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GRT MEDIA ETHICS OF JOURNALISTS, REPORTERS AND MEDIA HOUSES: SOME REFLECTIONS.

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Abstract:-Today the history of Indian Press is two centuries old. Radio is about 100 years old and Doordarshan is about 50 years old. We live, as we are often told, in the information age which is made possible by technological advances. The Indian Media is exploding day by day. Circulations of Newspapers and Magazine are surging. 24x7 TV News channels are witnessing unprecedented growth. Internet news portals are recording a good number of hits reaching out to audiences like never before. The technological development from printing to Internet, from pinhole camera to digital equipment, from gramophone to blue ray discs and from telegraph to mobile phones have changed every possible dimension of human communication and in the process is affecting changes in values and ethics.

Keywords:Media ethics ,Media houses ,Journalists ,technological advances.

INTRODUCTION:

Media ethics is one of the new branches of applied ethics in a democratic society. 'This professional ethics, concerned with a whole range of social issues such as –honesty and integrity in media coverage, objectivity, freedom of speech and expression, the media law, political influence, warfare and terrorism special conditions and national interests, issues connected with sexual or racial bias or stereotyping, the weighing of individual privacy against public interest, and censorship' (Thompson, 2002).Media has a responsible duty to play a vital role in building a universal harmonious global society.The media's association with the people, who they have duty to inform from time to time, has come up as a 'problem' in recent times in India. A single sentence in media is potential enough to change the minds of rulers resulting in the dawn of the sanity. A timely and meaningful photograph is enough to stall a war and evoke human empathy world over. This paper attempts to highlight on few incidences in the near past on unethical behavior of journalists and Media houses.

UNETHICAL BEHAVIOR OF JOURNALISTS AND REPORTERS.

1.Guwahati molestation incidence and media coverage:

The event which occurred on the night of July, 9, 2012 in Guwahati, triggered nationwide consciousness. A teenaged girl after attending a birthday party at a pub in the populated area of Guwahati was manhandled and tortured by a group of 20 to 30 youths. A local news channel “News Live” as its studio was nearby, recorded the shameless incident and broadcast it. The video went viral on the internet after the channel posted it on “Tube” that shocked the nation. The mob molested the girl for more than 30 minutes until passersby and police rescued her. But that channel's reporter and camera person failed to carry the human approach and were only interested in ratings. This led to an outcry all over the nation and the reporter had to eventually resign while his editor too had to step down. It involved social, ethical and professional questions of media persons.

2.Mangalore molestation incidence:

The unethical journalism again became a central point of debate with media just engaged in video recording the cruel attack on youngsters including molesting women in Mangalore neither protecting nor protesting nor even reporting. In Guwahati it was alleged involvement of TV channel reporter that shocked the whole nation. In Mangalore too the media was trying to project its 'recording' as the professional task covering the inhuman face behind. It was reported that a group of around 50 persons on 28th July 2012 at around 7: 30pm stormed into private home-state at Padil, Mangalore, and thrashed men and

women who were having a weekend party. While the persons celebrating a party pleaded that they were attending a birthday party, an activist slapped one of them. That attacking activist was found without a shirt. Women were slapped and jostled and were forced to take cover in one of the rooms. The attackers tried to force the girls to show their faces to a TV crew. The TV channel crew did not hesitate to film the episode while the mob was assaulting the young boys and girls. The video showed the men barging into the rooms of the resort, pushing around and slapping the women, molesting them and touching their private parts. One of the attackers grabbed a girl from behind, fondling her and forcibly lifting her face for the benefit of TV cameras. They also stripped the boys. All along, the TV crew kept filming, instead of trying to rescue the students. They justified the attack saying that the young men and women were spoiling the culture of India through their semi-nude dressing and indecent behaviour. The role of the TV channels became a discussion point as they were present as if they were invited to film a pre-arranged event. The crews of different TV channels were ready to shoot the attack. The Mangalore Police Commissioner viewed it as connivance of media with attackers and wanted approach Media Regulatory Body for going to resort creating a 'nationwide tamasha' without informing the police.

What is common in these two incidents of Guwahati and Mangalore is that the victims chose not to report or complain. The attacks are organized and raised doubts about involvement or indifference of media camera crew. If media is involved they will be accused along with those who attacked. It is not just indifference but it is absence of humanity. As a citizen the media person has an unwritten duty to either defend victims of such incidents or inform the police. Before being a journalist, he/she is the citizen and before that, a human being. If not as a human being, a journalist is expected to respect the position and use his resources to save the victims from the attack. Instead, using it as a news feed or subject of sensational story is deplorable. It may not amount to an offence, (if they are proved not partners in crime) but certainly it is undesirable, unethical and anti-professional activity.

3. Photo journalism of Nick Ut and Kevin Carter.

Contrast to the above mentioned incidences here are another two incidences of Journalism from abroad. At the time of Vietnam war a picture was photographed of a girl PhanThị Kim Phúc running down a road after a napalm bomb was dropped on the village of TrịngBàng in Viet Nam on June 8, 1972. That girl Kim Phúc escaped wrath of bomb by tearing off her burning clothes. This image not only saved her life but also secured Pulitzer Prize for the Photographer of Associated Press Mr. Nick Ut. "I cried when I saw her running," said Ut. He drove the badly burned child to a small hospital and helped her to survive. After 40 years the photographer was facilitated on June 8, 2012, by the survived Kim. Ut has performed his duty as a human being and won highest photo award for his performance of professional duty as a photographer. That was the case of ethics and professional responsibility going together.

There is another photograph of a vulture preying upon an emaciated Sudanese toddler near the village of Ayod in southern Sudan in March 1993. Photographer Kevin Carter has waited about 20 minutes, for vulture to spread its wings. It didn't. Carter snapped the haunting photograph and chased the vulture away. When published in New York Times on March 26, 1993, hundreds of readers asked whether child survived, leading the newspaper to run an unusual special editor's note saying the girl had enough strength to walk away from the vulture, but that her ultimate fate was unknown. Carter came under criticism for not helping the girl. One critical comment was: "The man adjusting his lens to take just the right frame of her suffering might just as well be a predator, another vulture on the scene." Carter eventually won the Pulitzer Prize for this photo, but he couldn't enjoy it. "I'm really, really sorry I didn't pick the child up," he confided in a friend. Consumed with the violence he'd witnessed, and haunted by the questions as to the little girl's fate, he committed suicide two months after receiving his Pulitzer by carbon-monoxide poisoning in Johannesburg, at 33. "I'm really, really sorry," he explained in a note left on the passenger seat beneath a knapsack. "The pain of life overrides the joy to the point that joy does not exist."

Here are two prize winning photographs and their story depicting how they served humanity. At the same, there are two incidents from India of media's indifference, if not involvement, showing the sad state of affairs reflecting decline in ethical standards of photo-journalism.

II. UNETHICAL BEHAVIOR OF MEDIA HOUSES:

Today mass media is suffering from two major crises, both of which have direct repercussions upon professional standards. One is an economic crisis, in which the cost of production now far outweighs earned income. The other is the crisis of credibility. It is not enough to maintain a free flow of information; that information must be gathered and disseminated with responsibility, objectivity and, above all, truthfully. The two crises inter-react. The more serious the economic crisis becomes, the more it involves the question of credibility.

1. Concept of News Hole: In USA, The New York Times may be the world's greatest news paper has the concept of 'News Hole'. That means they first lay out where the advertisement is going to be, in the afternoon when they plan for the following day's news paper. Then put the news in the gaps between the advertisements. Even in India national newspapers are less of news and views but full with advertisement. Many a times the complete first page if full with advertisement. The headlines are on the second page.

2. Paid news: A secrete advertisement

The phenomenon of “paid news” has acquired serious dimensions. Today it goes beyond the corruption of individual journalists and media companies and has become pervasive, structured and highly organized. In the process, it is undermining democracy in India. The phenomenon of “political paid news” became particularly noticeable during the 2009 general elections and thereafter during the elections to the assemblies of various states. The phenomenon acquired a new and even more destructive dimension by redefining political “news” or “reporting” on candidates standing for election – many such “news reports” would be published or broadcast perhaps only after financial transactions had taken place, almost always in a clandestine manner. According to the Press Council of India report on Paid news dated 30/7/2010, 'It is widely believed that many media companies, irrespective of the volume of their businesses and their profitability, were “selling” news space after arriving at an “understanding” with politicians and representatives of corporate entities that were advertisers. Space in publications and airtime were occupied by advertisements that were disguised as “news”.' Has our fourth estate, like Oscar Wilde said, become a sole estate, having sold out to mammon? The Editors Guild of India in its annual general meeting on December 22, 2009 in New Delhi strongly condemned the practice of paid news, which, in its opinion, whittled the foundations of Indian journalism. The Guild called upon all editors in the country to desist from publishing any form of advertisements which masquerade as news.

3. Making sensational news and propaganda model:

Today Media needs stories instead of plain news based on facts. It is therefore, often being quoted as "bad news is good news and good news is no news". We read newspapers, listen to radio and watch TV to find a murder, a molestation of a minor girl, an atrocity, a celebrity's divorce, an unholy alliance, a bomb blast, a vehicle plunging into depths, an insurgent attack, an encounter, a political coup, a plane crash where people died or hurt or made to suffer rather than the news on development. Very recently an electronic channel captured an event where a chain snatcher was beaten up by the mob; a policeman tied him to his motorcycle and dragged. It happened in Bihar State. Those visuals were telecast repeatedly creating a kind of vexation in the minds of onlookers.

The propaganda model is a conceptual model in political economy advanced by Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky that states how propaganda, including systemic biases, function in mass media. The model seeks to explain how populations are manipulated and how consent for economic, social and political policies is "manufactured" in the public mind due to this propaganda. The theory posits that the way in which news is structured (through advertising, media ownership, government sourcing and others) creates an inherent conflict of interest which acts as propaganda for undemocratic forces.

First presented in their 1988 book Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media, the "propaganda model" views the private media as businesses interested in the sale of a product—readers and audiences—to other businesses (advertisers) rather than that of quality news to the public. Describing the media's "societal purpose", Chomsky writes, "... the study of institutions and how they function must be scrupulously ignored, apart from fringe elements or a relatively obscure scholarly literature". Although the model was based mainly on the characterization of United States media, Chomsky and Herman believe the theory is equally applicable to any country that shares the basic economic structure and organizing principles which the model postulates as the cause of media biases.

CONCLUSION:

Indian Media and also Media abroad are today facing a major ethical crisis as never before because of globalization and new economic policies. The explosive growth of both print and electronic media, their ability to shape public opinion, and the fierce competition for TRPs has made the term 'media ethics' a mere paradox. Media is not just an observer but a skewed opinion maker. The recent trend has transcended the selling out of media to pure sensationalism. Shamefully, the real issues of real people have got lost somewhere in these blaring headlines and loud pulp fiction known as news. Today journalists need to have certain moral principles to be followed in his/her profession. Ethical guidelines are particular to each profession. Gone are days when journalism was considered to be an idealist profession and pen mightiness over sword was well mentioned. Now the journalist as well as the society has accepted that journalism is just a profession and media organizations are considered to be a business ventures. Who compete with each other to win a race ahead? Even in such a scenario, some basic ethical considerations need to be kept in mind by the journalists.

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