

“CONFLICTS OF VALUES: CONFUSIONS OF MEDIA”

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Dear friends,

It gives me great pleasure to be in this city of Kozhikode today amidst journalists of Kerala who hold a unique and distinguished position in the field of journalism. With its rich tradition in music, dance, literature, religion and culture and stunning natural beauty, Kerala is indeed a land of God and looked with admiration not only by the fellow Indians but by people from abroad.

It is really heartening that the journalists have accepted and appreciated that at the core of the problem with journalism lies the conflict between the value system of yesteryears and the new values in emerging media functioning with paradigm shift in the context of globalization and its impact on socio economic set up.

From time immemorial, an individual has interpreted values according to his or her own wisdom and acted accordingly. These individual perceptions have together set the value system for the society as well. Over the years, such value system had undergone test of the time, turmoils through which the society had to undergo and by such process had been constantly fine tuned in the light of practical wisdom and enrichment of knowledge. It is important to bear in mind that in the dynamic world, values have never remained static and have undergone transformations acceding to the dictates of time and ever changing circumstances. No doubt, adaptation is an important component of development and it is essential to change with time. Yet, there are some basic norms adorned by the society for long that form the bedrock on which acceptance of value system of a civil society is founded. The media as a mirror of the society more

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often than not reflect the changes in the system and the needs and aspiration of the society.

The traditional conflict of values was a moral conflict between good and evil in a changing society and significance and function of morality just lay in adjusting and solving such conflicts. Such values were by and large confined to limits of particular geographic boundary. With technological advances and amazing changes in communication system, the geographical limit has vanished.

Towards the end of the 19th century, modernization and globalization turned the conflict of values into universal phenomenon. In contemporary society, multiple choices are set against social, economic or political status and statures. In contemporary society, the discontent and desires of human beings to change their own life have unprecedentedly increased. The contemporary conflict of values has gone far beyond the moral realm and had extended into every realm of human life. The value system which media had subscribed has also started changing very fast. The transformation in recent years is so great that there has been a felt need to ponder and assess as to need of drawing a line or 'Lakshman Rekha' beyond which change should not take place as of now.

The Indian press is 228 years old. The first newspaper "Bengal Gazette" was launched by James Augustus Hickey on 29th January 1780. Even though a foreigner, Mr. Hickey true to the spirit of a journalist acting as a watch dog of the nation had fearlessly protested against wrong doings and exploitation of the British rulers thereby incurring wrath of the administration and subjected to various forms of punishment. Ultimately the paper had to be closed. Indian press during the following century is known for its role in the freedom struggle, fight for social reforms and public awareness. It had a missionary role and saw itself as a powerful instrument in the struggle for India's freedom and social reforms. In the six decades since independence, media has constantly evolved and embraced new forms. Today, the media functioning has under gone a sea

change. By and large, the media is being dictated by market force in the pursuit of more and more profit. As a result, the primary duty of a media to be the fourth estate and to guide the nation to the path of welfare has taken a back seat.

For any organisation for its survival, earning profit is imperative but for media, profit is not the only goal like other commercial organisations. The ultimate commitment of a true journalist can only be to truth and its mind set oriented for the benefit of society and nation and for mankind as a whole surpassing the interest of an individual. The Press Commission had observed that the proprietor of a newspaper have the authority to lay down the policies of the paper but the actual inputs of the reports have necessarily to be selected and determined by the journalist. It is here that the value system of the journalist determines how he shapes the destiny of the country and the mankind. It is easy to flow with the tide but it needs courage to stand for the vindication of cherished values and to remain alive to the duties and responsibilities of a journalist in leading the society for its development and guiding its members to achieve the goal and to fearlessly protest against any improper action by high and mighty.

The Press Council of India is a body constituted for an around development of the press. It avowedly professes the conviction of our constitutional forefathers of maintaining freedom of speech and expression and free functioning of the media. The Press Council was conceived as a peer body that would discharge three fold functions – regulate, advise, adjudicate. The authority with which it was expected to discharge these objects was not intended to be a penal authority but the declaratory authority to warn, censure and admonish – an authority that works on a moral plane by appealing to the conscience of a journalist to adhere to the basic value system expected of a journalist. Conflict of values existed even when the setting up of the Press Council was proposed in 1954 by the first Press Commission. To work as a moral

guide in discharging its above three functions, the Council has built up over the years the basic value principles for the benefit of the Press. These are founded on principles accepted world over as the minimum bench mark for maintaining the standards of the press. For the benefit of the members of the Kerala Union of Working Journalists, I am handing over a few copies of the compilation of the norms and guidelines formulated by the Press Council of India. These guidelines are updated from time to time and the Press Council will publish the updated guidelines this year. Any suggestion from your end will be gratefully accepted.

Only on 18th September 2008 a workshop was organised at the Conference Hall of the Press Council of India where some of the members of the Council, media persons from both Print and Electronic Media, Social activists, representatives of UNDP deliberated about the norms to be followed by both the media while reporting AIDS and HIV cases and about persons particularly children affected with AIDS and/or having HIV positive in order to update the norms and guidelines of Press Council of India in circulation. This exercise will only indicate the care and concern of PCI in updating its guidelines for print media in the matter of reporting and journalistic exercise concerning various issues.

Classical values of social and political outlook cherished for long are being replaced by so called modern values sponsored by the market. Revolutionary changes have been witnessed in the media world. Introduction of new modes of communication i.e. television, internet and now blogging are making their presence felt in a big way even in the remote corner of our country. This new system and its functioning as of now have changed the focus, approach and principles of newspaper industry which even about thirty years ago, were being followed. Priorities have been reshaped. Therefore, a new conflict is evident in media world – conflict between value system of yesteryears and marketism – conflict whether journalism is a service and a profession or a business and industry.

In the age of globalization, media is being increasingly governed by market forces, far removed from social issues. The question as to whether or not in this blind race of marketism and sensationalism, journalism today is losing its credibility needs to be addressed carefully and dispassionately. Apparently oblivious to the fact that the vast majority of people are still below the poverty line, large segments of the society still remain illiterate, extreme maldistribution of nation's wealth is making wider the rift between vulgar affluence and abject poverty, the media seems to be keen in focusing on trivial issues concerning the celebrities, movie stars etc for increasing circulation and earning higher profits, instead of addressing to serious issues for eradicating social and political evils and bringing in transparency in the administration and to lead the nation for a balanced and healthy growth. It is a tragedy that media which is supposed to highlight the drawbacks of marketism is being swayed by it. Journalists are working on packages. Editors are being marginalised and they have lost the dignity of the high and respected office of editor which in yesteryears editors had always enjoyed. Today, journalism has become more a profession and service than a mission that it used to be and news content has become secondary to advertising and entertainment content. Although, the inevitable transformation of social outlook on account of impact of globalisation need not be understated, but media in its turn has not resisted it but has freely floated with the tide thereby aggravating the problem of trivialisation and sensationalisation in media reporting.

Till mid nineties, the electronic media was primarily in government hands. After the Supreme Court judgment upholding open air waves with a view to give plurality of choice and opinion to the public, numerous private players entered the field of electronic media comprising news and entertainment channels. Unfortunately, not being properly regulated rather remaining unregulated the electronic media has failed to discharge the balanced and constructive role expected of the said media. The privileges of freedom of expression have been

breached more often than not. It is high time that electronic media should be regulated effectively by devising appropriate modalities.

Present always seems to be in conflict with the past. What is left behind is called the past. It will be ideal when present advances carrying with it the values and strength of yesteryears. It should be remembered that what is present today will be past the very next moment.

It is not hard to make decisions when one knows what values are to be adorned and preserved. Traditional values of journalism have not lost their relevance today. They can even now guide media decisions quite effectively.

Ethics is a code of values, which govern our lives, and are thus very essential for moral and healthy life. In the context of the press, "Ethics" may be described as a set of moral principles of values, which guide the conduct of journalism.

The ethics are essentially to be observed by the self-restraint and practiced by the journalists voluntarily, to preserve and promote the trust of the people and to maintain their credibility and not to betray the faith and confidence of the people. Since introspection and consequential voluntary action on its own by the journalists do not always happen in real life, the need of a regulatory body, be it voluntary or statutory will always be there. What is more important that the ethics and guidelines formulated by the regulatory body should be accepted and followed by the media and it will be only desirable that media observes the ethics willingly and not being compelled to do so.

Socially responsible, fair, accurate journalism with public service ethos based on the theory of self-restraint, is the solution in this present scenario, where journalists find themselves caught between traditional glorious values of past and today's competition and fight to survive.

Albert Einstein has rightly observed: ***“Try not to become a man of success but rather try to become a man of values”***. Revered Dalai Lama very aptly observed ***“Open your arms to change, but don’t let go of your values”***. Our own cultural background has traditionally guided us towards **‘Bahujan Hitay, Bhaujan Sukhay’**. Acts which are for the welfare of the maximum and for the happiness of the maximum, are a natural corollary of the basic values. In the fast changing scenario in media functioning, journalist’s service conditions are not very favourable and security of service is quite bleak. Many of the journalists are on contract service and can be easily removed from service. There are various other compulsions under which the journalists or a vast majority of them work today. But even with all such constraints, a journalist if he remains alive to his sacred duty to guide the nation for welfare of the mass particularly the down trodden, poor and exploited segment of the society, I believe, can still function without any confusion or intrigued by conflict of values.

I express my sincere thanks to the organisers for giving me an opportunity to share my views on such a relevant subject which is close to my heart before this august gathering.

Namaskar
