

Exploring Conceptual Links between Development Journalism and the Gandhi Model of Rural Development

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Abstract

Development journalism has the power to bring positive changes in society and presents as an alternative to sensationalist, commercially driven journalism. However, for development journalism to be successful, it must follow the postulates that M. K. Gandhi stated for development of rural society. A village built on his ideals of swaraj and self-development will be a fit background for local newspapers, radio stations, and other media channels to spread awareness and interest in villages. This will, in turn, motivate and garner resources for the village to pursue its development plans more effectively. Exploring this symbiotic relationship between rural self-development and supportive development journalism, preferably by the villagers themselves through a simple means of communication, can be a new step in the direction of rural uplift. This is the concept that the paper has tried to explore. The paper aims to establish a theoretical link between two groups of literature available in printed form – the articles, books, and papers written about development journalism, and the selected writings of M. K. Gandhi on the topic of rural self-development. It takes a qualitative approach with an advocacy/participatory worldview. The paper presents a model depicting mutual coexistence between development journalism and elements of Gandhian rural development, and gives policy recommendations based on this analysis.

Keywords: Development Journalism, Gandhian Model of Rural Development, Rural Self-Development

Introduction and Background of Study

Development Journalism in India

The genesis of the Indian print media can be traced to the first newspaper, the *Bengal Gazette*, published in Kolkata

by James Augustus in 1780. Since then, journalism in India has seen many social, political, and technological upheavals and yet has managed to hold on to the difficult task of representing the aspirations of a billion-plus people. But how well has this representation included the marginalized sections of the society? How truthful is our media coverage in promoting and analyzing the development efforts of incumbent governments? Do ordinary citizens who perform extraordinary tasks in nation building get media recognition on par with celebrities and politicians? Can people be educated about development issues through articles in newspapers and magazines? These are some of the pertinent questions that a niche form of journalism called Development Journalism tries to address.

The term ‘Development Journalism’ was coined by a journalist/writer Alan Chalkley (1968). While Chalkley emphasized the importance of giving simple facts to the readers based on economics and technical aspects, other thinkers defined development journalism as the reporting of the process of development as it happens. From 1970s onwards, a paradigm shift was happening from modernization theory of development toward the participatory approach, with thinkers like Friere (1972), Quebral (1975), Mody (1991), and others setting a foundation for Participatory Development Communication. Gradually, editors all over the world started acknowledging the difference between ‘means’ and ‘end’ of a development process, and between development journalism and development communication.

The difference between ‘event reporting’ and ‘process reporting’ is elaborated by Aggarwal (1978), in which he points out that development journalism is not simply

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informing the readers of the steps taken by officials or of the launch of a campaign by a government. This form is more appropriately called development support communication, where the role of the journalist is to support the program regardless of its actual usefulness to the beneficiaries. A true development journalist is more interested in the impact of the program on the lives of the beneficiaries, its loopholes, and how participation from beneficiaries can improve the process. Murthy (2006) points out that while a development journalist takes an investigative and even critical approach where required, and gathers his/her inputs about the issue from multiple sources, a development support communicator toes the official line, and focuses only on the specific program being run by an agency.

While development support communication also has a role to play, especially in the case of programs with sensitive development issues like RCH (Reproductive and Child Health), it narrows its scope of impact by not connecting at the grassroots level. Ground realities, actual difficulties in implementation of a program and its weaknesses can be brought out only by analyzing it as a continuous process, which means it must be observed over a period. This brings us to some of the challenges the Indian print media faces in pursuing development journalism.

To better understand the reasons why development journalism has taken a backseat in today's print media, let us take a brief look at the media industry.

According to India Brand Equity Foundation (www.ibef.org), a trust founded by the Government of India, newspaper readership has seen a remarkable 40% growth between the years 2014 and 2017. The print sector was worth Rs. 318.90 billion (USD 4.95 billion) in the financial year 2018, gaining the second-largest market share overall in the Media and Entertainment (M&E) industry. In addition, print advertising generated a whopping revenue of Rs. 210.60 billion (USD 3.27 billion) in the financial year 2018, which was second only to television advertising. With such huge investments and profits involved, it is no surprise that today journalism is more of a business than a profession, and it is going to remain so in the coming years. Apart from the commercial motive of Indian journalism, other challenges to development reporting exist in the form of lack of research, lack of training in this form of journalism, and the general non-recognition of credible development work in Indian society (Murthy, 2006).

But what is wrong in earning profits, one might ask. Though the trends of rising incomes and revenue generation are encouraging, they hide gross inequalities and deep-rooted socio-economic problems that a nation cannot ignore in the long run. Talking in pure business terms, industries cannot survive without the society and the nation that it is founded in. Hence, every business has a responsibility to give back to society and the people to sustain growth and profitability in the long run.

An example of a modern national newspaper trying to focus on positive changes in the society is the 'Tracking Change' section of the *Indian Express*. These stories inform and inspire the reader with real-life efforts by communities and agencies that have impacted in improving the quality of life.

One of the many ways in which print media can contribute meaningfully to nation-building is supporting issues related to rural development. Let us now examine the salient features of one of the simplest and yet relevant models of rural development named after its proponent.

Gandhi's Model of Rural Development

'Development' is a difficult term to define because of its countless components and connotations depending upon the context in which it is used. Rural development is equally hard to describe because of the geographic, social, and cultural context of the villages in question. Nevertheless, a practical definition is given by Singh and Shishodia (2016) in the following words:

Rural Development is a process leading to sustainable improvement in the quality of life of rural people, especially the poor.

There is no universally accepted theory of achieving rural development in any country, but several theories have been proposed at different times, based on the then prevalent socio-economic environment. Some of the well-known theories are Lewis's Model of Economic Development (1954), Rosenstein-Rodan's "Big Push" theory (1970), and the Human Capital Development model propounded by Schultz (1964). Though all of these models throw light on different requirements for achieving rural development, none of them applies satisfactorily to the problems of Indian villages, given the colonial history of the nation and its unique social structure.

Though M. K. Gandhi never propounded any model of rural development in his name, studies of his writings and speeches give a clear idea of his vision for the uplifting of the rural poor, and that idea is referred to as the 'Gandhian Model'. Some of the essential elements of this approach are compiled by Singh (1999) as follows:

Box 1: Basic Tenets of the Gandhian Model of Rural Development

1. Real India is found not in its cities, but in its villages.
2. Revival of villages is possible only when the villagers are no more exploited by city dwellers.
3. Simple living and high thinking, implying voluntary reduction of materialistic wants, and pursuit of moral and spiritual principles of life.
4. Dignity of labor: one who labors must necessarily get his subsistence.
5. Preference to use of local, indigenous (swadeshi) products, services, and institutions.
6. Balance between the ends and the means: the end cannot be truthful if the means used to achieve it is untruthful.

Source: (Singh 1999:86)

M. K. Gandhi gave not just the conceptual framework, but also strategies to implement the same at the grassroots level. He suggested the setting up of institutions and procedures that will bring about the economic and social self-reliance of villages. Prominent among them is the Panchayati Raj, setting up of village cooperatives, trusteeship of natural resources and capital, and modifying the education system for the coming generations in the form of 'Nai Taleem'.

Though these institutions were strongly founded by Gandhi and his followers during the freedom struggle, after independence the path taken for nation building was that of modernization and industrialization. As rightly predicted by Gandhi, blind imitation of the western path of development brought ruin of village economy, which pushed millions of Indian villagers to dependence and poverty. It is in this context that the Gandhian model of 'revival of villages', self-development, and community leadership in building resources finds utmost relevance in today's context.

Gandhi is regarded as a masterful communicator with exceptional oratory and writing skills. He used these

skills appropriately to reach his message of constructive revolution to the masses using print media, radio, and personal communication. The journals *Harijan* and *Young India*, published by him from years 1919 to 1931 and from years 1933 to 1948, respectively, made a huge impact on people's minds regarding social evils like untouchability and gender inequality. The following section elaborates his contribution as India's foremost development journalist, with selected quotes from his writings.

Relevance and Need for Study

In the pre-independence years, the Indian print media, in English and vernacular languages, actively patronized stories that educated the masses on socio-economic problems and helped in molding public opinion on politics and state of governance. It was this spirit of free expression on governance or the lack of it that the British Empire sought to quell using harsh laws of censorship, like the Vernacular Press Act of 1878.

The print media in the decades after independence has vastly deviated from the objective of informing, educating, and analyzing news for social benefit. Today, commercial considerations, mainly circulation and advertising revenues, have taken over as the main criteria for publishing a piece of news on the front page. This unfortunate situation has precipitated due to multiple factors associated with social, economic, demographic, and technological and lifestyle changes that have occurred in the past 70 years. While not all these changes can be written off as harmful, there has been an erosion in the values of journalism that were built by eminent journalists, some of whom were also the founding members of major national dailies.

Development journalism presents as an alternative to sensationalist, commercially driven journalism. It has the power to bring positive changes in society. For this to be successful, however, the postulates that M. K. Gandhi listed for development of rural society must be followed. A village built on his ideals of *swaraj* and self-development will be a fit background for local newspapers, radio stations, and other media channels to spread awareness and interest in villages. This will, in turn, motivate and garner resources for the village to pursue its development plans more effectively. Exploring this symbiotic relationship between rural self-development and supportive development journalism, preferably by the villagers themselves through a simple means of

communication, can be a new step in the direction of rural uplift. This is the concept that the paper has tried to explore.

Research Objective, Design and Methodology

The paper aims to establish a theoretical link between two groups of literature available in printed form – the articles, books and papers written about development journalism, and the selected writings of M. K. Gandhi on the topic of rural self-development. It takes a qualitative approach with an advocacy/participatory worldview. According to this view, a research question must be addressed in the context of political reality and agenda for reform (Creswell, 2009). In this case, though no participants are involved in the actual process of study, the results and interpretations are expected to benefit the mostly rural population of our country. According to Creswell (2009), in this approach, theoretical perspectives are blended with philosophical assumptions, such as those of M. K. Gandhi, to give a greater understanding of issues like poverty, unemployment, and lack of education.

The research method used is content analysis with comparative study. There is no primary data involved as the aim of the study is to link two bodies of literature and derive meaning from them for recommendations. Articles and excerpts from published works of M. K. Gandhi were collected and studied carefully to identify central themes related to village life, health, sanitation, education, employment, and service to people. These were then matched with themes obtained by coding the available literature on development journalism that focuses on people's efforts to solve their own development problems through cooperation, planning, and communication. Comparison of both sets of themes raised some common themes that point to a conceptual relevance between both. Reliability of the exercise was increased by using two members other than the researcher to verify the codes.

Findings and Interpretation

Content analysis, as mentioned in the previous section, offered some useful insights on how development journalism can help in the process of rural development. Some of the relevant themes are explained here.

M. K. Gandhi as India's Pioneer Development Journalist

Development journalism, as discussed in the introduction, has certain traits that make it different from regular news coverage in the form of newspapers, journals or magazines. In the history of Indian print journalism, two journals stand out as beacons of high-quality development journalism – *Young India* and *Harijan*. The articles published by M. K. Gandhi in these journals covered almost every social, political, and economic aspects of millions of common citizens of India, particularly the 'voiceless' and marginalized population. The articles were written in a simple descriptive style so that even the less educated readers could understand the message. Since most of these writings were based on his personal life experiences or his insights from his vast travels into the heartlands, the villages, and the poorest areas inhabited by his countrymen, they were authentic and relatable to every reader.

The articles published in *Young India* were focused more on the political awakening of the masses to fight against oppression and to prepare themselves for eventual freedom that he strongly believed that India would achieve. This preparation entailed bringing radical changes to the way people perceived society and lived their daily lives under a foreign rule. For example, the following lines define *swaraj* as not just political freedom but as a responsibility to be borne by the people:

'Real Swaraj will come not by the acquisition of authority by a few but by the acquisition of the capacity by all to resist authority when it is abused.' – *Young India*, 29-1-1925

Harijan was started much later in 1933 with the main objective of forming strong awareness and public opinion against the social evils in the Indian society. It covered a wide range of topics, from village health and sanitation to the dowry system, untouchability, and so on, and made sharp observations about the Indian way of life, which needed to be modified so that the country could stand tall as a free nation. It is a sad reality that many of these issues are still present in our villages and need to be addressed in a similar unbiased manner by journalists and policy makers.

'Only those, therefore, who have faith in themselves and in their mission will serve the villagers and influence their lives. A true-life lived amongst people is in itself an object-lesson that must produce its own effect upon immediate surroundings.' – *Harijan*, 20-2-1937

Writings by Gandhi bore the true hallmark of work by a dedicated development journalist, as the content was accurate, informative, and inspiring. The range of development issues selected for discourse was wide and sourced from real-life experiences. The messages exhorted people to go into action for nation-building and community service, which were not only accepted but acted upon by thousands of his followers. Journalists of today can use these writings to learn the meaning, style, relevance, and appeal of development journalism in the rural context.

Let us now analyze how the writings and speeches by Gandhi reflected upon rural development issues in pre-independence India. Before the arrival of Gandhi on the national scene as a prominent member of the Indian National Congress, the freedom struggle was reserved for the elite, educated Indians, who could communicate with the British in their style and language. The common man was not connected to these political issues, as basic problems such as food, income, education, health, and so on were more pertinent and demanding. The rural poor were so downtrodden that their fight for survival was bigger than any political freedom. The society was divided into castes and communities; people were either too poor or too busy earning their subsistence that it did not matter to them whether Indians or foreigners ruled them. The brilliance of Gandhi as a leader of the freedom struggle was that he realized that these issues of human development needed to be addressed first, and that aspiration for political freedom had to come afterward. Most poor Indians who lived in the villages had to be roused from a state of helplessness and servitude to handle the huge responsibility that *swaraj* would bring them.

This was no small task and required a multi-pronged approach at communication. This is where the launch of *Young India* and later, *Harijan*, along with countless public speeches, prayer meetings, and radio broadcasts played a major role. The success of this approach is evident in the way millions of people from all sections of the society refused foreign goods and took to spinning during the *swadeshi* movement. A better example of potency of development journalism to induce rural development is hard to find.

The study of the Gandhian form of development journalism and his ideas of rural development reveal a close connection between them. Let us explore this conceptual link further in the present context.

Theoretical Links between Development Journalism and the Gandhian Model of Rural Development

In the previous section, we saw how development journalism as inspired by Gandhi played a significant role in informing and motivating people. In present times, we are governed by a democratically elected government at state and central levels. Moreover, in its seventh decade since independence, India has made rapid strides of progress in every field, from science to economy to healthcare. Despite all these changes, the poorest sections of the society are still deprived of the basic needs of human development. While our cities have proudly risen to compete with the best and richest in the world, our villages still rank among the least developed. Such an overwhelming socioeconomic divide between sections of population of the same country is hard to find in the world. It is high time to rectify this inequality between the rich and the poor, the cities and the villages.

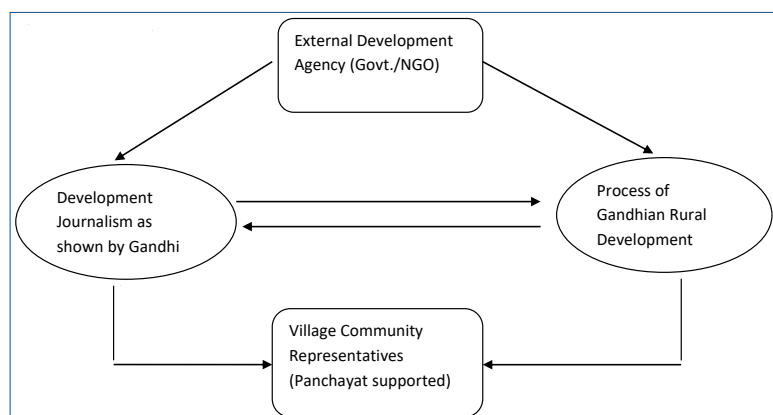
Just as Gandhi used development journalism in his time to connect people and unify them for a common goal, governments, media houses, and policy planners can use this tool to bring social and economic change in rural areas.

Rural development encompasses many aspects of people's lives, and every village has its own unique issues that require attention. The Gandhian method of village development will be to first unite them as a community. The newest paradigm of human development calls for a participatory effort by the people, where the initiative and plans for development come from village community members, and external agents like government agencies are given the task of facilitation. This form of participatory rural development can encompass principles like a healthy diet, sanitation, spiritual activities, community service, and so on. Villages today are better connected with facilities like telephones and mobile phones, radio, and television. These can be used in promoting knowledge and communication links between communities for the common good.

The media industry, particularly the print media, has a social responsibility to look out for such changes, promote them by giving news coverage, and inspire village communities in other places to follow such self-development projects. Thus, development journalism can stand as an active promoter and participant in rural development programs. Another way in which development

journalism can be a partner in community development is to make members themselves communicators, by assisting in starting local newsletters, video, and audio broadcasts.

Hence, the relationship between development journalism and rural development is symbiotic, where one supports the other mutually. Fig. 1 explains this link thematically.



Source: Author

Fig. 1: Model Depicting Mutual Coexistence between Development Journalism and Elements of Gandhian Rural Development

Fig. 1 depicts the interrelationship between the four main elements that drive development initiatives, namely Government/Non-Government agency, overseeing the development effort, media in the form of development journalism, village community representatives, and the process of rural development programs.

Development journalism and the process of any rural development process are depicted as two independently functioning parts, both of which are funded and supported by the external agency. Both provide benefits to the village community, who are responsible for initiating, planning, and implementing the development process through dialog using the participatory approach. Efficient functioning and transparency in procedures gives strength to development reporting and similarly, effective use of development journalism will provide awareness and maximum participation for the success of the process. *Hence, linking development journalism with any rural development process improves its outcome and efficiency.* This symbiotic relationship of mutual give and take is depicted by the two-way arrows at the center of the figure.

Promotion of development journalism as a catalyst to rural development will need support from policy makers, the public, and institutions. The following section gives a few recommendations in this direction.

Recommendations and Conclusion

In the previous section, we explored the inherent link between the process of rural development at the

community level and development journalism. Both of these ideas are embedded in the Gandhian philosophy as discussed in earlier sections. Let us now derive some recommendations for the media industry, governing bodies, policymakers, and researchers to adopt this model for improving development efforts.

- The three starting points of development for a given village community should be health, employment or source of income, and education, as these are the components of the globally accepted Human Development Index (HDI) measured annually by international agencies like the United Nations Development Program (UNDP). Following Gandhian principles, the community must work out its own goals for reaching minimum acceptable standards in all three and set a time frame to achieve this. The Panchayat at village level and block level must take the lead in motivating community members.
- Murthy (2006) has presented an analysis to find out the meaning of development journalism as practiced by today's print media, and the coverage given to development news in major national and regional dailies. Though not conclusive due to limited sample size, the study has indicated a very low priority given to development news in the print media. The media industry and the print media in particular, because of its affordability and reach in rural areas, must be made aware of its social responsibility. The governing bodies like the Press Commission of

India (PCI) may use directives as well as incentives to promote development journalism, with special focus on rural areas.

- Development journalism following Gandhian ideals need not be solely dependent on big media houses for publication. Nowadays, publishing a newsletter or a magazine is possible with minimum resources, and they can be made available in every village Panchayat. A useful merger of development journalism and rural community needs can be in the form of a newsletter, video or periodical that focuses on people and processes. Village workers, officials, and social workers showing exemplary good performance in rural development can be honored in these publications so that it motivates people in other places.
- The real beauty of the Gandhian way of village uplifting is that it requires no external help in the form of funds, training, infrastructure, and so on. Ideas like village diet, sanitation, spinning and other industries, cooperatives, and community action for betterment of village life can easily be adopted in any village, provided the people are informed and encouraged. Development journalism can fulfil this role by creating a bridge between Gandhian philosophy and new-age realities. For example, while villagers can access new technology like social networking and mobile apps, they must be made aware that these should not be used to spread rumors and destructive news. This kind of adaptation of values found in the Gandhian philosophy to the new-age lifestyle must be one of the focus areas of rural development journalism.
- Development journalism, like any other form of journalism, must adhere to truthful and fearless reporting for public benefit. This was one of the main objectives set for the press by Gandhi. Development journalists must be trained to research their subject well, understand in-depth issues of rural life, and learn to discern between official version of development and the actual progress on ground. They must be encouraged to report not only the successes but also the shortcomings and mistakes so that positive action or rectification can happen.

To conclude, rural development and development journalism can work in tandem for holistic change at

grassroots, provided they get support from institutions and community members. The need of the hour is to adapt a fresh approach to development issues by understanding the difficulties of villagers in different parts of the country. The efforts have to be decentralized, as every region has its unique social, economic, and political background. But what is common is the aspiration of people to rise above their hardships to provide a better life to the coming generations, with dignity and pride. No one understood this need of the people better than the Father of the Nation, and so the path shown by him has relevance today and for ages to come. It is up to us, the thinkers and planners, to choose to follow that path.

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