

**Address to the Students of Institute of  
Professional Studies, Ghaziabad on  
9.8.2005**

**Justice G N Ray  
Chairman, Press Council of India**

I am very happy to be here on this momentous occasion when you are on the threshold of a new chapter of your life. Soon you will leave the cocooned environment of your student life and step into a world of challenges and competition. You have chosen your career well as you will now get an opportunity to serve the society. But then this is opportunity the many other professions beget. Your profession is unique in that it puts on your shoulders the very onerous responsibility as a moulder of opinions - opinions of the authorities, opinions of the public at decision making level, opinion of the public at grass root level and opinion at national and international levels. But do not be weighed down by this heavy responsibility on your young shoulders. Listen to your conscience and you will never go wrong. The Press has been hailed as the fourth estate, a pillar that balances the functioning of the executive, the legislature and the judiciary. It is a purveyor of news and views, a forum for ventilating social problems and public grievances and a watchdog over the interests of the populace and over the performance of the authorities and a participant in nation building.

The import the press clearly left to the fore in India during our struggle for independence from the British yolk, was not a

mere coincidence. Truly, a large number of our leaders were eminent journalists in their own rights.

A dynamic new social order emerged when the society broke out of the bounds in which it was held during the two hundred years of British rule. The egalitarian goal and the rapidly expanding economy created hithertofore unknown opportunities for the youth, predominantly in the fields of industry, technology, social services, agriculture, scientific research etc. Journalism, which till independence was a mission, emerged as a profession of choice by virtue of the power it vested in the wielder. And then began the concern for gradual erosion in its values. The First Press Commission was born out of this concern. This Commission in its report stressed not only on the need for maintenance of professional standards but also "the objective towards which journalism should strive". It observed that "it is only a clear perspective of the objective which can give a meaning and significance to the vocation of journalism" and the ultimate objective enshrined in our constitution is to secure justice, social, economic and political to all its citizen.

Thus took birth the institution of the Press Council in India. You will, in the months to come, read in detail about the Press Council but I may very briefly tell you the first and foremost object of the Council i.e. to ensure that the press adhere to high standards and values and that in discharge of its functions it faces no hindrance and pressure of any kind. The latter function is unique to the Indian Press Council and there is no other similar regulatory institution of the media that exercises such power over the authorities - be it governmental or otherwise. To sit in judgment over their brethren's conduct as journalist, the Council comprises largely of press persons themselves, with the

remaining members representing the readers' interest. The Press Council has by convention been headed by retired Supreme Court Judges who ensure whether an act or conduct is judged by the yardstick of ethics and the principles of jurisprudence are also not lost sight of. One of the major functions assigned to the Press Council is to build up a code of conduct for the journalist. I lay stress here on the word 'build up' which is the keystone to the Council's functioning and make it crystal clear that the Council does not bind down any one with cast iron rules but judges each charge of violation of ethical values by a journalist or a newspaper with a flexibility according to the facts and circumstances of each case. In doing so, it lays down principles and guidelines, which serve as a measure of conduct for future. These are at regular intervals compiled and published and I am happy to provide to your institute two copies of the latest publication brought out some months ago. Some of the most basic principles relate to: -

1. Defamation
2. Privacy of citizens
3. Privacy of public person
4. Coverage of Court proceedings
5. Coverage of the proceedings of the legislature
6. Communal crises reporting; and
7. Investigative journalism

I hope you will study them thoroughly and imbibe the values enshrined in this booklet 'Norms of Journalistic Conduct' for these will guide you through the rest of your career. Always remember that values are an essential component of education. The end aim of all education is the development of character and

to be truly educated, you must imbibe the values, which are a part of our rich cultural heritage.

Dear students, I believe that the best way to learn is to pass through the process. Therefore, I also have a suggestion to make. Your institute may provide to you the facts of some of the cases adjudicated by the Council and you may write your own account of how you would have acted in the circumstances or how far the newspaper's action in the given case was correct. This will help you assess and regulate your own conduct when you are actively pursuing your career and are faced with difficult choices.

Remember that a newspaper is not a product like a soap or a toothpaste. It affects not the body of the end user, but the mind and the soul. Therefore, commercial considerations, however important, cannot be a primary criterion for the contents of a newspaper. A prominent national daily which had been called upon by the Council to explain the reasons for its prima facie obscene photographs and writings strongly defended the publications and claimed that the "contemporary society in India is fast changing and the impugned articles/pictures are life stones of new styles of life, challenging traditional social norms and values. What they have stated has to be tested by the current standards of ordinary decent people, the newspaper being in English and likely to be read only by well-educated persons. Some of them may find some stray words or pages/pictures shocking or disgusting but not obscene. Even one should not forget that freedom of expression requires adequate "breathing space".

Rejecting the claim, the Council observed that "the Indian media with its long cherished tradition of leading and guiding the

public, needs to overcome its myopic vision to stride with the country's populace in achieving wider global perspective on social and economic developmental issues, issues much more relevant to the country than the marriage or the antics of a European pop icon. The Committee believes that it is time for the Indian media to grow out of its reliance on standards of the western paparazzi and fulfill its obligations and duties towards its own country and the generation next." Therefore, if you want to be taken seriously, do not trivialize news, do not allow yourself to be used in the circulation war. Remember it is not important to work for a big newspaper. It is more important to work for a good paper. You have a good mentor here. Dr. N.K. Trikha is widely respected for his belief in values in journalism and I am sure that when you pass out of this institute you will compulsively stride the path that he shows you. It is good to see so many women taking up journalism as a vocation now a days. They bring with them values and sensitivity that can only help uplift the dignity of the profession.

The journalists of yesteryears had an inborn talent for writing and journalism and newspapers were a vehicle to convey patriotic message. Today the training institute abound and one has to admit that the professionalism they have imparted to the vocation is clearly visible in the young blood. As the first Chairman of the Press Council Justice J. R. Mudholkar had pointed out in 1967 "today no country which is regarded as advanced is sticking to the age-old half truth that journalists are only born, not made". The UNESCO International Commission for the Study of Communication Problem said in its report: "In many countries even today, journalists are not regarded as members of an acknowledged profession and they are treated accordingly.

To overcome this situation, journalism needs to raise its standards and quality for recognition everywhere as a genuine profession. To be treated as professionals, journalists require broad educational preparation and specific professional training. Programmes of instruction need to be developed not only for entry-level recruits, but also for experienced personnel who from time to time would benefit from special seminars and conferences designed to refresh and enrich their qualifications".

The Second Press Commission headed by Justice K.K.Mathew lay great emphasis on training in journalism and inter-alia observed that " Training should comprehend not only the skills but also the values of journalism, the know-why as well as the know-how. The Indian journalist, he or she-and more especially she-is drawn typically from the middle or upper class, and is likely to have had an urban background. Training should include the necessary correctives. The aspiring journalists should have a social vision and a range of interests wider than of urban middle-class life. If the Press in our country is to be able to play the role we have commended for it, those who are preparing themselves to enter the profession should acquire an understanding of the problems and concern of the majority of our people who live in the villages, a large section of them below the poverty line. It should be part of training to make the would-be journalist realise that he can-as much as a planner or an administrator or a legislator-contribute to the economic and social betterment of the underprivileged. Trainees should be made aware that, whether as reporters in the field or as sub-editors at the desk, they are going to play a very responsible role as 'gatekeepers' of news."

Remember each one of you has the capability of making a contribution to the nation and to the mankind. Make the best use of it. In the words of Stephen Grellet:

“ I shall pass through this way but once. If, therefore, there be any kindness I can show or any good thing I can do, let me do it now; let me not defer it or neglect it, for I shall not pass this way again”

I conclude with a fervent wish for the success of each one of you in your career.

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