

Media Ethics

October 13, 2020

The media is known to play an effective role not only in informing the people but also in influencing their thinking and shaping their attitudes. Recent way of media behaving without any ethics in Sushant Singh suicide case is a cause of concern.

In news: Coverage of Sushanth Singh Rajput suicide

Placing it in syllabus: Role of Media in society

Dimensions

- Necessity of ethics in media
- Code of Newspaper Media ethics in India
- Regulation of Media overview

Content:

Necessity of ethics in media:

Media describes **any channel of communication** which can include anything **from newspaper to digital data**, and encompasses art, news, educational content and numerous other forms of information.

The **modern democratic edifice has been constructed drawing on the above** and the individual **liberty of expression of thought** as the supreme principle.

The **press is an indispensable pillar of democracy**. Parliamentary democracy can flourish only under the watchful eyes of the media. **Media can make or unmake any individual, institution or any thought.**

With so much power and strength, the media cannot lose sight of its privileges, duties and obligations. However to enjoy these privileges, it is **mandated to follow certain ethics in**

collecting and disseminating the information, fairness in reporting.

In the context of the press, **“Ethics” may be described as a set of moral principles or values, which guide the conduct of journalism.** The ethics are essentially the self-restraint to be practised by the journalists voluntarily, to preserve and promote the trust of the people and to maintain their own credibility.

The media all over the world has voluntarily accepted that code of ethics should cover at least the following **areas of conduct.**

- Honesty and fairness;
- duty not to falsify pictures or to use them in a misleading fashion;
- duty to provide an opportunity to reply to critical opinions as well as to critical factual reportage;
- appearance as well as reality of objectivity;
- respect for privacy;
- duty to distinguish between facts and opinion;
- duty not to discriminate or to inflame hatred on such grounds as race, nationality, religion, or gender;
- duty not to use dishonest means to obtain information;
- duty not to endanger people;

Code of Newspaper Media ethics in India:

The code of ethics is a statement of broad moral principles which will aid and guide the journalists, and which will help them in the process of self-appraisal and self-regulation. Several codes have been formulated from time to time, to guide journalists in their work.

AIPEC code:

- In 1968, the All-India Newspaper Editors’ Conference (AIPEC) formulated a code of ethics, according to which

- A free press can flourish only in a free society which is free of communalism.
 - It is the duty of the press to help promote unity and cohesion in the hearts and minds of the people, and refrain from publishing material tending to excite communal passions or inflame communal hatred.
 - The **press should adhere to the following guidelines** in reporting on communal incidents in the country.
1. All editorial comments and other expressions of opinion should be free from scurrilous attacks against leaders or communities and there should be no incitement to violence.
 2. Generalised allegations casting doubts and aspersions on the patriotism and loyalty of any community should be eschewed.
 3. Generalized charges and allegations against any community of unfair discrimination amounting to inciting communal hatred and distrust must be eschewed.
 4. A deliberate slanting of news of communal incidents should be avoided.
 5. News of incidents involving loss of life, lawlessness, arson etc...should be described, reported and headlined with restraint and should not be prominently displayed.
 6. Items of news calculated to make for peace and harmony and help in the restoration and maintenance of law and order should be given prominence and precedence over other news.
 7. The greatest caution should be exercised in the selection and publication of pictures, cartoons, poems etc., so as to avoid arousing communal hatred.
 8. No facts or figures should be published without the fullest possible verification.

PCI Code:

- Provocative and sensational headlines should be avoided;
- Headings must reflect and justify the matter printed

under them;

- Figures of casualties given in headlines should preferably be on the lower side;
- allegations made in statements should either identify the allegations or at least should carry quotation marks;
- judgements in presentation of news should be avoided;
- should not be motivated or guided by partisan feelings;

Parliament Code:

Rajya Sabha, in 1976, adopted a code of ethics for journalists and newspapers, in pursuance of its social and moral responsibility which includes:

- In the discharge of their duties, journalists shall attach full value to fundamental human and social rights, shall hold good faith and fair play in news reports.
- Journalists and newspapers shall highlight activities of the state and public, promote national unity, solidarity, integrity and economic and social progress.
- Journalists and newspapers shall avoid reports and comments which tend to promote tensions or are likely to lead to civil disorder, mutiny or rebellion.
- No fact shall be distorted nor information known to be false. or not believed to be true, shall be published.
- No sensational report or tendentious report of a speculative nature shall be published.
- Professional secrecy shall be preserved.
- Journalists shall not exploit their status for non-journalistic purposes or inquiries and shall not allow personal interests to influence professional conduct.
- Journalists and newspapers shall not give currency to public rumours or gossip or even verifiable news affecting the private life of individuals.
- Journalists and newspapers shall not publish information and comment detrimental to the interest of the

sovereignty and integrity of India. the security of the State and friendly relations with foreign countries.

International Code of Ethics:

In **1991, at the Stockholm Symposium**, an International Code of Ethics was drafted and adopted. It **applies to everyone working for the press and other media.**

- The fundamental objective of a journalist is a fair, accurate and unbiased story.
- Unnamed sources should not be used unless the pursuit of truth will best be served by not naming the source.
- The journalists have a moral obligation to protect confidential sources of information.
- Corrections or clarifications should 'be published for errors of fact promptly.
- The use of any obscene or tasteless language should be limited to quoted material.
- In principle, journalists should avoid paying for information unless public interest is involved.
- Plagiarism, i.e. using some one's work without attribution, is a serious ethical breach and should be avoided.
- Except in rare and justifiable circumstances, journalists should not tape anyone without that person's knowledge.
- Privacy of an individual should always be safeguarded except in some exceptional cases.
- Sex discrimination should not be done.
- Children should not be indentified in reported cases concerning offences.
- Living victims of sex crimes should not be identified in the news story.
- Journalists should maintain the highest professional and ethical standards.
- Acts of violence should not be glorified.
- Publications of photographs showing mutilated bodies,

bloody incidents and abhorrent scenes should be avoided.

Regulation of Media Overview:

Self-regulation in the broadcast media is the best way forward in **achieving a balance between the media's duty to empower the participatory role of the people in governance and the reasonable restrictions that prevent the abuse of its immense strength.** If it failed to exercise self-restraint and regulate its own conduct, then that would provide a justifiable reason for intervention from outside. Therefore, **self-regulating is the best way so that there is no justification for any outside intervention to regulate.**

The existing bodies for regulation of media such as the **Press Council of India (PCI)** which is a statutory body and the **News Broadcasting Standards Authority**, a self-regulatory organization, issue standards which are more in the nature of guidelines.

One of the best examples is the **compliance of the media with the code of ethics framed by the National Broadcasters Association** in the wake of the Mumbai terror attacks and the advisories issued from time to time.

Recently, the Chairman of the Press Council of India, former Justice of the Supreme Court, Mr. M. Katju, has argued that television and radio need to be brought within the scope of the PCI or a similar regulatory body.

Press Council of India (PCI):

- It was established under the **PCI Act of 1978** for the purpose of preserving the freedom of the press and of maintaining and improving the standards of newspapers and news agencies in India.
- It **consists of a chairman and 28 other members.**
- The Chairman is selected by the Speaker of the Lok Sabha, the Chairman of the Rajya Sabha and a member

elected by the PCI.

- The **functions** include (i) helping newspapers maintain their independence; (ii) build a code of conduct for journalists and news agencies; (iii) help maintain “high standards of public taste” and foster responsibility among citizens; and (iv) review developments likely to restrict flow of news.
- The PCI has the **power to receive complaints** of violation of journalistic ethics or professional misconduct by an editor or journalist and is responsible for enquiring into complaints received.
- **Decisions of the PCI are final** and cannot be appealed before a court of law.

However, PCI has **limited powers** of enforcing the guidelines issued. It cannot penalize newspapers, news agencies, editors and journalists for violation of the guidelines.

Mould your thought:

1. Is self regulation of the media required? Brief about the media code formulated by Press Council of India (PCI).

Approach to the answer:

- Define media ethics and write about its necessity
- Write why self regulation is necessary
- Jot down the code of PCI
- Conclusion