

Title

PASSION OR PROFESSION

Lived Experiences of South Asian Journalists
Serving Ethnic Media in Canada

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Research Questions

- What do ethnic journalists chose ethnic media as a career?
- Do they face racialization in their trajectories as ethnic journalists, how this effects their perceptions?
- What makes their profession a passion?
- What are the challenges they face in their profession?

Methodology

-In-depth, semi-structured interviews

Sample

-Twelve (12) South Asian Ethnic media

Journalists (3 women and 9 men)

▸ Serving Pakistani, Indian and

Bangladeshi diasporic communities

▸ Including reporters, editors, Radio/TV show hosts, media managers, owners)

▸ Working in SA ethnic Print, Radio and TV media

Diversity among the Journalists

Qualifications	Languages	Religions	Previous Professions
PhDs (1)	Punjabi	Sikh	Professional Journalists/ media personnel (5)
MA/MSc (8)	Hindi	Hindu	Information technologist, Environmentalist, Architect (3)
BA/BSc (2)	Urdu	Muslim	Business and Sales, (2)
High School (1)	Bengali	Christian	Researcher, student (2)

Preliminary Findings

Journey to Ethnic Media Profession

Media Entrepreneurship

"We lived ... in the North of BC. There were about 300 to 400 South Asian families but there were no means of entertainment or no Punjabi store so I started a TV program and I also establish a grocery store as well."

Journey to Ethnic Media Profession

Accidental Entry

"If I didn't get a job in TV I wouldn't have been a journalist. It was like a hit and trail, I am not a window washer I was a practicing lawyer, I never delivered mail in my life but I then I did. I was a carpenter helper you know, pounding nails and I have done for years. Then I worked for a refinery and I did shovelling, loading stuff, driving forklift. I mean that's a journey I did because of lack of direction, lack of resources in Canada to guide me in my profession where I wanted to go. In order to survive I had to do all these odd jobs."

Journey to Ethnic Media Profession

Professional Experience Recognition

“A new radio was started in 1972 and they wanted to do Indian programming. They had given the same show to three people and one of those producers hired me to do their program as an announcer. Then the channel owner felt that these three producers didn't have a broadcasting background, they were business people while I had broadcasting background so they offered me those Indian programs so with the blessings of those three people, I started those programs and I worked with them until 1978 and that was the first Indian programming in British Columbia.”

Experiencing Racialization

Historic Racism

"...when I came here, there were very few non-Canadians ...but, when the population increased, there were two issues; first, the job competition increased and secondly the supposedly ethnic white superiority was being challenged. This brought us to street level issues light fighting, violence, racial suppression and there was a reaction too from minority communities... Gradually...the number of ethnic population increased and they became political and consumer force. Then white mainstream society and the media, they started doing it [racial biasness] in subtle ways, because otherwise their political system and their consumer markets would be affected."

Experiencing Racialization

Workplace Racism

"The problem with [mainstream newspapers] was that they were very restrictive and they wanted you to suck up into them which I was not doing so we had this tension going on. I always did good stories but I didn't like the idea that I was like a token brown guy, both the paper were totally white, it was just one or two [brown guys] here and there and they [white] would tell you what to do and if you told them what to do, they would get really upset about it. And, for me coming from [leading English newspaper of India], this was very insulting you know, for being told what to do."

Experiencing Racialization

Systemic Racism

"I sent my resume to a mainstream leading newspaper and they offered me, come and work as a subordinate, as intern. I did not go, I did not like it. I said to myself that I have published in Times Magazine [and you don't consider my experience] so I did not [chose to] work with them."

Passion or Profession

Satisfaction

"I always wanted to do something that nobody was doing, everyone was in other businesses and nobody was touching the media side and media was a field where you could help yourself and the community so that was my passion... my passion has been in the media, right from high school... May be it was God's way for me to serve the community. I didn't have knowledge of how to acquire radio stations; learning with time, I was given an opportunity to learn and have some experience. At the end of the day, I think your faith really helps you a lot. I wanted to serve my community, I was able to do it, not many people in Canada are able to do it."

Passion or Profession

Recognition

"I do my own TV show, though it's not a money minting machine but yes my satisfaction is my passion... it's a passion and I am just spreading it out to the community that yes, we can have something good also, if you want to. I feel that the ripples I am creating are enough for me when I receive phone calls in the morning from the elders and the blessings I get because this kind of program has never ever been seen and it's the only program in North America where every day we talk about spirituality."

Passion or Profession

Empowerment

"Frankly speaking when I came to this profession it was not my choice it was my need but now it has become my choice and my passion. This is the only profession which gives you a lot of knowledge, I came to Canada about 5 or 6 years ago but I have much more knowledge than people who are living here for the past 50 years. Everyday I meet new people, from prime minister to an ordinary person, I interviewed many politicians premieres, mayors, corporate officials ...so learning new things everyday."

Challenges

Security

"...there is no security for the ethnic media presenters, a journalist was killed in 1998, he was shot 10 bullets. His thought went against [some practices] of the community [so he was killed] and his killers are still not caught. When you become a public figure and say something that some groups in the community do not like or a journalist makes some mistake, which is unavoidable, they are at risk. What government is doing for their security?"

Challenges

Income Disparity

"... it's not that fair, like when it comes to pay scales, we are happy when we compare ourselves with other south Asian media then we are happy but if we compare with mainstream, we might not be happy... Still, our organization is much better but we are not paid over time even if we spend 2 or 4 [extra] hours. Our personal level relationship with our management becomes a problem, they also expect that we could work extra hours without any overtime payment."

Challenges

Multiple Roles

"May be in few years if the financial situation improves in ethnic media, but for now, the media workers are fully abused. They have to work as a journalist, media managers, salesperson to get the ads, doing live-on-location [programs on radio and TV] and they are stuck, they don't have any other option. If you are not a qualified journalist, you are in benefit because people recognize you [as a journalist] and if you are qualified, you think it's better than a security guard's job so you get stuck into it."

Challenges

Learning New Skills

"So when this radio station was started, I didn't have much background in Punjabi because I was working for the English newspapers [in India] so it was a big challenge for me because here, majority of programs are done in Punjabi. Of course, I could communicate but I didn't have in-depth knowledge; I can read, speak and write Punjabi but it wasn't very fluent. "

Conclusion

- South Asian ethnic journalists have diverse backgrounds.
- Majority of them experience racialization as a lived experience after their immigration.
- Once joined, ethnic media becomes passion for most of them.
- They earn satisfaction, empowerment, recognition for their work from their communities.
- Working in ethnic media is more challenging as compared to working in mainstream media. Some of the challenges include lack of compatible income, multiple roles (“from GM to Peon”), extra load of work, pressure to learn new skills (e.g., language), job insecurity, personal security and backlash of community.