

## **Ethics in Human Development : Role of Print & Electronic Media**

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**“We must be the change we wish to see in the world”**  
**Mahatma Gandhi”.**

Ethics is based on Greek word ‘ethos’, meaning character, or what a good person is or does in order to have a good character. In general, ethics deals with the philosophical foundations of decision-making, or choosing among the good and bad options that one faces. Ethics deals with “owes” and “oughts” what obligations we owe or to responsibilities we have towards the mankind.

The press in any democratic country plays a vital role in creating, in moulding and reflecting the public opinion and shaping political, social and economic development in the country. Through the media, knowledge and skills could be imparted and change could be achieved.

President Dr. Abdul Kalam, recently addressing at the National Press Day thus observed, “National Press definitely has to get transformed into media of billion people and above all they have to play a vital role as a partners of India’s economic development..... The nation’s important need is development politics”. Hon’ble President reminded journalists that their reporting is essential in the area.

He advised that journalists should interact with such grassroots social reformers and bring out their core competence, dedication and experience in serving rural communities, which can become a model for youth to follow.

*\*‘Ethics in Human Development; role of print and electronic media’ on 23.1.2007 at young Horizons School, Kolkata.*

He further suggested that in order to be an effective partner in the national development, media should be partner in development missions and outlined an eight points mission to be taken up by the media people for immediate implementation.

1. A media movement: Developed India before 2020.
2. Media becoming a development partner in the programme of PURA (Providing Urban amenities in Rural Area) – connectivity is the focus.
3. Celebrating every aspect of the success of the people of the state and nation particularly in rural areas.
4. Evolution of a corruption free India before 2015.
5. Promoting an enlightened society, which means education with a value system, transforming religion into a spiritual force and building economic prosperity of nations based on their core competence. For mission, a unique world body is essential.
6. Print media and electronic media should bring honour to womanhood.
7. Scanning and digitising all issues of the print media since its establishment and storing in a digital library to preserve our national heritage and make it available for research.
8. Media should evolve a code of conduct among themselves for ensuring that all reporting is analysed, evaluated, and researched prior to publication. This is essential for peace, prosperity, and safety of the nation.

The main role of media is to inform the society today is an old concept. The role of media both print and electronic is to inform as well as motivate the society on its paths to development. This role of the media is more called for in developing countries.

“The National Readership Survey, 2006 presents some interesting data. The country’s 230 million Television viewers (in 112 million homes) now exceed its 203.6 million newspapers readers. Cinema going has declined from 51 million filmgoers to 39 million filmgoers a month. FM radio listeners now total 119 million. Indian language newspaper readership is fast growing, especially in Hindi belt, while the comparable figure for English dailies has been stagnating at around 21 million.

If these figures tell any story, it is that rural India, and disadvantaged “Fourth World” groups among them, are disempowered and unable to participate effectively in local governance or national affairs.

However, the print media is thrusting out into the remoter countryside, albeit slowly. Among the many inspiring experiments under way is that of ‘Jan Vani’, an interactive Oriya newspaper that has taken on a ‘Fourth World Mission’ to cater to the State’s mainly dalits, tribes and OBCs through rural reporters drawn from their ranks and trained for the job”.

Members of the Society of Professional Journalists believe that public enlightenment is the forerunner of justice and the foundation of democracy. The duty of the journalist is to reach those ends by seeking truth and providing a fair and comprehensive account of events and issues.

Now the question arises, what Development Journalism means?

According to ‘Aman Namra’ development journalism should focus on the needs of the poor, the deprived, the marginalized and should emphasize their effective participation in development planning with the kind of journalism that motivates the active participation of the affected people and advocating for their interests, in place of the views of polity makers and planners.

Tsedu states that development journalism “is about highlighting what people are doing to help transform their lives”. He believes that since the strong and mighty are able to look after themselves, journalists should concern themselves with the plight of the poor and the weak.

Development issues covered today are still largely fixed on informing.

We need to strive for journalism where a common problem is identified and followed by probable solutions, leading to development. Instead of merely reporting issues related to poverty, corruption, hunger and illiteracy, journalists committed to development should look at the situation beyond first reporting it.

The media would be well advised to recall Mark Twain when he said *“The secret of getting ahead is getting started. The secret of getting started is breaking your complex overwhelming tasks into small manageable tasks, and then starting on the first one”* and then make positive effort to give the society a new direction and underline the success stories at grassroot levels. It is not that the journalists are ignorant of the calls of their profession. A leading journalist had observed, “Why don’t stories on starvation and clean drinking water make it onto the front page of South Asian newspapers? Another lamented at the “growing rift in his country between mass media and mass reality, a trend driven by increasing corporate control”.

Currently the Indian Press both print & electronic, seems to be driving towards on trivialisation and sensationalism of news. ‘Page 3’ concept has eventually taken its toll on the ethical, moral and leading role of the press. Market dynamism has become the aim of journalists of today. Moral and ethics in journalism have taken the back seat and the topics, not the news; that generate revenue are reflected in the press.

Recently a small tribal illiterate girl while crossing the railway line noticed the crack in the track. The girl at the risk of her own life took out her red shirt and evaded a major mishapening. But no newspaper prominently reported it in their newspapers. Front page reporting of such events is a far cry. What dominates front page today in newspapers and headlines in electronic media in the shape of 'Breaking News' is beauty contest or the activities of celebrities.

There are occasional bleeding heart stories on the sorrows of the poor, but the newspapers fail to make the connection between poverty and policies. P Sainath Calls this inconsistency and indifference of media "market fundamentalism" and its attendant structural adjustment programmes.

The 1990s have witnessed a rapid growth of inequality the world over, as successive UN Human Development Reports have shown us. This may occasionally be reported in the press. But very little have been done inquestioning the social and economic philosophies and frameworks that generate this inequality.

Journalists must place people and their needs at the centre of stories, and accord better coverage to the rural political process. A society that does not know itself, cannot cope. More stories on the rights and entitlements of the poor could help. Governments do react and respond to the press, if; the press tries hard enough to be heard.

Yet why is there such a lack of interest in crucial issues like poverty and what accounts for the disconnection between mass media and mass reality, and why do the largest sections of the Indian press fail to cover the most important stories are not being addressed with such seriousness as it deserves. Is it an aphorism that with globalisation and

corporate ownership, the issues which attract global media are those that promote the interest of the developed? Indian press during freedom struggle played a role, which today it seems to ignore. This inspite of the fact that technically we were then very far behind and ill-equipped.

Now, with rare exceptions, the most successful Indian papers are run increasingly on corporate line. Profits and advertising do not rhyme with socially relevant news.

We now have full-time correspondents for fashion, glamour, design, even for eating outs. One non-financial daily has eleven correspondents covering business in a society where less than two percent of the population have investment of any kind.

Correspondents covering education are often loaded with several other unrelated beats because education is not considered a weighty enough topic. And no paper has a full time poverty, unemployment or housing correspondent.

Not surprisingly, the media has proved increasingly inept at covering development issues. The equation is simple: the more corporate a newspaper becomes in its ownership and culture, the less space there is for public interest.

When the media is driven by no higher cause than maximization of profit, it can seldom serve the public interest. When corralled by corporate interest, journalism gets devastated.

Answerability to society is a duty that the Indian press is increasingly failing to perform, but try it must only then can we hope for meaningful development, – development of the people right down the grassroot level.

*“Many a drop makes an ocean”* so let us come forward and contribute to the noble cause of human development.

Young Horizons, for years, is selflessly working to impart education and knowledge to the weaker segment of the society and to improve the content of their lives. Being inspired by the dedication of a missionary zeal, it may not bother for publicity and applause for the good works being done by it but the society has a duty to appreciate the noble works done by Young Horizons and to acknowledge its indebtedness to it. The media will do good in making others know about the activities of Young Horizons not only in acknowledging the society’s gratitude but to make others know for inspiring them to follow. To say the least, the Media have a solemn duty to play a positive role.

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