GANDHIAN CONCEPT OF DEVELOPMENT JOURNALISM AND ITS RELEVANCE IN POST INDEPENDENCE INDIA

MR. SUBHASH KUMAR*

*Assistant Professor,
Faculty of Media Studies,
Manav Rachna International University,
Faridabad, India.

ABSTRACT

In the era of capitalism, it is true that media is completely controlled and guided by the market forces and instead of covering society at large, media concentrates only on profit making content. In a country like India where most of the people still live in rural areas and depend directly on agriculture, Media with its primary objective of educating, informing and creating awareness among people have diverted its attention and facilitating its services to the market which constitutes largely the rich and literate class. The absence of development in the present day reporting is a regular phenomenon. Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, a pioneer of development journalism practitioner has set many examples in the past. Since development is a continuous process, journalism based on Gandhi’s principles holds the key at every stage of development. This paper is an attempt to find out the relevance of Gandhi’s concept of development journalism in India.

INTRODUCTION

Media profession is changing and it can be said that at present scenario most of the media organizations are becoming ‘social entertainers’. It is no accident that no television channel in India today has any place for mass oriented content. Newspapers lack in-depth study or research on subjects relating to the nation. Events are more important than issues. It is true that media has become a product that trapped in the hands of free market capital forces and neglecting developmental issues related to mass. Hence, it would be relevant to go through Mahatma Gandhi’s canon of journalism who is considered as one of the greatest journalism of all time and started the various aspects of development journalism.

Mahatma Gandhi consistently wrote for a common man. Gandhi himself applied his basic perspective to several fields, not only to politics, including governance, and economics, which were his focus of interest, but also to others such as treatment of nature, including animal life, education, social relations, religion, science, technology, and culture. In education, he stressed character building as its main aim; in social relations, love, empathy, and respect for the other; in religion, tolerance, openness, and freedom from dogma; in science and technology, humaneness; and, in culture openness combined with refusal to be blown off the feet. Gandhi
believed that Great men are always above their time. If time passes, the relevance of their thought becomes more important (Sharma, 1991: P-123).

Gandhi continuously emphasized the necessity for identification with the villagers, who represented the masses of India and their needs be met. For Gandhi, the sole purpose of journalism was the service to the entire sections of the society. As Gandhi wrote in Young India “I have taken up journalism not for its sake but merely as aid to what I have conceived to be my mission in life. … I may not write merely to excite passion. The reader can have no idea of the restraint I have to exercise from week to week in the choice of topics and my vocabulary. It is training for me. It enables me to peep into myself and to make discoveries of my weaknesses.” (Gandhi, Young India, July 2, 1925)

DEVELOPMENT JOURNALISM: MEANING & CONCEPT

Development journalism was first introduced in a global context much less complicated than that of today. The clear political and economic divisions gave people much simpler attitudes and ways of life compared to what we have in the 21st century. The media, like most public institutions, functioned within a much different environment.

Principally, it is assumed that journalism is able to influence the development process by reporting on development programmes and activities. Therefore, it is the journalists’ duty to ‘critically examine and evaluate the relevance of a development project to national and local needs, the difference between a planned scheme and its actual implementation, and the difference between its impact on people as claimed by government officials and as it actually is’ (Aggarwala 1979: 181). The reporting on national and international events is only desirable if they constructively contribute to the development and improvement of the living standard (Kunczik 1995: 84).

Different forms of development journalism can be identified (overview in Kunczik 1995: 90-4). The first form is comparable to a western style investigative journalism. It deals with the reporting which essentially examines development projects on the one hand and controls government activities on the other hand. Though, freedom of the press would be a basic requirement for it. The other form of development journalism can be defined as benevolent-authoritarian. It allows systematic manipulation of information in favour of a subtle development serving the common welfare. More recent conceptions include a Chinese version of this concept (which deals with distinct class-character following the communist party) or an intellectual development journalism: “The journalists should form a kind of free intelligence and should critically examine the aims of national development and the applicable instruments in a rational discourse and solve them by reasonable criteria free of social constraints” (Kunczik 1986: 270). Subsequent to the fundamental assumptions of development journalism, this approach also strictly adheres to the needs of the population and supports the perception that the people concerned should participate in the development projects.

Accordingly, journalism has the following tasks: on the one hand, motivating the audience to actively cooperate and on the other hand, defending the interests of those concerned (Kunczik 1986: 272). The interaction of population and journalists is a must for this.
audience should be involved in the decision making process. To do so, the journalist should be capable of distinguishing the crucial points and of comprehensibly pointing up every (social) process for the recipients, as complex as it may be. Assistance for interpretation has to be provided for decision making. The journalist himself has to be committed to finding solutions.

Presently development is considered as a solution for social problems in general, so development journalism is no longer exclusively limited to the rural areas. Hence, the problems and the audience of the – immensely growing – urban area have to be central topics of reporting as well (Kunczik 1995: 223-4). One of the needs is that the journalists are proficient enough to entertain their audience (Domatob and Hall 1983: 16). In this spirit and on the basis of Aggarwala, Hemant Shaw extends the tasks (1990: 1035-36):

“Development news should examine critically, evaluate and interpret the relevance of development plans, projects, policies, problems, and issues. It should indicate the disparities between plans and actual accomplishments, and include comparisons with how development is progressing in other countries and regions. It also should provide contextual and background information about the development process, discuss the impact of plans, projects, policies, problems, and issues on people, and speculate about the future of development. And development news should refer to the needs of people, which may vary from country to country or from region to region, but generally include primary needs, such as food, housing, employment; secondary needs such as transportation, energy sources and electricity; and tertiary needs such as cultural diversity, recognition and dignity.”

GANDHI’S MODEL OF DEVELOPMENT JOURNALISM

Gandhi was one of those who were deeply aware of the social dimension of technology and of the fact that technological advancement does not take place in a social vacuum. This awareness led him to develop an ethics of technology, technological advancement, and industrialization. He wanted all these to be constantly subjected to ethical evaluation, monitoring, and correction. He accepted technology when it was emancipator, relieving drudgery, improving skills and productivity, and raising human dignity, freedom, and creativity. He was sensitive to the fact that technology can lead to increase in inequity, when it favored only a few at the cost of others. He used to often cite Singer’s sewing machine as an example of desirable machinery, as it increased human comfort and productivity without depriving others of employment and livelihood. He similarly welcomed improvements in the technology of surgery and medical relief, as also in sanitation. Technological advancement, for him, was not to be an end in itself and self-driven. It had to be driven by considerations of dignity and freedom for humanity at large, without harming any.

Gandhi’s idea of trusteeship was an innovative way of reconciling the psychological need for incentive or reward for skills and entrepreneurship on the one hand and the social need to take care of the deprived on the other. Gandhi in the beginning echoed such conservatism in his concept of trusteeship which was defense of property that applied equally to the industrial capitalist (Copley, 1996: P-55). The enterprising and better-skilled people need an incentive or reward for their work, which the society values higher, in the form of higher income and wealth.
It gives them some sense of achievement and pride, but this does not mean that they need to keep all of their earnings to themselves. Gandhi felt that they should consider themselves as trustees for the income and wealth which is a surplus after meeting their basic needs, minimum comforts to maintain their skills, and reinvestment requirements, and spend it on the less fortunate in society who need these resources to end their deprivation. They can spend their surplus wealth directly for such purposes or give it to charitable trusts who can utilize this surplus wealth to meet the needs of the poor.

Gandhi’s principle of social service is useful both in reducing economic inequality and helping environment. It is not enough to share one’s wealth with the poor and for collective causes, it is equally necessary to give one’s time and labor too, Voluntary service or Shram-daan is also useful for economic development in creating rural, and economic assets and for protecting them such as in constructing and renovating tanks, wells, canals, bunds, soil, and water conservation measures, aorestation, and regenerating gumals or village pastures. His idea of social service even extended towards satyagrahis supporting the victims of social or economic injustice when the latter wanted to resist oppression and exploitation. However, unlike some self-styled revolutionaries, Gandhi’s emphasis on constructive activities on the part of satyagrahis was a conspicuous feature of his teaching, and was not confined to merely offering resistance.

Gandhi’s constructive programmes had a holistic view of economic development. Besides having livelihood concerns, particularly about the weak, the constructive programme valued the principle of economic equality, and the governing principle of decentralization. They aimed at benefiting the producers and consumers most, in contrast to the ways of modern economy which allow and encourage a huge disparity between the producers’ price and consumers’ price. By catering to local needs as much as possible, the economic activities minimized unnecessary transport costs, thus saving on fuel too. The constructive programmes also had the moral aims of human development, including schooling and eradication of illiteracy, character building, promoting communal harmony, providing health services, teaching cleanliness, encouraging mutual co-operation, improving the status of women, avoiding alcohol, and so on.

Issue of Young India 17 March 1931 and 16 April 1931 clearly indicate Gandhi’s views on strategies to fight inequality:

1. Trusteeship provides a means of transforming the present capitalist order of society into an egalitarian\(^1\) one. It gives no quarter to capitalism but gives the present owning class a chance of reforming itself. It is based on the faith that human nature is never beyond redemption.

2. It does not recognize any rights of private ownership of property except in so far as it may be permitted by society for its own welfare.

3. It does not exclude legislative regulation of the ownership and use of wealth.

\(^1\) A social philosophy advocating the removal of inequalities among people
4. Thus under State regulated trusteeship, an individual will not be free to hold or use wealth for self satisfaction or in disregard of the interests of society.

5. Lust as it is proposed to fix a decent minimum living wage, even so a limit should be fixed for the maximum income that would be allowed to any person in society. The difference between such incomes should be reasonable and equitable and variable from time to time so much so that the tendency would be towards obliteration of the difference.

6. Under the Gandhian economic order, the character of production will be determined by social necessity and not by personal whim or greed.

PRESENT PRACTICES OF DEVELOPMENT JOURNALISM

Gandhi as a development journalist showed an example to the present day media how to practice ethic based and development journalism. Further, after Independence, that mission was partly carried by researchers as well as newspapers in conducting a few experiments in development journalism to accelerate rural development. Selden Menefee and Audrey Menefee conducted an interesting study of mimeographed\(^2\) newspaper in Mysore containing some developmental information. Known as Menefee experiment, a small newspaper called Gram Samachar (village news) was published in Kannada, the local knowledge, for thirteen weeks to test the effects of communication on the villagers. For the purpose, four villages were chosen near Mysore in Karnataka. The researchers found an increase in the information level of the regular readers because of the newspaper (Menefree S & Menefee A, 1964). In 1969, B.G. Verghese, the then editor of The Hindustan Times, New Delhi proved that the development reporting would be helpful to accelerate development. Verghese asked a team of reporters to write periodically about Chattera, a small village in Haryana, about its people, their problems and the process of development taking in that village. ‘A Third World Perspective of News’, May-June, Freedom at Issue’, reported: Our village, Chattera is a bold attempt to give rural orientation to the predominantly urban based and elite-oriented newspapers in the country. It is the form of journalism that can prove of immense help in bridging the rural-urban communication gap in the Third World.

The Indian Press has taken up development-linked campaigns for the public good. The Press has a social responsibility function apart from educating, informing and entertaining the public. The theory of social responsibility postulates that the Press has to play a crucial role in the people-centric issues. Because people depend on media for their day-to-day information needs, media should act to inform and educate people on social issues. The socially responsible press helps the citizens to be well informed on issues of immediate concern to them. Moreover, the degree of media attention given to social and developmental issues makes people and government take necessary action on them. In this context, the Press in India played an activist role for effecting changes in development. A few case studies in development journalism are presented under to appreciate the role of newspapers in development.

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\(^2\) Mimeograph is a low-cost printing press that works by forcing ink through a stencil onto paper.
Udayavani, a Kannada daily established in 1970 which is published from Manipal (Karnataka) carried a three year (1981-84) experiment in development journalism, ‘Identify Backward Village Experiment’ in early 1980s. In order to carry out the experiment, the newspaper carried an advertisement on January 2, 1981 detailing the objectives of the experiment by inviting nominations from the readers. The advertisement was as follows: Udayavani has taken up a novel scheme to identify a backward village for studying the impact of numerous Central and State Government-sponsored schemes since Independence. Readers’ involvement is of paramount importance. They are encouraged to identify two backward villages, one in their taluka\(^3\) and one in the district. To help you, a Performa listing the ten basic infrastructure facilities has been provided. These facilities have been identified based on Government of India census report.

The newspaper identified a backward village if it does not have a primary school, middle school, electricity, post office, telephone, doctor, hospital, drinking water, and road and bus service. The newspaper encouraged readers to identify a backward village basing on the above criteria and a fifty-day time limit was fixed to send their nominations. A total of four hundred and sixty five readers sent their nominations identifying four hundred and seventeen villages and hamlets in the district as backward. However, keeping in view the scope and nature of the experiment, nominations from eight talukas of the district were considered for further evaluations.

The readers’ responses were analyzed with a view to selecting the most backward villages. Fifteen legislators were involved in identifying the villages from the district and they selected ten villages. Further, taluka level officials were asked to identify villages under their jurisdiction by checking their official records. The coordinator of the project, Sanjay Daitota, travelled over nineteen kms to verify and crosscheck the information given by the people. At the end of seventeen-day visit, the coordinator could identify ten backward villages for the experiment. The identified villages were: (1) Alanthaya (2) Bellapady (3) Bolmane (4) Didupe (5) Kemtoor (6) Kudyady (7) Malachowki (8) Mandekolu (9) Manila, and (10) Navoora.

The main problems of these villages were: non-availability of potable drinking water, mosquito threat, frequent malarial attacks, diarrhea, and other water-borne diseases. Since the villages lacked even a miniscule of medical facilities, the patient has to be taken to nearby towns for Medicare. Lack of proper roads along with isolation of villages made the emergency medical care very difficult. To make the project successful, some youth in these villages were motivated to take up development works, and later these youth formed a team of grass root reporters for the newspaper. The newspaper decided to highlight the problems and to sensitize the people for solving their problem.

In the first year, the newspaper covered all the problems and activities of the villages extensively and regularly. The coverage concentrated on development processes with an interpretation of the problems when the coordinator was touring the villages to understand the village’s problems. In the second year, the coverage was restricted to happenings and

\(^3\) A subdivision of a district or a group of several villages organized for revenue purposes
occasional success stories. In the third year, there was no coverage of any issues while the coordinator was contacting the youth who were working as field assistants. Moreover, the coverage concentrated on ordinary folks instead of politicians and rural elite. For instance, Maila, a resident of Mandekolu village was the first to travel by a bus to village could easily be recognized in the village after a photo story on him appeared in this newspaper. The coverage used all formats of publications such as front-page news, photo-features, readers’ complaints and double-page supplements. The coverage accelerated the process of development in South Karnataka. Farm clinics and school library came into being. Officials cooperated with the villagers and youth and others participated in development works.

In a further experiment, a research started a rural newspaper, Gramyavani, in 1993 in Deulpudi, a village in Ganjam district of Orissa to give information to the rural people. The fortnightly newspaper reaching eight villages continued for 16 months. A chief aim of the newspaper was to give development-linked information to the people. The contents of the newspaper included agriculture, health, forestry, and animal husbandry. The newspaper brought awareness among the villagers exposed to the newspaper. The two studies proved that the news; would raise the information level of the people and thereby give to accelerating developmental processes at the individual and community level.

CHALLENGES BEFORE DEVELOPMENT JOURNALISM:

Where is the place for ethics in the globalized marketplace celebrating social Darwinism? The reasons for not taking up ethic based and development journalism by Indian media are or the challenges posed by the market forces for ethical journalism are:

- CORPORATIZATION OF MEDIA HOUSES

The sole purpose of journalism has become profit making and Journalism as service to society has been replaced by journalism aimed at profit and affluence for media promoters and media workers. Hence, most of the media groups are not only dependent on market but they are also controlled and guided by the markets. According to Chomsky and Herman most of the media organizations are owned by large corporations with an objective of the news provided by the media will take care of their interests.

It is also a major factor deciding media content. Also, media companies have included corporate captains and big businessmen on their boards of directors. Many of those on the board of directors of media companies represent some of the biggest advertisers, companies with large market capitalization. Board Members not only exercise an influence on media content, they also influence appointments to key positions. Ideally there should be a Great Wall of China between the editorial and advertising departments or sections of a news media company, but this wall now has cracked, surprisingly not at the level of reporters and advertising executives who bring in funds but at the highest levels. Most of the board members of these media companies are not professional journalists. As Chomsky and Herman opine that due to the dependency on advertising revenue of the media organizations news becomes a product. Hence, stories that may
affect the ‘buying mood’ of the audience or the interests of the advertisers will be marginalized or avoided.

Corporate majors are also increasing their stakes in media/ news companies. The Anil Ambani headed Reliance Capital has invested in broadcasters such as Network 18, which operates CNBC TV 18, CNBC Awaz, CNN IBN and IBN 7 and the TV today network, which operates Aaj Tak and Headlines Today. Anil Ambani is gradually expanding his presence in the media sector. In 2010, reliance capital picked up 18 per cent in Bloomberg UTV, the business news channel. The Anil Dhirubhai Ambani Group (ADAG) has several footprints over the Indian news industry. The influence of the corporate sector in general and large advertisers in particular, on the working of the media in India seems to be rising with passing year. (Thakurta, P-208)

Reliance Industries acquired indirect control over one of country’s top most media houses Network 18 through a multi layered deal. Another of country’s major brands TV Today network is in the process of selling its stake to the Aditya Birla Group and thus going through a major restructuring. Although news networks being owned and run by political parties is not a new phenomenon in the country especially in the southern states, regional political parties are showing a lot of interest in controlling the distribution on TV signals in their respective states. This way they are not only broadcasting content of their interest through their channels but also able to control the broadcast of other channels.

● OWNERSHIP OF THE MEDIA HOUSE BY THE POLITICIANS

Today many media outlets are run and governed by the politicians and this trend has become a major threat to media ethics. Vineeta Kohli in her article viewed that “more than one third of news channels are owned by politicians or politico-affiliated builders. An estimated sixty per cent of cable distribution systems are owned by local politicians. These have influenced and funded several local elections. There are dozens of small and big newspapers owned by politicians or their family members that influence the course of several local elections. Many newspaper chains with political affiliations also own broadcast networks. Most of them now have Internet portals (Kohli, 2006). Orissa is also not an exception to the political control of media outfits which started with a noble objective subsequently got trapped in to the hands of political backed business conglomerates. The unique nature of media ownership in India seems to be divided in to two categories. One the national media which is largely controlled by the big conglomerates followed by their crony politicians whereas the regional media is largely being controlled by the politicians followed by business groups.

In the last few years there has been a growing consolidation of media organizations across the globe. In the political economy of the media the world over there is clearly an alarming absence of not-for-profit media organizations. Neither subscription- nor advertising revenue-based models of the media have been able to limit this tendency of large sections of the corporate media to align with elite interest groups. In not just economic terms, the media is perceived as an active political collaborator as well seeking to influence voters on the basis of allegiances of owners and editors. This can, and often does, constrain free and fair exchanges of views to facilitate democratic decision-making processes. According to Chomsky and Herman,
media organizations need information continuously so it has to rely on government organizations and major business that have the required stuff. The theory suggests that the information provided by these sources is generally biased and most media organizations avoid providing information that can affect their interest adversely.

- **PAID NEWS**

  One of the factors that is affecting media ethics is the practice of “Paid News”. News Media outlets are supposed to provide information that is factually correct, balanced, fair, and objective. These are the elements that clearly sets apart news from opinions expressed in editorial page or advertisements by corporate houses, governments, organizations, or individual. When the difference between news and advertisement starts getting unclear, when news is published or broadcast in favor of a particular politician or political parties by selling editorial space, the readers is misled and news lose its credibility. Corruption in the media is admittedly part of the corruption in society and in recent times, it has assumed an institutionalized form, with newspapers and television channels receiving funds for publishing or broadcasting information in favor of particular individuals, corporate entities, representatives of political parties and candidates contesting elections that is sought to be disguised as news. By publishing advertisements as news, especially about election candidates, the media is undermining the process of democracy and clearly violating the Representation of People Act, 1951 and rule 90 of the conduct of election rules, guidelines on media practices of the Securities and Exchange Board of India and norms of acceptable media practices of Press Council of India.

- **PROPAGANDA BY THE MEDIA**

  One of the major challenges of media ethics is the propaganda by the mainstream media. Noam Chomsky in his book ten-authored with Edward S Herman entitled Manufacturing Consent: The political economy of the mass media first published in 1988, several detailed case studies are mentioned to highlight how the mainstream media circulates propaganda. According to this propaganda model of the media, democratic societies like the US use nonviolent means of control, unlike totalitarian systems, where physical force can readily be used to coerce as well as the population at large.

  The propaganda model tries to explain a systematic bias in terms of structural economic causes. It focuses that the bias derives from five ‘Filters’ which all published news must pass through and this in turn distorts new coverage. The five filters are:

  It is important to notice that mass media outlets are now run by large corporations, they have to be as the same competitive pressures as other corporate bodies. It becomes quite obvious that the pressures to run profit centric business to distort the spirit of news. Hence, companies those focus on profits over news quality survive and grow. On the other hand the media organizations that try to present a more objective picture tend to get more marginalized.
CONCLUSION

In spite of some inspiring examples of practices of development journalism by today’s media the questions that arise at this point is Can Gandhian model of development journalism be practiced consistently under the prevalent economic system of capitalism, which functions on the basis of selfishness and unlimited multiplication of wants? It is true that some media outlets have taken initiatives on developmental issues and consistently working on the education, health, environment and other issues. But in a huge country like India where more than 70 per cent people still live in rural areas and they are not covered in this regard. It is a matter of serious concern that no private media talks about the issues related to rural India. Poverty continues to pose a threat to millions of people, journalists have no choice but to continue reporting development issues and what is there impact on public.

Gandhi developed a model for journalists to practice development journalism with a purpose to improve the society. He believed that the role of newspapers was only public service, hence he wrote a series of stories on various issues such as health, birth control, and women empowerment and so on. He consistently wrote on the importance of educating rural masses and this approach is still relevant in India with a major population of illiterate section. In a country like India, which is plagued with problems like illiteracy, lack of health care facilities, pollution, corruption, and the apathy of government officials etc, the role of the Press in development is desirable.

REFERENCES


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