

P. Sainath & PARI

P. Sainath is a highly-acclaimed journalist, who has received more than 40 national and international awards. He is one of the very few reporters consistently covering the poorest, most marginalised people of rural India. His articles speak, centrally, of inequality — of injustice, corruption, exploitation, discrimination and economic deprivation that is rooted in class, caste and gender.

He is also a teacher of journalism who has mentored, inspired and supported numerous reporters and photographers, especially in rural areas. He is a visiting faculty member at media schools in India and in other countries, where he has trained a few thousand young journalists.

Sainath's path-breaking reporting on farm suicides in India — more than 3,00,000 cultivators have taken their own lives since 1995 — has brought public attention to the severity of the continuing agrarian crisis in the country

One of the most critical aspects of Sainath's work has been its impact on public policy, related in particular to the problems of the rural India since the 1990s. If the farmers' suicides are a critical issue in India, it is largely due to his extensive reporting of this crisis. Sainath's reports on hunger, migration, distress and debt have significantly impacted policy in India, including a farm loan waiver. His reporting has also contributed to perceptions of, and policy directions in, the development of the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (NREGS), a key development in public policy. In 2008-9, he was a member of the Expert Group constituted by the Ministry of Rural Development to formulate a methodology for conducting the next Below Poverty Line (BPL) census.

Sainath is an accomplished photographer and his photo exhibition titled 'Visible Work, Invisible Women' has toured across India and many other countries. His landmark book 'Everybody Loves A Good Drought' was declared a Penguin Classic in 2013. For the stories that constitute this book, he covered 1,00,000-kilometres across India. Published in multiple editions and in 10 languages, the book is in its 48th edition. It is a recommended text for journalism students and is used in over 100 universities in India and overseas. All royalties from the book go towards funding prizes for rural journalists in India every year.

In December 2014, Sainath launched the People's Archive of Rural India (PARI), a multilingual site that is independent of both governments and corporates. PARI aims, over time, to tell the story of 833 million rural Indians — those who are mostly absent in the corporate 'mainstream' media. PARI is in the process of placing a fellow in nearly 100 regions of India to report on the everyday lives of everyday people. Sainath believes that as the 'rural' declines worldwide, every rural community everywhere needs a People Archive of its own.

PARI aims to capture the labour, languages, livelihoods, arts, crafts and many other aspects of rural India. This is a platform that combines video, audio, still photography and print. Public access to the archive is free. In just a short while, stories published on PARI have received awards; and in June 2016 PARI received the first Praful Bidwai Memorial Award for journalism.

PARI was recognised for recording and documenting rural India in all its diversity; it was, the June 2016 citation said, “Bold in conceptualisation and innovative in methodology, it uses the tools of digital communication, the practice of data storage, and the principles of good journalism to capture the layered realities of a region that is home to over 800 million people speaking in an estimated 700 languages.”

The awards and recognition received by P. Sainath include:

- 1995: The first Indian reporter to win the European Commission’s Lorenzo Natali Prize for journalism.
- 2000: United Nation’s Food & Agriculture Organisation’s (FAO) Boerma Prize (the foremost award for development journalism).
- 2002: The only print media journalist to win the Inspiration Award at the Global Visions Film Festival in Edmonton, Canada.
- 2004: Prem Bhatia Award for excellence in political reporting and analysis for 2003-04 in recognition of his "outstanding, indeed exceptional, work on the problems of the poorest of the poor, especially in Andhra Pradesh."
- 2006: Harry Chapin Media Award in New York.
- 2007: Ramon Magsaysay Award, Asia’s most prestigious prize (often referred to as the ‘Asian Nobel’) for Journalism Literature and Creative Communications Arts.
- 2009: Ramnath Goenka Prize for Excellence in Journalism
- In 2000, the leading Scandinavian publishing house Ordfront included one of Sainath’s reports in its volume: ‘Best Reporting of the 20th Century’, alongside the works of other giants like Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Studs Terkel and John Reed.
- In 2014, Sainath’s work appeared in another remarkable volume: ‘Global Muckraking – 100 years of Investigative Journalism from Around the World’ (New Press, Ed. Anya Schifrin).
- 2011: A Doctor of Letters (D.Litt) honoris causa by the University of Alberta in Edmonton, the university highest award.
- 2012-13: The McGraw Professor of Writing at the University of Princeton.
- Two documentary films on Sainath’s work, ‘Nero’s Guests’ and ‘A Tribe of his Own,’ have picked up over 20 awards / commendations across the globe.

Sainath has also turned down several awards, including one of India’s highest civilian honours, the Padma Bhushan. (He declined it because, in his view, journalists should not be receiving awards from the governments they cover and critique). Most of the money from his awards goes towards prizes for other journalists or to support projects aimed at improving journalism.