

Short Communication

Role of Media in Ensuring Good Governance: An Analysis

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ABSTRACT

Development Journalists feel that greater stress on 'development oriented politics' and greater media attention for such development are absolutely essential. The media should act as partners in various developmental programmes and should perform the role of watchdog on the governance. The media are not only a framework through which news about developmental initiatives is passed on to the larger field of the common man but also a filter through which the common man's perception of government policies and their implementation is brought to the attention of the government. One of its principal objectives may be to gather people's reactions to the programmes and policies of the government and their implementation and to report them back for appropriate and corrective action by the government. But the government, in the present set-up, lacks an organized and effective system to find out and disseminate the perceptions of the common man about various government programmes and initiatives. The media can be made the main channel for collecting and collating the feedback from the people. It is essential to have research wings in academic institutions developing media personnel in reporting news, event analysis and highlights that may help the Government to perform more transparently. This will enable our journalists to carry out original research on issues related with the functioning of the Government at Centre and at various States. Indian newspapers and news agencies should encourage research being carried out by journalists within India in academic research institutions, which will definitely improve the quality of reporting and enhance the participation of journalists in building good governance.

Key Words: Role, Media, Ensuring, Good, Governance, Analysis.

INTRODUCTION

Development Journalists feel that greater stress on 'development oriented politics' and greater media attention for such developmental efforts are absolutely essential. The media should act as partners in various developmental programmes and should perform the role of watchdog on the governance. In the deluge of what they identify 'political politics' and its coverage, it is often found that such initiatives go unnoticed by the media at large. The media are not only a framework through which news about developmental initiatives is passed on to the larger field of the common

man but also a filter through which the common man's perception of government policies and their implementation is brought to the attention of the government. The media can be used as an excellent channel of communication from the common man to the government. One of its principal objectives may be to gather people's reactions to the programmes and policies of the government and their implementation and to report them back for appropriate and corrective action by the government. The media thus may be acted as a two-way channel of communication between the government and the people. Information

from the government and the district or state level administration is available in quite adequate measure. But the government, in the present set-up, lacks an organized and effective system to find out and disseminate the perceptions of the common man about various government programmes and initiatives. It is in this respect that the media can make a real dent and prove itself to be continually relevant. The media can be made the main channel for collecting and collating the feedback from the people. For this, the journalists will have to be retrained in the art of gathering information.

METHODOLOGY

The Paper has followed the Analytical Method of Research.

Governance and Media

The media have a crucial role to play in strengthening the edifice of democracy and in ensuring good governance, which holds the key to the development of the nation. The media are playing a significant role in ensuring transparency and accountability in decision-making processes. The country needs more journalists who are courageous, public-spirited, and ready to take on the most powerful by exposing corruption, official insensitivity and apathy, and misgovernance.

The media rightly enjoy considerable power in playing the role of a watchdog over government and the corporate world; in influencing decisions and setting trends, in transmitting ideas and information; and in giving voice to the poor and the deprived.

The success of good governance depends, to a large extent, on the role of the media in serving as an interface between government and the people. It will serve our democracy well if the policies, projects and schemes of the government are provided important and adequate coverage. The media, by all means, should expose the misdeeds of those who are associated with the government machinery including the people's representatives and bureaucrats.

Long ago, Mahatma Gandhi offered this prescription: "One of the objects of a newspaper is to understand the popular feelings and give expression to it; another is to arouse among the people certain desirable sentiments; and the third is fearlessly to expose popular defects." [1]

The media's responsibility should not end with mere criticism of the aberrations and pitfalls in the system of which the media are an essential component. The media find fault with the functioning of the political and the social systems, but shy away from intervening proactively to address the imperfections.

When there is a deliberate attempt by forces inimical to the system to denigrate Parliament and the parliamentary system of governance, it is the collective responsibility of society, more specially the media, to seek to isolate those who do so.

Critics argue that sometimes, nasty situations have developed for media freedom targeted by the State and Central Government. As a result journalism has suffered a lot. It has gone all out to investigate and expose the corruption, mal-practice, mal-administration of the government time to time. Print and electronic media have been running a series of investigative stories to bring to light the bad governance which is regarded as one of the root causes of all evil within our societies.

Critics argue that the adamancy of the government sends a strong signal to the society, especially to the media that if anyone dares to speak, publish or publicly discuss any bad governance by any top brass or any administrative officer, he/she would be severely punished for that. The media persons across the country consider this to be an assault on our freedom of speech and expression. While it is important in any society that its government inspire public confidence, such confidence cannot be engendered by using the threat of contempt action to deter exposure of any wrongdoing in the governance. The use of the power of defamation to stifle allegations

against government machineries would only increase public suspicion about the governance. ^[2] Public confidence in the governance cannot be maintained by silencing dissenting voices or exposure of wrongdoing. Such exposure of all institutions, including the government, police and administration is also essential in public interest for corrective action to be taken. Expose of any wrongdoing in any public institution and action against the wrongdoing only enhances the prestige of that institution rather than lowering it. According to the Media Experts, Association of Journalists and Press, such conduct of the government and administration lends further credence to the allegations reported by these journalists.

State and Media

Over the decades, there have been two patterns to conflicts between the State and the Press. One is attempts by governments to introduce legislation that try to tame the Press. The other pattern of confrontation between the State and the Press has been on account of attempts by governments to focus on other business interests of media owners. Sometimes in retaliation, when publications criticize or investigate government actions, but not always. Either way the media call it an attack on press freedom. The point is that if the media want to be free to criticize the government it has to ensure that its owners are not vulnerable on some count. ^[3] The media is a self-appointed watchdog of the government.

Society and Media

In a political system that guarantees its citizens freedom of speech and expression, the media play a very important role by promoting democratic values in society and waging a crusade against aberrations and imperfections in the polity. "The absence of a free Press and the suppression of people's ability to communicate with each other," notes our Nobel laureate Professor Amartya Sen, "have the effect of directly reducing the quality of human life." ^[4]

At the same time, the press has to see that it exercises its power for the ultimate good of society and not out of any personal vendetta. We want our press to be fearless and unbiased, and, at the same time, abjure sensationalism and projections based on its own predilections.

Democracy and Media

A healthy democratic culture can be brought about only if those who indulge in or abet activities or behaviour incompatible with the established norms are made to account for such conduct individually or as groups, separating them from the institutions they happen to be associated with.

Democracy is unthinkable without a free press and its success depends to a large extent on the kind of role the media play as an interface between government and the people. It is necessary for all those involved, from newspapers to television channels to Internet news providers, to social media to institute a process of continuous introspection to ensure that they remain transparent and truthful purveyors of information.

What is the role of a commercial media in a democratic society? The real issue, therefore, is the systematic erosion of the concept of the press as the fourth estate: the belief exemplified by people like the 19th-century historian Thomas Carlyle that "invent Writing" and "Democracy is inevitable"; the belief that the press is the guardian of democracy and the protector of the public interest. ^[5] And this erosion is the inevitable culmination of the long process of the appropriation of the concept of public press for the private interests of a few, in short, the turning of the press into a business enterprise. The news here becomes like any other commodity in the market. Of course, the media in India has hardly assumed the scale and the depth of corporatization in countries like the United States. But the signs are ominous and these are hardly encouraging for the miniscule number of media outlets that seek to be a real "public press". The most problematic aspect of the

recent coverage is the media's posturing as an "objective" and "neutral" entity - above all kinds of power interests - which merely seeks to bring the "truth" to the public. This posturing is seen in the shrill rhetoric of the blaming of the State and the political class for the tragedy. In this simplistic formulation of the "good" press versus the "evil" politicians, the media panders to something called the "public opinion" instead of acting as a critical catalyst of the latter. [6] The moral angst of the media could not be roused all these years even when 1.5 lakh farmers committed suicide in a period of mere eight years from 1997 to 2005. How many channels did exclusive "breaking news" stories when India, the second fastest growing economy in the world, secured the 94th position, behind even Nepal, in the Global Hunger Index Report? But ultimately, it hides the fact that commercial media is just another partner in the State-corporate alliance. Otherwise, how can you explain the lopsided coverage in the English media about poverty, hunger, health, nutrition and violation of human rights (which would not exceed 10 per cent of the total number of stories and reports)? No one has raised the question about the need for a real independent media which is free not only from the clutches of the State but also from profit and commercial considerations. [7] Enforcing some security guidelines for the media for coverage does not address the larger question of the freedom of the press and its accountability to the public which can happen only if the latter are treated as citizens and not as consumers.

The litmus test of a thriving democracy is the unrestrained freedom of speech that exists in the society concerned. That freedom obviously includes the freedom enjoyed by the media. Yet it is noticeable that even States wedded to the ideals of democracy have a propensity to monitor and regulate the media. This tendency becomes pronounced whenever a threat is perceived. In a crisis, the first victims of the State are the freedom of speech and the freedom of the media. Yet

the existence of the tendency on the part of the State to gag the media cannot be denied.

[8] One of the principal strengths of Indian democracy is the existence of the free and vibrant media. The media report and write on subjects of their own choice and do so in the manner of their own choosing. On few occasions has this liberty of the media been questioned or curtailed. The most notorious of these was, of course, the Emergency, when democracy was suspended and the press was muzzled. [9] True to tradition, the media were bold and free. The Indian media as a whole is emphatically not an arm of the Indian State. It cherishes its independence and autonomy. If anything, the Indian media should be bolder and go about doing its business according to its own standards and choice. Its role should be distanced from, and critical of, the State, its interests and perspective. And this detachment and criticism should prevail even when the media is handling matters about governance of the country. The Indian media retains the right to be critical of the Indian State. Any law infringing on that right, and attempting to regulate the Indian media, is nothing less than an attempt to bring back the anti-democratic days of the Emergency. [10] Critics are of opinion that the fourth estate is ever vigilant about the State's intentions.

Freedom of Media

If there is no democracy, there will be no freedom of the press. Harping on freedom without demonstrating accountability and social responsibility would weaken the position of the media in society.

The editors recognized the need for the news media to evolve effective internal mechanisms to ensure that the integrity, independence, credibility, and trustworthiness expected by the people of the media were maintained. Decrying the continuing intimidation of, and attacks on, journalists in the region by State agencies, extra-constitutional authorities, self-appointed cultural custodians, religious and political press-gangs, and criminal elements, the resolution called upon SAARC

Governments to protect media persons from attacks and threats. ^[11]

The attack on media and assaults of journalists by hooligans owing allegiance to the ruling party at the government at the media houses raises serious questions about freedom of the press. The attacks on journalists expose the vulnerability of the media in the country. Political leaders in power, top brasses of government, bureaucrats are intolerant, sometimes viciously so, of criticism and opposition. Quite apart from governments using defamation cases and breach of privilege motions in the Assembly and Parliament as a weapon against the press and the withholding of government advertisements as a way of expressing displeasure, elements within ruling parties regard resort to intimidation, threats, and even muscle power against the media as a perquisite of office. Everyone interested in democracy and the rule of law must take up the attack on journalists and the fourth estate as an issue of violation of media freedom. ^[12]

Media must perform its role as a means to the end of creating a well informed, organized, peaceful and value based society. The Indian media in general has done a great job in exposing cases of corruption, mal-practices in governance, mal-administration and misuse of authority and has also ably served many public causes in diverse ways. But problem arises with those media persons who always toe the line of authorities in power. ^[13]

Initiatives on the part of the media will have a positive impact on policy formulation especially for the rural economic sector and on their effective implementation. Journalists, especially those with the regional language media, can not only help broad-base our politics but play a major role in the overall development of the weaker and marginalized sections and in projecting responsibly the problems of rural India. A vibrant and free media have a duty to create awareness among the people by disseminating facts. This is a prerequisite for the smooth working of a democracy and

for the cause of good governance. The representatives of the media should contribute effectively and meaningfully in this process through their writings and objective reporting. This is particularly so in the case of the print media, including the regional language newspapers, whose reach is substantially wider. The media have to play a key role by highlighting any deficiencies in developmental schemes, and maladministration and corruption, acting as watchdogs.

The Constitution of India, like those of other democracies in the world, recognizes the freedom of speech and expression as a fundamental right. Although there is no specific provision in the Indian Constitution guaranteeing the freedom of press, it is taken to be included within the ambit of freedom of expression, which is guaranteed under Article 19(1)(a). Freedom of expression means not only the freedom to express one's own views but also the views of others and by any means, including printing. For a society to be considered truly democratic, there should be a high degree of protection accorded to the expression of ideas in published form, whether the medium is newspapers, magazines, pamphlets, motion pictures or television. Freedom of expression remains an important facilitator for widespread engagement within a democratic society. ^[14] The fragility of media freedom in India, in the face of government and the ruling party's intolerance, stands exposed disturbingly. ^[15]

CONCLUSION

It is essential to have research wings in academic institutions developing media personnel in reporting news, event analysis, and highlights that may help the Government to perform more transparently. This will enable our journalists to carry out original research on issues related with the functioning of the Government at Centre and at various States. Print, Audio and Audio-Visual Channel owners should encourage research being carried out by

experienced and young reporters for acquiring post-graduate qualifications, which will improve the quality of the content of the print and electronic media. Participating media members must realize that continuous updating of knowledge in a research environment is essential for all media personnel. Indian newspapers and news agencies should encourage research being carried out by journalists within India in academic research institutions, which will definitely improve the quality of reporting and enhance the participation of journalists in building good governance.

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