

Study of Media and Nation in Henrik Ibsen's *An Enemy of the People*

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Abstract:

This study aims to analyse and discuss about media and nation in Henrik Ibsen's *An Enemy of the people*. Descriptive method has been used for study of the topic. The data belongs to one of the dramas of Henrik Ibsen *An Enemy of The People* (1882). An online library research method has been used for collecting the data which has been further analysed by qualitative method and on the basis of analysis it has been revealed that media plays a very important role in making nation's point of view and also in manipulating the same. The media works very closely with those having power and can be beneficial for the future of its platform rather than working for the nation's benefit without being biased. The nation and the people who forms it gets to suffer in many ways due to this biasness of media. Also, media has the power to make or ruin anyone's image who is working for nation selflessly just by making its' opinion otherwise.

Keywords: *An Enemy of the People*, Media, Nation

Introduction:

The idea of media was brought to keep the common people aware and updated about all the truth of each and every topic related to the nation and for welfare & security of its people. Media became mirror of the nation and society through its selflessness. Even today

the government of any nation cannot run smoothly without media's help as different announcements, policies and schemes and being made and spread among the people through it. A nation gets many advantages due to media but at the same time it is being misused as well. With time, the working principles of media has been changed. Though it is same on paper and to represent people but internally things have become different. Earlier, along with helping the government to run the nation smoothly, media also used to take a stand against a government if things are not going in favour of nation and the welfare of the people. But with time, truth became dispensable with the power of media. This research has been done to clarify the same change through a very famous play of Henrik Ibsen called *An Enemy of the People* (1882).

An Enemy of the People is a Norwegian play and is set in a coastal town of Norway, which has constructed new Baths for visitors in the town and which has also become the attraction and talk of the town. The visitors are bringing business and funds in the town which is nurturing the town and its citizens like never before.

Dr. Thomas Stockmann, the protagonist, is the one who brought the idea of Baths, planned for it and also became the Medical Officer in Baths Committee, but his brother Peter Stockmann, the Mayor of the town does not want Dr. Stockmann to get all the credit so he suggested some changes and implemented it with the help of majority while constructing it. Both the brothers differ in every situation since childhood, *Peter Stockmann – Oh, ideas Yes! My brother has had plenty of them in his time – unfortunately. But when it is a question of putting an idea into practical shape, you have to apply to a man of different mettle.* Dr. Stockmann always carries an attitude of serving people selflessly and sticking with truth, whereas Peter Stockmann always gives priority to his own profit and is image conscious.

Dr. Stockmann is behind a discovery related to Baths and his discovery completes when he gets the lab test report which states that the water supply of the Baths is contaminated and is equal to poison for the visitors of the Baths, *Dr. Stockmann – The whole Bath establishment is a whited, poisoned Sepulchre*. Dr. Stockmann suggests to change the complete pipeline in order to purify the Bath's water but Peter Stockmann does not really agree with his brother's discovery as it will ruin his image and popularity among the citizens of the town which will harm him in coming elections. Peter Stockmann hides his actual intention and pretends in front of his brother that changes can not be done because it is going to be very costly, so he asks Dr. Stockmann to keep his discovery to himself and forget about this issue. But Dr. Stockmann has already shared this with Hovstad, press editor of "People's Messenger", Billing – a journalist of that press and Mr. Aslaksen, a printer as they are going to support Dr. Stockmann irrespective of Peter Stockmann & Baths Committee's approval. Apart from these three-people Mrs. Katherine Stockman, Petra (Daughter of Dr. Stockmann) and Horster, the sailor also knows about it. After knowing this Peter Stockmann convinces Hovstad, Billing and Aslaksen for not printing anything related to Baths in "People's Messenger" because repairing of the supply will be a very costly process and will hammer on the pocket of local trade men and citizens through increased taxes. All the three get convinced and oppose Dr. Stockmann, as a result of which he becomes "*An Enemy of the People*".

Influence of Authority & Power on Media

Hovstad and Billing have always disliked the Mayor, Peter Stockmann and so does Peter feel for Hovstad and Billing, *Hovstad – I rather think it was us two of the “People’s Messenger” that he couldn’t digest.*

Hovstad, Billing and Aslaksen are all media people and claim that they work for nothing more than truth. They are so supportive to Dr. Stockmann regarding his discovery about Baths that Hovstad and Billing believe and want to suggest people for acknowledging this discovery of Dr. Stockmann, *Billing- Hovstad, don’t you think the town ought to give Dr. Stockmann some sort of testimonial? Hovstad - I will suggest it, anyway.*

Hovstad has ruined his paper and is now seeing a hope about it with the truth of Baths. He wants to bring this matter between all the citizens through his paper without even waiting for Peter Stockmann’s response on the report of Baths sent by Dr. Stockmann to him. Hovstad claims himself to be a follower and protector of democracy, *Hovstad - But a journalist of my democratic tendencies cannot let such an opportunity as this slip.* Hovstad is very well aware that this opportunity can bring back life to his newspaper. Hovstad presents himself to be so unbiased that he convinces Dr. Stockmann to go against his brother Peter Stockmann even if the Mayor does not support Dr. Stockmann in his discovery, *Hovstad – I should be very reluctant to bring the Mayor into it, because he is your brother. But I am sure you will agree with me that truth should be the first consideration.* The claim of Hovstad of being unbiased is also clear by another statement of Hovstad, *Hovstad - I am of humble origin as you know, and that has given me opportunities of knowing what is the most crying need in the humbler ranks of life. It is that they should be allowed some part in the direction of public affair, Doctor. That is what will develop their faculties and intelligence and self-respect.*

Like Hovstad, Aslaksen also supports Dr. Stockmann initially, *Aslaksen – Well, I have come to say that I will back that up by every means in my power.* He is so sure of supporting Dr. Stockmann that he even suggests Dr. Stockmann to stay ready for the rejection from local authorities and promises Dr. Stockmann support of small trade men to have majority, *Aslaksen – it may be not bad thing to have us small trade men at your back. We form, as it were, a compact majority in the town if we choose. And it is always a good thing to have majority with you Doctor.*

Aslaksen – Oh, it may be desirable, all the same. I know our local authorities so well; officials are not generally very ready to act on proposals that come from other people. Aslaksen made Dr. Stockmann feel that he himself and the townsmen are so thankful to Dr. Stockmann for discovering the making of a healthy community, that they can set some testimonials too if needed, *Aslaksen – Yes, some kind of an address of thanks from the townsmen for your share in matter of such importance to the community.*

All the media people support Dr. Stockmann and are eager to see the response of citizens on the article about the improvement required in the water supply of the Baths. All of them are set to print the article after knowing that the Mayor has refused to do any changes on Baths and make any public declaration about the problem in the water supply and that Mayor is threatening Dr. Stockmann for dismissing him from his job if Dr. Stockmann doesn't stop his planning and publicity of his discovery right away. With the refusal of Mayor, all of them become more defensive about improvement in water supply. Hovstad and Billing get a golden opportunity to revive their press and plans to ruin the image of authority, *Hovstad - that is why I want to seize this opportunity, and try it I cannot manage to put a little virility to these well-intentioned people for once. The idol of the authority must me shattered in this town. This gross and inexcusable blunder about the water supply must be brought home to the mind of every municipal voter.*

But as soon as the Mayor, Peter Stockmann comes to know that “People’s Messenger” and trade men already knows everything and are in support of Dr. Stockmann he gives a visit to Hovstad, Billing and Aslaksen in their press. The Mayor convinces them to join his and authority’s side by misleading them with excuse that such improvement in water supply is going to cost around twenty thousand pounds and the Baths will remain closed for at least two years and on the top of it, execution of this proposal will become a burden on small trade men of the town because the authority will be forced to increase taxes for execution, *Peter Stockmann – I have satisfied myself that it is so. If the town wants this very extensive alteration, it will have to pay for them.*

After all the discussions Hovstad, Billing and Aslaksen change their mind and support Peter Stockmann, they refuse Dr. Stockmann to print anything related to Baths, *Hovstad – I am not going to print it. I cannot and will dare not print it.*

Aslaksen – It would mean the absolute ruin of the community if your article were to appear. And when Dr. Stockmann decides to address the town all alone in a mass meeting, Hovstad, Billing, Aslaksen and the Mayor altogether challenged him that he won’t be able to make it; *Peter Stockmann – You will not find any public body in the town that will give you the use of their hall for such a purpose.*

Aslaksen – You won’t find a single man in the whole town to go with you.

Somehow with the help of Horster Dr Stockmann organises the mass meeting but both the bodies i.e. media and authority combine to stop Dr. Stockmann and do not allow him to speak about the Baths in the mass meeting organized by Dr. Stockmann, rather Aslaksen and the Mayor address the mass gathering first and turns the majority into their side by misguiding them about the expenses the town and its people will have to suffer. Dr. Stockmann opposes it, tries to make the people understand about the reality and finally

refuses to support the majority, *Dr. Stockmann - I propose to raise a revolution against the lie that the majority has the monopoly of the truth. What sort of truths are they that the majority usually supports? They are truths that are such advanced age that they are beginning to breakup. And if a truth is as old as that, it is also in a fair way to become a lie, gentlemen.*

With many such statements of Dr. Stockmann the citizens of the town go totally against him, because they are not liberal enough to accept the change in the old thought process. By conducting a poll in mass meeting, the media and the local authority declares the Doctor “*An Enemy of the People*” with majority.

The twist come when the media again change its side after knowing that Dr. Stockmann’s father-in-law Mr. Morten Kill has purchased all the shares of the Baths and now the power is in hands of Dr. Stockmann as well so, Hovstad and Aslaksen are ready to print Dr. Stockmann’s article in “People’s Messenger”, *Aslaksen – Well, the fact is that now we know the bearings of whole affair, we think we might venture to put the “People’s Messenger” at your disposal.*

And when Hovstad and Aslaksen both sees that Dr. Stockmann is not at all convinced with their explanation, they again start threatening him with the power of press, *Aslaksen – The press is power in free community.*

Hovstad – And you please to remember that this affair of the shares can represented in two way!

Conclusion

The role of media is strongly reflected in the event. Dr. Stockmann, who always has worked and is working for the welfare of the community has been proven guilty by the local authority just because the media did not show the courage to work in favour of truth and bow in front of powerful people and authority to save itself from personal sufferings and increase

in financial burdens. The common people always trust media and have faith that media is always going to support and represent the truth and will guide them to choose between right and wrong. But in this play media corrupts itself by coming in the influence of local authority. The authority and the media both pretend as if they are working for welfare of town, community and ultimately the nation but in reality, they both are saving their own skins from personal loss.

In present times we see how botched government project gets eye washed and often go unreported. They are hands in glove i.e., media and authority. Same way as we see in the play they combine to stop Dr. Stockmann from bringing the truth to people.

Knowing that Baths will now be taken care by Dr. Stockmann and Baths is a topic which will remain evergreen in press & media, Hovstad and Aslaksen change their mind without second thought and again try to settle things out with Dr. Stockmann.

To hide this two-faced behaviour of theirs or say the media they are giving it the name of securing the livelihood, *Hovstad – It is a natural law, every animal must fight for its own livelihood.*

Aslaksen – And get its food where it can, you know.

So, in Ibsen's *An Enemy of the People* the media really does not care about the nation and its welfare rather thinks of its own livelihood. This is how the media has changed with time and this changed behaviour and characteristic of media has compromised nation's growth and has let its citizens suffer the repercussions. Despite being called a fourth pillar... It is in crutches, living the citizens limping.

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