

Address
By
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Hon. Chairman of the Press Council, Shri Raghu Rai, Shri Hiranmay Karlekar, Shri S N Sinha, distinguished ladies and gentlemen: I feel very humble to talk about photojournalism, sitting next to Shri Raghu Rai. It is really a great feeling to be here, to sit so near to him, rather next to him. I wish only he has a lot of techniques and he could find out one by which I can be shown a little better in my photographs so that I may look at those photographs with a sense of belonging!

It is a great honour to have been asked to be here on this very important occasion. Anything to do with the press is precious. I am saying it here about the institution of the press. It has to be nourished, its position has to be appreciated and cherished. Nothing is more important than the freedom of the press, which includes the freedom to publish photographs.

I think it has been said, and rightly I believe, what you could describe in one whole page, you can do it better by one photograph. Who can forget the photograph of that young man in Ahmedabad, or some other place in Gujarat, whose photograph gave the message of what was happening there during the unfortunate riots that took place, the vividness with which he has expressed his feelings? It was a wonderful snap that was taken.

Well, obviously, this is a very important part of the journalism in modern era. They have to have freedom, they must be able to discharge their professional duty as best as they can without any hindrance. So far as the role of photo journalist is concerned, while there are more competent people here to describe them, as a humble citizen of this country I would say that we know the great and important role this branch of journalism played in the development of our fourth estate, as we call it.

***Hon'ble Speaker, Lok Sabha on November 15, 2006 at AIFACS, Rafi Marg, New Delhi on the event of photo exhibition organised by the Press Council of India**

Of course, the role of the electronic media has been mentioned. You can sit in your room and see the world today. Shri Raghu Rai also mentioned about the huge cameras, which were prevalent earlier. When I see young boys and girls in the Lok Sabha precincts running up to the leaders with big cameras, huge cameras on their shoulder, I say that modern technology should find out methods to provide smaller cameras, so that they do not have to carry such a heavy load. But now with the onset of mobile cameras and mobile telephones, the position has eased a bit.

Photojournalism is one of the finest institutions. We are proud of our press in India. I am very proud. I feel they have rendered a tremendous service, not today, but from the days of our freedom struggle, even earlier. We have seen the photographs of Jalianwala Bagh, with such vivid depiction of the brutalities that took place there, which one cannot forget. Therefore, you have to keep it up.

India is a happening country for good reason. We are developing in different spheres. In a sense, I do not know whether I should allow photographers to come and take photographs inside the House, inside the chamber. There have been some demands made. But there is a good deal of skepticism about it. Many people tell me, you have invited more trouble for you by allowing the television cameras to take photographs of those creating disturbances. Well, I would like to have your views on that, because there seem to be two views.

I feel that it is essential for the people to know what is happening in the House. The House is a representative body. It is their house, the House of the People. They have sent their representatives. We are functioning on their behalf. Therefore, the people should know what we are doing.

We have the Visitors' Gallery, which has space for about 500 people. Even for that, one has to know a Member of Parliament to get the pass, stand in the queue to get in and all that. That is a cumbersome process. That is why I said that the entire country

should be the Visitors' Gallery; they should be able to see every moment of the functioning of the House. I do not know how far it is successful.

As Shri Karlekar rightly mentioned, I cannot think of a better institution and I have great responsibility to see that this House functions properly. I do not see any greater institution, which is representing parliamentary democracy in this country, than the two Houses of Parliament. Now the House of the People is a directly elected body. If there is no other substitute, no better substitute for parliamentary democracy, then we have to think how best they function and they ought to function.

Of course, the first responsibility of the Members of Parliament is to behave properly, discuss the issues and problems that confront the people, to have proper debates and dialogues for the purpose of finding out ways for the redressal of people's grievances, to see through the process of parliamentary discussion and debate the problems of the people are solved.

Therefore, it is essential to have good governance and we have more functional powers. The Ministers are selected only from MPs and MLAs. Therefore, the people who have to concern themselves with the development of the country, to wipe away tears from every eye, as Mahatma Gandhi, they have to take greater and greater interest in parliamentary affairs, take part in the proceedings of Parliament. We just cannot say that there must have good governance, but we will not come into the system and bring about necessary improvements, if needed, and only refer to the negative aspects of it.

I know that the media in our country have rendered a very stellar role, not only during the freedom struggle but afterwards also, for building up the country. After the traumatic experience of slavery and subjugation, India has awakened to freedom. As Jawaharlal Nehru exhorted us so many times, an endeavour has to be made, we have to find out ways and means to create a sense of feeling and belonging amongst the people. The people must be encouraged to do their duties to the nation, instead of merely fighting for their own rights.

I know sometimes there is distorted reporting, which has to be curbed. That is the very basis for the existence of the Press Council. Every institution should be able to conduct in a manner, which ultimately helps in making a better India, better country and better society.

There have been talks of regulation and self-control. Personally speaking, I am against regulation or control of the press, control of the media, by outsiders. Certainly, they themselves should be able to look at their problems and issues. As Shri Karlekar and others pointed out, it is the function of the Press Council and it is for them to find out how best they can serve through the print media. So far as electronic media is concerned, I hope ultimately it comes within the purview of the Press Council, so also photo journalism.

There are sometimes pitfalls, there are sometimes straying from the path of rectitude, the path of virtue. The Press Council has formulated a self-regulating mechanism. They are performing well. I think there is always talk about the enforceability of their decisions. I am not going into this at the moment. But it is very essential that the self-regulatory mechanism works in a manner, which improves the quality and the nature of service rendered.

I have expressed my high regard for the Press Council and the members of the media. There are many friends in the media, who come to me asking for opportunities, to allow more channels to function, so far as Parliament is concerned. While they are allowed outside, not inside as yet, because I do not want a competitor to the Lok Sabha channel.

What I would seek from all of you, who are so experienced, is suggestions as to how we can improve the functioning of the Lok Sabha channel. I do not know how many of you have seen it at all. It is a very good channel.

Coming as it does from you, it is very encouraging. It has taken great shape and now it is a 24-hour channel. I wish to point out that at least in this matter we are the pioneers in the world. There is no country in the world, where Parliament or Assembly is running 24-hour channel. Anyhow, we have started doing it, which even the House of Commons does not do.

I am very happy to hear, and nobody can deny, the significant role photojournalism has played in the development of media in this country. Once again I express my great feeling. But how do I express it sitting next to people like Shri Raghu Rai, who has been an institution by himself in this regard and so many other distinguished photojournalists. I do not know, Shri Karlekar was pretending to be one! But since he has got certificate from Shri Raghu Rai, I take it that he must be a very good photographer! Otherwise, he would not be sitting here at present. Thank you very much.

It is a great honour for me and I am very happy to be here. But I cannot help saying that I want people to give me suggestions as to how to improve our functioning. One thing I have been saying, and justifiably too, is that situations in Parliament, which may not be desirable, should be properly commented upon. You cannot show it from outside with pictorial presentations. But we need that type of expression, which will bring the feeling of the country, the feeling of the people. I know that nobody supports disruption of proceedings like that. Nobody supports behaviour inside Parliament, which is not in keeping with the dignity of Parliament. But how many of you give expression to your views? You have the media with you.

I have found that disruption of proceedings in Parliament is the front-page news. One of the very important members of the House told me that it is always better from the point of view of publicity to disrupt the proceedings than take part in a structured debate. I am not commenting on that. Those things should be published. People should know that their representatives are behaving in a manner, which is not in consonance with the obligations they have to the country and to the people and to the oath they have taken.

But we need suggestions. In fact, there should be exposure so that it would be understood by them that nobody is accepting such behaviour. It is not a matter to be extolled, it is a matter to be criticized and condemned. My dream is that this highest elected body functions in a manner, which maintains its dignity and the culture and heritage of the country.

Therefore, you have a tremendous role to play. Here I am not talking about Parliament, but I am talking of the press and the media. For good measure, it is treated as the fourth estate. I am not going into what I call the question mark by Shri Raghu Rai on the three other organs. But at least the fourth estate, which is a very important part of the entire process, the entire set up, it has a tremendous role to play, which it has played no doubt. But I want it to give a little more assertive views on the way Parliament sometimes functions.

Therefore, we want a more thriving democracy, a more participatory democracy in this country, not only during the elections but also after that. When I see people stand in the queue to cast their votes, I wonder and ask myself the question. We have the electronic voting machine, where it takes just about a second. But when the voting is manual, you have to stand in the queue for about an hour. I have seen, and all of you have seen, people standing in the queue for one hour in the morning to cast their votes. What do they think? Why do they stand there for hours in the queue to cast their votes, what takes only half a second in the voting machine? They do it because they want to express their views. They constitute the Parliament of India where it is their representatives who will look after them. They want good governance, which would be provided by the members of this Parliament. Therefore, if there is waywardness or pitfalls, it is the duty of the press to point out that you are doing it, no, you are not behaving. I may be misunderstood, not by many but by some, but this is needed in this country.

We have tremendous potential. Very few countries of the world have the resources that we have, especially the human rights. Our achievement in different spheres

is tremendous. We see young boys, men and women achieving wonderful results. The other day I led a parliamentary delegation to Greece, where the President of Greece said, “my admiration for India is boundless, because when a country like Germany, which is technologically so advanced, when they are inviting Indian boys and girls to come and work in Germany, that shows the high degree of excellence you have achieved. Otherwise, Germany would not have invited you, as many other countries have.” People look at us for the performance we have achieved. We can do it still much better.

It is the press, which has to be the partner in this. Therefore, I have always been saying that there can be no compromise with the freedom of the press, there can be no interference with the press. If there is anything to be done about the press, it should be done by their own regulatory system. I have no grievances against the press. But you must assert yourselves, in whichever occupation you follow. The Parliament of India, parliamentary democracy in India, has to be maintained and cherished in a manner, which brings us greater results.

I am not competent to speak on photojournalism. So, I would only say that I would like to see my photographs more often from a better angle. I am waiting to see my beautiful photograph! That is what I say. Therefore, please carry on with your great art. I wish to commend the Press Council and its members for their activities. When we say we look up to the Press Council, what we mean is that we look up to the media as a whole. You are our pathfinders than anybody else.

Thank you very much once again for allowing me to be here in your midst, with such celebrities and important people.