

Role of Print Media at Present Political Situation - A Case Study of Shimoga District

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Abstract

Indian Media consist of several different types of communications: television, radio, cinema, newspapers, magazines, and Internet-based Web sites/portals. Indian media was active since the late 18th century with print media started in 1780, radio broadcasting initiated in 1927, and the screening of Auguste and Louis Lumière moving pictures in Bombay initiated during the July of 1895. It is among the oldest and largest media of the world. Media in India has been free and independent throughout most of its history, even before establishment of Indian empire by Ashoka the Great on the foundation of righteousness, openness, morality and spirituality.

The period of emergency (1975–1977), declared by Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, was the brief period when India's media was faced with potential government retribution. The country consumed 99 million newspaper copies as of 2007 - making it the second largest market in the world for newspapers. By 2009, India had a total of 81,000,000 Internet users - comprising 7.0% of the country's population, and 7,570,000 people in India also had access to broadband Internet as of 2010 - making it the 11th largest country in the world in terms of broadband Internet users.

The Indian laws do not restrict political ownership in television or print media with the exception of radio, where political parties or members thereof are disqualified from applying for a license to operate a radio station. However, radio is barred from broadcasting independent news. There is no mandatory requirement to disclose political affiliations of the owners or of their family members. Vasudeva Bhupalam, a revolutionary thinker from a prominent Vysya family in Shimoga (Baniya family) shook the entire state in the mid 20th century by writing a book ' Devaru Satta ', an atheist treatise (meaning God is dead). He is still remembered for his fearlessness, extremely strong views on religion and eccentric nature. He led a lonely life fearing for his life every day at a huge mansion on Lavelle road in Bangalore before he died many years ago. Right wing Hindu zealots had issued death threat to him for 'killing' the god even then. Ironically his nephew is now a top leader of the state BJP. Many hard core Congress people with strong socialist roots have now joined BJP for power and money. Nobody talks about socialism now. Only money talks or the talk is all about money.

Key words: print media, Shimoga district, political parties, planning, free and independent media.

Introduction

As of 2009, India is among the 4th largest television broadcast stations in the world with nearly 1,400 stations. Snapshot of evolution of media in India is as below: Mass media in India - Bengal: The Bengal Gazette was started by

James Augustus Hicky in 1780. The Gazette, a two-sheet newspaper, specialised in writing on the private lives of the Sahibs of the Company. He dared even to mount scurrillious attacks on the Governor-General, Warren Hastings', wife, which soon landed "the late printer to the Honourable Company" in trouble. Hicky was sentenced to a 4 months jail term and Rs.500 fine, which did not deter him. After a bitter attack on the Governor-General and the Chief Justice, Hicky was sentenced to one year in prison and fined Rs.5,000, which finally drove him to penury. These were the first tentative steps of journalism in India. Mass media in India - Calcutta: B. Messink and Peter Reed were pliant publishers of the India Gazette, unlike their infamous predecessor. The colonial establishment started the Calcutta Gazette. It was followed by another private initiative the Bengal Journal. The Oriental Magazine of Calcutta Amusement, a monthly magazine made it four weekly newspapers and one monthly magazine published from Calcutta, now Kolkata. Mass media in India - Madras Chennai: The Madras Courier was started in 1785 in the southern stronghold of Madras, which is now called Chennai. Richard Johnson, its founder, was a government printer. Madras got its second newspaper when, in 1791, Hugh Boyd, who was the editor of the Courier quit and founded the Hurkaru. Tragically for the paper, it ceased publication when Boyd passed away within a year of its founding. It was only in 1795 that competitors to the Courier emerged with the founding of the Madras Gazette followed by the India Herald. The latter was an "unauthorised" publication, which led to the deportation of its founder Humphreys. The Madras Courier was designated the purveyor of official information in the Presidency. In 1878, The Hindu was founded, and played a vital role in promoting the cause of Indian independence from the colonial yoke. It's founder, Kasturi Ranga Iyengar, was a lawyer, and his son, K Srinivasan assumed editorship of this pioneering newspaper during for the first half of the 20th century.

Today this paper enjoys the highest circulation in South India, and is among the top five nationally. Mass media in India - Bombay: Bombay, now Mumbai, surprisingly was a late starter - The Bombay Herald came into existence in 1789. Significantly, a year later a paper called the Courier started carrying advertisements in Gujarati. The first media merger of sorts: The Bombay Gazette, which was started in 1791, merged with the Bombay Herald the following year. Like the Madras Courier, this new entity was recognised as the publication to carry "official notifications and advertisements". 'A Chronicle of Media and the State', by Jeebesh Bagchi in the Sarai Reader 2001 is a handy timeline on the role of the state in the development of media in India for more than a century. Bagchi divides the timeline into three 'ages'. The Age of Formulation, which starts with the Indian Telegraph Act in 1885 and ends with the Report of the Sub-Committee on Communication, National Planning Committee in 1948. State of Modern Mass Media: After Independence, the Indian media had evolved, realigned and reinvented itself to a large extent, and now-a-days you can see a clear division between commercial and aesthetic expressions of our Media Giants, sometimes arbitrary. Modern mass communication media is poles apart relative to any aesthetic feeling: vulgarity and arrogance nullify any hypothesis of meaning.

Aesthetics is the more powerful answer to violence of modern mass communication. Today's mass communication media seems to elude every determination, exposing its message to all possible variants, it finishes to abolish it. Goal of mass communication is always the unbiased dissipation of any content, and the world wide web is no exception, and surely is the most efficient media tool. It's also very interesting to observe how the old media are becoming more and more permeable to blogs and D.I.Y. information. This phenomenon is not due to a fascination in more democratic information sources. On the contrary - the pressure is rising due to the growth of the eyes' (cameras and new digital

devices) that are watching the same events that mainstream media are reporting to us: the possibility of being uncovered are too many and broadcast journalists are forced to tell the truth (or at least a plausible version of it). As a consequence, blogs have become the major source of news and information about many global affairs. We also have to consider that bloggers are often the only real journalists, as they (at their own risk) provide independent news in countries where the mainstream media is censored, biased or under control.

Objective:

This paper intends to study the role of print media in the present political context and its long term implications with Shimoga district as focal point.

Power of print media in shaping the political narrative

India's vibrant media are the freest in South Asia, but journalists, particularly those in rural areas and certain conflict-racked states, faced a number of challenges in 2012, including legal actions, occasional violence, and the expansion of internet censorship. The constitution provides for freedoms of speech and expression, subject to some legal limitations, though these rights are not consistently upheld. The 1923 Official Secrets Act gives authorities the power to censor security-related articles and prosecute members of the press. State and national authorities, along with the courts, have on occasion used other security laws, sedition statutes, criminal defamation legislation, bans on blasphemy and hate speech, and contempt-of-court charges to curb sensitive reporting. Two journalists who were arrested in 2011 and charged under the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA) and the sedition law—Sudhir Dhawale of the Marathi-language monthly *Vidrohi* and freelance journalist Lingaram Kodopi—remained in custody in 2012. In November, Naveen Soorinje, a reporter for a local-language television news channel, was arrested and charged with participating in an attack on women by a right-wing Hindu group in Karnataka State, although he had merely filmed the assault. He remained in jail at year's end after repeated requests for bail were denied. Legal restrictions on internet content have been increasing. The 2008 Information Technology (IT) Act gives the Ministry of Communications and Information Technology the authority to block material that endangers public order or national security. The law also enables the prosecution of cybercafés, search engines, and internet service providers (ISPs). In 2011, the government introduced rules under the IT Act that would compel companies to remove objectionable content within 36 hours of receiving an official notice and oblige cybercafés to install surveillance cameras and submit records of their users' online activity to the government. A lawsuit filed in 2012 against several global internet companies with the government's approval would penalize the firms for failing to remove content deemed offensive and likely to incite religious conflict; the case was still pending at year's end. In the meantime, official content-removal requests dramatically increased during the year.

In September, freelance cartoonist Aseem Trivedi was arrested and charged with sedition for publishing cartoons on his website that ostensibly mocked national symbols and criticized corruption, prompting government ministers to initiate a review of the sedition law. While the sedition charge was eventually dropped, other charges against Trivedi were still pending. Implementation of the landmark Right to Information (RTI) Act of 2005 has been mixed, with the majority of requests blocked due to the law's broad categorical restrictions on the release of information. The RTI

Act's success has also been hindered by an overall lack of awareness of the rights it guarantees, a large backlog of appeals and requests, and widespread inefficiency within state and local governing bodies. In July 2012, the government issued new RTI rules, imposing a word limit on requests and making appeals more cumbersome. In September, the Supreme Court ruled that all chief information commissioners should be retired judges, raising concerns among activists that the change would cause additional delays in adjudicating RTI requests. While some state governments are making an effort to disseminate information about the law, especially in rural and isolated areas, others are employing various means to make requests more onerous. A number of activists who have attempted to use the RTI Act to uncover abuses, particularly official corruption, have been killed in recent years.

Various media agencies and political outfits

The Press Council of India (PCI), an independent self-regulatory body for the print media that is composed of journalists, publishers, and politicians, investigates complaints of misconduct or irresponsible reporting, but does not have punitive powers. The regulatory framework for the rapidly expanding broadcast sector does not at present feature an independent agency that is free from political influence. The News Broadcasters' Association, an industry body that primarily represents the television sector, issued a new set of self-regulatory guidelines in February 2009, covering topics including crime, violence, and national security. The move was part of a bid to forestall official regulation of news coverage in the wake of the 2008 Mumbai terrorist attacks, including proposals by the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting (MIB) to increase controls on television news feeds in times of crisis. Media critics continued to call for greater regulatory curbs on unethical journalism in 2012. While access to the profession of journalism is open, an accreditation mechanism for online journalists has not yet been developed. Media industry groups and local press freedom advocacy organizations remain fairly weak. Despite increasing diversity in the print and online media landscapes, outlets have difficulty accessing official information, and some self-censor to avoid losing state government advertising, which is a key source of revenue. Foreign journalists occasionally have trouble obtaining visas to report from within the country, particularly if their prior reporting has been critical.

Physical intimidation of journalists by a variety of actors continued to be a problem in 2012, and media offices were also targeted during the year. Journalists were attacked, threatened, abducted, or detained by police, political activists, right-wing groups, insurgents, local officials, or criminals. Four journalists were killed in 2012, according to the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), although in two of the cases it remained unclear whether the crimes were motivated by the reporters' work. Two of the victims were beaten to death in Madhya Pradesh in February and March, a third died after opening a parcel bomb in West Bengal in September, and the fourth was killed by police while covering protests in Imphal, the capital of Manipur State, in December. In July, Tongam Rina, a journalist with the Arunachal Times, narrowly survived a shooting attack. The paper's offices and staff were also attacked by unidentified men in March, April, and September.

Media and its social responsibility

A prevailing climate of impunity encourages such violence, with many past murders remaining unsolved, according to CPJ. Members of the press are particularly vulnerable in rural areas and insurgency-racked states such as

Chhattisgarh, Jammu and Kashmir, Assam, and Manipur, where reporters face pressure from both the government and insurgents.

Those suspected of Maoist or other insurgent sympathies were sometimes threatened with sedition charges or detained by the authorities in 2012, while others were pressured to reveal their sources for sensitive stories or were blocked from covering the news. Kashmiri journalists continued to encounter physical harassment and verbal suggestions or written directives from the government or militant groups to slant coverage a certain way. India is one of the few countries in the world where print media remain a vibrant and financially sustainable growth industry, and there are rising numbers of print and broadcast outlets that cater to national or various regional or linguistic audiences. Most print outlets, particularly in the national and English-language press, are privately owned, provide diverse coverage, and frequently scrutinize the government. The low cost of newspapers—which are sold at prices far below the cost of production—ensures wider access to print media than in most low-income countries.

Shimoga political crucible catalyzed by media

Shimoga is one of the most beautiful districts in India. The gigantic Western Ghats have covered most part of the district. It is known as 'Gateway of Malnad'. In Kannada Malnad means hilly region. Agumbe, India's second most wettest place is also in Shimoga. For that matter Shimoga is one of rainiest places on the earth. The last Monsoon ended only in the first week of December! Its virgin forests have 50% of World species. UNESCO is planning to declare its forests as 'World Heritage natural sites'. About 300km away from state capital Bangalore take you to Shimoga town by the river Thunga. Yeddyurappa is now building an airport at Shimoga. The real Shimogaites concerned about the non-stop exploitation of its resources, lament that the land sharks now fly into Shimoga with their bottomless suitcases containing cash! Shimoga's neighbouring district Chikmagalur (known as Coffee bowl of India) is a hot tourist destination. But, the organised tourism is yet to take off in Shimoga due to lack of basic amenities and places to stay. Some say it is a blessing in disguise and Shimoga should not become another Chikmagalur or Kodagu. Because original Shimoga people consider themselves intellectually much superior to the rest and abhor the thought of their precious place being turned into yet another tourist destination. The place has managed to retain some of its old characters. Theatre is vibrant and doing well. Local newspapers and magazines devote a lot of space to art and literature. Young and old alike furiously discuss Shakespeare to Milton, Thomas Hardy to D H Lawrence, Tolstoy to Gorky, Satyajit Ray to Akira Kurosawa, M F Husain to Van Gogh at seminars and symposiums. People still take pride in the fact that they belong to a place like Shimoga. Besides, there are a number of other weeklies and dailies that are being published in the state in many languages. Some have lived longer and others have perished soon.

The broadcast media are predominantly in private hands, and diversity in the television sector has expanded exponentially. More than 800 television channels are in operation, with a significant proportion focused on news and current events. India's state-controlled television station, Doordarshan, has been accused of manipulating the news to favor the government, and some private satellite television channels provide coverage that reflects the political affiliations of their owners, according to the U.S. State Department. The state retains a monopoly on AM radio broadcasting, and private FM radio stations are not allowed to air news content. Under a 2006 policy that provided guidelines for the ownership and operation of community radio stations by civil society groups, there has been a

modest increase in such stations, leading to a greater diversity of coverage. As of late 2012, the MIB reported that more than 140 community stations were functioning, while several hundred applications were still being processed. There are no restrictions on cross-ownership or vertical integration of media, and growing consolidation and corporatization in the industry has resulted in potential threats to editorial independence and plurality. In 2012, a number of complex mergers, including plans for the Reliance industrial conglomerate to fund a major acquisition by the Network 18 media group, prompted the MIB to initiate a review of the cross-ownership issue. Access to foreign media, with the exception of some outlets based in Pakistan, is generally unrestricted. However, authorities sometimes block distribution of certain foreign print editions due to content such as maps of the disputed Kashmir region. In recent years, intelligence agencies have also objected to broadcasts from neighboring countries that contain “anti-India” content, and the government has attempted to block service providers from carrying them and increase the penalties for doing so. Some impediments to production and distribution of domestic media, such as blockades of newspapers or official instructions not to carry certain cable channels, also occasionally arise. The placement or withdrawal of advertisements is used by both the national and state-level governments to reward favored news outlets or punish those that produce critical stories.

Challenges to neutral media

Bribery is also a major concern, as is the erosion of barriers between the editorial and advertising departments at many outlets, sometimes through the use of “private treaties” with major companies. Despite investigations by India’s election commissioner and the PCI, the practice of “cash for coverage”—in which payments are made to secure favorable news coverage for candidates and parties, particularly during election cycles—remains deeply entrenched. The internet was accessed by about 13 percent of the population in 2012. Mobile telephones are increasingly being used as a means of gathering and disseminating news and information, particularly in rural communities and areas with high rates of illiteracy. However, the government retains the power to obstruct online communications. In August 2012, the government blocked several hundred websites and social-media accounts and temporarily restricted mobile-phone text messaging, ostensibly to combat serious outbreaks of communal violence in several states. In September, the government temporarily blocked some internet services and telecommunications in response to protests in Kashmir. Apart from the direct ownership, advertising can present another form of potential control over editorial content since more and more media show greater dependence on advertisement revenues.

Therefore, it is probably fair to say that Indian media, these days, is rather profit than conviction driven. This dependency becomes highly problematic, when media houses earn additional money through carrying, in particular, government advertisements precisely this contributes to the spread of their agenda. Through the media houses’ financial dependency on state advertisements to toe the line of producing a favourable coverage for the government. A transparent and independent coverage of content gets compromised a great deal by ways of such ‘soft pressure’. Often, there is an invisible pressure, for a newspaper, or a television channel to articulate the point of view of the government in a contentious issue. According to 2017 figures, the Department of Audio-Visual Publicity, the government department that allocates government advertisements to print outlets, spends as much as INR 21.34 million / USD 0.32 million for Hindi and INR 14.09 million/ USD 0.202 million for English print advertising. Government advertising therefore is the bread and butter for many but in particular for smaller Hindi newspapers allowing the

government to exploit its advertisement spending and the subsequent financial dependency of media outlets as a means of control.

The financial struggles of several media companies to sustain with their business model makes them more vulnerable to such dependencies and therefore control mechanisms. Potentially, if it so desires, the government of the day can give advertising to those whom they would like to reward. And conversely, those newspapers, which have earned their ire, can easily be punished by the government by cutting down on the advertising being given to them. Room for influencing the public advertising allocations result from the process through which it is determined and which lacks accountability. It relies upon circulation data approved by the DAVP (Directorate of Audio Visual Publicity).

Conclusion

As per the latest figures, there are 380 plus TV news stations and 118,239 publications, which include 17,239 dailies. Also, in TV, as the distribution of government advertising is based on ratings, there is room for doubt because these ratings are established without any transparency or accountability by an industry-owned association. Moreover, the audience shares of the top four TV channels are extremely close to each other and critics allege that the allocation of government advertising on TV is arbitrary.

On top of 'official' state advertising comes the one of political parties and it is no surprise that BJP, the ruling party, is the biggest advertiser in the past five years. According to the Broadcast Audience Research Council (BARC) the party had 22,099 insertions (number of times an ad is aired on TV) in less than one week (between November 12 to 16, 2018), which was almost twice as much as the second largest advertiser in the country – Netflix.

BJP ads ranked number one across all channels in the five states that went into assembly elections at the end of 2018 – Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Chhattisgarh, Telangana and Mizoram. The BJP ranked number two for the preceding week, while the Congress party did not even feature in the top-ten list. As an obvious result, media owners, quite aware of the political leverage through advertising, toe the official government's and BJP's line both in TV and print. There is clearly less coverage of the opposition. Need to regulate political capture of the media

The increasing control of the media by the government and the ruling party is an ubiquitous phenomenon that has come in handy to have a hold on the public. Apart from stifling the discourse and limiting the freedom of opinion, it has also blinded the people from knowing their real interests. The political capture of mass media happens by governments, political parties and big corporations and creates a worsening situation for those who are at the margins of the society. It leads one to the most significant question of whether there should be a legislation banning big corporations and politician to own media. As the space for critical commentary is shrinking at a fast pace there is an urgent need to address the issue.

Because it is mainly invisible to the public's eye, media ownership is one of the least appreciated factors contributing to the threat of the press freedom and compromising of ethical journalism. According to the Free Press Unlimited the ownership of media by people who have vested interests has enabled the governments and corporations "to develop a centralized information strategy that amounts to a modern form of propaganda whereby all important media are speaking a similar vocabulary, demonizing the same enemies, and presenting the same arguments in

support of the leadership's actions". It is really an fascinating development. The Newspapers have played their own role in the political, social and literary life of Karnataka Area.

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