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| **The Journalist in Gandhi** |
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In the midst of his manifold activities, Gandhiji worked as a journalist and edited four well known journals. The Indian Opinion in South Africa, and the Young India, Navajivan and the Harijan in India.
“The sole aim of journalism,” he had said, “is service”.
Through his journals the Mahatma had not only propagated his views but laid down a unique standard in journalism.
**He was a man of the masses and wrote about their problems, feelings and aspirations. His human approach gave his writings a unique character. His idea was to educate the people through his writings about the significance of independence â€“ political, economic and social.**
“One of the objects of a newspaper,” said Gandhiji, “is to understand the popular feeling and give expression to it; another to arouse among the people certain desirable sentiments and the third is fearlessly to express popular defects.”
At the age of nineteen Gandhiji went to London and for the first time read a newspaper. “In India,” he wrote in his autobiography, “I had never read a newspaper.” He became ambitious to write articles and began to contribute in the Vegetarian the journal of the Vegetarian Society of England. During his three year stay in London, he contributed nine articles in that journal on diet, customs, festivals etc. of India. This gave him an opportunity to become a freelance journalist.
During his return journey to India, the ship by which he traveled faced a bad storm. He wrote a description of this from the ship to for the Vegetarian which is an excellent specimen of freelance journalism.
In April 1893, the young barrister, sailed for South Africa to defend one of the cases of Dada Abdullah and Company. The political situation in South Africa not only made him a Satyagrahi, but a thorough journalist. He worked as the South African Correspondent of the India started by Dadabhai Naoroji and began to send despatches about the South African situation with particular reference to grievances of Indians there.
During the Boer War, Gandhiji with his band of Indian volunteers, offered his services for tendering the sick and the wounded in the battle-field. During this period he worked as a “War Correspondent.”
On June 4, 1903, Gandhiji with the help of Indians started publication of his first newspaper, Indian Opinion at Natal, South Africa, with a view to voice effectively the feelings of the Indians living in South Africa under the worst form of apartheid. The first editorial, “Ourselves”, which was an unsigned one, was written by him. It is marked by the simplicity of his language. The Indian Opinion was published in four languages, English, Gujarati, Tamil and Hindi. Gandhiji was not only writing for the journal, but gave his hard earned money also to meet its expenses. The difficulties faced by the Indian Opinion those days have been narrated by Mr. Henry Polak, one of the close associates of Gandhiji. “The printing press, where the type setting was done by hand,” wrote Mr. Polak, “Was run by aâ€¦.oil engine which frequently broke down. When this happened, the settlers had to resort to hand-power to turn out the paper in time for the usual dispatch of mails”. When this happened, Mr. Polak said, Gandhiji literally put his shoulder to the wheel as energetically as others. There were no servants, peons or other labour. The press workers themselves had to print the paper, fold it, paste the addresses, make bundles ad take them to the railway station.
While leaving South Africa, Gandhiji left Indian Opinion under the charge of Mr. Polak. In 1916, he sent his 23 year old second son, Manilal Gandhi, to look after the Gujarati edition of the Indian Opinion and to take charge of the English edition. From time to time, he wrote to Shri Manilal Gandhi guiding him about the papers. “The Editor”, wrote the journalist-father of his journalist-son, “has to be patient and seek for the truth only. You should write what is truth in the Indian Opinion; but do not be impolite and do not give way to anger. Be moderate in your language. If you are, do not hesitate to confess it.”
Gandhiji encouraged many to take up the profession of journalism in the service of the country and the people.
On October 7, 1919, a Gujarati journal appeared. Gandhiji took charge of it. A day later, the Young India began its publication. Gandhiji was editor of both.
His most popular journal, The Harijan, devoted to the cause of Harijans or men of God as he used to call the untouchables, appeared on February 1, 1933. At a later stage, the Harijan was devoted to the cause of the villages and constructive work in rural areas.
Gandhiji was always willing to help young journalists in guiding them in their work. As a young journalist I had the rare privilege of his guidance. Soon after his release from his last imprisonment in the Aga Khan Palace in Poona, Gandhiji went to Mahabaleshwar near Poona. As a reporter of the United Press of India, I was deputed to cover his activities there. There was no political activity and the only news I could cover related to his evening prayer speeches and his talks with the poor people and the villagers during his morning and evening walks. On Poet Rabindranath Tagore’s birthday, he spoke about his relations with Gurudev. There was also a big programme in celebration of the Poet’s birthday. I made a joint report of both and was going to the Telegraph Office to give Press Telegram. Gandhiji was then returning from his evening walk. He asked me where I was going in such a great hurry. When I told him about my purpose, he wanted to see what I had written. While he appreciated my efforts, he said that such a long telegram would take much time in reaching my office. He sat with me with a pencil and prepared a brief summary of my report. I was surprised how he put all the facts contained in my report in almost one-forth of what I had written.
On another occasion in the picturesque hill station of Panchagani where many Indians and foreign journalists had come to cover his activities, the Mahatma gave me a special interview which was flashed through the UPI in all papers. This gave rise to some protests form some journalists who are camping there for a long time and whose efforts to get interviews from him did not succeed. Gandhiji smilingly told them that by giving the interview to me, he wanted to encourage me, the youngest among them. They should feel happy about it.
I had the privilege of touring with Gandhiji in all parts of the country including his one-night-one-village historic peace mission pilgrimage of Noakhali, former East Bengal and now Bangladesh, his peace-mission tour of Bihar, his visits to Assam, Santiniketa, Calcutta, Madras, Madura, Palni, Srinagar, Jammu, both the Simla conferences, his last visit to Lahore, Rawalpindi, his visits to Sevagram, Delhi, Nagpur, Dehradun etc. and till the end of his life in Delhi. I traveled with him his third class compartment, steamers, accompanied him in his walking tours. Despite his busy life, I saw how he devoted time in writing editorials and articles for his journals.
Gandhiji had asked me to work as the correspondent of Indian Opinion South Africa and send news dispatches. I worked as its correspondent even from Delhi till the paper closed down for financial reasons.
Gandhiji always wanted the journalists to see that their stories did not adversely affect the poor people. During his last visit to Delhi in September 1947, he paid a visit to the Jamia Milia, the basic education institution of the late President, Dr. Zakir Hussain. I accompanied him during his visit. As he was getting down from his car, two fingers of one of his hands got crushed in the door and began to bleed. The authorities of the institution immediately brought some first aid equipment and medicine. But Gandhiji smilingly told them that he wanted only a glass of water and piece of cloth. He dipped his injured fingers in the glass and himself bandaged them with the piece of cloth. Thereafter, he went round the institution. I wrote the story of how Gandhiji became his own doctor and nursed his fingers. At night when I finished giving him a gist of some of the newspaper editorials and news items to him, I said I was sending the story about his injured fingers. While he appreciated my story, he asked me not to send it for publication. He said that hundreds of people on reading the story would write letters and send telegrams to enquire how he was. That would mean unnecessary expense on their part and increase his work.
I have seen Gandhiji writing editorials and articles for the Harijan during his train journeys. Once he asked his typist to type an article when he was traveling in his third-class compartment. The train was running at high speed. The typist did his best, but there were lot of mistakes in typing and several words had jumped. Gandhiji told the typist that he should do his job carefully. He asked him to bring the typewriter and himself typed the matter quite neatly. With a hearty laughter he told the typist: “Well, you see, I also know typing. As a journalist I learnt everything required to produce a paper.”
By editing the Navajivan in Gujarati, Gandhiji gave prestige to the language papers and slowly the language papers began to appear in various provinces.
He had said that: “When one takes up the responsibility of editorship, he must discharge it with a full sense of duty. That is the only way journalism should be practiced.”
Gandhiji advised pressmen to sincerely do their duties. “What is really needed to make democracy function,” he said (D.G. Tendulkar: Mahatma p. 247), “is not the knowledge of facts, but right education. And the true function of journalism is to educate the public mind, not to stock the public mind with wanted and unwanted impression. A journalist has, therefore, to use his discretion, as to what to report and whenâ€¦â€¦?
**In one of his prayer speeches, he said: “the press was called the Fourth Estate. It was definitely a power but to misuse the power was criminal. He was a journalist himself and he wanted to appeal to fellow journalists to realize their responsibility and to carry on their work with no idea other than that of upholding the truthâ€¦”**
Gandhiji was against sensational writing and writings which created communal tension. Under the heading “Poisonous Journalism” in the Young India on May 28, 1931, he wrote: “I have before me extracts from journals containing some gruesome things. There is communal incitement, gross misrepresentation and incitement of political violence bordering on murder. It is of course easy enough for the Government to launch out prosecutions or to pass repressive ordinances. These fail to serve the purpose intended except very temporarily, and in no case they convert the writers, who often take the secret propaganda, when the open forum of the press is denied to them.”
He believed in self-control and self-discipline for journalists.

*Hindustan Times//***Sailen Chatterjee//**<https://www.mkgandhi.org/articles/the-journalist-in-gandhi.html>