



ISSN Print: 2394-7500
ISSN Online: 2394-5869
Impact Factor: 5.2
IJAR2016; 2(8): 28-30
www.allresearchjournal.com
Received: 06-06-2016
Accepted: 07-07-2016

Dr. BVV Balakrishna
Asst. Professor & Course
Coordinator, Department of
Political Science Adikavi
Nannaya University
Rajamahendravaram, East
Godavari, Andhra Pradesh,
India.

Dr. N Rajasekhara
Asst. Professor, Department of
Political Science Adikavi
Nannaya University
Rajamahendravaram, East
Godavari, Andhra Pradesh,
India.

Correspondence
Dr. BVV Balakrishna
Asst. Professor & Course
Coordinator, Department of
Political Science Adikavi
Nannaya University
Rajamahendravaram, East
Godavari, Andhra Pradesh,
India.

The press: Changing face of the watch dog

Dr. BVV Balakrishna and Dr. N Rajasekhara

Abstract

Any survey of the Indian press cannot but reflect the different stages of growth and development that Indian democracy has gone through in the last sixty years, when freedom came, the press was proud of its role as the bulk of the fraternity had actively participation or contributed to the awakening of the people through different phases of the struggle against foreign rule. The press, particularly those owned by the Indians, served as an auxiliary of the freedom struggle. With each phase of the national movement, it moved forward and faced the consequences for doing so.

The Indian press have grown rapidly but we must realize that there are some challenges to be a head. Public confidence in the media, already low and it continues to come down. The major one is some of the Indian press controlled by politicians, government, businessmen, local leaders, celebrities and biased.

After independence two developments took place; first the nationalist press, though materialistically weak, got a boost and the new political elite become aware of the power of press in the running of the new edifice of the freedom.

The second development was that most of the British owned newspaper establishments sold of their assets and overnight these papers become Indian owned. The change in the patron of ownership entailed new developments in the newspaper world.

Keywords: Paid news, curriculum, syllabus, communal hatred, fraternity

Introduction

Any survey of the Indian press cannot but reflect the different stages of growth and development that Indian democracy has gone through in the last sixty years, when freedom came, the press was proud of its role as the bulk of the fraternity had actively participation or contributed to the awakening of the people through different phases of the struggle against foreign rule. The press, particularly those owned by the Indians, served as an auxiliary of the freedom struggle. With each phase of the national movement, it moved forward and faced the consequences for doing so.

An overwhelming number of newspapers at that time were published in the Indian languages whereas the more affluent and well established were the British-owned newspapers, which was mostly reflecting the views and actions of the colonial ruler. The language newspapers also on the other hand reflecting the views and actions of the colonial ruler. The language newspapers on the other hand reflected the nationalist view point. By their very origin and activity these newspapers were extremely badly off economically. In contrast the English language papers were well-placed.

The transfer of power upset this arrangement those who come to power had so long depended mainly on the language newspapers to communicate to the millions, their main weapon is fighting the foreign rule. When power was transferred from the colonial ruler to the national leaders, this linkage between the press and policies did not break down. Rather it took a new form. The press by and large supported the new dispensation; through it did not spare the rulers wherever differences arose. Particularly on the issue of the blood bath that accompanied the partitioning of the country, the press was normally divided however, after the first phase, and the press on its own formulated and accepted norms which helped strengthen a democratic approach untainted by communal hatred. Although this paper has not yet been written down its importance can hardly be minimised. It has to be said that at a time when the Indian leaders themselves were divided over the wisdom of agreeing to the partitioning of the country is worth noting that apart from giving news report the press as a

whole stood for communal harmony in the new setup. It is worth measuring the role of the Indian press in the building of the democratic order.

Growth of the Language

Over the last sixty years the press has passed through many phases. The regulation of the formulation of the linguistic states as a result of the state reorganisation commission of 1956 marked a watershed for Indian journalism. The phenomenal expansion of the language press was mainly due to two reasons, political and technological. An overwhelming majority of the language press had grown up along with the struggle for independence, as its active organ. The political leaders, on the other part, grew up in to effective communicators in the freedom struggle.

After the state re organisation in the mid-fifties, when many of the leaders of the freedom struggle days took over the reins of administration, it was but natural that the leaders of the newly-recognised state governments should try their best to establish a rapport with the press particularly the language press of the region.

Shift in Focus

This new development of the regional press brought a marked change in the focus both in news presentation and the comments on contemporary events. The newspapers by and large concentrated on provincial or regional politics with a progressively conspicuous change of emphasis from natural to provincial news-from centre to state politics.

This shift in the press focus to the politics of the regional or state level has also had an effect on the content of the newspapers.

Ownership Pattern

The ownership pattern of the press has undergone striking changes in the last sixty years. At the time of independence the prosperous were a few connected largely to the British-owned or controlled newspapers. They had the best paid staff, advanced technology and indirect government patronage. Most of the Indian language newspapers which participated in the freedom struggle or stood by it were poorly financed with primitive printing arrangements.

After independence two developments took place; first the nationalist press, though materialistically weak, got a boost and the new political elite become aware of the power of press in the running of the new edifice of the freedom. Although still weak in terms of resources, these newspapers found a free field of activity and independence which they had never enjoyed before.

The second development was that most of the British owned newspaper establishments sold of their assets and overnight these papers become Indian owned. The change in the patron of ownership entailed new developments in the newspaper world. Earlier the newspaper owners were mostly nationality with the sprinkling of them taking up a moderate liberal approach. These rests were all ardent supporters of the British Raj.

Now, with the transfer of ownership to Indian hands a new element entered. The Indian owners were mostly business magnates made themselves rich in other commercial or industrial spheres, with nothing to do with the media. Now when they purchased the new printing establishments-which were mostly in the best of conditions they come up like absentee owners of real estate. Most of them had nothing to

do with journalism but looked upon it as another line of business through which they could invest their capital for profit. They might have been jute magnates, sugar barons, cement manufactures; but they themselves could hardly run a newspaper. They grew new relationship between the proprietor (or the management as they would like to be called) and the journalists who brought out the paper from the editor down to the proof-reader.

This delinking between the proprietor and manufacturer of the product out of this investment saw the first assertion of the working journalists right to better wages and the editor's freedom and the proprietor's right to property and then right to earn profit from the press that he come to own.

In the fifties and sixties, the press reflected by and large the position and urges of the ruling establishment. It was friendly but few were the docile camp-followers of the establishment. Soon after this new rumblings started first in Gujarat and then Behar- mainly over misuse and corruption led by Jayaprakashnarayan. It had the potential of a powerful opposition movement and Indira Gandhi went for the emergency on June 25, 1975.

The press was gagged; some of the establishments were seized while censorship was imposed in a manner that she preferred. With the collapse of the emergency and the resumption of the elective democratic order the Indian press got back its freedom.

Present challenges

The Indian press have grown rapidly but we must realize that there are some challenges to be a head. Public confidence in the media, already low and it continues to come down. The major one is some of the Indian press controlled by politicians, government, businessmen, local leaders, celebrities and biased.

Second one is instead of serving public focus on profit margins. Most of the press concentrated on how to get the profits? This tendency is not at all help for the public and as well as press also.

There is need of the change in the curriculum and syllabus of the journalism schools. Most of the followed books published in 1960s. With no uniform curriculum this method too fails the Indian journalism student. Thus in India journalism students deserve better.

Paid news is another problem of Indian press. It refers to the systematic engagement of mainstream media outlets in publishing favourable articles in exchange for payment. This type of news is typically sponsored by politicians, businessmen, and celebrities in order to improve their public image or accomplish political goals. It rots India's democracy.

Reporters blackmailing is another problem. Some times news reporters blackmail for not publishing the concerned news in the paper. It is also one of the causes for the downing the value of the press and reporters.

Attacks against journalists tell about the state of freedom of press in India. There is a frequent attack on journalists from police, criminals, politicians and others. Now the respected lawyers have to be added to the list. The recent incidents are evidence, there is a threat against the rationalist journalists and writers in India.

Conclusion

The new philosophy of the market had by and large affected the press both in its functionary and approaches. These are

more emphasis on advertisement than on news and the elevation of the affluent with very little concerned for the impoverished majority-all this is fast transforming the charter of the Indian press.

Fifty nine years ago when freedom came, the country as a whole agreed with Gandhi Ji that the struggle would not end until last drop of tear from the most wretched was removed. The same should remain the objective of the press. Its democratic commitment demands that it has to take up new and difficult struggles for the up lift of the impoverished people in all of its manifestations from hunger to environment.

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