

Following is the full text of the speech:

“It is often said that we live in the information age. It is true but it doesn’t mean that the earlier generations had nothing to do with information of any kind. In my view, life of all forms is driven by information in different degrees of awareness and consumption. Patterned migrations of birds and animals are propelled by information about availability of food, water and congenial habit for different seasons of the year.

Human beings, the most evolved with the most complex of biological architecture, with the passage of time and changing life styles, have come to demand and consume a wide variety of information. The rapid technological advances have widened the need for and diverse information, from sources near and far. Thus, information has come to be the real power at present. Media has emerged as the main vehicle for delivery of such information and hence, as a medium of empowerment. In the process, media provides different perspectives and options.

Madhav Vithal Kamat was an iconic personality in the world of media for several decades, reporting and writing on a range of issues with analytical precision and offered clear perspectives on a range of complex issues from time to time. He left a distinct mark of his own during his long and illustrious career in journalism. Having born in September, 1921, this is the centenary year of late Shri Kamath. I am glad to have got the opportunity of speaking on ‘Journalism: Past, Present and Future’ in such a land mark year.

Late Kamat ji chronicled the transformation of India with lucid commentaries on a range of issues and events as the nation changed in myriad ways. As a correspondent in leading capitals of the world, Kamat ji earned the respect and goodwill of respective governments and he was an undeclared ambassador of our country. He kept reporting and commenting separate with objectivity distinguishing his reporting and his own views and perspectives reflected in his commentaries and columns. He made significant contribution to the setting up of Prasar Bharati and to its functioning as its first chairman.

Journalism as we broadly agree is the collection, preparation and dissemination of information about current events and developments. Over the ages, the collection and dissemination of information has undergone remarkable transformation. Returning merchants, mariners and travelers were the first carriers of information from far off places to homelands. Then came the handwritten sheets, pamphlets and chronicles that were hung at important places. Printing press brought the revolutionary change resulting in the emergence of news papers in the 18th century heralding mass communication. The print media continued its dominance into the 20th century despite the emergence of Radio and Television. There are millions still who like to wake up with a cup of coffee and a news paper. I shall admit that I am one among them but without coffee.

With the emergence of satellite communication and Internet, the media scenario has now become topsy-turvy. 21st century is the era of Internet. The last decade in

particular, has witnessed rapid expansion of Internet which has disrupted the traditional models of revenue and reporting. From the 24 hour cycle of the era of print, it is now 'instant journalism'. Speed of delivery of information is the essence now presenting the journalism at cross roads. In the process, the line between 'news' and 'fake news' has become very thin and blurred and is a matter of serious concern. This is the price of rapid technological changes and the growing thirst for instant information.

As we seek to reflect on the evolution of journalism over the time and look into its future, I would like to share some of my broad concerns about journalism and the emerging media scenario.

These include; issues of freedom of press, censorship, norms of reporting, social responsibility on the part of media persons, decline in values and ethics of journalism, yellow journalism, sensationalisation, for profit reporting, opinionated reporting, disinformation in the form of paid and fake news, journalism of false crusades, disruption caused by the Internet and the future of media.

As the newspapers were growing in number and strength since the 17th century, they were brought under censorship from time to time by the rulers of the day. Napoleon clamped total censorship in the year 1800.

James Augustus Hicky, who founded the first English news paper in India, the *Bombay Gazette* in 1780, described it as a 'commercial paper open to all, but influenced by none'. He thereby referred to the issue of freedom of press about 250 years ago and this continues to be a matter of concern even now. This Gazette also published a large number of advertisements including on import and sale of slave. It also carried gossip on the activities of the officials of the East India Company. Advertisements still matter even more now and gossip is one of the favourites that don the media space.

After the first battle of Indian independence in 1857, the colonial government came down heavily on the newspapers and in particular, against the vernacular press as it was increasingly and assertively became nationalist. The Vernacular Press Act of 1878 gave extensive power of censorship to the authorities.

In 1940, noted American journalist John Gunther wrote that only two of the 100 news papers in a leading European capital city were honest and columns were available for sale in other publications.

Under communist regimes, the media was required to promote the ruling ideology and publicise the stated goals of the country. In several non-communist developing countries, self-censorship and severe restrictions on the media are common.

Yellow journalism seeks to cloud the facts by resorting to eye catching headlines and promotes distortion and misinformation. Journalism based on taking up false crusades as witnessed in the case of a suicide of a film actor recently, is a fellow traveler. Both are aimed at increasing readership and viewership and should be avoided.

Advertisement revenue is the key for the viability of any media organization. But with the mushrooming of media outlets and the shrinking revenue pie, the traditional norms and principles of journalism are being forced to be compromised with serious consequences.

The disruption caused by the technology has resulted in a serious flux with media facing a serious crisis. Technology giants have emerged as the algorithmic gate keepers of information and the web has emerged as the main vehicle of distribution of information and news. We are witnessing the consequences.

While the democratization and decentralization that followed the rapid expansion of social media enabling freedom of expression is welcome, the world is witnessing the downside of it in the absence of self-regulation and protocols. In this era of saturated information and over abundance of news, the very news is getting devalued.

While the traditional print media is sincerely endeavouring to adapt to the technological disruption by going online, it is struggling to come out with viable revenue models. The information and reports generated by the print media at substantial cost is being hijacked by the social media giants. This is unfair. Some countries are taking measures to ensure revenue sharing by the social media giants with the print media. We too need to take a serious look at this problem and come out with effective guidelines or laws to enable print media get their share from the huge revenues of the technology giants. Appropriate revenue sharing models need to be evolved for the survival of traditional media.

There is a certain need to ensure sanity in the use of rapidly expanding social media outlets given the implications for social harmony, common good, peace and national security. Freedom of expression doesn't mean unfettered outburst of anger and hate against each other that may lead to chaos.

Dear brothers and sisters!

The central job of journalism is to establish facts and share them as widely as possible so as to build a common base to debate harder questions that society faces over its values and its interests and who gets what share of the pie. It means to enable informed discussion on larger issues and giving voice to the voiceless.

Mahatma Gandhiji looked upon journalism as a means to serve the people. He said in his autobiography and I quote: "The sole of journalism should be service. The newspaper is a great power, but just as an unchained torrent of water submerges whole countryside and devastates crops, even so an uncontrolled pen serves but to destroy."

Self-regulation is the best way to enhance the credibility of journalism. Discredited media is nobody's interest.

The owners of media organizations, the editors, the journalists on the one hand and the readers, listeners and viewers on the other make the world of media. They are

all human beings. They have their own pre-dispositions. But the norms of objective journalism demand that personal views and positions should not impact reporting of events and issues. Viewers and readers too should not look for only such information and reports that suits them.

My distinguished friend late Shri Arun Jaitely used to lament saying there are too many channels but there is dearth of facts. This should change.

A news paper or any other media outlet should report the facts as news, present different perspectives on a debatable issue besides conveying their own view appropriately. The aim shall be to leave it to the reader or the viewer to take his own position without seeking to influence his mind. News and views should be strictly separate. One can't masquerade as the other.

Journalism by nature is supposed to be critical of the order of the times based on facts and supported by evidence. This should not slip into complete negativity. I am not suggesting that media is completely cynical. We have opted for parliamentary democracy for negotiated socio-economic transformation and nation building. As a bridge between the people and the governments, media need to focus on the development taking place on various fronts. Governments are the principle catalysts of this change for the better. Development journalism does not mean beating the trumpet of the governments. It is about examining and reporting on the triggers of change, partnerships built and participation of people and other stakeholders, challenges faces and the way they were overcome etc. this kind of positivity reinforces the trust of the people in the institutions of our body polity.

Till the advent of modern media, print media played an important role in furthering the cause of independence by promoting the spirit of nationalism and nation building through socio-economic transformation subsequently.

It is appropriate to reflect on the media scenario in our country at present. For doing so, it is imperative to understand the socio-political context in which the media is operating.

To briefly recall this context, after about 35 years of political stability after independence, there was a certain instability in between before stability was restored. These changes ran parallel to the changes in the perceptions, perspectives and positions of the people with the passage of time. This transformation was founded on the way various issues and challenges have surfaced from time to time, the way they were articulated and dealt with by those in power.

Media captured, reported and commented on these changes widely, each giving their own version of commentary. Over a period of time, media in our country has acquired a certain orientation which is broadly termed by the commentators as left leaning and liberal. Nobody can make an issue out of this.

But the problem arises if the media is keen to stick to the perspectives acquired earlier and stayed with them for long and refuses to acknowledge the changing narrative. I am not suggesting media to be like a chameleon. Media should use a

standard set of reporting and analytical tools that captures the change without imposing respective positions. Media should not be seen by the public as discrediting the change that is happening since such a change is contrary to their long held positions.

Our nation is committed to uphold the Constitutional values of liberty, equality, fraternity and justice for all. Whatever change is happening in our country over the last few years, it is within the framework of the Constitution. The task of nation building is still a work in progress and this needs to be pursued with enhanced vigour and missionary zeal collectively. Such an united effort calls for a strong sense of 'nationalism' and 'nationalist spirit' that binds all Indians together.

It is not correct to weaken this spirit by attributing the non-existing divisive perspectives. Media shall highlight with all the vigour the aberrations if any, so that they are not allowed to recur. Presenting every incident or issue in a divisive perspective does immense harm to the goal of building a strong, resurgent and developed India.

Media, in all its forms has immense ability to shape right public perceptions and perspectives as an effective tool of empowerment. It shall not become a part of the problem and instead, be a part of the solution. It is because like every citizen, government and other stakeholders, media too have a certain responsibility towards the nation.

Media is facing a crisis situation for various reasons including the technological disruption, the latest. Agenda journalism with its pitfalls is not in the interest of media and the society. The major challenge is to handle the information explosion and the attendant challenges to journalism in an effective and organized manner. Given the flux at the moment, I would not like to hazard a guess about the future of journalism. For a bright future, an 'auto correction' is needed and perhaps, inevitable. Effective and enabling working protocols is needed to ensue better future for media by addressing the challenges that are now staring at this important profession. Enabling regulations may be needed to be put in place. I am not in favour of restrictive regulations.

Journalism is a very demanding and challenging profession. With evolution of media over the years, present day journalism demands a set of specialized skills. On account of its growing importance and rising recognition, a large number of youth, including those highly educated are now taking to journalism. For making journalism more vibrant and rewarding, it is imperative to create an enabling environment ensuring safety of journalists, proper skills and working conditions including attractive remuneration.

I pay my tributes to all the veteran journalists who had contributed to the growth of journalism in our country. I compliment all the working journalists for choosing journalism as profession and serving the cause of empowerment of common man.

We are required to interact virtually, the new reality forced on us by the Covid-19 pandemic. Media has also been hit badly by the pandemic. I appreciate the spirit with which the media faced this pandemic test and kept the information and news flowing. I hope that we will be able to leave this challenge behind us soon.

Thank you all!

Jai Hind!”