

This contribution from Dr. Bhargava, who is a distinguished scientist, is taken from his intervention at the Media Dialogue on Communal Violence at Hyderabad (June 21, 1993) organised jointly by the Namedia Foundation, Department of Journalism, Osmania University. It was originally published in Mainstream.

THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

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Today as we prepare to enter the twenty first century, the role of the media must change. It should not only inform accurately — it is important not to surprise facts — but it must also help readers, viewers or listeners to convert the information into knowledge and then knowledge into wisdom.

This would require annotation of the information communicated, and its analysis; it would require putting events that are being reported into a perspective — often a historical perspective. In fact, publication of news of communal violence without any annotation or analysis could do — and does — much social harm. Having said this, may I now point out some pillars of the framework of knowledge in which the media could handle communal violence. What I wish to do is to enunciate a 10-point programme — ten points that the media should be concerned with and the use for annotation and analysis of information and news of communal violence.

1. Man is born a non-violent animal. The proof of this is that genes seem to exist that appear to make an individual violent under certain conditions. This was perhaps the case with the Boston Strangler of the 1960s. That was probably the reason that he was a compulsive murderer who had no other motive than to murder by strangling. The fact is that a very few individuals in society have such an aberrant genetic make-up, and they must be considered abnormalities. To others who constitute the vast majority, peace comes naturally. And that is the biological truth. Thus, violence is an imposition — an imposition by vested interest, be they of the government of the political parties. Such an imposition on the peaceful nature of man that leads to violence, benefits only a few: most people lose out.
2. No one has a religion at the time of birth. There is no way to identify anyone a Hindu or a muslim or Christian or a Sikh, excepting by accepting what he or she says. There are thus no genetic markers for any religion. My last name is Bhargava and Bhargavas call themselves Brahmins. I, however, call myself as one who has no religion or caste whatsoever. The only iden-

tity I seek is that of an Indian — thus putting me in a minority that should really come within the purview of the Minority Commission. When my other Bhargava friends call themselves Brahmins, I ask them what is the proof? The fact is that there is none, for castes have no genetic markers. On the other hand, races have sometimes well identified (but never universal, that is, present in all or almost all members of a race) genetic markers, but race is not religion. Thus within the same race, we may have people belonging to different religions as we have in Africa. Even in the case of races where there may be some genetic markers, there is evidence that, unless there has been very considerable inbreeding and the group size is very small, genetically determined capabilities are randomised and thus get evenly distributed between the races.

3. Violence of any kind — certainly including communal violence — has never solved any problem. In our country, Mahatma Gandhi realised this and gave us an alternative that worked and solved a major problem. Even wars that involve large-scale violence, are not won today by such violence or the ability to perpetrate it on the strength of arms. They are won primarily by the justifiability of the cause for which people might be fighting and the determination of the people. An outstanding example would be Vietnam which surely was one of the most deprived countries of the world when it defeated three major powers. I recall a meeting in Hanoi with Gen. Giap, the legendary hero of the Dien-Bien-Phu battle, when he laid much emphasis on the above point,
4. In today's world, religion is **not** the major uniting force. Religion has two components: the ethical component, virtually all major codified religions seem to converge towards the same set of ethical values. It is the dogma that distinguishes one religion from another. As time passes by, more and more of all religious dogmas — irrespective of the religion — are being shown to be untenable. In the United Pakistan, a vast majority had the same religion; yet, they split into Pakistan and Bangladesh following a bloody war. The



recent Iran-Iraq war was fought between two Muslim countries. And in the last World War, many of the countries that fought each other were predominantly Christian. Today, profession is a much greater binding than religion. This is very much true, for example, of scientist. Good scientists all over the world today form a community in which religious considerations are non-existent. We should remember that one of the remarkable events of this half century has been the tremendous increase in the facilities for communication and travel, which have brought people from all over the world closer. As a consequence, humanism has become a more durable binding force than religion.

5. We must realise that no freedom can ever be absolute. This is something which can never be demonstrated scientifically in many ways. In other words, every legitimate freedom must be circumscribed by legitimate constraints. This would apply as much to religious freedom as to any other kind of freedom. Thus, I do not understand why people should have the freedom to take out religious processions. Why should temples be allowed to loudly advertise their wares through high power loud speakers at all odd times of the day and night, thus causing much disturbance? Why should we permit religion to be brought to the streets? why cant it be an entirely personal matter confined only to one's own house or place of worship? why should it be permitted to have anything to do with politics or even economics? Why could we not frame adequate laws to ensure that religious freedom is duly constrained, just as we must ensure that people are free to profess any religion they like?
6. We must emphasise that religion and culture have nothing to do with each other — absolutely nothing whatsoever. There is no Hindu culture or Muslim culture or Christian culture in our country. There is just Indian culture: there is only Indian music, Indian painting, Indian literature and Indian folklore. Many of them, like science, are today in fact far more international than national. Thus Hindus of Bali have much less in common with what the Hindus of India have with Muslims and Christians of India.
7. We must point out as to who gains by communal violence. Indeed, very few. And those who gain would fall into two categories: (a) those who are in power and would like to use this power for personal gain: and (b) those who are aspirants to such positions of power. The community as a

whole never gains through religious or communal violence. Indeed, there is not a single instance of such gain.

8. We must openly discuss and comment on techniques that are used to incite and instigate religious or communal violence. Many of these techniques have now become clear, and they must be repeatedly discussed. In fact, we are today in a position to anticipate the development of new techniques of inciting communal violence, and they must be discussed and taken note of through the media so that people are made wary and do not fall victims to them unknowingly.
9. We must bring as much pressure as possible on the government to remove *de facto* discrimination on communal basis or on the basis of religion or caste. Thus, why must we have different marriage laws for different groups? Why must we prescribe that in the eyes of the law, marriage would be legal only when it is registered? The rest can be a personal matter. Why could not we prescribe that all divorces will be governed by just one law in the country? What prevents us from making sure that the laws that govern inheritance are the same for every citizen of India? We surely do not have different laws in regard to murder for different communities, giving some communities greater right to murder than the others.
10. We must emphasise the consequences and the follow-up of communal violence. We must describe the misery that it brings to people by taking individual cases of the victims. We must make the point: was it necessary? Mere description of communal violence in the media without a follow-up has been, I think, a major disaster in the country.

Conclusions

To conclude, communalism makes no scientific sense. Violence makes no scientific sense. Communal violence is as senseless as anything can be. We are born without any religion. We are born with a desire to be peaceful. It is the political and vested interests — vested interests of those who are in power or who want power to exploit people — that generate conditions that lead to violence, including communal violence. We must be wary of such people and the media must help make people-at-large acquire the ability to identify such people and groups.

In the long run of course, it will be necessary to change the process of acquisition of power.