

Journalists' Challenges in Our Times

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Last few years the socio-political situations have changed nationally and internationally. According to the mass media I am sad to note That India is in forefront in corruption and persecution of the minorities in the name of religion. Let us speak about the situation in India and specifically in Gujarat. The Amar-Akbar-Anthony situation of brotherhood and friendship exists no more. A teenager Junaid Khan who had gone to buy new clothes for Eid was brutally murdered with sharp weapons in a train amidst other passengers. The fearless journalist-editor Gouri Lenkesh was shot dead in front of her house by two burkha-clad motor cycle riders.



The situation of Gujarat is not much different from the rest of India. Author journalist Anuja Chauhan writes in a popular periodical THE WEEK dated October 15, 2017: “These days Amitabh Bachan is busy white-washing Gujarat into some kind of weird, Sanskritised Disneyland on national television.” But the people know the picture portrayed by Bhachan is quite different from the actual situation of Gujarat. According to news paper report a Dalit young man was beaten to death for watching Garba Dance from afar! A few days after that a Dalit youth was attacked with a sharp weapon for the crime of keeping a mustache!

The people of good will are frightened with news paper reports like criminals not only being protected but also honored and promoted by self serving politicians. In the name of cow protection such criminals have cruelly murdered innocent people. Thanks to the fear of the terrorists of cow vigilante type, the sale and transport of cows have come to a standstill even without law. Consequently poor people and small farmers with one or two cows have now no income.

Consequently we see the increasing number of deaths by hunger and farmers' suicide. I am ashamed to take note here that India's position is 100th out of 119 countries on global Hunger Index 2017! Nepal, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka are in much better position than India. These realistic situations are great challenges for journalists.

Today in India journalists' profession has become a very dangerous profession. For, as leaves fall from a tree in winter the fearless and committed journalists are falling death as the victims of people who take law in their own hands. Such victims include rationalist Dr. Narendra Dabholkar, social activist comrade Govind Panshar, educationalist Prof. M.M. Kulburgi and fearless journalist, Gouri Lenkesh. The fearless journalists with independent views and freely write, are pursued and persecuted. Such independent journalists who fearlessly practice their profession are also victims of witch-hunt.

It is in this situation that we have to examine the challenges of the journalists. As I see it journalists face mainly three types of challenges. First, A strong will to pursue the truth and stick to it; Second, The courage to live fearlessly and Third, The rationalist intelligence to recognize good and bad and differentiate between them. Let's examine these three challenges.

First, a strong will to pursue the truth. While working this article the Ahmedabad Edition of the Indian Express dated October 18 and 19, 2017 has front news about a girl by name Santoshi Kumari in Jharkhand. The newspaper reports that the eleven year old Santoshi Kumari died last month due to hunger and thirst. According to the report Koyli Devi, mother of Santhoshi Kumari, and her eldest sister earn Rs. 40 or 50 selling fire woods which they collected from the forest. With that money and the wages they get, whenever there is works in the field, they run the house. But for eight days before the death of Santoshi Kumari there was nothing to eat or drink in their house. As Koyli Devi said before the death Santoshi Kumari was asking and crying for rice and rice-water. But there was nothing in the house to feed her.

The local activists and the journalist of the Indian Express Prashant Pandey have reported the story. But the civil officials and local medical personal of Jharkhand state are trying to cover up their own crimes saying that Santoshi Kumari died not of hunger but of Malaria! The journalist Prashant Pandey has quoted that the Chief Minister of Jharkhand Ragubar Das sanctioning to provide the family of Santoshi Kumari Rs. 50,000/- immediately. So it is clear that everything is not okay but the concerned official have something to hide.



Here I am reminded of Jesus' words to his disciples. "Whatever is covered up will be uncovered, and every secret will be made known. So then, whatever you have said in the dark will be heard in broad light, and whatever you have whispered in private in a closed room will be shouted from the housetops." The politicians and civil authorities may fail to perform their duties; but, when they are caught they look for scapegoats to hide their crimes of criminal negligence and find excuses. In such situation Journalists with determination and strong will are challenged to find the truth and bring it to the light.

There is selfishness of the so called upper class people in persecuting and keeping under control the poor, the Tribals and the Dalits with contempt and hatred. Selfish people keep the poor, the Tribals and the Dalits away from their basic human rights. They are prevented from coming up socially, educationally and economically. But we do hear 'Sabka sath sabka vikas' meaning 'development of all together with all', but nothing more! Consequently the majority of the poor, the Tribal and the Dalits are deprived of their basic needs like food, clothes and shelter even 70 years after our Independence. This reality is a great challenge to journalists through the wisdom

and the courage to present to the truth as it.

Second, fearless courage to live and performs duty as a journalist. The news reporter of Santoshi Kumari, Prashant Pandey has shown the example of a fearless and committed journalist. When health officials defend themselves claim visiting the village and treating Santoshi Kumari and mother, Prashant Pande quoting the Koyli Devi says, that the health personal and government officials never came to the village. Here the journalist Prashant Pande, in the words of Bernard Shaw “has learned to honor the truth.”

We need two things to cultivate courageous and fearless journalism. One, journalists need to be professionally competent in their field. Only professionally competent journalists can withstand and keep away from bribes, corruption and threats. In the words of Benjamin Franklin “only those who are courageous can get what they decided to have.” Two, to practice fearlessly journalism journalists should be ready to face the consequences even death. After reading some of my writings my sister Celine once asked me, “Brother, are you not afraid to write what you write when you read about the murders of activists and police encounter deaths?” I told her that I am not afraid of death. I am prepared to face death anytime. I do not fear anyone except God who takes care of me every moment. “But please take care,” she said.

Today one of the most dangerous professions is that of journalism. People to achieve their selfish ends sitting at high positions misuse their authority and money. The so called God-men in the name of religion mislead innocent people promising them heaven and salvation. In such situation fearless journalists are called to reveal true facts in public interest about the sinful behavior of such people and warn the public. The journalists need to be always on their guard that they do not misuse their profession for selfish purposes. It is a challenge for journalists to be faithful to their profession and fearlessly portrait the truth even in tempting situation.

Third, the rational intelligence to know and differentiate between the good and the bad. Journalists need to have a deep understanding and comprehensive power to differentiate the evil from the good. So journalists’ proficient in his/her own fields, needs to be sufficiently well acquainted about many other fields. A journalist is not an all knowing person but journalists need to have wisdom and the ability to know things they need to know.

The journalists need to be able to express and communicate well in the language in which they work. Similarly the journalists should also know the medium which they work and also the target audience for whom they work. Rational intelligence also called for a fair knowledge of laws concerning the profession and the general public. Finally, journalists have a great challenge to be professional and reliable in all their works.

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