

**The Role of Mass Media
And
Motion Pictures in establishing
Moral Values And
Universal Peace.**

In this era of electronics, when news are transmitted at once through teleprinters, or relayed on the air or bounced off a satellite on a T.V. Screen, the mass media play a very great role in moulding public opinion either by providing *information* or by *education* through *features*, etc., or through comments. The role which was once played by the home, the church, the school, the public platform or congregations in moulding a person's opinion, personality or character has, to a great extent, been now taken over by the news media and motion pictures. The media are now a person's chief avenues of contact with the world and, therefore, man now gains his impressions of the world and its peoples and its events from newspaper accounts or through the information provided by various periodicals, or relayed on the radio or shown on the T.V. or video screen. Many newspapers in England, America, Australia and other developed countries have now a vast circulation, often ranging between three to four million, and they have credibility in the minds of their readers who, anyway, have no independent source of verification of the veracity of the press reports. In the developing countries, like India, also there are national and regional language newspapers and periodicals with circulation as high as three or four hundred thousands and the number of radio-listeners and T.V. viewers of public-interest programmes in tens of millions. Besides, there are periodicals for women (which are also read, with special interest, by men) and there are also magazines for the youth and the children, which too are relished by grown-ups. All of us are, thus influenced by the printed word. This influence may be good, bad or mixed.

Influence of Newspapers and periodicals

The newspapers can have a sobering effect on their readers and can cultivate sense of impartial judgement and poise and can also create interest for higher values or they can stir up mass hysteria, create communal tension, bias public opinion against certain groups of fill their minds with hatred.

The newspapers can eliminate, dilute or distort certain items and can also insinuate motives for certain actions and can thus put those actions in different light. They can play down certain events and can thus throttle even good movements, and they can also play up certain other events if these relate to a cause, which they want to embrace or take up. *They can perpetuate prejudices against certain institutions, ideas and persons and can suppress news, which are favorable to them. They can serve as a nation's conscience by taking up important issues, and crystallize a change in a nation's thinking and, on the other hand, they can reject an important news and can, sometimes, even create bad news against certain persons or institutions if they are ideologically opposed to them. This has happened with many institutions, movements and persons.*

Undeniably, written word directly or indirectly affects vast sections of society and has a great sway over public mind, and one cannot, therefore, overlook their forceful impact. Groups and institutions may do some very useful work for strengthening the forces of peace and for creating spirit of goodwill and co-operation in society and newspapers may boost their morale and help to create a social change through their institutions, or they may kill those movements by remaining silent about them, by denying them any news space, or by commenting adversely on them because of some prejudice. On the other hand, they may highlight certain forces of disruption out of all proportion to their size and strength and may, in this way, give them great publicity and importance and thus be instrumental in turning them into a great violent movement. Thus, newspapers do not only report events of history but they also help to create History. Many instances can be given to substantiate how newspaper – reports created history by exposing certain scandals, by creating tension between nations and by commenting in a particular light.

Let us see what role the newspapers can play so as to reinvigorate the moral and spiritual culture and to establish peace at this juncture of history when mankind is giving up moral values.

The newspapers and periodicals vary widely in type and quality of the service they render. Talking of them in general, we may say that most of them combine at least six or seven functions:

1. They furnish news or information regarding the current events and trends.

2. They write editorials on contemporary issues or make comments on plans, programmes and events related to national or international situations.
 3. They advertise for business and other establishments.
 4. They provide various types of entertainments, from comic strips to puzzles, to short stories. They may also serialize a novel.
 5. They furnish miscellaneous information. This may include feature articles, historical information, latest inventions in science and technology, helpful hints for housewives or other persons and something about health and disease and about astrological predictions. They also publish press interviews of important persons, give information about lectures, exhibitions and other activities at various places, and there are various other things besides these, which are difficult to classify.
 6. They publish "*Letters to the Editor*" and also excerpts from other newspapers.
 7. They publish news about sports events.
- Let us take these one by one.

1. News or information

To understand newspapers and their coverage of the news, we need to remember that the press, in our day, is not an impartial reporter but an active participant. Reporters and correspondents as well as editors and owners, have, as human beings, their own definite social, economic, political, moral and religious view-points. These view-points or beliefs certainly color the reports that are published in their paper. After the reporters have given their color to the news, the editorial offices may select and slant these reports still further. Besides, many newspapers are frankly and professedly partisans in politics or religious matters. When economic, political or religious issues are involved, then also newspapers serve special interests.

Truth, Justice and Fair-play should be The motto in reporting news.

There are certain newspapers, which are owned by individuals who are committed to a particular religious sect. Such papers sometimes indulge in mud-slinging against certain minority religious or spiritual institutions on the advice of the preachers of the sect to which these owners owe

allegiance. They do not care to make some unbiased investigations before indulging into a campaign of slander and downright denunciation. Thus, some newspapers commit a great violence to the cause of truth and do great injustice though the legend at the top of their front page, says that their paper is meant to speak for those who suffer injustice and oppression! They, thus, do a great harm by creating hostility or bias, in the minds of their readers, against certain minority institutions.

Further, when these harmed institutions approach them to give the correct picture, they refuse to do their duty, for they think that, by publishing the facts now, they would, perhaps, lose credibility in the eyes of their readers or would be antagonizing the religious bosses under whose influence they are or, if they agree to publish a contradiction to the earlier report of a correction to the erroneous version, they do it after a number of days and that too in some such corner of a page to which the readers, generally do not pay much attention. Thus, such newspapers and periodicals not only suppress the truth but are, indirectly, an instrument of grave injustice and oppression and a means of spreading falsehood and baseless scandals. Such acts definitely cause disturbance in the society and are not at all congenial to creating a climate of unity, love and integration. It should, therefore, be remembered that newspapers have not only the privilege of drawing the attention and demanding the time of the public but they have their moral duty not to misinform, or miseducate their readers by taking shelter under the cover of the freedom of the press.

In this connection, it would not be out of place to mention here that it has been well established that opinions, attitudes and conduct of people depend to large extent, on the information available to them. One cannot think correctly or clearly on issues and ideologies, and about organizations, communities, countries and persons unless one can obtain accurate information. If the sources and channels of information are tainted or distorted, one is in serious danger of being led astray or being biased and prejudiced. And, in the present world, newspapers, newsreel radio and T.V. are the main sources of information. Directly or indirectly, they greatly influence our beliefs, attitudes and emotions. It is therefore, be sacred duty of the mass media to do justice to truth and to institutions and not to tilt the balance of news or to perpetuate prejudices.

Moreover, it is not their moral duty not to suppress news about the work of organizations and persons devoted to work of social or moral reconstruction in one way or another nor should they stifle good movements by magnifying their small weaknesses out of all proportion. Blanket ban on news about such institutions, whether they are religious, social or spiritual, is not only an act of grave injustice done to them but an act of causing great harm to society by misleading people about their work. It is also an act of depriving people of new of hope, joy and enlightenment in this world of sorrow and ignorance where newspapers give maximum space to news of horror, catastrophe and the like.

There is another angle of seeing how particular kind of news affects the news-readers. Every morning, even before one has taken one's breakfast, when one reads a morning papers, one finds such news as given, in three-column or bigger headlines, information about a peace less situation or an event that speaks of some distress or disturbance somewhere. An overdose of such news gives a bad mood for the day. Even so do the evening newspapers give many a reader sleepless nights or tense mood because of an overdose of horrifying, agitative or too exciting news.

If an impartial survey is conducted, in a scientific manner, to find out what effect sensational, provocative news or banner line scandals, or information of the negative aspects of society and its institutions, reported too often, and covering big news space, has on individual minds, one would find that these have definitely a tension-creating influence on the minds of men and women with grave social repercussions and after-effects. They do not only disturb, in a subtle way, the peace of mind of a man or a woman but make him or her of belligerent nature, easily Provo cable and one who talks of negative aspects of individuals and institutions. Such news has a bad effect upon a person's general health too.

It should, therefore, be fully realized by the media that an overdose of news that causes fear, frustration and worry, causes, emotional upheavals, it disrupts a person's normal state of mind, reduces his or her efficiency, causes many psychosomatic diseases and spoils his or her mental climate and social environment even as bombs destroy physical bodies and also environment. Thus, giving negative news abundantly is

like doing violence to one's subscribers even though unintentionally and in subtle form. Such continual exposure to violence, scandals, etc., in the media reinforces these negative traits in the people who, in course of time, become voluntary addicts to these. It is, therefore, the responsibility of the media to see that, as one would not like to feed one's children an unhealthy meal; they should not serve such-like stuff to their subscribers.

The news correspondents say that, from a journalist's point of view 'bad news' is a 'good news' and a 'good news' is either no news or it is a 'bad news', but, let us remember, by giving too much of these bad news, the newspapers have been giving their readers the present-day diseases of 'developed' or 'developing' society-diseases such as heart trouble, hypertension, peptic ulcers, bad stomach, fatigue without work, etc., etc.

It is, therefore, time that correspondents, reporter and editors now pay heed to this aspect also of the news and give some news that draw people's attention away from what is hot spicy, scandalous or shocking.

News of spiritual events is necessary for
Moral health of the society

Newspapers and periodicals are for the people in general. By denying space to religious, educational or other events of the type in which the reporters, correspondents or editors themselves do not believe, is like trying to cripple someone else's growing children; it is like plucking up budding flowers from someone's garden and trampling them under their feet.

Any event which can inspire people for a good life-style or for higher moral standards may not be 'newsworthy' in the strict journalistic sense as it is not in the nature of 'man bites dog' but, if we always give sensational or hot news and nothing soothing, elevating or peace-giving, we will be starving the spirit or the soul of our society. One does not need only spiced articles of food or only hot drinks but one also requires something sweet, nourishing, invigorating and even something in the nature of roughage, for a human system needs all these.

In this connection, the media should note that there is now enough evidence to show that mere scientific and industrial progress is not enough and that moral and spiritual values also are very useful for our mental and social growth and health, and that mere materialistic beliefs do not have the capacity to solve our global problems. Some media persons should now themselves realize that moral and spiritual alternatives are no less important to solve our current crises. They should not, therefore, prevent the spiritual wisdom from giving a healing touch to the sick soul of society.

In this context, the media should also note that there is already a growing feeling and a trend that more attention should be paid to ancient philosophies and spiritual systems. People are already tired of mere materialistic philosophies and view-points. It is, therefore, time that the media take courage to communicate the spiritual message, inform people of the ancient wisdom, and tell them of the necessity of moral values in the present context. Instances can be given of papers who adopted this policy and were successful both in having a brighter image and a higher circulations.

2. Editorials and comments

This is not merely a matter of editorials but the whole editorial policy, which decides what shall be and what shall not be stressed. Papers can headline some items of news or opinions and make them seem very important, or they can suppress items or omit them entirely. Their handling of news depends to a large extent on their own point –of – view or on their party affiliations, personal connections or financial or political pressures. Brahma kumaris Institutions also had a bitter experience to this. In Hyderabad (Sindh) where the Institution was founded, certain newspapers, which were owned by individuals belonging to Bhai Bhand community, i.e. the Business Class, were influenced by certain businessmen and political leaders to comment on the Institution in a particular light. In India also, certain newspapers, which are owned by individuals, belonging to a particular religious community, have, in the early history of the institution, been influenced by the views of certain religious leaders in editorialising the work of the Institution or the events connected with it with a particular slant. Not to speak of this Institution, even the U.N. has been complaining that certain newspapers have never reported favorably of its work

So, while editors, as free individuals, are at liberty to use their columns as they choose, yet, they have some moral obligations towards the readers and the general public. If the news are internationally diluted, distorted, suppressed or given an unfair slant, the readers and the public are in serious danger of being led astray, even though they are awake to use their own judgement. The editors must keep in mind that they control a powerful means of communication, which does not only report current events and the history of the world but also helps to create history. They would thus themselves also be judged by the future historians as to what part they played in creating or influencing history. Being in charge of a paper, editors have some responsibility also to discharge. They must, therefore, check up their sources of information before writing anything slanderous in a big way about any individual or institution and must give fair opportunity to the person or party concerned to present his or its own view-point. Further, if they publish information about the private life of individuals, they should do so only if it is in public interest.

Moreover, they must not merely cater for the general reader but should also give new direction. The media must not merely reflect society but they must work for bringing a social change. They must not accept merely that, which conforms to their own views and thus maintain the status quo but they should also give space to those ideas, which have the potentiality of creating a new, peaceful order.

3. Advertisements.

Between forty and fifty percent space is generally given by newspapers and periodicals to the advertisements, for about two-third of the revenue of newspapers comes from advertisements. Big business firms, who give big advertisements to the newspapers, may exert their influence on the newspapers.

But a major danger comes from those advertisements, which publicise articles, which are harmful to physical, mental or moral health of the society. For example, while the medical researches have proved it conclusively that the smoking is injurious to health, newspapers, in order to earn revenues, may publish big advertisements, which depict cigarettes as a status – symbol so as something, which gives a feeling of relaxation. The newspapers may, thus, do irreparable harm to the public health.

Likewise, certain advertisements may depict their saleable articles in an indecent or uncultured way. Certain other advertisements may be suggestive of prurient motives and obscene acts, and may be in bad taste.

Not to speak of advertisements, some newspapers have a general policy of giving certain photographs of women with certain couplets, which may have bad effect on the morals of people and may be profane and lascivious. They may imply presentation of a female figure in an undignified manner. They are, thus, an insult to women and they create wrong social values. It is; therefore, wrong to accept such advertisements that bring moral depravity.

Advertisements of Lotteries also are, in fact, harmful to public interest, for they persuade people to earn money without work and to depend on the factor of mere luck. Such advertisements spread wrong values and give wrong attitudes to public mind.

By selling advertisement space to cabarets or such other vulgar and nude floor-shows, newspapers, indirectly, co-operate with the body-conscious people in bringing the moral downfall of the society and utter degeneration of youth.

Newspapers can, if they care, help in carrying out a great social and moral reform of society by refusing advertisement space to breweries for hard drinks, and to tobacco companies for cigarettes and bidis, and to recreation clubs who give floor-shows. If they do so even for three years, they will find a lot of change in society.

4. Material for entertainment

The comic strips or other strips are generally seen by all family members, including children, for they provide entertainment. But, if these are suggestive of wife's constant disregard of her husband or a child's browbeating his or her parents, or if they are suggestive of violence under the guise of showing courage, they would ultimately do more harm than good. Instead of humour, they will, one day, take the form of a tumor.

Strips that make man laugh or feel light are, no doubt a useful part of a newspaper. One relishes them especially on holidays after a hectic work-week. One, therefore, does not ask for applying a whip of discipline to a

faltering cartoonist, a trip-maker or a humorist. But there are certain limits to everything and one should not cross the limits of decency and good taste.

Again, with the object of providing entertainment, one should not give crime stories in such details or serialise short novels, giving spying cases, which persuade the readers to imitate these so as to achieve certain things by cheap and criminal methods. The newspapers do sometimes give stories which disturb some people in their sleep. They do reproduce parts of novels, which shake moral foundations of certain individuals and give them ambivalence instead of moral strength.

5. Feature articles, Letters to the Editor, etc.

Newspapers and periodicals can do a great service to society by giving a good '*Thought for the Day*' or '*Think it over*', and by giving from time to time, certain feature articles, which, in this age of rank materialism, give people spiritual truths in the light of science, or in terms of their practical utility and usefulness in the present context. They can do real good to the public if they give articles which report findings of doctors about what effect on health the practice of meditation and positive thinking have. They can also publish experiences of people who have been working with honesty and sincerity and have been sticking to patience, tolerance, sweetness, etc. Practical instances from the life of those men and women who observed moral and spiritual values would inspire others to put these values in life.

Likewise, articles which give spiritual interpretation of history or letters which comments on events from a spiritual angle, or write-ups on significance of festivals can also be given space in newspapers and periodicals.

Again, it is generally a sub-editor or an editor who decides which letters be printed, if such letters as offer guidance and suggest solutions to the crisis which beset us and point out the implication of our attitudes, right certain social wrongs and expose villainy, should also be given space.

In short, the newspaper should not spend most of the space to political and the least to spiritual and moral events but should, instead, strike a useful balance. They should also see that no such articles or photos are published which supply incentives to crime or base conduct. Instead,

they should publish such stories, articles, news, features, pieces, write-ups, etc., which promote public peace, unity and co-operation and inspire people to practice human values in life.

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