

Media and Impartiality

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Abstract: Of a number of virtues, impartiality is neutrality occupies an important place in Media ethics. Nobody evade the role media in 21st century world around us. It is more or less true to say that we the people of a democratic state is directly or indirectly rely on media. When we are talking of media, especially social media, we mean that something shared globally. Thus, it is media through which we can share and develop our ideas and living standards. In this sense, media is helpful for us in many ways, for example, media helps one to decide about economic policy, to build up political consciousness etc. Media is dynamic. Whatever media may be, it runs by profit which based on its sale. Here nobody can deny external influences, i.e., pressure by political leaders or politicians of political parties etc. on the media. This is where the impartiality of media is slow down. Thus, Media must be free from political implications as well as other external influences. The present paper is an attempt to show the implication of impartiality in media ethics. It is because impartiality is one of the basic characteristic features of a journalist, a reporter or an editor.

Key words: Ethics, impartiality, media, social, virtue.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Impartiality is a virtue of human. There are so many other human virtues. Of a number of human virtues *impartiality* is an important one. When we talk of media ethics human impartiality comes into consideration. There is nothing wrong to say that media plays an important role in 21st century. At this time people are heavily rely on media. More simplistically, it can be said that *from dawn to dusk* the presence of media is implacably required in our life. It is these days we are talking of social media, where everything is being shared globally. Media is an umbrella terms comprising various categories, such as, print media, computer, internet, mass communication etc. Media helps one to develop his opinion about the society in which he lives, helps to form an opinion about the leader whom he voted for and helps one to decide about economic policy. It also helps one to build up political consciousness. Thus, in a sense, media is the hallmark of human life. Having said this, the nature and taste of media is being changed in every passing moment. It depends on the demands and the taste of the people of generation. After all media is a profession and it has to survive by way of making profit. There is no question of doubt that media of any sort cannot be survived without making profit. The profit of a media of a particular sort actually hinges on its sales. More simplistically its acceptance within the environment is its functions. Besides, there are so many other external influences within which it survives. Many would say that the impartiality of media actually hampers because of the external interferences, particularly, coming from political parties. The main objective of this paper is to explain and examine, with brief, the significance of impartiality in media ethics.

II. IMPARTIALITY AS HUMAN VIRTUE

It has already been said that impartiality is a human's virtue or quality. It is internal, but not external virtue. It is the quality of the soul of human. One has to cultivate it within a system. The manhood of a man is justified with regard to this virtue. Thus, the first and foremost character of a journalist, or a reporter or an editor is to retain impartiality within his or her profession. We have already said that the role of media is colossal towards developing a public opinion, such as, social, political, economic. Accordingly, a reporter for example, must be sincere and impartial to collect the report and accordingly do the needful towards publishing it. When we talk of ethics, we must honour moral universality. Moral universality is an ethical standard that has to be fulfilled within the practice of moral action. Kant has said this long back. It was equally supported by Greek thinkers, such as, Plato, Aristotle and Socrates. They were talking in favours of Virtue Ethics and in this regards they talked in favour of cardinal Virtues. According to them, the moral responsibility of a man actually hinges on the clusters of virtues he or she possesses. A virtues man is supposed to be relatively wise and he cannot do anything that would be harmful to the society or community. The virtues of a man actually guide him. His or her morality is being protected and retained by way of acquiring cardinal virtues. A morally sound man must be

impartial in his action. Following Kant, it can be said that an impartial man would be one who does not take care of his own interest. He would be detaching from emotion, feeling, self-interest and he would be obliged to perform his duty on the basis of the internal urge known as *Categorical Imperatives*. Categorical Imperative is a moral sanction coming from within, it is a moral consciences guided by practical reason and it would guide a man to do action having sound moral relevance. Following Mathew Kieran, we can say that impartiality is nothing but a *regulative Ideal*.¹ It is a virtue, an ideal that would help one to regulate as well as to guide to do action.

III. IMPARTIALITY AND HONESTY ARE THE QUALITY OF THE SOUL

Accordingly, it would be prerequisite that a reporter or a journalist must desire to the goal of truth what he intend to report through media. He has to be honest what is reported and he has to set in context and promotes the audience's understanding of 'why the event reported is significant'.² As impartiality and honesty are the quality of the soul and one has to cultivate it, it would be precondition that a reporter or a journalist must have such regulative quality. In our sense, impartiality is an essential condition, a fundamental virtue, of a journalist that would be treated as the *fourth estate*. News media includes stories of human interest and concern. It makes possible and helps one to build an implicit contact between the public and the news media, addressing the events happening in the world around us. Therefore, the news media's duty is to provide true reports that would enable us to get a quick but informed grasp on happenings to people and institutions which not only directly affect our functioning in society but are of social, cultural, or human interest. Thus, impartiality as a regulative guide immensely helps one for good journalistic practice. Therefore, impartiality as the basic regulative ideas ought to adhere for journalistic practice.

Thus, it should be kept in mind that the journalists must shape and phrase their report according to the *level of understanding* of the intended audience. It is not something for which we need specialists; it is purely non-specialists, according to Kieran. In fact, the point of reporting the news to convey the essence of what has happened in a way that can easily be grasped. One has to be in a position to assess and grasp. Thus, a reporter or a journalist must address on the essence of the news or story by way of comprehending the level of understanding of his own as well as the audience. In such a case, he has to be impartial. It would be the case that a story may not be interested to every section of people. For example, a story filled with scientific or bureaucratic jargon may not be interested to the general reader. In such a case, the reader would not be able to judge on the basis what is happening in the story. The most important thing to bear in mind that the news media must provide news bulletins and radio and television programs that any reasonably literate non-specialist can comprehend. Having said this, one has to keep in mind that there will be a basic range over which this is true. In a situation like this, various papers will typically aim at a generally presumed higher or lower level of understanding and interest in particular kinds of stories. This would be an overwhelming process and it would be continue. Of course, there will be a range of feature journalism, magazines, and current affairs programs that go in for in-depth explanation and context and critical analysis and as such, plays an integral role in both supporting and contributing to the news agenda. However, the bare essence of news must be addressed to the general audience. In this regard, the clearness and vividness of the reported stories is important and it would require little specialist knowledge. Rather, impartiality based on level of understanding would play greater role in media.

IV. MEDIA AND COMMUNICATION

The success of media actually hinges on communication where the level of understanding matters the most. In this regard, certain basic information and understanding must be recognized for the reporters to be in a position to communicate. It is indeed a fact that different audiences do have distinct level of understanding on the basis of which the story should be pitched. Besides, there may have some institutional constraints of space, time, the editing process, the need for pictures, and so on. Within such constrains the journalist must tackle the story to the intended audience in order to communicate effectively. A journalist in the real sense of the term can do this if he would be impartial towards his professions.

V. GOOD JOURNALISM

What then would be the essence of good journalism? The ability to contemplate the evidence impartially, to write a story open to confirmation or falsification by the evidence, and to draw out reasoned conclusions rather than being led by mere intuition, feeling, or commitment, is the essence of good journalism. We think that the ideal of impartiality immensely helps us to pick out what we should be wary of when considering the danger of reports and journalists getting too close to their sources. The danger is an ever-present one. It is frequently observed in the field of political journalism. The regulative ideal of impartiality would be hampered by the feeling of privileged access, by the attraction of the personalities, by friendships. These things lead to professional failure. Within the code of professionalism, one has to be impartial and should maintain the

codes of profession laid in favour of it. Following Kant, it can be said that a journalist may not be emotionally too close, to secure. A journalist has to be careful in maintaining a relationship for fulfilling vested interest. In this regard, a suitable analogy can be drawn that would address professional distance between teacher and students. While examining the paper of the students, the teacher should follow the regulative ideal of impartiality. It would be wrong if such ideal is violated in a case where personal relationship and intimacy has been developed between a particular student and a teacher. If the teacher would not the code of conduct of his own profession, then the teacher would fall into an extremely difficult dilemma that may eventually distort his or her ability truly and fairly to evaluate the student's performance. The ability to take up an impartial stance would be lost in cases where individual relationship would be mixing up with profession. This would be detrimental from professional perspective and a journalist must be careful about this. Emotional ties and commitment on the personal, social, and professional level 'can obstruct proper investigative reporting'³ Side by side, an over-reliance on official sources of information, due to political, social, or personal inclinations, can equally be distortive. Impartiality is a quality, an internal human perception, a great virtue that would be required to lead a healthy human life. It is associated with rationale conscience. Thus, failure of impartiality is a disgrace on the part of human, his or her professional and personality. A reporter who is not impartial mat divulges the report in many different ways. He would report something by way of forfeiting the important aspect of it. If we compare various papers reported same events particularly having some political implications, we see that the dimensions and implications of the same report reflected differently. Here the actual force lies in language and the way of presentation. The important point is that the ideal of the important reporter enables us to make sense of and criticize journalists and media institutions whose reporting of world events is contaminated by or pressed into service for the furtherance of their own personal, political or social agenda.

Of course, there is nothing wrong in preconceiving that a particular reporter who is impartial one has been seduced into making a particular version of events and omitting facts that did not fit with, in return for professional favours and social prestige. Having said this, a failure in impartiality need not be reducible to the personal integrity of a given journalist. It would indeed be the case that at times the information communicated by the media conceived in terms of propaganda.⁴ The recognition of impartiality as a regulative ideal does not just enable us to criticize personal bias or political propaganda, rather it provides a basis from which we may criticize any feature that distorts or inhibits the function of journalism. Here the intrinsic goal of newspapers is conceived of solely in business terms. The truth here may be conceived merely as an instrumental goal for the accumulation of advertising revenue.

VI. CONCLUSION

On the basis of the above observation, we may conclude by saying that the concept of impartiality, even if it has various contextual implications, should be taken into account as a regulative idea in the realm of media ethics. The concept of impartiality, we think, is an internal virtue, an internal quality of the soul. It is deeply rooted with the very concept of humanism. A journalist must be a human. Thus, impartiality is a moral sanction and it is essentially entwined with media ethics. In our sense, the concept of impartiality would be the culture of journalism. Of course, it would be true that current affairs, especially political and social ones, are often intricate, convoluted, and hard to unravel. In such a case, reporters will typically diverge over such aspects. We often have fundamentally distinct presentations of the same news story. This is perhaps not because impartiality is an impossible ideal. Indeed, experts in many fields, from science to sociology, where there is a truth of matter, very often disagree about diagnoses, explanations, treatment, and even whether a certain phenomenon constitutes a problem or not. Journalists may not be able to find out the truth of a particular matter, but it is in no way follows that there is no fact of the case. Putting everything into perspectives we can still claim that journalism should aim to be impartial by reporting the fact of the case and also explaining events clearly and rationally with the conscious perception that he belongs to a profession having greater responsibility and commitment to the community at large.

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