

## GANDHIJI AND DEVELOPMENTAL JOURNALISM

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### Introduction by Editor

*"A prolific writer, ... has to have self assurance. He can't sit around doubting the quality of his writing. Rather, he has to love his own writing..."*

*– Isaac Asimov, in his autobiography, It's been a Good Life<sup>1</sup> .*

*Gandhiji was undoubtedly the most prolific and indefatigable writer among his contemporary world leaders or since then. His complete works spans 50,000 pages and 100 volumes, and apart from the several letters, lectures, informal talks and notes that were written by him, bulk of this material is what he wrote in the various journals and newspapers that he contributed to, if not edited himself. He wrote his first newspaper article at the age of 21 in London and subsequently had been editing one journal or another between 1906 till 1948<sup>2</sup>, contributing every week to the journals and in 3 languages, viz., Hindi, Gujarati and English.*

*On May 3rd 1947, Gandhiji had to stop his prayer meeting as there was objection to the reciting of verses from the Koran in the prayer meeting. His prayer meetings had recitation from all religions and there was an objection to it in the surcharged environment of speculation of the partition that was still not official. Newspapers were rife with headlines that stoked apprehensions and unknown fear people still had not visualised even as the excitement of Independence from the British yoke must have been great. One such report had carried that morning as well and when Gandhiji started to speak after the silent prayer on the report.*

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*"...I want to talk about is the Press. One of the newspapers has published reports about the Viceroy's talks with our Ministers. They have also circulated reports about the discussions at the meeting of the Congress Working Committee. .... It has drawn certain conclusions about the Viceroy's plans. It is highly improper that newspapers should indulge in such speculation. They should let the Viceroy himself make a public announcement about what he intends doing. And why should any surmises be made even about discussions at the Working Committee meeting? Only the official report issued by the Working Committee should have been published.*

*I know there are a great many journalists who scoop up bits from different places and manage to build up a story. But I would say that these people are grabbing at left-overs of a meal. It is not the function of a journalist to depend on left-overs. ... what right do we have to give publicity to his (Viceroy's) actions without consulting him? What right does anyone have to wheedle information out of everybody by sweet words, draw inferences from here and there and then publish them in the paper?*

*I too have been a journalist for the past fifty years. I know how newspapers are run. I also know how newspapers are run in England and America. But why should we ape the evil practices prevailing in England and America? We shall perish if we imitate the bad things in others.*

*... I totally disapprove of this kind of journalism. Through you I wish to address myself to all journalists that they should not try to make money in this manner. If we cannot earn our livelihood in a straightforward manner, let us perish. But why should this journalist talk in a manner that would harm the country? He has even invented a headline no one would have dreamt of. It would be good to ignore whatever is unwholesome about England and America and adopt their good points.*

*... We have led a crusade of dharma and it is with dharma that we are going to win our independence. I would request journalists also to help us in this."*

*[From Hindi] Prarthana-Pravachan—Part I, pp. 62-6*

*Source: Speech at the Prayer Meeting, New Delhi, May 3rd 1947, CWMG Vol. 95, pg. 14-17*

*This moral scale to evaluate journalism sounds near alien in our times of eyeball-catching and viewer rating-oriented news grabbing. If the post-visual media journalism and launch of the 24x7 news channel, conspired to cook-up a daily conspiracy to keep its viewers glued to their television, the arrival of the social media and the potential of instant disbursement of news through people's phones has meant a continuous need to create excitement through news, well-captured by the term, 'infotainment', where validating of information is given a pass to its capacity to titillate the viewers. To this is added the citizen's capacity to compete in news creation as much as distribution through the web, meaning that journalists are competing with the medium, speed apart from the content or its quality. A far cry from the days Gandhiji asked journalists to earn their livelihood*

*in a straightforward manner. Today's journalists may be surprised to know that he avoided advertisements completely in his journals and newspapers for a long period of time<sup>3</sup>.*

*Development Journalism has of course been deeply impacted by information and communication technology. Today, initiatives like the People's Archive of Rural India (PARI), have created spaces for ordinary people with capacity to generate news and reportage to become journalists and be heard, whereas, in other spaces, it has also created space for wild speculation be spread mindlessly through the social media and be consumed and acted upon by ignorant masses. The need for journalists to be aware of their responsibility and ensure that they not merely provide content of relevance, but also content that can be relied upon, is even more important in the current times. In today's context, what does Gandhi have to offer to journalism and Development journalism in particular? What concerned him? What were the issues he wrote on apart from the political ones? The article by Prof. Murthy and Dr. Akanksha Shukla highlights this aspect of Gandhiji in his work as a journalist and highlights some very insightful pronouncements on women's rights, education, and birth control among other topics. It kindles our interest to get to know the first development journalist that Gandhi was and what drove him to be a journalist for five decades.*

**Note:** *All emphasis in the article by the Editor*

"I have taken up journalism not for its sake, but merely as aid to what I have conceived to be my mission in life. My mission is to teach by example and precept under severe restraint the use of the matchless weapon of satyagraha which is a direct corollary of non-violence and truth...To be true to my faith, therefore, 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 peep 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 fine exercise to remove these words"

Gandhiji, Young India, July 2, 1925

### **Origin of Developmental Journalism**

Developmental journalism focuses on developmental issues as it considers that socio-economic and cultural issues become part of development, however, the news coverage of development issues follows the principles of mainstream journalism. Further, developmental journalism contextualises developmental issues keeping in view the geography, people, events, and objects. Moreover, developmental journalism critically evaluates the relevance of developmental initiatives as its objective is to benefit the stakeholders of development.

In 1967, with the coinage of the term, developmental journalism by Alan Chalkley, it gained popularity with the creation of Press Foundation of Asia, financed jointly by Asian Newspapers and Ford Foundation (Altshull, 1984:151). Nevertheless, those who conceived developmental journalism in

the beginning believed that national development depended heavily on economic development and felt that journalists trained in economics could report competently about problems pertaining to a developing nation. Therefore, Alan Chalkley's book, published in 1968, *The Manual of Developmental Journalism* which laid emphasis on economics suggested training for journalists in economic reporting. Alan Chalkley (1968) observed that developmental journalism should inform the people while giving facts to the readers and in this context, a development journalist should use simple words while avoiding jargon. Further, when the concept was gaining currency, different experts offered various definitions to developmental journalism. Vilanilam (1975) viewed developmental journalism as that "deals with the process of development in developing nations". Further, Aggarwal (1978a) felt that developmental journalism should report the developmental processes instead of mere reporting the events. But, development news need not emphasise on happenings that take place at a particular moment or on a particular day, but should focus on happenings that will take place over a period of time. His view of development news is "to cover the entire gamut of socio-economic and cultural development- even non-development problems as well as prospects". Furthermore, Aggarwal (1978b) reasoned out that development news need not differ in its treatment from regular news or investigative reporting. Moreover, it can cover development issues at the macro and micro levels and can adopt different forms at national and international levels. The perspective of a development journalist is to critically examine, assess and report the relevance of a development project to national and local needs, while explaining "the differences between its

impacts on people as claimed by the government official/s and as it actually is". Ogan (1982), while agreeing with Aggarwal, identified the role of developmental journalism as critical examination while reporting the relevance, enactment and impact of development programmes to the country. Even the Second Press Commission (1982) noted, "Development reporting should tell the story of what is going well as well as what is going wrong. It should investigate the reasons for success as well as for failure, at different places under different conditions, of various development programmes affecting the lives of common people". Contrary to these definitions, veteran journalist with leftist leanings, Nikhil Chakravarty views developmental journalism in a different angle. Developmental journalism, according to Chakravarty (1983), embraces the magnificent story of the toiling man producing the wealth of the nation, on which he stakes his claim to be its master. Obviously, in presenting this fascinating drama, the media person has to be adequately equipped. And the basic equipment for this job is the faith in the common man, and the endeavour to be identified with his life so that the media may be able to articulate with sensitivity his moments of triumph and tribulations, his joys and sorrows. More specifically, Chakravarty understands developmental journalism from the Marxist perspective of the common man producing the wealth of the nation and he holds the means of production. Whatever be the definitions, largely, developmental journalism aims at accelerating developmental processes to usher in remarkable change in the quality of life of large sections of the people.

### **Gandhiji and Developmental Journalism**

However, Mahatma Gandhiji in India was practicing developmental journalism even before the term, developmental journalism was coined in Asia. As a journalist, Mahatma Gandhiji expressed the view that the newspaper's role was to educate the masses, and hence he was writing immensely on contemporary topics. For instance, Krishna Murthy (1966:79-80) observed that Mahatma Gandhi wrote on such issues "as Hindu-Muslim unity, removal of untouchability, prohibition, promotion of khadi and other village industries, and the popularisation of spinning wheel as a means of supplementing the income of the semi-starved and unemployed village peasants in India". The Press was considered to be an effective medium for nationalists as well as social reform groups during Independence movement in India. The Nationalist Press, for instance, exposed some social evils like casteism, child marriages, ban on remarriage of widows, social, legal, and other inequalities in society while carrying out a massive campaign to educate the people on the eradication of untouchability" (Krishna Murthy, 1966; Desai, 1993:237; Yadav, 1985). They thought that journalism was an instrument for them in awakening the masses socially and politically during freedom movement (Yadav, 1985; Parthasarathy, 1991).

Thus, Gandhiji himself set an example to the journalists in practicing developmental journalism with an intention to usher positive changes in society. He often stated that the intent of newspapers was only public service, and hence he used them for writing on various issues such as birth control, women upliftment, health and so on.

For instance, he wrote a slew of articles on birth control in *Young India* and *Harijan* beginning in 1925 as he was against the use of contraceptives to control the population. On April 4, 1925, he wrote: "If it is contended that birth-control is necessary for the nation because of over-population, I dispute the proposition. It has never been proved. In my opinion, by a proper land system, better agriculture and a supplementary industry, this country is capable of supporting twice as many people as they are in it today." On another occasion, he was candid in saying about women's problems of forcible use of contraceptives. He wrote in *Harijan* on May 2, 1936: "To ask India's women to take to contraceptives is to say the least, putting the cart before the horse. The first thing is to free her from mental slavery, to teach her the sacredness of her body, and to teach her the dignity of national service and the service of humanity." At the same time, he was a visionary though he denied it, and he foresaw the things that would happen in the coming decades. One trait of a development journalist is that he/she should signal the coming events before the people would understand the consequences of any action (Murthy, 2010). Gandhiji as a development journalist continued to write about the birth control methods in *Harijan* on March 28, 1936. He said: "I know what havoc the secret vice has played among school boys and school girls. The introduction contraceptives under the name of science and the imprimatur of known leaders of society has intensified the complication and made the task of reformers who work for purity of social well-nigh impossible..." However, in one occasion in *Young India* (April 10, 1930), he asked men not to degrade women. He wrote: 'To call woman the weaker sex is a libel; it's man's injustice to woman. If by strength is meant

brute strength, then indeed is woman less brute than man. If by strength is meant moral power, then woman is immeasurably man's superior...If non-violence is the law of our being, the future is with woman." Further, in 1946, he advised women "not to look for men for protection." "They must rely on their own strength and purity of character and on God" (*Harijan*, September 15, 1946).

In fact, Gandhiji wrote articles in *Harijan*, for educating rural masses on consumption of food and eating habits. Gandhiji wrote in *Harijan* on February 15, 1935 in an article entitled 'Green Leaves and their Food Value' about consumption of milk and banana. In the article, he narrated his experience that for nearly five months, he was living on uncooked foods. He advised the rural population to eat green leaves in their meals and thereby they could get rid of many ailments. In another article, he discussed about cow's milk versus buffalo milk. However, Gandhi warned against consumption of machine – polished rice. He observed that polishing of rice removes an overcoat containing vitamins, especially B1. He explained that lacking those vitamins, Indians, for most of whom rice is the chief staple food, would suffer from numerous debilitating diseases, notably beriberi. On few occasions, Gandhiji wrote on the nutritional value of the mango kernel and the groundnut or peanut, and informed readers that 'the improvement of seed, the proper use of fertiliser and the proper care of cattle could solve some of the basic problems of life'. He wrote further in *Harijan* on August 29, 1936 that there was a need to concentrate on the village development and the village industries must manufacture the things mainly for the use of villagers bereft of exploiting others.

His view of an ideal Indian village was explained by him in *Harijan* of July 26, 1942 : "It is a complete republic, independent of its neighbors for its vital wants, and yet interdependent for many other wants in which dependence is necessity. Thus, every village's first concern will be to grow its own food crops and cotton for its cloth. It should have a reserve for its cattle, recreation and playground for adults and children. Then if there is more land available, it will grow useful money crops, thus excluding ...tobacco, opium, and the like. The village will maintain a village theatre, school and public hall. It will have its own water works ensuring clean supply. This can be done through controlled wells and tanks (reservoirs). Education will be compulsory up to the final basic course. As far as possible, every activity will be conducted on a cooperative basis.' To this modest blueprint, which, however, seemed like a sketch of heaven to India's permanently underfed farmers, Gandhi added another wild dream: electricity in every village home (Fischer, 1994).

Gandhiji as a development journalist showed an example to the present day newspapers how to practice developmental journalism. Further, after Independence, that mission was partly carried by researchers as well as newspapers in conducting a few experiments in developmental journalism to accelerate rural development. Selden Menefee and Audrey Menefee conducted an interesting study of mimeographed newspaper in Mysore containing some developmental information. Known as Menefee experiment, a small newspaper called *Gram Samachar* (village news) was published in Kannada, the local knowledge, for 13 weeks to test the effects of communication on the villagers. For the purpose, four villages were chosen near Mysore in Karnataka. The researchers found an increase in

the information level of the regular readers because of the newspaper (Menefee and Menefee, 1967).

In 1969, B.G.Vergheese, the then editor of *The Hindustan Times*, New Delhi proved that the development reporting would be helpful to accelerate development. Vergheese asked a team of reporters to write periodically about Chattera, a small village in Haryana, about its people, their problems and the process of development taking in that village (Yadav, 1991). Aggarwal (1978a) reported: "Our village, Chattera... is a bold attempt to give rural orientation to the predominantly urban-based and elite-oriented newspapers in the country. It is the form of journalism that can prove of immense help in bridging the rural-urban communication gap in the Third World".

### Conclusion

Gandhiji as a role model in journalism pioneered development journalism and hence the modern Indian Press can emulate Gandhian perspective of developmental journalism. Thus, the press needs to give top priority to developmental campaigns for the benefit of the public. As a socially responsible press, the newspapers in the country must cover developmental issues by increasing the frequency of news coverage issues while dedicating more space to them. However, development-related issues appear in the newspaper when a crisis or an issue hit the country, and newspapers can signal the on-set of crisis instead of reporting the post-events. However, the growth of print media has been a phenomenon in the last five years in the country with the increase in circulation or readership. With the increase in the reach of the newspapers, the invention of technology and also the growth of

literacy have helped the newspaper industry in newspapers orient themselves towards taking part the country to expand its readership base. Also, the in national development. young generation of readers will be benefited if the

### Notes

1. Quoted in the article on Ordinary and Prolific Writers, <https://writingcooperative.com/isaac-asi-mov-on-the-ordinary-vs-prolific-writer-c460a78b39d7>.
2. Understanding Gandhi, Dharampal.
3. <https://www.mkgandhi.org/j.a.p/journalist.html>.

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