Media Evolution in India and Its Role in Democratize the Politics of India

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ABSTRACT :

Media is a very strong mode of communication today. It can be regarded as the watchdog of government affairs and 'fourth estate' in democracies since 17th century. Media actors influence the way social and political events are seen and evaluated. Media has critical functions in a democratic regime. 'How media evolute in India and how it helps to form public opinion in India' with its changing form and function is the matter of the study. This paper aims to analysis two separate aspects of media performance: 'How media evolute in India and how much it influence the people with its changing nature in forming public opinion to democratize the politics of India.

Keywords : Media, Democracy, Politics, India

Media : Definition

The term media refers to the communication channels through which we promulgate news, music, movies, education and other data. It refers to all means of communication everything ranging from press to internet. Generally, media acts as an catalyst in society to strengthen democracy and also in its different forms media have influenced people in several ways. Media has become so powerful that it can make or break the government by influencing the people. The public also heavily depends on the media to secure information. In this scenario the question of the accountability of powerful media arises. Media has a fundamental right of freedom of speech and expression which can be used as per its wish. The modern age is generally considered to be the age of representative democracy, and the mass media are an essential component of that representative democratic polity. Media strengthens not only the democratic values and norms but also quickens the speed of development.

Media has become very important in our societies that it is now hard to imagine a life without television, newspapers, social media sites etc. It helps the government in making a system more accountable, responsive and democratic friendly. It can involve public in several issues through imparting knowledge, skill, and technologies to the people. The role of media is to make the society aware of their democratic rights by acting as the voice of millions of citizens. Media is now a forum for social interaction and communication, a platform to collect information for any purpose. From traditional to social media, it is serving as a watchdog and it also provides to organise civil action. The powers of the media is heightened day by day and it can serve to increase awareness and participation to enhance access to information.

Democracy :

The word 'democracy' most often refers to a form of government in which supreme power is vested in the people and exercised by them directly or indirectly through a system of representation usually involving periodic free elections. It is a government on behalf of all the people according to their will. People should be able to control their own lives in a democracy and everyone have the same opportunity to influence the decision of others that affect people in a society. Democratic systems are more reflective to people's wishes and more responsive to their influence. There is also room to improve the power or will part of democracy, by giving the people more real power. Democracy is not about just voting, there are numerous other ways of engaging with politics.

For a democratic country, freedom to read or write, express is an important element to reveal the truth. In a democracy, people can make their opinion either by choosing representatives in parliament or give their insights about this. For this, access to free media is important. Media can help people for expressing their opinion. It can promote government transparency, highlighting policies made by government, helps to tackle mal administration, corruption etc.

Evolution of Media in India :

Media plays an important role in any country and the world by providing information about events. Based on this information, people are able to understand about government's success and failure. The most spreading method of media is the long range informal communication about the approaches of government and the working of popular government. In a democracy like India, there are three major pillars- Legislative, Executive and Judiciary. Other than these, media is a fourth pillar of democracy. Together they conduct, regulate and control the democratic nation.

The Indian national press made a significant contribution in the freedom struggle of India for Independence from colonial British rule. The modern press started after the advent of European Civilization in India.

Indian media was active since the late 18th century with print media started in 1780. The first newspaper printed in India was Hicky's Bengal Gazette in 1780 by James Augustus Hicky. After that the Bombay Samachar founded and printed in Gujarati which was the oldest newspaper of Asia. In 1826, the first Hindi language newspaper published in India named Udant Martand (The Rising Sun). The English language newspapers were published heavily in British captured India. Even after the independence of India from British Raj in 1947, the English newspapers were prominent and circulated over India with a high rate. Beside this, Hindi newspapers were also propagated throughout India with a massive amount. Print media was an instrument for fight against subjugation to bring social and economic reforms which helps India to bring its independence. The Times of India, The Hindu were the eminent newspapers circulated over India also in the pre-independence period. Even in the present times of 21st century, this two newspapers are very much popular for people over India. If we talk about the Hindi newspapers, Dainik Jagran is famous from past time to present time in this country. We can figure out that newspaper sales in the country is increasing day by day.

It is said that Indian media is the oldest and largest media of the world. In 1927, radio broadcasting started in India and the screening of Auguste and Louis Lumiere moving pictures in Bombay initiated during the July of 1895. From 1937, All India Radio took the responsibility of radio broadcasting as a division of Prasar Bharati. All India Radio is the largest broadcasting organisation in the world with many languages which serves the spectrum of socio-economic and cultural diversity. From 1957, it has been called Akashvani. Radio is a strong tool for the government to maintain control over news production and creating public opinion, especially due to the low literacy rates in rural areas where a major amount of the public might not afford a TV or be able to read a newspaper.

In the pre- independence period, press and radio broadcasting stood for social reforms and public welfare, and creating opinion on issues like education, child marriage, widow marriage and sati which shape the destiny of the nation and safeguard the rights and liberties of its citizens.

In before independence of India, there was no constitutional or statutory provisions to protect the freedom of press. "The freedom of the journalist is an ordinary part of the freedom of the subject and to whatever length, the subject in general may go, so also may the journalist, but apart from statute law his privilege is no other and no higher. The range of his assertions, his criticisms or his comments is as wide as, and no wider than that of any other subject". The Preamble of the Indian Constitution ensures the liberty of expression to its citizens. Freedom of the Press has been included as part of freedom of speech and expression under Article 19 of Indian Constitution. Article 19 says: "Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression, this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers."

Indian democracy has grown after the post independence period and made wide range of reforms for surging India in the 75 years of Independence. In the journey of democracy, the press has given valuable insights and suggestions at every step. In the 75 years of Independence, print media is regarded as the authentic medium of mass communication as the leader of a considerable period of time over India.

In 1959, television programming began in India and the complete broadcasting was started in 1965. Doordarshan was the main television channel broadcasted in India and The Ministry of Information and Broadcasting maintained the television broadcasting. After the 1990s, satellite television channels arrived and it helps to educate the citizens of India and made their public opinion bold about the government. BBC, CNN, CNBC and other television channels also arrived in India which initiated reforms and modernisation of Indian citizens.

Mainly after the 1990s, we see the privatized, liberalized and globalised Indian economy in India during the regime of Narshima Rao as Prime Minister of India and Manmohan Singh as Finance Minister. By opening up the Indian economy and allowing private satellite television news channels to beam into India by the government made the citizens to got a chance to watch non-Doordarshan shows. Indian viewers spoilt for choice for the first time for many television networks including Sun Network, Zee Network and STAR Network. The impact of globalisation dictated by the market dominated corporate capitalism made a powerful cultural content shaped by various advertising, television and internet. The rapid development of media technologies has changed the nature of media and it has become an integral part of democracy.

Based on 2021 data, there are currently 900 permitted private satellite television channels in India and many of them are devoted to news coverage in India. Presently, Indian media are controlled mainly by corporate sector and a large number of elites.

India has witnessed a large number of online and printed newspapers and news television channels. As of 31st March, 2018, there were over 1 lakh publications registered with the Registrar of Newspapers for India. India has the second largest newspaper in the world with daily newspapers reporting a combined circulation of over 240 million as of 2018. Also with regard to radio broadcasting, starting from 1927 to present, the number of radio sets had reached to 275,000.

If we see the evolution of media, early 2000s were the years of online publishing started in India. The impact of social media in Indian Politics has been increasing. India has used social media for the first time in Mumbai Attacks of 2008 and online voter registration and transparency campaigns in elections had begun in 2009.It is said that India is the second largest online market behind China. Social media makes the information easier to be transferred to the people to maintain the transparency of the government. It makes the data to be moved to the individuals to keep up the straightforwardness of the government.

At present, there are 491.53 million Facebook users in India. Apart from that, based on the data of 2022, the most popular social media platforms are WhatsApp (534.30 million active users), Instagram (503.37 million users), Telegram (374.40 million users), Facebook Messenger (324.39 million users), Twitter (295.44 million users), LinkedIn (244.78 million users), Pinterest (229.64 million users), MX Taka Tak (153.97 million users), Skype (151.34 million users).Indians spend 2.36 hours on social media daily. In 2022, the social media users have been growing at a steady rate of 467 million . The number of internet users in India also has grown to 658 million (47% of the total population of India). After increasing the usage of smartphones in India, the number of mobile internet users has reached to 601 million. According to the statistics, the annual growth in active social media users reached to 4.2% with more than 19 million new users.

Social media now is more accessible to people which enables mass participation in a democracy. It also provides instant updates which make people aware of their surroundings and participate in political, economic and other decisions of a country. In India, social media has taken the political messaging from the mass media model and placed in public dialogue. It provides an environment where the general people of a country is freely express his political opinions and expectations.

Media and Democracy in India :

In a democracy, sovereign force lies in the hands of every citizens to run the nation through the chosen delegates. Democracy helps holding of ideas for the betterment of life and gives civil liberties to all the citizens of a country. Media is an instrument of every citizen to take part in forming a strong political opinion about many political issues. In a democracy, media plays a vital role with fewer regulations. We can say that , media and democracy have a complex relationship in a society.

In India, as the fundamental rights of press is enshrined in the constitution, media carry out significant tasks in the society to shape the public opinion of individuals. Media helps to enhance a corrupted system and make it transparent. Transparency, comprehensiveness, straightforwardness, responsibility are the main services associated with media. If the government is not accountable to public requirements, media can assist public for taking speedy initiative of this problem. Media assist individuals for security of human rights and censuring government approaches to public.

Media helps to reveal political hypocrisies with truthfulness which is helping the common people to decide which party will be best after coming in power. The government make a bridge to individual through media for influencing them about their laws, policies etc. All the individuals from general public is come to aware certain significant issues and open conversations through different media channels.

In present day, the effects of traditional media have been enhanced by new communication technologies. Traditional and New Media enhance each other and amplify each other's effects. Television takes up news from web and news stories from traditional media are discussed in online and get attention of a larger audience.

Until the 1980s and 1990s, newspapers published in India were mostly concerned with domestic political affairs. But today, newspapers are read more than before. It is covered intensively in both local and regional news of India. The strong tradition of Indian journalism which mainly focused on national politics has changed to localization of news in India. Indian media has a close relationship with economic developments as publicly owned media sector into a privatized media sector after 1990s. Today's media also helped to form public opinion and influence citizens in every step of their decision related to politics.

Politics and media are inter-related because regional political parties are playing an important role in elections as national parties build partnership with regional parties.

If we want to relate the role of media with democracy of India, we have to talk of three to four events.

- **Media and 26/11 Mumbai Attacks:**

 In 2008, the Pakistan based Lashkar-e-Tayyabba (LeT) launched on assault on Mumbai on 26/11 that lasted three days and was broadcast live on television. Then the media played an under-appreciated aspect of crisis to unfold and in framing public discussion on escalation of a conflict with Pakistan. During crisis, the media takes news from the government and responds to what the public expects to hear, see and read. Through the media, has not directly influenced policymaking of government, it has shaped the way in which issues are framed and news is consumed.

The day of 26th November, 2008 made a horror in everyone's a life like everything shut down in the city. A day after the siege of Mumbai attacks, the Daily Telegraph's journalist Claude Beaumont wrote that Twitter and Flickr are the media platform which broke the news first. Twitter users in India mainly in Mumbai provided the eyewitness accounts of the unfolding drama by posting around 70 tweets every five seconds. Microblogging platforms are used by many people for gives their plight to friends and families. At the time of this attack, the social media tool 'Twitter' was the dependable site for finding out more information about the attack. The mainstream media outlets including CNN and other television stations, radio stations also trained

on each location for coverage of the news. Citizens also used Wikipedia, Google Map for knowing about the single information of the attack. Mumbai attacks in India shows that how technology is transforming people to potential reporters.

Though the Indian Government alleged that news and information spreading by Twitter helped the terrorist to know the news, but there can be no doubt that Twitter provided a powerful communication platform for people of India. Journalists face a demanding audience at the times of crisis even difficult reporting environments like terror attacks and unfolding hostage crises. When government authorities can not comply with this situation, journalists dealt with this for public interests.

Reporters, journalists tried to get close to the attack sites and they reported what they saw in the naked eye. Without appropriate system and channels of information, the poor judgement of attacks led by journalists able to spread the terrorist activities. That is why, a day after the attacks, top media owner were summoned to south block of Mumbai. Also the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting issued notices to two Hindi news channels- Aaj Tak and India TV. It is not easy for government to release the information and tackle the warlike situations both in the times of crises. But, media couldn't cover and spread any information which would create any problem to the government.

Media coverage should be based on the public interest of citizens and the live media reporting should not be facilitated publicity of any terrorist. Similar with those, some additional guidelines were came up for media personnel by India's News Broadcasters Association for the coverage of emergency situations after the Mumbai attacks. The National Broadcasters Association stays clear about the line between national interest and public interest.

With the course of time, media has learned from the past mistakes and experiences. In a democracy like India, media is a significant force to mobilize public opinion in the shaping of national issues and politics and it can not be under- estimated.

- **The influence of Media in 2014 Lok Sabha Election of India :**

The survival and success of India's democracy heavily depends on media. Electronic and print media has great contribution to the politics of India. Television media reaches to those who cannot read and write and has become an integral part of our democracy. Print media also helped to form public opinion in India. And the new dimension is social media which is privately owned and questions everything to help in making conclusions of any problem.

In 2014 General Election, media's role has become more important as media has never played such an influencing role over politics of India. There has been a lot of evidence about what is played up and structured for the impending Lok Sabha Election.

The media coverage was started in December, 2012 when Narendra Modi was re-elected as the Chief Minister of Gujarat for the third time. At that time, Television news channels and social media sites had little time for anyone else other than Modi and his party against the ruling UPA government. The campaigning led by the media sector and corporate sector propagated that the Congress rule was corrupt and less benefactor to the poor class and society. Also the middle class sector was disappointed about the economic slowdown led by the UPA government. Television news channels relied heavily on the live feeds from the two leading parties mostly focusing on BJP's live feeds and sessions. The Modi wave was also seen in the opinion polls in television channels and other social media sites ignoring the larger issues involving the election.

If we study the role of media in 2014 Legislative Assembly Election of India, we found that the influence of social media mainly the uses of Twitter marked a remarkable contribution in shaping BJP's role in national and state politics of India. It also helped BJP led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) to come in power of India after a long decade of Congress rule. Before the election, BJP party dominated the social media space with a higher network strength in comparing more than the Congress led United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government. BJP was ahead in the competition in the number of political tweets, retweets by its followers. Negative tweets were far less for BJP in social media sites. In before the election, the access to new media with cheaper smartphones and 4G SIMs made Twitter became a platform of public polls, sentiment, views and public opinion. Citizens able to influence by the whole political scenario which was proved in the ballot of 2014 Legislation Assembly Election of India.

In before the election, the political parties spent more digital media platforms to grab the attention of the youth voters in this election. Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), Congress, Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) , even smaller regional parties spent on ads and other sources on digital media platforms. Election Commission of India made mandatory provision for all political parties to seek clearance for ad insertion on social media sites as for high spending of parties on digital media sites. The young and urban voters are active on social media and they are more interested in politics and governance which help to generate public opinion. Though the age gap between 30-60 years also highly influenced by television media channels as well as social media sites about the election. Citizens were more engaged on social media to know about everything relating to the election. We can easily figure out that through digital media platforms, voters know the primary base of statistics and contribute energetically in campaigns led by several parties.

Party candidates used new media for mobilizing, communicating and informing the voters about the party strategies and implementing of new policies etc. Who were less alert towards traditional media like print and television news channels, they can easily figure out about the situation of party politics in India through social media. In digital media sites, there are hubs of news sharing in the news feeds which influence the voters. Television is the source of plenty of information for citizens, but online platforms also made great importance for people. Social media presents several source of voting materials for electorates of that time. Online newspapers were also a great source of information and entertainment for interactive engagement of voters. In election procedure, online newspaper made a great contribution towards election.

Previously, the political discourses mainly rooted in traditional media. With the advent of new media, the campaign method drastically changed. Political parties and their supporters influence voters by online campaigning and engaged in exploratory campaign reportage through Twitter feeds, blogs.

The 2014 Lok Sabha Elections of India depicts the picture of the role of media with politics in India. New campaign media presents the primary base of statistics to voters and they contribute in campaigns through digital platforms. Citizen used new media gradually at that time of 2014 General Elections for mobilizing, contacting and informing the voters. The parties outreach to voters in social media and television media to engage voters in elections. Journalists can accumulate information and distribute it to people for spreading immediately. The role of media is nurturing a more active electorate for promoting elections. In 2014 Lok Sabha Election of India, media helped BJP to shape public opinion, set the political agenda and determine the content of public policy as everyone said that the massive BJP victory can be attributed to the impact of the so called new media.

- **The 2016 Surgical Strike and Media analysis :**

On 18th September, 2016 Pakistani terrorist attacked the Indian army base in Uri town of Kashmir in which 18 Indian soldiers were dead. On 29th September, 10 days after the Uri attack, Indian army claimed to carry out a ' Surgical Strike' in Pakistan occupied Kashmir (PoK) inflicting heavy casualties on terrorists. In the history of India, it is the outstanding army attack led by the Indian armies. After the surgical strike, the government led by the BJP changed the framework of electoral campaign. BJP used ' national security ' with ' development ' and ' governance ' as for their campaigning procedures in before elections.

BJP's election posters and banners displayed military images in the banners, posters and in many media platforms as for their new campaigning method. Several party officials, journalists and political analyst said that the rising nationalistic mood helped Narendra Modi to waggle the 2017 Assembly Elections in Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand with the landslide victory of BJP and his allies.

Media is an important element in the time of national conflict in any country. Television news channels are engaged intensely with the national issues and make public aware of everything related to the issues. After the Uri attack, a cold war was started between Indian media and Pakistani media coverage. Indian newspapers maintained that even though India needs to give a reply, it still needs to be calm and not act in haste. Many editorial places in Indian media talked of that Pakistan based terrorists across the border are getting dogmatic day by day and they called for a ' befitting ' response from the Indian political leadership. And after the ' Surgical Strike ', media was like the face of every citizen of India. The media coverage after this strike was really remarkable. Every citizen of India got satisfied with the media coverage in the great national issue of India.

The 2016 Pathankot and Uri attacks are useful example of successfully regulated media narratives by Modi government by controlling the release of information to public, as demonstrated by its highly publicised 'surgical strikes'.

- **The flame of Agnipath Scheme and the Role of Media :**

Agnipath Scheme was introduced by the Government of India on 14th June, 2022 for recruitment of soldiers below the rank of commissioned officers for the term of four years. The soldiers recruited under this system are called 'Agniveers'. The scheme has been criticised a lot and it was debating by public, citizens, journalists for a long time. The army aspirants felt angry with the new scheme and they damaged many public property from 16th June, 2022 onwards. The protesters had disrupted the road and railway services. The aggressive agitators have also blown up many trains.

Various pictures and videos were also going viral on social media sites and newsfeeds of this agitation. The anxiety of this agitation was so high that the politics of India made suffering for this issue. There were many people who are supporting this 'Agnipath' scheme and also many were protesting against this through television channels, digital media platforms. The anger of the youth was increasing rapidly about the issue and they protest severely. Many trains have cancelled and their routes also diverted by agitators which was trending in the social media sites. Television channels and newspapers were also bursting with the news heavily. Through digital media platforms, everything goes viral and the protest was more strong day by day. By understanding about the scheme by different media sites citizens made their views in and against the scheme. Overall, one can say that in the time of this agitation, media and politics of India were flaming up with this news.

India is the world's largest democracy and a vibrant and diverse mass media is an important pillar of this country. Media can amplify the effect of anti-corruption legislation by reaching and mobilizing a broader audience and motivating them for a cultural change. Media has the ability to change people's beliefs, perceptions, norms and behaviour for fight against corruption. Media influence our perceptions as the watchdog of our affairs, as the agenda setter, and helps to form public forum. Media act as an monitor of government behaviour by highlighting cases of mal- administration and corruption and help to ensuring accountability and transparency of governments. By discussing issues and putting them on public agenda, media draw attention on problems in society. Media attention legitimizes corruption as a problem in before the audience. By reflecting a range of perspectives, media help to combat corruption and provide suggestions, arguments, public debate in any circumstances.

Conclusion :

India has the largest democracy in the world and media has a powerful presence in the country. The media sector in India is growing faster than the economy of the country. Media has played the role of the watchdog of the government activities and has also made communication between news and citizens well. Media influence our perceptions of what is right and what is wrong. It provides platforms for citizens to voice their opinions and demand accountability from government. It is the major limb for the democratic Functioning that Thomas Jefferson who was the third US president (1801-1809) said, "Were it let to me to decide whether we should have a government without newspapers or newspapers, without a government. I should not hesitate for a movement to prefer the latter".

In the present scenario, the Indian media has been subject to a lot of criticism. Media also has some negative impact on democracy. It is like a mirror which shows the bare truth and harsh realities of life. The News is meant to be objective, fair and neutral but today the news, advertisements are paid for

by corporate entities and government organisations. Newspapers and television channels receive funds for publishing or broadcasting information in favour of political parties, corporate sector and government also. Since 2009,the phenomenon of 'paid news' has acquired a new dimension in the sphere of political news. Several news reports and articles on political parties are appeared in newspapers, television and also in the social media randomly.

The media's function of reporting should be kept away from any political pressure. Media organisations have to be more accountable to general public. It shouldn't be in the hands of a small group of elites and the function of free and independent press should be there for strengthening democracy in India. Media should take utmost care in publishing sensation news without any bias. The tools of discussion, opinion polls, debates should be used by media for taking appropriate and immediate action. We wish that, with the passage of time, media have to become more matured and more responsible entity.

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