

Whither news journalism?

Dr N Bhaskara Rao

News journalism is in the midst of a crisis. And yet We continue talk about symptoms than the root causes. More than twenty years ago I have signalled the twist and shift in the paradigm itself. Even cautioned the unions and associations of working journalists that they are going to be the worst effected as the people of the country are. Today, journalist's world over are under threat, harassment and risk of life. The trend is to mussel independent journalism and investigative reportage which is already shrinking anyway.

We are today at a point when it is no longer journalist who matter for news media? Yes, that profession itself may no longer be a factor. Yesterday's schools of journalism are today's school of communication which mean more corporate communication which is what public relations is all about. journalists exist today only to the extent one has adjusted and adopted to changed priorities in the media and alignments outside.

Nevertheless, it is time to introspect. There are four ways to go into. First, the context of journalism and journalists. There are three angles. Freedom of press and what it means today and decided by whom. It is The government and the corporates who decide the scope of press freedom today, not so much the constitution of the country. Second is journalism a job or profession view. If so with what standards and self regulations? Third, human development angle. Unless this larger context is understood, the deeper malice troubling journalism cannot be addressed.

A second factor for the paradigm shift is conflict of interest sweeping the nation. Of late this important aspect is ignored or kept under carpet. This is to do with fundamental question is news media a service or a business or both and with what restrains or under what regulatory jurisdiction. Its a Lobby of powerful which decides what matters in news media. This is also because journalists are cornered, divided, hankering for individual advantages more and without substantiating facts and figures to count journalism as a community of professionals or as a critical stakeholders.

The third factor is the way journalists slipped as a credible force? Despite wage board etc., never took up the cause at a macro level in a systematic way, resulting in fake, planted news and compulsions of new media becoming routine. With objectivity and independence giving way to manipulation, influence and quick profits, journalist lost out. Such a trend today is not limited to journalists. That is the fate independent and objective voices are facing world over.

A fourth factor is decay of instruments and institutions of a profession. For example journalism or communication schools are no longer run by journalists but by management and PR guys. The TRP mania further misled a nation. The school syllabus is more management and PR. There are no longer professional magazines like the Hoot, Vidura, etc. with voice in support of the profession. And then the research is for the numbers. those who had seen matter, not necessarily those who read. A good example for making a difference is how AP Union of journalists had brought out paid news phenomena to fore. Need is more such studies and such initiatives.

The task is challenging. it is a national task. It is journalists themselves should come forward, no one else is going to come to risk of and retrieve journalism. The unions and association should come together, and take to analysis with transparency and debate forthrightly with substantial issues to do with the profession. Where as These bodies themselves are dwindling, getting isolated or limiting to micro issues.

I have a five points agenda for journalist fraternity. Not for the news media. First, show of strength and solidarity. This has to be on larger issues within once media and outside. Second, take to research and analysis. Substantiate with facts and figures what is being pursued. avoid being viewed as allusive. Third, professional objectivity be visible. Be cautious and concerned while using words like activism, conspiracy, Dalit, etc. and in covering fake, false and planted. Fourth, in reporting adopt to anecdotes, humour, analogies (even while bandwagoning). Bust, blast and black out false and fake. Fifth, cover citizen and civil society and basic concerns of grass roots far more. Move away from TRP priorities frame.

Insights from 50 years of active tracking, counselling and research