



HISTORICAL ANALYSIS OF MEDIA ETHICS

Dr. Kisholoy Choudhury and Bhanupriya Daimari

ISSN: 2249-894X
 IMPACT FACTOR : 5.7631 (UIF)
 UGC APPROVED JOURNAL NO. 48514
 VOLUME - 8 | ISSUE - 8 | MAY - 2019

**Assistant Professor(s) , Department of Political Science
 Tezpur College, Tezpur, Assam, India.**



ABSTRACT:

The concept of media ethics has gained popularity in recent times. This is due to the fact that people have recognized the responsibility with which the mass media is vested with. The mass media acts as the mirror of its times. It has become so powerful that it can alter governments in power. Therefore, the media houses and media persons ought to follow ethics while performing their work and thereby become more responsible for the overall benefit of the society. The absence of ethics in the working of the media may lead to dangerous consequences, which may disrupt the entire society and the social fabric. For a proper understanding of the

morals of media, the study of its history and the background from which it emerged is indispensable. History helps media ethics by showing the established path and thereby helps in evaluating possible actions and policies.

KEYWORDS: *Mass media, Media ethics, Global media ethics, Journalism, Professionalism.*

MEDIA ETHICS

Media Ethics may be described as the ethics which media persons and media houses are required to follow in their profession. Contemporary Philosophy classifies ethics into descriptive ethics, meta ethics and normative ethics. Among these, descriptive ethics stand for actual moral practices, beliefs and traditions. Meta ethics tend to examine and study the meaning and usages of moral terms such as 'good, right' etc. But, it is normative ethics which practically studies what activities are right or wrong, good or bad. It thus makes moral arguments too as

to what is right and wrong and thereby subsequently making judgments as well. For convenience of study and relevance, the history related to media ethics has been studied under two contexts in this chapter namely, global context and Indian context.

GLOBAL CONTEXT

Since 1609, when the oldest newspaper was published in Germany, at various times, there has been debate and discussions about journalistic conduct, media use and freedom etc. But it was not until the end of the 19th century that a distinct relationship between the press and the society was sought to be established.

When gradually journalism took on the path of professionalism,

moral practices and standards raised their head throughout the eighteenth and the nineteenth century. The criticism of the Press in terms of ethics came to be conceived only at the end of the nineteenth Century. Till then, ethics as a term in the context of journalism rarely appeared anywhere. It was only in 1889 that a specific article on journalistic ethics was written by a Catholic writer, William Samuel Lilly (1890) in 'The Forum'. The article titled "The Ethics of Journalism" by W.S Lilly later become one of the chapters in his book 'On Right and Wrong' (1890). In this article Lilly (1890) argued that journalists were given freedom of the press in order to state facts, to critically analyze upon them, to denounce wrong doings of the society and

to suggest reforms if any, but according to Lilly truth was hard to come by for the journalists. After W.S. Lilly set the field, critics of the U.S. Press in the 1980's complained about two major problems plaguing the Press namely sensationalism and dishonesty in journalism.

The journalism of the 1890's also came to be criticized for the negative effects it seemed to create upon the readers. Consequently, a need was felt by the world community at large for a kind of instrument which could regulate the affairs of the Press. During this time the critics of the press strongly condemned and denounced newspapers which sought readership by publishing scandals, murders, prostitution etc. Besides sensationalism, another problem addressed by the critics was dishonesty by the newspapers. To sum up the fact, sex scandals and sensationalism sold like hot cakes.

The creation of a free press in the Western world started centuries ago roughly in the 1600s. It was only by the end of the 19th century that a free press, along modern lines, could be established. In England too, the press had to overcome resistance from Monarchs, parliament and courts to establish its independent status. Since the 1980's several factors contributed to give communication ethics a distinct shape. The press and the media emerged more as a complex and diversified social institution. During this time journalism as a subject of education came to be seriously recognized for the first time in the world especially in the Western world. Subsequently, university programmes in the field of journalism emerged mainly due to the fact that the press had to regain its lost status amidst heated public criticism. In the 20th century media ethics fully established its identity and even focused its interest upon the international arena.

One of the leading voices and the oldest organization in the United States of America, on the subject of journalistic Standards and Ethics, is the 'Society of Professional Journalists'. The Preamble to its Code of Ethics states: "Public enlightenment is the forerunner of justice and the foundation of democracy. The duty of the journalist is to further those ends by seeking truth and providing a fair and comprehensive account of events and issues. Conscientious journalists from all media and specialties strive to serve the public with thoroughness and honesty. Professional integrity is the cornerstone of a journalist's credibility."

The code of ethics in media also owes its origin to the suggestions provided by the 1947 Hutchins Commission which was formed during the World War II (1939-1945), which suggested that newspapers, broadcasters and journalists had started to become more responsible for journalism and thus they should be held accountable. The guidelines for such suggestions were viewed upon two important ideas. The primary rule is that "whoever appreciates an exceptional proportion of opportunity, similar to an expert writer, has a commitment to society to utilize their opportunity and powers mindfully." (Straubhaar, LaRose & Davenport, 2010). This rule is vital with the goal that concerned individuals don't abuse their expert power and in the event that they do as such they can be held at risk for the equivalent. The second rule that was built up is "society's welfare is foremost, more significant than individual professions or even individual rights." (Straubhaar, Larose & Davenport, 2010).

This rule laid significance on the way that the general public everywhere is unmistakably more significant than any individual, and in this manner, individuals ought to be considered in charge of their activities since a lion's share of individuals of the general public might be influenced by flighty and poor conduct of a specific person. The Hutchins Commission likewise included another five rules implied explicitly for the press. 'Present significant news, exact and isolated from sentiment' (Straubhaar, Larose & Davenport, 2010). 'Fill in as a discussion for the trading of remark and analysis and to extend access to various perspectives.' (Straubhaar, Larose & Davenport, 2010). 'Task a delegate image of the constituent gatherings in the public arena' by maintaining a strategic distance from generalizations by including minority gatherings.' (Straubhaar, Larose & Davenport, 2010). 'Explain the objectives and estimations of society; understood was an intrigue to abstain from pandering to the most minimized shared factor.' (Straubhaar, Larose & Davenport, 2010). 'Give wide inclusion of what was thought about society.' (Straubhaar, Larose & Davenport, 2010).

All of these guidelines are important because the press is needed to maintain a neutral viewpoint, providing the basic facts and allowing for readers to come up with their own opinions from

the news that they report. The need felt by the world for such a mechanism paved the way for setting up of the first Press Council known as the 'Court of Honor' for the Press in Sweden in 1916. This marked the trend to the setting up of similar other bodies throughout the world. Though ethics has a very long history, journalistic ethics however can be said to be a relatively recent philosophy. However, early evidence of ethics in mass communication was noticed at the dawn of the twentieth century as a reaction against the excesses of the extreme freedom of the Libertarian theory of the Press. The Libertarian theory of the press was such that in its most basic form, it advocates that the Press should be completely free to publish whatever it likes. The abuse of this freedom gave rise to such negative journalistic practice as yellow journalism characterized by irresponsibility, sensationalism and character assassination. By the 20th century, the Press had suffered its worst abuse and the time was ripe for the emergence of a free but responsible Press. Then came into existence the Social Responsibility theory of the Press characterized by the rise of professional journalistic association with code of ethics designed to encourage responsible behavior by the members of the Press. The social responsibility theory stresses the need to reconcile the independence of the Press with its obligation to the society.

Journalistic ethic therefore in the view of Merrill and Lowenstein (1974) and in Sambe (2005, p.266) "is a branch of philosophy that helps journalist to determine what is right to do, by giving the journalist standards by which he can judge actions to be right or wrong, good or bad, responsible or irresponsible". The purpose of the ethics in mass communication is to assist journalist to be more moral professionally, the importance of journalist ethics lies in the fact that the journalist who has a concern for ethics obviously cares about good and right actions, and such concern leads him or her to seek the highest good in journalism, thereby increasing his or her authenticity both as a person and as a journalist. Ethics should therefore saturate the whole process of mass communication rather than be regarded merely as a minor aspect of communication, this is because, a concern for ethics is indispensable in the practice of journalism and it instills in the journalist a continuing sensitivity and consciousness for his every action, decision and integrates with his total search for truth. It also gives him greater awareness of himself, of others and of the consequences of interpersonal relations.

A concern for journalistic ethics is the key plank in any journalistic platform, it is the alpha and omega of public communication (Sambe, 2005). The practice of journalism or mass communication is such that operates within an organized social system controlled or governed by rules and regulations. The activities of the journalist can impact on and be impacted upon by other elements existing within this social system. Therefore, journalists can only live up to their responsibilities and withstand societal pressures by understanding the legal rights and privileges accruing to them within the social system, they also need to know the limitations, constraints or challenges facing them in the pursuits of their professional callings (Asemah, 2009).

GLOBAL MEDIA ETHICS

In his article on Global media Ethics, Stephen J.A Ward sees that, Global media morals goes for building up an extensive arrangement of standards and guidelines for the act of news-casting during a time of worldwide news media. Today, news media use correspondence innovation to accumulate content, video and pictures from around the globe with remarkable speed and changing degrees of publication control. A similar innovation enables news media to disperse this data to gatherings of people dissipated the world over.

In spite of these worldwide patterns, most codes of morals contain measures for news associations or relationship in explicit nations. Worldwide relationship of columnists exist, and some have built announcements and standards to be followed in the act of reporting. Be that as it may, no worldwide code has been received by most significant columnist affiliations and news associations.

In the 1970's there was an endeavor to build up an alleged 'New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO)' incited by worries that Western media and its qualities were compromising the social qualities in non-Western, creating countries. The principle players in NWICO were the neutral countries, United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)

and the Sean McBride Commission. The suggestions of the McBride report in 1980, *One World, Many Voices*, sketched out another worldwide media request. The report was supported by UNESCO individuals. The USA and Great Britain left UNESCO in the mid 1980s contrary to NWICO.

The endeavor to change the worldwide media framework is a lot more extensive in degree than an endeavor to develop a worldwide media morals. The previous takes a gander at what standards should direct media professionals when they face challenges in taking choices on what to report. The last goes past moral reflections to incorporate the financial aspects, governmental issues, and innovation of media.

NEED OF GLOBAL ETHICS

A capable worldwide morals is required in this present reality where news media unite a majority of various religions, conventions and ethnic gatherings. The duty of news media is to report issues and occasions in a manner that mirrors this worldwide majority of perspectives; to rehearse a news coverage that enables various gatherings to see each other better. Reports ought to be exact, adjusted and different, as made a decision from a universal point of view. A one-sided and parochial news-casting can unleash devastation in a firmly connected worldwide world. Except if revealed appropriately, North American perusers may neglect to comprehend the reasons for viciousness in Middle East, or a starvation in Africa. One-sided reports may impel ethnic gatherings in a locale to assault one another. An intolerant, enthusiastic news media can rush populaces into war. Additionally, news coverage with a worldwide viewpoint is expected to enable residents to comprehend the overwhelming worldwide issues of destitution, natural corruption, mechanical disparities and political insecurity.

Worldwide reporting morals suggests a firm journalistic reaction to internal looking dispositions, for example, extraordinary nationalism. It was aggravating to perceive how some news associations amid the Iraq War of 2003 so immediately shed their peacetime duties of free, fair revealing when the drums of war began thumping. In this manner at different occasions and conditions the worldwide network everywhere felt the requirement for the presence of media morals in the realm of news coverage.

INDIAN CONTEXT

In India, the first Press Commission which was set up in 1954 recommended the setting up of a Press Council in India, and on 4 th July' 1966, the Press Council of India was set up as an autonomous, statutory and quasi judicial body to regulate the Press in India. The objectives envisaged by the council were: "to safeguard the freedom of the press", "to ensure on the part of the Press the maintenance of high standards of public taste and to foster due sense of the rights and responsibilities of citizenship" and "to encourage the growth of sense of responsibility and public service among all those engaged in the profession of journalism."

The Commission also suggested that the council should consist of men who would command general confidence and respect of the profession and should have 25 members excluding the Chairman. The Chairman was to be a person who was or had been a Judge of the High Court and was to be nominated by the chief Justice of India.

Subsequently, The Press Council of India was first constituted on 4 th July, 1966 as an autonomous, statutory, quasi-judicial body, with Shri Justice J R Mudholkar, the then Judge of the Supreme Court, as Chairman. The Press Council Act, 1965, listed the following functions of the Council in furtherance of its objects:

- to help newspapers to maintain their independence;
- to build up a code of conduct for newspapers and journalists in accordance with high professional standards;
- to ensure on the part of newspapers and journalists the maintenance of high standards of public taste and foster a due sense of both the rights and responsibilities of citizenship;

- to encourage the growth of a sense of responsibility and public service among all those engaged in the profession of journalism;
- to keep under review any development likely to restrict the supply and dissemination of news of public interest and importance;
- to keep under review such cases of assistance received by any newspaper or news agency in India from foreign sources, as are referred to it by the Central Government.
- to promote the establishment of such common service for the supply and dissemination of news to newspapers as may, from time to time, appear to it to be desirable;
- to provide facilities for the proper education and training of persons in the profession of journalism;
- to promote a proper functional relationship among all classes of persons engaged in the production or publication of newspapers;
- to study developments which may tend towards monopoly or concentration of ownership of newspapers, including a study of the ownership or financial structure of newspapers, and if necessary, to suggest remedies thereof;
- to promote technical or other research;
- to do such other acts as may be incidental or conducive to the discharge of the above functions.

The Press Council of India Act of 1965 provided that the Council shall consist of a Chairman and 25 other members. Of the 25 members, 3 were to represent the two Houses of Parliament, 13 were to be from amongst the working journalists, of which not less than 6 were to be editors who did not own or carry on the business of management of newspapers and the rest were to be the persons having special knowledge or practical experience in respect of education, science, law, literature and culture. Through an amendment in 1970, the membership of the Council was raised by one to provide a seat for persons managing the news agencies. The Chairman under the Act on 1965, was to be nominated by the Chief Justice of India. Of the three members of parliament, two representing Lok Sabha were to be nominated by the Speaker of the Lok Sabha and one representing Rajya Sabha, was to be nominated by the Chairman of the Rajya Sabha. The remaining 22 members were to be selected by a three-man Selection Committee comprising the Chief Justice of India, Chairman of the Press Council and a nominee of the President of India. The Chairman and the members were to hold office for a period of three years provided that no member could hold office for a period exceeding six years in the aggregate. The amending Act of 1970 also introduced several other provisions in the Act.

The manner of selection of persons of special knowledge or practical experience was specified. It provided that of the three persons to be nominated from among such people, one each shall be nominated by the University Grants Commission, the Bar Council of India and the Sahitya Academy. It also provided for raising the membership of the Council to give one seat to the persons managing the news agencies. Out of the six seats for proprietors and managers of newspapers, two each were earmarked for big, medium and small newspaper. No working journalist who owned or carried on the business of management of newspapers could now be nominated in the category of working journalists. Also, it was specified that not more than one person interested in any newspaper or group of newspapers under the same control, could be nominated from the categories of editors, other working journalists, proprietors and managers. Under the original Act, the Chairman was nominated by the Chief Justice of India. But, after the amendment, nomination of the Chairman was also left to the Nominating Committee. The Council set up under the Act of 1965 functioned till December 1975. During the Internal Emergency, the Act was repealed and the Council abolished with effect from 01/01/1976.

In the year 1978 a fresh enactment was brought forward in the Parliament which sought to form a new Council and the institution came to be reviewed in the year 1979 with the very same object of preserving the freedom of the Press and of maintaining and improving the standards of Press in India. The present Council is a body corporate having perpetual succession. It consists of a Chairman and 28 other members. Of the 28 members, 13 represent the working journalists of whom 6 are to be editors of newspapers and remaining 7 are to be working journalists other than editors. 6 are to be from among persons who own or carry on the business of management of newspapers. One is to be from among the persons who manage news agencies. Three are to be persons having special knowledge

or practical experience in respect of education and science, law and literature and culture. The remaining five are to Members of Parliament: three from Lok Sabha, and two from Rajya Sabha. This new Act provided for selection of the Chairman by a Committee consisting of the Chairman of the Rajya Sabha, the speaker of Lok Sabha and a person elected by the members of the Council from among themselves. The twenty representatives of the Press are nominated by the associations of the aforesaid categories of the newspapers and news agencies notified for the purpose by the Council in each category. One member each is nominated by the University Grants Commission, the Bar Council of India and the Sahitya Academy. Of the five Members of Parliament, three are nominated by the Speaker of the Lok Sabha and two by the Chairman of the Rajya Sabha. The term of the Chairman and the members of the Council is three years. A retiring member is eligible for re nomination for not more than one term.

The objectives of the newly formed Press Council remained substantially the same as were laid down under the Act of 1965. But the functions have undergone some changes by way of incorporating three important functions. These were (a) promoting the establishment of such common services for the supply and dissemination of news to newspapers as may, from time to time, appear to it to be desirable; (b) providing facilities for proper education and training of persons in the profession of journalism; and (c) promoting technical or other research. In addition, the Act of 1978 lists two new functions of the Council: (i) to undertake studies of foreign newspapers, including those brought out by any embassy or any other representative in India of a foreign State, their circulation and impact; and, (ii) to undertake such studies as may be entrusted to the Council and to express its opinion in regard to any matter referred to it by the Central Government. The other functions remained more or less the same as enumerated in the Act of 1965.

CONCLUSION

In this way, it was desired by the world community that the media is supposed to adhere to ethical considerations in its work; and also that the affairs of the media should be regulated for the greater interest of the society. Such an outlook led to the gradual development of media ethics and throughout the world the media came to be regulated by the creation of certain statutory bodies which introduced certain basic norms and principles which media persons were required to follow. However the level of success or failure of such regulatory bodies varies throughout the world. Also, the question as to how far the media practices such ethics in its work is determined by cultural considerations, social fabric, political scenario, legal enactments etc and thus varies in different countries.

Accordingly, in the Indian context too, there are laws, regulations and regulatory bodies which spread out the ethical norms, but the success or failure of such enactments and authorities is still a question of debate and has reached out to the people of the entire region compared to the earlier print media. However the growth of the electronic media in India has also brought with it the many dangers associated with false reporting, paid news, fabricated news, sensationalism in news etc. Therefore the issue of media ethics in India has now come to the forefront and has assumed even greater significance.

REFERENCES:

1. Aggarwal, V.B. & Gupta, V.S. (2002). *Handbook of Journalism and Mass Communication*. New Delhi: Concept Publishing Company.
2. B. Garrison. (1996). *Successful Strategies for Computer-Assisted Reporting*. NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
3. Banik, G. (1997). *Journalism in Tripura*. Calcutta, West Bengal, India: Public Relations Society of India (Eastern Region).
4. Barua, L. K. (2010). *India's North-East Frontier: The Colonial Legacy*. Guwahati, Assam, India: Spectrum Publishers.
5. Baruah, S. (2005). *Durable Disorder: Understanding the Politics of Northeast India*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
6. Basak, R. (1995). *The History of North-Eastern India*. Calcutta, West Bengal, India: Firma KLM Private Limited.

7. Benedikter, T. (2010). *Dialects, Languages and Government Policy: The Protection of Linguistic Rights in India*. Kolkata, West Bengal, India.
8. Bhargava, G. (2005). *The Press in India*. New Delhi, New Delhi, India: National Book Trust. .
9. Bhattacharjee, A. (1972). *The Indian Press: Profession to Industry*. Delhi: Vikas Publications.
10. Bhaumik, S. (2009). *Troubled Periphery: Crisis of India's North East*. New Delhi, India: Sage Publications India Pvt Ltd.
11. Chakravarty, S. (1997). *Press and Media: The Global Dimensions*. Delhi: Sage Publications.
12. Chatterji, P.C. (1998). *The Adventure of Indian Broadcasting: A Philosopher's Autobiography*. Delhi, Delhi, India: Konark Publishers Private Limited.
13. Gerbner, G. & Mowlana, H. & Nordenstreng, K. (1999). *The Global Media Debate*. Norwood, NJ: Ablex Publishing.
14. Goswami, P. (2012). *The History of Assam: From Yandobo to Partition, 1826-1947*. New Delhi: Orient Blackswan Pvt. Ltd.
15. Jeffrey, R. (2012). *Media & Modernity*. New Delhi, New Delhi, India: Permanent Black.
16. Moitra, M. (1969). *A History of Indian Journalism*. Calcutta, West Bengal, India: National Book Agency.
17. Natarajan, S. A. (1962). *History of Press in India*. New York: Asia Publishing House.
18. Neog Maheswar (2007). *The Orunodoi. 150 Years of Journalism in Assam*. Guwahati, Assam, India: Media Trust Assam.
19. Patrick Lee Plaisance . (2009). *Media Ethics: Key Principles for Responsible Practice*. CQ Press: Sage Publications.



Dr. Kisholoy Choudhury

Assistant Professor(s) , Department of Political Science Tezpur College, Tezpur, Assam, India.



Bhanupriya Daimari

Assistant Professor(s) , Department of Political Science Tezpur College, Tezpur, Assam, India.