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# Development Journalism

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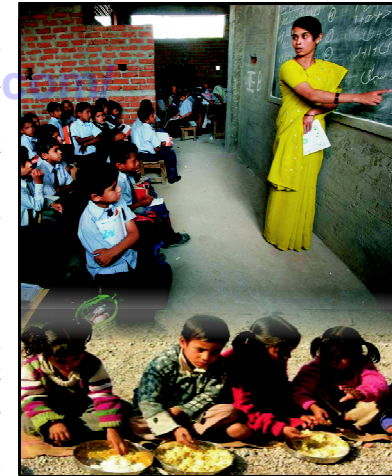
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### Meaning and Concept of Development Journalism

Five Year Plans (FYP) were started in independent India to expedite the growth and development of our country. Since 1951, the year in which the first FYP commenced, India is witnessing a sharp transformation in almost every sector of the country. Some the changes were welcomed enthusiastically by the public, but at the same time a number of other changes were not accepted as unreservedly and had to face opposition from the public. A lot of new issues emerged during



the course of this transformation and become the centre of debate. Development journalists' job is to critically analyse and evaluate these issues and create awareness in the public regarding these development issues. Their job is to inform the readers; the listeners and the viewers about various developmental schemes and programmes implemented and executed by various government departments and agencies. It is the job of a development journalist to make the public aware about various development policies, programmes and schemes initiated by the government and the manner in which these are beneficial for them so as to create a favourable

environment for the implementation and execution of all these development oriented policies, programmes and schemes and ensure the participation of the public in making them successful. Development brings with itself a number of facilities and amenities which help in raising the standards of living of the public; improves their societal standing and paves way for their material growth. The participation of the public in the development process has manifested itself in multitudinous changes we are witnessing around us every day such as the construction of new roads; construction of new residential premises; availability of clean potable drinking water for everyone; increased electricity production; easily accessible means of communication such as mobiles, internet, etc; ever growing number of Primary Healthcare Centres in rural areas; opening of a large number of primary schools and creation of new universities in order to provide word-class education to Indian students. Opening of a number of new radio stations, television stations and cinemas to inform educate and entertain the public is a culmination of various development works going on all around us. Food, clothing, housing, access to potable drinking water, etc. are some of the basic amenities essential to sustain a normal life. All these needs of the human beings can be fulfilled only through rapid inclusive development. Main objective of the development process should be to increase the income of the majority of the public and to raise their standards of living. Certain specific qualities, preparation, etc. are required to write on development issues. A reporter has to gather information about all the development policies and programmes of the government in order to be able to competently and successfully perform her/his job.

#### **Art of Development Journalism**

It is the result of development journalism that today the public at large is aware of various ill-effects of deforestation such as pollution, water related problems, sand erosion, etc. Development journalism has forced us to re-think our development goals and strategies. A lot many media writers have used the issue of development and the means to achieve developmental goals to write a number of very intriguing reports. Reports of development journalists should be structured around following facts and data:

- (i) A development reporter should collect data from that specific area which has already been developed. For this, it is essential to interview the people involved in coordinating various development works in that area or were associated with them in

one way or another and it is also important to take the points of view of the officials involved in the execution; inspection or any other activity directly related to different developmental activities going on in that area.

- (ii) It is important to be factual while writing development based news reports.
- (iii) It is more important for a development reporter to have her/his own perspectives regarding any specific developmental activity or plan than to have a distinctive style or technique of writing.
- (iv) Language of development reporters should be as simple and easy as possible. While giving statistics related to development such as income, expenditure, literacy rate, etc., it is preferable to give whole numbers instead of fractions.
- (v) Comparative numbers or statistics are always helpful. For example, if one is writing a report about the effects of new technology on the existing communication system, then the report can be made more effective by incorporating a comparative analysis of the current situation with situation that existed before the aforementioned technology was deployed. By putting comparative data side by side, a clear picture can be presented to the reader or the audiences.

#### **The Development Process**

The process of development is usually a slow one because people take time to get accustomed to new ideas. For instance, research as well as practical experience has proved that new varieties of seeds are very useful in increasing the production of the food grains; still, these new varieties of seeds are not adopted as quickly by the farmers as they should be. Lands of a lot of people have been acquired by the government in past few decades in order to make roads, dams, electricity generation plants, etc. and these people were displaced from their motherlands. Land acquisition is almost always opposed vehemently by the land owners who regard this as an attempt to alienate them from their motherland and destroy their livelihoods in order to provide benefit to industrialists or wealthy people. This is where development reporters have to play a crucial role. They have to make the people affected by land acquisition realize the importance or roads, electricity, dams, etc. in the development process and the way in which these development initiatives will help them is securing a better future not only for themselves but for their next generations as well. Also, it is the duty of development reporters to ensure that people

displaced from their lands are getting proper compensation and to report any irregularity in the purpose for acquiring the land and its actual use. Development reporters should ensure that whatever is promised to the people does not remain a pipe dream and development occurs in reality and not only on papers. They can do this by fearlessly reporting the truth. Although, the government has spent billions of rupees in various FYPs in order to achieve a number of development goals, but most of the government's goals are either still not attained or are attained only partially. For instance, various development goals of the government such as achieving 100% literacy rate, providing basic amenities to all the citizens, increase in per capita income, raising the standards of living of the public, etc. are still not satisfactorily achieved. At the same time, the environment has been destroyed ruthlessly on the pretext of achieving these development goals. For instance, World Food and Agriculture Organization has predicted that out of the 75% of the world's land that is deforested, only 17 million hectares is used for food-grain production. Improper drainage systems lead to increased alkalinity or salinity of the soil. Unbridled use of inorganic fertilizers is resulting in rapid spread of cancer and other pernicious diseases. Industrialization is taking place at an incredible pace across the world and industrial pollutants coming out of innumerable factories are leading to an increased presence of toxic chemicals in water, soil and air. This process of development has become quite complex. People across the globe are now vehemently opposing large development projects due to justifiable concerns regarding their environment. All the above mentioned issues need to be presented in front of the public as well as the concerned authorities. In such a scenario, development reporters can play a very vital role irrespective of the medium to which they belong.

### **Success Stories**

Generally, it has been noticed that while writing on development issues, success stories of various development programmes or policies are highlighted extensively. At the international level, the example of Japan's success story and the growth and development it achieved in merely 30 years is used time and again in various development based articles by the journalists. In India, articles written on Punjab's contribution in bringing about the Green Revolution in the country and its rise as the food production hub of India are appreciated greatly by the readers. But, same is the case with the stories of failure. People can learn from both success as well as failure.

From success stories, people get motivation and self-belief and start thinking that if someone else can do something; so can they and from the failure stories, they become aware of the mistakes committed by other people while undertaking similar developmental projects and hence, can avoid them. Social activists and writers like Sunder Lal Bahuguna and Bharat Dogra attracted the attention of the authorities and the environmentalists towards the plight of the people displaced due to construction of various dams by writing articles such as 'Worms in Breakfast Basket' to present their points of view in a logical manner.

Besides, there are certain positive aspects of development journalism. For example, there is a village on the outskirts of Delhi named 'Chatera'.

This village was selected by Mr. M.G. Verghese and the journalists working with the Hindustan Times for development journalism and christened the project as 'Hamara Gaon Chatera' (Our Village Chatera). When this village was taken for this experimental project, it was extremely undeveloped. The natives of this village were then given training to adapt new and advanced techniques of agriculture by the scientists of Indian Council for Agricultural Research and trained under the guidance of internationally recognized Indian agriculturist Mr. Mankombu Sambasivan Swaminathan, who was instrumental in bringing about the Green Revolution in India. A team of journalists kept appraising every stage of the project continuously and reported the growth and development taking place in the village as a result of this project regularly. This was a praiseworthy method of reporting based on development which was adopted for the first time in India by any mass media. This is an exquisite example of development journalism.

Although, there is no dearth of writers who look at only the negative aspects of every developmental policy, project or programme. Some of them are prejudiced and are not willing to accept India as one of the most progressive nations in the world and a future superpower. However, even a layman cannot ignore the astonishing success that India has achieved in various fields such as space technology, nuclear technology, science, textile production, milk production, agricultural technologies, etc. in past few decades. Before independence even a needle was not manufactured in our country and at present, India is among the biggest exporters of steel in the world. Country expects constructive criticism from a development

journalist. A development reporter should not be dismissive about any developmental project without valid scientific reasons or without suggesting feasible alternatives. For example, Sunder Lal Bahuguna appealed to the government to discontinue the Tihri Dam Project because he found out after extensive scientific research that the proposed site for construction of the dam fell under a highly active seismic zone and building such a large dam there would lead to high intensity earthquakes resulting in complete destruction of the environmental and biological diversity of the area, but eventually his appeal fell on deaf ears and the Tihri Dam was constructed.

#### **Search for Development News Stories**

There are numerous areas of development which media seldom cover. A number of state governments, various departments of the union government, voluntary organizations, large institutional departments, research organizations and innumerable famous scientists and researchers are continuously striving hard to make this world a better place. Even at this very moment copious amazing development stories are waiting to be told in the cabinets of various research institutes. They might never see the light of the day. Its reason may be the lackadaisical approach of various media towards development journalism or they may be just waiting for a competent development journalist arrive in their search and do justice with them.

Everyday the central government; governments of various states; different government departments and ministers provide information to the public regarding various development works going on in the country via press releases, handbooks, newspapers, year books or press conferences. Do not discard this information; instead, save it for future reference. It is always better to speak with the official or the scientist who has released that particular press release or handbook. Meet with different people; visit research institutes and organizations regularly; attend seminars and conferences from time to time; ask questions with concerned persons; collect matter related to development process and create your own person library. All the aforementioned tips will help you in becoming a good development journalist.

#### **Objectives of Development Journalism**

Main objectives of development journalism are following:

- Providing Information.
- Assist in Development.

- Description of Development.

If all these tasks are performed with utmost probity, then the job of a development journalist becomes even more demanding and places a lot more responsibility on her/his shoulders. With every development based article, its factual objectives are mentioned clearly. However, one should be cautious while trying to assist in the process of development. It is the duty of any conscientious development reporter to analyse the process of growth and development from a national perspective. A development reporter needs to awaken her/his sixth sense. S/he should consciously refrain from writing articles which extol or eulogize individuals. This is a very difficult field where a reporter faces a lot of hurdles.

A good development journalist should have the following qualities:

**(i) Extensive Network:** A good development journalist is required to create and maintain an extensive network of sources. S/he should maintain continuous communication with various government departments and agencies involved in the development work both – at the centre and in the states. For example, s/he should always stay in contact with Rural Development Ministry, Environment Ministry, Agriculture Ministry, Department of Social Welfare, Agricultural Universities and other similar ministries, departments and institutions which have a major role to play in the development process. Besides, s/he should also remain in touch with the Press Information Bureau and the offices of various private sector organizations involved in different developmental activities.

**(ii) Relationship with International Development Organizations**

United Nations is the largest international organization in the world comprising more than 191 countries. It is responsible for various development activities in various member countries. Offices of numerous organizations such as World Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), World Health Organization (WHO), United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), International Labour Organization (ILO), etc. involved in developmental activities across the globe are located in Delhi. They publish various reports on a regular basis providing important information about different developmental activities going on in our country as well as in the world. A good development journalist should maintain regular contact with Public Relations Officers or PROs of these organizations as they can provide invaluable information for writing excellent development stories.

(iii) **Keep a Desk Diary:** A development journalist should maintain her/his own desk diary. This should be used to record routine and specific developmental activities going on in her/his area and her/his personal observations regarding the progress of various development projects. Information regarding important days can provide a good background for development news stories or articles.

(iv) **Maintain a Personal Lexicon of Quotations and References:** Maintaining a personal lexicon of relevant quotations and references and using them prudently will render a unique flavour to your reports and make them better than the others, because they are a result of your diligence and assiduity. This is something you have earned through your persistent hard work of years and it will definitely show in your development based news stories and articles. Maintaining a topic-wise list of quotations and references will help you in choosing pertinent matter for your report effortlessly and in quick time and hence, will render your reports much more useful and beneficial for the readers.

Main difference between routine journalism and development journalism is of the 'purpose'. Duty of development journalists is not merely to provide information to the public. Besides providing information regarding various development policies and programmes to the public, they also have the responsibility of describing the effects of the proposed development on the lives of the people concerned; creating conducive environment for proper implementation and execution of various development programmes and ensuring healthy participation of the public in various governmental or non-governmental development initiatives.

Field of development journalism comprises a lot of sub-fields and each one of them requires a particular type of specialization. Seventy percent of Indian population is directly or indirectly involved in agriculture. Therefore, agricultural development will be a sub-field or rural development based reporting. There is a profound objective in front of you as a development journalist. A development journalist belonging either to print media or electronic media is free to choose any developmental programme for a thorough evaluation of the progress that programme has achieved on various parameters. S/he can provide answers to pertinent questions such as—"Why the benefits of any particular developmental programme are not reaching to its primary target group?" and delineate various reasons for the slow progress of any such programme. S/he can persuade the public to

participate in such programmes. New developmental issues are emerging everyday. The need is to stimulate the senses of development reporters so that they may extract good journalistic stories out of those issues.

### Development Journalism for Print Media

Development journalism is a highly challenging job and demands diligence and dedication from its practitioners. Print media is very important for development journalism. Almost all leading dailies like the Indian Express, Pioneer, The Hindu, etc. keep at least a whole page reserved for development news every week. Features are the best form of journalistic writing to communicate development based news stories. Development based news stories can be made more interesting and stimulating with the help of photo-features. Interviews of persons involved in various developmental activities have a high impact quotient and are liked by the readers. News agencies like Press Trust of India (PTI) and United News of India (UNI) have created separate desks for development based news.



### Development Journalism for Radio

While reporting for radio, development reporters must keep in mind that they are conversing with the listeners and not reading. Although, one can transmit one's script in her/his own voice, but the audiences should never get the inspiration that one is reading. For this to happen, one must use simple language and words. Follow the rule of 'I' and 'You' while on the microphone so that you can establish one to one relationship with your listeners. If you want to reach to illiterate audiences, then radio is the best medium. Real meaning of development is making all the basic amenities of life available to each and every citizen of the world. The purpose of development journalism is to act as



a catalyst in the process of development. The success of any development reporter lies in achieving this objective of development journalism.

### **Development Journalism for Television**

A good television programme based on developmental issues can be quite helpful in discovering various loopholes in various developments policies, projects and programmes. It is imperative for a good television programme that each one looks after each department. Television programmes which delineate the concept of development so that the general public can understand it easily are ideal from the point of view of development journalism. Television holds the edge over its contemporary mass media due to its audio-visual nature. Television as a mass medium is perfect to motivate people for participation in the process of development by broadcasting various programmes based on success stories of development. Meaningful and persuasive scenes should be chosen to convey the message. It is always better to let the scenes tell the story than to create a web of esoteric statistics and data. Indian television caters mostly to the needs of the urban audiences. National channel of India–Doordarshan –was an exception, but now even Doordarshan is caving in to the pressures of market economy. Concept of development is not proprietary to the urban areas. If separate yardsticks will be used for measuring development in Indian cities and villages, then the gulf of inequality between the rich and the poor will continue to increase unabatedly and the fruits of development will not reach to the majority of the populace.

It can thus be concluded that development is not an isolated concept. Similarly, development journalism is also a relative concept. Just like development, development journalism also varies in meaning and has different purposes under different circumstances and surroundings,



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