

survivors and relatives to the accident, background of similar accidents, the technical inspection of the plane before it took off and the loopholes in the inspection procedures, comparative statistical study of accidents with other airliners, loss of articles and behaviour of the community, etc. are interesting themes of a feature.

Similarly (in the case of hijacking of a plane, the news story deals with the hard facts. A feature writer can project the experiences and feelings of the passengers, their relatives, and that of the pilot.)

While news coverage of elections is concerned with the size of electorate, the candidates, the constituencies, the performance of the candidates, etc., the feature writer, on the other hand, portrays the mood of the voters and a vivid picture of the election scene.

(If there is a hike in the petrol prices, the news item gives the extent of increase, the need for it and the possible consequences. A feature writer, on the other hand, tries to find out the reaction of the car-users, taxi drivers, transporters, so as to find out how they have been affected in their day-to-day life.) The car-users switching over to scooters, scooterists taking to cycles, the reaction of petrol dealers, etc. can be probed by a feature writer. (Even social effects due to increase in the cost of transportation can be an interesting subject for a feature writer.)

At the time of air or railway strike, while news items give details in regard to people on strike, the number of services in operation, etc., the feature writer would get the reactions of porters, taxi drivers and others whose livelihood has been affected. Similarly, people travelling on urgent calling—marriage, death, illness, business, etc. can be interviewed to find out their reactions to the strike. This type of probe would result in excellent features.

(Features not only differ from news items in regard to their scope but also in several other respects such as timeliness, length, style, etc.)

(News story deals with recent and current events.) It is like a dairy product, a perishable commodity. (The speed is of great importance. It has to meet certain deadlines. This is not so necessary in the case of features. A feature need not be only on a recent subject. The event might have taken place some time ago but it can still be a subject of a feature, if it is of interest to the readers.) For instance, feature on hijacking of a plane in Lahore in 1970 became readable when IAC plane was hijacked in Pakistan in 1976.

(Brevity is the soul of news writing. News story has not much scope for subsidiary or background material. Every word counts in news

place. It is not always a complete story in itself. The presumption is that the reader is aware of earlier happenings on the subject. (Feature, on the other hand, is a self-sufficient and self-contained piece.)

News is more or less common in all papers since the sources of news, (i.e., agency, broadcasts, etc.) are the same. The difference in news coverage in different papers lies on emphasis, extent of space and the slant. This is not necessarily so in the case of features. In fact, features give an individuality or distinctiveness to the newspapers.

The purpose of the news story is to inform, educate and enlighten the readers about certain happenings. The feature, on the other hand, entertains, guides and instructs the readers.

A reporter or a correspondent writing a news story does not generally put his name. The name is given only when the story is of some significance. Feature, on the other hand, may be signed.

While news stories are generally written in third person, features which are more in a nature of personal rapport may be written in first, second, and third person.

(Most of the news go without illustrations or without any visual aid. In the case of features, illustrations are more or less a 'must'.)

Feature and Article

(There are many things common between a feature and an article, yet each has a character and personality of its own.)

(Both articles and features are non-news form of writing. They thrive on the quality of good prose. An article often acquires the character of a feature and a feature sometimes takes the characteristics of an article. It is not easy to draw a line.) Each encroaches on other's territory.

(An article is generally written on broad subjects, covering more than one aspect. In features, the subject-matter is specific, minute and narrow.) Only one or two aspects are dealt with at a time. It deals with a single mood. (The approach to the subject in the article is general, while it is specific in the feature.)

(An article is an elaborate piece of composition, a product of mind, based on study and research. It is more scholarly and more serious in tone.) It is generally well-documented. There are facts, figures and lot of statistics. (The feature, on the other hand, is a product of heart based on emotions, feelings and reactions of the writer to the people, places and events, and written in a much lighter vein.) In features, facts

and figures are not so essential.

(In terms of length, an article can be lengthier than a feature. Again, besides information and educative material, an element of entertainment is generally there in a feature. It is not necessary for an article to provide entertainment or instruction.)

(While photographs, etc. are very essential in features, it is not so in the case of articles.)

(The style of writing an article is generally formal, more learned, heavy and sober. It can even survive dullness. The style in features is more informal, more colourful. Dullness is fatal to a feature. Features can dramatize, humanize an event or idea and provide joy and delight so as to make greater appeal to the readers.)

(In articles, an element of personal opinion is always there, as they are generally written by experts.) The expert gives his views and conclusions after making a comprehensive study of the subject. (In features, personal opinion is generally projected through others. The features may be written by the same person on a variety of subjects.)

(While an article has a conventional beginning, middle and end, the feature can begin and end even abruptly.)

The feature is a sort of lyric in prose: 'a momentary mood garnered in words'. An article, on the other hand, deals with several moods: 'from grave to the gay and from sublime to the ridiculous'. If the article is like 'many-roomed mansion with several storeys', the feature is 'a neat little, beautiful one-room cottage'.

(An example here makes the difference between the article and the feature clear. If one has to write an article on 'Beggar problem in India', the writer will survey the entire situation, give relevant statistics and throw light on what has been done on the subject by the government and voluntary organizations. It will deal with many aspects of the problem. But if a feature is to be written on the same subject, the writer will portray the actual life of the beggar and his family. He will present a vivid picture of the conditions. The documentation, in the feature, if any, would be subservient to the human aspect.)

A single news item, event or situation can provide varied approach and result in different types of stories. Take, for instance, if there is an announcement that US President is to visit India.

There will be straight news story giving dates of visit, programmes, etc. There will be editorials weighing the relative value of the visit, editors giving their opinion about the visit. A column

writer will give his individual opinion about the visit. An expert can write an article covering Indo-American relations in all its aspects—political, economic, social and cultural, giving lots of facts and figures.

The feature writer would not be interested in the aspects mentioned above. He would like to do a personality feature on Mr. Bush as to how he has become the President of the USA. He can write a background feature in regard to a former US President's visit to India or Indian PM's visit to USA. The feature writer can write features on the projects which the US President would be visiting in India. He can also interview experts on Indo-American relations, so as to find out their views about the success or failure of the visit. (The feature writer can write a feature on press and broadcasting teams accompanying the President. Features can also be written on Mrs. Bush's social engagements, shopping, etc. in India.)

CHAPTER X

Features—Variety

It is rightly said that 'the sky is the limit' as far as the scope of feature writing is concerned. Features can be written on every possible subject provided the writer has imagination and skill. These qualities can be acquired and developed in course of time, if the writer has the necessary aptitude for such writing.

Just as it is difficult to define precisely a feature and also to distinguish it from interpretative news or article, so also it is extremely difficult to classify features into different types. There is no consensus among the writers about the classification of features or their exact nomenclature. One type of feature blends into another, and at times different types are indistinguishable. In any case, the features cannot be divided into watertight compartments. However, a rough classification of features into various types indicates the scope of wide range of subjects, and helps in the location and collection of material.

One way to classify features is on the basis of technique of writing. A feature is an 'interview feature', if the major portion of the feature is in the form of interview. An interview feature may be a personality or narrative feature.

(Features can be classified according to purpose—expository, explaining things or timely topics; descriptive, giving verbal picture of persons, things and places of interest; and narrative which narrates events with plot, setting, and characters.)

✓ **News and Background**

(The most common type of features are 'news features' which are also called news follow-ups, or news in depth, or news behind news. These features are connected to current events, and one gets ideas of these

features from the newspapers. (A few instances are: Prime Minister's forthcoming visit to the USSR may give an idea of features on pen pictures of people the PM would meet in the USSR.) The idea of a feature on detailed cultivation practices and impressions of farmers may come from a news item that a farmer has won a prize for producing the best crop; an advertisement about making a new car may prompt a feature writer to write a feature pointing out the defects in the existing models of cars; personality feature may be on a politician who has been shot at; an official hand-out giving family planning facilities may be the starting point for a feature writer who may interview eligible couples in regard to the facilities that actually exist in the hospitals; a news item that some blind people see for the first time after years of blindness may lend itself into an excellent feature, if a few such people are interviewed and their experiences projected; an advertisement 'best way to prevent lung cancer is to stop smoking' can be probed through a feature by interviewing smokers, doctors and cancer patients.

(Features which are not directly connected with news but deal with subjects of continuing interest such as smoke pollution, road safety, slums, etc. are known as background features. These features may also be on anniversaries of battle, or birth or death of a person, or on hijacking of a plane, or on earthquakes, etc. which can be linked with the current events.)

Features written on religious festivals, or on memory of God or Goddess fall in the category of mythological background features.

Statistics may be turned into interesting features. Such features would add to public understanding. Statistics in regard to State-wise collection of Flag Day Fund, crime, etc. may be used for writing features.

✓ Personality

(Another important type of features are biographical or personality features. Personality features are based on well-known persons and their achievements. In such features, the emphasis is on what has made the man great rather than cataloguing his achievements.)

(Personality features may be written not only on news-worthy personalities or on great men who capture the imagination of people, but also on little-known persons, such as a beggar who has become a

millionaire. These are rag to riches stories which hold readers' interest. These features are not biographical sketches. It is not necessary to tell the story from birth to death. It is sufficient to give just enough background of the person and his recent achievements. A feature writer need not give all details or deal with all aspects. The objective is to tell the readers about the qualities of the man, and how he has achieved the position of eminence.)

Human Interest and Utility

Human interest features are now becoming more popular in India. One can get ideas of such features in a number of ways. Human interest features may be written on 'a day in the life of a common man', such as a constable, gardener, sweeper, beggar or a 90-year-old man marrying the fifth time or a blind teacher taking a class. Then there is the story of a man who passes matriculation examination at the age of 50 or so, on 15th attempt. (The emphasis in these features is on the unique views of life or on unusual occupations. A feature writer may probe on subject such as 'Hippies'—why they behave as they do and from where they get the money, or why dogs form part of the Republic Day parade, and many other interesting and unusual subjects.)

(How to do, or utilise, or process features give direction and guidance on doing something, such as repairing or assembling of radio or television sets, gardening, childcare, health and hygiene, preparation of a new dish, making of dolls, etc. Such features should be on a definite and concrete piece of work.) The directions should be simple, clear and in logical sequence, so that they can be followed by readers without specialized knowledge or skill.

Experience and Enquiry

(Experience features are of three types: based on own and others' experience; experience of groups of people; and experience amounting to confession.)
 (Personal experience features are based on the actual testimony of a person who has undergone the experience.) In such features, no attempt is made to preach or sermonize the beneficial effects of new practices. (The readers are allowed to draw their own conclusions from other persons' experience. Features based on personal

Features—

experience of a space traveller, or hijacked, or a survivor in a plane or The experiences should be unusual additional information to the reader interviewed and a feature is prepared harrowing experience undergone known as group experience feature personal. (In such features, the experience—success, omission and who recited death ceremony and because he remembered only those confessional feature.)

(Enquiry or investigative feature and assess the accuracy or others can be on subjects, such as various death traps, manholes and plugh necessary to elicit truth.)

Places/Hobbies/Pets/Scientific

(In features on places, the feature place with an observant eye undergone remarkable transition of scenic beauty may be fit so Features may also be with arrival of a rare animal in the feeding of a cranky, operation pets of unusual breeds, train together.)

(Technical and scientific advances in science and medical subjects are projected through even a layman can understand Features on hobbies, past and how one has got interest field for a feature writer.) The different walks of life may

Photo Features

(Photo features are pictorial

experience of a space traveller, or a pilot whose plane has been hijacked, or a survivor in a plane or train crash fall in this category.) The experience should be unusual. It should entertain or provide additional information to the readers. Where a number of persons are interviewed and a feature is prepared on their experience, such as the harrowing experience undergone by the hijacked passengers is known as group experience features. Confession features are more personal. (In such features, the person narrates his intimate experience—success, omission and failure.) The confession of a priest who recited death ceremony *mantras* at the marriage ceremony, because he remembered only those *mantras* would yield an excellent confessional feature.

(Enquiry or investigative features go into the depth of the matter, and assess the accuracy or otherwise of the allegations. Such features can be on subjects, such as shortage of drugs, housing problem, road death traps, manholes and plight of *jhuggi* dwellers where probe is necessary to elicit truth.)

✓ Places/Hobbies/Pets/Scientific Subjects

(In features on places, the feature writer gives concrete details of the place with an observant eye. Features on places which have undergone remarkable transformation, or places of tourist interest or of scenic beauty may be fit subjects for feature treatment.)

(Features may also be written on animals and pets, such as the arrival of a rare animal in the zoo, the death of an old favourite, feeding of a cranky, operation of a sick one, tribulation of keepers, pets of unusual breeds, training of pets, and fighting pets living together.)

(Technical and scientific features explain in layman's language advances in science and medicines, technology, or electronics.) Such subjects are projected through features in simple language, so that even a layman can understand the significance of these changes.

(Features on hobbies, particularly unusual hobbies, others' hobbies and how one has got interested in a particular hobby is yet another field for a feature writer.) The hobbies of well-known retired people in different walks of life may be the interesting subjects of features.

✓ Photo Features

(Photo features are pictorial features. In such features, a series of

photographs arranged according to a particular pattern 'tell' the story, in an effective manner. There is very little write-up in such features.)

Institutional/Narrative

(Features on organizations and institutions, such as an artificial limb centre, blind school, bird sanctuary; or informative features, where the writer tells the readers something of interest and significance such as fastest aeroplane, newest ship and biggest rocket are yet another variety of features.)

In institutional features, the good or bad work of the institution should be projected through the beneficiaries themselves. It will make little impact if the head of the institution alone tells of the progress or facilities, or the feature writer only conveys his own impressions.

(Narrative features present facts vividly. These may be travel experiences or eye witness accounts from the battle front) (The emphasis in these features is on action and adventure. The writer shares with the readers what he has seen, felt, or witnessed.)