



## **MEDIA AND DEMOCRACY- A CRUCIAL RELATIONSHIP**

**DR. ANURADHA NAGIA**

Assistant Professor in Political Science  
KVA DAV College for Women, Karnal

### **Introduction**

#### **Democracy**

A system of government in which all the people of a country choose and elect their representatives' is called Democracy. Putting famously in the words of Abraham Lincoln, democracy is the government of the people, by the people and for the people, wherein the power is exercised by the government to provide protection to civil rights. 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. The term 'Democracy' has always attracted much debate in socio-political context. The relativity of the concept of democracy arising out of its relation with the society it descends from, the socio-cultural settings of the territory, the kind of economic and political environment that the state patronages has given rise to vivid typology of democracy, including both classical and modern concepts. 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-fulfilment of citizens and to help ensure participation of citizens in a democracy. Reliable information resources are an important constituent of any democratic society. This is where media steps in. A list of the core characteristics of democracy includes people's sovereignty, rule of law, social and political equality, elected government by means of universal adult franchise, free and open competition for political positions and institutions, periodic elections for legitimizing government, fundamental rights and civil liberties, multi-party system, independent judiciary and free media.

#### **Media**

Mass media in its different forms have influenced human life in the present century. They have primarily provided information and entertainment to people across countries. Print media, being the leader over a considerable period of time has now got competition from Television, which is reshaping many of the social responses. Radio apart from providing news and views has also developed a flair for entertainment, thereby getting a lot of acceptance. There is also the new media with internet being its flag bearer. Internet has indeed made it possible to disseminate information and ideas in real time across the globe.

#### **Background of Media in India**

During the British rule, the role of media was quite different. In the name of security of the State, in the 20th century people were deprived of the basic information and transparency in the process of governance was a distant dream. The print media during the freedom struggle of India played a foremost role and got a confidence booster. It is well known fact that most of the freedom fighters were well familiar with journalistic knowledge and many of them were said to be journalists. Media largely influenced the India's freedom movement. Subsequently after India's



independence, the responsibility and role of the media was improved but during the period of emergency (1975) the activities of media were strongly controlled. Even strict orders were issued against the media houses and media independence was completely crushed. However, the role of media during the post emergency period strengthened again as well as it came much closer to the hearts of the common people. The political, social, economic and cultural areas of India were reflected in the newspapers which eventually paved the way for strengthening the democracy and the government of the people of India. Now-a-days, besides the print media, the electronic media, particularly, the television programs and internet brought revolutionary changes in the pitch of news broadcasting and scrutiny.

### **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 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”. Hence in Indian constitution the right to press was inserted in freedom of speech and expression i.e., 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.

### **Media and Indian Democracy**

The role of media in India, the largest democracy of the world is different from merely disseminating information and entertainment. Educating the masses for their social upliftment needs to be in its ambit as well. In a country where there is large scale poverty, unemployment and underdevelopment media has a responsibility towards developmental journalism. It has a role to play behind formation of public opinion which can force the political parties to address the core issues haunting the country's progress. However, public opinion can be manipulated by vested interests to serve their own goals. Media can conceal facts and project doctored ideas to influence the electorate and thereby the voting outcome. Values like objectivity and truthfulness in presentation of news and ideas can be totally done away with. In India public service broadcasting was given much importance after independence. It was used as a weapon of social change. AIR (All India Radio) and Doordarshan, the public service broadcasters in the country had the responsibility of providing educational programs apart from information and entertainment. However, it needs to be taken note of that the public service broadcasting system in the country was closely identified with the state.

A monopolistic media structure under state control has the threat of becoming the mouthpiece of the ruling elite. The scenario was bound to change with the opening up of Indian economy in a bid



to integrate with the global system. It signalled the emergence of a competitive market in the field of media with public service broadcasters getting challenges from private entities. This, however, had the seeds of a new problem of ownership. Ownership pattern of media across the globe and in India is a cause for concern. There are big corporate houses with their own newspapers and television networks. A higher concentration of ownership increases the risk of captured media. Media independence in such a scenario gives way to safeguarding the interest of the owners who may not serve social responsibilities. The space for plurality of ideas is eroded sending ominous signals for democracy.

The growth of media conglomerates and their powerful presence has raised fears of manipulation of ideas by a powerful few detrimental to the democratic fabric. The corporate giants have also engaged in severe competition among themselves dishing out news and content which is primarily dominated by sensationalization, sleaze and glitz to capture wider markets. The disturbing trend that has emerged in the present media scenario is the use of media in the battle between rival political groups. In fact, this new phenomenon is in operation in India with newspapers and news channels taking sides while presenting facts. The same event can be presented in two contrasting manners in two newspapers or two television channels. Coronel (2003) argues that promotion of hate speech in place of constructive debate and creating an atmosphere of suspicion rather than social trust has the danger of making people cynic about the democratic setup leading to its breakdown. While discussing the dangers associated with the developments in media it needs to be said that media in India has also undertaken roles which have strengthened democracy.

The media as a watchdog of the democratic system has unearthed its various shortcomings. Investigative reporting in print and television media has helped in exposing large scale corruptions which have robbed the nation. The Commonwealth Games Scam (2010), Tehelka's defense deal and match fixing scandal (1999 and 2001), the Adarsh Housing Society Scam (2011), Cash for Vote Scam (2008, 2015) and the Bofors Scam (1987) are the highpoints of the Indian media. Across newspapers and television channels voices have been raised when the bureaucracy, judiciary or other public functionary have crossed the laxman rekha. There have also been initiatives to promote community media for the citizens to air their concerns. This is a significant leap towards alternative media usage which is distant from the dominant structure. Here the importance lies more in participatory communication right from the grassroots rather than communication which flows top down. Various television channels have also given the space for ordinary citizens to air their views in the form of citizen journalists thereby promoting democratic participation. Newspapers have educated the masses by informing them of the developments in the field of science and technology. They have also expressed strong views against prejudices which harm the society. Much developmental news has also been aired through the medium of radio. Its comparative low cost and wide acceptance among poorer sections have made it a potent tool for expressing ideas beneficial to the public. Internet, a relatively newer entrant in the field of mass media, has proved to be more democratic than newspaper and television. Internet has provided the opportunity for citizens who are conversant with the medium to express their views about a number of issues.

In many cases groups have been formed by like-minded people who discuss and debate over a number of decisions on the part of the government and seek new ideas for way ahead. The power



of the internet can be easily judged from the developments in Egypt in recent times. Social networking sites like Facebook and Twitter were used to garner support against the regime of President Hosni Mubarak. Internet has been used by various public service organizations and N.G.Os to inform people about their objectives and also to make them aware of various initiatives on the part of the government as well as non-government organisations for social upliftment. In internet the barrier to communication is minimal which helps in the formation of a participative environment. There is also greater empowerment of the users through higher level of interactivity and flexibility in choice of media outlets. The potential of the medium lies in its ability to be more personalized by offering user-created content. Nevertheless, there is the threat of advertising revenues influencing media outputs. Those who control considerable wealth have the opportunity to sway public opinion in their favour with the help of mass media. In the 2G scam (2012) the Radia Tapes (2010) controversy brought in focus the journalist, politician and industrial conglomerate nexus (Jebaraj, 2010). Developments like these are a threat to democracy and undermine the media fraternity. Advertisements in newspapers, television, radio and at times the internet have become a part of the present election campaigns. Candidates with better funds have the edge over others in being voted to office because they can buy newspaper space and considerable air time.

### **Findings**

- The media works as a watchdog of the government and carry every report of the action of administration thereby keeping the people informed about the day to day happenings taking place around them.
- The media is considered as fourth pillar of democracy. It makes us aware of various activities like politics, sports, economic social and cultural activities etc. It is also like a mirror which shows the bare truth and sometimes it may be harsh.
- The media also exposes loopholes in the democratic society, which ultimately helps government in filling the vacuums of loopholes and making a system more accountable, responsive and democratic friendly. Thus the democracy without media is like a vehicle without wheels.
- Media acts as a bridge between the people and the government and also a very powerful tool with the ability to make and break the opinion of the people. It has the capacity to swing perceptions or evoke emotions. This is why it has gained faith of the public. Media, through its various means of newspapers, television and cinema is what rules the heart and mind of people.
- The media has helped to shape the democratic society by giving emphasis to issues that are at one point in time, would have been considered strictly private such as child birth, child care, domestic violence, and sexual harassment.
- Media in exercise of freedom of expression is essential to communicate the thoughts, views, ideas, philosophy, ideals and activities. Communication keeps society together and cohabitate. For healthy growth of civilization world, the free flow of information and ideas is essential.



- Modern Methods of interpersonal Media communication include seminars dramas, public meeting and workshops etc. these are effective media methods to address small and medium gatherings, which can be used as grounds for advocating the Human Rights and building public opinion.
- Media technology has got a crucial role in everyone's life today. Media has got a great job of bringing social change in whatever the topic covers from entertainment to all the on-going issues. Currently there exists revolution in fighting against corruption in the country. People started realizing the corruption is the element to be eradicated. Internet and social networking sites like Face book and Twitter, along with traditional media like print and electronic are powerful weapons that curb the menace of corruption and lead to greater transparency in public life by policing India's situation vis-a-vis economic and governance, highlighting ongoing corruption cases and applying pressure on corrupt organization and individuals. The free distribution and wide reach of the internet and social media channels is critical in the fight to reduce corruption and renew the social fabric. This can give rise to virtuous cycle of transparent policy making, clean government and faster economic growth.
- Media today 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. Awareness 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 labour 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 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.

### **Conclusion**

In Indian democracy media has a responsibility which is deeply associated with the socio economic conditions. The present scenario is not quite encouraging and certain areas need to be addressed. Media organisations, whether in print, audio visual, radio or web have to be more accountable to the general public? It should be monitored that professional integrity and ethical standards are not sacrificed for sensational practices. The freedom of press in the country is a blessing for the people. However, this blessing can go terribly wrong when manipulations set in. The self-regulatory mechanism across media organisations need to be strong enough to stop anomalies whenever they occur. Agencies like Press Council of India need to be vigilant to stem the root. Big media conglomerates are a serious threat. To counter this problem, pluralistic media organisations which are financially viable need to be encouraged. Community participation is a goal that the media should strive for in a country like India.



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