



**Dr. N.K. Trikha**

**Veteran journalist Dr N.K. Trikha has been editor of *Navbharat Times*, Lucknow. Apart from teaching journalism at Makhanlal Chaturvedi National Journalism University, Bhopal, he authored many books on journalism, press laws and Indian parliament. He has been active in journalist movement for decades and also represented mediapersons in various committees. He was member of the Press Council of India for six years. He was president and secretary general of the National Union of Journalists (India). He has also been honoured with many awards including Patrakarita Bhushan, Sahityakar Samman, etc.**

# Media Ethics: The World Perspective

**W**hen the competitive yellow journalism perpetrated grave excesses through the Penny Press in the later parts of the nineteenth century in the United States of America their potential to do harm was still very limited as compared to the holocaust it can wrought today. The circulations, though large by contemporary standards, were confined to certain areas and affected comparatively small sections of the people.

And, yet public disenchantment with the conduct of the newspapers grew so deep and strong, and their credibility became such a grave matter of concern for the Press itself that one of its own main actors, Joseph Pulitzer, felt impelled to warn the American newspapers that "a cynic, mercenary and demagogic press will produce in time a people as base as itself." A leading American press critic has recently observed that this admonition had guided news operations through most of the twentieth century but they started eroding since the 1970s.

The fact, however, is that this and other forms of degeneration of the press had set in much earlier and had gone on for long. The situation was causing concern not only in America but in parts of Europe too. It was with this distressing realisation that this kind of journalism had caused the profession enough grievous loss of public trust and credibility that the first press codes were evolved in the 1920s. The situation quite perceptibly improved thereafter, but only until the advent of the television in the 1950s.

The television introduced disturbing new trends in the news media. This was characterised by what the then Chairman of the

United States Federal Communication Commission, Newton Minow told the National Association of Broadcasters in 1961. Minow described the television programming as "a vast wasteland." He said, "I am here to uphold and protect the public interest but some say the public interest is what interests the public. I disagree." Obviously, what Minow was trying to tell the world was the media was serving interests other than the public interest.

However, the scope for harm and hurt of the public interest was as yet extremely limited because there was no satellite communication, no cable TV networks, no globalisation of the cultural products, no mega corporations occupying the entire communication space including newspapers, magazines, radio, TV, satellite, films, book publishing, music and entertainment industries; no digitisation of media operations and no Frankenstein of the Internet.

The subjects they dealt with were also softer. There was no horrendous problem of global terrorism, no great wars fought with the subtle help of the sophisticated media operations, techniques and gadgets, no determined attempt to use communication as an instrument of state power with a view to achieve carefully targeted results in the manner people would perceive them innocuous and harmless, if not benevolent; no embedded journalism, no cross-border and cross-country bigotry-driven violent attacks.

But, even in that situation, several surveys and studies commissioned by different bodies since the 1980s have more or less repeatedly confirmed that the public is