

THE SHADED TRUTH

Jeopardizing Reality Of Selective Journalism

The Indian Media: Navigation or Exaggeration of Opinion?

by **FAMENA KHATOON**



Imagine a man sitting in a restricted room with earmuffs on to deviate or cancel any sound coming from the outside while the television feeds this man's mind with propaganda, falsity, and biased ideologies. While the world outside his enclosed space continues to boil in the heat of grievous issues it stands facing. How do you imagine this man interacting with his surroundings on being released? Will he walk by the humanitarian and logical causes or by the outrageous, delusional ones? Well, you know the answer!

India, the largest democracy with the second-largest population in the world is said to go through the same obscure and dazy situation. As the Indian media which has turned into an economic giant and is one of the fastest-growing media in the world with the print media showing a growth rate of 10 percent+ per year continues to lose its credibility. It had started to actively shift its role from people's watchdog, whose responsibility was to inform the public and show the truth of every situation unbiased, unfiltered to that of jugglers for the propagation of propaganda, silencing the diversity of views and neglection of real issues at hand. The Indian Media is being actively accused of disproportionate exaggeration of public opinion, and of losing authenticity, credibility and qualitative journalism. It has also been accused of neglecting coverage of the emerging issues in society such as the LGBTQ+ community's social struggles, social justice, suicides due to unemployment, and farmer's suicides to name a few. The media is increasingly seen to Indulge itself either in glorifying some irrelevant issues related to a celebrity or obsessing half of the time over the US and Pakistan, all this to deviate national attention from the real issues at hand.

THE TUSSLE OF DEPENDENCY

As the media microcosm continues to come under the influence of the Industrial macrocosm, depending on the big business giants of the country for economic survival it doesn't hesitate to rub shoulders with big business and government personalities to curry different favours from them, and due to this position, it's losing the ability to choose an unbiased stand and pass impartial judgments. Newspaper or print

media is one such instance as they highly depend on advertisements to generate revenue and these spaces are commonly bought by these corporate giants.

Media dependency on the government is also no negligible story as more and more news channels depend on the government to sponsor their annual programs. The idea that the government needs media is dismissed today as a myth. As it's the media who needs the government bureaucrats and ministers to speak on their multiple shows to attract greater TRPs and views. Therefore, displeasing the government mean weakening its vocal strength. Instances of such kind can be easily seen such as the withdrawal of the Prime minister along with his ministers from the ET global summit of the Times Group due to a speculated displeasure regarding the coverage of the Samajwadi Party - in the UP elections.



And also, a tweet coming from the editor of the Hindustan time Bobby Ghosh after his sudden resignation allegedly claiming that the resignation involved government pressure. The cause in question is speculated to be the "Hate Tracker run by Hindustan times which is said to be a "national database on crimes in the name of religion, caste, race". Which was also taken down after the editor's exit.

RED FLAG FOR THE MAINSTREAM MEDIA?

The growing distrust regarding media's credibility in people especially among Gen Z can be easy as they resort to the few small social media pages and some of the self-managed media start-ups who try to shift the spotlight from the vague agendas of identity politics and polarization to the mushrooming economic and social issues in the country. But the issue is that these credible pages and channels are less heard and these dubiety big media channels have been able to shout from all four corners for a decade owing to their paramount popularity. But as people grew wary of the new media business, they begin to question everything rather than believing whatever the media displayed.



THE IRON LADY'S IRON CAGE FOR THE PEOPLE'S WATCHDOG!



The darkest chapter of post-independence India is that of emergency 1975-77 imposed under the rule of Smt. Indira Gandhi. Aside from the sudden halt faced by all the constitutional rights, freedom of the press faced the starkest blind fall during this period as the government's foremost attack came on media with the imposition of several censorship laws on its freedom. Around 7000 publishers and journalists were arrested, And the media was told to follow certain "guidelines" before reporting and publishing any kind of news. A position was also created for a "Chief Press Advisor" who had the authority to assist and guide newspapers in case of any doubt arising regarding a piece of news being contentious to the image of the government. International media had its head over heels to acquire coverage about the ongoing situation in the country but any interaction or connection was disbarred. In protest, some of the big newspapers such as the Indian Express and the Statesman left their most popular columns empty. At last, the emergency was withdrawn on 21 March 1977 and the media began its recovery.

THE GAMBIT MOVE

The Ruling Party in India can be said to be the first national-level party which has remarkably made use of social media to put its politics on the front. In the 2014 elections, it made use of social media to propagate their ideology to the masses, mobilize public opinion, and reach voters even in the remotest locations with micro-targeting through social media. Though the opposition party also campaigned heavily through social media it didn't prove as efficient as the BJP which was actively engaged in grass-root campaigning. As a result of the efficient and smart social media campaigning BJP in the 16th Lok Sabha elections secured a win with a sliding victory over 202 out of 545 seats.

Though from the past half of a decade the traditional media can be seen to be struggling with increased self-censorship, decreased engagement with the government bureaucrats and officials, and getting coverage about the government agendas and policies beforehand as there has been no exchange of information between the media and the Government. Decisions about the new policies only come to awareness after being announced by the government itself. There have been also little to no press conferences and interviews are done only with a handful of selected reporters.



POLITICAL POLARIZATION AND MEDIA

Though in the Nehruvian era, the two-faced sword of identity politics and political polarization was kept under the curtains but the period of the 1970s during which prime minister Indira Gandhi suspended the basic rights of citizens for the total period of 21 months and changing political landscape from the year 2014, the question of identity politics, political polarization, and the divisive two ideas of the nation have been again brought to the boil.

The media of a country is expected to work as a mirror, reflecting things as they truly are but the changing political landscape and polarization have also grasped in its claws the ability of the Indian media to remain impartial and have turned it into a wheel for the propagation of its ideologies and to exaggerate false binaries or divisions. Media, today is more of a face of activism rather than journalism as the plethora of big media channels indulge in cherry-picking of facts to make a story favorable to

As Media continuously tries to mobilize and appropriate public opinion in the direction of that social change which is based on its ideological tilts, news reporting is beginning to transmute itself into story-telling which too is nonetheless based on



In his speech only justice NV Ramana also pointed out this growing problem "Allowing yourself to be co-opted, by an ideology or the state is a recipe for disaster" he quoted. The big media channels seem just not ready to show both the flip sides of the coin, any policy has both ups and downs for the citizens placed at different strata of society but the media today isn't easily seen to constructively criticize the downs of recent or upcoming policies. For instance, during demonetization in India, any popular media channel hardly reported the sufferings and hurdles faced by the poor masses huddled in the never-ending bank lines. Even during the farmers protest over the farm Bills 2020 the farmers accused the media of being partial and manipulative and decided to start off their own print publication "Trolley times"

After the rise of digital communication advancements from the 2000s in India with a total of 5.09 billion smartphone users as of estimated 2019. Social media apps such as WhatsApp, Twitter and Facebook have been increasingly used to mobilize public opinion, and to push misinformation, and to fuel sentiments of rage and intolerance.



All though some of the credible small media start-ups are rooting to protect democracy in general and the social responsibility of media in particular, the big media businesses owned by the business giants of India are aggressively trying to fan the flames of polarization, divisions, and identity politics by engaging in selective journalism.

KEYWORDS

- **Gen Z:** The young generation of people born between 1997 to 2012.
- **Polarization:** Division of two opposite, ideologies, opinion or beliefs into two opposing/contrasting groups.
- **Selective journalism:** Biased reporting by omitting facts and stories considered unfit for a particular ideology or set of beliefs.