

Alicia Wright

Mellon Foundation Area and International Studies Fellowships for Incoming Graduate Students

Submitted: September 25, 2015

With the funding provided by the Mellon Foundation, I spent three months in New Delhi, India to observe and participate in media production. As a journalism and mass communication doctoral student, I broadly study political news in India published in English and Hindi to interrogate how actors in the news ecology produce and consume ideas of conflict. At the pre-dissertation stage, my goal for this short-term fieldwork aimed at articulating a clear fieldwork plan for further ethnographic research in India. This included more clearly organizing specific focus areas of study for my dissertation, which broadly cover language translation and journalism education. I divided my time between shadowing journalists and writers, attending lectures and meetings on the media industry, and developing contacts in a Delhi-based research group.

I lived in an area of South Delhi known as a hub for international freelancers and young Indian reporters. In this way, I networked with writers for a variety of news organizations as well as independently employed. These individuals covered news for diverse media ranging from print, online, radio, television and film. I shadowed some reporters while they covered major events in the city, and I had the opportunity to collaborate on several projects to not just observe the production process but to experience the timeframe and planning for daily news coverage. Early in my fieldwork in June, I assisted a South Indian videographer and journalist to the Indian national government's International Yoga Day event that was picked up by MSNBC Shift. We had a 24-hour window following the world-record breaking yoga session in New Delhi to attend other yoga day celebrations and interview practitioners for the four-minute feature.

Meeting foreign correspondents and their Indian co-writers, I learned about the challenges of language in covering stories from South Asia. By following them through their daily work, I traced the multi-tiered process of translating information. This requires work beyond editorial standards. The reporters explained how they would be required to attend events held in Hindi or English when they were not fluent in one or the other. Therefore, especially among freelance journalists, they tended to share information or work together to decipher meaning. Observing the writing process, I grew interested in how journalists understand their role as interpreter or translator in the news. This point has become a central focus to my doctoral project that also incorporates my years of language study in Hindi-Urdu.

Besides these one-on-one experiences with journalists, I sought out the academic community researching media in India. I was fortunate to find the Lila Foundation for Translocal Initiatives, a group that organizes a yearly series called Lila PRISM with lectures and workshops that address the theme of transformative governance. These lectures brought journalists from a variety of news organizations to discuss new models of news reporting in India with a concentration on future journalists and journalism education. The lecture series drew veteran journalists in Delhi like Mark Tully (BBC) and Saeed Naqvi (BBC, *The Statesman*, *World Report*, etc.).

I met with scholars at the Centre for Culture, Media and Governance, a research institution housed on the Jamia Milia Islamia campus. I attended presentations by PhD researchers there and one-on-one meetings with the faculty in the Centre. We discussed plans to implement journalism training workshops based on research conducted by faculty there that could also incorporate components of my research interest in language training for reporting. Involvement in these workshops lays a foundation for long-

term dissertation fieldwork in Delhi through the Centre for Culture, Media and Governance. With the help of information provided by the director of the Centre, I mapped out other field sites to return to in the future where innovative journalism education courses are being established. I thank the Mellon Foundation for funding my research this summer in India so that I could develop a clearer idea of my larger dissertation fieldwork and establish crucial contacts among universities and news reporters.