

MEDIA POWERFUL PILLAR OF DEMOCRACY

Sonia Varma

Student MA (Public Administration)

Department of Public Administration, Panjab University

Email: soniavarma299@gmail.com

"...in the terrible history of famines in the world, no substantial famine has ever occurred in any independent and democratic country with a relatively free press"

-Amartya Sen (Nobel Prize laureate)

Abstract: Media came into reality in 1780 with the beginning of a newspaper namely 'The Bengal Gazette' and since then it has advanced leaps and bounds. It has been playing a very vital role in shaping human minds and healthy democracy. It is the backbone of a democracy. Media makes us aware of various social, political and economical activities happening around the world. It is like a mirror, which shows us or strives to show us the bare truth and harsh realities of life. Media is like a watchdog in a democracy that keeps government active. From being just an informer it has become an integral part of our daily lives. With the passage of time it has become a more matured and a more responsible entity. The present media revolution has helped people in making an informed decisions and this has led to beginning of a new era in a democracy. Many times the media has played an extremely positive role by creating a public opinion towards a thing. In the campaign of social activist Anna Hazaray, media played a big part in making the campaign a success. Large section of the people in India are backward and ignorant, so it is necessary that modern ideas are brought to them and their backwardness removed so that they become part of enlightened India. The free and fearless media plays a key role here. This paper tries to analyze the media role in promoting and strengthening democracy in the country.

Keywords: democracy, media, transparency, good governance

1.0 Introduction

Of all the institutions governing peoples and those who rule over them, the most dignified and egalitarian is democracy. It is an institution where the people decide who should govern them. Democracy is considered the finest form of government in which every individual participates consciously and in which the people remain the supreme power determining their destiny. So, in democracy the people are the crucial source of power and its success and failure depend on their insight, awareness and alertness. Though India had elements of functional democracy in the ancient times, it is after independence that we became a modern democracy. There are three pillars that guarantee the smooth functioning in a modern democracy: Executive, Legislature and Judiciary. Today, media is considered the fourth pillar of the state all over the world; first and foremost British Member of Parliament Lord Macaulay had given this status to the media. Media plays a crucial role in shaping a healthy democracy. It is the stamina of a democracy. Media makes us aware of various social, political and economical activities happening around the world. It is like a mirror, which shows us or strives to show us the bare truth and harsh realities of life.

It is noteworthy that role of media is a key factor in the course of operationalization of tenets of democracy. During the current times the role of media in have a great role in influencing the policy makers and hence policies. The degree of this influence is many a times of such extent that the government has to reform, amend, remove or bring out a new policy decision. Media while discharging its duty wholeheartedly highlights the lacunae in the existing policies and decisions, loopholes in the ongoing schemes and also suggests mechanisms to beat them. Putting rational restrictions on media shall not amount to clipping their wings but shall assure another necessity for establishing good governance. The present paper highlights the relationship of media and democracy in its various dimensions. An effort has been made to analyze the role of media as powerful pillar of democracy and thereby to put out different concerns and issues involved in it. Given this conceptual relationship it is worthwhile to start by posing the two problems: what is media and what is democracy?

2.0 Media in 21st Century

Media plays very crucial role in awakening and enlightening people not only by educating them but also by creating their own opinions. These opinions of citizens acts as a raw material for policy makers and therefore through this

activity media acts as a bridge between citizens and policy makers. Today in the 21st century, Media has taken various forms and these are Print media like magazines, newspapers and electronic media like internet, radio, face book, YouTube, mobile phones, social networking sites etc hence, the face of media has been changing drastically with the growth of internet and the development of satellite and cable networks. In the age of information technology we are bombarded with information. We get the pulse of the world events with just a click of a mouse. Media by felicitating debates on the various current issues has promoted the very concept of 'People Participation' which is the key requirement of every democracy.

Five features of Media have been identified by Cambridge University's John Thompson.

- Comprises both technical and institutional methods of production and distribution: This is evident throughout the history of the media, from print to the Internet, each suitable for commercial utility.
- Commodification of symbolic form: as the production of materials relies on its ability to manufacture and sell large quantities of the work. Just as radio stations rely on its time sold to advertisements, newspapers rely for the same reasons on its space.
- Separate contexts between the production and reception of information
- Reach to those far removed' in time and space, in comparison to the producer.
- Information distribution.

This is a "one to many" form of communication, whereby products are mass produced and disseminated to a great quantity of audiences.

Media keeps a check and balance system on government by highlighting its corrupt practices, wrong doings and hidden deals. Media has also a very crucial role to play in bringing communal harmony and fellowship among citizens.

3.0 Democracy

Democracy or democratic government is a form of government in which the people or citizens of a country have the liberty to choose their leaders and get involved in governance. Mahatma Gandhi has said "I understand democracy as something that gives the weak the same chance as the strong". Unlike a monarchy or oligarchy wherein an individual has absolute power or a small group of persons have the power, a democracy is a government for and by the people. It always open to ideas and views. The Preamble to our constitution says, "We the people of India, having solemnly resolved to constitute India into a Sovereign Democratic Republic " It has been further said in the preamble itself that Indian democracy will secure to all its citizens social, economic and political justice, liberty of thought, expression, belief and faith and equality of status and opportunity.

4.0 Objectives of Study

- ❖ To study the relationship between Media and Democracy.
- ❖ To define the role of media in protecting citizen interest.
- ❖ To identify various ways through which media enhances the direct relationship between people and government.
- ❖ To state that how media can help the government to work in an effective and efficient manner.
- ❖ To find out the various issues of media which downside the democracy.

5.0 Media in Nation-Building

Media is a backbone of nation which impacts the daily lives of citizens it connects the whole population in single thread. Media eliminates the distance factor and helps the government in implementing its various schemes and programmes. Media perform a watch dog role not only over executive but on all the three pillars of democracy i.e. legislature, executive and judiciary. Various governmental steps taken to uplift the deprived section of society have been brought to the forefront of citizens by media to empower them and inform them about their rights. One of the great achievements of India is our free and vibrant press. This is an accomplishment of direct relevance to the working of democracy. Authoritarianism flourishes not only by stifling opposition, but also by systematically suppressing information. The survival and flowering of Indian democracy owes a great deal to the freedom and vigour of our press.

5.1 Media As Intermediation Between Citizen and Government: For a proper functioning of democracy it is essential that citizens are kept informed about news from various parts of the country and even abroad, because

only then can they form rational opinions. A citizen surely cannot be expected personally to gather news to enable him or her to form such opinions. Hence, the media play an important role in a democracy and serve as an agency of the people to gather news for them. It is for this reason that freedom of the press has been emphasised in all democratic countries, while it was not permitted in feudal or totalitarian regimes. Media makes a direct link between people and government thus acting as a medium to convey problems of citizens to people and policies of government in return to citizens. Programmes like ‘*aap ki adalat*’, ‘*mann ki baat*’ and ‘*satya mev jayate*’ has proved this mediation role of mass media very well. Media highlights diverse issues which attracts reaction of the governance authorities on a positive note.

5.2 Media Promoting People Participation : Media strengthens people participation in policy formulation, execution and valuation. Media influences people at all levels from the grass roots to the decision makers. Involving people in decision making makes the government transparent and accountable also. Strengthening accountability of government and public institutions to ensure that powers given to them are not exploited can be checked by media by enhancing the role of people by informing them about the events.

5.3 Media and Globalization : Media is a buzzword all over the world the various new ways of technology has allows people to express their opinion and ideas. After the LPG policy of 1991 various private stakeholders had entered the mass communication market which further leads to competition among them. The growth of social networking sites and blogs has made the domain of media more interactive and feedback oriented.

5.4 Downsides of Media The socio economic problems like poverty, dowry, corruption, discrimination and communalism can be brought to the forefront by media. But sometimes the Political biasness among journalists strongly affects their reporting and covering of trivial and unimportant issues makes them irrelevant for the audience. The occurrence of negligent reporting, no legitimate well-researched news, paid news reporting and over emphasis on trivial issues downside the very purpose of media. These evils in media have a very bad impact on the minds of people. Just to make their channel’s high TRP ratings the quality of media content is compromised. Especially on the private news channels repetition of false and eye catching headlines decline the trust of people on media.

- Freedom of press: Instances like in the case of NDTV shutdown for reporting during Pathankot attack, weak whistle –blower protection act, defamation suits etc have restricted the freedom of press.
- Paid News, a nexus between media persons and politicians seems to have taken firm roots in India.
- The Election Commission is reported to have identified more than 1,400 cases of paid news between 2009 and 2013.
- Biasness of reporters, editors etc have dented the image of news channels and newspapers.
- Corporate and political lobbying and ownership
- Yellow journalism: Unnecessary sensationalisation of issues to fetch TRP meddles with the real content of news.
- Advent of social media; Competition for instant and quick news and reporting without first checking the facts.
- Media trials: Often media declares the verdict immediately after an allegation. This is contempt of court and also violates right to reputation of an accused who later gets evicted.
- The media often diverts the attention of the people from the real issues to non issues. The real issues in India are socio-economic, the terrible poverty in which 80% of our people are living, the massive unemployment, the price rise, lack of medical care, education, and backward social practices like honour killing and caste oppression and religious fundamentalism etc. Instead of devoting most of its coverage to these issues the media focuses on non issues like film stars and their lives, fashion parades, pop music, disco dancing, astrology, cricket, reality shows, etc.
- The media coverage of the education field concentrates (if at all) on the elite colleges like the I.I.Ts, but there is very little coverage of the plight of the tens of thousands of primary schools, particularly in rural areas where education begins.
- The media promotes superstitions, in this transitional age, the media should help our people to move forward into the modern, scientific age. For this purpose the media should propagate rational and scientific ideas, but instead of doing so a large section of our media propagates superstitions of various kinds.

6.0 Conclusion

The Indian media must now introspect and develop a sense of responsibility and maturity. That does not mean that it cannot be reformed. The belief is that 80 per cent people who are doing wrong things can be made good people by patient persuasion, pointing out their errors, and gently leading them to the honourable path which the print media in various other countries in the Age of Enlightenment was following. Also the Big section of the society in India are backward and underprivileged, so it is necessary that contemporary ideas are brought to them and their backwardness removed so that they become part of progressive India. The liberated and courageous media can play a active role here. In a developing country like India the media have a great responsibility to fight against backward ideas like casteism and communalism, and other social evils. Thus, the role of media allows the expansion of a strong democratic state, in that way allowing for healthy societal progress in the country. The media also exposes loopholes in the democratic system, which ultimately helps government in filling the vacuums of loopholes and making a system more accountable, responsive and citizen-friendly. A democracy without media is like a vehicle without wheels.

In the words of Dr. A.P.J. Abdul Kalam (Former President of India) "It is important for the media to be a partner in national missions. They should highlight the positive aspects and provide solutions to difficult aspects through nationwide consultations. This will certainly make a difference in the implementation of the programme and bring smiles to the faces of our billion people".

7.0 References

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