Role of Media in Promoting Communal Harmony
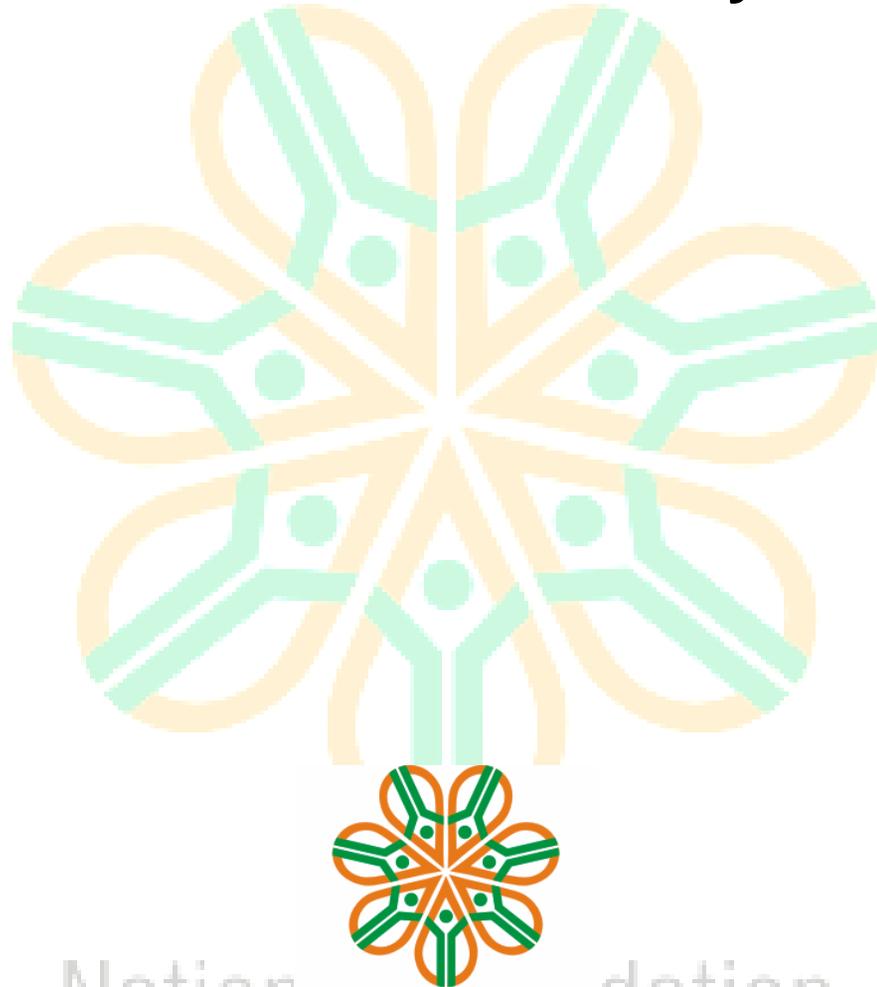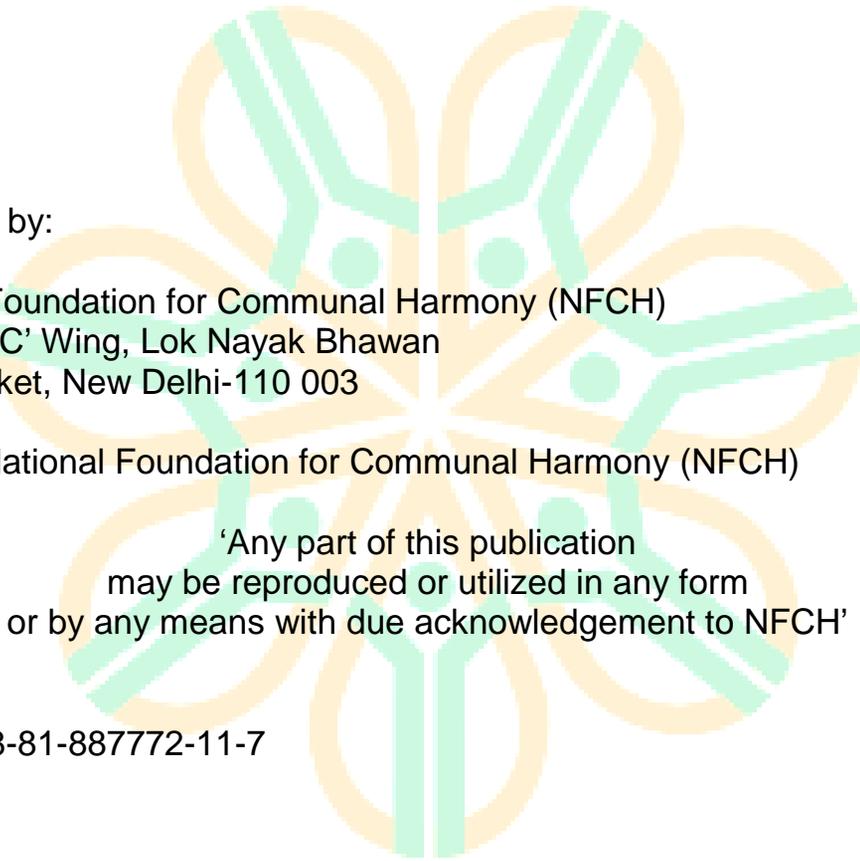
National Foundation for Communal Harmony

National Foundation for Communal Harmony
New Delhi
2012

National Foundation
for Communal Harmony

Role of Media in Promoting Communal Harmony

Preface

I am pleased to present this collection of essays on 'Role of Media in Promoting Communal Harmony', authored by the Civil Services officers at Lal Bahadur Shastri National Academy of Administration, Mussoorie (LBSNAA). These essays presented in the form of an e-monograph, are the result of an annual essay competition organized for the 82nd Foundation Course by LBSNAA at the request of National Foundation for Communal Harmony (NFCH).

Over the years, the problem of communalism has adversely affected the progress of the country. The Central & State Governments and other relevant agencies have made concerted efforts to contain the problem and promote social harmony. It has now been widely recognized that the print, electronic and other forms of social media can effectively play a very significant role to promote communal harmony and National Integration. This compilation would provide all relevant inputs to make media more effective for creating social cohesion.

We are grateful to the officers who spared time to contribute these thought provoking essays on a topical subject, despite their busy schedule, covering various dimensions of the topic. Since the essays included in this monograph highlight the importance of increasing role of media in promoting communal harmony, these will be of immense use to administrators, media personnel, academicians and students.

The views expressed in these essays are those of the contributors alone and do not necessarily reflect those of the Foundation. However, any editorial mistake is subject to correction by NFCH. I am thankful to the concerned staff of the Foundation for the help and cooperation in finalizing this e-book.

Secretary
NFCH
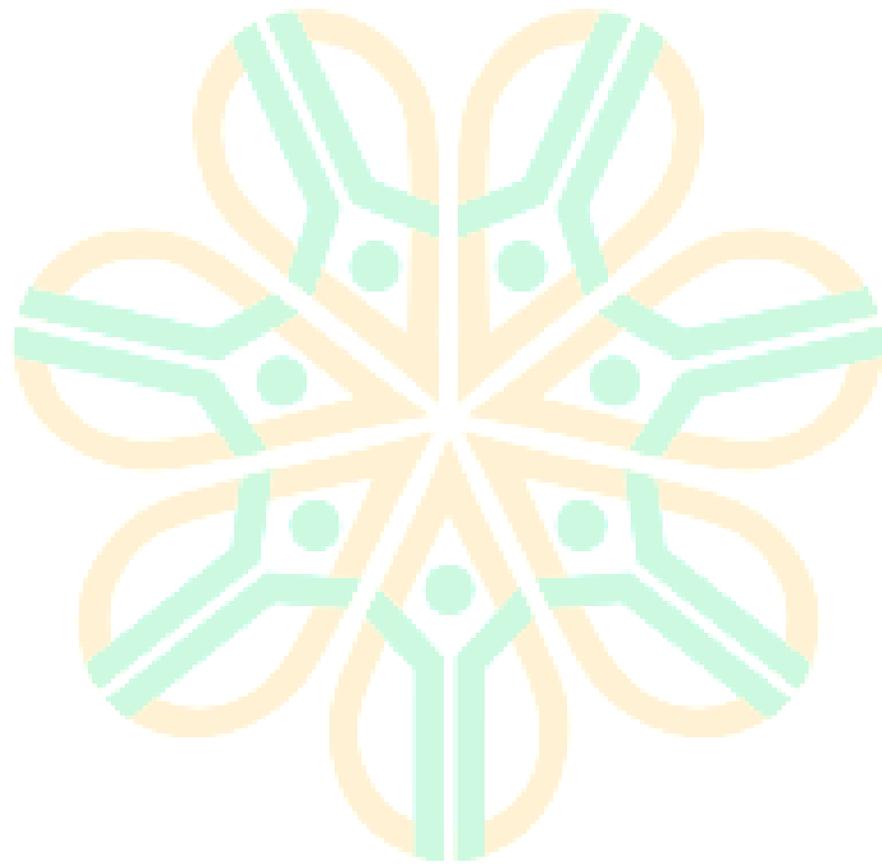
National Foundation
for Communal Harmony

Media - the fourth pillar of the society

RADHAKRISHNAN B

"Pen is mightier than Sword" - this old proverb seems to be true even in today's context as the media seems to gain strength in the modern society. Media includes mass media like TV, News channels, News papers, Radio, journals, magazines and most importantly internet and email. The sphere of influence of media is increasing day by day as the coverage of a small news article is very wide these days. And more importantly in this modern knowledge-society, media plays the role of facilitator of development, disseminator of information, and being an agent of change. Today, media is considered the fourth pillar of the state all over the world. More importantly this is very true in the context of a biggest democracy like India.

The Mass Media is an unique feature of modern society. It's development has accompanied an increase in the magnitude and complexity of societal actions and engagements, rapid social change, technological innovation, rising personal income and standard of life and the decline of some traditional forms of control and authority. There is an association between the development of mass media and social change, although the degree and direction of this association is still debated upon even after years of study into media influence. Many of the consequences, either detrimental or beneficial, which have been attributed to the mass media, are almost undoubtedly due to other tendencies within the society. Few sociologists would refuse the importance of the mass media, and mass communications as a whole, as being a major factor in the construction and circulation of social understanding and social imagery in modern societies. Therefore it is argued that the mass media is used as "an instrument", both more powerful and more flexible than anything in previous existence, for influencing people into certain modes of belief and understanding within society.

According to the old notion, the newspaper was responsible advisor to the public. Its first duty was to provide the news, "uncoloured by any motive". Its second duty was to present "a certain view of public policy" which it believed to be for the good of the state and community. It treated life as a "serious matter". It had an antiquated respect for truth and believed in the moral governance of things. It aimed at something and that something was guarded for the good of the society. This made Wickman Steed to say that "the printing and the selling of news is a social service". It is an aid administration and a spokesman of the public. It will bridge the gulf between the public and the government and the governed. It is a profession where so many decisions involving so great a responsibility are to be taken at such a pace.

"Media" holds a special position because its raw material is really the public mind and it trades chiefly in "moral values". The institution whose raw material is the public mind is a great institution. The study of the human mind is the most interesting thing and even more interesting is to inform guide, teach and help it in coming to a decision.

The press is the most important, effective, extensive, popular and convenient; cheapest and the surest method of moulding and formulating public opinion. It is the most important of the elements which constitutes public opinion itself. Communal disharmony is a problem which attributes to various factors. Among those factors media also gives its contribution. This media which acts disseminates of information to the public plays vital role in promoting communal harmony.

An example of the media resorting to untruth is: while Mr. Pravin Togadia had said to the effect that if *Rambhaktas* are prevented from entering Ayodhya, there would be riots, the Indian Express used the words, "communal riots" instead of "riots". This word is very mischievous and capable of causing / hatred between communities.

Over the last century, India has been rocked by communal, caste, linguistic or regional violence, of this; communal riots have assumed dangerous proportions from the beginning of eighties. The innumerable incidents of small or big proportions have sharpened the communal intensity leading to an emotional upsurge in the country, which added' to the communal tension. The responsibility of the media in such situations is undeniable. Unfortunately, the Press has not always covered these events dispassionately and objectively. Without going too far back in the time, if we analyse the situation since 90's, between 1991-92, some section of the media got carried away by the turn of the tide in this very city. Else where, the militants and terrorists were openly glorified for serving the cause of their community.

The modern media often tends to forget some of its basic social responsibilities. Instead they often indulge in sensationalising of news. For example, the news of Amitabh Bachhan going to temple is being covered in wide way than the cracking of a terror module by a Delhi police. Media channels are more worried about their TRP ratings rather than the issue of social responsibility. And this trend is needed to be changed. If you take the role of media in coverage of communal riots in the past, riots of late 60's, the violence of 1980-81, the separatist movement of mid-eighties and early 90's, the incidents at Ayodhya, Mumbai, Gujarat the media played different kinds of roles. During these periods, the media which enjoys the utmost freedom of expression, has a great and vital role to play in moulding public opinion on correct lines in regard to the need of friendly and harmonious relations between various communities and religious groups and thus promote national solidarity. The role of media in such situations is to be peacemakers and not abettors, to be trouble-shooters and not troublemakers.

The present day situation of our country demands an active and vibrant media. The frequency of incidence of communal conflict is increasing these days. Recent communal conflicts in Karnataka, Kandhamal in Orissa shows the need of media's involvement in promoting communal harmony. Because the people of

other parts of the country come to know about those incidents only through media. So while reporting those incidents the media should take in minds that no hatred is created among the sections of the people.

The Wardha commission states that media, both print and electronic, had also to exercise restraint and screaming headlines should be avoided. It said: "New headlines in the cases of rape of nun and murder of Christian boy and girl after rape have been noticed. One cannot imagine the damage that might have been caused to the polity by such headlines and reporting" and added that "reporting on communal strife should not done without proper verification or an ordinary crime given a communal twist." In this regard, the memorandum said in view of the Government's commitment to uphold the freedom of the press, it would not be appropriate to prescribe any code of conduct on reporting by the media, as it would be construed an interference in their working. It, however, said that the views of the commission were being brought to the notice of the Press Council of India.

Media is the fourth pillar of the society but sometimes tries to outsmart the other three pillars like judiciary, executive, and legislature. This creates an imbalance in the system and ultimately fails in doing its role. For example, in the wake of the Tamil Nadu speaker's action against journalists, many media bosses have called for the need to codify privileges of parliament and state legislatures. Thus they want to curb the rights of MPs and MLAs.

Many times they had tried to curb the power of the Judiciary also. For example, the press maintains that truth must be the basis of consideration in matters of contempt of court cases. But the media does not hesitate to report untruth when it suits its interests. There are many examples to illustrate how the media tramples truth. The media bosses try to play one pillar of democracy against another. After getting the stay order from the Supreme Court against his arrest, N. Ram was arrogant to state: "we are not opportunistic and have not demanded invoking article 356 as things stand now". If one reads between the lines this is

nothing but short of N. Ram's threat to Jayalalitha to Demand dismissal of her government and impose President's rule there in Tamil Nadu.

But, irrespective of the age we live in, newspapers must continue to pursue a higher purpose than mere profit making. And, this purpose is best served when a newspaper, without fear or favour, keeps its readers fully informed and provides space to a plurality of views. As I have often said, free speech is the life- blood of a democracy. It is also one of our fundamental rights. But this right comes along with responsibility. The responsibility not to sensationalize events. The responsibility to guard communal harmony and national unity. The responsibility to strengthen the social fabric of our multi-religious and multi-lingual country.

At the same time, we have to compliment the media for its changed attitude towards establishing communal harmony. I feel that the media is to be complimented for its coverage of the recent incident at Varanasi. Even; while the controversy over the Danish Cartoons was gaining momentum, in Varanasi, Hindus were felicitating a Muslim whose alertness made possible the diffusion of a bomb at Dashmeshwar Ghat. The credit for this can only go to the media. Therefore, I firmly believe that the media of our country has matured into an institution where its initiatives and instruments can stop the spiral of hatred and obfuscation, which, in itself, constitutes a threat to international peace and security.

There are also lots of columnists in the newspapers who work for the communal harmony and they have been recognized, the examples are: Author Tanveer Jafri is a columnist based in India. He is related with hundreds of most popular daily news papers/portals in India and abroad. Jafri, almost writes in the field of communal harmony, world peace, anti communalism, anti terrorism, national integration, national & international politics etc. He is a devoted social activist for world peace, unity, integrity & global brotherhood. Tanveer Jafri is also a member of Haryana Sahitya Academy & Haryana Urdu Academy. Thousands articles of the author have been 'published in different newspapers, websites & news portals.

In the wake of recent rising conflicts among communities in the country, each and every journalist should take the responsibilities in promoting the communal harmony. And they should follow certain basic principles while writing about communal clashes:

1. Journalists and columnists owe a very special responsibility to their country in promoting communal peace and amity. Their writings are not a mere reflection of their own feelings but help to large extent in moulding the feelings and sentiments of the society at large. It is, therefore, of utmost importance that they use their pen with circumspection and restrain.

2. News, views or comments relating to communal or religious disputes/clashes shall be published after proper verification of facts and presented with due caution and restraint in a manner which is conducive to the creation of an atmosphere congenial to communal harmony, amity and peace. Sensational, provocative and alarming headlines are to be avoided. Acts of communal violence or vandalism shall be reported in a manner and may not undermine the people's confidence in the law and order machinery of the state. Giving community-wise figures of the victims of communal riot, or writing about the incident in a style which is likely to inflame passions, aggravate the tension, or accentuate the strained relations between the communities/ religious groups concerned, or which has a potential to exacerbate the trouble, shall be avoided.

3. The media, as a chronicle of tomorrow's history, owes an undeniable duty to the future to record events as simple untailored facts. The analysis of the events and opinion thereon are a different genre altogether. The treatment of the two also to be necessarily different. In times of crisis, facts unadorned and simply put, with due care and restraint, cannot be reasonably objected to in a democracy. However, a heavy responsibility devolves on the opinion of the author on the articles. The author has to ensure that not only his or her analyse

is free from any personal preference, prejudices or notions, but also they are based on verified, accurate and established facts and do not tend to foment disharmony or enmity between castes, communities and races.

Recently, some of the TV channels have shown the coexistence of Hindus and Christians while the clash between them in Kandhamal and other areas. Media should give more space to cover wide ranging of articles regarding communal harmony. They should cover festivals celebrated in certain parts of the country where different communities together join and celebrate. For example, Nagore *dargha* annual festival, Velankanni flag festivals in Tamilnadu are the ones celebrated with the cooperation of different communities.

Some of the media are giving awards for the people who are working in the area of communal harmony. This is a wonderful sign of increasing media role in promoting harmony among people. Founding Fathers of our constitution believed that secularism is the antithesis of and the anti-dote to communalism. Therefore, they made secularism, in all its ramifications, one of the basic pillars of the Constitution. They enshrined it as one of the prime objectives in the Preamble of the Constitution. I am sure it is possible with the active role of media and it is the real mandate for them right now.

Media gets great power along with great responsibility

AISHVARYA SINGH

India is a country characterized by a diverse population comprising people belonging to different religions, castes, communities, sects etc. Though generally they can all be found living together in peace and harmony, the nation has from time to time also witnessed a number of instances of serious communal tension or conflict.

In times of such conflict the onus is primarily on the Government and also on various other agencies to try and restore normalcy in the country. Among all these agencies the Media is probably the most powerful single influence today, helping mould public opinion with regard to the need of fostering friendly and harmonious relations between various communities and religious groups and thereby also promoting national solidarity.

Here the term "media" generally refers to the "mass media" which is specifically envisioned and designed to reach a very large audience such as the population of a nation state.

The mass media basically comprises the print media, like newspapers, magazines and the electronic media consisting traditionally of the television and radio, along with which are now also added the internet and mobile telephones. All these together form the gamut of sources which not only disseminate factual information but also serve as foray for constructive discussions and debates regarding a wide range of issues at both the national and international levels.

Historical perspective

The Media has been a major champion in promoting the cause of communal harmony in the country. Historically, right from the days of the British rule the Media (at that time limited to the print format) has been a very vociferous supporter of communal peace and harmony and the importance of getting united to fight the common enemy, the British.

On thinking of those times and the important role played by the Media then, the foremost example that comes to mind is that of the anti-partition movement launched by the Indians as a response to the administrative decision to partition Bengal in 1905. The nationalist print Media comprising newspapers and periodicals like the *Amrit Bazar Patrika, Sandhya, Yugantar, Bande Mataram* etc was utilized by the leaders of the movement to carry out their views to the general public of Bengal and other parts of India and to urge them to protest the partition. It was through such efforts that a huge stir was created which finally led to the annulment of the proposed partition in 1911.

Even later on during the freedom struggle Mahatma Gandhi too launched *Young India* and *Harijan,* which contained his views on the importance of uniting as a nation to fight the British, preserving communal harmony and protecting the interests of the minority communities.

Maulana Azad's famous newspaper *Al-Hilal* too was a very staunch supporter of communal unity and brotherhood and strongly opposed the communal extremist ideology, which it said would greatly harm the future vision of a free India.

All these efforts finally bore fruit when we achieved independence in 1947. The happiness of the moment was however overshadowed by the gory carnage and riots that occurred in the border areas during the partition of the country. It was in such troubled times, when innumerable Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs were getting butchered that the leaders resorted to the Media to appeal to the public to maintain peace and shun violence. In fact it will not be wrong to say that in independent India the responsibilities of the agencies of mass media increased manifold.

The Indo-Pak and Sino-Indian wars too saw the Media taking an active lead in keeping the morale of the country high and stressing the need to eschew internal differences and conflicts and stand up united against external aggression.

Even later on during the anti-Sikh riots of 1984 the Media took a lead and worked endlessly in trying to dissipate the communal tension and restore normalcy

in the country.

The incidents which came as a major shock to this normalcy however, were the demolition of the Babri Masjid at Ayodhya in 1992 and the communal riots in Mumbai. Not only did they shake the foundation of Secularism in the country, but also presented a major challenge before the Media to prevent the building up of any more communal resentment and discord. The Media however did not belie these hopes and living up to the challenge, not only reported the actual demolition but thereafter also continuously condemned it to the utmost. The various TV channels and the virtual chat rooms became hotbeds of discussion through which the Press and Electronic Media tried to formulate some public opinion about the issue.

Later on too during incidences like 2002 Gujarat violence that followed the Godhra train burning, terrorist activities such as the 2005 Ram Janmabhoomi attack in Ayodhya, the blasts in markets in Delhi (when Eid and Diwali both were falling only one day apart from 'each other), the 2006 Varanasi bombings, the 2006 Jama Masjid explosions, the 11 July 2006 Mumbai train bombings, and more recently after the Ahmedabad and New Delhi blasts in 2008, the various agencies of mass media all condemned the incidents and made the utmost efforts to maintain communal harmony by going to the affected areas and bringing forth examples of people from different communities living together in peace, helping each other despite the prevalent communal tension etc.

The counterview: Do we have an irresponsible Media?

However, despite all these positive steps taken by the various agencies of mass media towards preservation and promotion of communal harmony, an often heard criticism of these is that they are prone to giving in to sensationalism and exaggeration of facts/ events which sometimes can result into serious communal tension and clashes.

It has also been noted that a large number of newspapers and news channels in the country and, in particular a large section of the print and electronic media

has, instead of alleviating communal unrest, often played an ignoble role in inciting communal passions leading to large scale rioting, arson and pillage in the State concerned.

Such irresponsible behaviour especially assumes greater ramifications when we understand the fact that people in general make decisions in large part in terms of favourable or unfavourable images, relating facts and opinions to stereotypes. Today the movies, internet, newspaper, magazine, comic strips etc are the principal agents in creating and perpetuating these conventional conceptions. When the images they portray fail to represent or distort the image of a community or group, they tend to pervert judgment which can at times lead to communal tensions and chaos.

This may not always be done purposely and may occur indirectly and incidentally too. For instance if the movies continuously depict people of a particular community, say Muslims, as terrorists, drugs and arms dealers, anti-nationals etc, an image of the Muslims is built which needs to be balanced by another positive one.

Such actions also need to be necessarily analyzed with the rapid advancements being made in communication technology nowadays and the world turning into one big global village.

Technology: Opportunity as well as Threat for the Media

Nowadays, any controversy even if it happens in a remote village reaches all over the world due to advanced communication technology and new media. When transnational media targets a global audience, issues and controversies become a global event. Therefore, any controversy created by an irresponsible act of any media organization can spread all over the world and in such a scenario the repercussions will be far reaching.

An example of this on the international level can be the controversy that erupted after the publication of the cartoons of Prophet Mohammed by the Danish newspaper the Jyllands-Posten. In the aftermath of that controversy people were

killed, newspapers were closed and editors sacked. The controversy was narrated as a clash between two civilizations. It was also described as an encounter between freedom of expression and religious fundamentalism.

The controversy and the clashes spread worldwide and India also witnessed protests in different parts of the country including Delhi and Mumbai. Four persons were killed in Lucknow, the capital city of Uttar Pradesh. Political parties expressed solidarity with the minority Muslim community. The state elections for various legislative assemblies in April-March 2006 compelled political parties to organize demonstrations against western media accusing it of anti-Islamic propaganda.

In fact, so grave were the reactions and protests in the country that anticipating a communal clash, the Prime Minister's Office had to come out with a statement, saying "it is incumbent on all of us to be sensitive to the beliefs and sentiments of other and avoid all actions that cause hurt to them. India's commitment to religious harmony and tolerance is unshakable and actions that cause hurt to the sentiments of any part of our people are not acceptable."

The commissioning of the cartoons by the Danish newspaper, its subsequent reproduction by the international media and the ensuing communal clashes and tension besides highlighting the extensive and pan-global reach of the Media, also raised many ethical questions regarding freedom of the press and social responsibility of the Media. While governments started contemplating more regulations on the media in the name of communal harmony and national integration, media organizations too once again stressed the need for redefining ethical boundaries in day-to-day journalism in the era of new technology.

Publication of the entire truth

Another issue which is highly debated when it comes to the role of the media in promoting communal harmony and even otherwise is the extent to which truth should be revealed by the media in its coverage of issues, especially in times of communal tension or conflict.

One view with reference to this issue says that upholding values and principles, journalists have the responsibility to report the truth to their audience. Kant (1986), in his famous essay "On the Supposed Right to lie Out of Humanity" advocates the fundamental validity of telling the truth, even if there is a conflict of duties: Tell the truth whether it is convenient or inconvenient, regardless of the consequences"

At the same time it has also been argued that the publication of the truth is not advisable when there is a possibility of communal violence and social anarchy.

The Press Council of India says (Section 3:11),

"Truth is no defence for publishing derogatory, scurrilous and defamatory material against a private citizen where no public interest is involved."

Even another statement related to this view suggests that even 'lies can be justified if they serve the higher public good'.

However this issue still remains unresolved and subjected to much debate and the policy followed by the various agencies of mass media related to this too remains highly varied.

The Indian scenario

Taking the case in India, even though there is no blasphemy law in our country, the publications here would not normally commission cartoons of religious figures, as it is a very sensitive subject. Also while the Constitution of India guarantees freedom of speech, it places "reasonable restrictions" "in the interests of the sovereignty and integrity of India or public order or morality. Our social ethics too direct respect for the sentiments of the minorities.

Such restrictions resulted in censorship, an example of which was seen in 2004 when the documentary *Final Solution,* which looks at religious rioting between Hindus and Muslims, was banned. The film follows 2002 clashes in the western state of Gujarat, which left more than 1,000 people dead. The censor board justified the ban, saying it was "highly provocative and may trigger off unrest and communal violence". The ban was lifted in Oct.'04 after a sustained

campaign.

In Punjab too the *Bhavsagar Granth* was banned by the state government, following clashes between mainstream Sikhs and the apostate Sikh sect that produced it.

These instances however do not mean that the media does not criticize religion. They often report on outdated customs as well as the rigid stance of different religions on various issues. Newspapers recently published reports on the controversy surrounding the Da Vinci Code and Gospel of Judas. Reports appeared in the media when well known painter M.F. Husain portrayed the Hindu goddess Saraswati in the nude.

In short, the Indian media upholds the 'norms for the journalistic conduct' prescribed by the Press Council of India which (Section 20:11) says,

"Journalists and columnists owe a very special responsibility to their country in promoting communal peace and amity. Their writings are not a mere reflection of their own feelings but help to a large extent in moulding the feelings and sentiments of the society at large. It is, therefore, of utmost importance that they use their pen with circumspection and restrain."

The Council also directs the journalist to be vigilant and restrained when dealing with issues of communal clashes. In the aftermath of the Gujarat communal carnage the Council revised the 'norms for journalistic conduct' by saying (Section 20:111),

"The role of media in such situations [Gujarat Carnage} is to be peacemakers and not abettors, to be trouble shooters and not trouble makers".

The Council adds (Section 20:111),

"There is a greater moral responsibility on the media to do their best to build national solidarity and to strengthen communal harmony at all levels remembering the noble role they had played during pre-independence days. "

Considering the sensibility and freedom of faith, the Council also prohibits the portrayal of religious figures and characters in bad light. In the 'norms for

journalistic conduct' it says (Section 22:4),

"Newspapers should not publish any fictional literature distorting and portraying religious characters in an adverse light and offending the religious susceptibilities of large sections of society who hold those characters in high esteem, invested with attributes of the virtuous and lofty. "

The Council also rejects the argument of 'news value' for the reproduction of any objectionable material. It says (Section 3: VIII),   ~

"The 'publication of defamatory news by one paper does not give licence to others to publish news/information of similar nature. "

Along with all these directions what is noteworthy is the fact that though the Press Council of India suggests that media organizations impose self-censorship when it comes to national integration and communal harmony there is actually in general circumstances, no pre-control on media content by the Government or any other agency.

Also important is the fact that though such stipulations have been laid down by the PCI for the print media, there are no regulations regarding the code of conduct, so to say, of the electronic media. This gives a lot of space to the television, film, radio industry as well as to the online portals/news forums etc when it comes to deciding their content and other ethical considerations related to their programmes/ uploads. This discretion is what, if misused, results in a lot of chaos and communal tensions.

On the other hand a more responsible coverage and depiction of multifarious groups of humanity would, if resorted to by the Media, imply revelation of the truth about that group, not excluding its weaknesses and vices, and also recognizing its values, aspirations and its common humanity. Such exposure to the inner truths of a group helps the others in the social milieu to gradually build up respect for and understanding of it, thereby bolstering communal harmony and spirit of national unity.

Conclusion

"Mile sur mera tumhara, to sur bane hamaara .... "

How can one forget this promotional item that was aired on the TV channels so many years ago, but is as fresh as ever in memory when one thinks of Media promoting communal harmony. Or can one forget Amir Khan in the film Sarfarosh, or for that matter the simple children's song "ek chidiya, anek chidiya ..." once again aired on TV citing the importance of unity in diversity.

All these are images embedded in the mind and reiterate the importance of Media as the means for promoting communal harmony in the most effective and efficient manner so as to reach millions of people worldwide.

This is in fact great power, and the Media should always be vary of the fact that *"power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely".* Also, as the famous saying goes *"With great power comes great responsibility",* so the Media too should be fully aware not only of its power but more so of the responsibility concomitant to it and should use it for the best of the society.

Joseph Pulitzer sums up this ideal role/ image of the Media quite aptly when he says:

"Nothing less than the highest ideals, the most scrupulous anxiety to do right, the most accurate knowledge of the problems it has to meet and a sincere sense of moral responsibility ..."

The Media can greatly facilitate thought and discussion. It can also stifle it. It can advance the progress of civilization or it can thwart it. It can debase and vulgarize mankind. It can even endanger the peace of the world by a rash and unthought-of comment!'

The Media can play up or down the news and its significance, foster and feed emotions, create complacent fictions and blind spots, misuse the great words, and uphold empty slogans. Its scope and power are increasing every day as new instruments can spread lies faster and farther than our forefathers dreamed of.

The primary responsibility of the Media thus is of creating an informed citizenry in order to empower society and strengthen democracy and along with this it should also play an active role in enhancing social, religious and communal harmony for the betterment of the community, the society, the nation and the entire humanity as a whole.
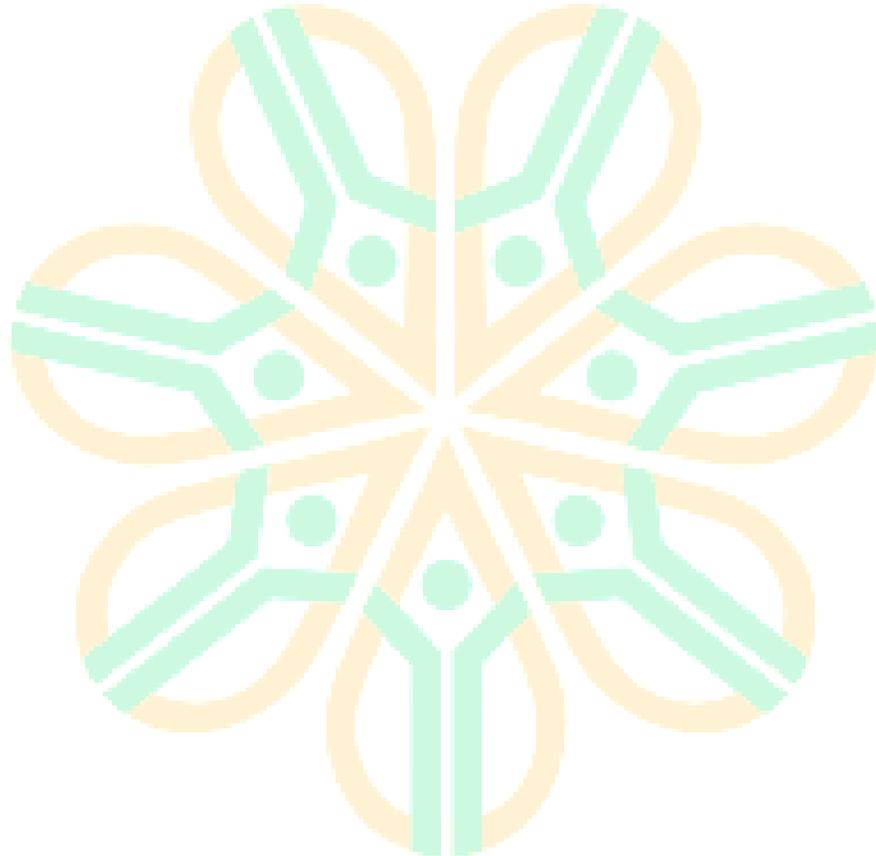
Media has a responsible role in strengthening communal harmony

RAJAN VISHAL

'The media is the most powerful entity on the earth. They have the power to make the innocent guilty and to make the guilty innocent, and that's power. Events do not travel Reports do. And through this they are able to influence the minds of the masses".

In the present times, with the advances in technology, the reach of all forms of media (print & electronic) has become all-pervasive, wide and deep. The mass media has become the single most potent medium to shape public opinion. It can vulgarize or brutalize the society. Or it can help lift the society onto a higher level. A good and responsible media is a nation talking to itself. In a diverse country like ours, which has different hues and shades of cultures and diversities, the role of media becomes all the more important.

The importance and need of communal harmony

Geography and history seem to have vied with each other in assigning India the role of a crucible of cultural, linguist and religion interaction, and the Indian people too have shown a proclivity for absorbing alien influences and giving them local colour from ancient times. The traces of such cultural, linguistic and religious overlaps have been so inextricably woven into the fabric of everyday life, that it is impossible to separate the strands of what was once imported, from what is indigenous. The history of the land has always shown the adaptability of the people to new elements, with no loss of the vital Indian essence. The ideas, beliefs and institutions thus imported, have neither been accepted nor rejected in their totality, but they have been assimilated with an ambience, which makes its culture, composite in character. Communal harmony and national integration are the heart and soul of India.

In the current era, when India is marching ahead on the path of economic development and acquiring a glorious place on the world stage, the need of the hour is, to preserve, promote and defend the secular, pluralistic,

socialist and democratic values of our Constitution.

Media as a potent tool to promote Communal Harmony

To maintain and strengthen communal harmony, the society has to use different channels and mediums. Media is one of the most potent and effective medium given its wide reach, effective delivery mechanism and ability to mobilize public opinion.

Communal disharmony and conflicts are fuelled by fear, suspicion and hatred. The different channels of media are the transmission channels through which fear, suspicion and hatred spread. Similarly, the confidence, trust and sense of security also get transmitted through the same channels. Whatever be the form, insecurity is perhaps the major cause of individual and social dissensions. We have not till now had many instances, of societies or communities that are fully integrated and therefore fearless. The societies and individuals must rise above fear, jealousy and hate. When such individuals combine themselves into a community, the problem of communal jealousy and discord will disappear. *The positive assertive role of media to alley the fear, hatred end-suspicion is essential to generate communal harmony.*

The need for mobilizing like-minded people at the national level and creating among them an awareness of the dangers involved in communal hatred and conflicts and of the need for joining hands and protesting against such divisive and destructive forces is now strongly felt. This process needs to be hastened by finding ways and means to change the mindset of people from narrow religious, linguistic and regional identity or allegiance to a broader identity of Indian ness. The biggest challenge is to merge the religious, linguistic and regional identity into a national identity, while maintaining the other identities and cultures. Media has the potential to play a very important role in bringing this change.

Media reporting in times of conflict

The reporting by the Media in times of conflict acquires all the more importance since events do not travel. Reports do. It is the account or the image of an event that arouses passions among millions of readers and TV watchers. The event is witnessed hardly by a score of persons. What form the image or the report acquires is in the hands of the reporter.

The communal riots in Gujarat after the Godhra tragedy were probably an event which was exhaustively covered live through print and electronic media at the national level. Media credibility emerged from Gujarat reporting as bruised as the psyche of the victims from religious violence. But the reports bruised millions of readers who had no hand in unleashing that savagery or supporting it. News acquired new definitions providing room for a bit of fiction that did irreparable damage to the communal fabric but also arbitrarily created two new social classes deriving their identity from their understanding of the Gujarat and Godhra events.

In the strictest sense, it is in the reporters telling of the story that the element of mediation enters. Since very few of the readers happen to be on the scene, the reporter who has seen the burning Godhra train or the burning Best Bakery tells us the story of the arson. This story telling is not very simple. *The reporter is not just a journalist but also a member of the society that in the end bears the cost of his reporting. Here the reporter does not enjoy the same privilege as that of non-media spectator who can react to what he has seen.* Yet the reporter has a compulsion to reconstruct the event for the benefit of the reader. This is what is called media construction of reality.

There is only one reality that our senses alone can experience. What we read in newspapers is a version of that reality. The problem with reality is the multiplicity of versions that it makes available to the journalist. The phenomenon of the same story appearing in different pages, with different heading sizes, with different leads and with different word-count manifests the

impossibility of arriving at a consensus on the core of the reality the journalist is reporting. This is no excuse for straying wide off the mark.

The mention of the word Hindu to represent Mahatma Gandhi's assassin in announcing his death over AIR prevented a possible repetition of the partition frenzy. Let us consider one hypothetical example.

> Assume that a piece of meat was found in a temple. It is a fact but restraint in reporting it would localize any damage the fact could do to communal harmony. The event could fizzle out as just a law and order problem and when temperatures come down might even permit community leaders to sit down and negotiate peace. When facts are likely to convulse communities, reporters need discretion in transmitting them. That is the essence of *social responsibility theory* that requires the media to share the blame for adverse effects of their reporting.

A similar case in point here is the media reporting on the Muslim growth based on the data on population growth culled from India Census 2001. The media sensationalized the issue by reporting prominently and provocatively on their front pages that the minorities' population growth had increased. However, it is worth noting that none of the media reports mentioned that the Census Commissioner and Registrar General of India, had clarified that the apparent increase in the growth rate of Muslims was not to be taken at face value. The seeming rise in the Muslim growth rate was in reality a false impression created by the fact that the census could not be carried out in Jammu & Kashmir in 1991, and in Assam in 1981 - and that, since the former is a Muslim majority state and the latter has a sizeable proportion of Muslims, these omissions had a definite bearing on the current figures. The political storm which resulted from the media reporting of this census figures was based on an illusion created by misleading statistics, which the print media left unexplained and did not prominently report even after the furore began.

Media reporting in times of harmony

Harmony seldom makes a headline. - Silas Bent

Media being a channel having wide reach and penetration with high retention value and immense potential to influence public opinion, the reporting in times of peace is a long term investment in keeping intact the communal fabric of the country. During the harmony and tranquillity, the media owes the responsibility of reporting the instances, endeavours and experiences of communal harmony with the same fervour as they do in case of conflict.

This would go a long way in forging a sense of security, trust, comfort and belongingness among the masses. This would be an invaluable investment in strengthening the communal harmony in the society. The media should prominently carry reports, articles, documentaries, serials, films showcasing the success stories in forging communal harmony.

What media should do

In the present time, when there is a deluge of 24 hour news channels, numerous newspapers, radio channels, magazines etc, the journalists are vying with each other to churn out saleable news stories in fiercely competitive market. Sometimes in pursuit of increasing the TRPs or readership, they tend to sensationalize the news and lace the news with spice to attract more eye-balls. Here the *media construction of reality* is far from truth and is detrimental to the fabric of communal harmony. The media should refrain from doing this and strictly adhere to the principle of social responsibility.

It was while making newspaper deliveries, trying to miss the bushes and hit the porch, that I first learned the importance of accuracy in journalism.   *-Charles Osgood*

The regional media (regional news channels, newspapers and magazines) have to understand that they have a big responsibility towards the

strengthening the communal harmony in the country. They should strive to align the reporting of regional interests under the over all domain of the main stream national interest because in addition to being their ethical responsibility their own long term interest lies in this approach.

In this competitive era, every news channel and newspaper suffers from cover-it-all' syndrome. It so happens that many news stories are constructed in the editors' room without really delving deep into the facts and figures. This spells danger to the communal harmony and has the potential of raising the tempers and hurting the feelings of people. They also tend to make stories out of nothing and nowhere which do not have any news value.

Newspapers are unable, seemingly, to discriminate between a bicycle accident and the collapse of civilization. - George Bernard Shaw

There should be a well defined set of rules and principles to report communally sensitive events and issues for the media which should be strictly adhered to. Press Council of India already has a set of rules like glorification/ encouragement of social evils to be eschewed, violence not to be glorified, norms to be followed during covering communal disputes/clashes, headings not to be sensational/provocative and must justify the matter printed under them and norms regarding references Caste, religion or community.

But the ambit of such set of rules should be broadened and strict adherence to the same should be ensured. A similar set of rules should be made for electronic media also.

Concluding Remarks

Media has an important and indispensable role in strengthening communal harmony in the India of twenty first century. To ensure inclusive growth on all fronts and for all sections of our society, communal harmony, national integration and peaceful co-existence is the mantra. The peace and tranquillity that emanates from communal harmony is conducive for socio-

economic growth and development. It fosters sense of belongingness & concern for each other among masses. Media can cast the talisman which is needed to build the India of Rabindra Nath Tagore, the India where the head is held high and the mind is without fear.
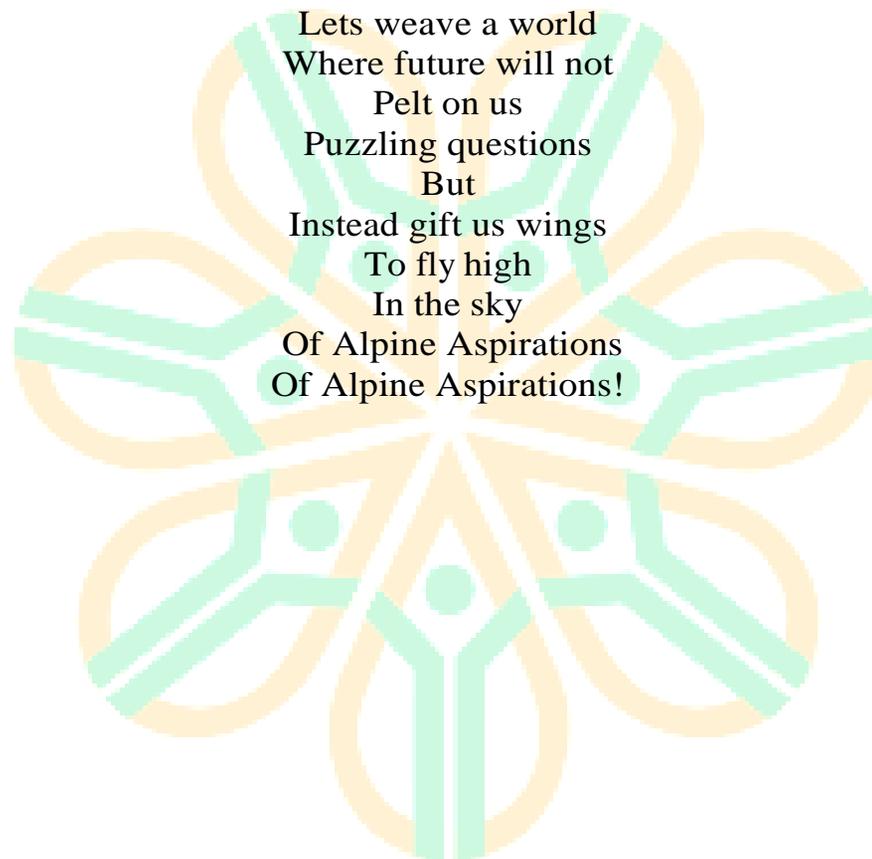
Lets weave a world
Where future will not
Pelt on us
Puzzling questions
But
Instead gift us wings
To fly high
In the sky
Of Alpine Aspirations
Of Alpine Aspirations!

ASHWINI SATTARU

When holy friendship shakes the hand,
He stands between them too,
He pours the nectar in mother's kiss,
And the baby's sweet "mama",
Thou wert my god with prophets old,
All creeds do come from thee,
The Vedas, the Bible and Koran bold
Sing thee in *harmony*

- Swami Vivekananda

Definition and importance of harmony

Every religion, culture, society provides for living in harmony with everything surrounding us since ages. Harmony is the fundamental law of creation, it is the law that continues to govern our life. But etymologically harmony means 'joint'. Harmony is understood as binding together and being in concord with one another and the cosmos. From a sociological perspective, harmony can be understood as a mode of social existence. Social harmony means living with unity, mutual reciprocity, beyond class, caste, creed and gender barriers. Sin or violence emerges whenever this harmony is disturbed. Harmony by itself cannot be disturbed. It needs an agent. Religious and communal harmony, economic harmony, political harmony and ecological harmony are increasingly necessary today. No human being enjoys disharmony or violence.

Definition of communal, communalism

'Communal' means: i) For common use or benefit shared; ii) Of or relating to a commune; iii) Of or relating to the community and iv) Between different communities. The new Webster's Encyclopaedia Dictionary of the English language defines communalism as a theory or system of government in which each commune is virtually an independent state, and the nation merely a federation of such states. Another definition is 'strong allegiance to one's own ethnic group

rather than to society as a whole. Today the second expression seems to be more appropriate.

Importance of media and communication in today's world

"The only security of all is in a free press".

–Thomas Jefferson

Without the presence of thought provoking, mind dominating, opinion-swaying media, we would as societies be lost and disconnected with each other. We have access to the media almost everyday by surfing the net, reading newspapers and magazines, watching television and by listening to the radio. In today's era of information technology, media has a deep impact on how we think and react. One can identify a leading role undertaken by media in Australia's multi-cultural society, where media actively publicise and celebrates national harmony day to foster communal harmony. Media's role in modern society is unchallenged. What we need however is socially responsible media, "to contribute to a more cohesive, equitable and harmonious international society." One cannot rely upon a single entity to take decision for peace building but a significant role in this respect has to be played by civil society through communication and manual efforts, by technology that provides means to communicate, work, trade and share advance knowledge, above all by media that provides realistic interpretations of reality and a merge of these communication kinds through the advanced innovative approach for policy-making, crisis management and peacemaking.

A study report has declared that in Cambodia when United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC) started dissemination of information through its own news outlet, radio UNTAC and information network of the NGOs many citizens reacted by turning out for the 1993 election. This incident can serve as an example for defining the importance of media, communication and technology in creating an awareness of human and political rights that would in turn stimulate people to put in efforts for peace building.

In India media's positive role can be gauged from the newspapers publishing reports about the Godhra massacre. The media covering the incident had played an important role in extending cooperation across the community barriers. This fact was established by two of the Baroda based organization Shanti Abhiyaan and People's Union for Civil Liberties which had been following the vernacular press and English newspapers to analyze the report of the incident throughout the period of the Godhra massacre. Many a times, the newspaper plays a lead role through peace giving headlines and news like the Gujarat Samachaar that quoted in its 11th March 2002 edition that Lilapir durgah devotees included all Hindus and Muslims and talked about Elol village being an example of communal harmony. Newspapers have always been a medium for communicating solution, knowledge and thus have succeeded in maintaining a good balance in its reporting and constructing, encoding and representing realities.

Media has always been a source, arena and resource for gathering, selecting and presenting realistic interpretations. Media was also ahead in covering most peace and anti-war campaigns. Information supporting peace has flowed in through television, magazines, radio, literature, art, music, films and through various other cultural activities. Not to forget the advantages of internet and its contribution towards peace building and peace making by providing education and swift innovative communication that served in arousing people and improving social and living conditions worldwide. In future, these medium would be able to achieve computer aided peace and harmony that would overcome barriers and tensions between cultures, societies and countries. A global consciousness in minds of people would be achieved then. Any form of transfer of information and knowledge plays an inordinate role in shaping the political consciousness among people with even little experience and understanding which would continue in future also and thereby directly contributing in building communal harmony. With growing time and with developed and advanced approach these forms of media would draw more audience into an alternate world and experience, thus

contributing the internet media role in advancing peace and harmony.

For example the international campaign to ban landmine had used the internet and email technology for swift communication of knowledge, information and message through its campaign and tried to empower people towards a democratic change. The importance of internet and technology communication could be viewed through fax machine system deployed that has overcome delay in the exchange of any kind of information.

Waiter Lippmann, observed that modern life is so complex that we necessarily learn of events via the press, claimed that the press functions like a spotlight on a stage, focusing on a certain character or action. Since then, other observers have discovered that the press does have, as political scientist Bernard Cohen put it in a study of foreign media, *the power to tell us what to think about, although not what to think*. The power of media reaches down to the edge of our attitudes and values, but our values and attitudes also reach up. For messages to become part of the total social fabric, there must be a marriage, a melding of personal and media agendas. Certainly audiences do reach up and this is where media's impact becomes visible.

Trends in media-power equations

Access to media is one of the key measures of power and equality. Media can shape power and participation in society in negative ways, by obscuring the motives and interests behind political decisions, or in positive ways, by promoting the involvement of people in those decisions. In this respect the media and governance equation becomes important. Media occupies a space that is constantly contested, which is subject to organizational and technological restructuring, to economic, cultural and political constraints, to commercial pressures and to changing professional practices. The changing contours of this space can lead to different patterns of domination and agenda-setting and to different degrees of openness and closure in terms of access, patterns of ownership, available genres, types of disclosure and range of opinions represented.

"Power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely"

- LORD ACTON

Media also has assumed such power over a long period of time. Thus with power comes the burden of huge responsibility. A form of power creation is seen as - concentration of media ownership (also known as media consolidation) which is a commonly used term that refers to the majority of the media outlets being owned by a small number of conglomerates and corporations. These individual media industries are often referred to as a 'Media Institution'. Media ownership may refer to states of oligopoly or monopoly in a given media industry, or to the importance of a low number of media conglomerates. Large media conglomerates for example include Disney, National Amusements, Time Warner, Viacom, News Corp, Bertelsmann AG, Sony, General Electric.

One may think why discuss about media consolidation, how does it play a role in promoting communal harmony? Yes it very much does, because media by itself is woven around a web of sub-systems which have to be also studied in equal detail, as the final product depends on these factors too. Concentration of media ownership is very frequently seen as a problem of contemporary media and society. When media ownership is concentrated in one or more of the ways mentioned above, a number of undesirable consequences follow, including the following:

1. Commercially driven, ultra-powerful mass market media is primarily loyal to sponsors, i.e. advertisers and government rather than to the public interest.
2. For the general public, there are less diverse opinions and voices available in the media.
3. For minorities and others, fewer opportunities are available for voicing their concerns and reaching the public.
4. Healthy, market-based competition is absent, leading to slower innovation and increased prices.
5. The companies dominating a media market choose to suppress stories that do not serve their interests, the public suffers, since they are not adequately informed of some crucial issues that may affect them. If the only media outlets in town refuse to air a story, then the question becomes, who will?

An opposite evolution: massive diversification via citizen media on the other hand can be observed to counter the consolidation forces. A massive diversification of media, thanks to the Internet, materialized by millions of websites, forums, blogs and wikis is taking place. That evolution, often labelled citizen journalism or citizen media, makes it possible for practically everybody to be a media creator, owner and actor, instead of a passive user. Citizen media gradually take audiences out of the traditional media and weaken the role of information professionals. Traditional media are slowly trying to adapt by becoming more "participative", asking their readers or watchers to send their own news.

In a democratic society, therefore, the role of the media assumes seminal importance. Democracy implies participative governance, and it is the media that informs people about various problems of society, which makes those wielding power on their behalf answerable to them. That the actions of the government and the state, and the efforts of competing parties and interests to exercise political power should be underpinned and legitimized by critical scrutiny and informed debate facilitated by the institutions of the media is a normative assumption uniting the political spectrum. It has been further remarked by Davis Merritt, in his work Public Journalism and Public Life that what journalists should bring to the arena of public life is knowledge of the rules - how the public has decided a democracy should work - and the ability and willingness to provide relevant information and a place for that information to be discussed and turned into democratic consent. They must exhibit no partisan interest in the specific outcome other than it is arrived at under the democratic process.

Communal harmony issues-history and psychology

Few communal riots are accidental. Most are planned or preceded by communal propaganda. While a riot is "a violent disturbance of the peace by an assembly or body of persons," a pogrom is "an organized massacre". Before

media advances as a promoter of communal harmony one has to understand the dynamics of lethal Communal Riots. After a brief overview of the complexities of studying ethnic riots in India and elsewhere around the world, Horowitz noted that one of the most troubling aspects of such riots was the level of violence. While all riots tend to be destructive, he stressed that communal riots were marked by extremely high levels of violence often resulting in numerous deaths as well as maiming, looting, and destruction of property owned by the ethnic group targeted by the rioters. He opines that the orgy of killing in riots is largely rationally planned and ignited by rumours. Then we need to ask despite this complex psychology, how to maintain communal harmony.

What has retained communal harmony?

It is indeed one of the most pertinent questions of the hour. However, it is also interesting to note that harmony and mutual coexistence is intrinsic to human society for it is a society based on interdependence and exchange. Nevertheless, we cannot turn a blind eye to the communal outbursts we have seen across history. Most of these were politically motivated, but even political incitement has not worked and the reason lies within people themselves. It is a question of daily needs of people that converge at most of the points irrespective of socially, religiously or politically constructed identities. We have always felt that despite belonging to different faiths, human beings share the same bodily needs, everybody feels thirsty, hunger pangs strike every stomach and communal riots only add to such woes by making living conditions worse.

MODERN politics is largely a mediated politics, experienced by most citizens through their broadcast and print media of choice. Any study of democracy in contemporary conditions is, therefore, also a study of how the media report and interpret political events and issues, and how media itself influences the political processes and shapes public opinion. Thus, media has become central to politics and public life in contemporary democracy.

Role of media in handling sensitive information

The media which enjoys utmost freedom of expression, has a great and vital role to play in moulding public opinion on correct lines in regard to the need of friendly and harmonious relations between various communities and religious groups and thus promote national solidarity. The role of media in communally tense situations is to be peacemakers and not abettors, to be trouble-shooters and not troublemakers. Over the years in India, the Press Council of India has played a key role as watchdog of the country. The riots of late 60's, the violence of 80-81, the separatist movement of mid-eighties and early 90's the incidents at Ayodhya, Mumbai, Gujarat saw reports on media's role and requirements based on which the Council has advised the press to keep the following basic principles in mind while covering communal disputes/clashes.

1.   Journalists and columnists owe a very special responsibility to their country in promoting communal peace and amity. Their writings are not a mere reflection of their own feelings but help to large extent in moulding the feelings and sentiments of the society at large. It is, therefore, of utmost importance that they use their pen with circumspection and restrain.

2.   News, views or comments relating to communal or religious disputes/clashes shall be published after proper verification of facts and presented with due caution and restraint in a manner which is conducive to the creation of an atmosphere congenial to communal harmony, amity and peace. Sensational, provocative and alarming headlines are to be avoided. Acts of communal violence or vandalism shall be reported in a manner as may not undermine the people's confidence in the law and order machinery of the State.

3.   Giving community-wise figures of the victims of communal riot, or writing about the incident in a style which is likely to inflame passions, aggravate the tension, or accentuate the strained relations between the communities/religious groups concerned, or which has a potential to exacerbate the trouble, shall be avoided.

The media, as a chronicle of tomorrow's history, owes an undeniable duty to the future to record events as simple untailored facts. The analysis of the events and opinion thereon are a different genre altogether. The treatment of the two also thus has necessarily to be different. In times of crisis, facts unadorned and simply put, with due care and restraint, cannot be reasonably objected to in a democracy. However, a heavy responsibility devolves on the author of opinion articles. The author has to ensure that not only are his or her analysis free from any personal preference, prejudices or notions, but also they are based on verified, accurate and established facts and do not tend to foment disharmony or enmity between castes, communities and races. Even while the controversy over the Danish Cartoons was gaining momentum, in Varanasi, Hindus were felicitating a Muslim whose alertness made possible the diffusion of a bomb at Dashmeshwar Ghat. The credit for this can only go to the media. Therefore, I believe that the media of a country if matured into an institution can through its initiatives and instruments stop the spiral of hatred and obfuscation which in itself, constitutes a threat to international peace and security.

Guidelines for handling communal riots by media in India

Press Media and awareness building should be undertaken as:

1.   Promoting the cause of communal harmony and peace should be a constant endeavour of the administration. For this, a multi-media publicity and promotion campaign needs to be conducted, on a continuing basis, from time to time.

2.   "Catch them young" should be the philosophy for promoting the concept of communal harmony. Inspiring literature should be distributed among the school students, both in the government and in the private sector, and they should be encouraged to organize various competitions and talks on the subject of communal harmony.

3.   If any communal incident occurs, channels of contact with media should be established at a responsible level. The objective is to provide the media with the

facts to avoid speculative reporting leading, *inter alia*, to fuelling rumours and community sentiments.

4.	Often, the electronic media continuously shows images of specific incidents, which could lead to exaggerated perceptions about the incidents and lead to provoking sentiments and passions. Regular monitoring and briefing of the media in this context should be ensured:

5.	Video/Audio coverage and cameras may be used to record the proceedings and movements of such religious processions and gatherings, particularly where the routes may be sensitive or, there may otherwise be even a remote apprehension of possible untoward incidents. These recordings could be subsequently used, in case of any communal disturbance, inter alia, for speedy identification and prosecution of the / offenders and, in the process, could also act as deterrent.

Amongst all the freedoms available to man, freedom of speech and expression is the most important one. Media role discussed above in variety of dimensions, is inevitably one form of collective expression. Because it undertakes this role of disseminating information, it's role and impact analysis becomes necessary. After identifying the effectiveness of this powerful medium, which alone touches different aspects of life globally one can conclude that media's role in enhancing values of harmony and peace are huge. Let us all be informed citizens for our country via a media which undertakes this onerous task of building social capital across countries, minds and souls. Media education supports the creation of an informed media public, a public that is able to critically judge between good and bad media content. Simultaneously however, for a true democracy, we also have to ensure that there is a strong stream of media free of any government control, with free speech and free press.

Media has to be sensitive for harmony

HARSH MANGLA

India is a land of multifarious communities where every person has a right to freedom of expressions. This freedom of expression is availed by Indians in many forms. Out of the various such forms two important forms are media and the freedom of joining a particular group and preaching its view points and ideologies. First form has given right to all the media forms to report about the various facts and situations existing in the nation. Numerous forms of hard & soft, audio & visual forms of media have crept into the whole society which makes available to the public at large the minutest information from the remotest places across nation. The second form allows the people to join a particular group with whom these people can identify themselves. Therefore, people unite in a group to manifest their desires and ideologies. Sometimes these groups adopt the fundamentalist approach and become so sensitive to their demands and demonstrations that they adopt violent recourse and often trapped as communal discord.

The media in India has been very active since the period even before Indian independence. This active role of media has strengthened even more after the Independence. However, many a times, debates are undertaken among various sections of society whether media in India has played the expected role for promoting the communal harmony. To understand this issue it is urgent to understand the state of Indian society and that of communal harmony in India.

Indian society is divided into various categories among which religion and caste system are prominent. People in India are free to adopt any religion of their choice and by virtue of birth in a particular

community, the casts are assigned to the person within that particular religion. However, in India this stratification is generally adhered to rather strictly. The religious sentiments are strongly imbibed and within a religion the cast system is followed to an extent that the lower casts Indians feel that it is a social issue in their daily lives.

Due to the socialization practices adopted in the Indian family systems, the situation of communal harmony in India has never been in best of its form. People are not in harmony as far as cohesion with other religious groups and casts are concerned. Though, the economic integration in India has crossed all bounds and each small strata of the society is engaged in one or the other form for economic purpose, there is a large gap as far as the social and psychological interaction is concerned. This is not the fact that there is no bonding at all between these sections anywhere in India but generally in relatively poor and uneducated sections, the incidents of communal discord can be found relatively more. The examples can be seen in the attack on Christians in Orissa and Karnataka, dispute between Hindus and Muslims in Gujarat. The people involved in these disputes are neither of high standards of living nor very much educated in general.

The media in India is very active these days. Numerous and ever increasing newspaper agencies and news channels attempt to provide coverage to all the incidents occurring in the area. However, this coverage sometimes serves the purpose other than intended. Whatever news is provided to the public creates an image in the minds of people which encourages their actions accordingly. Though there are thousands of different newspapers and magazines available in national and regional languages but the reality is that people tend to read from one or two sources only. This results into formation of people's viewpoint similar to that of the newspaper which they read or the news channel

which they listen to. The media persons are also the human being and while analyzing the situations to be reported, they are most likely to be affected by their personal bias and consciousness. The viewpoint of that particular media may not exactly reflect the situation at hand and it tends to be affected by the personal beliefs and thoughts of the person presenting it. In the numerous incidents of communal violence, it has been observed that the media tend to circulate the news in such a manner which preaches the ideology of the religion/ group with which it is attached. They also tend to preach the ideologies of a particular political party and hence the coverage is accordingly modified. In the case of Hindu Muslim conflict in Gujarat, various newspapers published news depicting the dreadful stories about the attack by Hindus or Muslims on other group. Such news worsened the situation by motivating the various groups to take revenge. Press Council of India took the matter very strictly and advised the news paper media to restrict its coverage so that the hatred is contained. In such case, no doubt the media not only didn't play the positive role but also disturbed the communal harmony.

However, despite experiencing the above, it will not be proper to gag the media to cover the incidents in selective manner. As media has freedom to express freely, people have also freedom to get the actual state of the situation irrespective of the dreadfulness involved in those incidents. The access to true information cannot be restricted from the public. Now there emerges a contrast between the exercise of fundamental rights by the people including media and the imposition of restriction on this right by putting the shackles on the limits of media so as to avoid the communal disharmony. To understand this issue, it is urgent to notice about other details of the role media is playing these days.

The reach of local media is limited upto its local clientele and therefore its impact is also limited. Generally the attitudinal changes brought about by the regional or national level modes of media are greater and long term in duration. Therefore it should be worthwhile to examine their contribution to the society. Broadly these days, both visual and print media have expanded its role from merely reporting the various incidents happening in the society to promoting the talents existing in the society, social contribution by various segments, creating awareness about the surroundings, spreading education level, presenting various debates and expert reports etc. This all helps into creating a view point in the society which provides to the administration various cues to suitably mould its policies. The constructive steps adopted by various organizations like NGOs, Civil Societies, Residents Welfare Associations (RWAs), Political Parties or any individual are provided sufficient coverage. Such coverage strengthens the harmony in the society. The main reason why such coverage are effective in their attempts and intentions is that such news are neutral and do not particularly highlight any religious or communal group. People are also receptive to the theme when they are not preoccupied with any sensitive thoughts which they are really concerned for. In the incidents of communal discord, such preoccupied thoughts of concern is the only factor which make the people sceptic about the news and prefer only those reports which provide them the sense of security or satisfaction. Therefore they read/listen those reports in which they seem themselves towards the winning side and if the situation in the reports seems otherwise they make an attempt to turn that situation seeming to be in their favour. This attempt only takes the form of communal violence.

Therefore, the impact of media in promoting the communal harmony is beyond doubt. People cheer on the achievement of a kid in the nationwide talent hunt programme irrespective of his religion. People feel dejected about the people affected in flood or earthquake or any other natural disaster irrespective of their belongingness to any religious group. People adopt the practices followed by the progressive RWAs without concerning that the residents are Hindus or Muslims etc. Civil Societies and their main participants give their opinion on the national issues without bias. All these reports and personal viewpoints are duly reflected through the visual, audio or print media only. These days, internet has become very strong media which have many forms of inter group communication like blogging, email, social interaction websites like orkut, facebook etc. These provide the opportunity to develop sentiments on international issues and create harmony. The welfare schemes adopted by the Government of India or state governments are promoted through this media only. These benefits percolate to all the people of a nation and credit goes to media only.

Few years back, the Times of India, a national daily English newspaper, started a campaign "Lead India" wherein people were selected from various zones of India and finally a winner at national level was selected as a prospective leader of India. Through this process, each religious and caste community got together and the great deliberation was conducted on various issues concerning the people of nation. Such activities though have not been adopted in past in large number but certainly a new movement has been started and it is hopeful that this will get more momentum in future.

From the above discussion it is amply clear that media has contributed to both communal harmony as well as communal discord. So it will be wrong to adopt either or position. However, lots of

concerted efforts are required to be adopted so that the ill effects of the media can be curbed and positive effects can be magnified. It is clear that same set of people react differently when they are party to the incidents and when they have some preoccupied notions and faith than when it is not the case. Therefore it is very important to understand each case separately and to have the idea in advance about the impact of the upcoming reports. The Indian social system has typical characteristics and it needs to be deciphered properly. The media has to mould itself so that the reports suit the typicality of that particular audience. A world sans frontiers should be ultimate aim of humanity. While a long way is yet to be traversed with a concerted efforts of every strata of the societies of the world, the media has the capacity to play a leading role in conceptualizing this ideology. Disputes and war makes news because of the interest it evokes in the viewers. The media also focuses on and even sensationalizes conflict because they believe that is what people want. But what can war beget but more war and in this media has a greater role to play. There are two ways of depicting any incident of communal violence. One is to give its causes and antecedent consequences which should be absolutely objective and other is episodic or fragmenting accounts of such dramatic moments. The former would encourage peace process through introspection and do a service to the society.

The most basic feature of journalism training to a media person is to be unbiased in reporting, but is this really possible? As already stated above, media person behaves as normal people and his personal sentiments and belief provide some bias in the reporting. An alternative suggested to this in journalism training centers abroad is "peace journalism in which reporters draw on their insights of conflict assessment and resolution to try to better explain the interests of each

side and the conflict dynamics including courage of constructive or escalatory moves". In addition, greater attention can be given to peace processes and their contribution to the development of a country and its people.

The Latin saying *'si vis pacem para baleum'* (if you want peace, prepare for war) may have been appropriate for Roman times, but it militates against the ethos passed on to us by our civilization, which we hold to be unique and conducive to the highest and most sublime of human experiences. As our scripture extol: "*Sarve Bhavantu sukhina; sarve santu niramayaha.*" Therefore, the media needs to be a peacenik with conviction that peace is the only path to progress and only then would it lead others along that path. An individual whose words or action affect an isolated few may form his own rules of conduct but can a leader, which the media undoubtedly is, adopt this posture when it is in a position of moulding and giving direction to the entire country. A true leader would lead and not merely follow the demands of a crowd. Along the path of human progress some adaptation may be inevitable, but let this adaptation not imperil our basic deals and objectives.

Jawaharlal Nehru speaking of Mahatma Gandhi's contributions to the world, had observed "we live today in a world torn with hatred and violence and fear and passion, arid the shadow of war hangs heavily over us all. Gandhi told us to cast away our fear and passion and to keep away from hatred and violence. His voice may not be heard by many in the tumult and shouting of today, but it will have to be heard and understood some time or other, if this world is to survive in any civilized form". It is not very encouraging to note that these remarks remain as relevant today as they were decades ago. Over the past few years, turmoil has brewed world over on a series of caricatures published by a newspaper of Denmark. Similarly distressing portrayal of

some Gods and Goddesses has bred anger and protest. The media must realize that the freedom enjoyed by it also casts on it a very heavy responsibility. While it must in no way itself give rise to such confrontations, it can play a salutary role in dousing the burning fires of religious passions.

Therefore, now there seems to be some way out where there can be maintained a fair balance between the Fundamental rights of media to report the incidents, fundamental rights of Indian citizens to know about incidents and the moral responsibility of media to report in objective manners. The Constitution of India, provides many conditions in which the reasonable restrictions may be put on the exercise of fundamental rights. Such conditions are like maintaining public order, public decency and maintenance of internal integrity of the nation. Therefore, it would not be gagging if some restrictions are put on the media about the reporting of various reports. The guidelines may be issued for example Press Trust of India has already issued many guidelines about how to handle and publish the news which are communally sensitive. However, mere issuance of some guidelines do not fulfil their objectives. There needs to be a great responsibility on the part of the enforcer and also a greater responsibility on the media. Unless media is sensitive enough itself, there is not going to be much difference due to any guidelines. The day such will happen, the debates like role of media in promoting communal harmony shall also be stopped automatically.

Media is a double edged sword

MARIAM F. SADHIQ

Today, media impacts the lives of one and all in several different ways. It affects the way we think, our attitude and actions too. This being the case what is the role of media in promoting communal harmony, especially in a diverse country like India? In fact, media is one of the most powerful tools to promote communal harmony. It can be very effective in promoting democracy, equality, tolerance and other positive social values in several ways. But market driven media culture has eroded the credibility of its real work – at least to a large extent.

The media should strictly adhere to proper norms and standards in reporting or commenting on matters, which bear on communal relations. One such important norm is not to distort, or exaggerate, not to employ intemperate, inciting and unrestrained language. The local papers particularly should strictly adhere to this norm.

Every profession functions by certain norms of conduct evolved by years of practice with objective to improve its standards to prevent its abuse and above all contribute to the society and social development. There was a time when journalism was a mission. Soon it became a profession and is now run as a full-fledged business activity like any other enterprise. Journalism has expanded in its role and its activities and has also grown in power. Codification of its work ethics is therefore an imperative need.

The Press Council of India, in keeping with its mandate to build up a code of conduct for newspapers, news agencies and journalists in accordance with high professional standards, has on the basis of its adjudications of cases from time to time, built up a code of journalistic norms. Though these codes have emerged out of cases relating to print media the fundamental principles evolved in the process are as much relevant to radio and television.

Journalists and columnists owe a very special responsibility to their country in promoting communal peace and amity. Their writings are not a mere reflection of their own feelings but help to large extent in moulding the feelings and sentiments of the society at large. It is, therefore, of utmost importance that they use their pen with circumspection and restrain.

News, views or comments relating to communal or religious disputes/ clashes shall be published after proper verification of facts and presented with due caution and restraint in a manner, which is conducive to the creation of an atmosphere congenial to communal harmony, amity and peace. Sensational, provocative and alarming headlines are to be avoided. Acts of communal violence or vandalism shall be reported in a manner as may not undermine the people's confidence in the law and order machinery of the State. Giving community-wise figures of the victims of communal riot, or writing about the incident in a style which is likely to inflame passions, aggravate the tension, or accentuate the strained relations between the communities/religious groups concerned, or which has a potential to exacerbate the trouble, shall be avoided.

The media, as a chronicle of tomorrow's history, owes an undeniable duty to the future to record events as simple untailored facts. The analysis of the events and opinion thereon are a different genre altogether. The treatment of the two also thus has necessarily to be different. In times of crisis, facts unadorned and simply put, with due care and restraint, cannot be reasonably objected to in a democracy. However, a heavy responsibility devolves on the author of opinion articles. The author has to ensure that not only his or her analysis free from any personal preference, prejudices or notions, but also they are based on verified, accurate and established facts and do not tend to foment disharmony or enmity between castes, communities and races.

All disorders, which acquire communal character, make news. It is axiomatic that they cause divisiveness and hatred among the common people. It is needless to say reporting of such an event is as sensitive, delicate and challenging

as the event. The media, which enjoys the utmost freedom of expression, has a great and vital role to play moulding public opinion on correct lines in regard to the need of friendly and harmonious relations between various communities and religious groups and thus promote national solidarity.
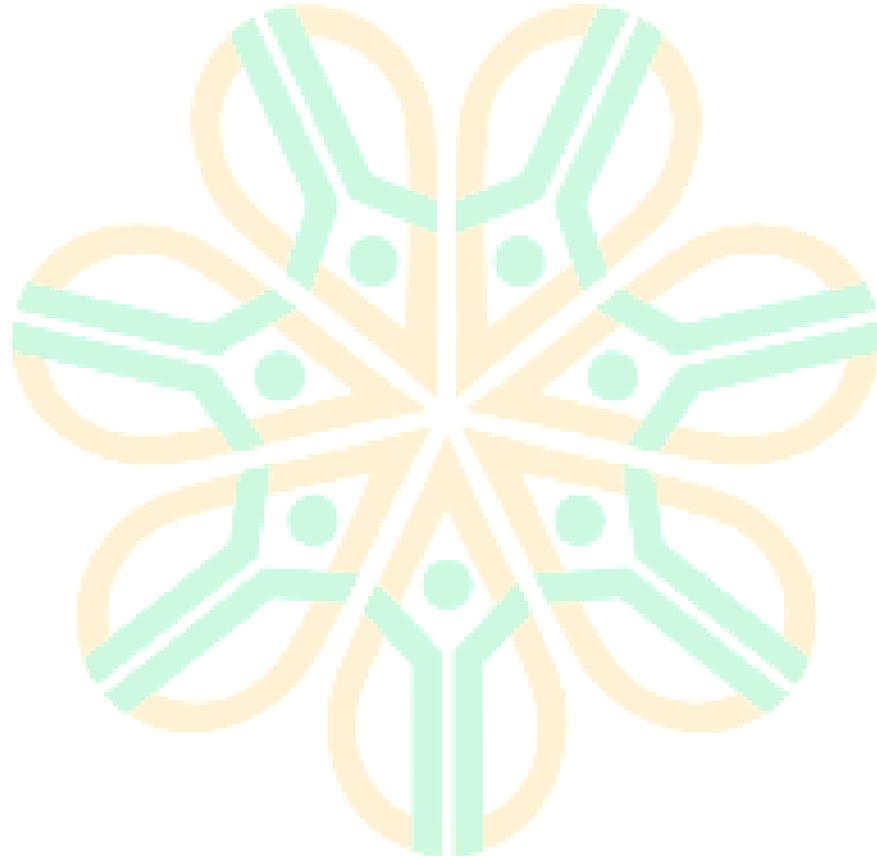
The role of media in such situations is to be peacemakers and not abettors, to be trouble shooters and not troublemakers. Let the media play their noble role of promoting peace and harmony among the people in the present crisis in Gujarat. Any trend to disrupt the same either directly or indirectly would be an anti-national act.

The first communal carnage of the new millennium, and the first such incident after a decade's gap in India, saw the use of new and old media as well as communication tools to spread hate and violence and to ensure collaboration in violent attacks. In fact, the media as well as new age communication devices played a dual role. Mobile telephone calls, SMS messages, email, websites, newspapers, television broadcasts, private television channels and desktop printers were used to spread hate campaign and to instigate violence in Gujarat as never before on the one hand.

On the other, large section of the media, especially the national print and electronic media, stood firmly as one bloc, criticising the violence and exposing its perpetrators and collaborators. A few bold reporters and amateur filmmakers used compact digital video recorders to document, broadcast or disseminate through CDs accounts of the targeted violence. There were also initiatives to use the media to spread messages of peace, communal harmony and to provide life- saving information about relief. However, such initiatives were limited.

Thus media and its role in communal peace and harmony is like a double edged sword. There should be fair, impartial, reliable reporting and accurate news analyzation. As far as news is concerned, media should take a very rigid stand to analyze the news, how it happens and how it came into the existence to know the root cause of the problem. But rather going deep into the problem, journalists are blindly

accepting the truth which is formulated by the police or some social evil elements and proliferate the same publicly. In many cases innocent people have been charged and guilty enjoy their sins with the contentment to commit it again. Hence media should act responsibly and in a proactive manner thereby contributing to national peace and harmony.

The press is the best instrument for enlightening the minds of men

V. LALITHALAKSHMI

India is a multi-ethnic, multi-religions, multi-lingual society harbouring a vast variety of races, tribes, castes, communities, religions, languages, customs and living styles. Each cultural group has its own set of cultural traits and is a community in itself. It is but natural that the groups develop a sense of belongingness to their own group. This feeling of belongingness to the group of which one is a part can be termed as communalism. In India, communalism manifests itself in the form of linguism (where language is the binding force), regionalism (where region is the cohesive factor) and religious communalism (where religion forms the basis for community formation).

Communalism as such does not have negative connotations. It is functional for the society to the extent that it creates unity within the group/community. It stimulates the members of the community to work together for the upliftment of the group. However, communalism is not limited to this. The feeling of oneness from being absolute slowly gives way to a feeling of relative oneness whereby communities perceive themselves in terms of other communities. The cultural traits of the community to which one belongs are considered to be superior compared to others and conscious efforts are made to preserve them. The practices followed by other communities are considered as a threat to the existence of the community. This promotes antagonistic relations between communities and in its extreme form, communalism manifests itself in the form of annihilation of out-groups. Communal riots are an example of this form of communalism. India has been witness to many instances of communal hate and violence.

There are many reasons for the growth of communal feelings in India. From the point of view of the communities whose numbers are more, there is a feeling of loss of socio-economic space to the minorities. This is also compounded by the fact that there are special safeguards that have been provided to the minorities under the Constitution of the country.

From the point of view of the minorities, there is a fear of assimilation into the majority fold and loss of identity. This explains the resistance to the introduction of Hindi in southern states.

Further, the level of socio-economic-educational development is different among different communities. This leads to a sense of relative deprivation among communities.

Politicisation of the conflict has further aggravated the distance between the communities and prevents fruitful interactions between various communities. Communal identities are ready made platforms for political mobilization in the country and passions can easily whipped up in the name of these identities. This explains the growth of regional parties in the national politics.

There are anti-social elements which have vested interest in a situation of anomie in the society. Hence these elements constantly try to capitalize on the situation of mutual hatred between communities. There is mass looting during communal riots and wrongs done in such a situation often go unpunished.

India has had a history full of instances of communal hatred and no part of the country is free from this phenomenon. These range from minor localized events to major riots involving displacement of population across borders. Be it the displacement of Kashmiri Pandits form the Kashmir valley in the north or the anti English-Hindi-Sanskrit movement in the south, the issue of separatism in the North-East on the basis of ethnicity or the Gujarat and Mumbai riots in the west, India has been a witness to

events attributable to communalism across space and time.

Considering the seriousness of the issue, there is an urgent need to check this dangerous tendency. The approach has to be basically two-fold- firstly to check communalism and secondly to promote nationalism (feeling of oneness of a nation irrespective of caste, creed, language and religion) and media has a major role to play in promoting communal harmony in India.

Role of media in providing information

Mark Twain has highlighted the role of media in information dissemination. He stated that, *"There are only two forces that can carry light to all the corners of the globe ... the sun in the heavens and the Associated Press 'down here"*

Media plugs the information gap during a situation of communal tension by covering the events and bringing to light the happenings to all parts of the country. The Journalists from news papers and television channels have risked life and personal safety to bring first hand information on communal tensions across the country. With news pouring in 24 hours a day, the media has bridged the time and space gap in respect of information. The media has made the best use of technology in this regard. This is evident in the live coverage of events. For instance, the news of riots in 1984 in Delhi and 1989 in Bhagalpur took quite some time to reach the other parts of the country unlike the news of say Gujarat / Mumbai. The availability of information in real time is a must for checking communal tendencies. In the words of Amy Goodman, *'Independent media can go to where the silence is and break the sound barrier".*

Role of media in curbing anti-social activities

The plethora of information available with the media can be made used of to book the anti-social elements and criminals involved in rioting and causing communal tensions. The media coverage acts as an agent of

social control over anti-social elements who are exposed in the pictures both still and motion shot by the media. There have been instances where the police have been able to arrest rioters on the basis of video footages shot by media personnel.

Role of media in promotion of Justice

The media has also a role to play in championing the cause of justice to victims of communal tensions. For instance, the media has closely followed the story of Graham Staines and Zahira Shaikh in the fight to justice. The media also managed to trace an alleged eye -witness of the 1984 anti-sikh riots. The media has brought off some sting operations unearthing the role of various people in the various tense communal situations. In another case, the media closely followed the case of Dr. Md. Haneef who was wrongly arrested in Australia in connection with the car bomb case in Glasgow, UK and brought about pressure ultimately leading to his acquittal.

Role of media in provision of relief and rehabilitation

The media also has a role to play in covering the aftermath of riots like, rehabilitation and return to normalcy in the riots affected areas. The media has to act as the unelected opposition in highlighting the deficiencies in the post riot rehabilitation situations and keep a constant vigil for any act which could cause a relapse into tense situation once again. Thomas Jefferson has stated that *"No government ought to be without censors; and where the press is free no one ever will."*

Role of media in projection of the ill-effects of communalism

The media has a role to play in highlighting the maladies of communalism and suffering of the common man as a result of communal hatred. For instance, Indian media has depicted the plight of Kashmiri Pandits in the movie 'Sheen'. The film 'Maachis' highlights the issue of

extremism in Punjab and tries to look into the reasons behind such extremism. Movies like Final Solution and Parzania were made based on the Gujarat riots. A Malayalam movie 'Vilapangalku Appuram' based on the aftermath of the 2002 Gujarat riots. The film, Amu takes a look at the anti-sikh riots of 1984. There have been several accounts of partition of India ranging from Television serials like *Buniyaad* to films like *Gram Hawa*, *Meghe Dhaka tara*, *Komal Gandhaar*, *Khamosh Paani* and 1947 Earth.

The print media has played its part in presenting various accounts of tense communal situations in India. Numerous books such as *Hoshiyarpur se Lahore tak*, Train to Pakistan, Ice-candy man, The Broken Mirror etc bring out the experiences of common men during the tragedy following partition of India in 1947. The book *Pinjar* later made into a feature film depicts plight of women who were the most vulnerable section of the population during partition.

Responsibility of media in maintaining communal harmony

The media in India has to act responsibly. In this age of cut-throat competition, the various news channels tend to sensationalise news items often leading to disastrous consequences. During the Gujarat riots the media came out with many sensitive pictures of the riots. These pictures have been made use of by communal elements to whip up communal passions and attract and recruit vulnerable sections of the population into the communal ideology. It is seen that the pictures of Gujarat and Babri Masjid have been used extensively to motivate youth to take up arms for carrying out terror attacks as revenge for the same. The subsequent investigations during the blasts at Ahmedabad, Hyderabad, Jaipur, Delhi and Mumbai have revealed this.

In another instance, the news channels went on to air erroneous reports on the bomb blasts in Mumbai. The various channels looking to pull off a scoop reported that blasts had taken place in areas where actually

there were no blasts. During such situations, with cell phones also jammed, people look up to television channels for accurate information. In the instant case, the wrong reporting caused more panic and commotion among people. In this context, Norman Mailer has mentioned that *"Once a newspaper touches a story, the facts are lost forever, even to the protagonists".*

In the context, it is also said that *'If you don't read the newspaper, you are uninformed. If you do read the newspaper, you are misinformed".*

More often than not, media is used as a tool to promote communal feelings as it has the widest coverage and is thus the easiest way to reach across to many people. For instance, *Aftab,* a local Urdu newspaper of the Kashmir Valley, published a press release issued by Hizb-ul-Mujahideen set up by the Jamaat-e-Islami in 1989 to wage Jihad for Jammu and Kashmir's secession from India and accession to Pakistan, asking all Hindus to pack up and leave. Another local paper, *Al Safa,* repeated this expulsion order. More recent is the allegation made against two local newspapers of Mangalore, namely, Karavali Ale and Vijaya Kirana where by the news papers have been accused of instigating communal sentiments by publishing wrong reports and also provocative images during the recent communal tensions in Mangalore. This is not a new phenomenon. The media has been used to propagate communal literature even during British times.

It is also seen that many a times, there are articles and opinions brought out in the media which are biased or which are vulnerable to communal interpretations. There have been instances where the media has taken sides instead of unbiased reporting. Further, there are newspapers which openly support certain ideologies and political parties which claim to follow these ideologies. There have also been instances of under-reporting. For instance, there have been claims that the history of

the Islamic invasion of India is being systematically whitewashed and censored in Indian school-books and in other media. There have been allegations that the Indian media rarely reports the human rights violations against Muslims in Indian administered Kashmir and human rights violations in the North-East.

On the other hand, It is also felt by many that many media stations in India provided vast coverage of the Gujarat Riots in 2002 in which a large number of Muslims were murdered but have often failed to report on the persecution of Hindus in Muslim-dominated Jammu & Kashmir.

In this context, Malcolm X has pointed out that *"If you're not careful, the newspapers will have you hating the people who are being oppressed, and loving the people who are doing the oppressing."*

Thus, it is the responsibility of the media to exercise restraint wherever and whenever necessary in the interest of the larger public. It is not out of place to mention here that 'Freedom of expression' is a delicate right which has to be exercised in utmost responsible manner. This freedom is a cherished one considering that there have always been restrictions on media during the British times. Considering this, there is all the more responsibility on the media to join hands and bring out the moderate and liberal opinion of the society in order to counter these aberrations and allegations.

Role of media in promoting National Unity

Prevention of communalism is only one side of the coin. In a country like India characterized by diversities, it is not sufficient that the different communities exist side by side. There has to be something which all the people of India come about to share. This is the feeling of belongingness to an entity larger than that of their community, which is India. The Indian identity has two parts, the individual identity of each person whereby each individual relates to his own community (uniqueness) and the overall

identity of being an Indian whereby each individual shares commonality with individuals of all other communities. The easiest way of communicating the same to vast sections of the country is through media. In the words of Thomas Jefferson, *"The press is the best instrument for enlightening the mind of man, and improving him as a rational, moral and social being."*

For instance, there have been short films national television where celebrities from all walks of life have come together to promote the cause of national integration. Most notable is the short film titled *'mile sur mera tumhara'* which used *'Des Raaga'* to convey the message of Unity in Diversity. The *Vande Mataram* and *Khadi* series is the latest addition to this list. Media can effectively be used to convey the message of tolerance, non-violence and peace.

The greatest strength of India is its diversity whereby the focus is on unity and not uniformity, cohesion and not fusion, integration and not assimilation. Politically neutral, socially responsible, psychologically mature and culturally tolerant media is the best instrument to carry this message far and wide and promote communal harmony.

As has been pointed out by Arthur Miller, *"A good newspaper, I suppose, is a nation talking to itself."*

Media must help society to define and promote right values

KARMA DORJI

Media today has a major role to play in this democratic world to give first hand information to the public. This fundamental institution of democratic governance, the media reflects public opinion, but plays a vital role in creating and shaping it.

Media has both the sides of positive and negative. The positive nature of the media is not given much attention. It is not because the benefits of the media are not realized but the ill effects of the media have been widely discussed and given more attention.

Media has the greatest influential power. It can shape people's attitude and expression. It can shape the country in particular and world at large, making it better place to live in or the worse place to live in. The media can create terror or comfort by giving discouraging or encouraging news.

Many believe that the media should be truly free and should not be restricted by cultural constraints or public emotion and moral values. It is difficult to agree to this point. In fact, an enlightened media should strive to inform the public, to create and sustain as a wide range of interests as possible and encourage debate, which involve accurate and impartial presentation of news and views and evaluation of conflicting ideas. Today the culture is affected by new values emanated out of print media, television, internet and cinema. Media has important role to play in preserving and supporting culture. It should not lose itself to the demands of the market and the politics of the day. The media must be conscious of our blatant and inherent biases, be it religious, political, gender and age to ensure that the society is not divided based on religion, political, region, linguistic and so on and so forth.

Media must help society to understand change and, in the process, define and promote right values. Media, in the democratic governance has always

played role to provide public space for people's views and initiate public discussion.

In Bhutan, the young media has played a positive role in making the first election of Bhutan a successful one. Bhutanese news media- Bhutan Broadcasting Service Corporation (TV), Bhutan Times, Bhutan Observer and national news paper Kuensel has widely covered the news on party campaign, highlighted their malpractices and of course their positive approach without partiality and siding any political party. This has facilitated the general public to make the best choice of Government. This is the positive side of media's role.

However, the newspaper doesn't realize or overlook few small but equally important things that would not only have short term implication but long term impact. For instance, a line of sentence can create lots of doubts, suspicion and bring various sorts of interpretation if words are not given due care.

Let me share my experience. A journalist from the Bhutan Observer had come to meet me to confirm a threat letter received from some anti-social elements which states that random blast will be carried out in the country. I explained to him that the report is purely an unconfirmed one and it is not likely to happen and therefore we should not terrorise the general public. Well, he did not listen to me and has brought out the news with terrifying headline. Here, the media is giving an impression of a world famous peaceful country to be totally unsafe to live in which is absolutely untrue. Moreover, if such news keeps on coming on the news paper based on un-reliable source, people will loose faith in newspaper and will not believe the news even when the news is genuine and has the role to play for alerting general public.

It was in 1990 when a news paper brought an article on drug abuse in the country where it had mentioned names of various drugs which even the Bhutanese drug abusers were not aware of. This article had become like a drug advertisement rather than its role to inform the public on its ill effects on individual and society as a whole.

Bhutan believes in one nation and one people. People should not be divided by religion, cast creed and region and create countries within a country. But on the other hand if media writes that east is better than west or west is better than east, the very word- east and west will create regional divide. The Bhutan Times had brought out a tabulated report indicating community to which the elected members of the MPs belong to. A constituency will have more than 4 or 5 different communities based on mostly dialects in the case of Bhutan. Here, the media is promoting sense of regionalism and create division. Candidates for MPs should be elected not based on region but it should be based on one's competency and capability. It is because of such misled information that creates majority and minority in this very democratic world situation.

In the 90s the Bhutanese could speak Hindi better than the National language. It was because Hindi movies were popular in Bhutan and did not have its own local movie production. Since 2000, with the development of Bhutanese film industry, it has changed the scenario. Now the Bhutanese theatres are always booked by Bhutanese films released almost every month. The children of today see Bhutanese movies and sing Bhutanese songs. Media has therefore helped promote our own language and culture. On the other hand, movie is a power of influence which can shape ones attitude, life style and ideologies. The movie makers therefore should be highly sensitized to ensure and maintain moral values, cultural ethics and beliefs. The story line should be well taken care to ensure that it does not include any sensitive issues which may be capable of bringing communal disharmony. For example; many youths are influenced by their favourite hero and take up smoking imitating the actor.

It is always an experience for all the people that many a times the media brings out articles which are biased and vulnerable to communal psychoanalysis. At times the media report is much influenced by the reporter itself in the sense that the particular article may take sides of certain ideologies and political parties in which the reporter has faith. Sometimes, the reports are incomplete where issues

may be highlighted but unbiased and. correct analysis are absent which gives only one sided story.

Pluralism is regarded as the very essence of democracy. Media therefore must not bring out any opinion which will only promote identity of majority and neglect the minority. Media should ensure that no word, no sentence and no article give an impression that the majoritarian ethos as the national ethos, and the predominant culture as the mainstream culture. If the primacy of the majoritarian values and culture is accepted, then the minorities are likely to be marginalized and alienated and it will cause minority revolution. It will make minority insecure in its own homestead. Therefore, any desire for majoritarian dominance must be consciously eschewed.

National identities should not be defined in a narrow or exclusive way. Minorities should not be excluded in the self definition of the nation state. Such a self definition is bound to alienate the minorities and give them very little stake in the society.

There should be a conscious effort at all levels to reach out to the minority communities. The members of the majority community should make it a point to acquaint themselves with the religion, philosophy, values, language, tradition and practices of the minority communities. These should be consciously appreciated and cherished. The majority group must express its affection for its own countrymen from the minority group through social integration to convince them that they belong to the same family/ state.

The state should, in collaboration with civil society, initiate through the media and the educational system, measures to enable citizens to overcome ignorance, prejudices and fixed mindsets regarding the characteristics of people belonging to other communities. Textbooks, particularly of history, philosophy and social studies, for children and young people, should be carefully screened to remove from them all stereotypes and misinformation.

The foundations of pluralism are rudely shaken with every act of violence against the minority community. Therefore, a pluralistic state should not put up with acts of violence, aggression and intimidation by one community against the other, and least of all by the majority community against the minority communities. In such circumstances, the reaction of the state should be prompt, unambiguous, firm and decisive. The state cannot afford to waiver, hesitate, prevaricate or delay. It must immediately display its capacity to act and its absolute firmness of purpose.

It is, when our natural phenomenon tendency of discriminating nature or mindset express openly insensitive words which may be discriminating or deemed discriminatory without much care causes communal disharmony. Therefore, newspapers, televisions, internet articles, educational text books and any other forms of media must be free of sensitive words which may misled and divide the community and cause rivalry and revolution in the country. The writers should not write without considering communal sensitivity, the political leaders should not only choose majority for power, the bureaucrats should not act partial and so on. Lastly, I plead to all the scholars, writers, political leaders and bureaucrats to sensibly ensure that the country's peace and national security is not exchanged for money, power and status through insensitive actions.

Media can steer the country in a direction where peace prevails

RAHUL JAIN

India is a country of diverse culture, religions and ethnicity. Geographically, India is counted as a subcontinent and one sixth of human population lives here. This short description of India, suffices to lead us to the conclusion that so many people are to live on the same land there should be an environment of vibrating and thriving harmony and peace. Only this can ensure an overall well being and holistic, inclusive development of the people.

But the time and space in which we are living, the experience tells a different story, which may not be very coherent with the imagined and desired social norms. The existing humanist organisations are cramped by an inability to overcome the conservatism of their own members and are unwilling or unable to expand enough to undertake all the activities that are needed in the increasingly demanding market place for information and presentation of the rationale for secularism. Things have deteriorated since the main humanist organisation has, through recruiting lost much of its ideology.

Atheism has always been suppressed, now much of the current membership seems unable to open up to the new possibilities for them to explain the need for secular humanism to the wider public. Some are so confined within the security of their little cliques, that they seem afraid, not only of the wider public, but of their own members and supporters. Some are almost entirely dormant and in no way fulfilling the expectations of their founders.

Even now they stubbornly refuse to link the many web-sites of independent atheists thinking and writing on the Internet. And seek to suppress rather than promote their own talent, relying solely on a few already well known journalists.

The other serious problem is their apparent inability to co-operate with each other where appropriate, in the interests of not only their members but to the advantage of the whole community.

No joint advertising, no co-ordination of information, or promotion of print and Internet sources through its journals. They are so afraid of criticism that it only uses closed discussion forums.

Thus to break away from the ghettos and come out in open, the sharing of information is of paramount importance. This can be effectively done by the media of modern days. The purpose of the media is to stir up some of the stagnation and inward looking attitudes that prevail there and deliver a kick up the pants to get them to open up and promote all those atheists and secular humanists who want to be active, and want their opinions heard in public debate, but are just used to make up the numbers and keep quiet.

Atheists, who support the humanist cause for its different approach, still want it to represent the core values of atheism and secularism.

Interested people need to be able to get information about the issues, and the range of issues, on which the churches and religions seek to maintain their dominance, and see their national organisation making the running, not trailing behind.

Religion is so ingrained within our culture that many people do not recognise its all pervasive presence. Many of these issues need clarification, if we are to challenge the religious agenda that still persists. There are so many issues over the whole range of human activity, public policy and public attitudes, political and personal, on which religion shapes our lives.

Power of Media

The media of modern days, equipped with the mighty electronic means of communication which are swift and carry a wider reach, which was never possible earlier in the times of print media, is so powerful that it influences every section of society. The means of communication, apart from television, radio, and newspaper are websites, mobile phones, e mails, wireless, sms etc. With these instruments even a street toddler may be covered. This leaves it to the wisdom of the media what direction does it give to the information. It may use it or it may misuse it.

Print

As an example during the Gujarat riots, the local Gujarati press took to biased reporting. The Editors' Guild report noted the communal role played by certain Gujarati newspapers including two leading language newspapers, Gujarat *Samachar* and *Sandesh*. There were several instance of misreporting. At the same time there was no report on the plight of the people in the relief camp or interview with the victims except in one local newspaper, Gujarat Today.

In an interview to the Editors Guild Fact Finding Mission Report, the Chief Managing Director and Editor of Sandesh, Falgun Patel, admitted that his reporters did sometimes lose the balance and were communalised down the line. He said that the reaction to Godhra was "justified". He claimed that owing to its "pro-Hindu" stand Sandesh's circulation had increased by 150,000 since the violence began. Gujarat Samachar's owner-Editor Shreyans Shah told the Editors Guild team that his daily's circulation had increased by around 50,000 during the course of the carnage.

Television

This incident demonstrates that what influence can media exert over the thinking of the common man. It can virtually sway the opinion of people in one direction or the other. Based on their information and hence their perception people form opinions. It is therefore, responsibility of the media or the people at the helm of affairs that they provide fair deal to the people, in order to promote the integrity and harmony. The role which media can play may be even stronger during the ongoing riots. During the violence what subscribers want from their local (electronic) media (including cable networks) is positive stories of community living and hard information about incident-prone areas, curfew hours, safe routes for commuting and so forth. This is not much of an expectation and is easy for the cable operators to disseminate provided they have will and are genuinely interested.

Radio

Apart from the television, radio also has a wide reach and is also a state controlled body. It may act independently during the riots and violence and provide with accurate information which may be of vital use.

Phones

Mobile telephones can be powerful tools for people coordinating violence as well as those trying to report it under great risk to their safety. Members of several mobs that attack minority residential areas and business establishments carry mobile telephone, either receiving orders or briefing someone away from the actual site of violence. During the Gujarat violence National Human Rights Commission, while pointing out "local factors and players" overwhelming the district officers in certain instances where situation got out of control. "Such information had been sought from the State Government particularly since there were widespread reports of well-organized persons, armed with mobile telephones and addresses, singling out certain homes and properties for death and destruction. The Gujarat riots probably mark the first occasion when digital media has been so extensively used, if at all. Rioters and middle class looters were directed by mobile phones.

E-Mails

We see in our day to day business several emails which spread the message of communal harmony, in a very effective way. They are so beautifully designed with power point presentations that they immediately attract the attention. Similarly emails can be used to spread the hate message and incite the communal tension. Similar thing happened in Gujarat when for the first time along with short message service (sms) the emails were used to incite people communally. One e-mail was specifically asking the readers to boycott Muslim shops and vendors.

Websites

Many positive initiates can be taken through the websites to spread the communal harmony. The accurate and authentic information can be disseminated through it to the educated class which can further take up the information to the

uneducated class or to those who do not have access to internet. On the contrary these may be as powerful tools of destruction as well.

Initiatives Media has taken

The media is indeed doing quite a bit towards promoting communal harmony as a very vital necessity - through debates and dialogues and critiques on violations of this value. It promotes democracy, equality, tolerance and other positive social values through different documentary, case studies etc. On numerous T.V. channels we see debates, the programmes like "Devil's Advocate" hosted by Karan Thapar, "We The People" hosted by Barkha Dutt, and articles written by Vir Singhvi in Hindustan Times are live examples of the breath taking debates. The editorials of several national and serious newspapers are making an impact on the thinking of the educated community. They bring to fore the real living conditions of the minorities and their actual needs. In this process they act as interface between the larger community that is the mainstream community, government and the minority. This is how they create a talking platform and the social fabric is intertwined. But ultimately it falls upon the people who have to take the responsibility to bring a change in their thinking. The media can act as a medium and mechanism, but change has to be brought by the people themselves.

Harassment of Independent Media

Performing its role in bringing a change in people's thinking and establishing a harmonious environment puts impediments in the nefarious ideas of selfish quarters. Independent media is criticised by the rioters, as well as the Government for portraying the meticulous targeting of minority establishments and households in the attacks. "They only listen to minorities and ignore the mainstream community," is a common complaint. Taking up the case of Gujarat riots, television news programme *Aaj Tak,* invited harsh attack, especially for its prompt coverage of the first few hours of the carnage. Major national dailies, The Indian Express and The Times of India, both of which have Ahmedabad editions were also singled out for mention.

The administration often came down heavily on independent media because the coverage did not suit its interest. Many correspondents covering the riots were put through personal test by rampaging mobs. Journalists took it as part of occupational hazard, but the harassment from officials came as a shock. The police confiscated from a national television correspondent a videotape containing fresh footage of victims criticising the police for inaction for two days. The editor of the channel called from Delhi to put pressure on the Chief Minister's office and the tape was returned, but after erasing four minutes of crucial footage.

Conclusion

The media has all the necessary equipment and power at its disposal in spreading the communal harmony. What is required is its will to fulfil its responsibility. It can be easily done if they understand their social responsibility. Though it is difficult but they necessarily have to resist the pressure exerted on them by the quarters who have vested interest in inciting communal violence. If they command a control over the thinking of the people they must steer it in a direction where the peace prevails. That is how the goals mentioned in the preamble to the constitution viz. social justice, fraternity, equality etc may be achieved.

Content of the Media should be congenial for Harmony

DR. DHAVALKUMAR K. PATE

"There are as many religions as there are individuals; but those who are conscious of the spirit of nationality do not interfere with one another's religion. If Hindus believe that India should be peopled only by Hindus, they are living in a dreamland. The Hindus, the Mohammedans, the Parsis and the Christians who have made their country are fellow countrymen and they will have to live in unity if only for their own interest. In no part of the world are one nationality and one religion synonymous terms; nor has it ever been so in India."

Mahatma Gandhi

In today's India we have perhaps forgotten this great piece of advice of our father of nation. Today there is a major feeling of distrust and grudge amongst the communities of this great nation.

India has always been a mixture of different ethnic, religious, linguistic and other communities. And it has witnessed many disputes and clashes among the same. Today we are far from a country with a good harmonious population, and it has also had its repercussion on the economic and cultural front, too.

Communalism as defined by oxford dictionary is a theory or system of government in which each commune is virtually an independent state, and the nation merely a federation of such states. Another definition is strong allegiance to one's own ethnic group rather than to society as a whole. Unfortunately, in the Indian context, communalism has acquired a perverted connotation and means the evil practice of exploiting religion or caste by the members of a community/caste or party to get an unfair political advantage, undue material gain, patronage, or favourable treatment as against the legitimate rights, interests, and aspirations of a rival community.

Communal harmony is not merely absence of communalism but also a state in which the different communities live comfortably, amicably, peacefully and productively with one another.

Our constitution guarantees secularism in its preamble and other provisions such as fundamental guarantees of freedom of conscience, practice and propagation of religion (Article 25) and also freedom at religious instruction in certain educational and cultural institutions (Article 28). It also provided for was the protection of the cultural and educational rights of minorities (Article 28 and 30). An important and integral part of these Articles is Article 19(1) that embodies the faith our constitution framers had in the press of the county in promoting the above principles.

But our forefathers' trust in media and constitution of India has not materialised itself in the sphere of communal harmony as it should have been. But why is the role of popular media so important in extinguishing communal hatred and promoting communal harmony? Why so much importance had been and has been given to an unbiased and pro active press?

One of the answers is the information asymmetry. Press and media due to their dedicated network of reporters and respondents are better informed about the happenings of any incident. Most of other people are not privy to first hand information. Majority of the people depend on the media for the information. And it is the only means for the outsiders and international world to know about any incident. Thus it is ethical and moral responsibility of the media to present before its audience the information in an unbiased and undistorted form.

The media has a wide and all encompassing coverage today. Nobody in India today is aloof from what is happening around him, because of the media. And the eminent media persons, performers, actors and actresses, sports persons, news analysts, column writers, news readers etc. have a large clientele and are in an influential position. Their views and presentations more easily accepted by the audience than the government's official declaration. And with glory and power, some social responsibility is bound to follow.

Last but not the least, media and press is a noble profession. Free press is to any democracy as the air is to life. It is media's responsibility to drive the society on the path of progress rather than destruction and provide the society with the guiding torch.

Now having focussed on the responsibility of media in promoting communal harmony, let's focus on what actually is media's duty and what is expected from it for the communal harmony.

Role of media in promoting communal harmony has two entirely different but complementary functions, namely (1) Role of media during communal riots/ tense situation and (2) role of media during peace time to promote communal harmony and bonding.

Let's discuss the first point i.e. role during riots and tense situation.

Firstly, media has the responsibility to produce only proven facts during the riots. It should refrain from fanning and spreading the rumours, because in that time not many people have the brain to reason out the information's veracity. They simply go by the word of the media. Therefore, language used should not be instigating, derogatory, inflammatory or insulting.

The media has to refrain from putting personal emotion of writer in the article and be as unbiased as it is expected to be. Media has to be free from any external pressure like political, bureaucratic, economic, power groups, peer groups or other vested interests so as to be unbiased.

Nowadays due to competition and rivalry in the field of media, there is a chance of drifting away from ethics towards TRP and popularity based journalism. Media should put the societies interests before its own TRP or monetary interests, and not forget humanity for TRP.

As it has been seen in many riots and communal clashes, the repetitive broadcast of provoking or disturbing scenes in the electronic media has the result of brain-washing of the youth and fills the mind of the youth with a sense of vengeance. And its repercussions are felt sometimes immediately like aggravation

of riots or at some times after a long time like the serial bomb blast in Delhi, Ahmedabad, Jaipur etc. for the revenge of Gujarat riots.

Media should not provoke people again and again by reiterating the same painful story, which has already been forgotten or put in the back store of one's mind. E.g. reminding people about Ayodhya, Babari Masjid demolition, Gujarat riots, Bombay clashes etc. usually serve no useful purpose except the incitement of the miscreants for revenge. A golden rule is not to tease any sleeping lion.

Media should not cover the incident in such a way as to undermine the people's trust in government's administrative and police system. Criticism can always wait till the acute condition has been brought under control. At the time of tension, media should give the people a positive signal by spreading the message that government is taking care of the problem effectively. At the time of tension, only verified facts should be published. And the job of analysts and opinion article writers are even more responsible. They should keep their personal emotions and thoughts away from the objective analysis.

Media should also curtail the rumours which are on the wind during the tense times by stating that no such event has ever happened. If rumours are controlled, half the law and order situation problem is already solved.

One more problem that has come forth is "half truth". It happens sometimes that the heading, scroll bar or photograph don't accrue with the facts published below. Avoid provocative titles and photographs because they are the features which make the most impact. They should depict the truth rather than being sensational.

And the most important thing is the role of REGIONAL MEDIA. Generally, major national newspapers follow journalistic norms. But some of the regional newspapers are sometimes a mouthpiece of some political party or religion. Now at the time of some communal events, the national newspapers or news channels depend on the information collected by the regional journalists. So their analysis may also be biased depending on the information received. And the local

vernacular newspapers have much more coverage in the affected area than the national newspapers which are mainly in Hindi or English. Thus they should behave much more responsibly in the hour of crisis.

The most important thing is not to glorify the terrorists or extremists who created the problem of communalism or terrorism, however noble their cause may seem to be, because no riot or war has yielded positive result in long run. Sometimes the miscreants get too much media attention, which make them hero. And sometimes it happens that the media invites religious leaders to deliver speech on the happenings, and instead of cooling the fire down, they just deliver provocative speeches. Such indirect assistance to the miscreants should also be stopped.

The other important area is caste, religion or community references. Press Council of India has given the following norms for the same to all the press media, which is also applicable to other electronic media. In general, the caste identification of a person or a particular class should be avoided, particularly when in the context it conveys a sense or attributes a conduct or practice derogatory to that caste. Media should not use the word 'Scheduled Caste' or 'Harijan' which has been objected to by some. An accused or a victim shall not be described by his caste or community when the same does not have anything to do with the offence or the crime and plays no part either in the identification of any accused or proceeding, if there be any. Newspaper should not publish any fictional literature distorting and portraying the religious characters in an adverse light and offending the religious susceptibilities of large sections of society who hold those characters in high esteem, invested with attributes of the virtuous and lofty. Commercial exploitation of the name of prophets, seers or deities is repugnant to journalistic ethics and good taste. It should also not attempt to promote balkanization of the country.

Now let's focus on the role of media during the peace time for promotion of communal harmony.

One of the jobs of the journalists is also to bring forth to the public notice the plight of the weaker sections of society. They are the watchdogs on behalf of the society of its weaker sections. If this is followed in good faith the weaker section can get along with the mainstream and they feel equally comfortable thereby decreasing the sense of inequality and injustice which is the root cause of all the communal tensions.

The media should build up national solidarity and instil this idea that this is our country and all the countrymen are our brothers and sisters. Media should bring to the notice of the people that they have been living together very comfortably in the long history of India except the small periods of communal unrests. The time spent in harmony far outweighs the time spent in communal disharmony. The media should make a conscious effort to remind the people of the great glory of the India and the harmony prevalent in India since time immemorial.

Media should facilitate inter religion communication and talks among the religious leaders on the issues of social importance. They should bring forth the best of the practices and cultural diversity of all the communities. Media should also teach us to be tolerant of the cultures and values of other communities which may not be agreeable to us.

Media should publish good books, movies and other material which promotes the communal harmony. There are many movies and books on communal riots, but merely a handful of movies and books on the theme of communal harmony. This has been created because media is money driven. The basic thing is "whatever incites your basic instincts, sales well" our mindset is such that we like war, clashes, deaths etc. but are quite apathetic to peace building measures. Therefore the media tries to play around people's raw wounds and never let them heal.

Art is one of the thing which is above the communalism and pure. Media should take the help of part in establishing the communal harmony. Music, paintings, songs of national unity and communal harmony go a long way in

promoting communal harmony. The artists have the moral responsibility not to incite the sentiments by depiction of the religious leaders, gods, goddesses or religious symbols in an objectionable way. Art is meant for uniting and not for dividing. Let the art be used for healing the malady rather than aggravating it.

Last but not the least, editors of the media have a very conscious and active role to play in the promotion of communal harmony. They should make sure that the content of the media is a healthy one and' congenial to the atmosphere of communal harmony and not instigating any section of society and definitely not affecting law and order situation. Furthermore they should give the space and importance to the articles related to the promotion of communal harmony and upliftment of the weaker sections of the country.

As the Sanskrit saying goes,

"na hi gyanen sadrisham pavitramiha vidyate"

Let our media be engaged in bringing forth the best of the knowledge and art out of our cultural diversity and spread this knowledge across the world that India will stand united and strong for the generations to come.

Media can play harmonizing role in the society

ADESH TITARMARE

Though a country, India is rightly termed a subcontinent. It is a country of diversity and heterogeneity. Many languages and dialects, a variety of customs and traditions, castes and religions and differences emanating from communalism render the task of national integration more hazardous. In recent years violence due to communal differences has raised its ugly head in almost all parts of India.

As flowers of different colours and shapes enrich a garden, so does the variety of faiths and ideologies make a colourful nation. No religion supports violence. Those who resort to violence in the name of religion are doing a disservice to their faith and humanity at large. No religion sanctions the killing of innocent people and certainly not in the name of religion. Communal harmony, therefore, is the basic building block of our country. The importance of communal harmony is the 'sine qua non' of our survival as a civilised society.

Communal harmony is of utmost importance in taking the nation to newer heights of success and growth. A handful of people shouldn't be let to vitiate the atmosphere in the name of caste, creed, colour, religion, region, majority or minority.

The new Webster's Encyclopaedic Dictionary of the English language defines *communalism* as a theory or system of government in which each commune is virtually an independent state, and the nation merely a federation of such states.

Another definition is 'strong allegiance to one's own ethnic group rather than to society as a whole'.

Today the second expression seems to be more appropriate. Unfortunately, in the Indian context, communalism has acquired a perverted connotation and means the evil practice of exploiting religion or caste by the members of a community/caste or party to get an unfair political advantage, undue material gain, patronage, or favourable treatment as against the legitimate rights, interests, and aspirations of a rival community.

This brand of communalism is vicious to nationalism, deleterious to democracy, dangerous to the integrity of the country, inimical to peace and progress, and repugnant to the basic human values propagated by saints and sages of all faiths, down through the ages.

Founding Fathers of our Constitution believed that secularism is the antithesis of and the anti-dote to communalism. Therefore, they made secularism, in all its ramifications, one of the basic pillars of the constitution. They enshrined it as one of the prime objectives in the Preamble of the Constitution. They embodied in the Constitution the fundamental guarantees of freedom of conscience, practice and propagation of religion (Article 25) and also freedom at religious instruction in certain educational and cultural institutions (Article 28). Also provided for was the protection of the cultural and educational rights of minorities (Article 28 and 30). An important and integral part of these Articles is Article 19(1) that embodies the faith our constitution framers had in the press of the county in promoting the above principles.

The Constitutional injunctions and guarantees to ensure the secular character of our polity are based on values, which are the common cultural heritage of India. These moral principles have been evolved during the past several hundred years through a process of cultural synthesis, by the holy men and saints of various religious faiths and denominations. These ethics seek to integrate and regulate the life and

variegated culture of the followers of different faiths, in terms of common socio-spiritual ideals.

Over the last century, India has been rocked by communal, caste, linguistic or regional violence, of this; communal riots have assumed dangerous proportions from the beginning of eighties. The innumerable incidents of small or big proportions have sharpened the communal intensity leading to an emotional upsurge in the country, which added to the communal tension. The responsibility of the media in such situations is undeniable.

As the adage goes, "Good news is no news, only bad is". Much importance has been attached by the media to minor issues in the recent years. These issues generally are all political stunts to gain popularity. If public is intelligent enough and believe in promoting communal harmony by following only nation-building steps, public should avoid paying heed to such activities. Those who indulge in destructive activities will themselves see reason if ignored by the majority of the people of the country. The power of pen can indeed overshadow the power of issues and materials that can create communal discord.

Unfortunately, the Press has not always covered these events dispassionately and objectively. Without going too far back in the time, if we analyse the situation since the 90's, some section of the media got carried away by the turn of the tide. Elsewhere, the militants and terrorists were openly glorified for serving the cause of their community.

A large number of newspapers and news channels in the country and, in particular a large section of the print and electronic media in Gujarat had, instead of alleviating the communal unrest, played an ignoble role in inciting communal passions leading to large-scale rioting, arson and pillage in the State.

A very important question is 'how do media influence communal harmony'?

When people are exposed to a common language, culture, problems, laws and issues, it gradually leads to social homogeneity. Media has the capability to focus attention on social issues and current events resulting in a common experience which itself contributes to a feeling of closeness and integration.

If the media audience becomes suspicious that they are being exposed to falsehood or motivated propaganda then the media tends to lose credibility. On the contrary, if the media enjoys credibility and trustworthiness, their audiences get influenced without being conscious of it. The media should not take the role of a preacher as people generally shun such an approach. The media should reflect the extant social conditions. If a person has been seeing or experiencing people of different communities living together, interacting in various social situations, the acceptance of similar situations and characters becomes easier in life.

Media is an instrument which can be used both ways. As media can help in achieving harmony, it can also be used to spread hatred and distrust between communities. It is a question of who uses what and how it is used. The media will promote integration and harmony when they act responsibly and work under reasonable control. The power of media to ferment communal discord became self evident in the controversy that cropped up in the Danish cartoons case.

The media should imaginatively reflect the variety in the national life, so as to promote tolerance and goodwill among people. What damages a nation most is the stereotyped attitude that communities hold towards each other. These stereotypes result from ignorance and lack of interaction reinforced by irresponsible and prejudiced reporting.

Perhaps, the worst offender is local media which doesn't exercise sufficient restraint in reporting on communal disturbances. The power of media is such that while it takes them years to create goodwill and amity among people, they are capable of destroying it in no time. The media do create new attitudes but over a longer period of time. However, they are effective in reinforcing existing attitudes relatively faster.

Media's effectiveness is closely linked to people's access to it. With the proliferation of electronic media and news channels, majority of the population is able to access some from of news media. Even the illiterate who couldn't read print media has now access to television and radio. Infact, media is one of the powerful tools to promote communal harmony. It is supposed to promote democracy, equality, tolerance, and other positive social values through different documentary, case studies etc. But market driven media culture has reduced the credibility of its real work. Most mass media are now covering news items of violence, anti- social act and broadening the divide among different religious groups.

Media has the potential to play a role in moulding public opinion on correct lines in regard to the need of friendly and harmonious relations between various communities and religious groups and thus promote national solidarity.

The media should strictly adhere to proper norms and standards in reporting or commenting on matters which have a bearing on communal relations. One such important norm is not to distort, or exaggerate, not to employ intemperate, inciting and unrestrained language. The local papers particularly should strictly adhere to this norm.

Any news report printed or published by the print media or relayed by the electronic media in contravention of ethical norms in reporting or commenting on matters pertaining to communal harmony is liable to

"invite penal action" under the provisions of Section 295-A of the Indian Penal Code and allied provisions.

There are press laws to check sensational reporting that can damage communal harmony but laws only aren't sufficient. Media persons need to shed their own, personal biases also. There is not only a need of an appropriate media policy but more importantly an appropriate 'media philosophy'.

Over the years, the Press Council also has played a key role as a watchdog over the media in the country. The riots of late 60's, the violence of 80-81, and in early 90's the incidents at Ayodhya, Mumbai, Gujarat saw reports on media's 'role and requirements' based on which the Council has advised the press to keep some basic principles in mind while covering communal disputes/ clashes.

Journalists and columnists owe a very special responsibility to their country in promoting communal peace and amity. Their writings are not a mere reflection of their own feelings but help to large extent in moulding the feelings and sentiments of the society at large. It is, therefore, of utmost importance that they use their pen with circumspection and restrain.

News, views or comments relating to communal or religious disputes / clashes needs to be published after proper verification of facts and presented with due caution and restraint in a manner which is conducive to the creation of an atmosphere congenial to communal harmony, amity and peace. Sensational, provocative and alarming headlines should be avoided. Acts of communal violence or vandalism should be reported in a manner as may not undermine the people's confidence in the law and order machinery of the State. Giving community-wise figures of the victims of communal riot, or writing about the incident in a style which is likely to inflame passions, aggravate

the tension, or accentuate the strained relations between the communities/religious groups concerned, or which has a potential to exacerbate the trouble, should be avoided.

The media, as a chronicle of tomorrow's history, owes an undeniable duty to the future to record events as simple untailored facts. The analysis of the events and opinion thereon are a different genre altogether. The treatment of the two also thus has necessarily to be different. In times of crisis, facts unadorned and simply put, with due care and restraint, cannot be reasonably objected to in a democracy. However, a heavy responsibility devolves on the author of opinion articles. The author has to ensure that not only are his or her analysis free from any personal preference, prejudices or notions, but also they are based on verified, accurate and established facts and do not tend to foment disharmony or enmity between castes; communities and races. The media should refrain from publishing / telecasting pictures of mangled corpses or any other photographic coverage which may create terror, or revulsion or ignite communal passion among people.

The role of media in such situations is to be peacemakers. And not abettors, to be trouble-shooters and not troublemakers. Newspaper should not publish any fictional literature distorting and portraying the religious characters in an adverse light and offending the religious susceptibilities of large sections of society who hold those characters in high esteem.

Newspaper should also not publish advertisements, which have a tendency to malign or hurt the religious sentiments of any community or section of society.

The media should also be cautious not to falsely give communal colour to incidents which might occur in which members of different communities happen to be involved.

The press is now everywhere! ... and is becoming more and more powerful in creating awareness and educating people, on a wide variety of issues, including on communal harmony. There is a greater socio-political awareness about people's rights, irrespective of communal identities, and this is a sign of a society which has matured.

Further, because of media reports showing pictures of, and reporting on violent mobs indulging in arson and creating chaos, people have become sympathetic towards the innocent people under attack, no matter which community they belong to.

One very good example of media coverage of issues is the coverage of the bomb explosions in Varanasi. The media of our country is slowly maturing into an institution where its initiatives and instruments can stop the hatred, which, in itself, constitutes a threat to national peace and security.

Media can play an effective role not only before and during a communal riot but also after it by reporting on the initiatives of the government to rehabilitate the victims and stop further clashes.

The media has also exposed the sycophancy of the political parties who fail to draw from the repositories of harm. Through the various forms of media, including print, television, and especially film and popular culture, people have also learnt about diverse cultures, religions, cuisines and have learnt to celebrate each other's joys and desire to live together with respect, equality, justice and peace.

Films also play an important role in making and breaking the communal fabric.

Community Radio which is an emerging form of Media with the mechanism of in-built participation of community people and representation of the cores, corners, needs and aspirations of local community can essentially contribute a lot by ensuring communal

harmony, by offering peace and social development, especially in a developing country like India.

The power of media depends on political will and national mood. Finally, it may be said that ordinarily media plays harmonizing role in the society; it can't be effective in absence of national consensus.
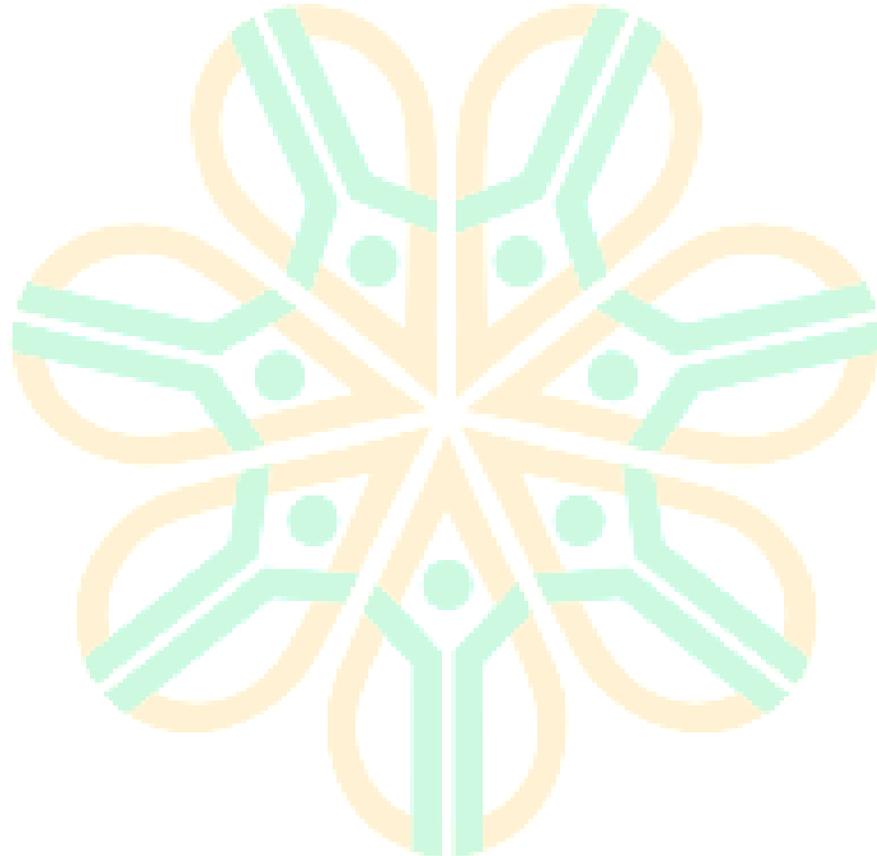
Media is the key for building Communal Harmony

SHEMUSHI BAJPAI

According to Tolstoy the subject of history is the life of peoples and of humanity. So one simple question arises that who provides the material for history? Society, nation and so many other institutions and individuals are backbone for history. But who preserves history and sometimes creates history? And this time media emerges as the key player.

All social change is accompanied by a period of tension and maladjustment. The various media can regulate the temperature of this tension by providing explanation, holding out rewards, speeding up development. In early society three information roles were clearly to be seen. The watchman role to scan the policy and report back. The policy role to decide policy and to lead. The teacher role to bring the new members of society. Essentially, the role of media in the modern world remains the same. The only difference is that the role requires different clothing. Now we have television, internet, newspapers, magazines, broadcasting stations etc.

Knowledge is power. This being beyond dispute, it may be said as well that the mass dissemination of information has shown itself to be amongst the most powerful forces of our time. Depending on the veracity of the information disseminated, the intentions of the authors, and the climate in which the information is received, it may be a force for progress and the common good, or catalyst for destruction, intolerance, also even genocide. Freedom of opinion and expression has become universally recognized as fundamental human right and implicitly the mass media has found international protection for its global voice.

But rights have corresponding duties. Articles 19 and 20 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) makes clear that free expression was not a license to use the power of the media to destroy the rights or reputations of others. Some restrictions must be permitted as well for the

protection of national security, public order, health and morals. Free expression does not protect propaganda for war, or advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred constituting incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence.

The world has come to recognize that free, flourishing, independent and responsible media plays an essential role in the functioning of a democratic society. As a tool for the promotion and protection of human rights, a free media can greatly facilitate the building of a culture of human rights by encouraging tolerance between various national, ethnic, religious and linguistic groups; by exposing rights violations wherever they occur. Unfortunately, the enormous power of the media has not always been used to the benefit of democracy and humanity. In former Yugoslavia; radio, television and print media were used to create a climate of hate, suspicion and intolerance upon which a campaign of ethnic cleansing was launched. Too many times media has taken part in the violation of human rights.

Media is a powerful medicine, if the medicine is used properly it can heal many ills, if the medicine is misused it can becomes poison. The role of media in promoting communal harmony means information dissemination which combats propaganda for riots, intolerance, or racism.

Media for communal harmony means publications and broadcasts which serve not the interest of power but rather empowerment for marginalized people.

Media for communal harmony means to promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among the individuals and groups and to contribute to eradication of racism, racial discrimination and racial prejudice, in particular by refraining from presenting a stereotyped, partial, unilateral or tendentious picture of individuals and of various human groups.

There is no country where everyone speaks the same language, belongs to the same race and shares the same culture, beliefs and traditions. In the modern world, many countries embrace a mosaic of people, and coexistence is not always

peaceful.

A nation of more than a billion people having different ethnic origins and divided into a number of castes and communities. There are at least eight major religions, 22 scheduled languages in India.

In Indian society, since ages, communal harmony has been the norm and disharmony has been an exception. From the very early times, different religions and communities have come to India and all have been, by and large, absorbed is a negative word which means minority community are in a way forced to adopt majority view.

The word communalism finds its roots in the word commune which means living together in a way where everyone aims at the mutual prosperity of the community to which he/she belongs. The members of the commune can be perceived as people who share a common set of beliefs, or common ideology.

In India communalism is understood in a negative way, and has come to mean a kind of pride in one's community on the grounds of religion caste or language, which is accompanied by hatred of others religion and culture. The slide begins when one faith begins to encroach upon a separate conviction. The first symptom of fundamentalism is aggression. When this aggression is channelled through an organized section of community, it becomes communalism.

The goal of fundamentalists, of any stripe, is to disunite and destroy our communal harmony. One of the major causes of communal hatred and violence is the exploitation of the unclear but emotionally powerful sense of allegiance to a community by individuals and organizations for their own personal selfish ends. Exploiting caste, religious and regional sentiments among the people leads to clashes and divisions in society.

But not a single religion supports violence. Those who resort to violence in the name of religion are doing a disservice to their faith and humanity at large.

No religion sanctions the killing of innocent people and certainly not in the name of religion. All religions of the world were great as all of them had a message of love and humanism.

In matters of race and color, attitudes of chauvinism and prejudice or on the other hand attitude of equality to develop at an early age.

Parents and other members of family and also peer-groups in the school and the neighbourhood are the major influences.

But these attitudes can change generally in response to changing social conditions the media can play a significant role in promoting and accelerating positive changes in attitude.

Media, both print and electronic, to exercise restraint and avoid publishing or broadcasting screaming headlines and managing of mass media so that violence is not portrayed as something heroic. And there is a need for pre-censorship of news, more particularly at the time of any communal disturbance or violence relating to communal matters before it is published.

In this regard according to Tolstoy 'The history of culture offers us as the impelling of the life of the people, the circumstances of the lives or the ideas of a writer or a reformer. We learn that Luther had a hasty temper and uttered certain speeches; we learn that Rousseau was distrustful and wrote certain books; but we do not learn what made the nations cut each other to pieces after the Reformation, or why men guillotined each other during the French Revolution. 'If we want to save our composite culture and communal harmony we have to learn from our past. And for this purpose media should be more responsible and responsive.

The power of media to promote public awareness and understanding of the culture, the social habits and traditions, the attitudes and hopes and also grievances of each diverse group in the population is well recognized.

But there are so many bad films and their massages are also disastrous. Communal riot itself generates headline currency in media and as a result of continuous media coverage level of violence increases.

If the media realizes in a real way its responsibility in building up communal harmony; whether it is the national media or the international media, it has to be built up.
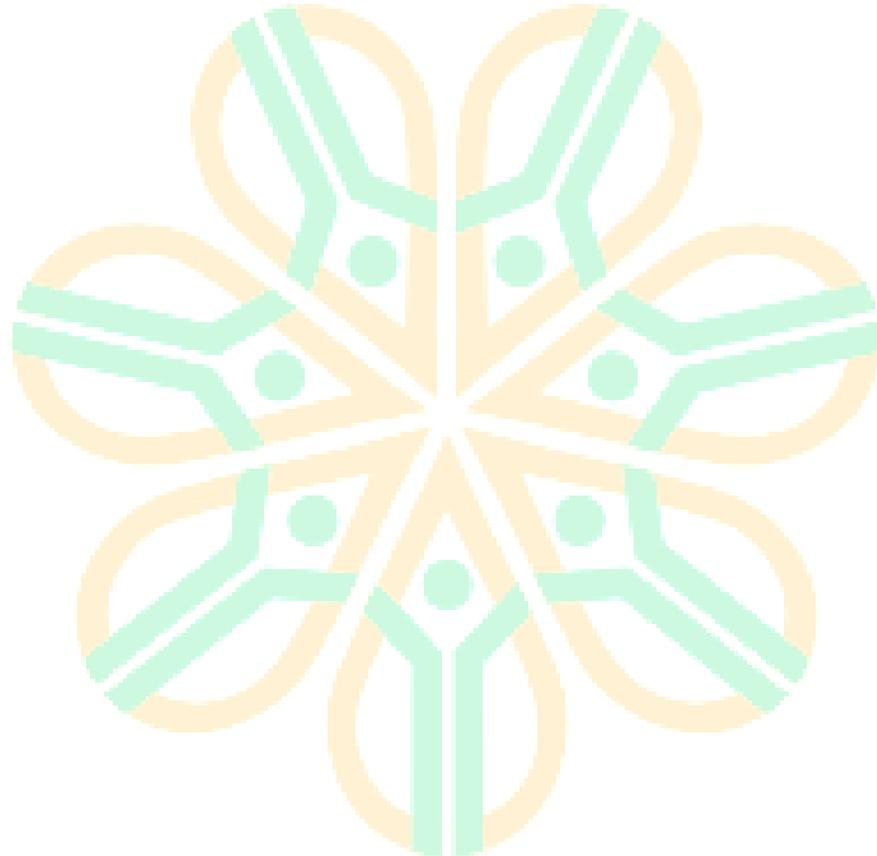
सत्यम् ब्रूयात, प्रियम ब्रूयात। न ब्रूयात, सत्यम् अप्रियम्।।

भरत यादव

वर्तमान लोकतांत्रिक विश्व में मीडिया का क्षेत्र अत्यधिक विस्तारित हो चुका है, अब मीडिया केवल खबरों को लोगों तक पहुँचाने का माध्यम न होकर लोकतंत्र का प्रहरी बन गया है। लोकतांत्रिक मूल्यों की स्थापना में मीडिया महत्वपूर्ण भूमिका निभा रहा है, इसी कारण मीडिया को लोकतंत्र का "चौथा स्तंभ" कहा जाता है। भारत जैसे गंगा–यमुनी संस्कृति वाले देश में जहाँ विविधता का बाहुल्य है, इस "विविधता में एकता" बनाए रखने मे मीडिया की अत्यधिक महत्वपूर्ण भूमिका है। भारत में अनेक धर्म, जाति व संस्कारों को मानने वाले लोग निवास करते हैं, मीडिया उनके बीच साम्प्रदायिक सद्भाव बनाए रखने में वॉचडॉग की भूमिका निभाता है।

वर्तमान भौतिकवादी विश्व में मीडिया भी अति व्यावसायिकता के प्रभाव से बच नहीं सका है। इसी कारण से साम्प्रदायिक सद्भाव व अन्य लोकतांत्रिक मूल्यों की स्थापना में मीडिया की भूमिका नकारात्मक स्वरूप भी ग्रहण कर रही है। व्यावसायिकता की दौड़ में मीडिया संस्थान चाहे वह इलेक्ट्रॉनिक मीडिया से हों या प्रिंट मीडिया से व्यावसायिकता व नैतिकता के बीच संतुलन स्थापित नहीं कर पा रहे हैं। वर्तमान में सभी प्रमुख समाचार चैनलों पर हिंसक घटनाओं को बढ़ा–चढ़ाकर दिखाया जाता है जो "आग में घी डालने" का काम करता है। कुछ मामलों में समाचार चैनलों ने सकारात्मक व अनुकरणीय उदाहरण भी स्थापित किए हैं। एक ऐसा ही उदाहरण है वाराणसी के दशमेश्वर घाट पर बम विस्फोट की घटना। इस घटना के समय मीडिया ने साम्प्रदायिक सौहार्द बनाए रखने में बड़ी अच्छी भूमिका अदा की जबकि उस समय सम्पूर्ण विश्व में डेनिस कार्टून विवाद भी

चल रहा था। इस प्रकार मीडिया द्वारा सकारात्मक व नकारात्मक दोनों प्रकार की भूमिका साम्प्रदायिक सद्भाव के क्षेत्र में परिलक्षित होती है।

भारतीय संविधान निर्माताओं ने भारत की मिश्रित संस्कृति को देखते हुए साम्प्रदायिक सद्भाव बनाए रखने के लिए संविधान में पहले से ही कई प्रावधान किए हुए हैं। जिनमें यथा समय संशोधन भी किया गया। जैसे अनु0 19(1) में सभी नागरिकों को अभिव्यक्ति की स्वतंत्रता दी गई है, और इसी अनुच्छेद के तहत मीडिया शक्ति ग्रहण करता है। वहीं विभिन्न धर्मों व सम्प्रदायों को देखते हुए अनु0 28 (धार्मिक एवं सांस्कृतिक संस्थाओं की स्थापना) अनु0 25 (धर्म की स्वतंत्रता), अनु0 29, 30 (अल्पसंख्यकों के हितों का संरक्षण) आदि में विभिन्न प्रावधान किए गए हैं। इन सभी प्रावधानों में सामांजस्य स्थापित करने में मीडिया की भूमिका अत्यधिक महत्वपूर्ण हो जाती है। व्यावसायिकता की अंधी दौड़ में मीडिया संस्थान अत्यधिक लाभ कमाने की भावना की ओर आकर्षित हुए हैं, इस कारण ये अपने नैतिक दायित्वों से दूर होते जा रहे हैं। गोधरा कांड हो या फिर बाबरी मस्ज़िद कांड इन सभी मामलों में मीडिया की भूमिका को सराहनीय नहीं कहा जा सकता है। ऐसी नाजुक परिस्थितियों में मीडिया द्वारा हिंसा और हिंसक चित्रों को बढ़ा चढ़ाकर दिखाना, हिंसा को और बढ़ाने व संबंधित क्षेत्र के साम्प्रदायिक सौहार्द को बिगाड़ने का काम करता है। सम्प्रदाय या धर्म के आधार पर मृत लोगों की संख्या को बताया जाता है जिससे संबंधित धर्म या सम्प्रदाय के लोग अपने आप को असुरक्षित महसूस करने लगते हैं, उनका विश्वास राज्य और कानून व्यवस्था से उठने लगता है वे हिंसा का सहारा लेने लगते हैं। भारत के कई राजनैतिक दल व संगठन, धर्म व जाति आधारित राजनीति करते हैं, कई बार मीडिया संस्थान इनकी राजनीति व ओछे स्वार्थों में इनकी मदद करते नजर आते हैं। स्वतंत्रता के बाद भारत में व्यापक स्तर पर सम्प्रदाय, जाति, भाषा या क्षेत्र आधारित हिंसा अस्सी के

दशक से शुरू हुई और इस हिंसा को कम करने में मीडिया सुयोधन के स्थान पर दुर्योधन की ही भूमिका अधिक निभाता नजर आया।

मीडिया का कर्तव्य केवल यह नहीं है कि वह लोगों तक सही खबर पहुँचाए बल्कि जैसा कि पाली साहित्य में कहा गया है कि :–

"सत्यम् ब्रूयात, प्रियम ब्रूयात, न ब्रूयात सत्यम् अप्रियम्"

उपरोक्त शब्दों की भावना का पालन मीडिया के लिए अति आवश्यक है। अर्थात् दंगों या हिंसक घटनाओं का चित्रण मीडिया द्वारा इस प्रकार किया जाना चाहिए कि लोगों को यह न लगे कि कानून व्यवस्था का पतन हो गया है और दंगों के नियंत्रण में राज्य की प्रशासनिक व्यवस्था अक्षम हो गयी है। किसी सम्प्रदाय या धर्म के लोगों की भावनाओं से खिलवाड़ भी नहीं दिखाया जाना चाहिए।

मीडिया लोकतांत्रिक मूल्यों की स्थापना व धार्मिक सद्भाव बनाए रखने में कई प्रकार से योगदान दे सकती है। हिंसा या दंगों के समय राहतपूर्ण कार्यों में प्रशासन की मदद कर सकता है। जैसे हिंसा या दंगों के समय राहत सामग्री के वितरण, लोगों के विस्थापन व लोगों को एक दूसरे से मिलाने में, लोगों का विश्वास कानून व्यवस्था पर बनाए रखने में। भारत सरकार मीडिया पर नियंत्रण के लिए एक कानून बनाने के लिए भी प्रयासरत है, इस कानून को सिर्फ अनु0 19(1) (अभिव्यक्ति की स्वतंत्रता) का विरोधी कहकर खारिज नहीं किया जा सकता। जब वर्तमान लोकतांत्रिक विश्व में जिम्मेदारी, पारदर्शिता व जबाबदेही को बढ़ावा दिया जा रहा है तब मीडिया पर भी आवश्यक पाबन्दियाँ जरूरी है। भारत में व्यवस्थापिका, कार्यपालिका व न्यायपालिका को "सूचना के अधिकार" तहत जवाबदेह व पारदर्शी बनाया जा रहा है तो लोकतंत्र के चौथे स्तंभ (मीडिया) को इन मूल्यों से अछूता नहीं रखा जा सकता। इस संबंध में कुछ निर्देशों की चर्चा करना समीचीन रहेगा। जैसे– सम्पादकों और पत्रकारों का पेन उनकी व्यक्तिगत आकांक्षाओं की जगह समस्त समाज की अभिव्यक्ति होना चाहिए, साम्प्रदायिक हिंसा संबंधी खबरें प्रशासन

द्वारा पुष्ट होने के बाद ही छापी जाएं या प्रसारित की जाएं, खबरों में ध्यान रखा जाए कि वह लोगों का विश्वास प्रशासन व कानून व्यवस्था से उठने न दें, हिंसक चित्रों को बार–बार न दिखाया जाए, सम्प्रदाय या धर्म के आधार पर घटनाओं को लोगों से न जोड़ा जाए।

उपरोक्त सुझाव यह इंगित करते हैं कि क्या न किया जाए, इसी प्रकार कुछ सुझाव ऐसे भी हो सकते हैं जिनमें 'क्या किया जाए' का निर्देश हो जैसे– इस प्रकार की घटनाओं के समय दो धर्मों या सम्प्रदाय के लोगों के मध्य सामंजस्य व सौहार्द के उदाहरणों को बार–बार दिखाया जाए। धार्मिक प्रमुखों व विद्वानों के मध्य स्वस्थ वातावरण में परिचर्चा करायी जाए व उसका चित्रण व प्रसारण किया जाए, मीडिया द्वारा भारत की मिश्रित संस्कृति व 'अनेकता में एकता' रूपी इतिहास के प्रसंगों का इस समय प्रसारण व चित्रण किया जाए, प्रशासन के सहयोग से शांति की पुनर्बहाली के प्रयास किए जाएं एवं प्रशासन के निर्णयों व कानूनों को लागू करने में पूर्ण सहयोग दिया जाए।

भारत सरकार द्वारा 'प्रसारण बिल' को लागू करने के प्रयास किए जा रहे हैं, इस प्रयास में भारत के सभी नागरिकों व राजनैतिक दलों और स्वयं मीडिया–संस्थानों को सरकार का सहयोग करना चाहिए। मीडिया संस्थानों के केन्द्रीय संगठनों को अपनी ओर से भी कुछ "कोड ऑफ कन्डक्ट" (code of conduct) बनाना चाहिए व उनके परिपालन को कड़ाई से सुनिश्चित करना चाहिए। इलेक्ट्रॉनिक व प्रिंट मीडिया के बिना वर्तमान विश्व की परिकल्पना ही नहीं की जा सकती है, क्योंकि मीडिया लोकतंत्र का प्रहरी है, ऐसे में मीडिया क्षेत्र का भी दायित्व है कि वह वाचडॉग व व्हिसिल ब्लोअर (whistle blower) की अपनी भूमिका को ईमानदारी से निभाए। मीडिया संस्थान पूर्णतया व्यावसायिक हितों से परिचालित नहीं हो सकते क्योंकि मीडिया लोगों की अभिव्यक्ति का माध्यम है। मीडिया संस्थानों को व्यावसायिकता व नैतिकता के मध्य उचित व अनिवार्य संतुलन

स्थापित करना होगा। हम यह नहीं कह सकते कि हमेशा मीडिया ने साम्प्रदायिक सद्भाव स्थापित करने में नकारात्मक भूमिका ही निभाई है, निराशा के समुद्र में छोटे–छोटे कई आशाओं के टापू भी नजर आते हैं। आवश्यकता है इन सकारात्मक उदाहरणों का ईमानदारी से अनुसरण किया जाए। मीडिया संथानों को अपने कर्त्तव्यों व दायित्वों का स्मरण कराना व उनके अनुपालन को सुनिश्चित करना हम सभी का परमकर्त्तव्य है।

जब मीडिया संस्थान अपने कर्त्तव्यों का सही अनुपालन शुरू कर देंगे तो न केवल साम्प्रदायिक सद्भाव वरन् समावेशी विकास, निरक्षरता निवारण, गरीबी उन्मूलन आदि क्षेत्रों में भी गति आएगी और लोकतांत्रिक मूल्यों की स्थापना को बढ़ावा मिलेगा। भारत की गंगा–यमुनी संस्कृति यह माँग करती है कि यदि भारत को यथाशीघ्र विकसित देश बनना है तो सम्राट अशोक और अकबर के समय से चले आ रहे धार्मिक भाईचारे व साम्प्रदायिक सौहार्द को बनाए रखा जाए व पुष्ट किया जाए। वर्तमान विश्व में जब आतंकवाद एक वैश्विक परिघटना बन कर उभर रहा है तब समन्वित संस्कृति को बढ़ावा देना व उसका अनुपालन और आवश्यक हो जाता है। भारत प्राचीन समय से ही नैतिकता के क्षेत्र में 'विश्व गुरू' की भूमिका निभाता आ रहा है, इस भूमिका को बनाए रखने व इसके क्षेत्र में वृद्धि करने के लिए आवश्यक है कि मीडिया क्षेत्र साम्प्रदायिक सद्भाव को बढ़ावा देने में अपने दायित्व का निष्ठापूर्वक अनुपालन करे। वर्तमान ग्लोबलाइज विश्व में वैश्विक मंच से नेतृत्व करने (सुरक्षा परिषद् की स्थायी सदस्यता) के लिए आवश्यक है कि भारत में गोधरा काण्ड व बाबरी मस्ज़िद ध्वंस जैसी घटनाओं की पुनरावृत्ति न हो। और इस क्षेत्र में मीडिया की भूमिका सबसे महत्वपूर्ण है। सरकार व मीडिया संस्थान इस ओर जागरूक हो रहे हैं, आवश्यकता है इन प्रयासों की गति को बल प्रदान करने की। और इस प्रयासों के फलस्वरूप हम भविष्यवाणी कर सकते हैं कि आने वाले समय

में भारत 'साम्प्रदायिक समरसता' का अनुकरणीय उदाहरण बनेगा व धार्मिक और साम्प्रदायिक कट्टरता अतीत की बुरी यादें बन कर रह जाएगी।
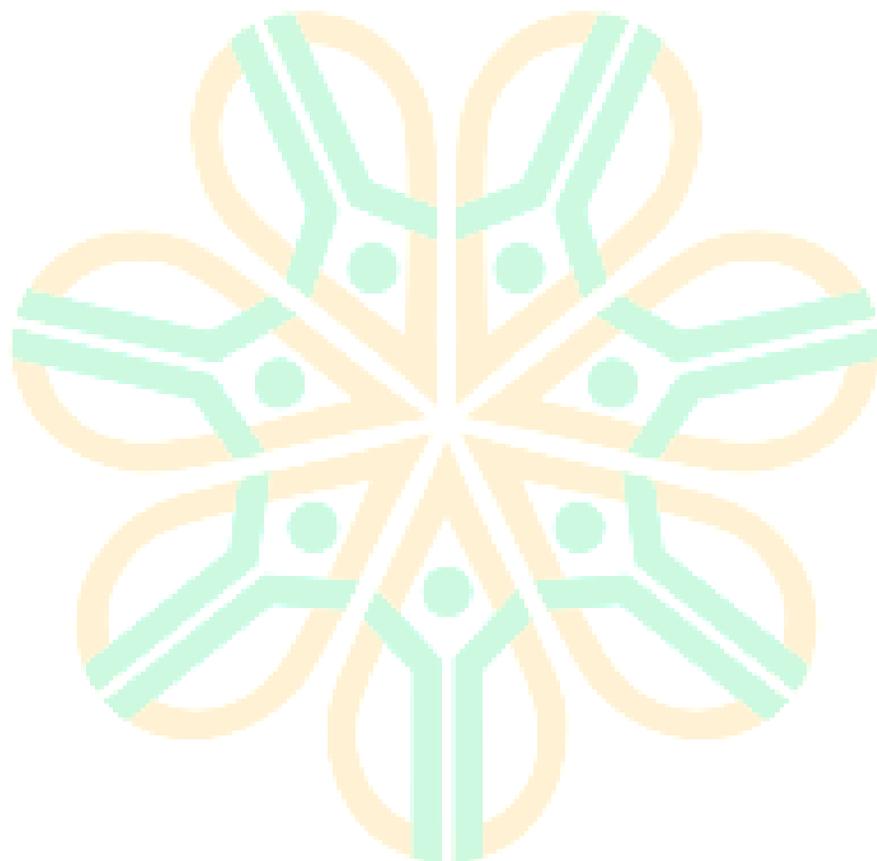
National Foundation
for Communal Harmony

मीडिया को व्यावसायिकता व नैतिकता के मध्य अनिवार्य संतुलन का कार्य करना चाहिए

ललित शाक्यावर

समस्त मानवीय सभ्यता के इतिहास में मानवीय मूल्यों को स्थापित करने का संघर्ष रहा है। दानव से मानव बनने की प्रक्रिया में संपर्क सूत्रों ने बड़ी महत्वपूर्ण भूमिका निभाई है और यही संपर्क माध्यम वर्तमान में मीडिया के रूप में दिखाई दे रहा है। प्रिंट मीडिया से इलेक्ट्रॉनिक मीडिया का प्रभाव मानव जीवन के प्रत्येक अंग में दृष्टिगोचर हो रहा है चाहे वह आर्थिक, सामाजिक, सांस्कृतिक तथा राजनैतिक ही क्यों न हो, मीडिया का प्रभाव हर क्षेत्र में दिखाई दे रहा है यही कारण है कि मीडिया को लोकतांत्रिक मूल्यों को स्थापित करने वाला सबल यंत्र माना जाता है। मीडिया ने लोकतंत्र को सुदृढ़ता देने में महत्वपूर्ण भूमिका निभाई है इसीलिए इसे लोकतंत्र का चौथा स्तंभ कहा जाता है किंतु भौतिकतावादी मानसिकता से युक्त वर्तमान में यह स्तंभ कहीं न कहीं हिलता जरूर दिख रहा है। अतः वर्तमान में भारतीय समन्वित संस्कृति को बनाये रखने तथा प्रगतिशील बनाए रखने के लिए मीडिया की भूमिका क्या हो, यह ज्वलंत प्रश्न सबके सामने सिर उठाये खड़ा है।

भारतीय संस्कृति अपने स्वरूप में सामासिक संस्कृति को धारण करती है। ऐतिहासिक कालक्रम की दृष्टि में भारत में शक्, हूण, कुषाण, इस्लाम तथा अंग्रजों का आक्रमण और आगमन बना रहा किन्तु सभी अपनी सांस्कृतिक विरासत के साथ यहाँ की संस्कृति में रच बस गये और भारतीय संस्कृति इस बीच अपने को बचाती हुई प्रगतिशील पथ पर बनी रही। वर्तमान में यदि मीडिया की नकारात्मक भूमिका को देखा जाए तो व्यावसायिक मीडिया के द्वारा विदेशी तथा पाश्चात्य संस्कृति का प्रचार प्रसार किया जा रहा है, जिसे कुछ बुद्धिजीवियों ने सांस्कृतिक आक्रमण की संज्ञा दी है। ध्यान से देखा जाए तो आक्रमण वह होता है जिसमें तीव्रता तथा अचानकता का मिश्रण हो, जिससे संभलने का मौका न मिले और वर्तमान में

इलेक्ट्रॉनिक मीडिया ने कॉस्मोपॉलिटन सिटी से लेकर भारत के सुदूरवर्ती गांव तक एक साथ प्रसारण कर संभलने और पाश्चात्य संस्कृति को पचाने का समय नहीं दिया है। जिसके कारण प्रत्येक क्षेत्र, वर्ग, समाज, जाति, लिंग पर इसका असर अलग–अलग रूप में पड़ा है। यही कारण है कि कहीं–कहीं इससे साम्प्रदायिक सद्भाव को भी हानि पहुँची है।

वर्तमान उपभोक्तावादी तथा भौतिकवादी दौर में मीडिया का मुख्य उद्देश्य लाभ कमाना रहा है। इस लाभ के क्षेत्र में महत्वपूर्ण भूमिका विदेशी चैनलों की रही है तथा व्यावसायिक मनोवृत्ति के चलते चाहे भारतीय संस्कृति में मूल्यों का गुणगान करके धनार्जन हो या पाश्चात्य संस्कृति को प्रसारित करके मूल उद्देश्य आर्थिक लाभ की प्राप्ति ही रहा है। इसी कारण से साम्प्रदायिक सद्भाव व अन्य लोकतांत्रिक मूल्यों की स्थापना में मीडिया की भूमिका नकारात्मक स्वरूप भी ग्रहण कर रही है। व्यावसायिकता की दौड़ में मीडिया संस्थान चाहे वह इलेक्ट्रॉनिक मीडिया हो या प्रिंट मीडिया, व्यावसायिकता व नैतिकता के बीच संतुलन स्थापित नहीं कर पा रहे हैं। टी0आर0पी0 बढ़ाने के लिए मीडिया के समस्त चैनल ब्रेकिंग न्यूज की अवधारणा से ग्रसित हो रहे हैं जिसमें छोटी सी हिंसक घटना को बढ़ा–चढ़ाकर पेश किया जा रहा है। भाषा और शब्दों की ऐसी चासनी में खबर को पेश किया जाता है जो साधारण मानव के मस्तिष्क पर नकारात्मक भाव पैदा करती है और यही नकारात्मक भाव समाज में साम्प्रदायिक सद्भाव में आड़े आता है। गोधरा कांड में मीडिया की भूमिका काफी नकारात्मक रूप में सबके सामने है। गोधरा में हुए साम्प्रदायिक दंगों की जैसी तस्वीर मीडिया ने सबके सामने रखी उससे समय–समय पर एक विशेष सम्प्रदाय को मानने वालों की भावनाएं आहत हुई और जिसके परिणामस्वरूप प्रतिरोध की अग्नि ठंढी होने के बजाए मुखर और हिंसक रूप में प्रज्वलित होती रही। इलेक्ट्रॉनिक मीडिया की सबसे बड़ी प्रभावशीलता यह है कि यह न केवल घटना को सुनाता है बल्कि उसका आंखों देखा हाल सीधे

दर्शकों के सामने प्रसारित भी करता है जिससे मानव की श्रव्य, दृश्य और अनुभव इन्द्रियों पर एक साथ असर पड़ता है। यही कारण है कि गोधरा कांड के समय साम्प्रदायिक दंगे रूक–रूक कर गांवों तक पहुँचते गए।

गोधरा दंगों में मीडिया अपने नैतिक दायित्वों से दूर ही दिखाई दिया। एक अन्य ज्वलंत समस्या में भी मीडिया की भूमिका को सही नहीं ठहराया जा सकता। बाबरी मस्जिद विवाद में कारसेवकों के द्वारा मस्जिद को गिराते हुए दिखाया गया जिसने समस्या को और गंभीर बना दिया जो कि वर्तमान में भी हल होती हुई दिखाई नहीं दे रही है। ऐसी संवेदनशील परिस्थितियों में मीडिया अपने नैतिक दायित्वों से दूर ही दिखाई दिया। एक अन्य ज्वलंत समस्या में भी मीडिया की भूमिका को सही नहीं ठहराया जा सकता। मीडिया द्वारा अपने नैतिक दायित्वों का पालन न करते हुए हिंसा और हिंसक चित्रों को बढ़ा–चढ़ाकर दिखाया गया जिससे संबंधित क्षेत्र के साम्प्रदायिक सौहार्द को काफी झटका लगा। खबरों में विशेष धर्म या सम्प्रदाय से संबंधित लोगों पर हुए हिंसक हमलों में मरने वालों की संख्या को दिखाया जाता है इससे भी अन्य या पीड़ित सम्प्रदाय विशेष की भावनाओं को पीड़ा पहुँचती है तथा कहीं न कहीं वे समाज की मुख्यधारा से अपने को कटा हुआ महसूस करते हैं। पीड़ित या शोषित सम्प्रदाय वालों का विश्वास भारतीय कानून तथा राज्य व्यवस्था से उठने लगता है तथा वे अपने को भारतीय कानून व्यवस्था में ठगे तथा असुरक्षित महसूस करने लगते हैं और आगे यही प्रक्रिया साम्प्रदायिक समरसता को बनाये रखने की जगह उसे नष्ट करती है।

भारतीय राजनीति में आज क्षेत्रीय राजनैतिकता का चलन उभर कर सामने आया है यह क्षेत्रीय राजनीति, धर्म, जाति तथा भाषा विशेष होती है, कई बार मीडिया आर्थिक लाभ के चलते इन राजनीतिज्ञों तथा उनके स्वार्थों की पूर्ति में मदद करती है। स्वतंत्रता के बाद से राजनीति में धर्म तथा जाति आधारित वोट बैंक की महत्वपूर्ण भूमिका रही है और इस भूमिका को बढ़ाने में मीडिया ने आग में घी का

ही काम किया है। मीडिया की भूमिका देश में विभिन्न जाति, धर्म, वर्ग, भाषा के बीच समरस स्थिति पैदा करना है किन्तु वर्तमान में निजी लाभों को कमाने के लिए मीडिया की भूमिका कहीं न कहीं कठघरे में खड़ी हुई है। मीडिया का कर्तव्य यही नहीं है कि सही खबर का चित्रण दर्शकों तथा पाठकों तक पहुँचे बल्कि सही दृश्यों या घटनाओं के प्रसारण से होने वाले मानवीय मूल्यों के नुकसान की नैतिक जिम्मेदारी को भी निभाना है अतः कई संवेदनशील मुद्दों में नैतिक दायित्व महत्वपूर्ण हो जाता है जिससे लोगों में घटना से होने वाले प्रभाव का विपरीत असर न पड़े। दंगों या हिंसक घटनाओं का चित्रण मीडिया द्वारा इस प्रकार किया जाना चाहिए कि लोगों को यह न लगे कि कानून व्यवस्था का पतन हो गया है या कानून किसी एक पक्ष के साथ खड़ा है। मीडिया द्वारा मानवीय मूल्यों को बनाए रखते हुए किसी विशेष सम्प्रदाय के प्रति समर्पित नहीं होना चाहिए।

समग्र नकारात्मक भूमिका के साथ–साथ मीडिया की सकारात्मक भूमिका को चिन्हित नहीं किया जाना एकतरफा विश्लेषण होगा, अतः आवश्यक है कि साम्प्रदायिक सद्भाव को बनाए रखने तथा उसे प्रगतिशील पथ पर अग्रसर करने हेतु मीडिया द्वारा किए गए कार्यों को इस साम्प्रदायिक सद्भाव को सबलता प्रदान करने के लिए क्या उपाय अपनाने चाहिए, उन पर भी चिंतन तथा प्रकाश डालना अति आवश्यक है।

समय–समय पर मीडिया ने लोकतांत्रिक मूल्यों को बनाए रखने तथा धार्मिक सद्भाव बनाए रखने में कई प्रकार से योगदान दिया है। हिंसा या दंगों के समय राहतपूर्ण कार्यों में प्रशासन की मदद की है। गोधरा दंगों तथा गुजरात भूकंप के समय समस्त देश में आर्थिक राहत सामग्री पीड़ितों तक पहुँचाने में सराहनीय भूमिका अदा की है। मीडिया का दायित्व है कि अनुच्छेद 19 (1) अभिव्यक्ति की स्वतंत्रता के तहत नैतिक कर्त्तव्यों का पालन करे ताकि अभिव्यक्ति की स्वतंत्रता का उपयोग अपने मनचाहे ढंग से सीमित लाभों और साम्प्रदायिक सद्भाव को बिगाड़ने

का कार्य ना करे। भारत सरकार मीडिया की अभिव्यक्ति को नैतिक मूल्यों में बाँधने के लिए कानून बनाने की सोच रही है तथा इस कानून को अभिव्यक्ति की स्वतंत्रता का विरोधी कहकर खारिज नहीं किया जा सकता क्योंकि अभिव्यक्ति की स्वतंत्रता तभी तक दी जा सकती है जब तक कि नैतिक मापदण्डों में रहे तथा देश के हित में कार्य करे।

ग्लोबलाइजेशन के इस दौरान में लोकतंत्र को मानव जीवन तथा उसके विकास के लिए सशक्त औजार माना जाता है। इसके साथ समस्त जगत में जिम्मेदारी, पारदर्शिता तथा जबावदेही को बढ़ावा दिया जा रहा है तब मीडिया पर भी आवश्यक पाबंदियाँ लगाना देश तथा सामाजिक सद्भाव के लिए आवश्यक है। भारत में व्यवस्थापिका, कार्यपालिका व न्यायपालिका को 'सूचना के अधिकार' के तहत जबावदेही तथा पारदर्शी बनाया जा रहा है तो लोकतंत्र के चौथे स्तंभ को भी इससे अछूता नहीं रखा जा सकता। मीडिया के संबंध में कुछ निर्देशों की चर्चा करना आवश्यक है जैसे सम्पादकों और पत्रकारों की भेदभाव रहित सामाजिक अभिव्यक्ति को बल देना चाहिए ताकि व्यक्तिगत आकांक्षाओं को साम्प्रदायिक हिंसा तथा संवेदनशील मुद्दों को प्रशासनिक तथा सामाजिक हितों को ध्यान में रखकर ही प्रेषित करें। हिंसक खबरों या घटनाओं को बार–बार 'ब्रेकिंग न्यूज' में नहीं दिखाना चाहिए तथा सम्प्रदाय या धर्म के आधार पर घटनाओं को लोगों से नहीं जोड़ना चाहिए।

वर्तमान में सबसे मौलिक प्रश्न है कि मीडिया को किसी संवेदनशील मुद्दे पर दो धर्मों तथा सम्प्रदाय के लोगों के मध्य सामंजस्य तथा हल खोजने के लिए सौहार्दपूर्ण परिचर्चा को दर्शकों तक पहुँचाना चाहिए ताकि आम जनता में सद्भाव तथा उनके कुंठित विचारों को सकारात्मक सौहार्द में तब्दली किया जा सके। कुछ दिनों पहले दशमेश्वर घाट पर बम्ब मिलने की घटना, डेनिस कार्टून विवाद तथा उड़ीसा में माओवादियों द्वारा स्वामी सरस्वती की हत्या मीडिया द्वारा सकारात्मक

रूप में दिखाई गई। जिससे समाज में आपसी तालमेल तथा सौहार्द का वातावरण बना। संवेदनशील मामलों में धार्मिक प्रमुखों व विद्वानों के मध्य स्वस्थ वातावरण में परिचर्चा करायी जाए व उसका चित्रण व प्रसारण किया जाए। भारत की सामाजिक संस्कृति तथा 'अनेकता में एकता' जैसे ऐतिहासिक प्रसंगों का प्रसारण व चित्रण किया जाए। प्रशासन के सहयोग से शांति की पुनर्वहाली के प्रयास किए जाए, तथा मीडिया को इस स्थिति में काफी सोच विचार कर घटना के प्रसारण से पड़ने वाले प्रभाव की समीक्षा करके ही उसे प्रसारित करना चाहिए।

भारत सरकार द्वारा 'प्रसारण बिल' लागू करने के प्रयास किए जा रहे हैं, इस प्रयास में भारत के सभी नागरिकों, राजनैतिक दलों और स्वयं मीडिया संस्थानों को सरकार का सहयोग करना चाहिए। मीडिया संस्थानों को अपनी ओर से भी कुछ 'कोड ऑफ कन्डक्ट' बनाना चाहिए व उनके परिपालन को कड़ाई से सुनिश्चित करना चाहिए। वर्तमान विश्व में प्रिंट तथा इलैक्ट्रोनिक मीडिया के बिना जीवन की परिकल्पना ही नहीं की जा सकती क्योंकि मीडिया लोकतंत्र का मजबूत और सशक्त पहलू बनकर उभर रहा है। ऐसे में मीडिया का भी दायित्व है कि वह वॉचडॉग व 'व्हिसल ब्लोअर' की अपनी भूमिका को ईमानदारी से निभाए। मीडिया को वर्तमान स्थिति में उपभोक्तावादी लाभकारी हितों से बाहर निकलकर व्यावसायिकता व नैतिकता के मध्य उचित व अनिवार्य संतुलन स्थापित करना होगा। मीडिया ने सदा ही साम्प्रदायिक सद्भाव स्थापित करने में नकारात्मक भूमिका निभाई है, यह कहना मीडिया की भूमिका के साथ अन्याय ही होगा क्योंकि कई मौकों पर मीडिया ने अपनी भूमिका बड़ी ईमानदारी तथा सामाजिक सौहार्द बनाने के लिए भी निभाई है। इन सकारात्मक उदाहरणों का ईमानदारी से अनुसरण किया जाना चाहिए। जब मीडिया अपने कर्त्तव्यों का सही अनुपालन शुरू कर देगा तो न केवल साम्प्रदायिक सद्भाव वरन् समावेशी विकास, आदि क्षेत्रों में गति आएगी और लोकतांत्रिक मूल्यों को बढ़ावा मिलेगा। भारत की समन्वित तथा गंगा–जमुनी

संस्कृति ने ही भारत को विकास के पथ पर तथा लोकतंत्र को मजबूत बनाया है जो कि अशोक और सम्राट अकबर के द्वारा किए गए सद्भाव और कल्याणकारी कार्यों का नतीजा है। जब वर्तमान विश्व में आतंकवाद एक महिषासुरी मुख के समान ज्वलंत समस्या बना हुआ है तब भारत की समन्वित संस्कृति जैसे विचारों को ही मीडिया द्वारा बढ़ावा दिया जाना चाहिए। ताकि यह संदेश फैले कि जैसे भारत में विभिन्न भाषायी, जाति धर्म के लोग सौहार्दपूर्ण वातावरण में रह सकते हैं तो आतंकवादी गतिविधियाँ अवश्य ही कमजोर होंगी। भारत अपनी ऐतिहासिक पृष्ठभूमि में 'शांति तथा भाईचारे' के लिए 'विश्वगुरू' की भूमिका निभाता आ रहा है, इस भूमिका को बनाए रखने व इसके क्षेत्र में गतिशीलता लाने के लिए आवश्यक है कि मीडिया साम्प्रदायिक सद्भाव को बढ़ावा देने में अपने दायित्व का निष्ठापूर्वक पालन करे। वर्तमान ग्लोबलाइजेशन के दौर में वैश्विक मंच से नेतृत्व करने के लिए आवश्यक है कि मीडिया द्वारा साम्प्रदायिक सद्भाव को बनाए रखने तथा उसे बल प्रदान करे के लिए दृढ़ निश्चयी होना पड़ेगा ताकि भविष्य में 'गोधरा' तथा बाबरी मस्जिद विध्वंश जैसी घटनाओं की पुनरावृत्ति न हो। मीडिया द्वारा ही वह स्थिति प्राप्त की जा सकती है जिसका वर्णन जयशंकर प्रसाद ने अपने महाकाव्य 'कामायनी' में समरसता की स्थिति के रूप में किया है जो निम्न पंक्तियों में सामाजिक सद्भाव तथा समरसता को उद्धरित करती हैं–

"औरों को हँसते देखो मनु, हंसो और सुख पाओ।
अपने सुख को विस्तृत कर लो, सबको सुखी बनाओ।"

इन्सान की औलाद है, इन्सान बनेगा

<div align="right">गिरिवर दयाल सिंह</div>

<div align="center">
तू न हिन्दू बनेगा,
न मुसलमान बनेगा।
इन्सान की औलाद है,
इन्सान बनेगा।।
</div>

यह फिल्म का एक गाना है, जो हमारी सभ्यता, समसामयिक संस्कृति, समभाव की भावना तथा इन्सानियत (मानवता) को सबसे बड़ा धर्म मानता है। तभी तो इस गाने में एक पिता अपने छोटे से बच्चे को जो संस्कार देने की बात करता है, वह किसी धर्म से प्रेरित नहीं है, उसमें कटुता नहीं है, विष नहीं है बल्कि उदारता, सर्वधर्म समभाव तथा सभी धर्मों से बढ़कर मानवता की शिक्षा देने की बात कही गयी है।

प्रसिद्ध मीडिया आलोचक जॉन टूले ने कहा था, "हम क्या थे, क्या हैं तथा भविष्य में क्या होंगे, इसकी भूमिका के निर्धारण में मीडिया एक महत्वपूर्ण कर्ता की तरह कार्य करेगा। आज नव विश्व आतंकवाद तथा परस्पर वैमनस्य की भावना से जूझ रहा है तो हम सभी मीडियाकर्मियों तथा मीडिया प्रबंधकों का यह दायित्व बन जाता है कि हम आने वाली पीढ़ी को यह दिखाएं, जो मानव को मानव से, मानवता को मानवता से तथा शिक्षा को नैतिक शिक्षा (डवतंस म्कनबंजपवद) से जोड़ता हो।"

मीडिया को लोकतंत्र के चौथे स्तम्भ के रूप में मान्यता दी गयी है। यह सर्वविदित है कि एक सफल लोकतंत्र के लिए यह अति आवश्यक है कि समाज में परस्पर प्रेम हो, लोक–नीतियों, परम्पराओं का परस्पर आदर किया जाए, सभी जाति तथा धर्म के लोगों तथा उनके परस्पर विश्वास को सम्मान देते हुए सर्वकल्याण की भावना को जागृत किया जाए। यह कार्य हमारी मीडिया के एक प्रमुख दायित्वों में से एक है। इसने जहाँ एक ओर ऐसे कार्यक्रम दिए हैं जिनसे सभी धर्मों की विशेषताओं, उनकी उन्नतशील संस्कृति, आचार, विचार तथा एकीकरण की भावना

का प्रचार–प्रसार होता है वहीं दूसरी ओर उसने ऐसे भी कार्यक्रम दिए हैं जो रूढ़ियों तथा बुराइयों के विरूद्ध आम भावना विकसित करते हैं। लोगों को उनके विरूद्ध जागरूक करते हैं तथा इसके खिलाफ लड़ने को प्रोत्साहित करते हैं।

साम्प्रदायिक सौहार्द को बढ़ाने में यदि हम मीडिया की भूमिका का विभिन्न कालों के आधार पर विश्लेषण करें तो हम यह पाएंगे कि केवल वर्तमान में ही नहीं बल्कि प्राचीन काल से ही प्रिंट मीडिया ने सामाजिक समभाव, राष्ट्रीय एकता तथा नवजागरण में विशेष भूमिका का निर्वाह किया है। इसने सदैव मानव, मानवता तथा देश प्रेम को धर्म तथा जाति से ऊपर रखा है, तथा “जननी–जन्मभूमिश्च स्वर्गादपि गरीयसि।।“ अर्थात् “माँ व मातृभूमि स्वर्ग से भी बढ़कर है।” की भावना को ही प्रचारित तथा प्रसारित किया है।

प्राचीन काल में संगठन छोटा होता था, प्रायः राजा या मुखिया एक गाँव का होता था, जो बाद में एक ही कबीले का होने लगा। चूँकि वे सभी रक्त–संबंधी होते थे तथा वे परस्पर आचार–विचार, रीति–रिवाज तथा धार्मिक विश्वास में समांगी होते थे, अतः इनमें संघर्ष (आपस में) नहीं थे। लेकिन धीरे–धीरे जब संगठन का आकार बड़ा होने लगा तथा विभिन्न विश्वासों को मानने वाले लोग एक ही राष्ट्र–राज्य में शामिल होने लगे तो उनमें वर्चस्व के लिए संघर्ष बढ़ा क्योंकि प्रत्येक समुदाय अपनी परम्पराओं को दूसरे पर थोपना चाहता था। इससे उनमें आपस में संघर्ष उत्पन्न होने लगा तथा शक्तिशाली की विजय होती थी। वह अपनी परम्पराओं को हारे हुए लोगों पर थोपने लगे। इसमें एकीकरण का अभाव था, इसी लिए यह स्थायी नहीं होता था, तथा दूसरा पक्ष सदैव इसमें लगा रहता था कि कैसे वह अपनी शक्ति को बढ़ाए, तथा फिर से अपनी खोई हुई परम्परा तथा रीति–रिवाजों का पालन करना प्रारम्भ कर दे। यह अराजकता तथा बर्बरता का युग था। किसी भी प्रकार के प्रिंट अथवा इलेक्ट्रॉनिक मीडिया का अभाव था।

लेकिन मध्यकाल में स्थितियाँ बदलने लगीं। ब्रिटेन में औद्योगिक क्रान्ति हुई तथा मशीनों तथा छापेखाने का विकास हुआ। प्रिंट मीडिया सामने आया तथा वैश्विक सूचना का स्थानीकरण कुछ हदतक होना संभव हो सका। रूसो, अरस्तू मिल्टन तथा हाब्स के विचारों से सारा जग लाभान्वित हुआ। मानव अधिकारो, मानव के सम्माननीय जीवन तथा प्रत्येक धर्म को मानने, उसका प्रचार–प्रसार करने तथा उसका सम्मान करने की भावना जागृत हुई। मानवाधिकारों का उदय हुआ तथा धार्मिक प्रवृत्तियाँ जो मानव के विकास तथा उसके फलने फूलने में बाधक थीं, साहित्यों के प्रसार के कारण कम हुई।

भारत में भी ब्रिटिश राज्य की स्थापना के साथ औद्योगिक क्रान्ति तथा प्रेस के विकास का चरण प्रारंभ हुआ। इस प्रेस के माध्यम से नवजागरण से युक्त साहित्य पूरे विश्व में फैला। नये–नये अखबारों का प्रकाशन प्रारंभ हुआ। हिन्दी भाषा जो कि उस समय भी पूरे देश के सर्वाधिक भाग पर बोली जाती थी, के संदर्भ में भी पहला समाचार पत्र ‘उतण्ड मार्तण्ड’ प्रकाशित हुआ। इस समाचार पत्र की सबसे बड़ी विशेषता यह थी कि इसका सम्पादकीय जहाँ एक ओर राष्ट्र–भावना से ओत–प्रोत था, वहीं दूसरी ओर इसने साम्प्रदायिकता, धार्मिक विद्वेष एवं ऐसी परम्पराओं, रीतियों का विरोध किया जो धार्मिक विद्वेष को फैलाती थी, तथा नवाचार, वैज्ञानिक शिक्षा, मानवतावाद और तर्कवाद पर विशेष बल दिया, जिसने यह बताया कि सबसे बड़ा धर्म मानवता का है तथा मानव जीवन का उद्देश्य “परस्पर सहअस्तित्व“ है। साम्प्रदायिक सौहार्द को भारत में बढ़ाने का मीडिया के रूप में इस अरव़बार की भूमिका विशेष रूप से उल्लेखनीय इसलिए भी है क्योंकि इसमें विभिन्न धर्मों तथा सम्प्रदायों के मतावलम्बियों के विचारों को शामिल किया गया था। अंग्रेजों को ऐसा लगा कि यह समाचार पत्र जनमानस में सामाजिक समरसता की भावना को एक ओर जागृत कर रहा है वहीं दूसरी ओर अंग्रेजों के विरूद्ध भी भावना का

संचार कर रहा है। अतः वर्ष 1912 में कुछ समय के लिए इस पर प्रतिबंध लगा दिया गया।

20वीं शताब्दी के उत्तरार्द्ध में कुछ ऐसी स्थितियाँ उभरने लगीं कि लोगों के विचारों में अपने धर्म तथा सम्प्रदाय के लिए विशेष रूप से भावना जागृत होने लगी, तथा उनका मानना था कि एक धर्म/सम्प्रदाय के हितों की बातें, योजनाएं तथा सरकार का झुकाव, उनके मत/धर्म के विकास में बाधक होने लगे हैं, अर्थात् उनके विरूद्ध कार्य करके ही दूसरे सम्प्रदाय का हित सुनिश्चित किया जा सकता है।

ऐसी दशा में लोगों के मन में एक प्रकार की विषाक्त भावना ने जन्म लिया। यह भावना एक ओर तो लोगों को आजादी प्राप्त करने के महत्तर उद्देश्य से दूर तो कर ही रही थी, वहीं दूसरी ओर वैमनस्य ने अंग्रेजी राज्य की जड़े और गहरी कर दी थीं। ऐसी स्थिति में मीडिया ही तो था, जिसने इस वैमनस्य को कम किया। सामाजिक–धार्मिक आन्दोलनों में सुधार की भावना को बढ़ाने में विशेष रूप से समाचार पत्रों की विशेष भूमिका रही है। उदाहरण के लिए श्री राजा राम मोहन राय द्वारा सम्पादित अखबार 'मिरातुल अखबार' तथा बाल गंगाधर तिलक द्वारा निकाला जाने वाला 'केसरी' और 'मराठा' ने लोगों को जातिगत तथा धार्मिक संकीर्ण भावना से निकालकर, राष्ट्र की मुख्य धारा में सम्मिलित होने का सुझाव दिया। उन्होंने अपने अखबार के माध्यम से यह बताया कि सभी धर्मों का आधार मानवता है, हमें धार्मिक तथा जातिगत आधार पर विलगित नहीं होना चाहिए एवं प्रयास करना चाहिए कि परस्पर एक होकर अपने–आप को संगठित करें तथा गुलामी की जंजीरों को तोड़ें। लेकिन यह कार्य तभी संभव है जब हम एक होंगे और आपसी विद्वेष को तथा धर्म के आधार पर अलग देश बनाना अथवा कुछ धर्म के मतावलंबियों द्वारा यह मानना कि अंग्रेजी राज्य में ही उनकी उन्नति हो सकती है, यह गलत है।

महात्मा गाँधी द्वारा निकाले गये समाचार पत्र 'हिन्द स्वराज' तथा 'हरिजन' में भी साम्प्रदायिक सौहार्द की बात की गयी है। जहाँ एक ओर धर्म से अलग रहकर 'सर्वोदय' तथा 'अन्त्योदय' की भावना को स्पष्ट किया गया है वहीं छुआ–छूत तथा दलित उद्धार पर भी बल दिया गया है। यह माना गया है कि साम्प्रदायिकता मात्र धर्म के आधार पर ही नहीं होती है बल्कि यह अंतः धार्मिक अर्थात् उच्च तथा निम्न–वर्ग, सवर्ण एवं हरिजन के बीच भी हो सकती है। अतः आवश्यकता इस बात की है कि परस्पर समभाव व एकीकरण की भावना व मान्यता को अपनाया जाए।

'हरिजन' के 12 अक्टूबर 1930 के अंक में महात्मा गाँधी ने लिखा था– "हम सब एक हैं।" और किसी को भी, चाहे वह मानव हो अथवा मानवेत्तर, हमें किसी भी आधार पर अलग करने का अधिकार नहीं है। सबसे बड़ा धर्म मानवता है, तथा वह धर्म इसका अगर विरोध करता है, अथवा इसके विरूद्ध विद्वेष की भावना पैदा करता है तो हमें उसका बायकाट करना चाहिए, चाहे वह भले ही हमारा अपना धर्म हो।" हम देखते हैं कि बीसवीं शताब्दी के पूर्वार्द्ध में आजादी को प्राप्त करने के लिए जितने भी आन्दोलन हुए वे अत्यंत संगठित, देश–प्रेम की भावना से ओत–प्रोत तथा स्व की भावना से परे बड़े उद्देश्य को प्राप्त करने के लिए थे। यह तभी संभव हो पाया जब लोग साम्प्रदायिकता की भावना के विरूद्ध खड़े हुए। यह कार्य मीडिया के बिना संभव नहीं था।

आजादी के बाद विकास तथा 'कल्याणकारी राज्य' की स्थापना का चरण प्रारम्भ हुआ। विकास को सभी तक पहुँचाना था, तथा यह देखा जा रहा था कि ब्रिटिश सरकार ने जो कटुता के बीज देश में बोए थे, उसके कारण कई धर्मावलंबियों के विश्वास को जीतने में समस्या थी, तथा उनको यह विश्वास दिलाना कि देश उनके लिए है तथा विकास तथा कल्याण की योजनाएं उनको भी लाभान्वित करने के लिए हैं, दुश्कर कार्य था। लेकिन सरकार ने उनको यह विश्वास दिलाने के लिए दृश्य, श्रव्य माध्यम तथा प्रिंट मीडिया का सहारा लिया।

विभिन्न विज्ञापनों के माध्यम से उनको विकास की मुख्यधारा में शामिल किया गया तथा इस कार्य को विभिन्न समाचार पत्रों, जो कि प्रायः सभी महत्वपूर्ण भाषाओं में थे, में प्रकाशित करवाया गया। रेडियो पर धार्मिक कुरीतियों के विरूद्ध धर्म गुरूओं के भाषण आयोजित तथा प्रसारित करवाए गये। इतना ही नहीं सरकार ने वर्ष 1972 में, जब पाकिस्तान तथा चीन से युद्ध के बाद यह आवश्यक हो गया था कि लोग एकता में रहें और उनमें परस्पर समभाव तथा आदर की भावना हो, तो इस कार्य में श्रव्य मीडिया (रेडियो) की भूमिका को और प्रभावशाली तथा सशक्त बनाने के लिए "राष्ट्रीयता एकता पुरस्कारों" की घोषणा की, जो आज भी उन आकाशवाणी केन्द्रों को दिए जाते हैं, जिनकी राष्ट्रीय एकता में विशेष भूमिका रही है।

वर्ष 2007 का "राष्ट्रीय एकता को बढ़ाने के लिए सर्वश्रेष्ठ कार्यक्रम" का पुरस्कार आकाशवाणी तिरूचिनापल्ली को कार्यक्रम 'अगाथेमाची' जो कि राष्ट्रीय एकता की वृद्धि करने वाला एक नाटक था, को दिया गया। "अगाथेमाची" एक ऐसा नाटक है, जिसमें नेता के आह्वान पर, जब देश पर संकट आता है तो लोग परस्पर जातिगत विद्वेष को भुलाकर, देश के लिए अपनी जान देने से भी नहीं हिचकते।

अस्सी के दशक में जब टेलीविजन की शुरूआत व्यापक पैमाने पर हुई तथा टी0वी0 की पहुँच दूर–दूर के गाँवों तक हुई तो, देश–प्रेम तथा सर्वधर्म समभाव के कार्यक्रमों से ग्रामीण भारत में भी धार्मिक कुरीतियों, धर्म विद्वेष के प्रति अंधानुकरण तथा विभिन्न प्रकार के ऐसे रीति–रिवाजों को मानने में, जिससे दूसरे सम्प्रदाय की भावनाएं आहत होती हों, में कमी आयी है। लोगों का लोगों में विश्वास बढ़ा है।

चाहे हिन्दू हों, सिक्ख, मुसलमान अथवा ईसाई सभी ईद की सेवईयाँ खाते हैं, परस्पर गले मिलते हैं तथा एक दूसरे को शुभकामनाएं देते हैं, ऐसे ही होली तथा दीपावली राष्ट्रीय त्यौहार बन गये हैं जो धर्म से परे हो गये हैं। यह मीडिया का ही योगदान है।

90 के दशक में वैश्वीकरण, उदारीकरण तथा निजीकरण से आर्थिक भोगवाद तथा भौतिकवाद बढ़ने लगा लोगों में फिर से संकीर्णताएं जन्म लेने लगीं। अमेरिका द्वारा इराक पर तथा बाद में अफगानिस्तान पर हमले के बाद पूरे विश्व में धार्मिक विद्वेष फैलने लगा तथा भारत भी इसके प्रभाव से अछूता नहीं रहा। हाल के वर्षों में भारत वर्ष के लगभग प्रत्येक क्षेत्र (प्रदेश) में साम्प्रदायिक दंगे हुए। आतंकवाद तथा बम–विस्फोट द्वारा निर्दोषों को कालकवलित कराने के बहुत से सफल तथा असफल प्रयास हुए। नेशनल क्राइम रिकार्ड ब्यूरो की रिपोर्ट के अनुसार वर्ष 2006 में कुल 26 स्थानों पर साम्प्रदायिक संघर्ष की बड़ी अथवा छोटी घटनाएं हुई तथा इन घटनाओं में 172 से अधिक निर्दोष लोगों की जान गई तथा लगभग 270 करोड़ रु0 की सम्पत्ति का नाश हुआ। इसी प्रकार वर्ष 2006 में बम विस्फोट की घटनाओं में 200 से अधिक लोगों की जानें गयी। अतः वर्तमान समय में मीडिया की भूमिका इन अवांछनीय घटनाओं को रोकने में और भी बढ़ जाती है। 90 के दशक में विभिन्न प्रकार के धार्मिक सीरियलों जैसे– रामायण, महाभारत, ईसूमसीह की कहानियों तथा कुरान की आयतों पर आधारित धारावाहिकों का प्रसारण कर जहाँ एक ओर कुरीतियों को दूर करने का प्रयास किया गया वहीं दूसरी ओर 'द सोर्ड ऑफ टीपू सुल्तान' तथा 'महाराणा प्रताप' जैसे देशभक्ति से पूर्ण धारावाहिकों का प्रसारण कर साम्प्रदायिक भावना से हटकर देशभक्ति का जज्बा पैदा किया गया।

वर्तमान समय 'सूचना प्रौद्योगिकी' (आई.सी.टी.) का युग है। इस सूचना प्रौद्योगिकी ने 'स्थानीय सूचना का भूमण्डलीकरण' (Globalization of Local Information) किया है। अतः 'बेस्ट प्रैक्टिस' का विकास हुआ। अर्थात् ऐसी सूचनाओं को उदाहरण के रूप में प्रस्तुत किया गया जो 'साम्प्रदायिक सौहार्द' को बढ़ाने वाली हों तथा वे प्रत्येक समाज में लागू होती हों। उदाहरण के लिए– केरल के उडुपी जिले में एक गाँव में हुए अन्तर्धार्मिक विवाह को न केवल प्रदेश के स्तर पर बल्कि पूरे देश व विश्व के स्तर पर प्रचारित व प्रसारित किया गया।

कई चैनलों में अन्तर्धार्मिक विवाहों तथा परस्पर मेलमिलाप को प्रोत्साहित किया है। कई धारावाहिकों में परस्पर हिन्दू–मुस्लिम, हिन्दू–सिक्ख अथवा विभिन्न साम्प्रदायिक मतावलंबियों के परस्पर वैवाहिक सम्बन्धों को दिखाया जाता है तथा यह भी बताया जाता है कि किस प्रकार तर्कों के आधार पर माता–पिता तथा अन्य समाज के संबंधियों को इस बात के लिए मनाया जाता है। वर्तमान में स्टार प्लस पर प्रायोजित धारावाहिक 'आना माही रे' कुछ इसी प्रकार का उदाहरण प्रस्तुत करता है।

इसी प्रकार हमारा प्रिंट मीडिया (समाचार पत्र) भी पीछे नहीं रहा है। विभिन्न प्रकार के उच्च गुणवत्ता वाले समाचार पत्र इस बात को हमेशा ध्यान में रखते हैं कि उनके समाचार–पत्र में कोई भी ऐसी बात न छापी जाए जो किसी धर्म विशेष की भावनाओं को आहत करती हो। उनके सम्पादकीय सदैव धार्मिक संकीर्णताओं तथा कुरीतियों का विरोध करते हैं चाहे वह बाल–विवाह हो अथवा महिलाओं की परम्परागत तथा दृढ़ता से पालन होने वाली प्रथा– पर्दा प्रथा।

इतना ही नहीं, विभिन्न समाचार–पत्र अपने वैवाहिक विज्ञापनों में ऐसे विज्ञापनों पर विशेष रूप से छूट देते हैं जिनमें अन्तर्जातीय तथा अन्तर्धार्मिक विवाहों को प्राथमिकता दी जाती है।

अभी हाल में ही विभिन्न स्थानों पर हुए बम–विस्फोटों के बाद साम्प्रदायिक तनाव फैलाने की आशंका महसूस की जा रही थी, ऐसी दशा में हमारे श्रव्य तथा दृश्य मीडिया (Auto-vedio तथा Print Media) ने सराहनीय कार्य किया तथा साम्प्रदायिक सौहार्द को बनाए रखने में विशेष भूमिका अदा की।

उपरोक्त परिस्थितियों के होते हुए भी यह दुख का विषय है कि कभी–कभी ऐसी परिस्थितियाँ उत्पन्न हो जाती हैं जहाँ मीडिया अपनी भूमिका को प्रभावशाली तरीके से नहीं निभा पाता है। कदाचित इसका कारण उपभोक्तावाद, भूमण्डलीकरण तथा सस्ती लोकप्रियता की प्राप्ति है। फिर भी ऐसी संस्थाओं तथा व्यक्तियों की

कमी नहीं है जो इस पावन कार्य को कर रहे हैं। आज भी मानवता जीवित है। राजनीति का दूषित होना तथा धन–बल भी इस शक्ति को पराजित नहीं कर पाया है। सरकार ने कई ऐसे प्रावधान किए हैं जिससे मीडिया की शुचिता बनी रहे। उदाहरण के रूप में प्रेस ट्रस्ट ऑफ इंडिया तथा प्रेस काउन्सिल ऑफ इंडिया में सदस्यों की नियुक्ति के संदर्भ में यह प्रावधान किया है कि समाज के सभी वर्गों का उचित प्रतिनिधित्व बना रहे तथा इसकी पवित्रता में कोई आघात न पहुँचे।

समस्याएं तो आती है, लेकिन "मानव की इच्छा–शक्ति से बढ़कर कुछ नहीं है।" आवश्यकता है– सभी को जोड़ने की, उनको विश्वास दिलाने की, कि हम सभी एक हैं तथा सदैव एक रहेंगे। जम्मू कश्मीर से कन्याकुमारी तक, सिल्चर से पोरबंदर तक सभी एक ही सूत्र में पिरोए हैं, हम कभी अलग नहीं होंगे– ऐसी भावना मीडिया द्वारा लोगों के मन में जगाने तथा इसको सशक्त करने की आवश्यकता है।

वर्तमान समय में जब सफलता पाने के लिए अनैतिक तरीकों का प्रयोग बढ़ रहा है, धर्म, जाति तथा भाषा के आधार पर विकास की मांग हो रही है, तब हमारे मीडिया का दायित्व और भी बढ़ जाता है। ऐसे कार्यक्रमों तथा लेखों का सृजन करना होगा जो धार्मिक समरसता को बढ़ाते हैं। विकास के कार्यक्रमों तथा लोगों के कल्याण के लिए चलायी जा रही योजनाओं की प्रगति की जानकारी जनमानस तक पहुँचना भी मीडिया की एक महत्वपूर्ण जिम्मेदारी है क्योंकि यह माना जाता है कि विपन्नता, बेरोजगारी, अशिक्षा तथा कुपोषण भी धार्मिक विद्वेष (साम्प्रदायिकता) को बढ़ाने का एक विशेष कारण है। अतः यदि मीडिया द्वारा लोगों तक उनके अधिकारों के बारे में शिक्षा पहुँचायी जाएगी, योजनाओं का अधिकतम लाभ लेने की प्रवृत्ति के

बारे में जागरूकता पैदा की जाएगी, तभी धार्मिक समरसता बढ़ेगी। निश्चित रूप से मीडिया का कार्य उल्लेखनीय है तथा उसका सूत्र वाक्य है–

<div align="center">

सर्वे भवन्तु सुखिनः,

सर्वे सन्तु निरामया।।
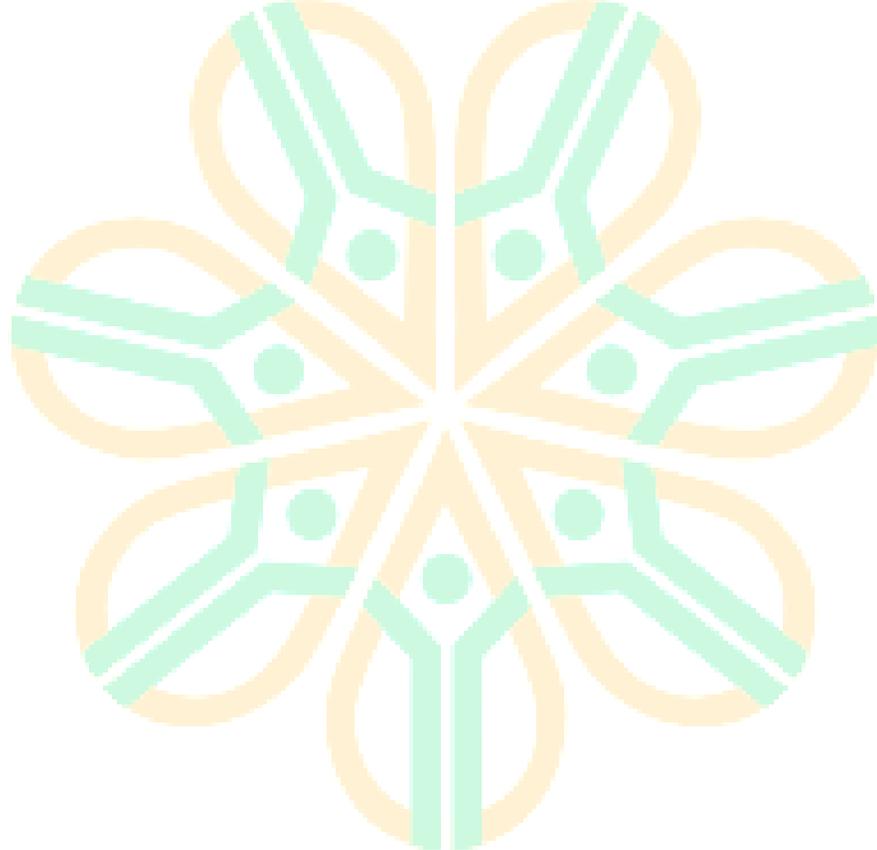
सर्वे भद्राणि पश्यन्तु,

मा कश्चिद् दुःखभाग्भवेत्।।

</div>

About the contributors

Sl. No.	Name	Service	Address
1.	Radhakrishnan B.	IAS	No.2, Bose Nagar 6th Street Pudukkottai-622 001 Tamil Nadu
2.	Aishvarya Singh	IAS	C/o Dr. A.K. Singh 510/220-b Baijnath Road Lucknow-226 007 Uttar Pradesh
3.	Rajan Vishal	IAS	27-Shiv Nagar Post Office Jawala Flour Mills Amritsar-143 003 Punjab
4.	Ashwini Sattaru	IFS	8-2-684-J-8-A, RD NUM: 12, Bhavani Nagar, Banjara Hills-34, Hyderabad-500 034 Andhra Pradesh
5.	Harsh Mangla	IAS	Gopi Nath Mandir Wali Gali Hasanpur-121 107 Haryana
6.	Mariam Farzhana Sadhiq	IAS	Old No.16, New No.31, Taylor's Estate, 2nd Street Kodambakkam Chennai-600 024 Tamil Nadu
7.	Lalithalakshmi Venkataramani	IAS	C/o K. Venkataramani B 704, Gopalan Jewels Kanakapura Main Road Bangalore Karnataka

8.	Karma Dorji	RBCS	Vill Kethokha, Block-Bongo Dist. Chhukha Thimphy Royal Bhutan
9.	Rahul Jain	IPS	C/o Ashok Jain 125, Maharani Jhansi Marg Ambala Cantt-133 001 Haryana
10.	Dhavalkumar Kiritkumar Patel	IAS	A/8, Gokul Flats Opp. Shivam Flats Nava Vadaj Ahmedabad-380 013 Gujarat
11.	Adesh Anand Titarmare	IAS	Plot No.44, Opp. To Plot 800, Kirti Nagar, Near Water Tank, New Nandanwan Layout, Nagpur-440 009 Maharashtra
12	Shemushi Bajpai	IPS	C/o Dr. Adya 104, Gautam Buddha Niwas Banasthali Vidyapith Tonk-304 022 Rajasthan
13.	Bharat Yadav	IAS	Village and Post Udgawan, Distt. Datia-475 661 Madhya Pradesh
14.	Lalit Shakyawar	IPS	C/o Mansharam Shakyawar 34, Nehru Colony, RK Puri Thatipur, Gwalior-474 011 Madhya Pradesh

15.	Giriwar Dayal Singh	IAS	C/o Ishwar PraSAD Singh Village – Bichchhi PO – Bichchhi Tehsil – Robertsganj Sonebhadra, Uttar Pradesh