market-driven and whose autonomy is continuously challenged by the political forces in the society.

In his introductory remarks, while republishing a report of an international survey conducted by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) on the *Conditions of work and life of journalists (1925-26)*, Hardt (2005, p. 6) pointed out that the document was “a reminder of the widespread plight of journalists as ‘brain’ workers since the industrialisation of the press. As such the report is also a historical document that anticipates and reinforces the development of a professional model of journalism and offers insights into the *social and economic determinants of a professional class as it is rising from its proletarian roots*” [Emphasis mine]. According to Hardt, some of the questions emerging out of the ILO report, ranging from wages to work-culture, suggested the continuation of a struggle, in both developing and developed countries, for better working conditions, rights of journalists, and recognition of journalists as an intellectual and creative labouring force (p. 7).

This observation was validated in an ILO report (2014) concerning working conditions, rights and laws of workers in media and culture industries a decade later, when the study maintained: “There was much confusion regarding competition laws that were negatively affecting the collective bargaining process for (freelance) performers and journalists in various countries” (p. 3).

⁷ The full version of the call for papers for the conference can be accessed at <https://www.jiscmail.ac.uk/cgi-bin/webadmin?A2=MECCSA;7f856843.1909>.

Highlighting this issue in the Indian context, Remesh (2018, p. 134) noted that there was “near absence of information or a conspicuous silence on the issues pertaining to work and working conditions of journalists themselves.” While dealing with the issue of unpaid and insecure work along with paid news phenomenon, Remesh (2018, pp. 134-151) moved beyond the thesis of ‘Murdochisation of Indian media’, which was prevalent in understanding media industry from a political economy perspective.

The following sections further this departure from the political economy perspective and suggest that it is possible to theorise the material conditions and informality of news labour from a field theory perspective, unravelling the connections between the economic, political, and cultural fields with the journalistic field. The attempt is to point out that the localisation strategy needs to be situated alongside issues of informal media economy, casualisation of news labour, and cultural aspects of journalistic practices.

This pursuit of understanding journalistic labour for the present study arose from: a) observations on the material conditions of news production in the field; b) the lacunae in the academic literature on the working lives of journalists in the Indian context; c) a general discomfort with mechanical replication of Bourdieusian field theory without taking into consideration the socio-cultural and economic aspects of the newswriters.

The following sub-section presents the material conditions of journalistic work of stringers, employment contract details, types of employment, professional differentiation within the field, and nature of news labour. These aspects are crucial in understanding the unorganised section of the informal media economy that fuels the field and implicitly influences the final output of news production. Before that, some key concepts such as the ‘informal economy’ and the ‘process of informalisation’, ‘casual labour’, ‘precariat’, and ‘salarial’ will be discussed briefly.

Sociologists, Portes, Castells, and Benton (1989, p. 306) in their seminal work on informal economy highlighted the perils of framing a rigid definition of informalisation. Instead, they suggested that it was more fruitful to understand the process in the historically specific context along with regional, political and economic conditions. They suggested that the informalisation process takes three distinct forms. They were:

First, economic activities may be informalised passively, through no fault of the participants, as it were. [...] Second, informality may come about through the efforts of firms and other private interests in a regulated economy to gain market advantage by avoiding some state controls. [...] Finally, there is a process of informalisation which takes place precisely because formal rules and controls exist, through manipulation of their application for private gain (p. 299).

These observations by Portes et al on the process of informalisation provided a near-perfect platform to understand the economic functioning of the journalistic field for present limited purposes. Casual work or casual labour is a closely related concept to the informal economy, which is also difficult to define. On the larger canvas, this casualisation of work appeared to be a strategy employed by petty commodity entrepreneurs to cut down their own cost of production and additional employee-related welfare expenditure and thereby maximise their profit (Omkarnath, 2012).

However, providing working definitions to the concepts of informal economy, informal sector and informal employment, Chen and Carré (2020) outlined:

The International Conference of Labour Statisticians (ICLS), convened every five years by the International Labour Office (ILO), has adopted two official international statistical terms and definitions related to the *informal economy*: *informal sector* refers to the production and employment that takes place in unincorporated or unregistered enterprises (1993 ICLS); and *informal employment* refers to employment without social protection through work – both inside and outside the informal sector (2003 ICLS). The *informal economy* refers to all units, activities, and workers so defined and the output from them. Together, they form the broad base of the workforce and economy, both nationally and globally (pp. 4-5) [Emphasis original].

Even though the concept of precariat (a neologism combining the words: precarious and proletariat) existed earlier, it gained popularity in both academic and activist circles through British economist Guy Standing's work (2011). The classes or concepts of salariat and precariat figured in the seven group classification, which he proposed:

- 1) Elite (plutocrats or super-citizens); 2) Salariat (full-time employed, entrenched in the corporate world with pension benefits and paid holidays); 3) Proficians (a neologism of professionals and technicians); 4) Old proletariat (workers with rights, a fast disappearing and shrinking class); 5) Precariat

(characterised by labour insecurity and insecure income); 6) Unemployed; 7) Detached group of socially ill misfits living off the dregs of society (Standing, 2011, pp. 7-8).

Even as the British economist made it clear at the outset that he excluded agrarian societies from this social group classification, a cursory look at it revealed a wide range of concerns. Some of the social groups and economic classes outlined by Standing had little relevance for the present study. The terms, salariat and precariat, which were already introduced in the previous chapter would be problematised further, while theorising the data emerging from the field and secondary data while discussing their relevance to informalisation of news labour and the status of agents in the journalistic field.

Informality and news labour: The dark side of localisation

One of the advantages of this study was that the first part of the fieldwork happened before the implementation of Majithia Wage Board recommendations for working journalists in India. And during the second half of my fieldwork, the Supreme Court gave directives to implement the Wage Board recommendations and thereby I got an opportunity to understand and capture the changes and dynamics that took place before and after the judgement.

Even though the geographical areas of research were limited to two mandals and two districts, the journalists' union meetings and my interactions with union leaders and senior journalists across different regions and districts in both the states helped in viewing a larger picture of the journalistic field. These interactions along with supporting archival work helped provide a better understanding, which was not only limited to the Telugu speaking states but also in the pan-Indian context.

In the following section I argue that informality of the media economy and casualisation of work existed in Indian-language journalism even before the localisation strategy adopted by the Indian-language dailies and the subsequent Murdochisation of media associated with the neo-liberal reforms embraced by the country.

Newsworkers in language journalism in the past: Always on the edge

The localisation strategy employed by Telugu newspapers from the 1970s along with advances in communication technologies, improved means of communication (transport), increasing competition in the industry, and literacy growth appeared to have resulted in quantitative and qualitative changes in the effective news workforce. The localisation aspect coupled with changes in society, polity, and economy was dealt with in detail by Jeffrey (2010), Ninan (2007), and Neyazi (2018) with respect to Indian-language newspapers.⁸ Building on these studies, this sub-section addresses the labour relations in news production and attempts to qualify that labour in the journalistic field was always precarious from the early days of Telugu news dailies.

The wage boards for working journalists had their own way of classification, which will be discussed in this section. But for the present study, based on the primary and secondary data collected during fieldwork, the employee groups in Telugu dailies presently could be classified broadly into three groups based on the broad nature of newswork they did and the manner in which wages were paid or not paid to them. They were: a) Core group; b) Full-timers; c) Part-timers.

While the editorial and reporting staffers along with management personnel and workers in the printing section comprised the full-timer group, the stringers working in villages, small towns, and urban areas formed the part-timer group. These two groups could be referred to, effectively, as the news workforce, not including another set of individuals who need not be part of the editorial, reporting, advertising, and management verticals, but formed the ‘core group’ of the newspaper establishment. This core group comprised individuals belonging to the same family of the proprietor-editor or persons sharing similar political party affiliations, who figure mostly in the managerial roles or personnel departments.

The existence of such core group was evident from the inception of earliest Telugu news dailies such as *Andhra Patrika*, *Krishna Patrika*, and *Golkonda Patrika* (to name a few) to the newspapers of the present day (Reddy, 1989; Sharma, 1992; Rajagopalrao, 2004). An examination of the nature of the news workforce prevalent in early newspaper establishments is necessary as it would help understand the impact of

⁸ Also, Israel (1994) presented a thorough account on the role of news agencies during colonial rule with specific focus on the Indian nationalist struggle in the early half of the twentieth century.

localisation strategy on the news labour aspects in Indian-language newspapers of the present times. This also helps in understanding the precarious nature of news labour in the industry from the inception, especially in the language news dailies.

Going by the limited available descriptions of newswork in the biographical accounts of journalists/editors of Indian-language newspapers, the presence of ‘reporters’, let alone stringers, in the workforce of newspapers seemed to be a rarity till the 1970s. Most of the time, it was the editorial department (translators, proof-readers, and editors) that used to bring out the newspaper with minimal stories filed by ‘correspondents’ on important political developments or ‘officially’ scheduled events that happened during the daytime.

There was a heavy reliance on the wire copies by foreign news agencies in bringing out the newspaper on a daily basis and reporters with specific beats were not to be seen till the second half of the twentieth century in a majority of Indian-language newspapers.⁹ The fact that there was no mention of salaries of reporters or correspondents in company scrip and the high expenditure in availing wire services by these newspapers till the 1950s was a case in point (Gupta, 1977, pp. 213-235; 1968, pp. 20-82; Umrigar, 1949, pp. 20-35; Reddy, 1989, pp. 186-188; Sharma, 1992, pp. 10-29; Rajagopalrao, 2004, pp. 26-37 & pp. 72-73, Venkateswararao, 2015, pp. 133-170; Israel, 1994, p. 134; Natarajan, 2017, pp. 59-64).

Providing details about the payments and work-culture of reporters, contributors, and writers in Indian-language dailies of the late nineteenth century, Gupta noted:

It was not that there were no contributors; they were few but they were well known. But they were not contributors who wrote for money. Indeed, there was little chance of their ever being paid. They wrote either as friends of the editors on being desperately requested to do so. (1977, p. 217).

The news gathering practices of the first generation Telugu dailies used to be strange and unique in their own ways. The publisher-editors of news dailies such as *Andhra Patrika* and *Krishna Patrika* used to ‘host’ political leaders of various parties at their homes to know about the developments in freedom struggle at the beginning of the

⁹ This appears to be one of the reasons for wider coverage of international and national events rather than reporting on regional and local events in early Telugu news dailies.

twentieth century. K. Nageswara Rao of *Andhra Patrika* used to engage in discussions with Indian National Congress leaders over freshly baked clarified butter cookies and filter coffee at his residence initially at ‘Sri Bagh’ in Madras Presidency and later at ‘Durga Vilas’ in Vijayawada.

These discussions would be ‘churned’ into news stories for the following day’s newspaper (Rajagopalrao, 2004, p. 8; Narayanarao, 1940, pp. 60-61).¹⁰ Even Mutnuri Krishna Rao, who founded *Krishna Patrika* used to hold meetings and discussions at his residence in Masulipatnam with political leaders of various parties and report about the developments in the country in his newspaper. This meeting place was popularly referred to as Krishna Rao Darbar/court (Sharma, 1992, pp. 23-29; Venkateswararao, 2004, p. 171). Apart from ‘reporting’ these developments along with some important political meeting reports by correspondents, most of the news in these two major news dailies used to be sourced from news agencies.

These newspapers started the trend of referring to articles and reports filed by known sources as *mā pratyēka pratinidhi* (our special correspondent; literal translation: special representative), reporters as *vilēkhari*, and stringers (unknown source) as *upa-vilēkhakuḍu* (sub-reporter or sub-writer).¹¹ Both the dailies used to carry ‘local’ reports that were many weeks old – sometimes as old as two months – due to postal delay or other unspecified reasons (Swamy Naidu, 1994, pp. 33-39; Rajagopalrao, 2004, pp. 38-39).¹²

Apart from the core group, the remaining workforce comprised students or those in need of jobs who used to stay at or near Krishna Rao’s residence in Machilipatnam or

¹⁰ Notably, the Sri Bagh Pact, which is an unofficial agreement between Andhra and Rayalaseema political leaders, concerning the demand for a separate state for the Telugus (Coastal, Circar and Rayalaseema districts) was inked at Nageswara Rao’s residence.

¹¹ See, Fig 6.1 for an earliest reference of a stringer’s report in *Andhra Patrika*. This practice of publishing pieces written by contributors (not freelancers or columnists) was so common that there were poems written in literary Telugu describing the characteristics and qualities of an ideal *upa-vilēkhakuḍu*. In one such poem, Kokkonda Venkataratnam wrote:

Should be able to grasp the veracity of the news development instantaneously. Should be able to present the context and meaning in a lucid manner. Should neither indulge in false praise nor trouble someone in the write-up. Name, background and whereabouts need to be detailed. These are the essentials of a sub-reporter or sub-writer (Cited in Swamy Naidu, 1994, p. 4) [Translation mine].

¹² Rajagopalrao (2004) noted that one of the reasons for carrying such reports was to encourage writers from remote or mofussil areas and not disappoint them. He also mentioned that *Andhra Patrika* used to publish a space-filler – “write about your village contest” – to promote the culture of writing for newspapers among the publics (p. 39).

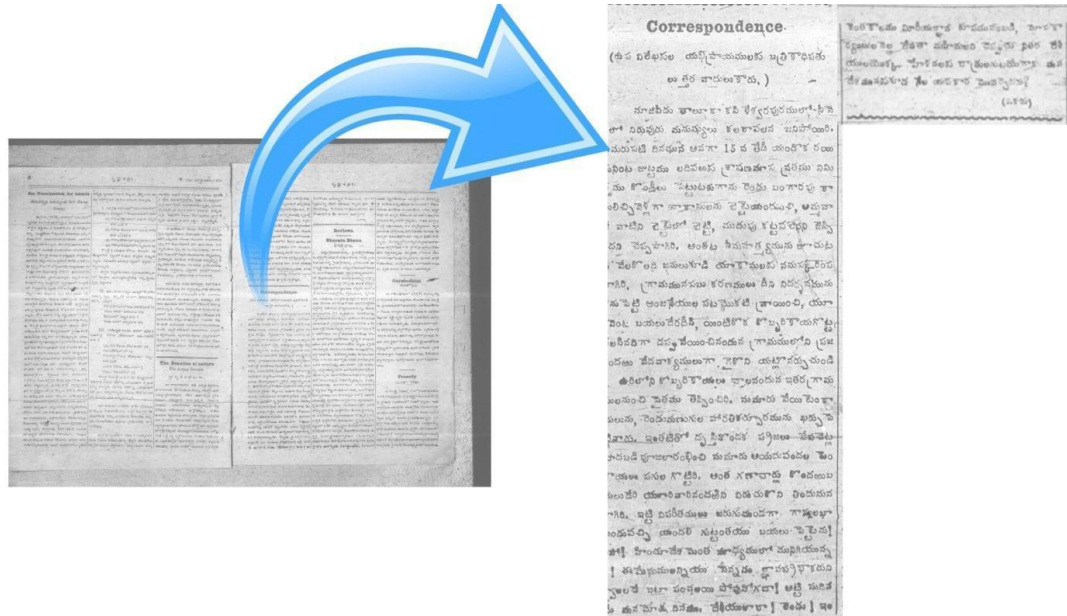
at Nageswara Rao's Sri Bagh in Madras or Durga Vilas in Vijayawada (Rajagopalrao 2004, pp. 72-73; Sharma, 1992, pp. 17-18). Needless to mention that even within the core group and the workforce there were no designated reporters. There was no separate payment or wages for the occasional contributors.

However, regular contributors (part-time) from Barampuram (now Berhampur in Odisha), Rajamahendravaram (Rajahmundry), Kakinada, Nellore, and Hyderabad used to send their reports using postal service without any prior payments. The unwritten agreement between the core group members and the regular contributors was that postal charges will be borne by the former.

The distinction between the regular contributors and writers of grievance letters along with sporadic contributors will be identified by looking at the details and address of the sender. If wages or salaries along with division of labour, among many other criteria, are considered for an occupation to be referred to as a profession, Telugu journalism in those days was not one, as it was more of an avocation.

STRINGING NEWS; EARNING RESPECT: A STRINGER'S REPORT IN *ANDHRA PATRIKA*

Figure: 6.1



Source: Andhra Patrika, 15 August 1902, p. 7. From the personal collection of Para Ashok Kumar, Anantaram village, Guntur.

Notes: This is one of the earliest instances of a report filed by a stringer or local news correspondent in *Andhra Patrika*. The editor/publisher at the beginning of the article makes a disclaimer that reads: “The publisher is not responsible for the opinions written by upa-vilēkhakulu”. The article reports about superstitious activities and irrational rituals carried out by local priests after the death of two persons in Kapileswarapuramu village in Nuzivid taluk (now Krishna district) earlier in the month of August 1902 (date of death unspecified). The writer laments how the “Hindu nation is clouded by ignorance” and hopes that it will soon bask in the “light of knowledge”. For a contemporary Telugu journalist and even reader, it is obvious that the article focusing on a hyper-local event is heavily edited to fit it in the grand narrative of the newspaper’s editorial policy highlighting the grave need for the Hindus to get enlightened and shed superstitions (especially the last paragraph).

What is of relevance for the present chapter is: Apart from not holding responsibility for such articles, managements never paid even the postal charges for contributions by correspondents, as they felt that publishing such articles will instil a sense of pride and respect for the writers (Swamy Naidu, 1994; Rajagopalrao, 2004).

The practice of having reporters with a ‘beat’ or responsibility for an administrative region or district in the Telugu speaking regions falling under Madras Presidency was not prevalent till the advent of dailies such as *Andhra Prabha* (Ramnath Goenka’s Indian Express group; established in 1938), *Visalaandhra* (CPI daily established in 1952), and *Andhra Jyothi* (founded by industrialist K.L.N. Prasad in 1960). With exclusive stories filed by correspondents and reporters, *Andhra Prabha* under the editorship of Narla Venkateswara Rao (V.R. Narla) dislodged *Andhra Patrika* to occupy the position as the leading Telugu daily. However, Narla quit *Andhra Prabha* in 1959 expressing solidarity with the workers’ agitation for payment of wages prescribed by the first wage board and joined *Andhra Jyothi* as founding editor in 1960 (Udayawarlu, 2018, pp. 8-9).

Ironically, even as *Andhra Jyothi* became a leading Telugu daily under the editorship of Narla, working journalists and non-journalist employees did not get wages prescribed by the successive wage boards for working journalists (Innaiah, 2013; Venkateswararao, 2004). Recalling the situation of salary payments in the late 1960s and early 1970s, *Andhra Jyothi* former bureau chief, Innaiah (2013, p. 86) noted, “One Babu Rao was then the *Andhra Jyothi* vendor in Hyderabad. He paid salaries to the daily’s staff from out of his monthly sales collection. As a result, there was no stipulated salary day.” In *Visalaandhra* of the 1950s, an extreme nature of equality prevailed as the chief editor along with full-timers in the desk drawing the same amount of INR 100 per month. Additionally, there used to be a fine of one-quarter of an Anna (*kānī*) for every grammatical error or spelling mistake an editorial staffer made (Venkateswararao, 2004, pp. 386-388).¹³

However, the *Golkonda Patrika*, published from Troop Bazaar, Hyderabad in the Nizam Dominion, unlike its counterparts in Krishna-delta region, gave prominence to dispatches from independent reporters by arrangement, along with the translated foreign wire reports (See, Fig: 6.2). But even these reporters were not full-timers and did not receive any monthly wage. The editorial board members were the only full-time employees and used to commission reports and articles from upcoming authors and poets.

¹³ Four *kānīs* make one Anna and 16 Annas make one Rupee. This currency was in vogue before the *naya paisa* was introduced to decimalise the Indian rupee.

NEWS FROM COUNTRYSIDE: GOLKONDA PATRIKA

Fig. 6.2



Source: Golconda Patrika, 9 July 1927, p. 7. Press Academy archives.

Notes: This page featured reports filed by svakīya vilēkhari (independent correspondent), pratyēka vilēkhari (special correspondent) from mofussil areas. Under the editorship of Telugu literary luminary and lawyer, Suravaram Pratapa Reddy, the newspaper had a dedicated page for such dispatches from areas such as, Gadwal (Mahabubnagar), Manukota (Mahabubabad/Khammam), Atraf-i-Baldah (Rangareddy), Medak, and Warangal in the initial years (Prasad, 2012, pp. 32-33; Venkateswararao, 2004, pp. 280-284). By the early 1930s, the newspaper had reporters from Hammakonda, Khammam, Karimnagar, Nalgonda, Jagityal, Makthal, Kalvakurthi, Suryapet, Mahadevapuram, Wanaparthy, Chennuru, Arutla, Uppala, Secunderabad, Korutla, Shubraveedu, Jeedikallu, Devarakonda, Bhongir, Hujurnagar, Remidicharla, Narayanapet, Gavvalagudem and Warangal (Venkateshwarlu, 2015, p. 253).

On the whole, reporting in the Telugu speaking regions in the pre-independence era was more of an avocation to acquire cultural capital than to gain monetary benefits. Appearance of a report about a political meeting or highlighting a public grievance in newspapers would give instant recognition to writers. At the same time, this invited trouble from the law enforcers from both the Nizam state as well as the colonial rulers throughout the country (Umrigar, 1949, pp. 20-24; Bhaskar, 1988, pp. 31-101).¹⁴

From the biographies, autobiographies, and interviews of senior journalists during the fieldwork, it was evident that the situation of journalists, both full-timers and part-timers, was precarious with no monetary gains and often subjected to political repression. Many journalists hoped that this situation would change in the independent country. Their aspirations and visions were articulated by then parliamentarian Kotamraju Rama Rao in a speech delivered at a working journalists meeting organised at New Delhi:

After August 1947 we were citizens of a free country, with a new destiny beckoning to us. We journalists were not going to live in the cubicles assigned to the workers by the capitalist system. The Fourth Estate had been becoming the Insecure Estate, and that had to be corrected. The new development was inevitable and in fact overdue (1965, p. 263).

Even though the above excerpt reads like a trade union leader's rhetorical speech, journalists believed that a separate wage board for them as suggested in the First Press Commission would bring about a sea change in their wage structure and employment benefits. Since the Working Journalists Act (1955) got Presidential assent, as many as six wage boards were constituted to assess, revise, and update pay scales of working journalists based on the nature of work (designation), standing of the publication (circulation and profits), periodicity, and location among other criteria till date.

Promise of Wage Boards: A view from the field

The idea of coming up with a separate wage board for working journalists was presented in the *Report of the First Press Commission* (GoI, 1954), which stated:

¹⁴ Even as the focus of this study is to trace the labour aspects (wages and organisation of newswork) of journalism in the accounts provided by journalists along with academic research material, there is a possibility to unravel economic significance of the culture that newspapers projected (including the commercial advertising) on the lines suggested by Canadian communication thinker, Harold Innis (1942, 1944). Most of the historical studies focused on the role of the press in a certain movement or freedom struggle or 'draconian' colonial laws that curbed press freedom.

Journalism [is] a highly specialised job and to handle it adequately a person should be well-read, have the ability to size up a situation and to arrive quickly at the correct conclusion, and have the capacity to stand the stress and strain of the work involved. His work cannot be measured, as in other industries, by the quantity of the output, for the quality of work is an essential element in measuring the capacity of the journalists. Moreover, insecurity of tenure is a peculiar feature of this profession. This is not to say that no insecurity exists in other professions but circumstances may arise in connection with the profession of journalism which may lead to unemployment in this profession, which would not necessarily have that result in other professions. [...] These circumstances, which are peculiar to journalism, must be borne in mind in framing any scheme for improvement of the conditions of working journalists (p.193).

The First Wage Board was constituted on 2 May 1956 and the latest one on 24 May 2007 as per the Working Journalists Act (1955). This Act was merged into the Code on Wages (Central) Rules in the year 2020, which stated that the Central Government may, for the purpose of fixing minimum wages under the code for the working journalists (GoI, 2020, p. 59). The responsibility of implementation of the wage board recommendations and inspection of its efficacy was bestowed on respective state governments as per the Working Journalists Act (GoI, 1955, Chapter IV, para 17-B). This clause remained intact even in the new Wage Code (GoI, 2020, p. 18).

The six wage boards that were constituted following the Working Journalists Act (1955) are: 1) Divatia Wage Board Committee, 2 May 1956; 2) Shinde Wage Board Committee, 12 November, 1963; 3) Palekar Wage Board Committee, 11 June, 1975; 4) Bachawat Wage Board Committee, 17 July, 1985; 5) Manisana Wage Board Committee, 2 September, 1994; 6) Majithia Wage Board Committee 24 May 2007.¹⁵

A reading of these reports reveals that the classification or grading of working journalists and non-journalist newspaper employees along with the methodology to

¹⁵ Earlier, the Working Journalists (Conditions of Service) and Miscellaneous Provisions Act, 1955 (45 of 1955) has been amended at several times since its passing by The Working Journalists (Amendment) Act, 1962, Central Labour Laws (Extension to Jammu and Kashmir) Act, 1970, and The Working Journalists (Conditions of Service) and Miscellaneous Provisions (Amendment) Act, 1974 in 1974 to include other Newspaper Employees employed in newspaper establishments. The amended Act has been renamed as the Working Journalists and Other Newspaper Employees (Conditions of Service) and Miscellaneous Provisions Act, 1955. The Working Journalists and Other Newspaper Employees (Conditions of Service) and Miscellaneous Provisions (Amendment) Acts, 1981, 1989 and 1996 have also been passed to amend the original law. See, Mishra (2016) for explanation regarding the amendments. Telugu novels and short stories in the backdrop of journalism, from the 1970s onwards, had a mention about the Wage Board commissions or chairmen of it (See, Nimmagadda, 2020).

fix the wages was getting sophisticated whereas in practice the implementation of the suggestions was getting diluted with each subsequent wage board at the same time. The reports, usually headed by retired Constitutional Court judges (the Supreme Court or High Courts), provide fine and detailed experiences of work experiences of reporters and editors (desk), changes in the newspaper industry along with technological advances, official categorisation of work location (that is, national/state capital, city or town or village) and more importantly the standing of the newspaper or periodical for pay scale grading purposes (See, Mishra, 2016, p. 127). I will limit the present discussion to the Majithia Wage Board recommendations, which suggested:

Every part-time Correspondent and part-time Photographer shall be paid not less than 40 per cent, if he is posted at district head-quarters and above and not less than 30 per cent, if he is posted at place below district headquarters, of the basic wage plus dearness allowance applicable to a full time Correspondent / Photographer at similar level, provided that no part-time Correspondent/Photographer will work for more than two newspaper establishments. In addition, payment shall be paid to him on column basis, the rate of which to be settled by mutual negotiations keeping in view the basic wages and dearness allowances drawn by a part-time Correspondent and part-time Photographer. (p. 71)

These recommendations were restricted only to paper as the managements did not wish to implement them for the benefit of working journalists. I measured the published news items and counted the published photographs of two stringers each in Sangareddy and Gannavaram to calculate the amount they ought to receive for their labour, as per the Wage Board recommendations.

Given that Sangareddy happens to be the district headquarters, the stringer or part-time correspondent ought to receive 40 per cent of the salary a full-time reporter receives (basic pay INR 13,000). And in case of Gannavaram, the stringer ought to receive 30 per cent of the salary of the reporter, as it is placed below district headquarters. In effect, Sangareddy stringers ought to receive INR 5,600 + lineage, whereas Gannavaram stringers ought to receive INR 3,900 + lineage. The tabulated lineage (Table 6.1) presented only 30 and 40 per cent of the basic pay and not inclusive of the dearness allowance to give a rough estimate. This is the payment or quantitative aspect.

Table 6.1

Lineage amount stringers ought to receive from newspaper establishments

Sl. No.	Month	Date/credit line	Column -cm	No. of News articles	Lineage amount in INR	No. of published photos	Amount in INR	Min. pay	Total amount in INR
GS-1	May 2012	Gannavaram	783	91	1,566	34	340	3,900	5,806
GS-2	May 2012	Gannavaram Urban	864	74	1,728	42	420	3,900	6,048
SS-1	Sept. 2014	Sangareddy	1158	146	2,316	86	860	5,200	8,376
SS-2	Sept. 2014	Sangareddy	1364	159	2,728	94	940	5,200	8,868

Source: Fieldwork

Notes: The number of photographs published in Sangareddy was relatively higher than Gannavaram due to the coverage of Bathukamma festival in the district tabloids. And even the number of articles published by the stringers was higher as Sangareddy is the district headquarters. GS – Gannavaram stringer; SS – Sangareddy stringer.

As mentioned in the Wage Board recommendations, the role of a stringer is not a part-timer ‘journalist’ as they were required to do non-journalistic work such as increasing the circulation numbers in the locality and procure advertisements for the newspaper establishment in which they work.

In reality, no stringer receives even these meagre wages for their services to the newspaper establishments. In fact, many stringers for months did not receive even the token amount of the lineage amount. At the time of fieldwork, many stringers did not even bother to check their line account or enquire about the pending amount in the line account from the managements. Instead they focused on procuring local business and political advertisements. Most of the newspapers, instead of giving salaries offer a commission of 20-30 per cent of the advertisements. From time to time, stringers got reminders and alerts from the managements setting ‘target revenue’ for upcoming events or festivals, which included May 1 or the International Labour Day. Most of the time, the journalistic work turned out to be unpaid, while the non-journalistic work seemed to have generated some amount of income for stringers.

Payment of the commission amount to stringers will be deferred in case of any mistakes in the content or placement of the advertisements. In case of any blunders, stringers will be fired without returning the caution deposit lying with the managements and payable pending amount from earlier advertisements. In Sangareddy, the stringer of a Telugu daily established in the 1930s misplaced a birthday wish advertisement of an ex-MLA. Instead of the ex-MLA's photograph, the stringer gave the name and photograph of an incumbent MLA. The desk persons, based in Hyderabad carried it the following day (Field notes, 3 October 2014).

More importantly, Gannavaram stringers pointed out that if they fail to meet the target revenue for two-three consecutive times, they will be fired. In Sangareddy, for some newspapers the pressure builds on for the first failure itself and for some stringers working in small or medium scale newspapers, it was based on 'understanding' with the managements.

The view of management personnel on the non-implementation of wage board recommendations or flouting them, which were gathered from two lengthy interviews, could be summarised as: small-town journalists and especially stringers did not deserve the inflated salaries suggested from time to time by the boards (YKK & ChNR, personal communication, September 2014, Hyderabad). The tone of these two interviewees working in the administration side of two Telugu dailies was as harsh as the chairman and managing director of the Indian Express, Vivek Goenka, who said, "I cannot think of anything more ridiculous," about the wage board recommendations (quoted by Jeffrey, 2010, p. 142). Commenting on the status and working conditions of journalists in Indian-language newspapers, Jeffrey (2010, p. 143) appropriately remarked, "The life of many journalists was hectic, beholden and unsure."

News labour of stringers at the local level in the Indian context was not acknowledged not only in the successive wage boards, which set their perspective aside while fixing the wages, but also in the larger journalistic field and even in academia. My field observations at both locations revealed that the newswork performed by stringers is more or less quantitatively similar (temporal and physical aspects of the work) to that of full-time journalists.

Having considered in this section the precarious nature of small-town journalists and stringers in Indian-language journalism from the inception, Standing's (2011, p. 26) argument that the formation and consolidation of the precariat class is "globalisation's child" emerging in a neo-liberal dystopian situation appeared superficial, as journalism seemed to be a profession that had been and continues to be precarious. But this idea of precarity is worth engaging as it is increasingly gaining significance in journalism studies (Sherwood & O'Donnell, 2016; Mitra & Paterson, 2019; Bunce, 2011; Palmer, 2018; Matthews & Onyemaobi, 2020; Ricketson, Dodd, Zion & Winarnita, 2020).¹⁶ Also, a more concrete engagement with the concept of precarity will be dealt in a later section of this chapter.

Despite the fact that the wage boards allowed stringers or part-time correspondents to work for not more than two news dailies or publications, most of them 'officially' did not avail the recommendation. Instead in the field, most of the newspapers had more than one stringer for the same location in Sangareddy and Gannavaram (urban and rural). This phenomenon was not restricted to Krishna and Medak districts, as it has been a prevalent practice in the Telugu speaking states.

When a stringer got fired from a newspaper, he approached a fellow stringer asking if he can share a beat in the locality or approach a stringer who was an old-timer in the profession to recommend to another newspaper.¹⁷ On one occasion, Gannavaram stringer ARP, who got fired from *Eenadu* without any prior notice, approached a senior stringer DD who in turn made a phone call and got the former appointed as Gannavaram urban stringer, while the latter confined himself to rural beat in the newspaper he works for. The entire hire-fire-and-hire episode highlighted at the same time the precarious nature of the profession at one level and the solidarities among the newswriters at another level.

Based on an estimate by APUWJ, APWJF, TUWJ and TWJF, there are around 20,000 stringers each in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana with almost every Telugu news daily

¹⁶ At the time of writing, it appears that the issue of precarity in the culture industries and media economy will continue to garner attention in the post-pandemic world due to the outbreak of COVID-19.

¹⁷ This situation of asking a fellow stringer to spare a beat reminds one about eminent American sociologist Theda Skocpol's study on work, welfare and employment issues in the post-World War United States (1990, pp. 192-194).

having at least one stringer in the tiny mandals of the districts. Most of them, similar to most of the stringers in Gannavaram and Sangareddy, carry out their newswork along with other duties given to them by their managements without either written contracts or sometimes any stipulated wages or monthly salary. The following section attempts to present the roots of this informalisation of media economy and casualisation of news labour from the beginnings of localisation to the present day.

Recognising the differences and similarities between full-timers and stringers is crucial to understand the issue of news labour as individuals belonging to both classes perform the same journalistic work if the relative importance or priority given to the space of work is set aside, which will be addressed in the following section.¹⁸

Normalising the informal: Rise of news networks in language journalism

One of the features of this field (theory)-based ethnographic study on local journalism is that it problematises approaches that tend to be either merely subjectivist or merely objectivist. My attempt in this work has been to understand the engagements and practices of the agents involved in the field, along with the rules of the field that is marked by its informality.

Most of the time, the localisation strategy was addressed in terms of local revenue generation and proliferation of newspapers and media linking it with increasing literacy rate in the country. There was an emphasis on the content generated by the stringers or local news gatherers in these works, but did not highlight the policy changes and the need for changing the tone of the State-led reports that concerned the journalistic field.¹⁹

Even as recruiting at a very large scale began in Andhra Pradesh of the early 1980s, this was quickly replicated in the Hindi heartland and even in other Indian-language newspapers such as *Sakal* (Marathi) by the early 1990s.²⁰ Terming this notable development in news gathering practice of Indian-language journalism as ‘stringerisation’ would risk limiting this phenomenon to newspaper economy alone,

¹⁸ Space here refers to the pages (district or main editions of the newspapers) of the newspapers along with the location of work (village or small town or urban space).

¹⁹ Ninan (2007, pp. 230-244) did elaborate on how stringers along with civil society activists dealt with developmental policies and discourse at local level.

²⁰ Marathi is the official language of Maharashtra and is the third widely spoken language in India with around 8.3 crore or 83 million speakers.

whereas in reality, it has strong linkages with the larger economy, society and polity as well.

Two important aspects of journalism in India till the late 1970s that are pertinent for the present study are, 1) Newspaper establishments time and again making it clear that they were not in a position to honour or adhere to the recommendations on wages fixed by the successive wage boards; 2) Minimal reportage from small towns and villages. These were crucial in understanding the emergence of stringers and part-time contributors in Telugu language newspapers on an ‘industrial scale.’

The very fact that many legal suits filed in the courts challenging the wage boards will qualify and substantiate the position of newspaper establishments as mentioned in the first point. The second aspect concerning minimal reportage from small towns and villages was addressed by two committees, which captured the zeitgeist of the newspaper industry during the early years of post-Emergency. They were: a) *Report of the committee on news agencies* (1977) under the chairmanship of veteran journalist Kuldip Nayar; b) *Report of the Second Press Commission* (1982a; 1982b).

The two committees had to deal with different objectives. While the Nayar committee pointed out the need for a government-run Indian-language news agency highlighting the linguistic diversity in the country, the Second Press Commission reflected the transformation of the image of print-media from that of an apparatus engaged in the service of national development and bringing about a social change to that of an industry. The Nayar committee report, which in hindsight appeared to be acutely sensitive towards the caste/communal and linguistic issues, faced criticism from the industry as well as some of its members and was shelved (GoI, 1977, p. 95; Shrivastava 2007, p. 57).

Around the same time, facing a lockdown situation a communist-turned-entrepreneur with diverse business interests and operations, Ramoji Rao decided to do away with the formal employment procedure of journalists in order to escape the Wage Board recommendations under the Working Journalists Act, 1955 and floated a surrogate news agency, named News Today. Under the new news agency, recruitment was done entirely on contractual basis flouting the norms.

It appeared as if the Second Press Commission report was resonating the inevitability of clearly mirrored the changing trend in the press industry of those times, when it pointed out:

Newspapers shall still be run by owners, whoever they may be... The production-relations of our society shall not leave them untouched. Even monastic Buddhism, let it be remembered, could not be delinked from the prosperity of trading Vaishya castes, whose emergence made it possible for this non-conformist religion to prosper. The concern of non-linked owners with profitability is likely to be more absolute and obsessive because being non-linked, they would have no other financial resources to cushion their losses, whether the non-linked owners would have any greater flair for or commitment to the profession of journalism is doubtful (GoI, 1982a, Para 36, p. 227).

What the Nayar committee envisioned in terms of news gathering from remote locations, villages and small towns, *Eenadu* with News Today realised it on a grand scale with a profit motive by the end of 1980s with the launch of district tabloid editions across the united Andhra Pradesh (EQC, 1999, p. 118). However, the guidelines suggested by the committee for career growth of employees, democratic values, and non-partisan approach (independent) for correspondents and stringers were compromised to the maximum extent.

The nomenclature (news network) was strategic enough to casualise the entire workforce. From the perspective of labour relations, this marked a watershed moment for journalists in the history of newspapers in this part of the globe. The stringer system of news gathering got consolidated and the newspapers which did not informalise the workforce lost the circulation race by the end of 1980s (for instance, *Andhra Patrika* and *Krishna Patrika*). Barring the left-leaning dailies (*Visalaandhra* and *Prajasakti*), almost every newspaper had established its own news network (See, Table 6.2). In effect, the simultaneous establishment of a news network by even the newly launched news dailies has become a 'norm'. One of the primary reasons for the instant success of the 'Ramoji model' of informalisation was that the same workforce could be used for sister publications and allied businesses.²¹

²¹ To be fair on part of remaining news dailies, they did not adopt the violent strategies employed by *Eenadu*. The management was at loggerheads with the AP newspaper hawkers and newspaper boys union due to differences over the payment of commission. Instead, the management mobilised

INFORMAL NEWS NETWORKS OF SELECTED TELUGU DAILIES

Table: 6.2

Sl. No	Newspaper	News Network
1	<i>Eenadu</i>	News Today
2	<i>Sakshi</i>	Newsline
3	<i>Andhra Jyothi</i>	Online
4	<i>Andhra Prabha</i>	KNN, Prabha News
5	<i>Andhra Bhoomi</i>	News flash
6	<i>Vaaritha</i>	Prabhata Vaaritha
7	<i>Namaste Telangana</i>	T Media
8	<i>Prajasakti</i>	Not applicable
9	<i>Visalaandhra</i>	Not applicable
10	<i>Surya</i>	Major News

Source: Secondary data

Effectively, Telugu news dailies were successful in circumventing the successive Wage Board recommendations even without engaging in any legal battles unlike other news organisations in the country. This normalising of the informal newspaper economy or media economy was so smooth and effective that even English language national dailies along with Indian-language media organisations followed the pattern.

In their memorandum submitted to the Majithia wage board, news networks or services like Express News Service (affiliated to *The New Indian Express*) and Times News Network (*The Times of India*) figured in the list of in-house news networks (Annexure 16, APUWJ, 2009).

Once the journalist unions sought legal means to prove that the news networks should be considered as agencies to ensure that prescribed pay scales are paid to working journalists and won the legal battle, the newspaper managements found a new way of manipulation. The modus operandi was to fudge the numbers or scale of gross revenue in their ledgers to ensure that the wage board recommendations were not applicable (APUWJ, 2009).

Margadarsi chit fund agents to deliver the newspaper to save on the commission. Like many progressive senior journalists who worked with *Eenadu*, Hanumantharao (2014, p. 46) and Venkateswararao (2004, p. 433) mentioned this incident in a tone of guilt, while the in-house silver jubilee anniversary souvenir edition took pride and termed the act as taming of hawkers and agents in Hyderabad (EQC, 1999, p. 137 & pp. 134-135). On a different note, there is not much academic literature on labour of hawkers or newspaper delivery 'boys' in the Indian context. Bekken (1995, pp. 190-226) provided an excellent account of the child labour and exploitation along with underpaid labour in the newspaper industry of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

The ‘normalising’ of the informal economy in the newspaper industry resulted in gross violation of labour rights of journalists. Those journalists (editorial and reporting) who were on the payrolls of news networks as full-timers were denied salaries and benefits prescribed in the wage boards. The situation of stringers was even worse than full-timers, as they had as much work as a full-timer but were not even on the payroll or written contracts of their employers.²² The magnitude of workload and the variety of works, both journalistic and non-journalistic appeared to be much higher than that of full-timers (editorial and reporting staffers).

The terminology used in the State nominated committees and wage boards, and in the language used by the management personnel along with some privileged core group of newspaper organisation, stringers were most of the times referred to as part-time contributors, which did not do much justice to the situation doing full-time work on the ground. As a result, the duties mentioned in the part-time correspondent designation mentioned in the State documents had little relevance to the nature of work of stringers in the field.

Ethnographic observations for the present study and the secondary data collected revealed that the condition of even the staffers (the so-called salariat class) was precarious like that of the stringers due to the informalisation in the newspaper industry. The salaried members of the newspaper organisations had a written and formal contract outlining the emoluments and specifying the conditions despite some problems associated with it, which will be discussed while presenting a couple of brief life-story narratives in the following sub-section.

A majority of stringers did not have any such formal agreement regarding salary or any other specifications even as they had to undergo the recruitment process which was discussed in an earlier chapter. Even in the case of some very large newspapers where there was such an agreement between the employer and the stringer, it was clearly mentioned that the employees can be removed from the position (stringer) without any prior notice. Most of the time, even in such big newspapers firing a stringer happened over a mobile phone call.

²² A comparative study of the news labour of stringers and reporters (both Indian-language and English language dailies) could be a topic of research in the future. At present, it is beyond the scope of this study.

While the informalisation resulted in ‘contractualisation’ of staffers, it resulted in ‘double informalisation’ in the case of stringers (Harriss-White, 2020). As part of employment contracts, a majority of newspapers and periodicals insisted that the employees would not form any union or federation to fight for their benefits and would have to sign a declaration to that effect.²³ Coming to the case of stringers, firstly they had to deal with the regular informal job or work of newsgathering, which was unpaid or underpaid, and were forced to look for other sources of income which were also informal in nature, as mentioned in detail while describing their sources of income other than journalism.²⁴

These aspects of news labour in the journalistic field seemed to have a near-perfect adherence to the forms of informalisation encapsulated by Portes et al (1989). An understanding of the working conditions of stringers and journalists suggested that Guy Standing’s classification of working classes in the neo-liberal era and the distinction between the salariat and precariat seemed to have little relevance in the journalistic field.²⁵

The concept of double informalisation could be a relevant explanation for the stringers engaging in informal activities, including real estate, money-lending, and self-employment activities such as, working as personal assistants to local politicians, labouring in rural employment guarantee schemes, running photocopy centres, and selling subsidised newsprint in the black market after floating a non-existing periodicals registered with the RNI (See, Table: 4.6).

A panoramic view of the study presents a remarkable overlap of the timelines of informalisation becoming a norm and already discussed contingent proposition of *Satshudraisation of media economy and Brahmanisation of work culture* in the Telugu

²³ One senior editor working with a leading Telugu daily in Hyderabad revealed that they were not even allowed to visit the Press Club of Hyderabad, which was located at a walking distance across the road. The same daily fired many a stringer in both Medak and Krishna districts for taking part in APUWJ or APWJF.

²⁴ The consequences of ‘double informalisation’ in other spheres of economic activities were even harsher, especially when viewed from a gender and caste perspective (See, Harriss-White, 2020).

²⁵ Pointing at a range of issues emerging from Indian, Chinese and Latin American economies, Breman (2013) brushed aside Standing’s thesis as a ‘bogus concept’. There was some amount of confusion with the words precariatization and precarization/precariation. While the former version was used by Guy Standing (2011) consistently throughout the work, the latter seemed to be a more accepted term in academic journals and books.

journalistic field. More importantly, this overlapping took place in the Telugu speaking regions (now states) in which the *masculine* political field was dominated by *Sat-shudras*.

In more general terms, the relatively less autonomous field of journalism in a given space or region needs to be understood by situating it alongside or thinking relationally with other fields of power such as, the social field, the political field, and the bureaucratic field (arena of officialdom). This is a mezzo-level understanding of the journalistic field.

To understand the specific logic of practice in the journalistic field, the economic aspect of informality, habitus of agents, existing social and organisational hierarchies needed to be laid out. It is only then the issues of relegation and delegation along with the relation between the dispositions, habitus of agents and the positions they occupy in the journalistic field were revealed in the present study.²⁶ In effect, social reproduction was taking place in the journalistic field with persons from modest backgrounds and marginal communities occupying lower positions or more precarious positions (stringers), while agents with considerably higher amount of social capital found themselves in relatively higher positions within the field, which was marked by informality and precarity.²⁷

The state of affairs in the journalistic field concerning the insecure working conditions prompts one to ask two pertinent questions. They are: 1) what is the reason behind the burgeoning number of stringers in AP and Telangana? 2) Are there any ‘acts of resistance’, collective or individual, on their part to deal with the precarious working conditions in their everyday lives?

²⁶ Drawing on Bourdieu’s field theory, Örnebring, Karlsson, Fast, & Lindell (2018, pp. 1-21) proposed a theoretical model or typology to understand the “space of journalistic work”. They also attempted to address the issue of precarity in the journalistic field. But the social structure and historical conditions present in Indian or South Asian context make it difficult to ‘measure’ forms of capital or to come up with a typological model. See, Harriss-White (2003, pp. 1-42; 2007) for the relationship between the social structure and the south Asian economy and Breman (1996; 2019) for an overview of the labour bondage, capital accumulation, and issues of inequality in the Indian context based on his extensive research for a little more than half a century.

²⁷ See studies done by Harad (2020) and Oxfam India (2019) on the representation of the Bahujans and the Dalits in Indian newsrooms respectively.

Making a generalised observation on the insecure working conditions prevalent across the world during an intervention – *Job insecurity everywhere now* – in Grenoble, France, Bourdieu (1998b) pointed out:

Casualisation of employment is part of a mode of domination of a new kind, based on the creation of a generalised and permanent state of insecurity aimed at forcing workers into submission, into the acceptance of exploitation. To characterise this mode of domination, which, although in its effects it closely resembles the wild capitalism of the early days, is entirely unprecedented, a speaker here proposed the very appropriate and expressive concept of *flexploitation*. [...] These submissive dispositions produced by insecurity are the prerequisite for an increasingly ‘successful’ exploitation [...] (p. 85).

Bourdieu’s observation on the mode of domination seemed to have opened a window to understand the concept of precarity from one of his own conceptual tools, symbolic violence. The following section attempts to address the questions after presenting life-story narratives concerning the exploitation of stringers in newspaper organisations, which flouted the mandatory wage board recommendations along with an engagement with the concept of precarity.

Negotiating precarity in the journalistic field

Editor and publisher Gauri Lankesh was shot dead at her residence in Bengaluru by ‘unidentified men’ on 5 September 2017. She ran an eponymous Kannada language periodical *Gauri Lankesh Patrike* and is known for her positions against Hindutva politics. This incident happened barely months after the government of a contiguous state unanimously passed a bill – “Maharashtra Media Persons and Media Institutions (Prevention of Violence and Damage or Loss to Property) Act, 2017”.²⁸

The following day, working journalists in Hyderabad carried out a protest at Basheerbagh junction against State, political and illegal mafia repression on journalists in the country. Earlier, print and electronic media journalists along with photojournalists (all languages), in a meeting at Desoddharaka Bhavan (TUWJ and APUWJ office) demanded the governments of both the Telugu speaking states to pass a similar bill that ensures protection for journalists (Field notes, 6 September 2017).

²⁸ This bill received Presidential assent on November 8, 2019 and became an Act (GoM, 2019).

There were many such protests and candlelight marches in solidarity with Ms Lankesh across the country.

At the same time, ‘netizens’ who believe in religious majoritarianism virulently expressed themselves against the deceased in various social media platforms. A leading novelist and journalist, Deb (2018) on the killing of Gauri Lankesh in *Columbia Journalism Review* wrote:

A man from Gujarat describing himself as a “garment manufacturer” and “Hindu Nationalist,” one of 1,779 accounts followed at the time by [the Prime Minister of India] Modi, tweeted, “One bitch dies a dog’s death all the puppies cry in the same tune.” Another man posted on Facebook, “Not an iota of sympathy for Lankesh, and the killers should have shredded her body with bullets and even blasted apart her apartment.” He also issued a hit list demanding that five women, all publicly visible authors, journalists, and commentators with politics ranging from liberal to left-wing, also be killed.

This gory murder of a senior journalist was not a stray incident. According to a study done by two independent journalists, there were over 30 officially recorded instances in which journalists were killed during the period 2010-2014 (Seshu & Sarkar, 2019). Pointing that a majority of journalists attacked or killed belong to small towns and villages, working with regional media as stringers, the report, focusing on the time period of 2014-2019 across the country, documented worrisome facts:

There were 198 instances of attacks on journalists during 2014-19, 63 of which were targeted attacks due to their investigative work (p. 7).

There was official data in which at least 40 killings of journalists, 21 of which were directly linked to their professional work. The motive for the remaining 19 killings was either not linked to their work or was unclear (p. 6).

Apart from these physical acts of violence, murders, and assaults, there was a rise in the number of cases of symbolic violence in which both women and men journalists were at the receiving end. These were from a section of the public that believed in religious fundamentalism trolling and slandering journalists on various platforms, who did not adhere to their ideology or concur with their ideas. Among the epithets

hurled against journalists by the right-wing politicians in power, publics and groups were: ‘presstitutes’, ‘libtards’, and ‘*tukde-tukde gang*’.²⁹

These issues were of concern in the Telugu journalistic field too, as I mentioned in detail its relationship with the fields of power in the previous chapters. More importantly, mofussil journalists and stringers in the early 1990s in the united Andhra Pradesh had to face severe State-repression due to the presence of a strong Naxal movement. The extra-judicial killing of Ghulam Rasool was a case in point (PUDR, 1992). The arrests, torture and unlawful detention of journalists by the AP police under the pretext of curbing extremism was a common feature regardless of the political party in power.³⁰

The arrest of an *Eenadu* stringer S. Ramalinga Reddy under the draconian Terrorist and Disruptive Activities (prevention) Act in the year 1990 was still fresh in the minds of experienced stringers and senior journalists with whom I interacted during the fieldwork in Sangareddy. They also mentioned the murder of Veeraboina Yadagiri allegedly by persons belonging to liquor mafia run by a local politician in 2004.

With the universally accepted norm of free press being an indicator of a healthy democracy, there was well-documented data on the subject by rights activists and networks. But theorising the repressive state and its apparatus from a legalist or human rights perspective is beyond the scope of this study. I limit myself to the concepts and conceptualisation of precarity and work insecurity based on the primary and secondary data sets with specific focus on the issues related to news labour.

Understanding precarity

In general, the economic aspects and the material conditions of labour are privileged over the non-material or symbolic ones when it comes to the discussion on the precarity of a particular sector or any sphere of productive activity in the relevant academic literature. Many studies addressed the issue of ‘exploitation of labour’ in factory settings, illegal markets, unorganised sectors, and even in the supposedly

²⁹ While the neologisms presstitutes and libtards needed no explanations, *tukde-tukde gang* meant a gang engaging in divisive politics. In Hindi, *tukdā* means a piece and *tukdē* is its plural form. This surfaced during the coverage of protests against the Citizenship Amendment Act and National Register of Citizens. These protests were often referred to as anti-CAA protests.

³⁰ See, Smith, Ramamoorthy & Murthy (2019) for cases of violence against journalists in India between 2000 and 2018.

organised sector from both Marxist and liberal schools of thought, which need not be mentioned or discussed here.

At the time of fieldwork at both sites, the difficulty was more about how was it possible for the vulnerable newswriters to ‘report’ and ‘bring to light’ issues about even more vulnerable labourers, as I presumed that there was no solidaristic avenue or platform for them to express their plight. Partly, the difficulty was also about the fact that there was not much literature to understand the issue of exploitation in the news or media labour as pointed out by Hesmondhalgh (2017).

The following are the life-stories that accentuated the necessity to understand the issue of precarity on broader terms.

Tormented by police, hallucinating a better world: Life of a stringer

Bonala Ramesh was a stringer working with Udayam daily in the early 1990s. He was brought from Medak town to Gajwel to take part in the first TUWJ meeting (Hello journalist, chalo Gajwel) organised in a function hall (Pragnya gardens), which was attended by working journalists from different parts of the newly formed state.

Even before the audience (including myself) got to know about him, we could not miss his presence for his ‘erratic’ behaviour and for not maintaining decorum required at a union meeting. He went on sloganeering (‘gibberish’) at his will during a series of speeches, as two youngsters accompanying him were trying their best to pacify him. Before providing a monetary assistance of INR 50,000, the then irrigation department minister T. Harish Rao (TRS), mentioned that Ramesh lost his sanity due to the police torture under Andhra leaders. The next speaker (union leader) after Rao revealed the details of the former scribe.

Ramesh joined the profession as a stringer in his early 20s in the newly launched Udayam in 1984. He travelled across the length and breadth of Medak district and reported on atrocities on weaker sections, state-sponsored violence, and repression by the police. While some of his contemporaries went either missing or booked under TADA, the stringer was illegally detained several times and was tortured in the early 1990s. Even after several episodes of such violence, he continued in the profession

with a progressive spirit. But he went missing for weeks in the first year of Chandrababu Naidu (TDP, the year 1995-1996) rule.

Nobody knew what happened to him during that time but was found picking up newspapers from streets and garbage dumping places to read. He lost his speech ability and regained it after some years. With his sister's (a government employee) support, Ramesh was admitted into the Government Mental Health Centre, Erragadda in Hyderabad for treatment but in vain. His nephew told me that Ramesh keeps hallucinating that people's party is in power (*prajā prabhutvam vaccindi*) or is under the illusion that he was still living in the 1980s or 1990s. The former scribe's age was around 50 but could easily pass off as a 65-year-old. (Field notes, Gajwel, Medak (now Siddipet) district, 7 October 2014).³¹

The bane of contractualisation

Despite hailing from a 'police patel' family (now a defunct system), SAK said that love for literature and arts ran in his blood. "My grandfather worked in the Nizam's Deccan Radio and I shared the same fascination for radio programmes. Maybe that could be a major reason for me to get interested in the news and journalism field," he recalled and added that his father was an Urdu poetry aficionado and an admirer of Makhdoom Mohiuddin.

He started his career in a local magazine as an intern for some months in 1996 and joined Andhra Jyothi daily as a stringer. Given his command over language and nose for news, he found himself working for *Eenadu*, a couple of years later. In 1999, he got recruited as a reporter in *Vaaritha* daily. "It was a sensation in those days. Even my seniors in the profession were surprised to see me rise from the position of the stringer to a staffer in such a short time," he reminisced.

In January 2004, he was hit by a truck on the Mumbai highway while on his way from his village Gopalapuram to Patancheru to report about an incident. He was rushed to the ESI Hospital at Ramachandrapuram. "I saw the lorry at a distance and do not remember anything after being hit. I was in RC Puram hospital and by the time I

³¹ According to a report by human rights and civil liberties organisations, there was a bloodbath in north Telangana in the year 1996. The report stated that at least 161 extra-judicial killings took place in Andhra Pradesh (PUDR, 1997, p. ii; p. 11).

gained consciousness, I could not feel my legs,” SAK remembered. It was only after shifting to Hyderabad for better medical treatment, he realised that his lower body was permanently paralysed due to his crushed spinal cord.

The stringer-turned-reporter was always under the impression that monthly cuts from his salary were going to the employees’ provident fund account, which was not the case, he said. He could not proceed legally as there were no salary slips or any related proof of financial transaction with his employer. Even the APUWJ could not come to his rescue as the newspaper management produced a letter, which stated that he resigned from the position five months before the date of the accident. With the help of the union members and local politicians, he managed to receive an amount of INR 15, 000 from the CM Relief Fund. SAK continued to write for magazines and started working as a TV anchor in local channels. (Personal communication, Sangareddy, 1 October 2014).

APUWJ leader DS pointed out that this issue of producing a backdated resignation letter or end of the contract was not limited to this particular case of SAK or the organisation he worked for and became prevalent since the 2000s in the Telugu print media. He revealed that most of these employment contracts for staffers were written in English, which many aspirants fail to understand.

First of all, signing an employment contract with a monthly salary itself was a big thing for many [as stringers were not on the payroll]. In the same manner, we press the ‘enter button’ in the computer [accept software licence agreement] without any second thought, they sign contracts, the former APUWJ president remarked.

The Supreme Court in February 2014 upheld the much-awaited Majithia wage board recommendations.³² The Apex Court ordered:

The wages as revised/determined shall be payable from 11.11.2011 when the government of India notified the recommendations of the Majithia wage boards. All the arrears up to March 2014 shall be paid to all eligible persons in four equal instalments within a period of one year from today and continue to pay the revised wages from April 2014 onwards.

³² Order reproduced in the ministry of labour official website, <https://labour.gov.in/sites/default/files/Wage%20Board%20for%20Working%20Journalists.pdf> [Last accessed on 15 December, 2020].

This resulted in two significant changes in the Telugu print industry. They were: 1) Near-total ‘contractualisation’ of editorial and reporting workforce; 2) Disappearance of news networks. This understanding emerged during the interactions with agents of the journalistic field in Medak district, taking part in union meetings in various parts of AP and Telangana, and informal interactions with scores of senior journalists and editors during literary and cultural events in Hyderabad.

The line accounts of stringers were maintained in separate books and at the time of fieldwork in Sangareddy, only three very large scale newspapers, as per this study’s classification, and one large daily along with two left-leaning newspapers were giving compensation to stringers that ranged from INR 1,000-3,000. By the end of 2019, the situation of stringers in the Telugu speaking states became even more precarious, as the newspaper establishments started firing them in case they did not meet the advertisement and other informal targets set for every three months. One of the reasons for the establishments being strict on the revenue generation by any means from stringers was due to availability of manpower willing to work at mandal and town levels by paying unaccounted and thereby non-refundable caution deposits.³³

A vast majority of staffers had to sign a renewed written contract declaring that they were willing to work for the news organisation forgoing the wage board recommendations for a consolidated amount. Needless to mention that the newspaper establishments can terminate the contract with or without giving prior notice and at the same time did not provide medical insurance or provident fund or basic benefits and entitlements in the new situation.

Considering such ‘prerequisites’ for entering the journalistic field, it was possible to state that entering and sustaining in the profession had become more difficult for women and persons from marginal communities. This situation was similar to what Harriss-White hinted while talking about the relationship between social structure and labour in the informal economy in a different context. She said that social identities “affect the tasks most people do – the kinds, terms and conditions of contracts they

³³ This situation was even more prevalent in television news channels. “Depending on the location and establishment, an identification card from the news organisation could range anywhere from INR 10,000 to 50, 000,” an English language newspaper reporter based in Sangareddy revealed.

are offered, and either settle for or refuse. They make for significant differences to the terms and conditions of work” (2003, p. 21).

This observation by the economic sociologist appeared to have relevance not only for stringers in the Indian-language journalistic field but also for a vast majority of the workforce in the informal media economy. When viewed at a broader level, the working conditions and lack of basic entitlements in the contractual system in the informal media sector had become a part of what was considered as inherent and foundational principles of the field (*doxa*), as a whole. More importantly, there were no avenues or platforms to address issues concerning caste-based symbolic violence (even ability/disability). These concerns had greater significance to understand the precarity in the journalistic field.

Some forms of precarity in journalistic field: A rudimentary formulation

Śrama dōpiḍi is the Telugu equivalent expression to describe ‘exploitation of labour.’ Most of the time, this was the initial response from stringers and reporters in the Telugu speaking states during my fieldwork when asked about the issues, insecurities, and problems they (stringers) faced in their work life. And not even a single journalist union meeting concluded without at least one speaker uttering these two words.

It was only after this initial response that stringers and journalists started talking about the issues of discrimination during formal interviews or informal interactions depending on their convenience. This gradual shift from the quick response – *śrama dōpiḍi* – to pressures and discrimination they faced within and without the field was strikingly similar to the shifting grounds of alternative (both parliamentary and non-parliamentary) politics from leftist to identity movements based on caste, gender, and region in the Telugu speaking states in the past six decades.

As mentioned earlier, there was a lack of scholarship on the issue of news labour and the precarious conditions in which agents work in the informal media economy; the materiality was privileged over the arbitrary or the symbolic even within the available corpus. The work of New York University professor Andrew Ross (2009) was a case in point, which dealt with the issue of precarity more on the economic and neo-liberal market perspective with little on the non-material aspects surrounding it even while discussing the culture and consciousness industries along with the media sector.

Also, Guy Standing's (2011) understanding of precariatization as a class-in-the-making or his theorisation that "[b]esides labour insecurity and insecure social income, those in the precariat lack a work-based identity" (p. 12) appeared to provide either a limited economic explanation, which was only one aspect of news labour, or an understanding that had little relevance to the present context.

The issue of lack of work-based identity was something which was not applicable to even stringers as they commanded a considerable amount of capital in the limited area of their operation, however minute it may appear when compared to their counterparts in other media or staffers within their organisation. Unlike other informal sectors, the agents in the journalistic field possess what was called as journalistic capital and the contributing factors or sources of it (roles and habitus) were discussed elaborately in the previous chapter.

But in the present context, having considered the nature of State repression on journalists at various levels (which was a common feature regardless of the political party or ideology at the helm), life-stories of some selected stringers within the Telugu journalistic field and the informality associated with the field, an understanding of precarity demanded a thorough understanding of the modes of social discrimination, the legal and legislative conundrum along with the economic aspects simultaneously.

How can we understand the issue of precarity in the relatively less autonomous journalistic field marked by its informality along with the existing social inequalities and political conditions? While grappling with the question, a reading of American philosopher Judith Butler's (2004; 2009) contribution to the concept of precarity appeared to have greater significance and relation while understanding the news labour in the journalistic field.

Her philosophical treatise – *Precarious life* – in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks in the United States, suggested that the concept of precarity cannot be understood without considering the arbitrary nature of the social and political conditions along with the economy (pp. xii-xiv, 62, 83, 113-14 & 116). In other words, for Butler, the arbitrary or the symbolic was as important as the materiality or the economic conditions to understand precarity. This work also offered constructive criticism about

the role of journalism and public intellectuals in times of “heightened nationalist discourse, extended surveillance mechanisms, suspended constitutional rights, and developed forms of explicit and implicit censorship,” which makes it even more relevant for the present study.

In a later work that dealt with the issues of precarity and performativity concerning sexual politics, Butler (2009, p. ii) further broadened the definition by stating that precarity was a politically induced condition,

- in which certain populations suffer from failing social and economic networks of support and become differentially exposed to injury, violence, and death.
- of maximised vulnerability and exposure for populations exposed to arbitrary state violence and to other forms of aggression that are not enacted by states and against which states do not offer adequate protection.

Probing into much more nuanced understanding of the idea of precarity would not be possible without the ethnographic observations, interviews and working journalists’ union meetings, and secondary data I collected from periodicals run by working journalists such as *Pratispandana* (Telugu), *Working Journalist* (Telugu), and *Scribes News* (English). A considerable amount of archival work and secondary literature helped me move beyond the limited materialistic conception of the idea of precarity. Following the standard coding procedures of Grounded Theory, the data was organised into thematic categories and it was only then I could see the inadequacy of understanding the precariousness of agents only in terms of economic aspects.

The rudimentary forms of precarity in the journalistic field are: 1) *Economic precarity*; 2) *Symbolic precarity*; 3) *Precarity that emerges out of vacuity of legal and constitutional provisions or the lack of their effectiveness or implementation in reality*. These three forms as they appear are not mutually exclusive or watertight categories. The connections between each form of precarity with the rest were evident throughout this chapter.

First, the *economic precarity*, which emerged out of the exploitation of news labour in the informal media economy, was fairly the easiest to understand. Most of the works that dealt with the idea of precarity in media addressed it on the material and economic aspects (class nature), even as the literature on the topic in the Indian context was scarce (See, Remesh, 2018; Örnebring, Karlsson, Fast & Lindell, 2018; Örnebring, 2018; Löfgren Nilsson & Örnebring, 2016; O'Donnell & Zion, 2019; Ross, 2009). The lack of job security and career growth coupled with the lack of protection of salary and allied economic problems faced by stringers and staffers comprised the sources of economic precarity in the field.

Second, the *symbolic precarity* was a form of precarity that emerged from the insecurity faced by the agents within and without the field basing on the non-material markers of discrimination such as caste, gender, religion, region/space and ability/disability. The present study argues that this under-theorised form of precarity in the journalistic field was not addressed adequately without which we cannot understand the issue of news labour. As much as the disparities in wage structure based on social hierarchies (*peddā-cinnā*), the issue of symbolic precarity was crucial in understanding the insecurities faced by certain agents based on their social capital, the positions they occupy in the social space as well as the professional space (the concept of relegation).

Apart from the issue of relegation, the symbolic precarity provided the rationale to the aspect of delegation in journalistic practice (“mind your own business”, “know your limits”, “we are not *pātradhārs* but mere *sūtradhārs*”) discussed in the previous chapter, when stringers could not file stories that they would want to or their stories getting spiked by editorial staffers or screened by reporting heads.

This form of precarity associated with the journalistic field also explained the absence of women as stringers and reporters in mofussil areas, persons from sexual minorities, and under-representation of persons from modest backgrounds in key-roles along with near-absence of persons from Scheduled Tribe category. Hegde (2014, pp. 92-101) brilliantly detailed how important the issue of “gendered precarity” was in the complex intersection of media and power before suggesting that there was a greater need for transnational readings of the politics of gender and mediated environments. There was every possibility to deal with caste precarity, religious precarity, and

cultural precarity among others. But it was termed as symbolic precarity as it could prove to be a useful concept to encompass such identity-based or non-material insecurities within and without the field along with the intersectionality of such sub-categories.

The third form of *precarity emerging out of the vacuity of legal and constitutional provisions* or the lack of implementing them was self-explanatory. Firstly, it was the lack of legal protection for journalists from State oppression, which resulted in the violation of human rights and killings, torture and illegal detention of journalists leading to violence, injury and death. Secondly, legislative Councils and Assemblies passing press acts to regulate and control not only media organisations but also mediapersons barring them to write against the government. Thirdly, the lack of any official grievance redressal mechanism or platform for journalists to present their case on a range of issues such as termination of services without prior notice, various kinds of discrimination they faced within the field and from sources outside of it, and malfeasant media organisations that deny basic wages, which fell under the purview of state government but got ignored conveniently.³⁴

The non-implementation of Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013 is another case in point. These were only some of the issues that were noticed during the course of fieldwork and thereby the list presented was not a comprehensive one.

Noticeably, the above three rudimentary forms of precarity in the relative autonomous journalistic field were interlinked to each other. Ignoring these forms of precarity in the journalistic field would lead to a failure in understanding the social, political, and economic conditions in which it operated.

³⁴ An expert commentary on the first two kinds of insecurities emerging out of lack of legal provisions and related issues about journalism can be found in the writings of practising advocate and legal commentator Noorani (1982a, 1982b, 1984, 1987, 19992, 2000, 2006 & 2009). These select articles provided an excellent understanding of the concerns pertaining to the nature of work and the legality. The non-implementation of the Employees Provident Funds (EPF) and Miscellaneous Provisions Act, 1952 in newspaper establishments was a classic example even as it offered special provision for working journalists which was included in the Working Journalists Act, 1957 (See, GoI, 1952, chapter X, Para 80, pp. 87-90).

Journalists' unions and collective action

What accounted for the burgeoning number of stringers in the Telugu journalistic field in particular, which was marked by its informality and precarious working conditions? How were the journalists' unions and federation collectively addressing these issues to safeguard the basic rights of stringers in particular and journalists in general? This sub-section briefly addresses these questions, while presenting the successes and shortcomings of the journalists' unions, in AP and TS, grounded with secondary data about journalists from government sources across the country.

German political theorist Isabell Lorey (2015) offered a brilliant follow-up research work on the concept of precarity propounded by Butler in *State of insecurity: The government of the precarious*. Despite the fact that the work emerged in the European context, the general theoretical formulations were relevant to the present research on journalism. Stating that Butler formulated ontology of precarity that cannot be understood apart from social and political conditions, Lorey (2015, p. 18) wrote:

These conditions enable historically specific modes of being, making it possible for bodies to survive in a certain way, which would not be viable without their being embedded in social, political and legal circumstances. At the same time, however, it is precisely these circumstances that endanger life. For this reason, according to Butler, it is important to focus on the political decisions and social practices through which some lives are protected and others are not.

Even though performativity was the core concern of precarity, in general, some of the philosophical arguments that Butler made resonated with some concepts and propositions by Bourdieu in his huge body of academic work. A critical engagement with Bourdieu's work alongside Butler's meditation on Levinas on the issue of precarity by Lorey while addressing the nature of the welfare State as a government of the precarious was another testimony for the "way of thinking in alliance" aspect between the two philosophers (Chaillan, 2018).

Riding around in the field with stringers as part of the ethnographic work and attending working journalists' meetings did not result in an extensive idea about the nature of the State (governing body). But it was only while classifying the data, I did

realise that there were many faces of the State and how it operated in the journalistic field.

The workings of the State on the field were interesting and arbitrary as it was a repressive State at once and at the same time a welfare State. Apart from these two faces, it also had a third face, which allowed informality to thrive in the field, which was a major cause for the economic precarity.

And the responses to those faces of the State from journalists' unions were democratic protests against the State repression, while engaging with the welfare State, and bringing out the parliamentary leftist rhetoric against the (neo-liberal) State siding with the corporate media houses that flout the norms. The premise for the role of working journalists' unions in India to fight for their rights was visible in the rhetorical writing of the founding editor of *National Herald* Kotamraju Rama Rao, who wrote:

Working journalists of India had their "October Revolution" in 1950 when they met in Delhi and decided to form a nation-wide organisation to protect their rights as a group and their fundamental rights, and those rights which indirectly issue from the Directive Principles of the Constitution such as the right to a decent wage. They met also to defend the journalists' position against the increasing assaults of the owners greedy for power and vigorously to restate the freedom of the press and of the individual, which provide the basic defence of democracy. It was an event of high significance in the history of modern India, *for the journalists were shedding false notions inherent in the bourgeois mind, and linking their fate to that of the working classes*. They were no longer to be a struggling, unorganised lot, they were evolving an organisation of their own, they were girding up their loins to fight (1965, p. 263) [Emphasis mine].

At a working journalists' conference organised in Hyderabad, the parliamentarian promised to bring about an act of Parliament to secure benefits and advantages for journalists. Thus came into effect the Working Journalists' Act, which consistently failed to secure the wage rights of working journalists over the years. On the ground, the unions did not fall for this rhetoric of "working journalists unite" and instead focussed on securing basic rights for working journalists through negotiations with the welfare State with the employers time and again denying them benefits and emoluments prescribed by the wage boards.

The APUWJ in united AP was one of the strongest unions in the country along with the Bombay Union of Journalists and Kerala Union of Journalists (Mazumdar, 2019, p. 38). While the State with its different forms (repressive, welfare and neo-liberal) continued to carry out peculiar jugglery, journalists' unions in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana engaged in making corresponding moves to push their 'demands', which could not be realised from the newspaper establishments in various ways with relative success. Some of them include, a) procuring accreditation cards for working journalists at various levels (mandal, district and state-level); b) housing schemes; c) medical insurance and allied facilities; d) free transport facility for stringers and staffers in state-run road transport services.

Most of the schemes that applied to persons below poverty line (BPL) were being offered to stringers who were given accreditation cards at mandal level (MRO) and some of them were even provided with 1.5 to 3 cent area land (653-1306 sq. ft.) in the mandal they work for. While the mandal level stringers were given AP and Telangana Road Transport Corporation bus pass to travel in the revenue division for free, the district headquarter level journalists can avail free transport facility to travel across the district, whereas, the state-level accreditation card would allow journalists to travel across the state at a very nominal tariff.

The collective bargaining of the members of journalists' unions with the governments enabled them to avail facilities such as *Aarogyasri* (a health scheme) or *Gruhakalpa* (housing scheme), which were otherwise allocated for persons from BPL in both Andhra Pradesh and Telangana. Some of these factors could be the possible reasons for the presence of a very large number of stringers in the Telugu speaking states when compared to the rest of the states in the country (See, Table 6.3).

This data was collected from the information and public relations website of every state and the number of publications of each state was procured from the RNI office. The accredited journalists' list of New Delhi was collected from the Press Information Bureau, which issued it. One of the significant achievements of the working journalists' unions in AP (13,506) and TS (10,309) was making the accreditation rules as inclusive as possible. These two states were followed by Madhya Pradesh (3,998) and Maharashtra (2,920) respectively. The next two states/UTs with the most number of accredited journalists were New Delhi (2,441) and Haryana (1,197) respectively.

While AP and TS unions bargained for more democratic and inclusive accreditation rules, journalists' unions in Maharashtra pushed the government to come up with a legislative act that protects journalists from violence, which was accepted as mentioned earlier.

And the Karnataka Media Academy had a special component plan for the benefit of Scheduled Caste graduates encouraging them to be part of the print and broadcast media. "The Union provides computers, desktop printers, and cameras to those aspirants from marginal communities along with providing nominally paid internship after offering training to persons from the Dalit background," office-bearer Karnataka Working Journalists Union office-bearer, TAS said.

This was an important aspect which journalists' unions both AP and Telangana appeared to have conveniently ignored: the caste question. Very similar to the responses of the edition in-charges and management personnel, even the APUWJ or TUWJ (to an extent) did not wish to address discrimination faced by persons from marginal communities or any attempts to make the field more inclusive. Even leaders from AP Working Journalists' Federation (APWJF) and Telangana WJF, which were politically affiliated to the CPI (M) did not wish to engage with the question during my interactions with them.

STATE-WISE ACCREDITED JOURNALISTS IN INDIA

Table: 6.3

Sl. No	State	No. of accredited journalists	No. of registered publications
1	Andhra Pradesh	13,506	3,319
2	Arunachal Pradesh	58	24
3	Assam	116	296
4	Bihar	690	489
5	Chattisgarh	Not Available	1,245
6	Goa	105	67
7	Gujarat	Not Available	4,041
8	Haryana	1,197	864
9	Himachal Pradesh	396	169
10	Jharkhand	205	338
11	Karnataka	819	4,199
12	Kerala	905	1,639
13	Madhya Pradesh	3,998	8,314
14	Maharashtra	2,920	10,337
15	Manipur	42	39
16	Meghalaya	97	27
17	Mizoram	120	58
18	Nagaland	26	11
19	New Delhi*	2,441	5,566
20	Odisha	91	1,178
21	Punjab	228	721
22	Rajasthan	180	3,105
23	Tamil Nadu	Not Available	3,465
24	Sikkim	Not Available	83
25	Telangana	10,309	982
26	Tripura	111	62
27	Uttar Pradesh	137	9,425
28	Uttarakhand	Not Available	2,554
29	West Bengal	Not Available	1,547

Sources: <https://www.arunachalpradesh.gov.in/press-media/> (Arunachal Pradesh);
<https://iprd.assam.gov.in/portlets/accredited-journalists> (Assam);
<http://210.212.23.61/pdf/files/journalist.pdf> (Bihar); <https://dip.goa.gov.in/accreditation-of-journalists.php> (Goa);
[https://prharyana.gov.in/sites/default/files/Media%20Corner/Accredited%20media%20persons%20of%20Haryana-website_sep%202018%20\(1\).pdf](https://prharyana.gov.in/sites/default/files/Media%20Corner/Accredited%20media%20persons%20of%20Haryana-website_sep%202018%20(1).pdf) (Haryana);
<http://himachalpr.gov.in/Default.aspx?Language=1> (Himachal Pradesh);
<http://prdjharkhand.in/iprd/apa/approved%20press%20accreditation1.pdf> (Jharkhand);
[https://dipr.karnataka.gov.in/storage/pdf-files/Accounts/ANNUAL%20REPORT%202018-19\(eng\)%20.pdf](https://dipr.karnataka.gov.in/storage/pdf-files/Accounts/ANNUAL%20REPORT%202018-19(eng)%20.pdf) (Karnataka); <https://www.prd.kerala.gov.in/home-1> (Kerala);
<https://www.mpinfo.org/MPinfoStatic/Hindi/Accreditation/Journalist-Card.asp> (Madhya Pradesh);
<https://cmdashboard.maharashtra.gov.in/scheme/facilities-registered-journalist> (Maharashtra);
<http://diprmanipur.in/infoApp.aspx?par=Accredited%20Journalist> (Manipur);
https://megipr.gov.in/local_media.html (Meghalaya); <http://www.pibaizawl.nic.in/pib/journalist.htm> (Mizoram); <https://pib.gov.in/newsite/AccMediaList/AccPressMediaNagaland.pdf> (Nagaland);
<http://pibaccreditation.nic.in/acriindexall.aspx> (New Delhi); <https://enews.nic.in/pdf/STATE.pdf> (Odisha); <http://diprpunjab.gov.in/?q=content/media-list> (Punjab);
<http://dipr.rajasthan.gov.in/content/dam/dipr/Accredited%20Journalist%20Information/MediclaimCardList.pdf> (Rajasthan); <https://ica.tripura.gov.in/Accredited-Journalists> (Tripura);
<http://information.up.nic.in/attachments/files/59f17ae5-b9d8-4ddc-abc4-402fc0b97065.pdf> (Uttar Pradesh)

*Figures refer to the National Capital Territory of Delhi (NCT) and not National Capital Region (NCR).

Stringers from marginal communities at both Gannavaram and Sangareddy complained that even these facilities were given to persons from influential castes and backgrounds. “I had to struggle for more than eight years to get a two-cent area plot under the BPL scheme, while a stringer from influential caste got his third plot due to his position in the working journalists’ union,” Gannavaram stringer, SSS at the time of fieldwork informed me (Personal communication, Gannavaram, 18 May 2012).

A major criticism against the APUWJ and TUWJ leaders from other federations and forums was that unions were making the fourth estate dependent on the State in the collective bargaining process to secure basic entitlements for journalists and stringers and thereby compromising or losing their right to question it. Another criticism from stringers against the union leaders was that they landed from Hyderabad and preached about paid news or journalism without addressing the wage issue of stringers in remote and mofussil areas.³⁵

At the same time, APWJF and TWJF leaders pointed out that the APUWJ members indulged in proposing and securing bourgeois demands and failed to address the root cause of the problem – systemic failure (*patanam avutunna vyavastha*) and the exploitation due to capitalist system (*pettubaḍidāri vyavastha*). “The union leaders (APUWJ or TUWJ) were always interested in pushing their agendas to secure plum positions in the government such as chairmen of Press Academies or becoming media advisers to the government,” an APWJF leader pointed out. But this particular criticism against the union leaders appeared to be too idealistic, as trade union leaders most of the times were accused of having their hands grimy and minds opportunistic. And, such criticism from rival or competing unions will only keep a tab on the dominant unions to help fight for the rights of working journalists.

The final chapter will address the question: What was the driving force behind a large number of stringers to engage in unpaid work in mofussil areas? While addressing the question, the ethnographic observations on the rituals in the journalistic field and strategies between stringers and agents from other fields will be presented after providing a summary and discussion of the thesis.

³⁵ APUWJ claimed credit for coining the word paid news in the country, which was asserted by former president of the union Devulapalli Amar on various platforms and occasions. Also, see Sharma (2013) and Mazumdar (2019).

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION: THE PURSUITS AND PURPOSES OF A STRINGER

The press brings into play an overabundance of information, which can be all the more provocative the more it is exempt from any use. (Only the ubiquity of the reader would make possible utilization; and so the illusion of such ubiquity is also generated.) The actual relation of this information to social existence is determined by the dependence of the information industry on financial interests and its alignment with these interests. – As the information industry comes into its own, intellectual labour fastens parasitically on every material labour, just as capital more and more brings every material labour into a relation of dependency.

– Walter Benjamin, 2002, p. 447.

First comes the meal, morals follow on.

– Bertolt Brecht, 2007, p. 57. (Act Two, Scene Six, *The threepenny opera*)

Set in the small-town backdrop of Mirzapur in Uttar Pradesh, the crime and political fiction thriller, *Mirzapur* went on to become one of the most successful and popular web series on digital platforms in India. Between the two digital releases of season 1 and 2 of the series, in 2018 and 2020 respectively, a real and shocking incident that happened in a government school in Mirzapur district captured public attention across the country in the last week of August 2019. In a journalistic exposé by a stringer, Pawan Jaiswal working with *Jansandesh Times*, school authorities were caught serving *rotis* (Indian bread) with only (rock) salt as an accompaniment in the midday meals for school children.

Media outlets reported that the *Jansandesh Times* stringer, who video-graphed the entire ‘salt-roti episode’ that went viral, was arrested by the local police after filing a First Incident Report (FIR) against him. In the FIR, the local police officers charged the stringer, who was carrying out journalistic work, with criminal conspiracy and of being involved in ‘despicable work’ and booked him under relevant sections of the Indian Penal Code. However, they ended up giving a clean chit to the local reporter.¹

¹ See, <https://thewire.in/media/mirzapur-journalist-booked-mid-day-meal>; <https://www.indiatoday.in/india/story/up-case-against-journo-who-exposed-roti-salt-mid-day-meal-at->

The Press Council of India took *suo-motu* cognisance of the issue and constituted a fact-finding committee to look into the issue (PCI, 2019).

This incident triggered many debates on various television and social networking platforms that raised questions about the working conditions of local news reporters in Indian-language journalism. Even the newspapers condemned the incident in their views columns and editorials with clichéd appeals such as, “Don’t shoot the messenger” and “Save the messenger”. In the Delhi, Hyderabad, and Mumbai journalists’ WhatsApp groups of which I am a part, some journalists even took a phenomenological position of the Mirzapur stringer while they ranted how the fourth estate ought to be and lamented about its present state.

The concerns expressed in the debates, editorials, and discussions gave me a sense of *déjà vu*. The present research attempted and endeavoured to address questions that did not limit to these alone but on a range of issues surrounding stringers and news production in Indian-language newspapers.

My research, which uses field theory to look at the role and position of the stringers in Indian-language journalism, is still a work in progress. There is still more to problematise and conceptualise on the topic of research than to stop and conclude. I summarise some of the notable arguments of this study in the following paragraphs.

A challenge I faced while carrying out this study on stringers in mofussil areas was to narrow down on the research method. This particular study demanded rigorous vacillations between research questions, theory, field/data, and secondary literature. I discussed this methodological traversing in a self-reflexive manner in chapter 2. Apart from the research method, I explained how the idea of space and region were central to understanding the journalistic field.

One would be doing injustice to the rich data the field offered if it were to be ‘fitted’ into an existing model or a dominant theoretical perspective. Instead, this study exacted a framework from the ground keeping the data and dynamics of the field,

[mirzapur-school-1594449-2019-09-02](https://www.mirzapur-school-1594449-2019-09-02); <https://thewire.in/government/up-police-gives-clean-chit-to-scribe-who-shot-salt-roti-midday-meal-video>. For the visuals of the midday meal inserted in a news report by NDTV see, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e6_lyCznCuQ [Last accessed on 15 December, 2020].

such as caste, community, communication, and polity in focus. Having observed the dynamics within the relatively less autonomous journalistic field, I integrated Ambedkarite social philosophy into Bourdieusian field theory to understand the markers of discrimination and resistance. This was discussed in Chapter 3, which provided a conceptual understanding of the journalistic, social, and political fields, which, in turn, served as a foundation for the following three core empirical and data chapters.

Along with unravelling of the gendered nature of the journalistic field, chapter 4 dealt with the social background of its agents. The absence of women at the ground-level indicated not only the masculine domination extant in the field but also hinted at the precarious nature of the work of a stringer. Based on the primary and secondary data sets, the chapter presented the ethnographic experience of the recruitment process of stringers and explained various types of recruitment of stringers and staffers. It discussed the relationship between the forms of capital and social space of the individual/agent, and the position occupied in the journalistic field. Based on the dispositions of the agents, this chapter introduced the concept of relegation, while dealing with the aspect of reproduction in the field, which laid out a basis for the logic of local journalistic practice.

One of the significant contributions of this study was the critical engagement with the approaches of political economy and sociology/ethnography of news production while dealing with the overlapping social and journalistic hierarchies in the field. Furthering on the concept of relegation, I also discuss the concept of delegation in newswork, which elucidated the above-mentioned overlapping. While presenting journalism as a field of cultural production, chapter 5 dealt with professional roles, various forms of hierarchies, social and economic aspects, and the shaping of journalistic practices in the local journalistic field.

This chapter not only discussed the contingent proposition of *Sat-shudraisation of media economy and Brahmanisation of work culture*, but also presented the drive of individual agents from being mere *pātradhārs* (role-players) to becoming *sūtradhārs* (ones who mastered the rules of the game) while carrying out newswork in the journalistic field. The descriptions of some of the events I mentioned from the fieldwork highlighted how the caste-habitus of agents and political affiliation

of the news establishments, which seemed to have had a considerable influence on reportage by stringers in the Telugu journalistic field.

Another crucial intervention made by this research was that of news labour. Chapter 6 presented the vacuity in addressing this aspect, which appeared to be a blind spot in journalism studies in the Indian context. Before discussing the issues of informality and precarity associated with the journalistic field, I presented how journalism as a profession has been informal from the inception in the Telugu speaking lands.

This particular chapter relied on secondary literature, including Press Commission reports, Wage Board reports, government policies, and biographies and autobiographies of journalists along with ethnographic observations to present the material conditions of the field in which stringers carried out newswork. A significant feature of the journalistic labour of stringers in mofussil areas was that it was unpaid on most occasions. This, in turn, left stringers to rely on non-journalistic work to support themselves and also engage in some other informal work to eke out a living. I pointed out that even full-timers or staffers were also in a vulnerable condition in the field, if not as bad as the situation of stringers.

In the chapter, I also stressed how the symbolic aspect of news labour was as important as the materiality, while dealing with the issue of precarity in the journalistic field. Building on the studies that brought the aspect of economic precarity in journalism and media fields to prominence, I emphasised that the symbolic and policy aspects were equally pertinent. Based on first-hand, documented life-stories from the field, ethnographic observations, and secondary literature such as magazines of various journalists' unions, I encapsulated forms of precarity in the journalistic field. The role of journalists' unions in securing rights of newswriters was also discussed in the chapter.

More importantly, in both chapters 5 and 6, I presented the Janus-faced localisation strategy, which, on the one hand, resulted in the democratisation of entry into the journalistic field, but, on the other, led to contractualisation of jobs, violation of Wage Board recommendations, and informalisation becoming a norm.

In short, chapter 4 addressed questions such as – *who* are stringers; *what* is the nature of the field; *how* does recruitment happen in it. While chapter 5 attempted to answer – *what* are the roles of agents and hierarchies in the journalistic field; *how* do stringers carry out newswork; and *how* do the agents negotiate with their identity while taking part in the news production process. Chapter 6 sought to answer questions – *what* are the material conditions of news labour, when the informalisation strategy began to take place on a large-scale in the Indian-language journalism (in post-independent India), and *what* are the noticeable forms of precarity in the journalistic field.

One of the questions that remained unanswered was: *Why* do stringers continue to carry out newswork given the informal and precarious nature of news labour? I did not give prominence to the non-journalistic work of stringers within the field, as in the case of journalistic labour in the core chapters. The non-journalistic work of stringers appeared to be interesting enough, if not as important as the news labour, to be mentioned and discussed briefly based on some ethnographic glimpses from the field.

The following section deals with the non-journalistic work along with the rationale given by stringers for continuing in the field. A discussion on the limitations of the research work and possibilities for future research will follow before I conclude.

Journalistic capital, non-journalistic work, and repertoire of stringers

One of the crucial aspects of Bourdieusian field theory is the conversion of capital from one form to the other in the field concerned. At the outset of the fieldwork, I realised the importance of the concept of ‘journalistic capital’ a stringer possessed and explained how it mattered for him to become *sūtradhār* from that of being a *pātradhār* in a later chapter.

While engaging with the idea of precarity in news labour, I pointed out how, unlike other precarious workers, acquiring this form of capital gave stringers a sense of identity in their immediate surroundings or locality. Also, the relationship between social capital and journalistic capital was discussed while dealing with the roles and hierarchies in the field and the spaces agents occupy in it.

In this section, I present how journalistic capital of stringers converts into economic capital or gets utilised in augmenting their social capital, while providing details of their repertoire and descriptions of non-journalistic work. While relations of domination/discrimination could be witnessed in the journalistic work, capillaries of affirmation and resistance, though in a limited manner, could be noticed in the non-journalistic work of stringers in the field.

In this section, firstly, I present a repertoire of mofussil stringers with specific focus on the non-journalistic work. Secondly, I encapsulate a range of reasons stringers offered at the time of fieldwork for continuing in the precarious jobs. Thirdly, I lay out the perceptions of stringers about work and ethics.

A field-based understanding of non-journalistic work

Be it due to acquisition of linguistic capital by way of working in newspapers for a long period of time or simply due to accumulation of worldly wisdom needed to perform tactical manoeuvrings in their immediate locality of operation, stringers operated as mediators or facilitators between the government administration, local politicians, and the local public.

There has been a considerable body of research in the political science and public administration disciplines to understand the role of ‘*pyraveekars*’ and ‘small-time political fixers’, while focusing on rural institutions or the functioning of the State at the ground-level (Reddy & Haragopal, 1985; Manor, 2000). Writing in the mid-1980s, Reddy and Haragopal (1985, p. 1149) noted:

In rural India the gap between the administration and the people is filled by the “middleman” or “the fixer” – the *pyraveekar*, as he is familiarly called. It is a matter of common knowledge that the *pyraveekar* has come to play an important role in the public affairs of rural India [...].

They explained, “[T]he word *pyraveekar* was derived from the Persian word *pyrov*, which means follower or one who pursues, and *kar*, which refers to work. Pyraveekar, therefore, means one who follows up work” (p. 1149). Political scientist James Manor (2000), while updating this study, pointed out:

These people are middlemen (and nearly all are still male) who serve as crucial political intermediaries between the localities (*sic*) and powerful figures (bureaucrats and, especially, politicians) at higher levels. [...] They also provide critically important assistance to politicians, especially but not only at election time (p. 817).

My ethnographic observations revealed that many stringers carried out some tasks which were similar to the ones performed by the *pyraveekars* and small-time political fixers. The experienced ones, especially, seemed to have their own way of dealing with various groups by showering adages and proverbs along with liberal doses of wordplay along with working for politicians as publicists.² Based on these observations, I present some of the roles played by stringers while carrying out non-journalistic work.

Stringer as petty pyraveekar

The combined Medak district with its headquarters at Sangareddy before redistricting was relatively large in area. For any official work in the district collectorate, the Sessions Court, and with either the MLA or the MP, most of the villagers and town dwellers in the erstwhile district had to visit Sangareddy. On the other hand, Gannavaram being the host mandal for the entire Assembly constituency had visitors from all the nearby and remote mandals and villages to submit their grievances to the MLA or the MRO.

Most of the time, it was stringers who facilitated meetings between the villagers and either with the local officials or politicians. Generally, the grievances were about including their names in the list of beneficiaries of government schemes, applications for farmer loans, and issues in their locality among other works in panchayat and revenue offices. Given the lack of awareness about the administrative and bureaucratic functioning among the villagers and non-local town people, stringers function as a mediator and bridge the gap between the public and the officials.

Stringers have time and again proven to be the way to approach officials, especially, as they know how to pursue the matter ‘through a proper channel’ or the ‘formalities’,

² I am aware of Lévi-Strauss’s (1966, pp. 15-26) notion of ‘bricoleur’ (bricolage), Geertz’s (1960) ‘cultural broker’, and now widely used concept of *jugaad* (frugal innovation). But in this work, I limit myself to presenting the various roles of stringers and highlight their non-journalistic work rather than theorising it.

and the ‘paperwork/ documentation’ required. These were the common words used by stringers and the public in both Gannavaram and Sangareddy. There was a difference between the dictionary meaning of these phrases and the functional meanings they have acquired.

For the government officials, a stringer, being a known face, is a safe bet while for the public, he is a matter of convenience to avoid the bureaucratic red-tape. And, stringers seemed to have acquired the know-how of the functioning of the officials concerned. For instance, they know when (it is time) to approach an official keeping the circumstances such as presence/absence of higher officials or vigilance officers or local elite who inform higher officials in case of any misdoings or malpractices in the office.

Be it in Sangareddy or Gannavaram, the scope of *pyravee* (pursuit) was very minimal, as for ‘bigger’ works, beneficiaries or parties concerned would have to go either to Hyderabad in the case of Sangareddy or Vijayawada or Machilipatnam in the case of Gannavaram in Krishna district. But the stringers were well aware of such networks and most of the times were part of a network of real *pyraveekars* (who called themselves social workers) in their respective areas.

Initially, stringers in Gannavaram would leave me behind before they went about these *pyravees*. After taking me into their circle of confidence, they started talking about this work. Stringers stated that they were only ‘small fish’, whereas the big fish were in Vijayawada (city) and Hyderabad (the then AP Secretariat) with whom they did not have much access. It was the same case in Sangareddy, with a slight modification in the terminology of work. While Gannavaram stringers referred to this kind of work as *panchāyati* (settlement) or *dukāṇam pani* (shopping), Sangareddy stringers mentioned it as ‘*cinna* issue’ or ‘settlement’.

Mostly these petty *pyravees* included getting income and caste certificates, ration cards, ‘ex-gratia’ amount (announced by governments), and registering names in government schemes. And, the people who approach stringers were generally those who do so through known contacts from other parts of the districts and sometimes from among staffers of the newspaper establishments in which they work. Usually, stringers for doing these petty *pyravees*, did not take any cash from the individuals,

but did not mind if they offered to buy some snacks and tea in the shops located outside these government offices.³

In Gannavaram, there was some sort of verbose melodramatic responses from stringers while rejecting any cash favour for the work they did, while in Sangareddy and most parts of Medak district, stringers' curt responses would generally be: “*iccināvle gāni tiy*” or “*avasarlēdu... poddudigukināka īḍuṇḍaddu sakkanga inṭiki naḍu*” (Leave it. No need to give [with gentle authority] or No need [to give anything]. Don't stay here after sunset. Head home... straight.).⁴

The maximum amount that the stringers took from the beneficiaries who received lump sum money was in the hundreds (less than one thousand Indian rupees) and even this pittance varied from case to case. However, those individuals who visited MPs, MLAs, MROs, and district Collector (especially during the meet-the-collector/MRO monthly calendar programmes) would be given a patient ear. Stringers considered such cases as resources to file district-level news reports on those public issues.

Stringer as local political publicist or PR guru

Despite the ubiquitous social media platforms and messaging services, one noticeable feature in villages and mofussil areas (even in urban spaces) was the presence of flex-posters and vinyl banners. There is a new banner at the market and other public places for every festival, local events and meetings, and during visits of high-profile political persons. Stringers engaged in a range of activities as a part of political campaigning for local leaders such as, helping in designing the banner, photography, placement of the banner, and writing and proofreading the content.⁵

³ At the outset, the issue of corruption and media appeared to be a pertinent topic. Based on my ethnographic observations and secondary readings (Gupta 1995; 2005; Jaruegi 2014; Pavarala, 1996; 2004), and (Pavarala & Malik 2012), I realised that it required altogether different methodology and approach, which is beyond the scope of this study. However, I used some chunks of field notes and interviews in this chapter.

⁴ These expressions are tough to translate into English. This authority or command from stringers arises not only due to the favour they did for the individual(s) but also out of care, as the latter might go to local *janata* (economy/public) bars or compounds and philander in the relatively unknown place (especially students [male] from remote villages who are new to the town).

⁵ The prominence given in allocating the space in such banners worked in the reverse (hierarchical) logic of their actual importance. Local politicians were presented in life-size or bigger stand up images, bust images of MLAs and MPs (or contested and lost from the same party), mug shots of state and national level leaders. On some occasions, images of local politicians of regional parties would be superimposed next to images of a lion or tiger to pictorially ‘lionise’ the local leaders.

A majority of them used to give ‘briefings’ to the local politicians and sometimes even wrote their speeches, in case of birth and death anniversaries of various iconic leaders, before they file a report of the same for newspapers. Only the ethnographer and local persons, who hang around with the local newsmen and politicians, would be able to witness this sort of ‘ventriloquist act’ by the stringers.

Many stringers extended these services to local ‘cable’ television advertisements during festivals. These abnormally loud broadcast advertisements would be inserted in between the commercial breaks in locally operated Telugu entertainment and movie channels.

While the legislative and parliamentary constituency members or contestants, usually, got their publicity campaign material prepared in cities such as Hyderabad and Vijayawada, it was the second-rung leaders and ‘youth wing’ cadre of respective parties, who approached stringers for assistance. When asked (informally) if they get any monetary gains from the publicity work, stringers in Medak informed that they maintained a *khātā* (account) with the local politicians, while Gannavaram stringers said that it was based on ‘understanding’.

This local publicity was more or less a collective activity for stringers, as some of them own photo/video studios, some were good at writing and proofreading, and some know how to convince aspiring politicians as part of marketing strategy. Both in Gannavaram and Sangareddy, stringers either worked in key positions or owned local cable TV franchises.

This was one area where the limited journalistic capital of stringers got visibly converted into economic capital and sometimes even added on to their existing social capital. Despite the collective nature of this publicity work, some senior stringers acted as public relations personnel of the local politicians.

It was not only to the local politicians or aspiring politicians that stringers suggested some publicity tips but also to the local elite (who wanted to gain some popularity by taking up some civic issue or doing charity work), trade union leaders, government and aided schools’ teachers among others.

Occasionally, stringers offered advice on the ‘timing’ of protests by localites, politicians, and trade union leaders. Most of the stringers had knowledge about the time and venue of VIP visits on a particular day in the nearby localities of importance, such as central and state government institutions and the airport, and alerted some of these persons to stage a protest or *dharna* accordingly to gain visibility. At the same time, stringers also cautioned these groups when not to protest. For instance, when the district police promulgated Section 30 of the Police Act, 1861, there would be a ban on public protests, gatherings, and political and religious rallies (Field notes, Sangareddy, 2 October 2014).⁶

On the whole, while the conversion of journalistic capital into economic capital was explicit in this description of non-journalistic work of stringers, implicitly they added a considerable amount of social capital. Works such as these helped them acquire relatively ‘elevated status’ as persona indispensable to certain sections of the population in their immediate surroundings, which will be discussed in the following section.

More importantly, this was a brighter side of the picture. They would face negative consequences from the local politicians if they did not do a balanced walk, as sometimes stringers got sandwiched between their proximity to local leaders and professional directives laid out by newspaper establishments or suggestions/orders from desk persons.

To avoid this dissonance, most of the experienced stringers preferred to work in small or medium-scale newspapers, where there was not much of professional and institutional pressure and, at the same time, offered them ‘freedom’ to engage in non-journalistic work using their professional identity.

For novice stringers, this was a tricky situation to be in. While the bureau and rural in-charges along with desk staffers saw this non-journalistic work as obsequiousness on

⁶ In general, the Section 30 of the Police Act gets promulgated in city and district police commissionerates to increase the surveillance on ‘anti-social’ elements. Imposition of this section could last for more than a month on certain occasions. A superintendent of police or police commissioner exercised a significantly high command and power in mofussil areas compared to their counterparts in urban areas. Same was the case with the district collector. During fieldwork, a stringer in Sangareddy remarked that the SP and district collector were like *maa-baap* (mother-father) of the entire district.

the part of stringers, not engaging in such work even after local politicians, government officials, and elite insisted would be treated as being headstrong. Often local leaders complained to the head-office about such non-cooperative stringers resulting in loss of jobs, as mentioned in the previous chapters (See, Figure 5.1).⁷ The non-journalistic work was also noticeably precarious in nature, as more than three complaints against a stringer were good enough for the managements of leading dailies to fire them.

Playing this game in the journalistic field, which was characterised by unwritten and unstated rules, was one of the crucial factors in deciding the standing of the stringer among his peers. Understanding these rules entailed what Bourdieu repeatedly pointed out in his writings and lectures as developing a “feel for the game.” Many a time, it was lack of or poor understanding about these rules of the game that made the job precarious.

Even while detailing and describing the non-journalistic work of stringers, the issue of their precarity springs up. This aspect of the field prompts one to address the question: Why do individuals continue to work in the lowest possible rank among the working journalists? The following section ponders over the possible answers before problematising it further by presenting the responses of stringers to this question.

Journalistic *illusio* or local journalism as a game of honour?

Some of the initial responses from the stringers about the reasons why they have chosen this field include: “journalism is my passion”, “to raise public awareness (*prajā caitanyam*)”, “to contribute for a better society”, “to highlight social evils”, and “opportunity to speak on behalf of the voiceless”, and “to bring about a change in the society” (Interviews, Stringers, Gannavaram and Sangareddy, 2012 & 2014). These would be the responses from a majority of aspiring journalists or even students who wish to join any J-school.

They also mentioned that journalism is a) a noble profession (*udāttamaina vṛtti*); b) a respectable job (*gouravapradamaina paṇi*); c) a way to get good recognition (*manci*

⁷ This figure illustrating the web of interactions and relations of news production was applicable to the non-journalistic work also.

gurtimpu) in the society.” After carrying out my ethnographic research and developing even better rapport with stringers, I asked them reasons, in semi-structured interviews, for ‘continuing’ in the field given the poor pay conditions and precarious nature of their jobs. Their responses were: “journalism is my passion”, “there is no way out of this [profession]”, and “it has become an obsession/addiction (*vyasanam*).” Apart from the respondents in Sangareddy and Gannavaram, even scores of stringers I met during the journalists’ union meetings in both states responded in similar fashion about the same questions. I will discuss the responses by stringers that the job had become an obsession at the end of this section.

Considering the responses about the reasons for choosing the profession and continuing in the field, it appeared that there was some disillusionment, which seemed to be arising out of the contradiction between their expectations before joining and reality (both financial constraints and social and professional pressures) the field offered or after realising the limited stakes they had in the field.

How does one understand stringers continuing to work in the field despite having a seeming disappointment or disillusionment? A readymade rationale can be derived from a field theory concept, *illusio*, which is, “the fact of being caught up in and by the game.” While addressing a sociological question, “if disinterested act is possible”, Bourdieu (1998c) introduced the notion of *illusio* as,

...the fact of attributing importance to a social game, the fact that what happens matters to those who are engaged in it, who are in the game. *Interest* is to “be there,” to participate, to admit that the game is worth playing and that the stakes created in and through the fact of playing are worth pursuing; it is to recognise the game and to recognise its stakes (pp. 76-77) [Emphasis original].

This explanation appeared to be just if one considered the dynamics of news gathering and news production practices, as I discussed in chapter 5. This notion of *illusio* appeared even more relevant after having understood the way stringers dealt with the disappointment regarding their news reports or articles getting spiked by the staffers at edition centres or being picked up by reporters working in the same organisation. Journalistic *illusio* was the manner in which the field tended to make the agent, here the stringer, believe that this was the only game available to them. Also, it was the

feeling that they will succeed next time or the following day even if case they were to fail on a given day, which seemed to have kept them going.

Instead of the tennis match or gambling metaphors that were frequently used while discussing *illusio*, it appeared more appropriate to present an agrarian metaphor used by a Gannavaram stringer, who said,

Idi kūḍā vyavasāyam lāgānēnandī. Raitu koṭiswaruḍu ayipōḍāmani sāguceyaḍu. Idi tappa vēṛēdi cēyaḍam teliyaḍu. Ante. Kākapotē ē sārī bāgā paṇḍutundi ani aśa. Tappuledugā? [...]” (Our job is akin to agriculture. A farmer does not till the land hoping to become a millionaire. The farmer continues to till the land because he does not know anything else. But he hopes that the produce/harvest will be better than the last time. There is Nothing wrong with having hope, right?). (SSS, Gannavaram, 18 May 2012).

While this readily appeared to have relevance for the journalistic work, it would not explain fully the non-journalistic work done by the stringers, which offered both social and economic benefits in an apparent manner.

Staffers, who supported their managements, pointed out that those stringers continued to work in the field without fixed wages because they had their means of earning using their position and doing non-journalistic work in the villages and mandals. “Stringers use their influence to avail government schemes and also get benefitted from various facilities provided by the government to journalists such as housing schemes, basic health facilities, and free travel passes,” CBRP, the Krishna district bureau head of a Telugu daily, said (Vijayawada, 17 September 2012) and informed that stringers took money from local politicians and live off small-time businesspersons. A majority of staffers in both districts offered similar reasons for stringers’ work.

But this rationale appeared to be based on economic aspects and overlooks the social positions stringers occupied in the society and the cultural capital the job provided. For both academic and practical understanding of the situation, the economic or utilitarian rationale provided by the staffers about stringers plodding in the journalistic field had little sociological or cultural relevance. This argument gets nullified especially when journalism is perceived as cultural production in the society.

Having considered the dispositions and the habitus of stringers in the journalistic field, working as a local reporter resulted in acquiring a considerable amount of cultural capital, which would not be possible otherwise. Keeping these factors in mind, along with the ethnographic observations at both sites of research, it seemed that stringers continued to carry on newswork and related to non-journalistic work for the following reasons: a) to secure identity in their immediate surroundings; b) to gain better recognition and access; c) to augment existing social and cultural capital.

Stringers, wherever they went about in their mandals, were always greeted by the public and well-received by village officers, police, and even politicians. They also freely walked into the houses of the local elite, which were inaccessible for the common public. And, the usual hierarchies among stringers based on their own habitus and the newspaper for which they worked mattered here also. Considering the social status of stringers vis-à-vis the local elite, entering the houses of the latter is still considered a 'privilege' in villages and small towns.

After joining a newspaper most of the stringers get a press identification card, which gives them access to many places. They also start brushing shoulders with politicians and businesspersons. Even a medical doctor or an engineer from any caste background does not enjoy this status in villages and mandals. We (stringers) get used to this after sometime and cannot imagine leading a normal life, a Sangareddy stringer, PR said. (4 October 2014).

It was precisely why stringers in Gannavaram and Sangareddy expressed that journalism had become an addiction or intense obsession. Many of them after getting fired from a newspaper for any reasons tried to get the same job in another newspaper, an issue already discussed in the previous chapters, as they could not quit the field/game.⁸ Some stringers even offered 'donations' to a fellow stringer to share the dateline.

In general, many journalists after working for, say, more than a decade find it tough to quit the profession for similar reasons. Even the peer group would not appreciate such a move unless those who left the journalistic field got opportunities either in more

⁸ Initially, I was baffled by this expression and the closest connection between journalism/newspapers and addiction was in an interview of Bourdieu, who talked about alcoholism among journalists in France (Bourdieu, 2010b, p. 327). Another link was by Adam Smith (2003, pp. 1091-1092), who suggested that taxation or stamp duties on newspapers should be on the lines of cards and dice (gambling) and consumption of liquor.

‘powerful’ fields like working with the government as advisors (state machinery) and politics or relatively more autonomous fields like, say, research and the university-level academic field. This perception about the profession could possibly be the reason for the catchphrase: ‘once a journalist, always a journalist.’

The concept of journalistic *illusio* along with the cultural capital associated with journalism appeared to provide a plausible explanation to understand the question of stringers continuing in the precarious local journalistic field. Moreover, the identity as a local reporter helped them in consolidating and building various forms of capital and also facilitated in the conversion of one form of capital into the other.

The following section presents some events and expressions used by stringers, which serve as a basis to understand the conflation of cultural capital, economic capital, and social capital. This section also discusses journalistic ethics and codes from the perspective of stringers in the Telugu journalistic field.

Codes, everyday rituals, and gifts in the journalistic field

‘Over a cup of tea’ was the title of a column written by a legendary journalist, Pothan Joseph. Spanning over five decades in different newspapers with the same title, this column offered political analysis, gossip in bureaucratic circles, and ‘non-partisan’ commentary on various issues in the pre-independent and post-independent India (Israel, 1994).

Telugu newspaper stringers may not be aware of this journalist but meeting with officials and local elite on most occasions happened over a cup of tea, which I realised was one of the codes they followed at both the fieldwork sites. The moment stringers enter any government office and reach an employee’s desk, they will be offered a seat and cup of tea. This happened whenever both parties were on good terms. In case, the officer or employee was not in a mood to interact or livid with stringers for writing anything against him, tea was not served, indicating that they may leave the place.

Sometimes stringer(s) attempted to persuade the official that the article against a particular employee or the office was published without their knowledge and so on. But on the whole, serving a cup of tea signified amicable terms between the two parties and vice-versa. It was not only the tea serving but also a shared meal had its

own code and an embedded message, depending on the time of the meal. It also appeared that a meal was an intrinsic part of journalistic practices and news production in both AP and Telangana.

This section discusses the codes, rituals, and gifts involved in the local journalistic production based on ethnographic observations. The rituals to be discussed here do not have any direct relation to Tuchman's (1972) intervention, "Objectivity as strategic ritual" or the ritualisation in reporting certain news events catering to the tastes and expectations of the audience. Instead, I discuss the everyday socialising rituals, in a Durkheimian sense, involving agents within the journalistic field and outside of it.

This vague idea about the relation between a meal and journalistic production got concretised after reading "Deciphering a meal" by British anthropologist, Mary Douglas (1972) who wrote:

If food is treated as a code, the messages it encodes will be found in the pattern of social relations being expressed. The message is about different degrees of hierarchy, inclusion and exclusion, boundaries and transactions across boundaries. [...] Food categories therefore encode social events (p. 61).

The gregarious nature of reporters makes it impossible to imagine them carrying a lunch or tiffin box along with them. Almost every reporter will be with her or his peers or at least in public places from the time they step outside their home to carry out newswork till they call it a day. Understandably, hosting a lunch or high-tea after a press conference and public meetings is an established practice in most parts of the country. Even a casual interaction with a bureaucrat or follow-up session with a politician or businessperson could end up in having lunch or drinks.

This was the case with stringers in mofussil areas with an exception to alcohol, as drinking was considered *haram* before 'sunset'. But given the social and physical proximity to various agents from other fields in mofussil areas, unlike in urban spaces, stringers had these socialising activities over breakfast (before work) and dinner (after work). Often, like the news gathering process, these meetings were collective in nature and, most of the time, not on a one-on-one basis.

Table 7.1

Types of meal, code and actual practice

Type of meal	AP Code	Actual practice	TS Code	Actual practice
Breakfast	Tiffin (breakfast; vegetarian)*	Feedback session	<i>Nāshṭa</i> (breakfast; vegetarian and meat)	Agenda setting
Lunch	Meals	Working lunch	Lunch	Working lunch
Dinner	Dinner (vegetarian and meat)	Reciprocal or appreciative gesture as well as casual	<i>Dāwat</i> (feast; vegetarian and meat)	Reciprocal or appreciative gesture as well as casual

Source: Fieldwork

Note: *The word tiffin in coastal Andhra means breakfast on regular days and supper on Saturdays. Also, a majority of stringers in both states did not eat meat as a part of their meals on Saturdays and some avoided it on Thursdays for religious reasons.

In their interactions they revealed that they met a local politician or an influential person over breakfast either to discuss the plan to be executed, if any, or received ‘feedback’ on an article that got published on that particular day. I accompanied two stringers for a couple of *nāshṭa* (breakfast) meetings with second-rung political leaders at their residences in Fasalwadi and Cinema Talkies road in Sangareddy at the time of by-poll for a parliamentary constituency in August 2014. The local leaders gave the itinerary of political campaigning and briefed the stringers about the issues to be highlighted to ensure media coverage.

Having a meal (breakfast, lunch, and dinner) was part of the ‘work culture’ and an accepted code in both states at the time of fieldwork (Table: 7.1). However, some local elite did not entertain them, as they had a ‘direct link’ with the bosses at edition centres or the head offices of newspapers, leaving stringers in a disgruntled state.

While the *nāshṭa* sessions happen occasionally in Telangana, the breakfast meetings between stringers with parties concerned took place on a regular basis. Lunch arrangements would take place between assignments in a coordinated fashion after talking to those who wished to meet stringers to discuss a local matter that needed coverage almost on a daily basis.

In case there were more than two different persons or sets of people who wanted to meet a stringer or a group of stringers, they would politely ask a party to reschedule the meeting to the following day or some other time. It was not the case where stringers would leech on individuals for lunches, rather it was a basic courtesy and kind concern the locals exhibited, which seemed to have emerged out of agrarian or semi-agrarian culture (even if they did not expect any return favour).⁹

Stringers certainly planned lunch sessions for the day. This planning was needed more in Telangana, as commercial food outlets were not available in the interiors. I had first-hand experience of starving as a researcher while accompanying a stringer to Chetlanarsampally in Medak in search of a story on an alleged Maoist party member. We started at around 10:30 a.m. in the morning and by the time we returned to Sangareddy it was 7 p.m. (Field notes, Sangareddy, 17 September 2014).

Most of the stringers in both districts visit a government school at least once in a month to check the implementation of midday meal scheme and attendance (or absence) of teachers along with state-run social welfare hostels. It appeared that this ritual of visiting schools and hostels was one of the humane sides of stringers, as they sometimes even mildly intimidate the persons concerned that they will inform the mandal or district education officer of any lapses. Acts such as these, as a part of their everyday work, gave stringers a sense of moral authority and command over others.

Dinner was not a regular feature but it seemed to be a relatively exclusive happening. Only the experienced stringers had the tact and skills to persuade the local elites and politicians for a dinner meet. Though I did not attend such meetings over dinner, I was around when such events were being planned. They would casually begin a conversation by saying: “*Enṭi sār ī madhya mammalni paṭṭincukōvaḍam mānēsāru....; ...ēm annā... garībōḷḷa dikku sūstanelēvu*” (Sir, how come you stopped taking care of us; Salute...how come brother [respectfully] you don’t turn your head toward the poor [us]).” The manner in which they put across their interest will make it difficult for the other person to respond in a negative tone.

⁹ Having worked as a journalist, I noticed that many a time outsiders looked down on reporters on the (working) lunch arrangement. It was a serious concern for middle-aged and elderly reporters as most of them develop gastric acid reflux problems over a period of time along with other health issues. Perhaps, the public relations personnel were the only lot who understood this requirement, while the rest overlooked the health aspect of journalists.

Novices and relatively younger stringers will be excluded from such meetings and the reason given by seniors (*sūtradhārs* in this context) was to the effect that the former did not know where to draw a line between liberty/familiarity and respect. Stringers had their own language, shared values and customs, rituals, norms, and practices that constituted the rules of the journalistic game. Among stringers themselves, more than the caste factor, it was the knowledge of these unwritten rules that decided the inclusivity and exclusivity to certain social events with people from the creamy section of their locality.

Certain material and non-material exchanges in the world of local journalism may appear quaint and unethical for self-righteous and moralistic outsiders. But writing a favourable news item in order to procure an advertisement for the newspaper seemed to be a normal and ethical affair for stringers. Even the broad and general principles of classification of places and situations were based on benefits or favour either in cash or kind.

For instance, stringers referred to attending a protest or press meet organised at local offices of communist and other national parties as *śivālayam* (temple of god Siva), while the same in case of parties where influential caste persons (local leaders) were at the helm of party affairs were often called as *rāmālayam* (temple of Hindu god Rama). Stringers, unlike in the case of dominant regional parties, did not receive any pecuniary gains for attending the press meets organised by the national parties. The analogy seemed appropriate from the perspective of stringers, as the *prasādam* (or Prashad or prasaada sacred food offered in temples) at the Shiva temple was *vibhūti* (holy ash) and *vaḍapappu* and *pānakam* (*Lens esculenta* soaked in water and a jaggery based beverage laced with black pepper) in the case of Rama temple on special occasions, and a variety of other rice-based items on normal days.

They even had a logic and hierarchy in classifying currency notes they received as monetary return for the journalistic work or non-journalistic work performed. While in Gannavaram, the currency note or notes were classified on the basis of colour, in Sangareddy it was on the basis of the amount or size of the note (*cinna* and *pedda*). This was before the demonetisation of big currency notes in 2016 and I learnt from a Krishna district stringer that they started going digital from then onwards.

Figure: 7.1

Journalistic capital or the donor's hand reversed



Note: This is a recreated image for illustrative purposes. The bare hand on the left is the receiver (stringer or reporter) and the donor or giver is on the right with his left palm placed on the elbow during the act.

At the time of fieldwork, I noticed that individuals (donors) placed their hands below while offering money to stringers and reporters, as the latter used to receive from above. I observed this peculiar way of money offering in Gannavaram and Vijayawada and noted it down. It recurred in Sangareddy on several occasions. The striking element of the transaction was the positions of the donor or giver and the receiver.

The hand positions were not even on an equal plane but in a reversed manner to the 'normal' way of donor having the upper hand. In effect, this appeared to be contrary to popular expressions in Telugu and Hindi languages respectively: “*iccēvāḍidē paicēyi*” or “*denewale ka haath upar hi rahta hain*” (The donor's hand is always on top). Essentially, this meant that even while receiving journalists had the upper hand indicating the prominence bestowed onto the professional status.

The above illustration also captures the bodily-hexis of stringers and the influential persons and more importantly, the dynamic conversions of social, economic, and journalistic capital from one form to the other. But there is little scope to celebrate the agency and social elevation they get due to their professional identity, as their scope is

minute and limited to a mandal unit in which they work in relation to owners of newspapers or even journalists in high-profile designations, platforms, and in all possible kinds of spaces.

The purpose and motive of a stringer's work was brilliantly described by a Gannavaram stringer, YSR who tersely said: “*ī vṛttilō ēdainā pani cēstē ‘job satisfaction’ ayinā rāvāli lēdā ‘jēb satisfaction’ ayinā undāli*” (In this profession, completion of a task should give either job satisfaction or else *jēb* [pocket] should be satisfied). Another stringer belonging to a religious minority community in Sangareddy mentioned that he felt secured with a ‘press ID card’ and red uppercase sticker on his bike, as he got instant recognition in the small town.

If the section – “Guidelines on undue favours to journalists” – in the *Norms of journalistic conduct* laid out by the Press Council of India (2019, pp. 97-103) was considered, every aspect of journalistic work (writing favourable news items) and non-journalistic work (being petty *pyraveekar* or local publicist) done by stringers using their professional status appeared to be ‘unethical’.

It was not the case that stringers were unaware of the ethical journalistic practices and conduct; instead they felt that the workshops on ethics of reporting conducted by AP Press Academy belittled them by saying that most stringers indulged in fraudulent practices.

I present the expressions of two stringers about their experience with the training classes and workshop on ethics. A Gannavaram stringer, CVR said,

They [journalist-instructors from Hyderabad] unnecessarily target us. Most of the big reporters polish off the meat in the food surreptitiously and put a garland of bones around our neck. We look like thieves in everyone's eyes” (Personal communication, Gannavaram, 22 May 2012).

Another experienced stringer in Medak used a similar food metaphor.

“*yājamānyālu, peddōḷḷu cēsē panulu evariki kanapaḍavu. Vaḷḷu rasagullālani sappuḍucēyaka gutukkuna mingutaru. Mēmēmō utta murukulu śabdam cēsukunṭu kanipistam. Vāḷḷu doralu; memu fāltugāndlam* (Newspaper owners and established reporters swallow *Rasgulla* and go unnoticed. But we will be

seen and heard chomping *muruku*. For the public they are gentlemen and we are fraudsters),” Sangareddy stringer, PR said (1 October, 2014).¹⁰

Stringers here were not playing the victim card. Rather they expressed what they know and felt in their own language and terms. As a postgraduate from a premier communication department in the country with both research and industry experience, I understand the importance of ethics in media education. But neither the Press Council nor the media educators from Press Academy of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana Media Academy seemed to have an understanding about the ground reality of the nature of work of journalists in small and medium-scale newspapers, media outlets and stringers.

The experience of the founder chairman of the AP Academy, the late Potturi Venkateswararao was a case in point. Writing about the first round of workshops organised by the Academy, he (2015, p. 254) noted: “A dissatisfying experience in my role as chairman was that the stringers did not make use of the training classes properly. [...] At the end of the classes, they would come and ask me if we give any gifts for attending.”

My understanding from the working lives of stringers suggests that the question about gifts in ethics training workshops appeared anything but ‘normal’. They may need to spend an additional amount of money to reach the ‘classroom’ along with losing some benefits which they otherwise could get from non-journalistic work.

Even though my fieldwork limited the discussion on the *pyraveekar* avatar to stringers in mofussil areas, it is applicable to reporters in most parts of India. Many state governments such as Telangana, Gujarat, Delhi, Karnataka, and Tamil Nadu had either put a blanket-ban or restricted entry for mediapersons into the Secretariat buildings. While the rationale given by the governments was that they wanted to block touts, lobbyists, power brokers, and *pyraveekars* from entering the administrative precincts and power corridors, the journalists and unions cried foul.

There was a palpable ‘contradiction’ between the nature of ethics and the moral discourse laid out by the Press Council (2019) and the life-world of stringers in small

¹⁰ *Rasgulla* is a Bengali/Odia sweet dish, which is soft, while *Muruku* is a south Indian *khara* (hot) snack, which crackles while eating.

towns. And more importantly, there was a direct correlation between the adherence/violation of norms of journalistic conduct by reporters and stringers and media houses following/flouting the recommendations of the Wage Boards.

To sum up this section, firstly, I presented a field-based understanding of stringers and the manner in which they utilised journalism as a mode of subsistence by doing both journalistic and non-journalistic work. Secondly, based on the ethnographic descriptions, I discussed how the conversions of forms of capitals happened in the local journalistic field. Thirdly, I elaborated on the codes, everyday rituals, and patterns of gift exchanges, which provided a platform for the conflation of social, economic, and journalistic capitals.

The issue of journalistic ethics and norms was not part of the research objectives of this study. However, based on my research, I suggest that adding a field-based research component, with a specific focus on the cultural aspects of news production, to media research on ethics and practices would be fruitful and may result in the sharpening of policy recommendations.

Having presented a summary of key arguments of the study at the beginning of this chapter and followed it up with some aspects of everyday life of stringers that I did not address earlier, in the following section I briefly reflect on the relevance and limitations of this research and conclude by providing a preview of some points of departure for future research.

Relevance, limitations, and the way forward

During the initial days of my research, web search engines for the entry ‘stringer(s)’ used to offer a very limited number of results before asking a question: “Did you mean “stranger””? At the time of writing, repeating the above experiment at least showed a few dozens of pages including a Wikipedia entry (with disambiguation).

There is a renewed interest in understanding the working conditions of newswriters, the vulnerable status of a journalist, and the material and non-material aspects of news production due to two most important developments that took place in the recent times in the Indian context: 1) Introduction of the Code on Wages, 2019; 2) The COVID-19 global pandemic.

The novel Coronavirus pandemic, the lockdown, and the unprecedented economic situation has shattered many industries and sectors, and had a direct impact on the print industry resulting in acute job losses with traditional media houses ceasing print editions and switching over to the digital. Even the established newspapers are finding it difficult to recover the newsprint costs in this economic crisis, which is officially heading towards a recession.

On the other hand, the new labour laws promulgated by the State under the Wage Code seem to be pushing workers, in general, to the edge without offering any help to improve their existing condition. While there is a discussion on this specific development in other sectors ranging from leather workers to tea plantation workers, there is a radio silence on the topic of newswriters in journalism.

Without getting into details, I briefly discuss one single aspect of the Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions Code (OSHWC), 2020. The Chapter X of this Code, which is applicable to all sectors including the media industry, presents the “Special provision relating to employment of women”, which is all of two paragraphs. It (p. 39, Para 43) read, “Women shall be entitled to be employed in all establishments for all types of work under this Code and they may also be employed, with their consent before 6 a.m. and beyond 7 p.m.”

Even during the times when the scrapped Working Journalists Act and Wage Board recommendations specifically mentioned the transport facility to be provided to women journalists working in the night shifts, it did not translate into practice on the ground. The OSHWC Code does not even mention a word on such a facility in their special provision for women’s safety.

The State officially does not overtly wish to discuss some crucial factors of a parliamentary democracy such as caste and religion. If one goes by Carey’s laconic formulation that journalism and democracy are effectively the names for the same thing, this study is relevant to the extent that it initiated a discussion on how caste, religion, region, and gender were negotiated in the news production in the field. My research also provided some ways of understanding the issues of informality and precarity that newswriters are faced with in the journalistic field.

Some of the observations and formulations, especially on the logic of journalistic practices, relations of news production, dynamics between the journalistic field and other fields of power, which I made in this study, will be useful to understand the working lives of journalists and newswriters in a rapidly converging media environment.

I rest the discussion on the relevance of this study here and present some of the limitations and issues faced in this project. In Bourdieusian field theory, distinguishing between quantitative and qualitative is akin to the making of a distinction between the masculine and feminine in understanding a field. I could not put into use the quantitative aspects such as the volumes of capital various classes of newswriters possessed along with multiple correspondence analyses (MCA) to assess the economic and cultural conditioning of/in the journalistic field.

Even in the qualitative analysis, in certain parts, I gave prominence to the tales from the field, while compromising even more rigorous conceptualisation and theorisation that the study demanded or could offer. This happened, partly, due to the reason that the ideas and worldly wisdom deliberated by agents in the field were too perceptive to give a skip.¹¹ It was extremely difficult to triangulate the ethnographic observations and primary data sets, archival material, and the dense and vast body of theoretical literature, I used for the study.

The word and act of ‘understanding’ has been both an asset and a liability for this exploratory ethnographic research. Due to the dearth of literature on some of the issues that I dealt with, I had to prepare a ground for almost every section before presenting my own formulations. In this regard, it was a liability.

But it was an exciting opportunity to learn and an asset in opening up new avenues and areas of research. Firstly, there is a possibility of extending this research on stringers, freelancers, and reporters working for online platforms, as it is increasingly

¹¹ For instance, while discussing the outcome of General Elections in 2014 with a stringer in the field, a comment he made was remarkable. I quote his view in English: “Sir, in our country, we can only choose between two Ramas. One is Ayodhya Rama (BJP) and the other one is Bhadradi Rama (Congress).” For him, Ayodhya Rama is the aggressive muscular version, while Bhadradi Rama is a secular version. Bhadradi is a temple-town, where a Hindu tahsildar (Ramadasu) working under the Golkonda ruler Tana Shah built a temple, which was initially objected but later granted an official status. On the whole, responses and ideas of stringers and reporters in the field were very perceptive.

becoming a trend to employ part-time workers instead of full-timers in the journalistic field.

Secondly, an intense engagement with the idea of precarity and journalistic labour appears to be the need of the hour in the years to come. Given the challenges of learning from past experiences, due to lack of a proper prosopography (collective biography) of journalists, this is an opportune moment to carry out documentary work on the tendencies and counter-tendencies in the journalistic field.

Especially in these times when religious and cultural nationalism are on the rise and even the rank and file of media organisations too are being replaced, bringing the ideological motives to the fore, such work appears to have significance and will prove to be resourceful in the near future. Managing or muzzling the media is taking new forms in the current economic and political scenario, which the orthodox political economy approach may not address adequately.

Thirdly, this study explicitly suggests the need for a comprehensive survey of journalists along with understanding and documenting the constitution of journalists' union office bearers and press clubs to assess the diversity issues including gender along with caste, ability, and region/space factors in the journalistic field. This research reiterates Bourdieu's formulation that such research, which takes into consideration the whole social and political orders, "in the longer term may contribute to the progressive withering away of masculine domination" (2001, p. 117).

Finally, I suggest that a field-based approach to understand ethical and moral issues in journalistic practices appears to be an untapped area of research in this part of the globe.

As mentioned earlier, this research is still a work in progress, as it provided only a glimpse into some key field-level issues in the exposing machine par excellence: the media.

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