



## ROLE OF MEDIA IN IGNITING MINDS FOR POSITIVE CHANGE AND A STUDY OF THE COVERAGE OF INSPIRING STORIES BY FOUR NATIONAL DAILIES *DAINIK BHASKAR*, *DAINIK JAGRAN*, *AMAR UJALA* & *THE INDIAN EXPRESS*

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**ABSTRACT** Media is a time-tested tool for igniting human minds for a societal change. It has best been witnessed during India's freedom movement and on many other occasions after that. But, as the corporatisation in media proliferates, the space for inspiring stories reduces substantially. The prime argument for curtailing the space for positive stories is that such stories have no commercial value, although they have the highest readership. But despite pressure from the marketing department on editors to avoid such stories, some top daily newspapers published from New Delhi, including *Dainik Bhaskar*, *Dainik Jagran*, *Amar Ujala* and *The Indian Express*, regularly dedicate some space to inspiring stories. *Dainik Jagran* and *Amar Ujala* have daily columns as 'Sarokaar' and 'Manzilen Aur Bhi Hain' respectively, while *Dainik Bhaskar* and *The Indian Express* have weekly columns as 'No Negative Monday' and 'Tracking Change Every Monday' respectively. Through these columns, these newspapers acquaint their readers with the individuals and voluntary organisations, which are causing a silent revolution of positive change in their respective areas. Contrary to the mindset that development is the sole responsibility of governments, these changemakers have proved that the contribution of everyone counts. Undoubtedly, raising questions is the job of media, but highlighting the positive side of the society and stirring people for a positive change too is the job of media. Hence, the media should take up some sustained campaigns like 100% literacy, preventive health care, energy and water conservation, etc. If it is done, it can be the best tribute to Gandhiji during his 150<sup>th</sup> birth anniversary year.

**KEYWORDS :** Positive news, inspiring stories, igniting minds, Gandhi & Media, media & social change

### INTRODUCTION

The main objective of media is to inform, interpret, evaluate, educate, inspire, generate opinion and transfer values. A newspaper is a trusted driver of change, as it enjoys the power of setting the agenda for readers. That is why many freedom fighters started newspapers during the freedom movement. Dr Ambedkar started *Mooknayak* (1920), *Bahishkrut Bharat* (1927), *Janata* (1930) and *Prabuddha Bharat* (1956) to ignite the minds (*Dr Ambedkar Books, 2018*). Gandhiji started many newspapers between 1903 and 1938 (*Desai, 2018*) — *Indian Opinion*, 'Harijan', *Harijan Bandhu*, *Harijan Sevak* and *Young India*. Similarly, Pt Nehru started *National Herald* in 1938. The objective of those newspapers was to motivate people to join the freedom movement. After Independence, this strength was expected to be used for driving people to join the nation-building activities, but sadly it did not happen. Rather, a mindset of depending upon government agencies for everything was strengthened by the successive regimes which was contrary to the mindset advocated by Gandhiji and other freedom fighters. Instead of stirring the rulers for materialising the dreams of freedom fighters, the media was seen toeing the government line. After the advent of globalisation in the 1990s, the Indian media also witnessed huge corporatisation. As the institution of editor speedily hits bottom and owners don the role of editors, mostly the news which fetches 'business' finds space and the stories, which show a positive side of the society, are the most neglected. As negativity begets negativity, a large number of sensible people have stopped reading newspapers. However, the newspapers, which have given prominence to positive stories, are touching new heights in readership. It is evident from the reports of the Audit Bureau of Circulation and the Indian Readership Survey (IRS) for several years.

### METHODOLOGY

The present study is based on the study of three top Hindi newspapers (*ABC January-June 2018*) published from New Delhi—*Dainik Bhaskar*, *Dainik Jagran* and *Amar Ujala* and an English newspaper *The Indian Express*, which covers positive stories. The coverage of inspiring stories in the month of February 2019 in the said newspapers was studied. Input has also been taken from the case study of *Dainik Bhaskar* newsroom conducted by the researcher in April 2017. The opinion of some senior journalists and experts was also gathered.

### COVERAGE OF INSPIRING STORIES

The study shows that only three Hindi and an English newspaper published from New Delhi provide regular space to inspiring stories. Taking the lead, *Dainik Jagran*, the second most-circulated newspaper in India (*ABC, January-June 2018*), and the topmost newspaper as per the IRS, started providing space to inspiring stories in 2000-2001 under the 'seven concerns' that the media house adopted as its social responsibility. In January 2006, the coverage of inspiring stories was accorded an organised form by incorporating it in the annual editorial

plan. Since the year 2008, the beginning of English New Year in January is always with the stories related to the 'seven concerns'. Equally, from the year 2010, there is extensive coverage to the women related issues during the 'Sharadeeya Navaratra' under the campaign "Yaa Devi Sarvabhooteshu". Similarly, there is special coverage on occasions like Teachers Day, Environment Day, etc. Special coverage is ensured to the individuals and organisations who are working for the fundamental Rights granted by the Constitution of India to every citizen under the column "Tantra ke Gan". On Independence Day, there is special coverage for one week from August 8 to 15 under the column "Swatantrata ke Sarathi". For the last one year, the first story on the front page of 'Dainik Jagran' is an inspiring story under the permanent column "Sarokaar". However, the detailed report is carried on the inside page. It has been started so that a positive action catches the attention of the reader. In this sense, the efforts of 'Dainik Jagran' have been commendable. On Sunday, it spares more space to such stories. Elaborating the idea behind starting the column, Executive Editor of *Dainik Jagran* Vishnu Tripathi said: "Dainik Jagran has adopted seven concerns—educated society, healthy society, women empowerment, environment protection, water conservation, poverty alleviation and population control. We are of the firm opinion that the sooner we meet these challenges, the faster the picture of the country would change. We are trying to awaken every citizen to contribute in it" (*Tripathi, 2019*). The ABC and IRS reports show that *Dainik Jagran* has witnessed a sharp rise in its readership for several years.

Following the footsteps of *Dainik Jagran*, *Amar Ujala*, the fifth highest circulated newspaper in India (*ABC, January-June 2018*) started carrying an inspiring story on edit page every day for the year 2017 under the column 'Manzilen Aur Bhi Hain' in which first-person account of the individuals engaged in constructive activities is carried. For example, the story on February 11, 2019 provided a first-person account of one Nilima Arya who in Hyderabad runs ten Homes for destitutes. The story on February 7, 2019 highlights the work of Pramod Laxman Mahajan who is generating awareness for organ donation. The story on February 6, 2019 focused on the work of Wajed Khan Bidkar, who is fighting against poor quality helmets on the road. Referring to the response to this column, Sudip Thakur, Resident Editor of *Amar Ujala*, says: "Many readers call us every day to inquire about the persons mentioned in the column and many have started emulating them. This is what we expect through this column" (*Thakur, 2019*).

Equally, *Dainik Bhaskar*, the highest circulated newspaper in India (*ABC, January-June 2018*) has started carrying positive news with a difference. Some years back, it started a campaign 'Aaj No Negative Akhbar' (Today No Negative Newspaper) in which no negative news is published on the front page on Monday. For example, the newspaper on February 11, 2019 carried three stories (as first lead) from Gujarat, Chhattisgarh and Maharashtra where instead of the male hawkers,

women hawkers distribute newspapers (*Bhaskar News, February 11, 2019*). The Monday Positive story on February 4, 2019 focused on All India Inter University Boxing Championship in which more than 1000 women boxers participated (*Bhaskar News, February 4, 2019*). Talking to this researcher about this initiative at Indore Newsroom on February 6, 2017, it's National Editor Kalpesh Yagnik had said, "Since the negativity in coverage of media dominates and not much attention is paid to the positive activities, *Dainik Bhaskar* decided to strengthen positive feeling among its readers. 'No Negative Monday' campaign has been started with the view that positive thinking should set the agenda for the entire week. Even if any critical negative news has to be covered, that is covered sensitively with a clear header of 'negative news' leaving no scope for playing with the readers' emotions (*Yagnik, 2017*). Under the title, '*Buland Bharat Ki Tasveer*' *Dainik Bhaskar* has initiated many campaigns for positive change, which included 'Jid Karo Dunia Badalo', 'Success and Happiness', 'Travel by Public Transport', 'Ek Ped, Ek Zindagi', 'Our Heritage, Our Future', etc.

'*The Indian Express*', has started a weekly column "Tracking Change Every Monday" as 'Page 1 Anchor' for inspiring stories. For example, the story on February 11, 2019 highlighted how a clinic in Bengaluru is helping the tech addicts log out gaming, social media, selfies (*Johnson, TV, 2019*). The story on February 4, 2019 focused on how in Wardha's villages, banking means ATMs coming home (*Deshpande, 2019*). However, its sister publication *Jansatta*, does not regularly carry such positive stories. Compare to *The Indian Express*, *The Times of India*, the most circulated English newspaper of the country, does not have any such regular coverage of positive stories. Equally, *The Hindustan Times*, the third most-circulated English newspaper, also does not have any such coverage. *Navbharat Times* and *Hindustan*, other leading Hindi dailies from New Delhi do not have regular coverage of inspiring stories.

#### GANDHIJIAN POSITIVE JOURNALISM

Advocating healthy journalism, Gandhiji wrote in *Indian Opinion* in 1903: "In the very first month of *Indian Opinion*, I realized that the sole aim of journalism should be service" (*Desai, 2018*). The constructive activities started by him after 1922 Bardoli Convention of Congress expanded all over the country by the year 1940. But he was not satisfied with their outcome. He wanted the entire society to join hands to curb the ills affecting society. Therefore, to bolster such activities, he, in February 1941, wrote a book '*Constructive Programme: Its Meaning and Place*' in which he identified 13 problems, which were blocking development of the society. Those 13 activities were "communal unity, removal of untouchability, prohibition, Khadi, village industries, village sanitation, new or basic education, adult education, women, knowledge of health and hygiene, provincial languages, national language and economic inequality" (*Gandhi, 1941*). In 1943, he added five more activities, farmers, labour, tribals, lepers and students, in the list bringing the total to 18.

#### UNSUNG BUILDERS OF MODERN BHARAT

However, the Gandhian institutions continued their efforts after the assassination of Gandhiji in 1948 also, many individuals and organisations outside Gandhian institutions silently started work on similar lines and created a big picture of change. Since these unsung heroes are working at the grassroots level, people at the national level are not aware of their work and the meaningful change that they have brought in the lives of millions of people. These are also away from the reach of media (*Kumar, 2019*). For example, Girish Prabhune in Maharashtra has ensured the benefits of various government schemes to over one lakh nomads who were treated as "criminal by birth" till the 1990s in government records. Sanjay Kambale of Latur (Maharashtra) has ensured a dignified life to more than 800 rag pickers. Dr Girish Kulkarni in Ahmednagar (Maharashtra) not only rehabilitated over 900 commercial sex workers but also saved their second generation from the ignominy of joining it. Dr BM Bhardwaj of Bharatpur (Rajasthan) has cured about 11,000 mentally-sick persons normally seen on the roads in highly unhygienic conditions without food, medicine, clothes, shelter and reunited them to their respective families. Ashish Gautam has ensured a dignified life to thousands of lepers in Haridwar. Dadhichi Deh Dan Samiti of Delhi, since 1997, has ensured donation of 226 dead bodies and over a thousand pairs of eyes to various Medical Colleges of Delhi, and over 10,000 people have pledged for it after death. SOCARE Ind. in Bengaluru has saved over 300 kids of convicts from joining crime. Harshal Vibhandik has digitised all 1,103 government schools of Dhule District in Maharashtra by mobilising 70 per cent funds from local villagers,

students and teachers in 2016-17. About 500 housewives at Pen town in Raigad (Maharashtra) transformed the lives of about one lakh people, including 3000 tribal girls. The people in Latur (Maharashtra) revived 18 km long River Manjara without government help. Chandrika Chauhan in Solapur (Maharashtra) has transformed the lives of over 15,000 women in distress and groomed about 400 first-generation women entrepreneurs. Dr Rajpal Singh of Johari village in Baghat District (Uttar Pradesh) developed 42 international, 300 national and over 3000 state-level shooters without basic facilities. Dr RS Tonk of Ram Manohar Lohia Hospital in New Delhi screened about six lakh patients in rural areas through free health camps. People at Manpura Village in Jhalawar (Rajasthan) have proved the advocates of Green Revolution wrong by getting bumper production through organic farming. Contrary to the winners of Magsaysay and other international awards, these achievers are working in their respective areas without recognition and resources. They have proved that eradicating illiteracy, poverty, untouchability, malnutrition or curbing the trafficking in human organs is very much possible. Media can play a significant role in motivating people to get rid of all such problems in a time-bound manner. Karnataka cadre IAS officer Bharat Lal Meena has listed more than 100 activities of social change, which do not require funds (*Meena, 2018*).

Commenting on the coverage of inspiring stories in media, Director General of the Indian Institute of Mass Communication, New Delhi, K.G. Suresh says that finding faults in the system is the job of media, but ignoring the good happening in the society is grossly undesirable (*Suresh, 2019*). Veteran journalist Dr Ravindra Agrawal, who revived the *Hindustan Samachar* multilingual news agency in 2003 says: "Media is equally responsible for awakening the society. If it comments on the weaknesses of the system, it should also praise the good happening in the society. It is good that some newspapers have started special coverage of the stories which inspire people for a meaningful change. All media houses should think about it" (*Agrawal, 2019*). Not only senior journalists and academicians but also the opinion leaders want a shift in the way media provides the news. Swami Chidanand Saraswati of Parmarth Niketan, while inaugurating the National Executive meeting of the National Union of Journalists (India) in Rishikesh on November 15, 2018 said: "Time has come for clean and green journalism. Stories that the journalists write, newspapers publish, television channels telecast and web portals upload, immediately enter people's mind. The media can either pollute or purify the minds. People think all the day about the news that influences them. If it is positive, the reader will think more positively. If it is negative, it brings negativity into people's mind. Hence, media has a great responsibility. Typically, journalism provides information, but it is important to provide inspiration also" (*Saraswati, 2018*). Vice President of India M. Venkaiah Naidu while inaugurating Golden Jubilee Celebrations of Kollam Press Club on February 2, 2019 said instead of focusing on negativity, it is important for newspapers in a country like India to accord importance to development journalism since the country is facing several challenges (*Naidu, 2019*).

#### CONCLUSION

Media is a driver of change. If this power is used for motivating people to take up constructive activities in their vicinity, India can witness unexpected change within a short duration. There are about a hundred activities, which do not require funds and their result is astonishing. The individuals and organisations mentioned in the study have proved it in their respective areas. For the change in media, both the editors and owners have to be sensitised. Everything happening in the country is not wrong. Many good things are also happening. The media should also highlight the positive side of society. If all the top newspapers start a campaign in the form of regular columns as has been done by *Dainik Bhaskar*, *Dainik Jagran*, *Amar Ujala*, etc a healthy change would be visible on the ground. The space being provided by these newspapers for positive stories also needs to be expanded. The online portals, which have a wider reach, should also provide space for inspiring stories. Some genuine voluntary organisations and government agencies can be involved in such campaigns. The media can take up 100% literacy, preventive health care and energy & water conservation as a campaign. This is what Gandhiji had desired. It could be the best tribute to him during his 150<sup>th</sup> birth anniversary year. It can also prove to be a good method for newspapers to save their readership.

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