

Rural journalism — the right to

Rukhsana Iqbal

On the 16th and 17th of January the first ever seminar on rural journalism was held at the Pakistan Academy for Rural Development, Peshawar. A host of speakers from all four provinces of the country, including, thinkers, teachers, intellectuals and journalists participated in the two-day moot divided into five sessions.

They discussed the role of the electronic media, the need for the preservation of indigenous culture, and, of course, the shortcomings of the journalists themselves. The response of the speakers was unprecedented. A spirit of unity in all that diversity of conceptions pervaded the scene, which was a positive pointer indeed towards which way the wind blows in our country today. (Most discerning Pakistanis must ask themselves at this point in our history, when we like to call our fabric a democratic one — are we free? Do 72 per cent of our people living in the rural areas have access to information or are they victims of what has been referred to as "conditioned power" — the acceptance of authority, dictated by the political culture of our land, and by their socio-economic conditions. There is an established "patrimonial" relationship between the rulers and the ruled achieved by the simple acceptance of what the community and culture have along thought right and virtuous. Whereas a democratic spirit demands a national commitment to the principle that debate on public issues should be uninhibited, robust, and wide open, and that it may well include vehement and sometimes unpleasantly sharp attacks on the government and public officials.

"Rural journalism" does not have a domicile, stated Mr Mukhtar Masud, the chief guest at the inaugural session, but he spoke of yellow journalism, blue journalism, red journalism and green journalism. Khaki he said could be the word employed for the journalism pertaining to the rural areas and hence to the soil — however our experience of "khaki" not being very pleasant he chose the word "khakistri".

At the concluding session, Wabzada Nasrullah Khan attributed our failure to address

the problems of the rural population to our failure to achieve democratic rule. Hence lack of representation was the root-cause of the inability to find solutions during the repressive regimes of the past.

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It is imperative today for all of us to study our local conditions and devise our own strategies to counter our difficulties. The seminar on "rural journalism" might go a long way in helping those of us who attend it to think about the role of those who have chosen to write, to shift their focus towards the ordeal of the majority that dwell in sordid conditions. Thousands of heads all over the world and in the richest capitals of the world join perennially, to advocate the cause of the down-trodden multitudes of the under-developed world, but in spite of

we must compile and collect the work done on the rural population and project it regularly through the media.

In our country as in other countries referred to as the "Third World" a great deal of aid money is wasted, for instance, in "purchasing" the expertise of foreigners belonging to aid agencies, when we talk of implementing schemes for the poor, whether it is in the field of health, literacy, or other social sectors. The aid personnel who consume these resources come in all shapes and sizes, and all kinds and varieties. Some are good indeed, and undoubtedly earn their pay. Many

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generous donations very little headway has been made to curb the actual cause of our ills. First of all, then, when we talk of "rural journalism," are we looking for ways to highlight and thus address the problems of our rural population beyond sensational stories of rape and the hegemony of the feudal class? Secondly, there is the need to train Pakistani workers in making scientifically correct analysis of the rural situation in the journalistic field by holding training courses for them and linking the journalism departments with the Academy for Rural Development, and thirdly,

Western "disaster experts" more often than not turn out to be an expensive fact-finding mission. What this means in practice is that they arrive with empty hands, and leave with their heads full of information, which may or may not later be translated into action. We must train our own people to embark on these fact-finding missions. There is a tremendous will among our urban middle-income females to go into creative writing and related fields, judging from the number of journals and magazines that are flooding the market.

Talking of development,

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which in Pakistan would be worth its name, and that writers and the media play in the process, we underestimate the fact that injustice is the root-cause of all ills, because the people, the 72 per cent who live in rural areas but the majority of the urban poor and middle class have been divorced from reality. It is a mysterious entity with esoteric proportions; they are conditioned to believe that only a selected few are fated to rule. Therefore we ask ourselves the question: those who hold perpetual power in this country manage it? The answer is in the words of John Kenneth Galbraith, a form of scholarship that does not to extend knowledge but to exclude the unknowing. Journalism must bring the "unknowing into the fold of knowing." That is a color and closely connected to Pakistan's major problem is the level of literacy. The important decision pertains to literacy is the officialisation of one or more languages, the nation of them as the medium of communication, with all government institutions, the medium of instruction in state-supported schools. The second important choice is: receive institutional help in reading and writing — the languages or those chosen by the elite? The language problem in Pakistan is subject to gross neglect because officialisation of a given language is an important gateway to participation. If too, there is found correlation between Access to power, wealth and prestige depends partly on one's ability to speak, read and write in the official language, where literacy is not necessarily a prerequisite for power, wealth and prestige. According to Paul Korten, *Politics of Education: Power and Liberation*, literacy comes only through the consciousness of the whole society and not through increased literacy of citizens, as the World Bank and cultural imperialised states are allowed to take away from the semi-rural areas which