

Media Relations

Jnani

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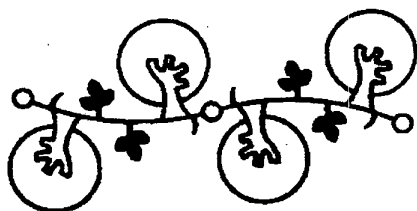
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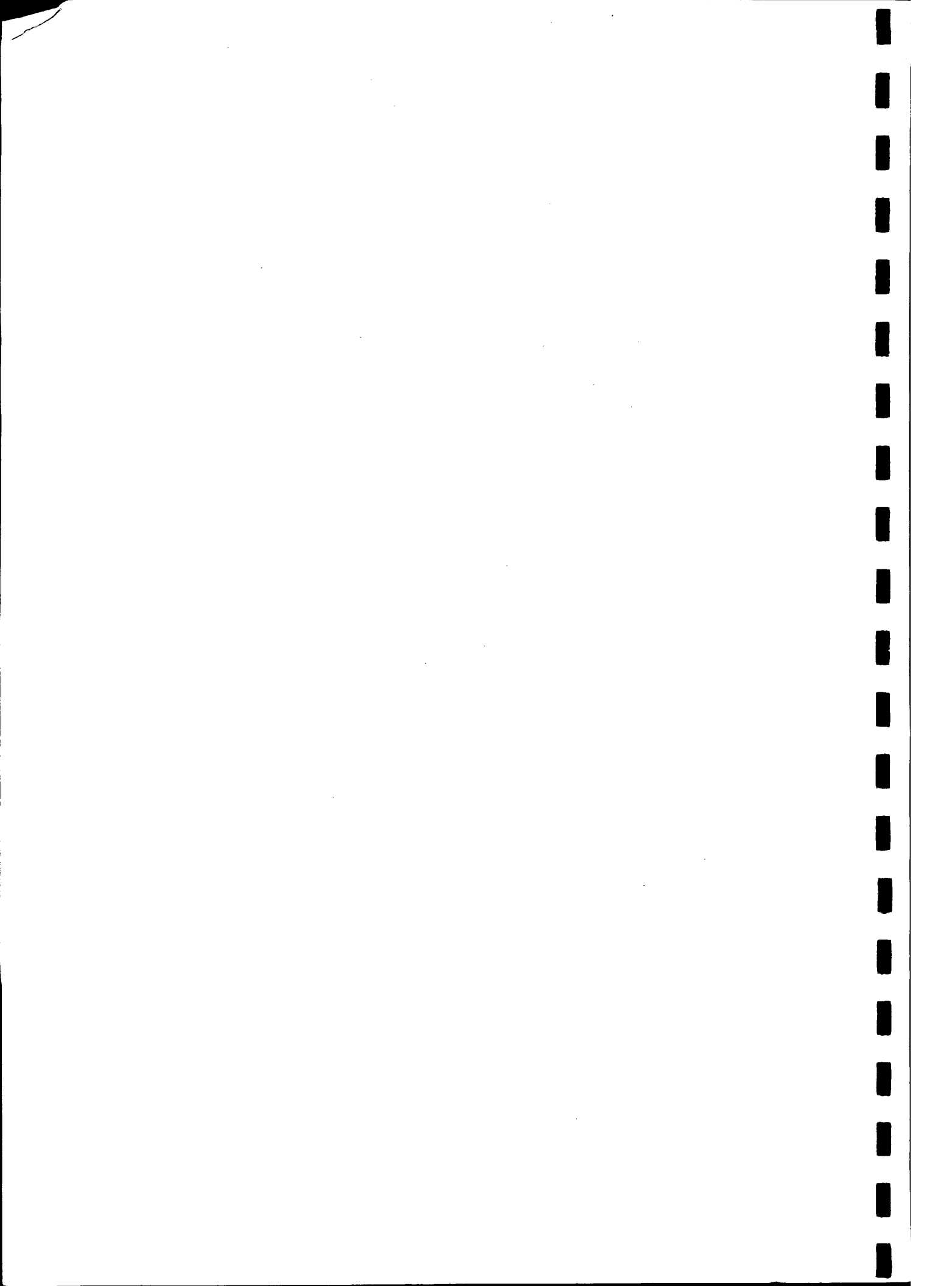
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Why this book?

Media has become an inalienable part of our lives today. It has become as essential as school, office, food, clothing and shelter.

Among the forces that shape our thoughts and opinions, media plays a key role. Hence NGOs who are constantly in touch with the general public can neither ignore nor neglect the media.

Project ACCESS of M.S. Swaminathan Research Foundation has regularly obtained the help of media for its activities. Such experiences have always been very special to us. When the NGOs working against Female Infanticide and Violence on Women approached us to convene a workshop on relating with the media, it was with these experiences that we were able to conduct the media workshop. Based on two such media workshops we decided to bring out a manual on how to work with the media. Our friend Jnani who has always been rendering support and cooperation to us wrote this manual on our request.

We thank Mr. Stalin from RUHSA, Mr. Raja Samuel, Lecturer, Madras School of Social Work and Mr. Marudhamuthu, Secretary CODES, who reviewed the manuscript and helped us to improve the book.

Our special thanks to the author of the book and the Bernard van Leer Foundation who have helped us publish the book. We thank the NGOs and their field staff who have been emphasizing the need for such a book. We thank the AMM Screens Printers who have printed this book, and also the artist Mr. Shyam for the appropriate illustrations. I thank all the Project Associates of ACCESS who have helped in bringing out this book.

This book is the first of its kind in the field of development communication. Hence your opinions are most welcome since they would help us enrich similar efforts in future.

Thank you

Mina Swaminathan
August 2000

Preface

Through my relationships with the media and the NGOs (non-governmental organisations) for 25 years, the major problem that I could identify is the vast gap that exists between these two sectors. Whatever NGO collaborations with media we see are only exceptions.

There is a need to bridge this gap. This manual is an effort in that direction.

This manual is not an elaborate research work on media. The objective of this manual is to introduce to NGO; some basic information that they need to know if they want to relate to the media for reaching their objectives.

I would like the manual to be used in two ways. Firstly, as a ready reckoner for the NGOs whenever they wish to relate with the media. Secondly, to kindle interest in the readers so that they would go in search of source books for the ideas and approaches expressed in this book.

I thank M.S. Swaminathan Research Foundation, Mina and the ACCESS team for motivating me and associating me with their activities whenever possible.

Jnani

Chennai
May 1999

What is Media?

Media is the tool that human beings use to communicate and share information with each other.

Some think that media is a recent invention. This is not true. This misconception has occurred because generally media denotes newspaper and television that reach a large number of people.

Even before the development of language, our ancestors have made use of sounds, symbols and gestures to communicate with one another. In all the present day art forms, we can see features of the primitive media.

The oldest form of communication is the attempt by one individual to converse with another. Conversation encompasses language and expressions.

Though it is not possible for the mass media to converse with its audience, today we could see several attempts by television, radio, newspaper and films to talk with the audience by addressing them as 'Dear viewer!', 'Dear Reader!' etc. Creating a feeling that someone is looking into our eyes from the screen is also a similar attempt.

New technologies that emerged in each century have been made use of by the media. Whoever wishes to reach more people makes use of such technologies extensively.

Even when spectacular media forms with wider reach emerge, they could neither destroy nor displace the existing media forms.

Any media form is alive somewhere as long as the society has a need and space for it. For example, *Koothu*, an ancient art form of Tamil Nadu is active in many districts of the state.

It is also important to note that the new media constantly tries to borrow, renew and own certain features from the old media. The 'Drama form' that followed *Koothu* made use of music. This is an essential feature of *Koothu*. The 'Movie form' that followed the 'Drama form' picked story construction and script features from the 'Drama form'. In addition, movies took scene setting and visual features from the field of 'Drawing and painting'.

In the contemporary society, both old and new media forms actively co-exist. We can classify them and look at them one by one as presented below.

- Folk art forms
- Print forms – Newspapers, magazines, publications, handbills, wall-posters etc.
- Audio forms – Radio, Audio cassettes
- Visual forms – Television, Video cassettes
- Theatre

Folk Art Forms

Innumerable folk art forms exist in Tamil Nadu. Songs on agriculture, social life, mythology, stories and *villuppattu* are the musical forms. In the dance form, dances such as the *oyilattam*, *puravi aattam*, *thevarattam* exist. There are also mixed forms where the combination of songs, dances and story-narration are alive in the form of *koothu* and *bommalattam*. In general, the folk art forms have the patronage of temple, religion and caste structure. They are also interwoven with religious rituals.

A question arises here as to how these art forms get classified under media while the duty of media is to convey the news or transmit an information. In the exchange of information between two human beings, two types of exchange occur. One is the sharing of the news and the other is the sharing of an opinion. For instance, consider the statement, "Two children died because of mal-nutrition." This is news. Identifying, analysing and stating whether the causes of mal-nourishment were poverty, ignorance or negligence is opinion.

Sometimes opinion could be stated directly as news. Otherwise they could be gradually made acceptable through different experiences.

Art forms do not directly sow the seed of opinion. They create opinions only through the experiences of the viewer or listener. For example, the value of honesty could be effectively conveyed and deeply registered in the minds of the audience through the story of Raja Harichandra, when compared to direct preaching. The opinion that M.G.Ramachandran (A popular Tamil film actor and political leader) fights injustice and supports the poor and the meek is not created through one film only. This is possible through an appropriate story, scene, songs, music, dance etc. portrayed in several films.

Print forms

Print forms include handbills, posters, small publications, (like handouts, pamphlets, booklets) books, magazines and newspapers. Today, they could be printed, published and utilised by anybody.

The computer-laser technology has made it possible to carryout small to large scale printing. There are printing presses that could print lakhs of copies in a few hours time. In accordance with their need and financial capacity, anybody can make use of the print media.

Despite the advent of Radio and Television with fast and wide reaching effects, handbills and posters continue to be powerful tools for communication.

Handbills

In small towns and villages, handbills are used extensively by cinema hall owners. A wide range of groups such as business groups, political parties or cultural groups can make use of handbills. The unique feature of handbills is that they directly reach the hands of individuals.

Posters

Poster is yet another form of media largely used in the field of politics and cinema. A unique feature of the poster is that it could be made in various sizes. It could range from the size of a handkerchief to that of a house door. Posters of varying sizes have varying functions according to the context they are used in.

Small size posters that advertise biscuits, cool drinks etc. could be seen only at the entrances of grocery shops. Cinema posters could be seen on the big walls adjacent to streets and street junctions. While large business organisations employ professional workers to paste their posters, smaller companies make use of their own staff to do the pasting. In metropolitan cities, the posters are taxed by the municipal corporation.

Even today in villages, people announce weddings, birthdays, other celebrations and even death through posters. Felicitations and condolences are also communicated through the posters. Hence this form is appropriate for use by NGOs. They could be used by NGOs to announce their programmes or for their campaigns on a particular issue.

Small Publications, Books

Every year thousands of books are being published. There are hundreds of professional publishers involved in publishing. To publish school or college text-books, permission must be obtained from the Education Department of the Government. Otherwise in general, no prior permission is required for publishing. Books are sold through the shops meant for them.

On the basis of the applications received from the Library / Publications department of the government, hundred copies of any selected book is bought every year by the government. They are distributed to the public libraries of the government. As a procedure, publishers must send a copy of their book to Chennai Connemera Library, the Calcutta National Library and the Delhi National Library.

Similar procedure applies to small publications also though libraries do not buy any of them. Neither are they directly sold through bookshops. The book that you are reading right now is one such small publication.

Print media

Print media in Tamil could be classified into two categories. One consists of the big newspapers and magazines published in large numbers by big groups with a commercial motive. The other is the group of newspapers and magazines published by individuals or groups in small numbers with cultural, literary or political objectives.

Generally the small magazines are published once a month, once in a quarter or whenever possible / required.

Large newspapers and magazines are generally a part of a group of publications. Most of these groups publish more than one magazine/newspaper with several editions from several places.

There are certain statutory rules for initiating a newspaper or magazine. According to this, the name of the newspaper or magazine has to be registered. Only a registered magazine can get benefits such as postal concession, newsprint allotment etc.

Audio forms

Radio

In India, radio continues to be a state-owned medium. Efforts taken to grant autonomy to radio and television by constituting the Prasar Bharathi are still inconclusive. As a step in this direction, in metropolitan cities private companies are allotted time on contract basis in the frequency modulation broadcasts. The next step is to sanction permission to private groups to start their own frequency modulation broadcasts by setting up stations. The order to grant permission is pending. This also involves investment in lakhs of rupees.

In Tamil Nadu, the All India Radio Stations are located in Chennai, Madurai, Trichy, Coimbatore and Tirunelveli. In all these stations the *Vividh Bharathi* commercial broadcasting also exists.

The main features of radio include both music and information.

Audio Cassettes

In Tamil Nadu, lakhs of audio-cassettes are being sold. In general, film and devotional songs are recorded and sold in the form of audio-cassettes. During election times, political parties release political cassettes for campaign purposes. Of late, commercial groups are releasing cassettes with theatre dialogues humourous debates other speeches etc. Cultural organisations also have started releasing cassettes with messages on social issues of concern.

In Tamil Nadu there is practically no house without a transistor radio thanks to the easy-to-buy installment schemes. At the next level, the two-in-ones or the tape recorders have spread and reached the level of lower middle class families.

The technology for producing audio-cassettes is now available not only in Chennai but also in Madurai, Trichy, Coimbatore and other important cities. By hiring these recording studios many local organisations are in a position to produce and release audio-cassettes.

Visual forms

Television telecasts

Like radio, television is also a state-owned medium. However, in the nineties, the onset of satellite technology has privatised the television.

Already the Government of India has set up telecast stations all over the country and linked them through its INSAT satellites. The government has recently permitted private television channels to make use of its satellite connections.

Doordarshan, the television division of the *Prasar Bharathi* continues to be a state-owned entity. Even today, among the total number of television viewers, the number of viewers who see Doordarshan telecast has not gone below seventy per cent.

All over India, among the six crore households with television sets, only two crore households have cable connections. The private satellite channels available in tamil are *Sun, Raj, Raj Plus, Vijay* and *Jaya*. All these channels produce their programmes from Chennai as their base.

Video Cassette

At a time when only Doordarshan telecasts were available in the television, video cassettes started reaching the middle class people. Since the Video cassette players and the video cassette recorders are expensive, they did not spread as much as the audio cassettes. The video parlours meant for public viewing of videos and the libraries for the hiring of VCRs and cassettes were functioning very actively for sometime. With the arrival of private satellite channels, the need and utility of video-cassette has gone down drastically.

Presently, video-cassette as a media form is widely used by private commercial organisations and NGOs. At the most simple level public make use of video to document record their family occasions as like photographs.

Drama

Today drama exists in several distinct types in the cities and villages of Tamil Nadu. Their methodology of reaching the public is also diverse.

In cities, we find sabhas that offer music, dance and drama to people who are members. Thus, the drama troupes could perform only with the help of the sabhas. Most troupes that perform in sabhas are amateur groups.

In small towns and villages, stage plays are performed in the musi-drama style that was introduced by Sankaradass Swamigal. On the lines of cinema, plays without songs also exist. These plays are organised by contractors during temple festivals, trade-fairs etc. Generally professional drama troupes perform on such occasions.

In the recent past, modern drama which does not fall into the categories mentioned above, has grown to some extent. Several groups stage modern drama on an experimental basis. They are mostly amateur groups.

In the repertoire of modern drama, street plays are already in use by the NGOs. Without the support of PA systems, lighting, costumes, cosmetics, back-drops and props that are necessary for stage plays, street plays solely depend on the acting skills and the non-verbals of the performers. The unique feature of street play is the use of traditional folk expressions in contemporary ways with minimal expenditure.

Why do so many media forms exist?

So many media forms exist because of our social structure. Various people co-exist at various levels with varying life-styles. Some people have wealth enough to see them through several generations, while several have to go in search of the money for their next meal. Some are literate and educated. Many are illiterates who use their thumb impression as they cannot write their own names.

But everyone has information and communication needs.

Different types of media communicate with people at different levels. The consumption of different media by different types of people is based on their life-situations, educational qualifications, wealth and their place of living.

If that is the case, should we use different media types to reach people in different life situations ?

Yes !! Only if we use a wide range of media forms, the communication of our information will be complete. Before relating with media, we should understand questions like, 'How media functions?', 'What is the objective of each media form?' , 'What is its approach?' and ' What is its need ?' .

Let us understand the media

What are the objectives of media? What were the objectives with which primitive people communicated with each other? What are the objectives for the media people today? Researching this is as good as reviewing the complete social, political, economic and cultural history of entire humankind.

Objectives of Media

Primitive people by nature shared everything they obtained with each other, including information.

Today, society is constructed in such a way that it has no motivation to share what it gets with others. The social structure that exists today induces competition to obtain whatever is available including information. It is for this reason that the phrase 'Information is Power' is very popular.

Some people need information to fulfil their needs. Some others need information to acquire more power.

In general, people on the higher rungs of political, economic and cultural ladder have better chances to access information compared to people at lower levels. This ensures that differences and gaps that exist between the two categories of people keep increasing. Thus acquiring information becomes a competition for more power.

Therefore all people on all times, somehow wish, long, crave and desire to acquire any or all information. This is the principal-investment for the media. Hence today media has grown into a big industry like any other industry. As in other industries, media also calculates profit-loss measures in terms of money. If the basic objective of privately owned media is making money, why is it that they do not choose an industry that is more profitable than the media; there are reasons for that.

Media is the only industry that gives income, social status and the political authority create and change the social opinion of the people. That is why many groups that were hitherto engaged in other business also wish to own a print medium or a television channel of their own. If this is the case with privately owned media, what is the objective of state owned media.

Radio and Television are state-owned. This is one of the symbols of the authority that a government exerts on its people. Even in small nations whenever there is any upheaval, the group that opposes the government first seizes the radio and television stations. It is worth remembering this in this context because such capturing is not only an attempt to confiscate the means to reach out to the public but is also an attempt to reinforce the fact that power and authority rests with them now.

The states in general make use of the media to attain two objectives. First, they attempt to justify themselves. Secondly, they attempt to fulfil the needs of different sections of people. Even if they are not actually doing so, they attempt to give at least a sense of contentment the public that their needs are being taken care of.

Religious institutions are also capable of functioning like the government. Most of the ancient folk art forms are intertwined with the rituals as enforced by the religious authorities. The existence of folk art forms is dependent on rituals and the religion. When the rituals lose their reputation, the folk art forms also dwindle. The folk arts flourish only on the basis of the influence that God, religion and caste have in the minds of the people. Religious institutions often use folk media to reinforce the influence of religion on people. In recent times, social activists have started experimenting with isolating the art forms from the religious institutions and using them to portray social issues. Though some intense efforts are going on, they are generally small in their size and reach.

Approaches of the Media

When a media is locality-specific its approach is simple and is easily understood as in case of most folk arts.

The folk artists view their art from three different perspectives namely, means for livelihood, devotional duty and as an artistic self-expression of their joy. From the perspective of temple authorities and religious leaders who organise these cultural events, folk arts are symbols of their authority. It is also seen as the devotional duty fulfilled by them on their own behalf and on behalf of the people.

The approaches of large media cannot be easily understood, as its functioning and authority is vested with a small group of people who are beyond our reach. The large newspaper/magazines and television are of this nature.

For example if we consider a private television channel, the viewers do not know who decides on the programmes that are shown on the channel.

Apart from the channel owner and the managers, the advertising agency and the agency that wants to sponsor the programme are also involved in the decision making. 'Why do they sponsor a particular programme? What is the impact they want to create in the viewers through the programme? What is their ulterior motive? It is difficult for the viewers to understand these things in a cursory glance.

Making profit is the primary objective of large media agencies. Acquiring an influence and authority in the society are the parallel motives. To fulfil these objectives media needs readers and viewers in very large numbers.

However, the readers and viewers do not have similar concerns and likes. They have diverse tastes, concerns and wishes. Print media, television and the other media forms have to face the challenge of meeting the diverse needs of their readers and viewers.

Today, if we take a close look at the print media and the television programmes that are successful both commercially and in terms of popularity, we could find that they have accommodated the likes and concerns of their diverse audience in one way or another.

A magazine that presents interviews of rationalists who oppose superstitions also in another page gives the horoscope and predictions for the following week. A television channel interviews commercial writers such as Mr. Rajesh Kumar and also literary writer as Mr. Sundara Ramaswamy.

Though media allows ideas, likes and views that might contradict each other, they are careful to ensure that sentiments of their audience is not offended. The approach of a successful media is to delight all categories of people, to convince them and to make them feel that it is their own magazine or TV channel. This is also a need for the media.

This approach of the media could be taken as commercial prudence. It could also be understood as a democratic gesture of providing space to all opinions.

At the same time, every print medium and television channel has its own affiliation in the political and cultural arena. However media is careful to ensure that the ordinary reader and viewer does not spot out such affiliations. Even if these affiliations are manifest, media creates an illusion that the

readers or viewers are accepting an opinion on their own. Media organisations ensure that their political or cultural affiliations is not seen as a campaign by their audience.

Media is the society's reflection, irrespective of how we look at it. All the differences of opinion that exist in the society exist in media also. Media considers itself a platform for balancing and compromising the differences of opinions.

Such balancing and compromising is not always possible. Hence it reduces the adversity of certain attacks and at times, it also unknowingly aggravates some controversies.

People who relate with the media could construct their relationship only on the basis of what are their priorities and objectives are in the society. Before approaching the media and even before relating with it, we should first determine why we need media.

Why do we need Media?

Our first relationship with the media is that we are also its consumers.

Many NGOs have library or documentation centres. They preserve clippings that are considered relevant and useful from newspapers, journals and books.

That is, from the media we collect several information required for our area of interest. In the same manner we also gather recordings of television programmes, video and audio cassettes etc. available under the subjects of our interest and concern. Apart from this, NGO functionaries also gauge the taste of people from the range of programmes they watch in the media.

Thus, the plans and activities of NGO functionaries are affected and influenced even without their knowledge by the information and opinion presented in the media. Hence one of the needs of NGOs is obtaining information, opinion and knowledge on the social changes from several media sources.

The other need is relating with the people by making use of media.

NGOs have to relate with people at several stages of their work. It is worthwhile to see what type of communication is required at what stage.

- ◆ Direct field level communication of the NGO with the people who participate in the project activities of the NGO.
- ◆ Communication in the locality to gain the general support of the public.
- ◆ Communication with the outside world to reveal the field realities so as to draw the attention of the public from other localities.

In each of these, the NGO could make use of several media forms (You can think for yourself which media form will be appropriate for which communication. You can compare and see whether your ideas match in the two chapters that follow)

Apart from relating with the people, NGOs also need to relate and communicate with several power structures. Media is needed to relate with such structures also.

1. Local institutions – Village presidents, Panchayats, Religious and Caste institutions.
2. Government institutions – Police Department, District Administration, Ministry etc.

3. Opinion Leaders – Influential people who guide people in their opinions such as the local doctors, teachers, fan clubs, youth clubs, women's clubs etc.

NGOs have to extensively publicise their role and functions if they have to gain the support of these institutions or to tackle opposition. By doing so, they have to gain and wield influence at the field level. For this clarity is required to decide on what media form could be used.

Before making use of a medium, its routine functioning has to be understood. Based on its routine functioning its need should also be understood. After such an understanding, we should plan to decide how our needs could be linked to that, for which we need to understand the communication strategies of every media.

Media Strategies

Each media form has its own characteristic features. If we understand them, we can decide how to make use of that form.

Folk arts

From *Oyilattam* to *Koothu*, if we consider any folk art, music and dance are their basic features. The rhythms, tunes and dance movements of most folk arts are very simple as they focus mainly on the expression of joy. People practising folk arts dance and sing in groups for their joy rather than focussing on an individual's talent. At the same time, those simple tunes and dances are expressions of their emotions, anger, vigour and energy.

The legends in the folk art are mostly from the traditional mythology, epics, and stories that the people are already familiar with. These contribute to both the strengths and weaknesses of these arts.

The viewers easily understand the stories as they already know them. But the stories of the new and modern era cannot be understood all that easily (This does not mean that none of the modern stories are understandable)

Therefore when we attempt to use the folk art forms to convey modern stories, we must construct the story in such a way that the story appropriately and harmoniously rests within the characteristic features of the art such as its music, dance and vigour.

The use of metaphors is another salient strategy and feature of folk story telling. No news or opinion needs to be conveyed directly as in a campaign. The metaphoric form itself conveys the story in an artistic way.

Folk arts make use of imaginations that could otherwise be described as unbelievable, exaggeration, strange, over-imagination, unrealistic etc. to convey opinions relevant for the contemporary era.

Print forms

Handbills

Handbills are like *Thirukkural* (Tamil couplets). This form is very useful for conveying an opinion instantly and directly. The advantage with handbills is that those who receive with utmost disinterest also would take a quick look to see what is stated before they throw it away. It is possible to attract someone's attention to our message even in the very first glance.

In general, handbills could be used when we think that a message is applicable to all categories of people. We can also use it when we want the message to reach only a particular category of people. The format of the itself is its strategy.

Posters

The main strategy of posters is the forceful communication of a message or opinion. Unlike handbills, poster is big in size. The visuals and letters in the poster easily attract the attention of viewers.

The weakness of poster is that its lifetime is very short. However its strength is that it could attract maximum attention in such a short duration itself.

Small Publications, Books

In general, messages and opinions in a booklet could attract only those people who already have some concern for the information presented in the book.

If an interest is already created on an issue through a handbill or poster, books or small publications would be useful to disseminate more information on that subject. Books lead to an elaborate understanding of any news.

The strength of small publications is that they could be read more than once. Their weakness is that they could be used only when a preliminary introduction is created on any issue.

Print Media

Newspapers and magazines are of different types. They could be classified as dailies, weekly or monthly magazines. Another way of classifying them would be as print media for news, for stories, for cinema, for women etc.

Irrespective of how we classify them, they have some features in common. We can see them now.

Marcus, the famous Latin American writer and journalist while pointed out that even if there is one real life truth, in a fiction, the novel becomes very special, a true story loses its respect even if there is one lie.

Therefore print media providing news follows the story-telling strategy while print media containing story adopts the strategy of creating a real-life effect.

In newspapers and newsmagazines the news is published in several forms.

- Direct news covering actual day-to-day happenings in the country, government announcements, the activities of the political leaders, road accidents, sports results etc.
- The background and an analysis of the news, including future possibilities are presented in the form of a news story. This form largely adopts the story-telling style.

In the first style, the pyramid method is adopted always. Pyramid is triangular in shape. The top portion or the head of the triangle is sharp. As it goes below, it expands. The most important information in the news is like the head of the triangle. The other information expands gradually in the steps that follow. While structuring the news this way, even if some information is removed from below, the main news remains unaffected. Therefore it is vital that the most important news is conveyed at the very beginning itself. This is one of the golden rules to be observed while writing for the print media.

To understand this, let us consider this example. The Prime Minister went to Gandhi hall to take part in the Industrialists' association conference. The president of the association welcomed the Prime Minister. Many industrialists spoke on the difficulties faced by them in the industrial field. At last, the Prime Minister addressed the gathering. He said that only when terrorism is suppressed and when peace prevails, industrial growth is possible. The event came to an end. When the Prime Minister was walking to his car, he was shot. The bullet grazed his ears. The Prime Minister did not suffer any injury. The public and the police captured the person who attempted the act. It was learnt that he was one of the workers removed from job from an industry due to retrenchment.

The incident occurred only in the above sequence. However, the most important news is that the Prime Minister was shot and he escaped. Only after that the answers to questions such as Where, When, Why, By Whom etc. should be presented in the news item. So that, if there is a need to remove certain sentences from the news, due to the space constraint, such news can be removed. News of less importance can be removed the president of the Industrialists' Association gave the Welcome Address" should be placed at the end. This is the pyramid method.

In any news there has to be answers for the five questions i.e. Who?, What?, Where?, When? and Why? This is the important strategy being followed ever since the origin of the print media. If there are answers for these five questions, the news is complete.

Media sensationalises ordinary events to draw the readers' attention. This is a general complaint posed against the media. Actually sensationalising is one of the strategies of media. However, the fundamental reason for this rests with the objective with which a reader buys a newspaper. The reality is the fact that readers do not buy newspaper to know routine happenings in the country. They read papers only to know abnormal happenings and why they happened. This is a basic need of the readers. Hence the print media tries to exaggerate to some extent.

However this sensationalising strategy is acceptable for a viewer or reader only at moderate levels. If there is no truth behind the sensationalism, the credibility of the print medium itself will be lost.

The main strategies of any print media could be listed as follows ;

1. Headings that attract attention
2. Expanding the news as in a story
3. Interest creation by using simple words
4. Use of illustrations and visuals

What is meant by the use of illustrations and visuals?

Use of illustrations and visuals refers to the appropriate use of photographs, drawings, cartoons etc. The common practice is to use photographs for news, drawings for essays and stories and cartoons in isolation.

There are certain exceptions for this. Some weekly magazines make use of the photographs of models for their stories and poems. If relevant photographs of locations such as a court scene or an accident spot are not available, drawings and maps are used to illustrate the news.

Audio forms

Radio

Radio is main audio form. In radio, the forms that predominantly find place are music, talks and jingles. Among this, music is the only form that could be listened for a longer duration.

Therefore the most important strategy in radio is the programme's duration. It is very essential to determine the length and duration of any broadcast before hand. There is a limit for continuously listening to a plain talk without boredom.

Therefore after deciding the duration of a programme, it is essential to ensure that different forms are presented within that time limit.

For a half an hour women's programme in the radio four to five different forms would find place. Interpersonal forms such as a song, a dialogue, a question-answer session, a short story reading, a jingle in the programme helps prevent listeners' fatigue.

Another important strategy of audio forms is addressing the listeners as though their presence is there. This helps creating a bond with the listener. (The same strategy is used in television When the presenter looks at the camera, it appears as if he/she is directly looking at us)

In jingles, short story-telling and short plays, another important strategy is the use of a multiplicity of real life sounds that add to their impact.

Sound does not mean sound of a talk, a song or music only. There is no end to the range of sounds that can be used. This includes the child's crying, birds' chirping, the sounds of trains, cars, the sound of a door closing, the sounds that could be heard in a kitchen, sound of brushing, sipping a cool drink, opening a newspaper, the sound of a pair of scissors during hair-cutting etc.

Short sentences, colloquial language, music, audio cues are the important components and strategies of the audio form.

Visual form

If we observe the overall programme construction strategy of television, we may note that it is similar to the print media

It contains a combination of politics, other general news, cinema, children's section, women's section, farmers' section, talk shows etc. The programmes also adopt the same combinations used by commercial magazines though in different proportions.

The strength of the television medium is that it gets into the viewer's house visually to convey the news. Being a visual form, it does not have the constraint of the audio form i.e. the short span of attention of listeners. In general, television programmes have the duration of 20 to 30 minutes.

However it has to be noted that even in the case of the television medium the short advertisement films have better impact. In both the radio and television media the short duration spots have a greater reach. In general, even while reading newspapers and magazines we have a natural inclination to read the news bits presented here and there, before reading the long essays and stories. Similarly, in the radio and television media the short spots draw our attention first.

Though the different components of the film medium such as music, dialogue, visual sequence, composition are common for the television, wide and long shots are generally avoided. More of close-up shots and mid shots are used as they create a sense of closeness with the viewers when they watch the programmes in the home environment.

The most important strategy of television is that the viewer gets a feeling that it is a friend sitting at home and chatting continuously to attend to the viewer's feeling of isolation.

We need to closely and regularly observe the different media forms and their mode of functioning to help us decide and strategise ways to get our space in it.

Our Strategies

Before charting our strategies to participate in the media we have to remember the important fact that every form of media reaches different categories of people at different levels in the society. All those who watch *koothu* may not read magazines and all those who watch television may not listen to *villuppattu*.

Therefore it is essential to have adequate knowledge of the type of media that would be appropriate to convey the information that we need to convey for the category of people we have in mind.

Folk arts

The folk art form is useful to share information with people in a particular locality where the NGO has its direct field intervention programmes.

Folk arts could be used in two ways.

A folk art performance that attracts large audience could be arranged to gather crowd. The intended interaction, information sharing and discussions could be conducted either before or after the folk art performance, keeping in mind the field situation as well as the audience. Here the folk art forms function as a technique for attracting the audience. Hence it is only a supplementary tool. There is no actual information sharing through the folk medium. At times the message conveyed by the folk medium and the message that the NGO wants to convey may be in direct contrast with each other.

The second and better alternative would be to convey the message through the folk art form itself, though this requires hard work.

We have to first decide the folk medium through which the information has to be shared.

For this, the NGO has to be aware of the folk art that is alive in that particular locality among the people who live there.

Following this, a positive relationship must be fostered with the artists who are involved in that folk art. We can conduct the performance either with those actual artists or with the staff members of the NGO who are interested in the art. We could also identify enthusiastic performers from among the public. However, people thus identified must receive formal training from the traditional artists.

Performances that include interested people from among the local public receive wider response from the audience. As there is direct participation from the public, the NGOs efforts could reach the public more intensely.

(The state owned campaign organisations such as the field publicity and media units have permanent cultural teams for spreading awareness on issues such as Family Planning, AIDS, Environmental hygiene etc. The NGOs can make use of such teams whenever their programme objectives match with the objectives of the government. While operating in the field with a critical perspective on the functioning of the government, such relationships are neither possible, nor desirable)

The programmes thus designed may be carried out in two ways.

- ◆ Retaining the original form of the folk medium
- ◆ Developing a new form blending features of the folk art with modern drama strategies

Among this, the first method may not always suit all information. Only some information could be redefined in old stories. For example Bharathiar, the Tamil poet has written his *Panchali sabhatham* without changing the story to convey contemporary ideas. *Panchali* appears to be a representative of the freedom struggle. The learned people who do not question injustice are strongly criticised by him. To some extent the stories and songs that exist in folk arts could be used to convey contemporary ideas.

In the second method there is freedom and convenience to do anything. However sufficient knowledge and practice are necessary to use the discretion. Decisions have to be made on what characteristics of the folk arts should be taken and what should be avoided, considering how well they would merge with the modern strategies. While taking such decisions the following points have to be kept in mind:

- ◆ When the new information is presented through the old forms, are the traditional artists so convinced of the information to agree to use their form to convey the information (or) Do they consider it as another job and do it for the honorarium given to them by the NGO.
- ◆ Are the NGO staff trained in folk art convinced of the information they communicate or involved in the art? (or) Do they involve in the programme just as another task delegated to them?
- ◆ Are the art forms and the information harmonious with each other without dominating one another?

Many field workers think that folk art and modern drama are tools for campaigns and awareness building only. As a result, a condescending attitude emerges. This makes them think they could learn nuances of this easily, conduct performances without sufficient practice and hard work. Unless there is dedication and total involvement, no cultural performance could be a fulfilling experience for the viewers.

If the art performance is not a fulfilling experience, the audience may feel that the ideas conveyed are alien to them. This could turn against the very purpose for which the art form was chosen.

Print form

Handbills, Posters

These forms can be used only in a particular locality. They are appropriate for use in the locality where the NGOs are involved with their field activities. They could be used to announce the local programmes of the NGO ; and are the ideal forms to convey a specific news.

Frugality of words is of paramount importance for handbills and posters.

The lesser the number of words, the better is its effectiveness.

Nobody would feel like reading a handbill if the writing resembles caterpillars crawling all over. If in one page of the handbill there are thirty to forty lines, they have to be split into small paragraphs, which can be given sub-titles. The important word in any sentence can be underlined.

If a handbill consists of small pictures and line drawings, its appeal would be stronger.

In the case of posters, at least seventy percent of the space should be allotted for picture or drawing, restricting the writing to thirty percent of the space.

Posters need not be multi-coloured. To convey most messages, the cost-effective black and white posters would be sufficient. Black and white posters also attract attention early amidst many multi-colour posters.

In a poster, there must be harmony between the size of the pictures and the length and breadth of the letters when both appear together.

The pictures and letters should not touch the edges of the poster. They stand out only when they are placed at a reasonable distance from the edges. However, in some cases, the pictures could be printed in such a way that they overflow on three borders. (Printers call it 'the bleeding effect')

Where the posters are pasted is of equal importance. The number of posters pasted is not the only criteria to draw the attention of the public. Even when printed in small numbers, if the places for pasting the posters are carefully chosen, greater benefits could be assured.

In large cities, thousands of cinema posters are pasted. However even a hundred carefully designed black and white posters would be sufficient to get enough attention if they are pasted in appropriate places.

Prior to pasting, with the help of field staff, a survey should be done to identify the places for putting up posters in the operational area. Places where people's attention would converge such as the wall behind a cobbler in a street side, the wall adjacent to the ticket counter in a railway station etc. should be chosen. In small towns and villages, places such as markets, places for fetching water, play grounds etc. could be chosen. NGOs who cannot afford large amounts of money can get maximum benefits by making the right choices.

Booklets, Books

There are two types of booklets. The first type consists of booklets that are developed by the NGO to serve as a manual for people working towards its vision. This book is also a manual of that nature.

The second type of booklets are those that are brought out by the NGO to inform the general public who have the habit of reading of its activities and issues of concern. There are some questions that need to be answered before publishing a booklet/book.

For Whom ?

Is it for those who have been directly affected by the issues that we write about ? Is it for those who already have an understanding of the issue or is it for those who have not shown any concern to the issue? Or is it for those who have concern for the issue but lack information on it?

Is it for those who have the power and authority to influence change in a particular issue? For instance, Is it for parents? Teachers? Or the Child Care Workers? Is it for the political leaders or the elected representatives?

Why ?

Is it for attaining immediate short term objectives? For instance ; to accelerate an amendment that is immediately required; to mobilise the public to get the attention of the authorities; to prepare the people for an ensuing immunisation programme etc. or is it for changing attitudes over a period of time ?

How?

While writing for short-term objectives, all the dimensions of the issue considered need not be explained. We could present only the information that is sufficient to bring in expected results.

There is an important rule to be followed while writing for the handbills, booklets, books or the print media. Questions that would arise in the mind of the readers when they read a sentence must be visualised and the answer to the question should be provided in the very next few sentences.

This strategy is suggested to ensure communication of ideas clearly. At the same time, there are occasions when they have to be written in ways that raise questions in the minds of the readers and motivate them to search for answers on their own.

Distribution

Whether it is a booklet or a book, ways and means to distribute them should be decided in advance so that it is possible to decide on its price.

If they are to be commercially distributed through bookshops, their commission, postage expenses etc. should be accommodated. While fixing the sale price, it may be necessary to raise the cost of the book to three times its actual production cost. While buying a book, the library department of the government decides the cost on the basis of the total number of pages. Instead of considering the quality of the content, the quality of the paper used for the book is considered (For the past fifteen years, the government uses Rs.2/- per 16 pages norm as the basis for calculating the cost of a crown size book)

Though the library department of the government purchases books for several lakhs of rupees every year, no NGO can consider publishing a book with the hope of selling to the government since there is no well defined procedure or policy for buying the books.

If an NGO wants its books to reach as many people as possible, a nominal cost should be fixed. In our state, people are yet to get into the habit of buying books for general reading. It takes at least two years for selling about a thousand copies of a book.

Instead of publishing huge and expensive books which remain unsold, efforts must be taken by NGOs to publish inexpensive books with less number of pages. If an NGO wants to publish books free of cost, greater care and concern should be taken while distributing them. Each copy should be distributed after ensuring that it reaches the audience for whom it is meant. It may be alright to give handbills to everyone who asks for it. But booklets and books cannot be distributed in that manner, failing which the benefit of this particular media form would be lost.

Newspaper / Magazines

When we try to convey our information and news through the print media, we must be very clear about the reader with whom we wish to communicate.

Print media includes Dailies and magazines. Under both categories, there are several newspapers and magazines that reach different categories of readers. First we shall consider the dailies.

The English newspapers that are largely in use in Tamil Nadu are *The Hindu* and *The New Indian Express*. Both are read by the upper class and the middle class people. Both dailies are keenly observed by higher officials in the government.

Among the Tamil dailies, *Dinamani* is read by upper and middle class people. Apart from reaching the above two classes, *Dinamalar* reaches people in lower class also. *Daily Thanthi* reaches the middle and lower classes as all other people who are not much educated but have a reading habit. Government officials generally read all the three newspapers. *Dinakaran* and *Kathiravan* are the other dailies whose readers are less in number. However they have exclusive readership belonging to the middle and the lower middle class. Apart from these dailies, several districts in Tamil Nadu have dailies specific to their own locality.

The Evening dailies are largely read by the lower middle and lower class people. Among these, *Malai Murasu* and *Malai Malar* are prominent.

Now we will take a look at magazines.

The following magazines reach middle and high class people. Tamil magazines: *Ananda Vikatan*, *Mangaiyar Malar*, *Aval Vikatan*, *Kalki*, *India Today*(Tamil), English magazines: Outlook, India Today (English), The Week, Sunday and the Frontline.

The Tamil magazines in circulation among middle and lower middle classes are Kumudham, Jr. Vikatan, Nakkeeran, Kungumam, Bhagya and Idhayam while Rani and Devi reach people in lower middle and lower classes.

The classification above will help us decide on the right magazine to reach the category of people we have in mind. Prior to this we have to decide on the category of readers we intend to reach.

Types and Forms

One other type of classification is essential to decide our strategy.

If we classify the print media as news media and the story media, *Dinamani*, *Daily Thathi*, and the bi-weeklies such as Junior *Vikatan*, *Nakkeeran* would fall in the same category. We would find stories in newspapers' weekly supplements such as the *Dinamalar_Vaarmalar*. We should also remember that sometimes story magazines such as *Ananda Vikatan*, *Kalki* and women's magazines such as *Mangaiyar Malar*, *Aval Vikatan*, contain news stories. The objective behind such classification is only to clarify and understand which print medium reaches which section of the audience.

While deciding the appropriate print medium to reach our audience, we also need to decide on the appropriate form that would convey the information that we want to convey. Then we must train ourselves to convey our information by using that form.

The forms used in both dailies and magazines: News stories, cartoons etc. The forms that find place only in magazines: Short stories, poems, news bits, comedy bits etc.

The form used only in dailies: Direct news report. These forms could be examined one by one.

News Report

The following are some examples of direct news.

'The Chief Minister inaugurated the Training Centre of the Women Development Corporation,' 'Thirty children died when a cycle rickshaw taking children to school fell into a well.'

We should examine what activities of the NGO fits into such direct news. Generally seminars, workshops convened by the NGOs and functions to distribute aids and assistance would fall into the category of news reports. Such information could be published only in dailies and not in magazines.

While approaching dailies to publish such news, we should ask ourselves whether the event organised by us is important enough to be known by the entire nation. We cannot ask to publish just because the event or programme is dear to us.

If it is sufficient that the news is known in the locality where we function, we must be contented with publishing the news in the local edition.

Instead, if our event has that kind of social significance to be publicised widely, efforts should be made to get the news published in all the editions of the dailies.

A general rule has to be always kept in mind. On most occasions, the NGO has to function silently and maintain a low profile. Sometimes for some activities, extensive publicity is required. This manual is to enable our understanding on how to make use of the media for such occasions. If we try to make use of the media for occasions when we are not supposed to, the effects may be negative.

Apart from the dailies and journals, there are also news agencies such as the Press Trust of India (PTI), United News of India (UNI) etc. Since a daily cannot have its reporters in all places, it makes use of the news sent by these agencies. In general, these agencies send very brief news. When the reporters of such agencies are in our locality, our news could be sent through them as well.

How to write a News Report

While writing the news report, it is important to follow the pyramid model as mentioned in chapter four. While writing in accordance with this model, a news report on childrens' day celebration cannot

be written as illustrated here. "The Children's Day was celebrated on November 14, 1999 evening. The honourable minister for Social Welfare for Tamil Nadu presided over the function."

The news should be written in such a way that an important information, announcement or news in the minister's speech finds a place in the first paragraph. For example, it can be written as follows. "The minister warned that stringent action will be taken against all government employees who employ children to work in their houses."

The news should begin as follows. "The Minister for Social Welfare who presided over the *Children's Day celebrations at the Thaaai Social welfare organisation held at the Anna Arangam, Uthukkottai* said that child rights' violations by the government officials cannot be tolerated since they should be models guiding the general public."

It can be noted that *when* and *where* the event was held is presented in the second paragraph itself. One might feel like asking, "why we have to write this? Can't the press personnel write it themselves?"

Reporters cannot be sent from the Press office to cover all events. On such occasions, it is better to write the news on our own and hand them over to the press office. If the news thus written by us is complete and good with no necessity for rewriting, the press reporters and the sub-editors will be pleased with us. Also, if the news that we want to announce is written by us, it would be saved from the danger of being misunderstood or distorted.

In the same way, when reporters come to cover our event, we must be ready with a compilation of some basic information and give it to them even before they ask for it. To begin with, the programme schedule, the speakers, their positions and if we are availing Bank loan for hundred people, what is the loan amount, why do we give them and for how many people etc. should be given. All these information should be presented concisely.

Handouts and brochures providing the history of our organisation, our past activities, the activities that we plan for the future etc. should be kept ready and given during such occasions. More than the NGOs in cities, the NGOs in small towns could reap greater benefits from such a strategy.

While sending news reports on functions, events etc. they need not be sent to the editor of the newspaper. Only invitations for events of great significance can be sent to the editor.

In general, news reports should be addressed to the *Chief Reporter* of the newspaper. Only the *News Editor* and the *Chief Reporter* would be directly responsible for the handling of daily news. In small newspapers and the local edition offices of newspapers, one person might be responsible for both functions.

While sending news reports, a covering letter is not always essential. A short note with a request for publishing the enclosed news item could be given in the NGOs letter-head, along with the news report.

We already saw that any direct news is published in the dailies only. If that is the case, one might feel like asking, 'Can't the magazines publish news on workshops and seminars?'

Magazines do not publish news about the inauguration and valedictory of a seminar. However any interesting and unique incident that occurred in the course of the seminar could be published in a magazine.

In this regard, the following example can be examined. 'In a workshop meant for Child Care Workers, the participants were involved in a theatre rehearsal in groups. A girl was watching them practice their play. She was the daughter of a lower level staff working in that campus. When the group members requested her to join their performance, she immediately joined.

That girl had discontinued her studies because of her family situation. The play she agreed to join was on the theme that children drop-out from the school because education is not attractive to them. The participation of that girl in the play made the team members realise a lot of truths and facts about life.'

This information is worthy of being published in a magazine. Though this cannot be written as direct news, it might find place in magazines as an anecdote.

While such news is being shared with them, the reporter or the editor of the magazine may immediately ask for a photograph of that girl. In such news bits, the reading experience will be complete only if the photograph is also included. Inability to provide the photograph may not only delay but may also deny an opportunity for that news bit to find a place in the magazine.

Therefore the photographs of our organisations' events and activities should not be taken for record or documentation purpose only. They can be used for the print media as well. Therefore while taking

photographs, we must be careful enough to ensure their quality and suitability for publishing in the print media.

In general, the close-up and mid-shot photographs would be suitable and visible in print. Big group photos where one has to search and identify the faces should not be used.

Wishing that the photographs of people close to us should appear on a magazine is not the right approach. The print media prefers photographs only on the basis of their significance and relevance to the news.

News stories

In general, news stories are best suited to analyse direct news. In doing so they trace the history of the news, the immediate effects, future possibilities etc.

The following news can be examined. "The Chief Minister announced that the educational qualification for eligibility to avail the benefits of the *Muvalur Ramamirtham Ammaiya*r marriage assistance scheme, is raised to a pass in tenth standard." This is direct news

A news story would attempt to analyse the same news more deeply. When the scheme was introduced, the eligibility criterion was a pass in tenth standard. Why was it brought down to eighth standard and why is it now reverted back to tenth standard? How many women have so far benefited from this scheme? How many have lost the opportunity to benefit from this scheme? Was this scheme useful in improving women's education or Was this scheme a grant of assistance only to get the girls married? Why should a government that is not bothered about the marriage expense of a poor boy, think of the marriage expense of a poor girl? Why is marriage given so much importance when it comes to a girl? Is the underlying principle of the scheme right or wrong?

While direct news just presents information before the readers, the news story attempts to analyse the information, inspire further thinking, provoke new questions and also places some resolutions for discussion.

Both newspapers and magazines publish news stories.

Though they are lengthier than the direct news, they have their own limitations. No reader enjoys reading long sentences and long stories.

Therefore unnecessary details should be avoided while writing a news story. The past background should be quoted just to support the topic currently under consideration. Repeating the same point has to be avoided. At the same time wherever it is necessary to consolidate, reinforce and recap the ideas earlier presented, repetition could be permitted.

Every information sharing has a basic rule. The rule is taking the reader from known information to the unknown information. This rule should be followed without fail.

Past events can be narrated as stories. Wherever possible, a thin line of humour can be added. One might feel like asking "Where could humour find place while narrating a serious, intense and painful problem?" Sometimes it is possible to present it with wit and sarcasm.

For instance, a news story that points out the lack of facilities in a Child Care Centre, starts with a description of the neighbourhood. The interviews of parents affected by the poor quality also are presented in the story.

"At the entrance of the slum, there are some shops. Two are tea-shops. There is also a wine shop, lottery shop and a pawn broker shop.

A mother says, "Had we been a little more prosperous we would have taken care of the child on our own. I hope that our income would go up within a year. On what basis does she believe that? Right! There is a lottery shop. Won't some fortune hit her?"

The last line is sarcastic. The irony of the social situation where the unnecessary components of life are given importance and the necessary aspects get pushed aside is presented here."

Generally, news stories appearing in newspapers and magazines are written by their reporter, sub-editor or other well-known writers.

The positive reception accorded to news reports written by NGO functionaries may not be there for short story, news bits, comedy bits, poems, cartoons etc. prepared by them. The lack of confidence in the skills of NGO functionaries for these forms could be a cause for this. In general, many do not have those skills though there may be exceptions.

NGO staff members who wish to come out with their own news stories, short stories, poems, news/comedy bits, cartoons etc. should get adequate in-depth training. Till then they have to get the help and guidance of experienced writers or artists who are well versed these skills.

Writers and Workshops

The information that can be published as news stories, comedy bits etc. could be shared with the creative writers in the press. They can be inspired and motivated to write on these topics. Any slight interest shown by them on a particular issue must be capitalized and they could be repeatedly encouraged to write on that, by providing them with supportive documents and materials.

NGOs must convene workshops for institution-based writers, artists and programme executives from Television and Radio stations. The objective of these workshops, is not to be preach to the writers on what they should write, how they should write etc. Neither the media people nor the NGO staff would appreciate such preaching.

In such workshops, the NGOs can share information available with them with the support of professionals and experts such as Doctors, Psychologists and Educationists. For example, a NGO might have collected information on the needs of children below three years, problems faced by them and the immediate danger, that await the future generation. The approaches of the senior writers in addressing this issue in their novels can be discussed with young writers. Such discussions would help young writers to acquire more social concern.

Some of the benefits of conducting such workshops from the experiences of M.S. Swaminathan Research Foundation are as follows.

Some writers who did not consider these issues as themes for their stories started writing on this theme on their own interest. Eleven short stories that emerged as a result of the workshop were published in several popular magazines.

Many young writers imbibed the social responsibility that even if they do not write to support the cause of child welfare and women's rights, they would not write any thing against the rights of women and children.

Collaborations

Collaborating with newspapers and magazines to conduct various competitions is another strategy.

M.S. Swaminathan Research Foundation collaborated with *Dinamani*, *Rani* and *Kungumam* and conducted Photography competitions and story, essay and poetry writing competitions with a focus on certain social issues. This resulted in the identification of young creative writers and also helped them imbibe social concern. Some clear decisions are necessary while planning collaborative ventures such as workshops and competitions with the media.

'Which section of people are reached by the media organisation that comes forward to collaborate with us?', 'Is the theme and focus identified for the competition relevant to its readers/viewers?', 'Is the media organisation in a position to sponsor the award for the competition?', 'Is the award sponsored by the NGO only?', 'Is the NGO representative in the selection committee competent to check only the subject matter of the entry?', 'Is he mature enough to leave the decision on the aesthetics of the form to the media representative?', 'Is the agreement to publish the selected entry in the media clearly decided and defined?', 'Who has the right to publish the compilation in future?'

Collaborations would be successful only when there is clarity on these grounds. While initiating such collaborative exercises, contacting two different media organisations at the same time would complicate matters. Initially, only one media organisation should be contacted. The other can be contacted after the first one clearly expresses its inability to participate.

As far as possible, we must have a friendly relationship with all media organisations. We should not enter into their politics and disputes. At the same time, tough competition prevailing pressurises every media organisation to come out with something different and unique. They should feel that collaborating with us helps them fulfill this goal.

One cannot think that the association with media is over with the publication of our activities or our writings. Several hundred issues of the same magazine or newspaper may be publishing ideas that contradict the ideas presented by us. Therefore even if our issues and concern find a place in the publication the benefits may not accrue. Therefore it is important that the concerned NGO continuously pin points any news or contradicting view-point presented in any magazine or newspaper.

Very often wrong ideas are published in a media because of the ignorance of the media people. The NGOs should continue to maintain their relationship with the media at least to do away with such errors.

Press Meet.

Press meet is a method by which an NGO could announce its news to all the newspapers and magazines at the same time.

Press meet is the method of sending out invitations to all the newspapers, magazines and inviting their reporters to a particular place to directly share information with them. The lesser we use this form, the better it is. Because most of the media offices do not have adequate staff members to spare for frequent press meets.

From the time the Press meet is planned and till it starts, there is no assurance on the number of reporters who will attend the meet. On the same day if they are sent to cover some other event and if a major accident or political upheaval occurs, even a few minutes before the Press meet, nobody would attend the meet.

Therefore unless and until it is very important, press meets should be avoided. For example, we should not have a press meet to distribute the invitations for a 'Women's festival' we plan to conduct next week. Such a press-meet would irritate the media people, and invite comments such as "This invitation could have been sent to the office itself. Why a Press meet for this?"

A press meet could be convened for instance, to declare an effort of immediate and long term relevance and importance is taken up for the first time in our locality / state / the nation.

It is also worth convening press meets to expose a major social malady, to announce the recovery of victims such as the children, women and labourers from tragedies such as bonded labour, sexual abuse etc.

How to conduct the Press Meet?

While sending out invitations for the meet answers for questions such as who would meet the journalists? For what, why, where etc. should be clearly mentioned. Sufficient advance the

information must be given. Inviting through the telephone in the last minute would create bitter feelings however friendly the press reporters are. It is important that a reminder phone call is given on the day of the press meet in the morning.

The information we want to give should be written and kept ready in a condensed form and its copies should be given to all those who attend the press meet. Tamil and English versions should be given to the Tamil and English press respectively.

The purpose or the reason for convening the press meet should be briefly stated before the commencement of the press meet. Then the answers to the reporters' questions could be given.

Reporters' motives must be understood. The reporters' nature is to seek as much information as possible and to ensure that the information given to them is true by raising several questions across. The reporters for dailies have the constraint of finishing this task and reaching their office on time. Therefore even if there is lack of patience or irritation in tone during the questioning, meet, it should be handled with patience.

The press meet is not a mere periodic information sharing exercise for the NGOs. It reveals and exposes several other things. During the Press Meet, the nature of the NGO, its characteristic features etc. can be easily assessed by the journalists.

The media people will be sharp enough to observe the NGO's inefficiency, its lack of integrity etc. if any. The media will also observe NGOs' treatment to ordinary people who participate in their development work, NGOs' attitude, whether the NGO considers itself a servant of the people or whether people are seen as pawns to be used for the NGOs' fund raising ventures.

During the press meet, while sharing information, the NGO must clarify whether it is an off the record information piece or whether it could be published.

For example, while talking about the non-implementation of a scheme meant for the welfare of the people, the information on the miseries of the people due to the non-implementation of the scheme could be made known to the public. Whereas an information that a political leader or a government officer is holding back the scheme for her or his own benefit is not a information that could be published when there is inadequate evidence. At times such background information could be shared with the reporters with a caution "Not for Publication". When this caution is not given, there is the danger of that information getting published as "The NGO staff blames so and so for this".

Ethics

The NGO should follow certain ethics whether it is direct information sharing through press meet or sending news report or sharing information through other means.

For example, a mother who happened to kill a girl child might have later on acquired the awareness to support the activities of the NGO. But the NGO does not have the right to expose her as a specimen while discussing the issue.

If the NGO decides to make the woman proclaim to the media that she committed a murder, that could be done only after obtaining the total consent of the woman. Her consent could be obtained only after clearly explaining to her the implications. If she is willing even after this, exposing the act could be done.

When NGOs wish to enable ordinary people to depose before the press meet regarding their opinions and information against the government and the power structures, the consequences must be clearly explained to them. If they are not ready, they cannot be used like scape-goats against their own will and consent. NGOs should not expose people if they have not decided to stand by them throughout.

If the NGO makes use of the people unethically, the exploitative relationship of the NGO with the people would be easily understood by the media. It should be remembered that if this happens the credibility of the issue and the NGO will suffer.

Audio forms

Among the audio forms audio cassettes are fully under our control. NGOs can make use of audio cassettes in two ways. The first way is to prepare them as training tools keeping in mind, the NGO field staff, field collaborators such as peoples' representatives etc. The second way is to make cassettes for direct use by the public.

Songs have an important position in the audio form. When songs have to be used, the easy way adopted by most NGOs is making use of the tunes of popular film songs for new lyrics on the

awareness messages to be conveyed. Though this is an easy way, it is not the right way. Therefore while making songs, new tune appropriate to the theme should be used. The tunes of traditional home songs, folk music etc. could be used. It is better to avoid the folk tunes already used in films.

As far as film songs are concerned, their tunes would immediately remind people of the films, the scene setting, the actual lyric of that song etc. When compared to the new message that is conveyed, the film images powerfully prevail in the mind. Therefore such an effort is not only against our objective but it would also mean that we have given our efforts to strengthen that films' goals.

Small NGOs that are not in a position to make their own songs with new folk tunes can buy the cassettes relevant to their themes from bigger organisations. There is a need for continuous interaction among NGOs to attain this objective.

NGOs that wish to produce their own audio cassettes should collect the cost details beforehand. When NGOs approach professionals for producing audio and video cassettes, they might get cheated by greedy producers. Therefore the production cost estimate should be obtained from more than one source. Before deciding, the relationship between the cost estimate and the quality should be carefully examined.

As per the prevailing costs, a original cassette with sixty minute (1 hour only) song or speech recordings with professional artists, would cost ranging from Rs.40,000/- to Rs.50, 000/- (Rupees Forty to Fifty thousand only). The cost for reproducing cassettes for use in tape recorders would be separate. The cost of production per copy would be Rs.15/- (Rupees fifteen only)

There is an important point to be kept in mind while producing cassettes for use by the public. Songs that motivate the public and songs that narrate social malady can be used only in places where people gather. Nobody would like to listen to such songs at home. At home, melody and pleasant lyrics are valued more.

Apart from campaign and information sharing purposes cassettes could be produced to fulfil the social needs as well. For example, there are not many Tamil songs for the pre-school children as there are in English. Even a few songs that are there do not address the needs of the children in the modern age. The NGOs functioning in this field could produce audio cassettes to fill up this gap.

The technology for recording and producing audio cassettes is available in Madurai, Trichy and Coimbatore. It is also available at Tiruvananthapuram which caters to the southern districts.

While producing audio cassettes, the necessary lyrics, dialogues, songs, music etc. should be made with the help of people who are well versed in them. Otherwise they could be made with the help of the NGO staff who have received sufficient professional training.

While working with professionals we must be receptive. We must respect their ideas on the form. At the same time, we must clearly state our need.

Radio

Among the audio forms the radio has the convenience and capacity to make an extensive impact.

In our country, radio is still a public sector entity under the state control. Therefore it has both the strength and weakness of being a government body. The policy for giving space and importance for issues of social concern continues to exist with radio since it is state-owned.

NGOs should make use of a longstanding tradition in the radio i.e. giving free advertisement for messages on social concern. Project ACCESS of M.S. Swaminathan Research Foundation has produced audio jingles of 10 - 30 sec. duration that were broadcast in the private frequency modulation metro.

Apart from this, there is also opportunity for the NGOs to take part in several programmes produced by the radio station.

The NGO personnel must develop contacts with the programme producers and executives at the radio station. We must have adequate knowledge of persons in charge of the programmes in our area of interest.

As in the case of the print media, information could be shared with the programme producers in the radio station as well. We must continuously interact with them and motivate them to participate in our programmes.

General points to be kept in mind while producing programmes for the radio.

No programme should be longer than 5 minutes

Interviews and discussions should not have a didactic tone. Likewise one should avoid talking style that conveys an air of superiority.

Jingles and programmes of similar nature should be of 10 sec. to 2 min. duration only. Music is very important here.

In radio, words should not be repeated. This would bore the listeners. Simple and commonly used words should be used as much as possible.

A phrase need not be used just because it is a widely used phrase in the government and NGO sector. Instead a simpler phrase with simple words to convey the same meaning could be used. Wherever possible, the story-telling style could be used.

Local specificity of radio

Similar to the local editions of dailies, radio has several production and broadcast branches all over the state, which have more autonomy compared to the television. The local station has the power to make its own decisions for most programme areas except a few.

The NGOs must continuously interact with these local stations.

Apart from seeking publicity for their own programmes, the NGOs must continue to foster their relationship by informing the radio station about the events they come to know about.

Visual forms

Video

The video form can be used by NGOs to communicate with people and to train their own functionaries.

But it has to be remembered that the video form is costlier than the audio form. However, every NGO might have at least a video player and a VCR.

The NGO personnel must be aware of the availability of cassettes necessary for staff training and should make use of them appropriately.

The cassettes for public use could also be availed in the same manner. In general while screening such cassettes, it would be nice if a video projector is used, though the facility does not exist in most places.

When the large screen is not available, viewers could be divided into small groups. The screen should be made visible for all viewers. The voice should be audible for all. There must be facility to darken the room for the screening

Screening a video film in an unfacilitative environment should be avoided. Films that are shown in such an environment may not have any impact, ending up as a mere ritual.

If the NGO wants to involve in video production, it has to be clear about its fund position.

The technology used for recording weddings is called VHS. This technology is suitable for one time recording only. The copies made from it will not be clear. They would be sub standard in quality. It would be very difficult to edit and rearrange sequences in a VHS recording.

NGOs can involve in this venture only to fulfil their project requirements. NGO staff with necessary motivation and interest in film production can be trained in this.

If there is a requirement for copies of good quality and proper editing, superior technology such as U-matic and Beta could be used for producing video films. The prevailing cost for making a one minute video film, ranges from Rs. 20,000/- to Rs.1,00,000/- (Rupees Twenty thousand to Rupees One lakh only). This is an estimate meant only for NGOs. For similar productions, commercial people would spend much larger amounts.

It has to be remembered that facilities are there is inadequate to screen such films for the people. Such films could reach a large audience only if screened through Doordarshan and the private television channels.

Television form

Like radio, television is also state-owned. Hence it is bound to follow similar social concern principles. There is a rule that free space must be available in radio and television for social concern advertisements. Therefore it is unnecessary and wasteful to pay to the Doordarshan for such advertisements.

It is worth mentioning the efforts made by Project ACCESS of M.S. Swaminathan Research Foundation to screen a few short video films. For a year, a few short video films on the difficulties of pre-school education were shown continuously. (To know more about this, refer to the report titled "Messages that Move") in channel one of Chennai Doordarshan. In continuation of this, a few short video films on gender justice and status of women were also produced and given to Doordarshan for telecast.

It is possible to screen video films of 30 minutes' duration produced by NGOs in Doordarshan for the general public. There is a selection committee to screen these films. Doordarshan gives a royalty of Rs. 300/- per minute for such films chosen for telecast. It is prudent to give in writing that the royalty fee is not required as this would ensure better chances for the selection of the film.

By continuously interacting with the television programme producers and executives, we can find space for our ideas in television as well.

The private television channels are more commercial than the print media. It is not easy to get space for the issues of social concern for NGOs in the private channels.

However there is ample scope to get space in the news section of private channels. In the special news section of private channels, several issues of social concern that need to be highlighted by the NGOs can find place.

In this context, it is very essential to maintain a relationship with the news editors of Doordarshan and other private channels.

The NGO staff and enlightened people from the operational areas of the NGOs should attempt to take part in the debates and talk shows appearing in the television.

It is useful to note who the programme producers for such events are and who among them are at somewhat democratic. Attempts should be made to directly approach such programme producers and to take part in their programmes.

Attempts could also be made to change the themes taken for discussion and debate in such programmes. Instead of conducting debate on topics such as "Who is chaste—Kannagi or Madhavi?" etc. It is possible to conduct debates on the following topics also "Who is the cause for female infanticide – Father or the Mother"? , "Child Care Centres are for whose benefit – Parents or the Children?" Such topics would bring focus of the public on issues of social concern.

While taking part in television and radio, we have to be alert about certain things. If it is a group discussion, we should try to know who our co-participants are. If we become aware of their nature and views, we would be better prepared to present our ideas forcefully. This would ensure that the issue put forth by us does not get sidelined. It is also useful to get acquainted with the programme producer so that before the recording begins we can interact with him and ensure representation and a rightful share of our views. If the recording is for a long duration and if the telecast time is shorter, several ideas may get edited. In such a situation, the ideas that should not be edited should be emphasised.

Cinema

There is reason and purpose for avoiding any discussion on Cinema. As per today's expenses, it costs Rs.7,00,000/- (Rupees seven lakhs) to produce a documentary film and Rs. 40,00,000 – Rs. 6,00,00,000/- (Rupees forty lakhs to Six crores) to produce a film.

Producing films like this may not be possible for the NGOs. Even if the investment is available, screening such films in theatres may become impossible since the distribution procedures are commercially structured.

However there is a great need to define our strategy on films since film plays a strong role in creating opinion among all sections of people. Cinema has contributed considerably to the secondary status of women. Films continuously nurture outdated and wrongful ideas about women through their projections resulting in depriving the basic rights of women. However, changes are taking place.

People in the operational areas of NGO's people are also under the impact of films. Therefore NGOs cannot ignore their responsibility to facilitate a right understanding about media through media education.

NGOs should convene discussions on cinema with public in a gradual way. People must be made to understand how their favourite movies cultivate themes that might go against them.

This exercise should start with NGO workers' training. There are many experts available in this country to provide media education. With the help of film movements, NGOs must create opportunities for the youth to view and appreciate good films.

On the other hand, if a popular film is conveying ideas against development work, NGO's are responsible to give feed back to the film producer, artists etc. Such criticisms must be written to newspapers and magazines. Film Education and education efforts to understand the media should be promoted wherever possible.

There is need to understand the media people to facilitate our participation and to enhance our contributions for any media. Such fundamental understanding would guide all other activities.

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Conclusion

In any media form, be it puppetry, handbill, book, newspaper, magazine, radio, video, television or cinema, the people operating them are more important.

Media relationship means relationship with the people who are working with the media.

It is important to know how NGO people could relate with media people.

It is necessary to remember some fundamental truths

1. NGOs do not have a commercial motive. However the social reality is that the NGO personnel receive salaries for the work carried out by them.
2. Media organisations function with commercial motives. Though the media people work for salaries, they also have social concern and love like us.
3. In the present society, there are both corrupt and honest organisations. Likewise, we have two categories of people too.
4. Neither the media nor the NGO personnel are above the conditions mentioned above. Hence both categories of people could be found in both sectors.

If we remember these basic truths, relating with the media people may not be difficult.

- ◆ While the NGO relates with the folk artists for any creative task, there is a danger of the NGOs treating them unequally, without giving them their due status because of their poverty and their educational background.
- ◆ On the contrary, NGO personnel have the tendency to lower themselves and fawn over the city-based English media personnel.

Both these behavioural patterns should be consciously avoided. The realisation and feeling that we do what is possible within our capacity to society and mutual respect and friendship should be the foundation for these relationships.

Interacting with corrupt and unethical media people may be tricky. The only solution to this problem is to strictly follow ethical procedures from the very first interaction with the media people.

NGO personnel have the wrong notion that they should give gifts to media personnel whenever they meet them. The reason may be that some media people expect gifts. Some NGOs and NGO heads keen on their own benefits rather than the benefits of the people are causes for promoting the negative forces in the media.

There is no need to give money or gifts to the media people who visit us. There is nothing more in this relationship apart from the basic hospitality of giving water and food to someone who visits our house. We should not forget that the reporter comes to do her / his official duty only.

Relating with media is like relating with a part of the society. Media is an essential organ of the society like law, education, politics and medicine.

Relating with the media need not be only for the NGOs benefit while reaching out to the people, this would help us to better understand ourselves and our society.