

# When Small is BIG : An Analysis of Sole Proprietor Newspapers as Grass Roots Media



Dr. Archana R Singh\*, Sanghmitra Jamwal\*\*

© Institute of Management Studies, Noida  
Online access at [www.publishingindia.com](http://www.publishingindia.com)

## Abstract

Gone are the days when grassroots communication could be compartmentalized into 'local' level approaches and their universal application out rightly rejected. We are witness to an era where global and local have amalgamated to form 'glocal' which is mostly based on audience interest, choice and perspectives. Thus, the concepts of diversity and pluralism operate at the level of the receiver. Internet has placed the control with the receiver and hence the basic premise of communication is being redefined. The communication in the era of 'glocal information' is happening at once amongst one to one, one to many and many to many. What is the role and form of grassroots communication in such a scenario? The participatory communication at the grassroots level fits in the framework of multiplicity. 'It stresses on cultural identity of local communities and democratization at all levels- international, national, local and individual'.

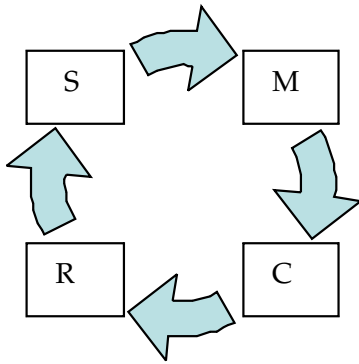
The sole proprietor can be compared with the citizen journalist who performs the same functions as the local newspaper. That, which started as journalism for the grassroots, is now journalism from the rooftops! This new phenomenon which emerged in a big way after September 11, 2001, has been called as 'building blocks of new grassroots' by Dan Gillmor in his book 'We the Media : Grassroots journalism by the people, for the people'.

## 1. Introduction

Perspectives on communication have changed. It is more concerned with process, context and on exchange of 'meanings'. It favours 'multiplicity, smallness of scale, locality, de-institutionalization, interchange of sender- receiver roles and horizontality at all levels of society' ( Mc Quail.D, 1983). Gone are the days when grassroots communication could be compartmentalized into 'local' level approaches and their universal application out rightly rejected. We are witness to an era where global and local have amalgamated to form 'glocal' which is mostly based on audience interest, choice and perspectives. Thus, the concepts of diversity and pluralism operate at the level of the receiver. Internet has placed the control with the receiver and hence the basic premise of communication is being redefined. The linear SMCR model, which stresses on flow of information from source to receiver and the usefulness of feedback, has now turned circular and infact has many concentric circles. Communication is thus happening at many levels, amongst many receivers and through multiple channels. The communication in the era of 'glocal information' is happening at once amongst one to one, one to many and many to many.

\*Reader, School of Communication Studies, Chandigarh, India

\*\*Student of School of Communication Studies, Chandigarh, India



### Circle of communication

## 2. Grassroots Communication

What is the role and form of grassroots communication in such a scenario? The participatory communication at the grassroots level fits in the framework of multiplicity. 'It stresses on cultural identity of local communities and democratization at all levels- international, national, local and individual'( Servaes, Jan et al, 1996). 'Participation occurs at many levels such as non participation, limited, manipulated and power which can be either co managed or self managed.'( Peruzzo, CMK, 1996). When the participation is at the self managed level societies within societies are targeted. It may overtly appear to be at a micro level but in reality, communication happens at the macro level.

## 3. Grassroots Journalism

One form of grassroots communication has been happening through grassroots journalism. The earliest newspapers began as grassroots papers, concentrating on local populations and brought out by sole proprietors. History is replete with instances of such publications that expanded their vistas and broadened their geographical horizons to turn into regional and national dailies. Presently, despite the competition from diverse media forms, we still have examples of grassroots journalism. They thrive in the form of sole proprietor newspapers brought out from small towns catering to small communities and surviving on small circulations.

## 4. Citizen Journalism

There is however another side to the coin. Grassroots journalism is in a phenomenal shift. Earlier, journalists had the front row in the drama of life, but now the actors are writing the drama scene after scene. The sole proprietor can be compared with the citizen journalist who performs the same functions as the local newspaper. **That, which started as journalism for the grassroots, is now journalism from the rooftops!** This new phenomenon which emerged in a big way after September 11, 2001, has been called as 'building blocks of new grassroots' by Dan Gillmor in his book 'We the Media : Grassroots journalism by the people, for the people'.

Thus, presently we have the traditional and the modern viewpoints on grassroots journalism. One is the small newspaper; the other is the citizen journalism website. Their

characteristics match :

1. Local origin
2. Limited targeted readership
3. Orientation towards viewpoints
4. Sole proprietors ( most of the time)
5. Emotional/Ideological proximity is limited to few
6. Interest in global/national topics
7. Both can provide the platform for local discussion.

They also have certain sharp differences :

1. Newspapers are tangible, physical objects. Websites are not.
2. Geographical range is very limited in case of small newspapers. Websites have global accessibility.
3. Few writers/reporters work in small newspapers on low salaries. Websites have unlimited scope for writers on voluntary basis.
4. Small newspapers have high credibility at local level; websites have to make their presence felt.

Despite the changes in form and context, grassroots journalism thrives and continues to make its presence felt. In developing countries and societies where computer literacy has not reached a position where all the citizens can participate in the cyber form of grassroots journalism, it is the small newspapers that continue to fill the information gaps for a large section of population. According to Registrar of Newspapers India, as on, 31st March 2006, there were 62,483 registered newspapers on record out of which the number of newspapers submitting annual statements was only 8512. Out of the 8512 newspapers that have submitted their annual statement, 350 were big, 1555 medium and 6607 were small. The big newspapers circulated 6,76,98,371 copies, the medium 6,41,55,462 copies, and small 4,88,84,778 copies. Out of 8512 newspapers, as many as 6686 were owned by Individuals, 1122 by Joint Stock Companies, 260 by Societies and Associations, 222 by Trusts and 150 by Firms and Partnerships. Newspapers owned by Individuals had the largest share in circulation i.e., 52.71 per cent, followed by those owned by Joint Stock Companies 39.04 per cent. The growth of these newspapers in the past decade has been indeed phenomenal but mere statistical growth must not make us oblivious to the inherent imbalance in the spread of this growth.

## 5. Importance of Small Newspapers

The small newspapers enjoy the potential to bridge the knowledge gap of the common man, for they speak the language of the locals and are thus capable of influencing their opinion. They also have the potential to serve as a conduit between the public and the local authorities by bringing to the notice of the authorities, the sufferings, difficulties and the needs of the people and in process carrying to the people the type of information they need from the authorities. Though these newspapers are brought out by people with small means, it also translates into small overhead costs. Thus this genre of press is the best vehicle for promoting unity and communal harmony among the people, thereby strengthening the roots of democracy and the process of development. The daily newspaper, in its role as the free press, serves several functions in the community such as informing the people, educating and finally entertaining them. Besides its services towards the

readers, a newspaper provides a print marketplace for advertisers and prospective customers.

The small press, which is largely represented by sole proprietor newspapers, has faced a new threat over the past 3-4 years with the big newspaper launching regional supplements into the main paper. These, no doubt, affect the circulation of the local paper, but they have not, at least not as yet, been able to compete with the local newspapers in coverage of local news. The local press enjoys this edge since it has its finger on the pulse of the local population and is aware of the comparative importance of local personalities and events. It is thus more attuned to local tastes and dislikes. It enjoys a further advantageous position in terms of advertisement potential at local/district level of limited services and products. It is however, undeniable that the small press enjoys a severe handicap in the form of technological advancements and non-availability of the best of personnel due to financial constraints. It also cannot match the big papers in the price war.

About a decade ago, the Press Council of India (PCI) had conducted an in-depth study into the problems of small and medium newspapers and came out with as many as 22 specific recommendations to encourage the small papers to play their role efficiently and to ameliorate their conditions. Highlights of these recommendations included an additional advertisement support to these papers by the government; cheaper newsprint; machinery and equipment at concession rates; transparency in advertisement empanelment and release, quick clearance of advertisement bills by the DAVP and other advertising authorities, making separate arrangements for input of information, news materials and visuals through Press Information Bureau (PIB) of the Government of India. But still there has not been much improvement in the condition of this genre of media, which is eking out for existence.

## 6. Aims and Objectives of this Study

To analyze the verbal and the visual content of the sole proprietor newspapers of Chandigarh with respect to the grass root reporting.

## 7. Objectives

1. To analyze the different sections of these newspapers with respect to the extent and depth of grass root reporting.
2. To study the visual and verbal content of these newspapers.
3. To study the style of reporting where grass root level of reporting is concerned.

## 8. Review of Literature

A number of researches have been conducted on the subject of small newspapers/sole proprietor newspapers and on the concept of citizen journalism as grassroots journalism. The point where the two have merged has been highlighted in *We the Media: Grassroots Journalism by the People, for the People*, by nationally known business and technology columnist Dan Gillmor (2006). He tells the story of this emerging phenomenon, and sheds light on this deep shift in how we make and consume

the news. Journalists are discovering that the new grassroots journalism presents opportunity as well as challenge to their profession. One of the first mainstream journalists to have a blog, Gillmor says, "My readers know more than I do, and that's a good thing." In *We the Media*, he makes the case to his colleagues that, in the face of a plethora of Internet-fueled news vehicles, they must change or become irrelevant

Similarly, Tom Grubisich (2005) in an article 'Grassroots journalism: actual content versus shining ideal', where he reviewed ten new citizen journalism sites and found many of them lacking in quality and content. Grubisich followed up a year later and found that the best sites had improved editorially and were even nearing profitability, but only by not expensing editorial costs. Also according to the article, the sites with the weakest editorial content were able to aggressively expand because they had stronger financial resources.

A research regarding the role of the mainstream media in taking up the issues relating to the grass roots has been conducted by Sudhirender Sharma, [2003]. In the article titled 'Grass root Innovations sidelined by media', the researcher attempts to find out the contribution of media in publicizing the grass root innovations. There is a need for media to step and highlight these achievements, as it would prove out to be an encouragement to others.

E.Lloyd Sommerland [1996] in his book "The Press in Developing Countries", throws light on the newspaper difficulties and failures in the developing countries. In a growing economy, the inflow of information holds paramount importance. Thus the traditional press here is expected to play two roles. Firstly, it must speak for the people and serve as the watch dog of the government. Secondly if not by control, then by conscience, it has to function as a government medium.

Another research emphasizing on the need for increased grass root coverage for more media consumption has been done by David Pearce Demers, [1996]. In his study, 'Does personal Experience in a Community Increase or Decrease Newspaper Reading?' the researcher challenges the age old notion that personal experience with issues decreases the usage of mass media, which is called as the obtrusive contingency. Under conditions of high obtrusiveness, the media are expected to have little or no effect on issue salience but in case of low obtrusiveness; effects are expected to be strong. As per the study the personal experience with an issue will increase the media usage.

Wu Yuehui, [1987]. His article titled, 'Rural Development leads to Press Boom', shows the effect of the outside environment on the press. Rural Economic Development is the main factor responsible for bringing about a growth in the rural press. China for this reason has enjoyed a tremendous growth in the area of print media. China has approximately 500 newspapers serving the peasants. Among these are 25 national and provincial peasant newspapers. Never before has the possibility of prosperity been visible to the peasants, as today. The study finds out the impact of development on these papers which are being read by the peasants with a strong desire to broaden their vision.

On the similar lines research has been conducted by Crispin C Maslog (1984). In his study titled as the ‘**Case studies of Four Successful Asian Community Newspapers**’, the researcher studies the role of Community Newspapers in the development of rural Asia. The four selected papers i.e. Jugabheri (Bangladesh), Rajasthan Patrika (Jaiur), Pikiran Rakyat (Indonesia), Sunday Punch (Philippines), stand exemplary in having risen up as independent voices and in playing the role of a catalyst. It was found that the factors common to success of these papers have been somewhat similar. All four started uniformly with small capital investment, proving that a big financial outlay is not necessary to start a community newspaper. Patrika and Rakyat are now big daily papers where as Jugabheri and Punch are small weekly papers. Besides, government advertisement and incentive is common to all these.

Crispin C Maslog, [1983] though disagrees with the fact that the chances of survival of these small players are bleak in face of intra media competition. The researcher in his article titled ‘**A Study of Ten Selected Philippine Community News papers**’, paints an optimistic picture regarding the future prospects of these small players. As per him, though there are a lot many challenges of the long term survival being faced by these small players, in face of limited advertising revenues and low subscription but still they have a way ahead to go.

The Community newspapers of South Korea have been studied by Lee See Hun [1983]. In his article ‘**Interest in Regional Issues and Circulation of Newspapers in South Korea**’, the researcher gives an insight into the grass root coverage by the Korean Newspapers and the problems in promoting the regional press.

Another study conducted in the same nerve is by Chimanbhai S Patel, [1974]. In his article ‘**The Language Press, Problems and Challenges**’, the researcher has looked into the problems being faced by the language press, which make it difficult for it to flourish in the contemporary situations. In a democracy, a newspaper cannot afford a situation where in the common man cannot buy a newspaper as it does not suit his linguistic criteria. Whatever be the reason, the commanding position of the English press still stands undiminished. The study reveals that the curtailment of the newsprint quota by the government has had more telling effects on the language newspapers for obvious reasons.

Surat Numnonda, [1964] in his article ‘**Thai Provincial Newspapers**’, a study of the Thai Provincial Press has been undertaken to analyze the emergence and working of these newspapers. His findings reveal that the development of Thailand’s provincial sole proprietor newspapers is inadequate. There is a scarcity of serious news coverage and most provincial publishers pay more attention to publishing lottery results. The study thus helps in accessing the reasons that hinder the progress of the provincial press.

Morris Janowitz [1952], in his book, “**The community press in an urban setting; the social elements of urbanization; elements of Urbanism**”, says that community press is a product of a group of individual publishers who in course of developing their enterprises emerge out as the local leaders. By

virtue of their occupation, they get subjected to full impact of group pressure and social contradiction at work in the local community. They also become enmeshed in a wide network of contacts and roles, which are beyond the role of a publisher.

Barnhart (1952) in his book, ‘**Weekly Newspaper Management**’ discusses the management strategies of small newspapers. He asserts that these publications though face severe competition from the dailies have managed to sustain and carve out a niche for themselves. These publications have not only managed to grow, but in due course, the publishers have attained a worthy position in the community from where these publications spring up.

### 9. Methodology

The study analyses three sole proprietor newspapers published from Chandigarh, namely Yug Marg, Him Prabha and Arth Prakash in terms of the space allotted to the text as well as the photographs pertaining to the grass root coverage. The study also reveals the kind of reporting style adopted by these newspapers while covering the grass root events. The unit of analysis here is every single story related to the grass root coverage. The time frame of the study is one month i.e. from 1st October, 2008 to 31st October, 2008.

### 10. Findings and Discussion

The study of the small newspapers has given a deep insight into the reporting patterns of these news papers. The regional press has undergone a lot of reformation in the wake of growing inter as well as intra media competition. These newspapers have graduated from being a two sheet tabloid to large size news sheets consisting of many pages. These have consequently increased the magnitude of news that they offer to their consumers. In process these news papers have taken on to reporting of larger issues, thereby forsaking the coverage at the grass root levels.

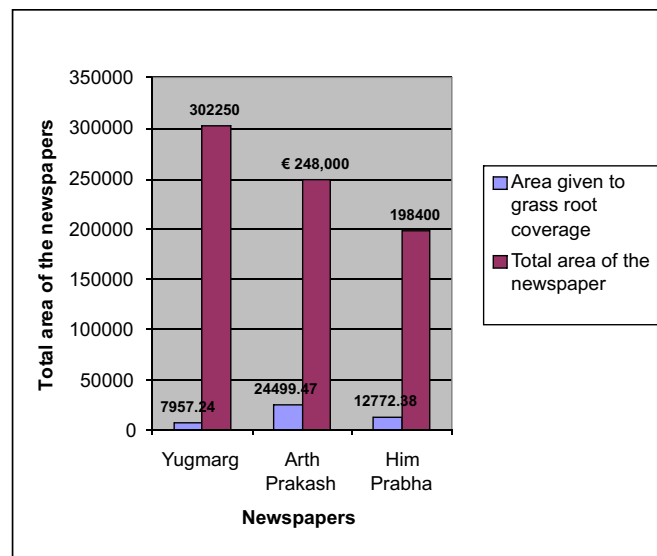


Figure 1 : Area allotted to grassroots reporting.

It indeed is a pitiable state as these newspapers, which were once called as the *grass root media*, are no more interested in catering to rural masses and eye the market share held by their elite counterparts. Thus these publications which are the only genre of media that bring the rural natives onto the informational platform seem to have deviated from this onerous job. A study of these newspapers throws light on the shift in the pattern and the trend of reporting of these papers. (Refer Figure 1)

As mentioned earlier, one obvious reason that can be attributed to this change is the growing competition that has compelled these small players to do away with the grass root events and take on to the mainstream issues that are being discussed by their elite counterparts. The language press thus seems to have taken on to the lines of the elite press, thereby ignoring the responsibility of catering to its immediate surroundings, on which it is dependent largely for all its resources. With this new identity, these newspapers thrive hard to capture maximum market share by inclusion of news that seems "Big" and "Sensational". In this process of aping their larger counterparts, these small newspapers focus mostly on national and international issues, than on the developing stories of their nearby areas. Another reason that can be attributed to this shift in loyalties of the language press is the growing commercialization that has reduced the status of the newspapers to that of a product. These newspapers are often sole proprietor entities and thus suffer from the inherent weakness of this structure, which are lack of resources, both manual as well as technical. Thus many a times the space allotted to these grass root stories is eaten up by the advertisements that bring with them, larger revenues for the proprietors. In wake of this commercialization, the grass root reporting seems to have lost the battle and as a result of which, these areas lie unattended. This is not a healthy sign especially in a democracy, wherein more than 70% of the people live below the poverty line and rely on the language press for their informational needs. Study of these newspapers has revealed substandard quality of reporting when it comes to the grass root coverage. This is because there is very less variation in reporting style when such reporting is concerned. This means that there are a very few articles, features etc. written on the grass root problems.

Importance to the visual element has been found to be limited and sparse. More of action oriented photographs must be published, which will make the news more exciting for the readers. The analysis also shows the element of error as far as the grammatical soundness of these reports is concerned. It means that there is a greater need for improved quality of write ups which certainly add to the credibility of these reports. Apart from that these newspapers need to rise up to a level of objectively opinionating their readers by taking a stand on issues and not merely playing safe by being neutral to everything. This can be done only when these newspapers realize the power and onus that press has. Another trend that can be traced out in the reporting style of these small newspapers here is the reporting of International news. This is done because of its availability from the agencies as well as the internet but in wake of all this, they move many paces away from being grassroots medium and towards being global.

Area devoted to grass root reporting in terms of text and pictures:

In case of Yug Marg there fair number of photographs accredited to stories because it carries a lot of advertisements and thus the requirement of having visual content on pages is some how gratified. However Him Prabha has more photographs attached to the stories. In case of Arth Prakash, fewer photographs are used; again the ones that are used are passport size photographs of people concerned. This calls for the need of practicing better photo journalism as the inclusion of photographs certainly increases the credibility of any news story. (Refer Figure 2)

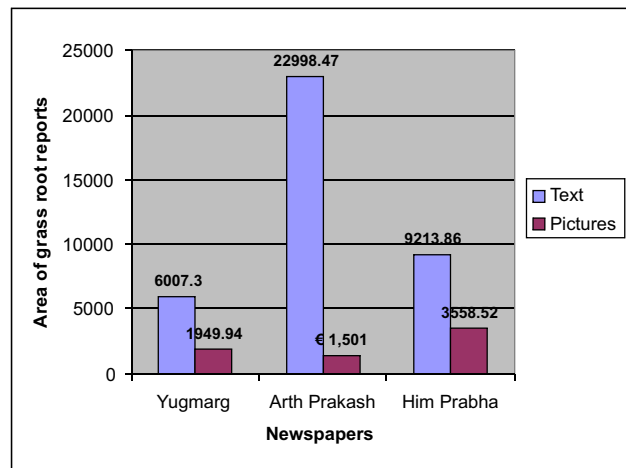


Figure: 2 Grass root reporting in terms of text and pictures

It was observed that use of agency photographs is limited and the three newspapers Yug Marg, Arth Prakash and Him Prabha, use photographs clicked by the photo journalist of these respective newspapers. It is only in case of Him Prabha that some agency photos pertaining to the grass roots have been used along side the stories. The remarkable aspect of self clicked photographs, especially in Arth Prakash, was that most of them were passport photographs of the protagonist in the story. Action photographs rarely find place in the newspaper. These photographs do not have much impact because of two reasons. Firstly, they are dead photographs as they do not involve any action and secondly since they are only passport size photographs, they do not substantiate the event at all. Thus it calls for a better approach towards photo journalism by this news papers. In case this paper can not manage resources for getting photographs, then it can derive ways out, like tying with other newspapers for photos, or using agency photographs where ever possible. This will not only increase news value of a story but also break the monotony of the text.

However, Yug Marg and Him Prabha have a lot of stories that are substantiated by photographs, while Arth Prakash has more of textual element than the visual element. Photographs not only add a visual element but at the same time increase the authenticity of the story. Him Prabha has a reasonable amount of photographs accrediting each story. Yug Marg also has photographs but in lesser ratio for it carries a lot of advertisements which act as a visual retreat. Arth Prakash on the other hand does not carry many photographs Use of

illustrations is also seen in all the three sample papers. These can be in form of boxes around the stories, or diagrams in the newspapers. Heavy use of these illustrative elements is made by Yug Marg and Him Prabha while Arth Prakash mainly fits the text into the pre set columns. These are used because they make the stories look appealing and significant. These also enhance the design of the newspapers. Most of the times, they are used to sensationalize a story. Him Prabha makes use of illustrations in form of Cartoon which is a regular feature of this newspaper. (Refer fig. 3) There is a regular column dedicated to cartoon that carries a caption/statement about the issue that will be taken up in the cartoon. This is then supported by few lines in form of the voice of the character. After analyzing the photographs for captions, it can be concluded that most of the photos appearing in these newspapers are without any captions. In case they are present, then these captions used by the sub editors are all **factual** and thus have no dynamism in them. Also the quality of photos is bad owing to the quality of the news sheet. In these photos again there is no mention of the source.

When a photo is attached to a story, a greater challenge that awaits a reporter is to give appropriate captions and cut lines to picture as these make the photographs more exciting or in other words, spice up the pictures. An ordinary picture can seem to be extremely innovative if it is accredited with the right kind of caption. In case of these newspapers, even the cut lines that appear along with the pictures are a mere description of the event with no heed paid to formation of short and crispy statements. (Refer fig. 4) These cut lines can at times be extremely lengthy and go up to 50 words. Thus there is no excitement added to the photographs which can otherwise compensate for their bad quality. This aspect must be carefully looked after as it would not only increase the picture's value but also help these small players break the cliché and add creativity to the visual content, as far as possible.

## 11. Photo Captions and Cut Lines

Photo Captions add a verbal element thereby substantiating the photographs already displayed. As mentioned earlier, there are no captions given to the photographs but there are cut lines in some of the pictures.

In case of Him Prabha, most of the photos carry these cut lines, which are usually long (upto50words) and are explanatory in nature. In case of Yug Marg, the photos carry captions and at times the news is carried in form of photographs only. This means that there are photographs carrying a cut line placed vertically along side the picture and it explains the story to the reader (Refer fig. 5). This format is commonly followed as far as the grass root coverage is concerned.

In Arth Prakash the photographs are used sans captions or cut lines. Analyzing these in terms of creativity, then these captions are factual. There is zero creativity involved as far as the framing of these cut lines or captions are concerned. The language used is news oriented and simplified. No emphasis is paid on generating imaginative catchy captions for these photographs.

Another way of reporting that has evolved in Yug Marg is

presenting news in form of cut lines attached to the photograph (Refer fig. 6,7). There is also a use of Cartoons in one of these newspapers (Him Prabha). These form a regular feature of the newspaper but there is no set pattern followed as far as the cartoon is concerned. That means that it can be dropped in a certain edition owing to space constraints.

## 11. Presence and Type of Headlines

All the news papers carry headlines which are mostly placed set centered but two deck, multi deck and banner headlines are also used. Kickers are also carried along side the headlines. Him Prabha has a lot of variation in the usage of the headline where as Yug Marg mainly uses considerable amount of format of headlines. In case of Arth Prakash the headlines are mostly set centered and are not as huge as in case of the other two newspapers.

## 12. Adherence to a Style Sheet

Adherence to the pre set format in terms of specific columns was observed in the selected sample. At times changes in the format are made as per the convenience of the newspaper. For e.g., In case of Yug Marg, the extreme left of the 2nd page is dedicated to Astrology but in wake of advertisements, this column is often replaced by the advertisements that appear on this page (Refer fig. 8).

Also in case of Him Prabha, its daily feature i.e. the cartoon, that appears on the extreme left of the front page is again forsaken in the wake of advertisements (Refer fig 9). In the third newspaper Arth Prakash, the basic format does not change but there can be fluctuation in the content i.e. the lifestyle section appearing on the second last page can at times contain news about the celebrities and at times it talks of spirituality.

The above details show that not much effort is placed on the visual aspect of the news stories. Photographs, captions and cut lines are used mostly as space fillers and not as an important ingredient of news writing and design.

## 13. Analysis of the Newspaper Design

In this era of packaging wherein a lot of products are purchased on mere face value, these newspapers are victims of poor designing. There is no column division in these papers. A part from that there is no consistency in the designing of some of these news papers These news papers do not carry the continuing stories to the following pages, which leaves the designer with just two options i.e. Firstly, to scrap the story, irrespective of the content of the last paragraph and secondly, to cut down on some of the columns in the newspaper in order to accommodate the report.

## 14. Principles of Design

Considering the various aspects of design, there are numerous deviations from the ideal. For instance, in the **element of Balance** in terms of Formal and Informal or symmetrical or Asymmetrical, Formal balance is a balance that is 90%

symmetrical and easy to achieve. The definite of Balance is the weight distribution with respect to the fulcrum, i.e. the optical centre. In case of Yug Marg, the front page is not designed on a particular format and varies in its design depending on the number of advertisements available which are carried in proportions of 40:60 in news and advertising. The front page carries local advertisements covering maximum space of the newspaper. No heed is paid towards balancing the text with the pictures. Thus there is an absolute absence of Formal Balance and it is the Informal Balancing that is practiced while designing the pages. Here a lot of importance is attached towards sensationalizing of the stories, by use of illustrations, inserting eye catching ads or using fonts of varied sizes etc.

In case of Himprabha, it is ensured that almost all the leading page stories are credited with large pictures. There is a lavish use of illustrations like the Text Boxes etc and a fair attempt is made to Balance out the pictures and the text.

The paper that rates high in terms of its balancing aspect is Arth Prakash. Designed on the lines of creating symmetrical balance, the paper has a right mix of photos and text which are gelled together in a way that it enhances the readability of the text. A lot of care is taken while designing of the first page which is comparable in these terms to the leading dailies.

Talking about the second design principle i.e. **Proportion**, it is the ratio distribution between one element and the other, and fundamentally between one element and space. Each element must be surrounded by generous white space. All the three news papers are sound in terms of proportion as there are white spaces. Talking about motion and movement involved in designing of these news papers, there is hardly any movement on the page in all the three newspapers.

In case of Yug Marg, owing to the panorama of ads, there is a lot of clutter of news. Him Prabha uses varied text fonts in order to create movement of the page and Arth Prakash uses illustrative boxes to mark the stories with its greater significance. Besides this, the Gaze movement is not always considered while pasting the photographs but most of the photographs are set centre shots. This again speaks about the lack of designing skills while designing these news sheets. Thus due to the absence of movement, there is a lot of deadness on the pages.

The third aspect of designing is **Contrast**. It is achieved through size, shape, color and direction. Him Prabha and Yug Marg rank high on this aspect as there is a lot of contrast involved by placing larger picture or text box with smaller ones. This is not done considering the news worthiness of the events but with the idea of making the layout appear more attractive and catchy.

Another design principle that must be adhered to while designing and page make up is that of **Unity**. It is the most important aspect of designing. It demands that there should be **Harmony** in all the elements on the page. It also means that all the other elements of designing are considered well while designing the page. It implies that each of the elements is placed in a satisfactory position. Since all the design principles are not adhered to, these suffer from the lack of unity. As compared to the other two, it is Arth Prakash that ranks high on

this aspect too.

Thus on the whole the design principles are partially followed by these news papers which suggest a need for better designers or for initiating a designing section.

Talking about the page make up, these do not follow a particular pattern; rather they follow a make up that is a combination of both vertical and horizontal make ups (**Refer fig. 10,11**). Vertical make up was popular when metal type faces were used with metal rules running down the page.

In this format, the headlines are restricted to that cylindrical column. The elements of the page appear as if they are standing up. The drawback of this kind of format is that it either becomes negative or situational. If there is no variation in the font size or the headline arrangement, it can lead to a false conception about the text. On other hand, in case of horizontal make- up the placement is much easier. It is simpler format where stories are bunched up beneath a common column. In this page the stories appear to be sitting. This format is not in conformity with the kind of formats being used. Thus these small news papers are smart enough and opt a way out by adopting a combination of both these formats. Thus the stories are placed depending upon their size and space available. Apart from this not much attention is paid to the movement on the page owing to the absence of a set format. (**Refer fig. 12**)

## 15. Fonts Used

A varied variety of font sizes are used in case of both the headlines as well as the text. But the most common font types used is The Times New Roman. Breaking the norms of the standard 12 point size of the Headlines can be of larger size. Both the Hindi and English newspapers makes use of aggressively broad and huge fonts (**Refer fig 13, 14**), to increase the captive value of a story. In case of Yug Marg, the font size in for body text remains to be 12 point but as mentioned above, there is a lot of variation in the headline sizes. Talking about the font type, the headlines are of varied formats and are bolder. The subheads mentioned below are highlighted. Larger and bolder fonts are not only accorded to the events of higher magnitude but even to routine stories. This is basically done with a view to sensationalize a story or to give it a better design. In case of Him Prabha, again there is a lot of variation in the headline sizes but the font style more or less remains same. Here again the standard size of 12 point is used for the body text but when it comes to the headlines, then there are variations in its sizes (**Fig. 15**). Talking about Arth Prakash, there is not much experimentation done in case of font sizes or style. It adheres to the norms followed by the National press and thus the Headlines or the body text is the conventional one being used by its larger counterparts.

## 16. Paper Quality

On the whole, all the three news papers use low quality paper which does not bank heavy on their pockets. Usually these papers are printed in form of a tabloids, where in the printing is done by the presses owned by these respective newspapers only. Yug Marg is of size 50 X 32 (In Sq. cms.), where as Him Prabha is also 50 X 32 (In Sq. cms.). Arth Prakash is the smallest in size and is 45 X 25 (In Sq. cms.) This is a commendable thing

in it self as many of the daily publications in cities share the printing presses.

This also indicates that these newspapers are self sufficient in terms of their infrastructural requirements as far as the printing aspect is concerned. The paper quality in case of Yug Marg and Him Prabha is fine while Arth Prakash lacks quality paper and as a result, its printing suffers (Refer sample 16, 17). This comes out as fallout in the circulation as many a times the paper suffers in terms of legibility in text and pictures, that are extremely blur.

## 17. An Analysis of Verbal Content

### 17.1 Quality of Language Used

The language that has been used in the write ups is colloquial and hence easily comprehensible. In case of the coverage of the local events, a lot of the content seems to have been taken up from the press release which is well depicted by the kind of obliging language towards the event (Refer fig. 18). The stories are reported in an explanatory form wherein a lot of importance is given to the minutest of the details involving any happening. The words used are not very heavy and can be understood with ease. Most of reporting is done in passive voice. Besides, short forms of various organizational names etc. are used without the mention of the full forms even once (Refer fig. 19). Most of the headlines are framed informally with a view to give an insight to the story. But many a times, there is a lot of sensationalizing in the headlines which can mislead a reader, incase he decides to take news as portrayed by the headline.

### 17.2 Proofing and Subbing Quality

The articles on the whole are proof read for mistakes but many a times correct grammar escapes the notice of the proof readers. Since national stories are sourced from the agencies, it is the grassroots stories that bear the brunt of bad writing and editing. A number of errors abound (Refer fig.20, 21 and 22)

### 17.3 Grammatical Errors

Since most of the news is taken as it is from the agencies, it is better in form of spelling and grammar but talking specifically about the grass root reports, there are many grammatical errors here and there. The sentences are very long and suffer from proper use of punctuation marks, which at times dilutes the whole essence of news (Refer fig. 23). Talking about the usage of words, many a times the words that are used miss the context in which they are being used. Besides, there is some problem when it comes to the formation of sentences (Refer fig 24), which tend to be very long. There are also errors in the photographs as there can be repetition of the same photo for two different news stories appearing on consecutive days.

All these three newspapers are printed in Black and White, but Yug Marg comes out with a special coloured edition during the festive season. For example its Diwali Edition had a coloured front page carrying an article on Diwali along with colored advertisements which makes the paper more attractive.

## 18. Style of Writing

### 18.1 Bias vis-à-vis Objectivity

The debate about bias vis-à-vis objectivity continues as a scan of these newspapers is conducted. The premise of the debate being that the focus on objectivity should not be on the objectivity of the result but on the objectivity of method used. Here it is important to recognize that what is covered and how it is covered is not a value neutral, scientific process. When we speak of objectivity, it means that story published must be fair, accurate and reasonably complete. The objectivity comes to its test in case of reporting the works done by the government bodies or the elections campaigns and the completion of the pledged projects. In case of the stories concerning the private bodies, the material is clearly picked up from the press releases (Refer fig.25). Thus it is reported in a manner where the facts are usually reported with detailed description, along with embellishments (Refer fig. 26,27). In case of the government bodies, a fair amount of coverage is given to these events, without adding shades of favouritism. Stories regarding government functioning can be attributed to the press releases. These small players are not in favor of annoying the government for obvious reasons but again there can be a story or two, which focuses on the discrepancies in the system (Refer fig. 28). Thus on one hand where due accreditation is given to the projects started by the government, then on the other hand the failures on part of government are also reported fearlessly, though not in the required magnitude. It is true that the lower strata that suffers most in the wake of absence of the provision of basic civic amenities but it seems that the grass root reports are not very keen on reporting it and bringing it out in the eyes of the authorities.

### 18.2 Nature of the Stories Reported

Most of the grass root news covered by these newspapers pertains to either the activities of various private institutions, or by the government bodies. In the former case, there is a wide coverage of the activities taken up by private entrepreneurs which includes certain inaugurations, schemes etc (Refer fig. 29). In case of the government stories, almost all the projects taken up by the government are publicized.

There is a lot of reporting about the stories concerning causalities like deaths due to accidents, murders, suicides or of the thefts in the near by areas (Refer fig 30,31). These stories form the main data of the grass root coverage. There is seldom any mention of the problems being faced by the residents of the areas. Nor is there an attempt to hunt for unusual stories that may have cropped up in the area.

Specialized areas of reporting such as Interpretative, Investigative journalism, development, business, science, environment etc. are totally ignored.

### 18.3 Treatment Given to the Stories

As mentioned earlier, the stories regarding the obvious happenings in the area are reported. The tone adopted is neutral and the events are narrated by giving more emphasis to the chronology of facts in which the event occurred. This means that there is no in depth journalism practiced in these newspapers, especially in matters concerning government or private bodies.

Details are mentioned in case of Human Interest stories (**Refer fig.32**), to increase the emotional appeal of these stories. Even if an event is reported in these newspapers, no attempts are made to find out the after math of the event. Thus there are no follow ups nor are their any parallel stories. Interpretations are rare and are present only in the form of back grounding, to the stories picked up from the press releases (**Refer to 33**). There is also a severe dearth of analytical pieces or articles written on the grass root level issues.

## 19. Context of the Story

The stories that are reported in these newspapers pertaining to the grass root issues are very positive stories. This means that there is very less of government bashing etc. This is also because these stories lack judgment or self analysis on part of the reporter. It is clearly visible from the stories that **no back grounding** regarding the past credentials of a speaker or the event is showcased and in that case the event is readily reported (**Refer fig.34, 35, 36**). Thus a very neutral, fact by fact reporting of the happenings takes place. This in a way is a good practice in some instances but does not show maturity in terms of in-depth understanding of the problem, nor does it answer all the questions in the minds of the reader or clarify their doubts. The practice also takes away the onerous responsibility of enhancing objective decision making on part of this grass root media. This throws a light on the fact that there is a dearth of investigative stories and in depth analysis of the news items. The stories thus are neutral and at times miss on providing an evaluative aspect of any story. Needless to mention here, that all the grass root stories are thus event oriented and lack the challenges of modern day journalism.

### 19.1 Editorials

Editorials are a reflection of a newspapers policies and view point. They set the agenda in the minds of the readers regarding the views held by the newspaper on different issues. Editorials are often used as a tool to comment upon and raise a voice against events of news worthiness. As a medium of the grass root level, it is the duty of these newspapers to take up the issues of common concern and get it noticed by the authorities. But, it is pretty ironic that following their national counterparts, these news papers too use their editorial space to write about issues of national concern most of the times. Thus the grass root issues take a back seat yet again.

### 19.2 Local vs. National Events

Speaking about this aspect of media, it is surprising to know that there is coverage of grass root news from within Chandigarh and the adjoining areas like Mohali, Panchkula and Manimajra. It is the national issues that take up most of the space (**Refer fig. 37, 38**). In case of Yug Marg, it is the International news that occupies most of the space (**Refer fig. 39**). Talking about the grass roots at a national level then besides coverage of news affecting masses, there is no coverage of the local issues of smaller localities and of the problems from other parts of the country. It well depicts that these newspapers are taking on the lines of their national counterparts, and in process, ignoring the grass roots.

### 19.3 Bylines Allotted

A Byline is what a reporter earns when he writes in a story for

any publication. In other words it is the identity of the reporter, who is known to the public via them. Very few stories in which are accredited with a Byline. In two papers i.e. Yug Marg and Arth Prakash, there has been no assigning of bylines. But there are a few stories in Him Prabha in which a couple of stories carrying a Byline have been printed. Since all the stories are published in the name of the newspaper service only, there is a lack of initiative on the part of the reporters, who seldom get accredited for the reporting they do.

### 19.4 Sources

These newspapers mostly give the first hand account of the things, but in case of stories demanding quotations, a lot of attribution is done. This can also be looked at a way of shifting the responsibility of the write ups of the newspapers onto others involved in the story.

This thus saves the newspaper from being a subject to any kind of controversy adhering to questionable or likely to be questionable statement used in the stories (**Refer fig. 40**).

## 20. Conclusion and Suggestions

The small newspapers have come a long way in serving the rural masses with the proximal information that they gather. Since people are gradually rising above the poverty line and with passage of time; more literate and educated people are reasonably expected. This change and progress will improve capacity to purchase and read. Literacy and consequential growth of potential readers backed by economic growth will obviously help the small press. The small newspapers must realize the change taking fast in the society and should come forward as catalyst of change. Although these newspapers enjoy immense benefits in terms of their management and control, there are certain limitations that these face in wake of limited resources and skills available.

## 21. Multi Tasking Employees

It's long been a common practice to look for people able to multiple task, because highly specialized staff is also expensive. However, the internet era requires people who can do more than just click a news photograph and write a story. The requirement is to be computer savvy and grasp the use of Computer Assisted reporting, editing and designing and also be internet savvy.

Small newspapers often look for recent college graduates to staff their newsrooms, in part because they are economical and won't demand high salaries. Hiring journalists and ad sales people right out of college makes even more sense today. Not only will recent graduates probably fit within the budget, but they'll have an understanding of the modern media picture, if they have gone through a credible journalism or communications program. The ideal hiring process would be to hire people whose skills cross media platforms. People who not only understand and are enthusiastic about online media, but who also can serve the print edition well will prove to be beneficial in the long run if the need arises to move towards the modern form of grassroots journalism.

## 22. Use Interns

In order to infuse fresh blood into the organization from time to time, a college or university in the community can be tapped. Students of media, languages or computers can be offered internships. The interns who are full of enthusiasm and in tune with the latest techniques will be able to ideate and implement futuristic projects thereby taking care of the age old problem of small newspapers which is lack new and fresh ideas and originality of content and design.

## 23. Collaborations with Journalism Schools

The newspaper can collaborate with the local journalism schools and take their help in bringing out a publication with more variety. The students will be able to suggest innovative design and story ideas. This system would help both the organization and the newspaper. For instance, a Web site planning to start a citizen-reporting initiative, finds an advertising class and a reporting class where the students can get some real-world experience selling and developing content for it, besides designing.

## 24. Team Up

News papers of comparable size can team up and collaborate. The Internet, obviously simplifies collaboration and on line as well as off line resources can be pooled, for the benefit of all concerned. The work load and the costs can be shared.

## 25. Move from Traditional Grassroots to Modern

There is a tremendous opportunity for the small newspapers to make themselves accessible globally while utilizing the same resources by going online. Online communities can be created, citizen journalists can be asked to participate on voluntary basis, and discussion forums can be started. The initiative will go a long way in giving a new lease of life to the small newspaper.

The plan given above may seem very ambitious considering the fact that the small newspapers cater to economically weaker section. The circulations of these newspapers in their present format are never going to increase beyond a very limited group. They will never be able to influence the elite and the influential section of society. Creating an online community will offer them a chance to move into another target group altogether thereby increasing their influence in the community.

In India, the media has grown along with the freedom struggle. It has played a pivotal role in creating awareness amongst the masses, mobilizing popular opinion during the freedom struggle and spreading the message of great leaders. Leaders like Tilak and Gandhi chose the newspaper to spread their message to the masses. The newspapers brought out by them were small newspapers, same for early newspapers in any country. They are a part of the history and culture of all countries.

Small newspapers are often criticized for ignoring ethical

values, for using the paper as a tool for settling personal scores or for blackmailing. But it is never correct to generalize. There are of course always some black sheep and 'fly by night' newspapers but that is no reason to not to give them the credit for filling up the vacuum being in the information communication chain. Thus there is indeed a need to protect and promote the genuine small and medium newspapers in keeping with the country's commitment to encourage plurality of opinion and sources of information, thereby strengthening the roots of our prized democracy.

## 26. Reference

1. Akhileshwari R, [2004]. 'Language Media vs English Media'; Vidura, PII. Volume 41 Issue No.3.
2. Barnhart Fredrick Thomas, [1952]. *Weekly Newspaper Management*. Edition 2. Appleton-century-crofts.
3. Bodle V John, [1996]. 'Assessing News Quality: A comparison between Community and Student Daily Newspaper'; *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly*, Vol.73, No.3, AEJMC.
4. Demers Pearce David, [1996]. 'Does personal Experience in a Community Increase or Decrease Newspaper Reading'; *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly*, Vol. 73, No 2, AEJMC
5. Gillmore, Dan; *We the Media* [2006]; *Grassroots journalism by the people, for the people*; O'Reilly
6. Grubisich Tom, *Grassroots journalism* [2005]; *Actual Content Vs Shining Ideal*; USC Anneberg Online Journalism Review
7. Hun See Lee, [1983]. 'Interest in Regional Issues and Circulation of Newspapers in South Korea'; *Media Asia*, AMIC Pg. 203.
8. Janowits Morris, [1952]. 'The community press in an urban setting; the social elements of urbanization; elements of Urbanism';
9. McQuail, D [1983]; *Mass Communication theory*, Sage, London, pp97
10. Maslog C Crispin, [1983]. 'A Study of Ten Selected Philippine Community 'News papers'; *Media Asia*, Pg. 192. AMIC.
11. Maslog C Crispin [1984]. 'Case Studies of Four Successful Asian Community Newspapers'; *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly*, Pg. 123, AEJMC
12. Nummonda Surat [1964]. 'Thai Provincial Newspapers', *World distribution of Mass Media*; Vol 14, No 2.
13. Patel S Chimanbhai [1974]. 'The Language Press, Problems and Challenges', *Asian Media*, Pg. 51. AMICyaar
14. Peruzzo Cicilia Maria Krohling; [1996]; *Participation in Community Communication in Participatory Communication for social change*; Servaes, Jan, Thomas L Jacobson, Shirley A White-Eds, Sage, 1996, Pp15
15. Robert J. Griffin and Sharon Dunwoddy [1995]; 'Impact of Information Subsidies and Community Structure on Local Press Coverage of Environmental Contamination'; *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly*; Vol 72. No. 2 AEJMC
16. Servaes, Jan, Thomas L Jacobson, Shirley A White; [1996] *Participatory Communication for social change*-Eds, Sage, 1996, Pp15
17. Sharma Sudhirendar, [2003]. 'Grass root Innovations sidelined by media'; *Vidhura*, Pg. 13. PII.
18. Sommerland Lloyd E, [1996]. *The Press in Developing Countries*, Sydney University Press.
19. Yuehui Wu, [1987]. 'Rural Development leads to Press Boom', *Media Asia*. AMIC