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NAAC ACCREDITED 'A' GRADE COLLEGE

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Investigative Journalism

Investigative Journalism is a form of journalism in which reporters go in-depth to investigate a single story that may uncover corruption, review government policies or of corporate houses, or draw attention to social, economic, political or cultural trends. An investigative journalist, or team of journalists, may spend months or years researching a single topic. Unlike conventional reporting, where reporters rely on materials supplied by the government, NGOs and other agencies, investigative reporting depends on material gathered through the reporter's own initiative. The practice aims at exposing public matters that are otherwise concealed, either deliberately or accidentally.

Investigative journalism requires the reporter to dig deeply into an issue or topic of public interest. 'Public interest' refers to a quality whereby a community will be disadvantaged by not knowing this information, or will benefit (either materially or through informed decision-making) by knowing it. Sometimes, information that benefits one community may disadvantage another. For example, forest-dwellers can demand better prices if they know the market value of trees that logging companies want to fell. Of course, the logging industry does not want this information revealed, as tree prices will rise. An entire country need not be affected by the story and indeed, 'public interest' is often differentiated from 'national interest'. Latter term is sometimes used by governments to justify illegal, dangerous or unethical acts or to discourage journalists from reporting on a significant problem.

Investigative journalism is not instantaneous. It develops through recognised stages of planning, researching and reporting, and has to adhere to accepted standards of accuracy and evidence. The base of an investigative story is the proactive work of a journalist and, where resources permit, his or her team. After receiving a story tip, journalists develop hypotheses, plan additional research, decide on the relevant

questions, and go out to investigate them. They must compile evidence by witnessing and analysing answers for themselves, such that they go far beyond simply verifying the tip. The final story should reveal new information or assemble previously available information in a new way to reveal its significance. A single source can provide fascinating revelations, access to insights and information that would otherwise be hidden. But until the story from that source is cross-checked against other sources - experiential, documentary and human - and its meaning is explored, it does not classify as investigation.

Investigative reporting calls for greater resources, team work and more time than a routine news report. Many stories are the result of team investigations. But this poses problems for small, local and community publications with limited time, money, staff or specialised skills. A journalist may need to seek grants to support an investigation and learn to tap the skills of individuals outside the newsroom to help with specialist expertise.

According to UNESCO:

Investigative Journalism means the unveiling of matters that are concealed either deliberately by someone in a position of power, or accidentally, behind a chaotic mass of facts and circumstances - and the analysis and exposure of all relevant facts to the public. In this way investigative journalism crucially contributes to freedom of expression and media development, which are at the heart of UNESCO's mandate.

UNESCO has constantly fostered debate on media accountability and professional and ethical standards, which provide journalists with guiding principles and training materials on how to best exercise their profession. In collaboration with Arab Reporters for Investigative Journalism (ARIJ), UNESCO launched the first manual for investigative journalists in Arab States, entitled *Story-Based Inquiry: A Manual for Investigative Journalists* in 2009. Following the successful launch of the Manual which has been adopted by many journalism programmes in the Arab States, Asia, the United States of America and the Russian Federation, UNESCO presented The

Global Investigative Journalism Casebook, as complementary material for training purposes.

The role media can play as a watchdog is indispensable for democracy and it is for this reason that UNESCO fully supports initiatives to strengthen the capacity building of investigative journalism throughout the world. At a time of a widening communications ecosystem, journalism today needs to clearly show its key value-add to the public interest. In this light, credible investigative stories, like the kind promoted in this book, are increasingly pivotal to public confirmation of the continuing importance of professional journalistic work in the coming years.

Investigative Journalism in India

For years, Indian journalists have used their work to call the government and corporate firms to account for wrongdoing, illegal practices and corruption, often sparking public outcry and reform.

Today, some are well known across the country. Others are remembered only in the states where they lived.

But all of them, undoubtedly, serve as inspiring reminders of why diligent investigative journalism is immensely valuable — in what it can do for ordinary folks, for society and the field of professional journalism (that often seems to be wield influence without responsibility).

Listed here are five noteworthy moments in Indian investigative journalism that highlight the positive power of the press.

- *The Hindu's Bofors Expose*

The Bofors scandal that broke in 1987 marked a watershed for India — it was the first time corruption became an intensely public and political issue. The scandal was uncovered mostly by the Chennai-headquartered *The Hindu* and reported by Chitra Subramaniam-Duella and N. Ram. Almost 200 documents relating to Bofors were secretly sourced, verified and translated from the Swedish language before being published along with interviews and analytical pieces.

Such was the public fury stoked by this investigation that the government in power eventually ending up on the losing side in the 1989 general election. Interestingly, the Bofors expose was also featured as one of the 50 great stories produced by Columbia Journalism School alumni—N. Ram is one himself—in the past 100 years.

- *Tehelka's Defence Deals Expose*

Even as the nation was trying to find its feet after being knocked off balance by the massive Bhuj earthquake, on March 13, 2001, Tehelka published an investigative report that ripped the lid off the murky world of defence deals.

Carried out using hidden cameras, the investigation (called Operation West End) publicized secret videotapes of top politicians, bureaucrats and military official accepting bribes from two reporters (who posed as arms agents). The resulting furore created a major political storm and led to the resignation of those indicted by the videotapes. Interestingly, the same year, Tehelka also blew the lid of the explosive match-fixing scandal in Indian cricket.

- *3. Indian Express's Cement Scam Expose*

On the morning of August 31, 1981, readers of the Indian Express woke up to find a meticulously-researched expose on corruption in the grant of government cement quotas, complemented by supporting evidence and a blistering analysis that ran into 7,500 words. The swift, bold and bloodless journalistic coup has since come to be known as India's Watergate - or the Cement scandal.

Almost overnight Arun Shourie, the then-executive editor of the Indian Express, became a national "hero" for his consciously studied and fearlessly pursued investigation of organised corruption in high places. In fact, it was after this incident that the irrepressibly buoyant MP Pilloo Mody famously remarked, "Can you imagine the improved state of the nation if we had 10 Arun Shouries working instead of one?"

- *4. Indian Express's Human Trafficking Expose*

The name Ashwini Sarin is not very famous, but in the world of media, he is known as the man who showed how investigative journalism can further the cause of democracy. His sharp and penetrating investigative articles exposed the family planning atrocities during the Emergency, the multi-crore defence vehicle disposal racket and the torture of Tihar Jail inmates.

However, the Indian Express reporter is best known for his incisive report on human trafficking that created a whole discourse around flesh trade, controversial as it may have been. In 1981, he exposed the sordid racket by breaking the law himself (when he bought a tribal girl named Kamala) and show how easy it was to buy humans in India. His work also inspired the movie and play named 'Kamala'.

- *5. Open Magazine's Nira Radia Tapes*

In November 2010, Open magazine carried the transcripts of telephone conversations between Nira Radia (a political lobbyist cum PR honcho) and politicians, industrialists, officers of corporate houses and senior journalists. The tapes – wire-tapped by the Income Tax department on a tip-off by the Central Board of Direct Taxes – shone a harsh light on the murky manipulations that take place at the highest levels in the country to manoeuvre government formation, influence public opinion, and cater to corporate interests.

Outlook magazine followed with a similar story just days later while the infamous audio recordings were submitted to the Supreme Court by advocate Prashant Bhushan as part of a PIL on the 2G spectrum scam.

One of the fallouts of this story was that the indicted corporates group terminated all commercial engagement with the Outlook Group but the magazine's undaunted editor (Vinod Mehta) stood his ground.

Furthermore, the story of investigative journalism in India would be incomplete without mentioning the important role played by alternative media like CG Net Swara of Chhattisgarh. Founded in 2010 by Shubhranshu Choudhary, CG Net Swara helps poor villagers fight exploitation and oppression by local authorities.

For instance, one when the circle officer refused to pay them for work done under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee scheme (and even shouted at them for coming so often), the officer's harsh rebuke was recorded and published on India's first mobile community radio. After this attracted the attention of mainstream media, government took action against the errant officer.

Hard-hitting and honest, journalistic initiatives like these are why the press is called the fourth pillar of democracy.

For reference and example -->

<https://www.gijn.org> - Global Investigative Journalism

<https://www.thebureauinvestigates.com> - The Bureau of Investigative Journalism