

Role of Media in promoting Hope and Happiness

¹G.N. Ray

Permit me to begin by quoting Thomas Jefferson, the President of USA (1801 to 1809)

“The press is the best instrument of enlightening the mind of man, and improving him as a rational, moral and social being”.

It gives me immense pleasure and happiness to be amongst this august and enlightened gathering and sharing views on ‘The Role of Media in promoting Hope and Happiness’. In today’s world of despair and discontent, conflicts and violence, terrorism and cultural differences, the sparkle of hope and any effort on our part that can bring happiness even to howsoever small group of mankind, is like a candle of light in the space enveloped by darkness.

It is true that the meaning of ‘hope and happiness’ will differ from person to person because the expressions are of very wide amplitude and contain various angle of vision. “Srimad Bhagbatam’ advises us to shun ‘hope’ (aasha) as it is the ultimate cause of despair (nirasha) and to seek true happiness i.e. Sat Chit Ananda. But in a worldly plane can a common man and the society to which he belongs attain such high and spiritual level of mind?

¹ Address at the Inaugural Session of the 3-day National Seminar on ‘Role of Media in Promoting Hope and Happiness’ on 22nd September 2007 at Brahma Kumaris, Shantivan, Abu Road, Rajasthan.

Therefore, for average people like us easier is the way to follow the path shown by our scriptures by doing our duty to the best of our ability without regard to the result or 'phal'. Quoting from Sree Sree Geeta we may say – Karmanye Badhikarastu Ma Phalesu Kadachana. Our duty is not only to identify the right path for our future generations but also to guide them in following such path. Media can play this role most effectively.

The latin saying 'sis vis pacem para baleum' (if you want peace, prepare for war) may have been appropriate for Roman times, but it militates against the ethos passed on to us by our very ancient civilization which adorned love and veneration for every one. Ancient Indian philosophy of life has exclaimed "Sarve Bhavantu Sukhina, Sarve Santu Niramayaa". To make the world full of peace should be the ultimate aim of mankind and the media has the capacity and should have the will to play a leading role in conceptualizing this ideology. I firmly believe that media can play a positive role in bringing hope and happiness to mankind which today seems to be fading away in this materialistic world. The nationalistic world today is attuned with utmost haste and extreme form of competition for achieving material prosperity by whatever means practicable, very of ten with shocking selfishness, leaving perhaps no time to ponder and think for finer elements of human soul which is potentially devine. It reminds me a few lines from a poem of an English poet Owen

– “What is this life, If full of care? If there is no time, to stand and stare”.
In this reality, media need to work for promoting hope and happiness in society by virtue of being the most potent means of communication.

An individual whose words or action affect isolated few may form his own rules of conduct but can a leader, which the media undoubtedly is, adopt this posture when it is in a position of moulding and giving direction to the entire mankind? A true leader would lead the nation to proper goal and not merely follow the demands of a crowd. With the march of time, adaptation best suited in changing socio economic set up is inevitable. The word ‘Jagat’ (world) is a derivative of ‘gam’ i.e. moving. Therefore dynamism is the key word on which the world moves on and on. But this adaptation should not imperil our basic ideals and objectives. Adaptation must happen in the right direction and the people need to be guided for that.

Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, speaking of Mahatma Gandhiji's contribution to the world, had observed “We live today in a world torn with hatred and violence and fear and passion, and the shadow of war hangs heavily over us all. Gandhiji told us to cast away our fear and passion and to keep away from hatred and violence. His voice may not be heard by many in the tumult and shouting of today, but it will have to be heard and understood, sometime or other, if this world is to survive in any civilized form”.

It is not very encouraging to note that these remarks remain as relevant today as they were over four decades ago.

The media must realise that although media enjoy freedom of thought and expression but such freedom is not unfettered but it also casts on the media a very heavy responsibility to act in the true spirit of a path finder, a watchdog of the nation with a missionary zeal to make this beautiful planet of ours more and more vibrant and peaceful.

Hope is defined like this:-

Hope is a belief in a positive outcome related to events and circumstances in one's life. Hope implies a certain amount of perseverance – i.e. believing that a positive outcome is possible even when there is some evidence to the contrary.

Happiness is state of delight. The mental frame associated with happiness includes well-being, delight, health, safety, and contentment. Contrasting states include suffering, depression, grief, anxiety and pain. Happiness is often associated with the presence of favourable circumstances. According to ancient and modern thinkers, happiness is influenced by the attitude and perspective taken on such circumstances.

For blissful mental state, there is no equivalent term. The closest one is found in the 'Veda' ie "ananda" meaning blissful satisfaction, delight. Ananda is higher form of mental frame and should not be confused with worldly pleasure having its base on five sensory organs.

Ananda is to be acquired through 'nirasakti' ie detachment. We may recall the great teaching of Sree Sree Geeta to remain unconcerned in all circumstances. "Dukhyesu anudbigna mana, Sukhesu bigataspriha" Detachment does not mean no urge or inclination for daily score of life. Every member of the society has a solemn responsibility to do his duties sincerely. What is really emphasized is that while performing such duties sincerely and honestly, one should not be slave of the outcome of such efforts and to be bound by worldly pleasures and aspirations flowing from them. If we inculcate with strong determination even some degree of detachment to worldly success and failure, contentment will come and we shall not be disturbed or distressed by the cycles of success and failure, pleasure and pain with which we are to move along

To understand the true meaning of 'ananda' or bliss the 'dharma' is to be taken into account. Ancient Indian philosophy has defined 'dharma' as "ja atmana tatha anyesam jibana bardhanam kriyate sa eba dharma" (which flourishes and nurtures one's and also of others' lives is 'dharma') Dr. Prapad Assavavirullhakern author of Past Lives of Buddha has remarked – 'if everything is in equilibrium in accordance with dharma, happiness arises'.

To instill hope and happiness in the minds of all is the crying need of the hour when the world is tormented by terrorism, hatred, violence, war in the name of religion, regionalism, castesism and intolerance. In

multilingual, multiethnic, multireligions denominations constituting our great country, India, the need for tolerance and acceptance of well reasoned views of others with respect can not be lost sight of. The fundamentalists of all religions have ignored the basic tenets of every religion founded on love and compassion.

God, creator of this universe is embodiment of boundless love and 'karuna' (compassion). Real love for God can never permit us to do harm to any object of His creation. The media must be proactive in denouncing fundamentalism in no uncertain term and bringing peace and harmony in the society. The role of media as a peace bonding tool will achieve greater force if we make ourselves receptive and sincerely want to live in a world of peace and happiness. The role of media and the members of the society for which Media function is complementary in this respect. RabindraNath Thakur has rightly observed in one of his poems. Song is not be sung by singer alone it is to sung by singer and the audience.

The motto of UNESCO that "Since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defenses of peace must be constructed", needs proper appreciation.

The media of today reflects our current culture of war and violence. It is one of the key institutions that must also be transformed to a culture of peace and non-violence. Of late, there has been a paradigm shift in the functioning of media. Currently the media is part of the problem.

With an eye for commercial success, media resort to sensationalisation, trivialization etc. and focus on darker side of human life and on glamorous segment of the society being oblivious or unconcerned for progress and welfare of others. This role is to be reversed. It needs to be part of the solution. Positive reporting on constructive efforts whether by individual or groups or administration need to be focused with appreciation when such effort may rightly deserve recognition.

In this era of information explosion, the role of the media for being for more responsible in developmental process is even greater. The new era of media, with the massive distribution of news and information, requires leadership and guidance for the betterment of individual based on values, compassion, concern for others and above all spirituality.

Media affects every facet of our lives and indeed can have a positive or negative bearing on all types of conflicts ultimately affecting the equilibrium of the society. Media can help in avoiding and deescalating conflicts and foster and promote peace making efforts for establishing a vibrant happy society. Media can help correct and de-demonise distorted image of religion, communalism and casteism, etc.

Media need to provide cures rather than focusing solely on the disease and thus reduce human suffering and bring hope and happiness in our lives.

Prime Minister Manmohan Singhji recently at 'Ramnath Goenka excellence in Journalism Awards Function' referred to Karl Marx "When an idea captures the minds of men, it becomes force" and he remarked 'you are in the business of capturing the minds of people, of shaping ideas and transforming society'. He invited journalists to become journalists of change, the change for a better world to live in.

Media being the watchdog of the society should be avowedly alive to the need of sensitizing the members of the society to the cherished human values of service and sacrifice for betterment of the society. Journalists should come forward to shape a new world glowing with peace, hope and happiness and bear the mantle of value based communication and cause the world to develop a global village where purity of thought brings "constant and true peace and happiness".

Media should draw inspiration from the noble thoughts of Swami Vivekananda who has rightly observed, "To devote your life to the good of all and to the happiness of all is religion". For every one of us including Media the mission of life should be oriented for "Bahujana Hitaya, bahujana sukhayacha".

I may quote Rabindranath Tagore in this context

'I slept and dreamt that life was Joy. I woke and saw that life was Duty. I acted, and behold, Duty was Joy.

The great institution of Brahma Kumaris is relentlessly striving to develop inherent human quality blessed with potential divinity to develop and empower the mental frame of a man with love, compassion and purity of thought. It is, therefore, quite natural that today's topic for media seminar of a national level has been very aptly chosen. I do not think that it will be proper for me to dilate more on the subject. I have only introduced the importance of the topic so relevant in today's scenario. I am confident that thought provoking deliberations on various aspects of the topic for the seminar will undoubtedly make the media and all of us more sensitive to the task for bringing peace and happiness in the society and if that happens the purpose of the seminar will achieve its goal "Ayaarambha Subhaya Bhabatu" (Let this beginning be beneficial).

Namaskar