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| **Mahatma Gandhi And Mass Media** |
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Today, when the contemporary media scenario bristles with unheard of turmoil- investigative journalism- through all means fair and foul; over-riding role of market forces in the media wherein the "advertorial" and "response" and "response features" edge out editorials, and when the media is trying to project the celebrities and models as the icons of modern society, it would be worth while to revisit Mahatma Gandhi's philosophy and canon of journalism and his contribution as a journalist.

 According to Chalapathi Raju, himself an eminent editor, Gandhi was probably the greatest journalist of all  time, and the weeklies he ran and edited were probably the greatest weeklies the world has known. He published no advertisement; at the same time he did not want his newspapers to run at a loss. He had gained considerable experience in South Africa, where he had taken over in1904 the editorship of the 'Indian Opinion' and published it in English, Tamil and Gujarati, sometimes running the press himself.

'Young India' and 'Harijan' became powerful vehicles of his views on all subjects. He wrote on all subjects. He wrote simply and clearly but forcefully, with passion and burning indignation. One of the objects of a newspaper, he said. is to understand the popular feeling and give expression to it; another is to arouse among the people certain desirable sentiments, and the third is fearlessly to expose popular defects.

Gandhi's papers published no advertisements. They enjoyed wide circulation. His approach to journalism was totally devoid of ambitions.  To him it was not a vocation to earn his livelihood; it was a means to serve the public. In the 'Young India' of 2 July 1925, he wrote: "I have taken up journalism not for its sake but merely as an aid to what I have conceived to be my mission in life. My mission is to teach by example and present under severe restraint the use of the matchless weapon of satyagraha which is a direct corollary of nonviolence."

Gandhi looked upon journalism as a means to serve the people. He said in his autobiography: "The sole aim of journalism should be service. The newspaper is a great power, but just as an unchained torrent of water submerges whole countryside and devastates crops, even so an uncontrolled pen serves but to destroy. If the control is from without, it proves more poisonous than want of control. It can be profitable only when exercised from within. If this line of reasoning is correct, how many journals of the world would stand the test? But who would stop those that are useless? and who should be the judge? The useful and the useless must, like good and evil. go on together, and man must make his choice.

**Gandhi- The Great Communicator and Journalist**

Apart from being a national leader and social reformer, Gandhi was a great communicator. More than any one else, he recognized that communication is the most effective tool to shape opinion and mobilize popular support. He was successful because he had a latent skill in communication that surfaced in South Africa where he had gone initially to set up practice as a lawyer. The practice of communication started by him in South Africa gave him the clue to rally millions of his countrymen when he returned to India.

Gandhi was associated with six journals, for two of which he was the editor. His first paper, 'Indian Opinion' was started in South Africa. In order to ventilate the grievances of Indians and mobilize public opinion in their favour, Gandhi started writing and giving interviews to newspapers ,He focused on open letters and Letters to Editor, but soon realized that occasional writings and the hospitality of newspapers were inadequate for the political campaign he had launched. He needed a mouthpiece to reach out to the people; so in June 1903 he launched Indian Opinion. It served the purpose of a weekly newsletter which disseminated the news of the week among the Indian community. It became an important instrument of education. Through the columns of the newspaper Gandhi tried to educate the readers about sanitation, self-discipline and good citizenship. How important the journal was to Gandhi is seen from his own statement in his biography, My Experiments with Truth:

'Indian Opinion... was a part of my life. Week after week I poured out my soul in its columns and expounded the principles and practice of satyagraha as I understood it. During 10 years, that is until 1914, excepting the intervals of my enforced rest in prison there was hardly an issue of 'Indian Opinion' without an article from me. I cannot recall a word in these articles set down without thought or deliberation or  word of conscious exaggeration, or anything merely to please. Indeed the journal became for me a training in self restraint and for friends a medium through which to keep in touch with my thoughts."

The critics found very little to which they could object. In fact, the tone of 'Indian Opinion' compelled the critics to put a curb on his palm.

Gandhi launched Satyagraha against the Rowlatt Act and the massacre in Jallianwala Bagh. He learnt in South Africa how important the press and public opinion could be in politics and had taught himself how to use the written word most effectively.

*Freedom of the press is a precious privilege that no country can forgo. - M. K. Gandhi*

The two journals 'Young India' and 'Navjivan' were used by him to ventilate his views and to educated the public on Satyagraha . In 1933 Gandhi started 'Harijan', 'Harijanbandhu', 'Harijansevak' in English, Gujarati and Hindi, respectively. These newspapers were the vehicles of his crusade against untouchability and poverty in rural areas. These papers published no advertisements even then they enjoyed wide circulation. His note of defiance and sacrifice gave a new stimulus to the evolution of press as a weapon of satyagraha.

**Gandhi and Role of Newspapers**

It will be pertinent to point out as to what Mahatma Gandhi considered to be the role of newspapers. He wrote: In my humble opinion, it is wrong to use a newspaper as a means of earning a living. There are certain spheres of work which are of such consequence and have such bearing on public welfare that to undertake them for earning one's livelihood will defeat the primary aim behind them. When, further a newspaper is treated as a means of making profits, the result is likely to be serious malpractices. It is not necessary to prove to those who have some experience of journalism that such malpractices do prevail on a large scale. He was of the opinion, 'Newspapers are meant primarily to educate the people. They make the latter familiar with contemporary history. This is a work of no mean responsibility. It is a fact, however, that readers cannot always trust newspapers. Often facts are found to be quite the opposite of what has been reported. If newspapers realized that it was their duty to educate the people, they could not but wait to check a report before publishing it. It is true that  often they have to work under difficult conditions. They have to sift the true from the false in  a short time and can only guess at the truth. Even then, I am of the opinion that it is better not to publish a report at all if it ahs not been found possible to verify it.'

The eminent journalist and freedom fighter Salien Chatterjee who covered Mahatma Gandhi, his actions and programmes for a number of years died a few months back. In an article, 'Reporting Mahatma', he had written for the special issue of Vidura on, Gandhi as a Journalist, (Jan-March, 1998) he said:

"I joined journalism in 1942. Reporting Mahatma Gandhi and my tours with him were the best and most memorable period of my journalistic career. Gandhi himself was a journalist. During my tours with him, he often told me how he worked day and night to produce his journal 'Indian Opinion' in Natal, South Africa. He described 'Indian Opinion' as the most useful weapon in his struggle in South Africa. He always stressed the importance of newspapers in educating the people. Gandhi always believed and always emphasized that the sole aim of journalism should be service, service of the people and the country.

In 'Young India' Gandhi once gave a glimpse of  the exacting code he ad set up for himself.  "To be true to my faith, I may not write in anger or malice. I may not write idly. 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 peek into myself and to make discoveries of my weaknesses. Often my vanity dictates a smart expression or my anger a harsh adjective. It is a terrible ordeal but a fine exercise to remove these weeds."

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**Gandhi's canons of Journalism**

Gandhi had been frequently writing on various aspects of journalism. To him editorial independence, adherence to truth and self-restraints were the three over riding considerations for journalism. In his message for the editor of the newspaper, 'The Independence', on 30 January 1919, he wrote: In wishing you success in your new enterprise, I would like to say how I hope your writings would be worthy of the title you have chosen for your journal; and may I further hope that to a robust of independence you will add an equal measure of self-restraint and the  strictest adherence to truth? Too often in our journals as in others do we get fiction instead of fact and declamation in place of sober reasoning. You would make 'The Independence' a power in the land and a means of education for the people by avoiding the errors I have drawn attention to.

**Newspapers and Advertising**

On receiving Advertisement support for running a newspaper Mahatma Gandhi wrote: It is now an established practice with newspapers to depend for revenues mainly on advertisements rather than on subscriptions. The result has been deplorable. The very newspaper which writes against the drink evil publishes advertisements in praise of drinks. In the same issue, we read of the harmful effects of tobacco as also from where to but it. Or we shall find the same issue of a paper carrying a long advertisement for a certain play and denouncing that play as well. Medical advertisements are the largest source of revenue though they have done, and are still doing incalculable harm to the people. These medical advertisements almost wholly offset the services rendered by the newspapers. I have been eyewitness to the harm done by them. Many people are lured into buying harmful medicines. Many of these promote immorality. Such advertisements find a place even in papers run to further the cause of religion. This practice has come entirely from the West. No matter at what cost or effort we must put an end to this undesirable practice or at least reform. It is the duty of every newspaper to exercise some restraint in the matter of advertisements.

*The sole aim of journalism should be service.- M. K. Gandhi*

Today, when there is widespread concern over the growing influence of market forces on media, and regret over journalism being no longer a social service, Gandhi's views on values of journalism bring to bear on the profession of journalism the force of ethics and morality. In this context he had said, 'It is often observed that newspapers published any matter that they have, just to fill in space. The reason is that most newspapers have their eyes on profits...... There are newspapers in the west which are so full of trash that it will be a sin even to touch them. At times, they produce bitterness and strife even between different families and communities. Thus, newspapers cannot escape criticism merely because they serve the people.'

*The true function of journalism is to educate the public mind, not to stock it with wanted and unwanted impressions. - M. K. Gandhi*

**Gandhi and Radio**

The first and only time Gandhi visited the Broadcasting house, Delhi was on 12 November,1947, the Diwali Day. He arrived at the Broadcasting House accompanied by Rajkumari Amrit Kaur. A report on this event published in the issue of' 'The Indian Listener' of 22 February,1948, after Gandhi's death, said: "A special studio was fitted with the 'takhposh' (low wooden settee) which was daily used by him for his prayer meeting addresses at Birla House, Appropriately, the prayer meeting atmosphere was created in the studio....... Gandhi was at first shy of the radio and it was after much persuasion that he agreed to broadcast from the studios of AIR........ but the moment he reached the studio he owned this impersonal instrument as his own and said: "This is a miraculous power. I see 'shakti', the miraculous power of God". According to the 'Hindustan Times' of 13th November, "He spoke for 20 minutes and his voice was exceptionally clear. His message was followed by recorded music of Vande Materam"

The news of Gandhi's assassination on the evening of January 30, which had spread like wild fire in Delhi was flashed by foreign correspondents and news agencies all over the world within minutes. That evening at 8-30 p.m. Prime Minister, Nehru whom Gandhi had called his heir in the freedom struggle, broadcast from the Delhi station a very moving talk which began with the oft quoted words: "A light has gone out of our lives". Others who broadcast later were Sardar Patel, Sarojini Naidu and numerous leaders and prominent personalities from all walks of life. Lord Mountbatten came to the Delhi station on 12 February to pay his homage in a broadcast talk.

On the day of the funeral, Melville De Mellow gave the marathon, almost ten hour long commentary, which in its moving description of the crowds and the procession as it inched its way with millions of people lining the route to the place chosen for the last rites on the bank of the river Yamuna, seemed to articulate the whole nation's grief and homage. It was a classic of broadcasting at its best, and established De Mellow's fame as an outstanding commentator. It was De Mellow who described the last anguished moments of the funeral ceremony before returning to the studios.

*The newspapers should be read for the study of facts. They should not be allowed to kill the habit of independent thinking. - M. K. Gandhi*

Mahatma Gandhi's speech during his visit to 'The Hindu' sums up his philosophy and vision of journalism: I have, therefore, never been tired of reiterating to journalists whim I know that journalism should never be prostituted for selfish ends or for the sake of merely earning a livelihood or, worse still, for amassing money. Journalism, to be useful and serviceable to the country, will take its definite, its best for the service of the country and, whatever happens the views of the country irrespective of consequences. I think that we have in our midst the making of newspapers which can do so.

Let us be clear in our minds that-to confine Gandhi to India and to view him as merely the great Indian national leader is to diminish his greatness and personality. Gandhi belonged to the whole world, the humanity at large. The Time magazine, while chronicling the sweeping forces and great events of the 20th century- catalogued Gandhi as one of the greatest activists-who fought for change from outside the traditional halls of power, who was bound to an abstract vision for which he would pay any price was life. The world that revered few men had revered Gandhi. Although Gandhi died believing his lone voice was unheard- he was mistaken; the power of his message would endure to move men and nations for all times to come.

<https://www.mkgandhi.org/articles/the-journalist-in-gandhi.html>

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