



Media Things

Department of B.A. Mass Media

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Looking back at 2021, journalists list out the highs, lows and reasons for optimism for Indian media



It was a packed year for the Indian media, but different sections of the media chose to divide focus between different events that punctuated the news cycle, some more than others.

The year 2021 saw an unrelenting second wave of the pandemic that claimed countless lives, recorded and unrecorded, and ended with the farmer protests

culminating in the Narendra Modi government's U-turn on its three farm laws. It saw the phrase "Bollywood drug gang" come back into the media lexicon, while the annual string of avoidable and unavoidable natural calamities happened one after the other.

Newslandry decided to know from journalists themselves, what they felt the year was like, for Indian journalism. We asked them three questions: What was, in their opinion, the lowest point for Indian journalism in 2021, the highest, and what they hope Indian journalism gets right in 2022.

Ravish Kumar, senior executive editor, NDTV

Indian media is now found only at its lowest point. It has abandoned its quest towards the pinnacle. The distinction between media and Godi media has shrunk even more this year. At the speed of light, the entire media fraternity is transforming into Godi media. Godi media today prefers to stay in the mud, with the exception of a few news pieces. In 2020, whether it was the link between Corona and Tablighi Jamaat or the months-long coverage of Sushant Singh Rajput's death, and in 2021, with coverage of the Aryan Khan drug case, the Indian media demonstrated that it is unaffected by the passing of time.

Here's what they said.

Godi media solely supported the government during the second wave of Corona. It took a back seat when it came to holding the administration accountable for the lack of oxygen.

Throughout the year, farmers warned the nation about the dangers of Godi media. What could be more embarrassing for the Indian media than the fact that there were signs during the farmers' protest stating that Godi media should not cover their protest.

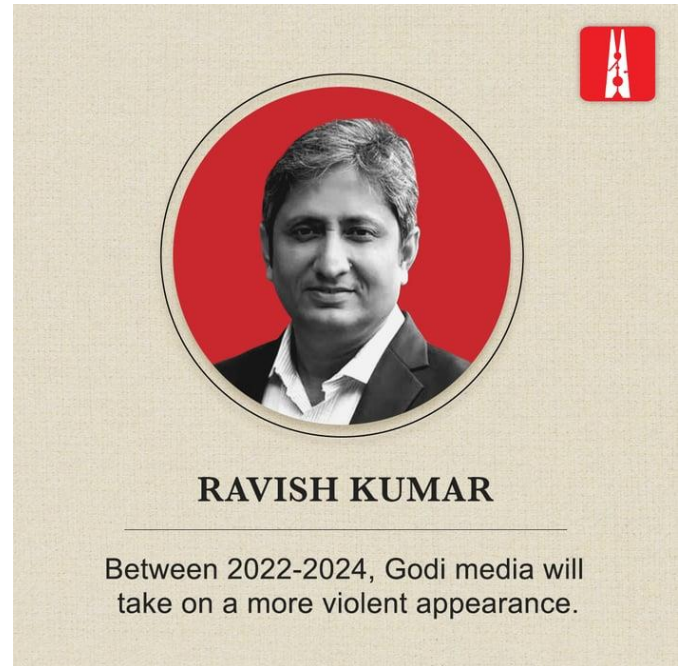
Godi media swallowed that disgrace as well, saying that it will continue to drink every shame as if it were Coke, Pepsi, and that it will not fall out of the government's lap. The media slept soundly on the ground of its demise in 2021. It enjoyed the AC cooler.

In terms of the highs, during the second wave of Covid, Gujarati journalists accomplished an outstanding job. The death toll from Corona was initially reported by *Saurashtra News*, *Gujarat News*, *Sandesh*, and *Divya Bhaskar*. Journalists from Gujarati language publications devised a believable approach for reporting the toll by risking their own lives, which drew widespread attention.

Researchers from a number of prominent universities around the world gathered information from Gujarati newspapers and concluded that the government is underreporting the number of people killed in the second wave. This technique was then adopted by Hindi newspapers. *Bhaskar's* report on the data of those who died was excellent. The *Bhaskar* group was also raided subsequently. Anurag Dwari, Ravish Ranjan, Saurav, and Pooja Bharadwaj are some of my channel's associates. They did an excellent job of covering the farmers' movement and Corona second wave. The report on the selling of land to a temple trust in Ayodhya by *Newslaundry's* Basant Kumar and Ayush Tiwari should also be remembered. Who can forget the Pegasus Report from *The Wire*?

Between 2022 and 2024, Godi media will take on a more violent appearance. It will go after dissenting voices with renewed vigour, and it will suppress authentic information in order to promote the administration. On TV news channels, in the coming two years, as the unemployed youth and the general public become more concerned about inflation, Godi media will progressively turn against the general public. In TV channels and newspapers, new kinds of politics and religious debate will be introduced. Every debate will be strangled under the guise of religion.

There is no chance for journalism from these quarters because you can't tell the difference between Godi media and media. There will be more news about names and



less news of work in the media where journalism will be practised. Many journalists, including us and you, will continue to do something on the fringes that is referred to as journalism. Other journalists will continue to risk their lives through YouTube, but under the name of journalism, market money will be spent exclusively on Godi media, which does not contain any journalism.

Those who are doing journalism on their own and in danger should be hopeful. The battle for hope is a daily one for them. Their hopes are not going to change as the old year comes to an end and the new year begins.

Karma Paljor, *EastMojo*

The Indian media faced one of its toughest challenges this year: we had to continue reporting from the ground even as Covid wreaked havoc in the region. The media professionals showed, on most occasions, exemplary behaviour in disseminating verified, factual and contextual information on the pandemic, and often doubled up as facilitators for patients and concerned families too, helping them arrange oxygen, hospital beds and every other essential. This year, the media also saw more value in using data and numbers to drive home the point. The Indian media also took a stance towards fake news, with almost every notable media house establishing its fact-checking teams. This, even as dozens of media professionals died in the pandemic while many became severely sick due to Covid.

The negatives, however, were many: the shamelessly biased reports on some media houses, the overwhelming love for certain leaders and parties, and the constant media trial faced by protesters across the nation left a bitter taste among the viewers. The Indian media is becoming increasingly polarised, and the “take no sides” mantra seems like a thing of the past. The year also saw harassment of media professionals at the hands of government agencies, an act that unfortunately found support among pro-government journalists.

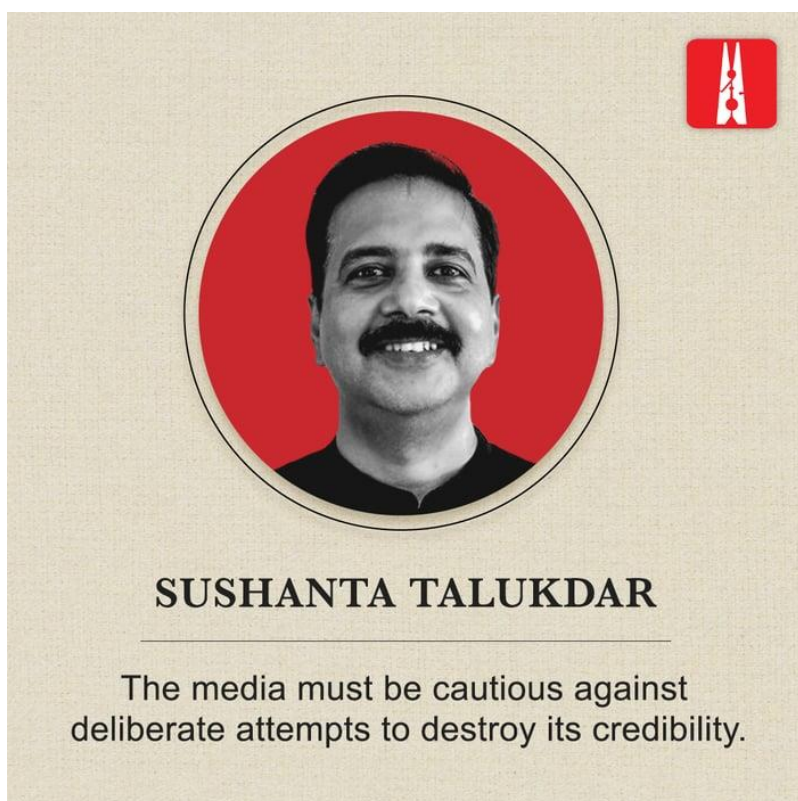


KARMA PALJOR

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Sushanta Talukdar, *NEZine*

The media in Assam got the news of the BJP and its allies retaining power for the second consecutive term in Assam right. The election analysis in most media correctly projected that because of the failure of the Congress-led Mahajot and two newly formed regional parties to unite despite a powerful movement against the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2020, the ruling BJP would not face any formidable challenge and will have smooth sailing.



However, what it got completely wrong was the eviction of “encroachers” from “government land” in Gorukhuti in Assam’s Darrang district in September. Most media organisations portrayed these alleged encroachers as “suspected Bangladeshis” or “suspected foreigners”, as claimed by the ruling BJP or right-wing forces. Assam Revenue and Disaster Management Jogen Mohan informed the Assam Assembly on December 24 in reply to a starred question raised by Leader of Opposition Debabrata Saikia that no government land is under encroachment of “foreigners” in

any of the districts in the state.

About what it needs to get right in 2022, gatekeeping in mass media must be strengthened to get the facts straight. The media must be cautious against deliberate attempts to destroy its credibility through planting stories to usurp media space for advancing the ruling party agenda.

Priyanka Pulla, *The Wire*

As a health journalist, I was disappointed at how often the government tried to justify their suboptimal policy decisions with incorrect science. And how often journalists bought the government claims without questioning.

Am happy with every bit of long-form health journalism that appeared, because it meant that publications were allowing journalists to spend time on a subject and to understand it, rather than demanding hot takes. There was plenty of good long-form health journalism, and I hope this grows.

I look forward to more training programmes for health journalists so that they are able to deal with the frequently technical nature of their beat, and are able to fact-check false claims.



Meena Kotwal, *The Mooknayak*

The lowest point for me was when the so called mainstream media ignored giving news space to the alleged gang rape and immolation of a Dalit girl in the Delhi Cantonment area.



I say it with utmost regret that there was virtually nothing that I found myself feeling proud about in the media...I am unable to recall a high point despite wanting to do so.

Lastly, for years, the media has been doing one-sided reporting on Dalits, tribals and Muslims, which is often far from reality. This is because there are rarely people on their teams to represent these communities, especially not in the editorial and decision-making positions. If people from the Dalit and tribal communities will get space on their teams, their issues will be spoken about in a nuanced and open manner;

this had also been found in multiple research studies. I hope this situation gets better in the coming year.

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