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BUSTER**

It is not merely the educated man that ardently looks up the columns of a newspaper, the business man for the rapidly changing market conditions, the job hunter for the openings in the 'wanted' columns and so on. Virtually there is no end to the range of readership. A good newspaper should cater to the needs of all types of readers - scientists to cine goers, king makers to gossip mongers. And the task is stupendous; it is not easy to satisfy such a wide variety of readership and that, with honest and faithful reporting.

The aim of a good newspaper should be to present the truth and nothing but the truth. But that is impossible. In this world of subjective perceptions, nobody can be completely free from bias and prejudice. But a conscious effort will certainly contribute to an objective analysis and dispassionate delineation. No newspaper can survive on exaggerations, coloured views and falsehoods, for a long time. What Lincoln has said applies to individuals as well as to newspapers. We cannot deceive all people all time.

And finally such papers lose credibility and its readership will gradually decrease. There is the thing called the freedom of press. But freedom again, is not absolute; it is conditional and relative like all individuals, papers too have a responsibility towards the state and the society; there is a code of conduct for them to guide and steer. But nothing is as powerful as the conscience to individuals and a soul to newspapers. We cannot throttle the voice of our conscience and the newspapers their soul.

Unfortunately we have few newspapers that present honest and faithful picture. They talk of news worthiness and apply scissors discreetly, with the result; the news becomes twisted and distorted, colourful and sensational.

Sometimes they encourage rumours, go on wild goose chase and harp on 'investigative journalism'. The issues become controversial and the paper becomes a forum for discussion.

Circulation may go up, but the amount of harm done to innocent people is incalculable. Sometimes they offer huge sums of money and induce writers of repute to create myths and scandals. Pamella Borders - nobody knows where she has ended; her memoirs and revelations ended many an illustrious career. Like the drug manufacturers, these yellow journalists too, forget that they owe a sacred duty to their readers. There is another class of papers and journals which are honest in their aim, though the news and views they present are not so honest. We know even at the very outset, what they are going to say, what kind of picture they are going to portray. And for precisely for this reason, we turn to such papers - they are the organs of political parties. These papers are the mouth pieces of the parties they represent.

Here in these papers we find the principles and policies of those political parties, the views and opinions of their leaders, about their plans and programmes and the achievements they make. Even if we sometimes get an exaggerated picture, it is pardonably and not much of a wrong indeed. But the major part of their space is devoted to undignified attack and bitter criticism of other parties and persons opposed to them. Here party loyalties cut across loyalty to truth and honesty. This kind of 'yellow' journalism is not confined to India alone. We have quite a number of such irresponsible and misleading papers everywhere in the world.

No wonder they are sometimes called the ' gutter press'. News papers do not merely give out a faithful account of an event. But the catchy headlines, dexterous arrangement of nest items, lengthy editorials and choice contributions from big political pundits certainly cross the ambit of presenting creditable news. Clearly their aim is to shape the public opinion. If that is the case, they have a very great responsibility thrust on their shoulders.

They must first realize that what they should be for the good of the country; not for projecting a particular man or a particular policy or denigrating someone or something. They must get rid of their individual likes and dislikes; and develop a dispassionate mind and temper; only then, they will be able to discharge their duty without fear or favour. When they do so and succeed in creating a strong public opinion, no politician can dare to ignore the message; no government can fail to take note of the warning signals. Thus like mercy that blessed both the governor and the receiver, the freedom of the press too, does well to both the press-and the people alike.

Unfortunately there is not much of an understanding here, the press indulges in excesses in the name of freedom and the government applies scissors in the name of abnormal conditions. The T. V.

and the radio are now the two great rivals of the newspaper. But they cannot be satisfying to a newspaper lover, their short bulletins, their summing ups may cater to the need of a man on the street; but not a genuine news paper lover who does not read the paper for the sake of news alone. He has his own attraction which neither T. V. nor Radio can ever offer. Some of these

things such as articles and contributions by eminent people - give them a touch of permanence, though the day today news items lose their value and freshness. They deserve to be cut and preserved.

Another special feature of modern newspapers is the serials they publish regularly. Even in those days, such great master pieces as David Copperfield and Vanity Fair appeared first in the columns of newspapers and journals. If you cut out the serials of such works of literature and file them in order you have the volumes in your shelf long before their publication. News papers and journals form a stepping stone to many a writer and a politician. Sir Winston Churchil and Earnest Hemingway to name only a few, had in the morning of their career worked as newspaper reporters.

In a democracy the press has a role only next in importance to parliament. As long the press sticks faithfully to its norms-objectivity impartiality and accuracy, as long as its freedom remains undisturbed, democracy has nothing to be afraid of. " Despotism can no more exist in a nation until the freedom of the press is destroyed, than the night can happen before the sun set", says Q C. Colton. When the press loses its freedom, the entire edifice of democracy crumbles freedom of conscience of speech, of education, of assembly would all be lost. The value of newspapers cannot be under estimated.

As Wendell Philips has said ' we live under a government of men and morning news papers'.