

Practical 5

Journalism Ethics and Responsibility

Responsibility of Journalism

“ Let noble thoughts come to us from every side” is the eternal message of the Rigveda given several millennia ago signifying the freedom of expression. The modern democratic edifice has been constructed drawing on the above and the individual liberty of expression of thought as the supreme principle. 'Journalism', the concrete form of this expression has grown in power over a period of time. It has become a coveted profession amongst the present day career conscious youth and I am sure I find here today a most promising group many of whom will surely find place amongst the leading journalists in the years to come. The fundamental objective of journalism is to serve the people with news, views, comments and information on matters of public interest in a fair, accurate, unbiased: and decent manner and language. In 1948 the United Nations made the Universal Declaration of Human Rights laying down certain freedoms for the mankind. Article 19 of the Declaration enunciates the most basic of these freedoms, thus: “Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression’, the right includes the freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek and receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers”.

Code of Conduct

The media all over the world has voluntarily accepted that code of ethics should cover at least the following areas of conduct.

- i. Honesty and fairness; duty to seek the views of the subject of any critical reportage in advance of publication; duty to correct factual errors; duty not to falsify pictures or to use them in a misleading fashion;
- ii. duty to provide an opportunity to reply to critical opinions as well as to critical factual reportage;

- iii. appearance as well as reality of objectivity; some codes prohibit members of the press from receiving gifts'
- iv. respect for privacy;
- v. duty to distinguish between facts and opinion;
- vi. duty not to discriminate or to inflame hatred on such grounds as race, nationality, religion, or gender; some codes call on the press to refrain from mentioning the race, religion or nationality of the subject of news stories unless relevant to the story; some call for coverage which promotes tolerance;
- vii. duty not to use dishonest means to obtain information;
- viii. duty not to endanger people;
- ix. general standards of decency and taste;
- x. duty not to prejudge the guilt of an accused and to publish the dismissal of charges against or acquittal of anyone about whom the paper previously had reported that charges had been filed or that a trial had commenced

Journalism Standards

The mandate of the Press Council of India, as well as similar bodies across the world is to specifically promote the standards of the media by building up for it a code of conduct. It is to be appreciated that our legislation very wisely did not entrust on the council the task of 'laying down' a code of conduct. For ethics cannot be mired down in a strait jacket.