



The Role of Media in Indian Democracy

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ABSTRACT

The media plays a very significant role in our society today. The media is all around us. From the shows we watch on TV, the music we listen to on the radio, to the books, magazines, and newspapers we read each day. Without the media, people in societies would be isolated, not only from the rest of the world, but from governments, law-makers, and neighbouring towns and cities.

Media is the “fourth estate” of democracy and it plays a pivotal role in ensuring justice and benefits of the government policies reach the interior sections of the society. They act as a chain between the government and the citizens of the country, people have faith in media as it has an impact on the audience.

1. Introduction

Democracy is commonly defined as a government of the people, by the people and for the people. Freedom and democracy walk hand in hand so Indian society is accepted democracy where the media plays a pivotal role in the Indian democracy. Media is being considered as the fourth pillar of democratic society after executive, legislature, and judiciary. Beyond the control and limitation of the governments vital organ in large interest of the masses, media sometimes raise over or above. The last few years witnessed an enhanced interface between the media and common man. It is the media (print or electronic) has become a part of the life of the people of India, who are largely dependent on the media coverage for various needs including entertainment and information. Starting from the issues relating to common man, their feelings, their necessities, their expectations and every aspects of their life closely associated with the media. Media keeps the peoples awakened and there is no denying the fact that it has become one of the major instruments of social change. In a democratic set up, it is media which strengthens the democratic norms and values and also accelerates the pace of development.

2. Role of Media

The Bengal Gazette was the first news paper which was started by James Augustus Hickley in year 1980 in India. Since then the media has been emerging in various forms. Media is playing a vital role in shaping human minds. Media plays an important role in shaping the democracy. It is called as backbone of democracy. It empowers the citizens by information. Media arranges the debate so different views regarding same issue could be put forth.

A democratic system to run in its full potential need wide participation on the part of general masses which is impossible without the people being informed about the various issues. Thus reliable information sources form an important constituent of a democratic society. This is where the role and importance of media arises.

Democracy cannot be successful without free press. Free press is inseparable part of democracy as well as it is the voice of the people. Freedom of speech and expression is one such right which the citizens are entitled to. In a democratic country like India the media has duties as, to equip the citizen with unbiased information, to play vital role in broadening the thinking of citizens, by empowering them with knowledge, to fairly criticize any action which is against the spirit of justice or essence of democracy, to point out the concept practices and play a crucial role in initiating the proper procedure against the people who are accused of any antisocial activities, regardless of any political connection, and to foster the spirit of unity and brotherhood among the people, and install faith in democracy and justice. If the media adheres strictly to its duties then the democracy will be enjoyed in true sense by the citizens of India.

The press has long served as an important part of democracy. Its role is to investigate the truth when politicians try to hide it, and to uncover government's failings. It is a protector of the people against those with power. Without effective mass media the populace cannot cast informed votes. Good journalism is good for democracy⁵ - when journalism operates "properly and in the public interest [it] is one of the true safeguards of our democracy"⁴. 'Research shows that the information that news provides becomes the building blocks for our political attitudes'². The Economist looked at the decline in sales of newspapers and worried about the collapse of the newspaper industry:

"News is not just a product: the press is the fourth estate, a pillar of the polity. Journalists investigate and criticize governments, thus helping voters decide whether to keep them or sack them. Autocracies can function perfectly well without news, but democracies cannot. Will the death of the daily newspaper [...] damage democracy?"

Traditionally and constitutionally, the media has no defined role in governance. It doesn't have the power to change any decisions made by the various arms of a state—the legislature, executive and the judiciary. Yet, the media plays one of the most important roles in the functioning of any society. It amplifies the voice of citizens and communicates their opinions to the lawmakers.

3. Role of Media in Nation Building :

In any democratic country the media plays a vital role in creating molding and refracting public opinion. Over the years the media became so powerful that it soon acquires the status of fourth estate as it was aptly described by the British politician Edmund Burke. It is become so indispensable for the democratic functioning that Thomas Jefferson who was the third US president (1801-1809) said, "Were it let to me to decide whether we should have a government without newspapers or newspapers, without a government. I should not hesitate for a moment to prefer the letter". For the some reason our first prime minister, Jawaharlal Nehru declared, "I would rather have a completely free press with all danger involved in the wrong use of that freedom, than a suppressed or regulated press", in fact media touches almost every aspect of our public life. Media plays a very important and crucial role in enlisting and educating the people. The media can aid public involvement through advocating issues and transferring knowledge, skill and technologies to the people. A wareness about various rural development programs, propagation of family planning could be spread by using the media. It made farmers aware of the new and improvement methods of agriculture and protection of the crops. Media plays very emphatic role in awakening people against many evils prevailed in the society like child marriage, killing of female unborn child, the evil practice of child labor etc. though educational programs, it can cover many student in a single platform. The university Grant Commission telecast educational programs for the benefit of the school and college students all over 192 India. Media can ignite scientific temper among the students for development of science. The government can use the media more effectively to make it an instrument of social change. Media has exposed a number of corrupt practices, hidden deals, thus putting a check on the cancer in the form of corruption in the society.

4. Media Role in Good Governance :

Good governance is an indeterminate term used to describe how public institutions conduct public affairs and manage public resources. Governance is the process of decision making and the process by which decisions are implemented (or not implemented)".^[8] Good governance is about the processes for making and implementing decisions. Its not about making 'correct' decisions but about the best possible process for making those decision. The concept of "good governance" centres around the responsibility of governments and governing bodies to meet the needs of the masses as opposed to select groups in society.

Good governance is an ideal system which is difficult to achieve in its totality. In other words, no country or society has ever said to achieve good governance in totality. We can only come close to this by our activities with the aim of making this ideal a reality. The journey of India from developing nation to a developed nation will depend on the role played by the media in the country. It needs to be focused on the real matters, which are mostly social and economic in nature, instead of trying to divert the attention to the non issues. Achieving the good governance requires the understanding and participation of every member of the society. The media, their significant roles, channels and contents, are considered to be the most powerful weapon to make this achievement a reality.

5. Role of Media - Woman Empowerment :

Growth of women's education and their entry into employment has contributed to women empowerment. Media has an important role to play to create awakening in women to achieve their potential. In today's world, print and electronic media play a vital role in effectively conveying message that needs to be conveyed. Communication is extremely important for women's empowerment and mass media play a significant role. Effective informative communication is one of the most important channels for the growth and development of women in 196 the informal or unorganized sector. Without information regarding services and benefits available through legislation, government schemes, banks and voluntary organizations, women can hardly take advantage of them. The distance between women and media not only deprives the women of their right to information and knowledge, but it can also keep the women in dark regarding the blatant misuse of the female and distortion of the truth.

Media Sensational Motive : The media generally tries to highlight sensational stories like that of crime, rape, and sometimes spicy stories like sports, or what a particular celebrity is doing etc. There can be some other important issues which are needed to be addressed, but these issues, though are of public importance are not covered.

Media TRP and Popularity Motive : In a mad race to gain TRP and popularity the media tends to show what people want to see, sidelining some important news which are of real public importance go unnoticed. The best example was lakme fashion week which was captured by nearly every channel, while the suicide by farmers in Maharashtra during the same time was neglected.

Media Profit Motive : It has also come to notice that, the media publishes the news, which are favourable to a particular candidate for monetary or other consideration. The term which is popularly called as paid news. The phenomenon of "paid news" has acquired serious dimensions. Today it goes beyond the corruption of individual journalists and media companies and has become pervasive, structured and highly organized.

Media Intrude on Private life : As a rule channels must not intrude on private lives, or personal affairs of individuals, unless there is a clearly established larger and identifiable public interest for such a broadcast. The underlying principle that news channels abide by is that the intrusion of the private spaces, records, transcripts, telephone conversations and any other material will not be for salacious interest, but only when warranted in the public interest. However, it is also understood that the pursuit of the truth and the news is not possible through the predetermined principle of prior permission; hence door stepping individuals or authorities for the purpose of newsgathering may be used only in the larger purpose of public interest. Further, in the case of minors, in any broadcast that intrudes on their privacy, the channel should attempt, where possible, to seek the consent of the parent or legal guardian. However, the defense of the premise of privacy cannot be misconstrued as the denial of access, and this applies to all individuals, including those in the public eye and public personalities. It does however apply in its entirety, as per the provisions mentioned above, to their children and kin who are minors.

The Media is referred as fourth estate of democracy. For proper functioning of democracy free press is must. But free press does not mean an uncontrolled press. The problem then comes is who and how to control press. The answer is there shall be an uplifting the standards of journalism can only be solution. Every journalist must honestly and consciously make an attempt not to fall in any trap and raise the standard of journalism.

While the media has historically been viewed as being overly aggressive and insatiable in their plight for the latest and hottest news, their watchdog-type function is essential in a democratic society where people MUST know what their governments are doing. The media has the capacity to hold governments accountable, forcing them to explain their actions and decisions, all of which affect the people they represent. In a democratic society, people should know all their options if they are to govern themselves, and the media is a vehicle for the dissemination of such information. The assumption in some societies is that the press speaks for the people, thus the Freedom of Speech and Freedom of the Press Acts in the United States and in many other countries. The reason for Freedom of the Press is to ensure that democracy is able to function, so it is important to understand that such legislation does not only protect the functions of the press.

Democracy faces many challenges. Large multinational companies can outmanoeuvre and ignore local governments, which sometimes places them above-the-law. Therefore regional and international

agreements are now an essential part of maintaining the rule of law - bodies such as the UN and EU answer this call. Special interest groups and single-issue lobbies (as well as parties) can, through their hearty activism, undermine democracy. Mass stupidity and voter apathy means that the people normally vote (if they vote at all) on short-sighted, shallow and unimportant issues, hindering the ability of government to overcome long-term problems. Nationalism, ethnic divides, religious impulses and mass intolerance can all pressurize a democratic government into allowing the 'tyranny of the masses' to overcome human dignity and freedom: new ways of curbing populism need to be tested and implemented.

Democracy needs to be actively watched and defended against these challenges. Despite weaknesses, its democracy has proven itself to be *the* superior method of governance and facilitates personal freedom, human development (technological and moral) and human rights. Good national governance is not a simple affair, and those in power should be dedicated to their job, highly educated and capable.”

6. Conclusion :

The media plays an important role in the welfare of the society, working as an informer, an educator, a form of entertainment and an opinion influencer. With the current media ownership that poses a credible threat and questions the credibility to the role of the media; media users need to consider, who to trust now? Political issues are highly dependent on the media as it highlights what is important and is highly influential thus it works as a form to influence the political mind-set of media users. With the mainstream constantly bombarding pro-government issues towards society, media users now yearn for a different point of view, shifting to the alternative media to abstract that diverse opinion. In sight of how the media and politics are inter-wined, it is important that the opinions and comments of the public take place to form a democracy, in the words of Abraham Lincoln; for the people, by the people and of the people. Thus, the public sphere is important in the role to collect or obtain the voices of the public. The alternative media has already taken the role in providing that space for the public to take part in forming the country's democracy; it is now up to the mainstream media to do the same, for a better political constitution of the country.

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