

## THE CRITICAL OVERLOOK ON THE IMPACT OF MEDIA IN INDIAN DEMOCRACY

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### **Abstract**

*Media is considered as the fourth estate in modern democracies because of its role in generating public awareness, shaping public opinion and forming popular perceptions. In India the role of media seems to score very low in various dimensions. Media organizations are generally assumed to play an important role in a democracy, but how effective are they in performing this function is a matter of study. Media is a primary institution between the people and policy makers. Some people believe that not all media is objective and, in some cases, show bias in reporting by either covering something it does not want the public to know or covering something in perhaps much greater detail than might be necessary. Our free press protected by the first constitutional amendment, plays a critical role in ensuring that every Indian has constant access to important and trustworthy news. Most people rely on the media for all or most of their information regarding policies and other necessities. The power of Media can be used to reinforce democracy. It can be used as an instrument to bridge between administrators and the people who are governed. The impact of media as a platform of nation building through political, social, economic and cultural democracy emphasised on this Paper.*

**Keywords:** *Democracy, Media, Constitutional Status, Administrators*

### **Introduction**

A system of government in which all the people of a country choose and elect their representatives' called democracy which contains the right to vote as enshrined in the constitution of India. Media came into existence in 1780 with the introduction of 'The Bengal Gazette' and since then it has matured leaps and bounds. It has been playing a very significant role in shaping human minds and opinion. Democracy is a popular political notion in today's world, fair and free elections are the prerequisite of democracy and rule of the law, protection and freedom of human rights and supremacy of the constitution are important elements in true democratic system and it serves as a fundamental features. For a democratic country, access to information is essential, freedom to read or write is an important element to expose and reveal the truth, to ensure self-development and self-fulfillment of citizens and to help ensure participation of citizens in a democracy. In other words Democracy in general terms is understood to be a form of government which is subject to popular sovereignty. Living under an era of Liberalization, Globalisation and Privatization modern societies could not imagine to live without a vibrant mass communication. Media in this sense is regarded as the fourth estate of democracy next to legislature, executive and judiciary.

### **Evolution of Radio Communication in India**

Mass communication technology started its journey in colonial India in the 1920s. Radio clubs were started in 1933 in Calcutta and Bombay. The British Indian government had several established methods for managing emerging technologies and the policy was formulated on the advice of British officers engaged in the same policy. Radio broadcasting networks were seen as a means of imitating and propagating an indigenous Indian culture (Ghosh, 1998). The story of Prasar Bharati's (Broadcasting Corporation of India) bill is a good example of the paralysis that has

plagued Indian political parties since coming to power. The first committee was formed in 1964 to even ask about the possibility of future broadcasting. Radio broadcasting began in 1927. However, in 1937<sup>1</sup> it was renamed as All India Radio. And since 1957 it has been known as Akashvani. Prachar Bharati was a public service broadcast in 1997 as an autonomous body under the Campaign Act to oversee all-India radio and television. It started in Delhi in September 1959 as an experimental base with a small transmitter and a temporary studio; however, it started in 1965 as part of the regular performances of All India Radio. Indian media consists of different types of communication: television, radio, film, newspapers, magazines and internet based websites / portals. Indian media has been active since the late 18th century. Print media started in India in the early 1780s. Indian media is one of the oldest in the world, foretells the reign of Asoka. The Indian media has been free and independent for most of its history. Radio broadcasting began in 1927 but became the responsibility of the state in the 1930s. It was renamed All India Radio in 1933 and since 1955 it has been known as Television, Akashvani. An autonomous body called Prachar Bharati was established to take care of broadcasting ( Mitra 1993).

### **The Post-Independence Media in Free India**

Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister and a leading figure in the freedom struggle, made important contributions to the formation of the press. And the development of media in India since independence has been uninterrupted and healthy. In 1944, political independence came to a country that was socially and economically divided into hundreds of groups. Most of these groups, especially the upper class, upper-middle class and largely lower class, were influenced by Mahatma Gandhi and the Indian National Congress (INC)<sup>2</sup>. When Nehru was the Prime Minister the Indian media seemed to pursue a democratic agenda. Most newspapers believe in a multi-party system, even because of their allegiance to extreme political parties. Freedom of the media is therefore not perfect even in ordinary times, when reasonable restrictions can be imposed on the freedom of the media by the state. A state of emergency can be declared on the basis of war or external aggression or internal unrest, which was originally issued under Article 352<sup>3</sup>. Under Article 357, which was originally enacted, the fundamental rights under Article 19 were automatically suspended at the time of declaration. In any event, after 19 months of national emergency and media control, Indira Gandhi became so confident of her continued success that Mrs. Gandhi called for parliamentary elections in March 1977. At the same time, Mrs. Gandhi also removed press censorship. The people's persuasive objections against the actions of Indira Gandhi's rule were brought by a coalition government of several small political parties. Faced with pressure from the Indian press after the imposition of the 'state of emergency', it may be tempting to consider it as a slight but completely unexpected pressure for independence. India was only involved with third world countries, so there was some doubt about its authenticity overall.

### **Constitutional Status of Media in India**

After the independence of India when the constitution was being drafted, the question aroused before the constitutional makers of India that whether or not to have a separate provision for press like in Constitution of America, or to include the freedom of press in right to speech and expression as in constitution of England. In this context, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar the Chairman of Drafting committee powerfully argued that, "The press is simply another way of describing a citizen or an individual. The media has no superior privileges which are not to be given or which

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.afaqs.com/news/guest-article/radio-riding-the-evolutionary-waves>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.tantaran.com/evolution-and-growth-of-radio-in-india/>

<sup>3</sup> Constitution (Forty - Fourth Amendment ) Act, 1978

are not to be exercised by the voter in his separate capacity. The executive of press or the editor are all citizens and therefore when they select to write in a newspaper they are just exercising their right of freedom of speech and expression and in my decision then no special mention is necessary of the freedom of press at all<sup>4</sup>. Hence, in Indian constitution the right to press was inserted in freedom of speech and expression. Article 19(1)(a) Free press is the need of democracy and is more important for the huge democratic country like India. In India, in the absence of any exact article in the constitution for free press, it was the judiciary who promoted and safeguarded the independence of press.

### **Role of Indian Judiciary in Protecting the Independence of Press/Media**

The court in *Romesh Thapar VS State of Madras case*<sup>5</sup> has alleged that right to circulation is as important as right to publication. In *Sakal News Papers VS Union of India*<sup>6</sup> indirect effort by Government to restrict the freedom, by passing the News paper(Price and Pages) Act 1956, which empowered the government to regulate the space for advertisement, was struck down by judiciary as it, would have direct impact on circulation.

### **Role of Judiciary in Restricting the Freedom of Press/Media**

In India the judiciary protected the rights of press as well as constrained it in the interest of justice. The court in *Bihar VS Shailabala Devi case*<sup>7</sup> speech and expression on the part of an individual which inflame or boost to of ferocious crimes such as murder, etc. will undermine the security of the state. The court in the case of *Dr. D.C. Saxena VS the Chief Justice of India* alleged if preservation of democracy is the foundation for free speech, society equally is authorized to regulate freedom of speech or expression through democratic action. The cause is evident, e.g., that society accepts free speech and expression and also puts restrictions on the right of the majority<sup>8</sup>.

### **Responsibility of Media in Democratic Country**

- To train the common man with fair information. Media shall not stain the evidences; they shall present them as they are.
- To play vigorous role in expansion the thoughtfulness of people, through allowing them with information. In India like other country where there is major rate of illiteracy, it is the responsibility of media to carry knowledge and widen their opinions.
- To play a key role in introducing the proper way against the people who are reproached of any antisocial activities, irrespective of any political connection.
- To foster the essence of harmony and brotherhood among the people, and mount faith in democracy and justice. If the media obeys firmly to its duties then the democracy will be appreciated in factual sense by the citizens of India<sup>9</sup>.

The role of media in Indian Democracy Considered as the backbone of a democracy, it plays a prominent role which includes the following:

- The media acts as a watchdog of the government and informs the public about the happenings around them through every report of the administration's actions.

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<sup>4</sup> Constituent Assembly Debates, Vol. VII p 780 (2nd December 1948).

<sup>5</sup> AIR 1950 SC 124

<sup>6</sup> AIR 1962 SC 305

<sup>7</sup> AIR 1952 SC 329

<sup>8</sup> [(1996) 5 SCC 216].

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.thedrum.com/profile/pubmatic/news/understanding-the-growing-importance-of-responsible-media>

- The media is considered the fourth pillar of democracy. It makes us aware of various activities like politics, sports, economic, social and cultural activities etc. It is like a mirror that shows the empty truth and sometimes it can be harsh.
- The media in a democratic society also leaks gaps, which ultimately helps the government to fill the gaps and make a system more accountable, responsive and democratic friendly. So democracy without media is like a wheel less car.
- The media serves as a bridge between the people and the government and as a powerful tool with the power to create and break public opinion. It has the ability to suppress perception or blow emotions. That is why it has gained the trust of the people. It controls people's hearts and minds through media, various magazines, television and movies<sup>10</sup>.

### **Globalization and the Media**

Globalization is understood as a process through which economic and cultural events that used to be at the national level in most cases become increasingly international. This process has accelerated in recent decades, led by U.S.-based multinational corporations and imperialist centers. At the ideological level, corporate globalization initiatives are encouraged by neo-liberal arguments about the potential for "free trade." The Global Village often leads to the notion of globalization where the real beneficiaries are information and communication technology whose visual face is the media<sup>11</sup>. However, critics of globalization never forget to mention the rise of the trend of cultural homogeneity as a new form of hegemonic-cultural imperialism.

### **Role of Media in Social Change**

Earlier the Indian society presumed that women are weaker in terms of earning capacity and physical stamina. The society was patriarchal and hence women were given less importance. Also gender discrimination, lack of access to healthcare and gender based violence are some reasons which was prevailing in the Indian society. These are some of the main reasons of terrible crimes which used to dominate our country. So the awareness about such problems was communicated to the people by the media<sup>12</sup>. Actually the information about this heinous crime was provided to the people through television drama, animated news packages, influential radio documentary and persuasive films. Now government started using media as a platform for eliminating social evils and bringing positive change. Finally the people reacted positively to it and now the cases of social evils are decreasing. The media as an unbiased informer acts as an educator, as a mentor, as the guardian with the free participation of the public. So unless in a society everyone is equal that society can't be considered to be a democratic society. It is because equality is one of the essential features of the democracy. Promoting equality is actually making an attempt to strengthen democracy. Therefore the media plays a very significant role in strengthening democracy in India.

### **Conclusion**

The importance and role of media in a democratic system is debatable. India has the largest democracy in the world and it is widely accepted that media has a powerful presence in the country. In the current scenario the Indian media has been subject to a lot of criticism for disregarding its obligation to social responsibility. Perilous commercial practices in media have affected the fabric of Indian democracy. In the race of sustainability and commercial interest

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<sup>10</sup> <https://participationpool.eu/resource/media-and-information-literacy-and-democracy-education/>

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.encyclopedia.com/media/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/globalization-media-industries>

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.epw.in/journal/1966/1/book-reviews/sources-social-change-india.html>

transnational media organizations have spread their wings in the Indian market with their own global interests at the cost of truth and accuracy which was initially thought to be an agent of escorting in social change through developmental programs aimed to uplift the weaker section of the society and showcase the truth only.