

RESPONSIBILITY OF MEDIA IN A DEMOCRACY

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Underlying principle of democracy is freedom i.e. freedom of speech and expression, freedom of movement etc. From these fundamental freedoms arise the freedom of mass media and communication. Democracy provides ample freedom for mass media which includes print and electronic media and now a new dimension which is added is that of internet. India is one of the largest participatory democracy and at the same time having a powerful mass media. Media plays a crucial role in effective working of democracy. It is the sole means through which public opinion is generated. It is regarded as fourth estate in the effective working of parliamentary democracy. Since media enjoys considerable power, there of course arises the question of responsibility because every power has its corresponding- responsibilities, limitations and accountability. As Sir Acton has rightly said that power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely. Especially in a democracy where media enjoys sufficient freedom, responsibility become- all most important.

India has a representative form of democracy where people vote for their respective candidates to the positions of power and representatives are accountable to their electorates. Government machinery had to work in a non-partisan, transparent, and accountable manner. So media plays two-fold role, first as an opinion maker to allow individual voters to make an informed choice for the candidates and secondly keep a continuous vigil on the working of the government. Similarly it provides important platform for common man to put forth his demands, needs and aspiration to the government for their fulfillment. It is media which makes democracy dynamic and vibrant. It acts as an important forum for interaction between state and the people at large.

It plays an important role to uphold the principles of sovereignty, secularism, equality, rule of law, justice which are enshrined in our constitution. Important issues of local, national and international affairs are discussed and debated by the media. It provides information of multi various types be it news, reviews, literature, art, culture, business, films, entertainment,

religion, law, society etc. We are living in globalised world where key to know the world is information and information, not just generated within the country but anywhere in the world, with the emergence of knowledge based societies and world economies being so interlinked with one another any event happening in one part can have impact on the world's economy hence a greater dependence on mass media to keep individual and countries connected to the world.

Thomas Friedman in his book 'The World is Flat' opines that in a flat world key to success lies in the fact how well a country is part of global supply chains. Last decade has seen enormous growth of mass media. India has one of the largest number of newspapers, magazines and journals published in the world and also the largest number of readers. The growth both print and electronic media is drastic especially the new culture of 24 hours new- channels which has completely changed the way the news are presented, reviewed and received. There are two important issues that lie at core of responsibility one which issues are to be raised, discussed and given priority and second how these issues need to be presented. Last few years have shown how wrong journalism can go and how great a role they can play. These are two contradictory things but at the same time true. It is generally said there is nothing called good journalism. Well this is one extreme yet the rise of paparazzi and to extreme they can go to kill the privacy of an individual stands testimony to this.

Indian media shows a mosaic picture. Many of the issues discussed and shown on the news channel are not only irrelevant but are blown out of proportion. With emphasis on unnecessary issues, real issues generally gets buried. News channels are generally driven by TRP's rather than issues. They try to scandalise the issue to generate public curiosity. Instead of breaking news they are actually making news and then breaking it. The channels trivialise the issue and set bad precedence. It makes icons out of Rakhi Sawant and the likes. One of the channel shows regularly story of 'Bhoot' coming to village which

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reinforces supersition

among people. Media is now being used by people to get instant attention from the public. Controversies are created every morning demolished the same evening just to make a new controversy next day. Under this whole hue and cry the real issues take back scat. Same is.

the case with the print media many of the newspapers carry the most irrelevant news on their front page. Yellow journalism has become the order of day. This has given rise to new culture of Page3 journalism which exclusively covers the elite parties and thoroughly discuss them the next day., Media houses generally absolves of their responsibility by saying that

they show what people want. But actually it is the media that first set the trends create demands and people fell prey to it. A line need to be drawn some where.

Well there is other side of the coin. There are few responsible news channels and newspapers, how so ever, their numbers are limited. They do. reflect what is called as meaningful journalism. They cover issues of public importance generating awareness among people at the same time bringing to states's notice various issues of concern. Journalism can play important role I to curb social evils and find solutions to problems. Many newspapers ignore. issues pertaining to rural India like poverty, lack of education, health services etc. Covering such issues can bring fundamental change as this would bring fourth common. concern not from government machinery but from citizens of civil society at large. There are stories of some news channel where their effective intervention into a issue has brought government machinery to act. The recent initiative by a news channel in Jessica Lal murder case actually made the

court to reseek the issue and change the decision. Similarly issues concerning needs of common citizens like bad infrastructure, corruption, government apathy can be brought to light by the media. Media has also created greater concern among citizens on' issues concerning justice, human rights violation, social evils etc.

Working of democracy lies on the premise of electing representatives and how free and fair these elections are. Come elections media frenzy grabs the whole country. Media coverage have brought greater awareness among people about the respective candidates from their constituency. Earlier municipal/district elections went just unnoticed but now due to local newspapers and local news channels it generates lot of public participation. Another dimension that is added to media is the internet though it is not as far reaching as the other ones yet it has emerged as new platform especially in the globalised world. The novel idea of blogs and websites like 'You Tube' which provides freedom to individual to upload video clippings, news etc or to start forms to debate on. any issue has brought greater power in the hands of an individual to share and present their views on global forum. Yet this unfettered power sometimes create malaise and hurt public sentiments.

There is very subtle line that decides what is good or bad, moral/immoral. Yet these are questions which are very crucial to journalism. Freedom of press does not connote that they can do anything in the name of freedom. This may have serious implications for the society and nation at large. It is said that during riots the fire may just occurs once but on news channels it occurs for 24 hrs. It is said that cure for evils of democracy is more democracy similarly cure for evils of media is not to curb its freedom but to make it more responsible.