

Media Responsibilities and Ethics

Puspanjali Paikaray

Media has been rightly considered as the fourth pillar of Indian Democracy. Democracy can thrive not only under the vigilant eye of its legislatures, but also under the care and guidance of public opinion and the press in “par excellence” is the vehicle through which opinion can be articulated. Its role is not only limited to reflecting public opinion but in instructing it and giving it proper orientation and guidance. For this reason, media acclaim moral right to free expression, which is supposed to be free from deliberately making irresponsible errors.

In recent years, blended with advance technology, media has become more powerful than before. It has become a significant driver of growth in Economics, socio-economic development, strengthening of democracy and also safeguarding and enriching the cultural, political and social fabrics of the Nation. Lying on the basis of ethical principles, the media sometimes forget its social obligation and moral rights. Though the Constitution of India has conferred the Press the Freedom of Speech or the Freedom of Expression vide, its Article 19(1), at the same time in Article 19 (2) provides reasonable restrictions on exercise of freedom of expression and speech in the interest of (a) sovereignty and integrity of India (b) the security of the State (c) friendly relations with the

foreign states (d) public order : decency or morality (e) contempt of court (f) defamation (g) incitement to an offence. So it is not justified to say that absolute rights have been conferred to media to right to speak or publish without responsibility whatever one may choose. With all such constitutional provisions and side by side restrictions and with around forty numbers of norms and conditions on ethics and principles of Journalism which is laid by Press Council of India, some sections of media, though not all, devoid of ethics for the growth of their channel / publications.

Some prominent events cannot be omitted without citing examples. The event which occurred on the night of July, 9, 2012 in Guwahati, triggered nationwide consciousness. A teenaged girl after attending a birthday party at a pub in the populated area of Guwahati was manhandled and tortured by a group of 20 to 30 youths. A local news channel “News Live” as its studio was nearby, recorded the shameless incident and broadcast it. The video went viral on the internet after the channel posted it on “Tube” that shocked the nation. The mob molested the girl for more than 30 minutes until passersby and police rescued her. But that channel’s reporter and camera person failed to carry the human approach and were only interested in ratings. This event brought heavy reaction on the behaviour of the

men who outraged the modesty of the teenaged girl and also raised an ageold question about the media, that, should a journalist be a silent observer of such a shameless act ?

Eventhough, News-Live's crew of Guwahati helped the police to identify and arrest the molesters but at the same time failed to inform the police instantly which raised eyebrows on their moral duties. Instead, the reporter instigated the mob to act such disgraceful act for TRP (Television Rating Point) of their channel. By that time there was a wide coverage of that event and news in other media also published out that the local channel team interrogated the girl about her identity which was purely unethical. For the sake of popularity of the channel, they invited nationwide criticism. As a result of which the editor-in-chief of that particular channel resigned from the job and the reporter quit the job. But it was unfortunate, that the national media forgot to analyse this unethical side whereas focusing on arrest of the culprits and failure of law and order situation of Assam.

Similar event also happened in Gaya of Bihar, where, out of frustration a woman poured kerosene on her to set fire and to put herself into end. Seeing the event, a cameraman available there, did not resist her rather took her photograph for his credit. If it is minutely analysed many such events take place where media fails to live up to its human obligation and are only interested in rating.

In print media also, such types of events happen, when there is corporate conflicts, political rivalry, crime detection, forgetting moral contention media put them into controversy. Some reporters and editors pose different attitude for the reputation of their papers, knowingly they distort the news keeping the truth far behind. It not only affects the public also raise questions on their credibility.

In this context, eminent journalist, S.S. Agrawal in his publication has quoted, "Public Interest is the basic principle underlying the whole philosophy of Press. He said, it is unethical on the part of the editor to hold back information which gives an insight into the functioning of the Government. Citing the Bofors issue decade ago, Agrawal said how Chitra Subramanyam of Indian Express and N. Ram of The Hindu were the first two media victims where the Editors did not publish their reports for their convenience, for which both the reporters resigned from the job. To be frank to say, news should carry sacredness and truthfulness, so that the comment would be free. Press Council of India has clearly indicated what should be the moral conduct of media. Council has clarified about distorting and twisting of news, which influence the public mind in a negative way and therefore does not come under moral responsibility of media.

Accuracy, pre-verification and caution against defamatory writings and refrain from deliberately twisting the report are the essential parts of ethical journalism.

Lastly, media is the mirror of Democracy. The tender plant of Democracy flourishes only in an atmosphere where there is a free interchange of views and ideas. It has not only a moral rights but a moral duty. Prabhu Chawla, the Eminent Journalist has said that media should act upon for the greater interest of the nation like farmers and soldiers. Moral duty and responsibility never count the personal interest. Thus coordination between thought and expression should be based on truthfulness, transparency, objectivity and public accountability, which are the ethics of media.

Puspanjali Paikaray, Asst. Inf. Officer, I & PR Department, Bhubaneswar.