

Role of Media in Strengthening Democracy in India

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Abstract

Since 17th century, press is being recognized as Fourth Estate of democracy and a forum for public discussion and debate. Today, Media is respected as watchdog, as a guardian of the public interest. Media organizations are generally assumed to play an important role in democracies, but how effective are they in performing this function is a matter of study. The power of Media can be used to reinforce democracy. It can be used as an instrument to bridge between governors and the governed. This Paper aims to analysis two separate aspects of media performance: the extent to which they perform a 'watchdog' role by providing information, and the degree to which they act as a representative forum for the views of citizens. Through his research paper an attempt has been made to highlight the role of Media in strengthening democracy in India. The present study highlights the impact of media as a platform of nation building through political, social, economic and cultural democracy.

Keywords: Democracy, Media, Representative Strengthen, Society

Introduction

Democracy: Meaning and explanations

'A system of government in which all the people of a country choose and elect their representatives' called democracy. Media came into existence in 1780 with the introduction of 'The Bengal Gazette' and since then it has matured leaps and bounds. It has been playing a very significant role in shaping human minds and opinion. 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.

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-fulfillment of citizens and to help ensure participation of citizens in a democracy. In other words Democracy in general terms is understood to be a form of government which is subject to popular sovereignty. It ensures that citizens make responsible, informed, choices rather than acting out of ignorance or misinformation. And information serves a "checking function" by ensuring that elected representatives uphold their oaths of office and carry out the wishes of those who elected them. A democratic system can run to its paramount potential when there is extensive participation on the part of mass which is not possible without people getting informed about various issues. 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.

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Media: As an instrument

Media means communication - whether written, broadcast, or spoken. Generally, the word 'communication' is defined as an exchange of information and message. However, Mass Media denote a section of the media especially designed to reach a large audience. Liberated media is an essential part of a functioning democracy. The media has an extraordinary ability to act as a catalyst in society efforts to strengthen democratic polity. Mass media in its different forms have influenced human life in many ways. Being the leader over a considerable period of time Print media is still regarded as the authentic medium of mass communication. Apart from providing news and views Radio and Television, has also developed a flair for entertainment. And now the latest form of media named the new media with internet has indeed made it possible to disseminate information and ideas in real time across the globe. By airing divergent views and engaging in cross-questioning on significant national and social issues the media reflects and informs public opinion and practically shares the task of the parliament.

Operational Definition

Role defines a function or part performed especially in a particular operation or process whereas Media means by which something is communicated or expressed. To strengthen means to empower something and Democracy outlines a system of government by the whole population or all the eligible members of a state, typically through elected representatives.

Importance and role of media

Defining Goals

Today, the word media is used by the general public in all the spectrums of life. It is not a surprise because no industry has grown, extended and succeeded as media in the present times. Under the garb of speech and expression, media is now omnipresent, it has invaded upon all the facets of life of an individual. This fact is not only applicable to the Indian soils, but is global. Not only this, the 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. Here we need to understand that We "Public" are the active participant, we are require to shape the role of media because this commanding instrument can use as a boon or as bane too. Media has a fundamental right of freedom of speech and expression which can be used as per its whim or wish. The modern age is generally considered to be the age of representative democracy, and the mass

media are an informal but an essential component of that representative democratic polity. Equally important is the fact that a democratic polity is an institutional guarantee of a free, fair and fearless media.

Media and Democracy

In India however media has developed and emerged as a very powerful and influential tool in all matters. Importance and power of Media can never be denied in democracies; media policies, media content etc. and media persons have a direct or indirect influence on the audience. Mass Media and Democracy are always related to each other. Media is a mirror of the society and how democratic a society is, can be represented through media. Opinion leaders influence the public opinion regarding political leaders and political system of any country. Hence, media has an influential role in strengthening democracy. Media and democracy have strong association. Countries which are strong democracies always have resilient and free media. In the role of 'watchdog' the media can promote government transparency, accountability, and public scrutiny of decision-makers in power, and by highlighting policy failures, maladministration by public officials, corruption in the judiciary, and scandals in the corporate sector, Media acts as a mirror.

The media acts as a strong agency to formulate and organized public opinion. The relevance and importance has been adequately dealt in this research. The role of the media as public forum is vital, media functions as an agenda-setter, providing information about urgent social problems the free press can strengthen the public sphere, by mediating between citizens and the state, facilitating debate about the major issues of the day, and informing the public about their leaders. A good democracy is thus first and foremost a broadly legitimated regime that completely satisfies its citizens (quality in terms of result). Hence to strengthen Democracy, India require to safeguard its citizen first. Media is a tool for social change also. Through promoting programs like the beti bachao, beti padhao, building and maintenance of clean toilets, swach Bharat, saving of water and saving of fuel etc., that the media is quite successful in promoting the social values and protecting the environment to some extent. The media is also responsible to grant aid, assistance and help to the needy people in the situations like any other catastrophe. The media provides the help lines in the cases of adverse contingency. If the channels of communication reflect the social and cultural pluralism within each society, in a fair and impartial balance, then multiple interests and voices are heard in public deliberation. This role is particularly important during election campaigns, as fair access to the airwaves by opposition parties, candidates and groups is critical for competitive, free and fair multiparty elections.

Media freedom and people participation

Media freedom shapes the social, legal, political, economic and the cultural factor. People know very less about the political issues and activity in countries where the government interfere with the media. Corruption has a very adverse impact on the development of the country. Media extracts the fact and information's from the institutes and makes it available to the people. And this role off media makes the life of corrupt government officials tough. The media even at times releases the secret files which may include the actual instance of corruption. So in countries where the government does not interfere with media, people participation in the functioning of the governance is more and the people can easily punish the corrupt politicians. So free media repeatedly report the action of the government to the people and it put everything in front of the people to decide whether if it is right or not. When people are not conversant of the political activity, they become ignorant of the political affairs of the country.

So if the media is not free, the information does not reach the people and the people lose interest participating in the government functions. Also when the information about the political leader and the political parties does not reach the people, they become unaware about the detail the political party or candidate of the election. So either they vote in darkness or they chose not to vote. So, lack of information has a very adverse impact on the voter's turnout. So, free media play a very significant role in enhancing the voter's turnout. As voter's turnout is a very essential aspect of democracy it definitely contributes to the strengthening of the democracy. As voter's turnout is a very essential aspect of democracy it definitely contributes to the strengthening of the democracy. So it's the media who help the people to collect information from these institutes easier and cheaper. So, a medium play a vital role in digging out the facts from these transparent institutes and makes these facts available to the people. Therefore media contribute a lot to these three processes namely transparency, publicity and accountability which strengthen the democracy.

Role of media in public policy

The foundation of the democratic institutions dates back to the French revolution in 1789. There were three centers of power namely the monarchy, the church and the feudal lords during those days. So the fourth estate 'media' was added by the French revolution first. It was because of the major role played by the media in the democratic institutions. So even during the inception era of democracy the media had a very important role to play. Therefore we can't imagine democracy in present day without media. It a two aspects or faces of one coin. Media structures the policy of a country by making public opinion. The policy

output is actually authoritative action i.e. the decisions of the government on various problems of the people. Media directly can't shape the policy but definitely it can criticize the policy and force the government to change the policy in case if it is not in the interest off the people. Media mediates between the state and the society and hence criticize by the media has very adverse impact on the popularity of ruling party. In a way media exercises the decisive influence over the public policy. Media is the regulating flow of communication between the policymakers, policy and others in any political system. This role of media influences the policy making and hence makes a country and its political system more democratic.

Role of media in bringing social change

Earlier the Indian society presumed that women are weaker in terms of earning capacity and physical stamina. The society was patriarchal and hence women were given less importance. Also gender discrimination, lack of access to healthcare and gender based violence are some reasons which was prevailing in the Indian society. These are some of the main reasons of terrible crimes which used to dominate our country. So the awareness about such problems was communicated to the people by the media. Actually the information about this heinous crime was provided to the people through television drama, animated news packages, influential radio documentary and persuasive films. Now government started using media as a platform for eliminating social evils and bringing positive change. Finally the people reacted positively to it and now the cases of social evils are decreasing. The media as an unbiased informer acts as an educator, as a mentor, as the guardian with the free participation of the public. So unless in a society everyone is equal that society can't be considered to be a democratic society. It is because equality is one of the essential features of the democracy. Promoting equality is actually making an attempt to strengthen democracy. Therefore the media plays a very significant role in strengthening democracy in India.

Sway of Media

A democracy without media is like a vehicle without wheels. The media has undoubtedly evolved and become more active over the years. It is the media only who reminds politicians about their unfulfilled promises at the time of elections. Through excessive coverage during elections helps people, especially illiterates, in electing the right person to the power. This reminder compels politicians to be up to their promises in order to remain in power. Media plays a central role in shaping a healthy democracy. It is the backbone of a democracy. Media makes us aware of several social, political and economic activities happening around the world. It is like a glass, which reflects us or attempts to show us the bare truth and harsh realities of life.

The impact of media is really remarkable. The media reveals the drawbacks in the democratic system, which eventually helps government in eliminating the loopholes and making a system more responsible, responsive and receptive. In the age of digital media every day we are bombarded with information. We get any information of the world with just a click. The flow of information has increased manifolds. Thanks to technology that has brought a kind of revolution in journalism.

Nature of the research

Primarily this research is a doctrinal research as the library method is employed while conducting this research. So primary sources of data collection are not used, hence this research can be classified as a purely doctrinal research. The researcher has followed the analytical and critical method in this research. The focus of this research is to give a critical evaluation of the role of the media in strengthening democracy in India.

Sources of data used in this research

As this research is doctrinal research the sources of data involved in this research are secondary sources of data which are as enumerated below.

- Text books
- Reference books
- Journals
- Articles
- Newspapers
- Internet etc.

Conclusion

The importance and role of media in a democratic system is debatable. India has the largest democracy in the world and it is widely accepted that media has a powerful presence in the country. In the current scenario the Indian media has been subject to a lot of criticism for disregarding its obligation to social responsibility. Perilous commercial practices in media have affected the fabric of Indian democracy. In the race of sustainability and commercial interest transnational media organizations have spread their wings in the Indian market with their own global interests at the cost of truth and accuracy which was initially thought to be an agent of escorting in social change through developmental programs aimed to uplift the weaker section of the society and showcase the truth only. But Extreme coverage or propaganda of sensitive news has led to communal riots at times. Constant repetition of the news, especially sensational news, breeds apathy and insensitivity. Though media has at times successfully played the role of a watchdog of the government activities and has also aided in participatory communication, a lot still needs to be done. Media should take utmost care in

airing or publishing such sensational news. It is a mirror of society and a powerful tool in implementing laws. Although the Indian constitution does not have an exclusive act defining the liberty of the press but it is evidently included in the freedom of speech and expression under the Article 19 (1) (a).

Media organizations, 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. No one is perfect in this world. Still there is a lot of scope for improvement by which media can raise up to the expectations of the public for which it is meant. We cannot think of a democracy without active and neutral media. Media employs the tools of discussion, opinion polls, debates, and write ups to stimulate authorities for taking appropriate action. Media offers an indicative and investigative platform for discussing the different causes of and solutions to, to the problem of improper implementation of law. The Indian democracy has survived and is functioning relatively well, and the media no doubt have great contribution in it. However, the Indian media have its own serious criticism, elitists; urban oriented; politically biased; under the grip of big industrial and business houses; using hate politics and sensationalizing the news for economic interest; using communal and caste politics especially by the vernacular media.

When there is information, there is enlightenment. When there is debate, there are solutions. When there is no distribution of power, no rule of law, no accountability, there will be exploitation, corruption, suppression and annoyance. Media does more than mere reporting news. It also monitors administration and keeps a check on corruption and bad administration. The fight against corruption has been largely fueled by the media. With the passage of time it has become a more matured and a more responsible entity. Big media conglomerates are a serious threat. Citizen -friendly democracy is a goal that the media should strive for in a country like India. The present media insurgency has led to people in making an informed decisions and beginning of a new era in a democracy. This study ends with the suggestion that this complex issue and its other dynamics need further investigation.

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