

PROSPECTS FOR THE FUTURE

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In a quickly changing society like India, with practically negligible reliable social survey data, thinking about the future will necessarily be intuitive guesses of an involved participant.

If democracy survives for the next two decades it is likely to acquire roots thus making discussion about the respective roles of law and the press possible. Democracy has to be continuously kept up through effective presentation of changing values and statistical data to help people to arrive at their own views about life and society.

This continued presentation will have to be the responsibility of two major institutions: the universities (as creating and clarifying ideological and value literature) and the press (as an effective transmission agency of facts and opinions and their interpretation and elaboration in terms of social needs of the times).

In the next generation the universities and the newspaper press will still be the two major institutions sustaining the democratic way of life.

The law affects these major institutions in two ways: first, as relating to their organization and existence and, second, as regulating the extent and nature of their functional roles in the general social interests as outlined in the Constitution.

The regulation of the universities by the Government has so far not raised many problems of conflict. But the situation is now changing and the future will see greater and greater regulation in this area. Evidence of such regulation is already appearing in the controversy over the Andhra Pradesh University Act. With the press, however, the problem of regulation and therefore of conflict with the government appears more prominently because of the great power and influence of the press on public opinion and its role as critic of social policies.

In India no special privilege or right attaches to the press.

The recent U.P. case projecting the controversy between the judiciary and the legislature raises certain important issues for the future.

The legal system, particularly in a federal country, will have to rest upon two basic assumptions: first, certain rules of behaviour of the political process must be observed and not made issues for legal clarification. Secondly, the decisions of the highest judiciary must be accepted without open criticism.

The decisions of the courts relating to the press do not disclose a consistent or progressive philosophy. The notification of the Punjab Government² imposing a total prohibition on publishing anything on a particular topic was upheld by the Supreme Court as being reasonable, in another case³ a Central regulation relating to price, was declared to be *ultra vires* and unconstitutional as unduly interfering with the right of freedom of speech and expression⁴.

By and large the role of the press has been so far negative. For instance, it is not enough to give formal publicity to birth control news and notices and food riots.

The problem of population control and food distribution patterns are top priority problems and need a more thoughtful and creative coverage. The language press can be made effective in educating public opinion in mofussil areas towards these basic questions and in helping to develop a public conscience.

Another area in which one would expect the press of the future would be a drive against the popularly noticeable social misdemeanours. Open breaches of traffic rules, loitering on public thoroughfares, committing public nuisances on the

2. *Virendra v. State of Punjab*, A.I.R. 1957 S.C. 896.

3. *Sakal Papers Private Limited v. Union of India*, A.I.R. 1962 S.C. 305.

4. Recently the Diwakar Committee on small newspapers has, by a five to four majority, recommended "the introduction of a statutory Price-Page Schedule ... as an inescapable necessity". See *Report of the Enquiry Committee on Small Newspapers* 185 (1965). The Committee has also recommended that "the Government take steps to amend the Constitution with a view to enlarging restrictions in clause (2) of Article 19 to make possible the enactment of the Newspaper Price and Page Act." (*ibid* at 183).

Mr. Raj Bahadur, Minister of Information and Broadcasting assured the Lok Sabha that the Government would take a decision soon on the Report (*The Hindustan Times*, New Delhi dated March 29, 1966).

roads and on public parks, increasing tempo of eve-teasing are some instances of this evil and need a purposeful and concerted drive from the press.

Such items as are publicised are not pursued till something effective is done by those in authority.

Newspapers to be effective instruments of democratic process will have to take greater notice of the equipment and capacity of the men who man the press. There must be some process of selection through which weightage could be given to intellectual and moral equipment beyond degrees in journalism or experience of working in newspapers.

Even after proper selection has been ensured, periodic refresher courses to the editorial, reporting and news staff must be provided.

Chanchal Sarkar in *The Hindustan Times* has pointed out that special areas are developing in a vocationally disintegrating society. This vocational disintegration will multiply. Separate specialisations will develop resulting in greater and greater heterogeneity.

The press has to be aware of the basic elements of most of the essential aspects of life in India. This can only be done through periodic refresher courses.

One of the more important roles of the Press Institute of India should be to organize courses as well as take the batches of pressmen to well-known departments of universities in India.

I feel that in future India the Press will have to provide not only facts and opinions but a continuing interpretation of them in terms of social needs. For this the Press would require to have experts and social scientists with an insight.

It is common knowledge that most of the important Indian dailies are controlled by men who own more than one daily and who are masters of industry. This dependance of the Press upon the financial wizards of the community limits its freedom of speech and expression.

There is a suggestion of creating a financial corporation to assist in setting up new presses and also to give to the press independence from both the government as well as the vested interests. There is a general recognition today against the monopolistic growth of industry.

It is difficult to forecast how the Press will be able to face economic pressures. If the democratic process survives and a socialistic society is fulfilled, schemes might emerge through which the finances of the press could be regulated by an independent autonomous tribunal for new ventures and the governing bodies of big business. Press could be assisted by some independent experts and some government men to keep pressure tactics in check.

One must not forget that the men in the Press reflect the general social calibre. The problem of balancing interests of the Press and those of other groups and vocations will not be solved by executive, legislative or even judicial means. The guidance required would be a continuing one and can only be given by associating experts in various areas. But certain administrative regulation can hardly be avoided.