

**BIASED MEDIA: A THREAT TO INDIAN DEMOCRACY***-Rakesh Kumar\****Abstract**

In the mass media era, the role of the media was universally regarded as fundamental to the proper functioning of the democratic state: the media's capacity to provide information freely to all citizens ensured they had equal access to the democratic process. Media is being considered as the fourth pillar of democracy . It is easy to demonstrate how the flow of information could be manipulated and the power of the media abused. The modern era seems to be the of a media . In this world of technology we often come through fake news, hate speech, revenge porn and so on. In this article, I want to discuss some aspects of what we have got from the digital mediums so far, with a particular focus on the changing relationship between the media and democracy – and within that, the role of news, information and the practice of journalism. Media is being considered as “Silent revolution” in 21<sup>st</sup> century.

**I INTRODUCTION**

“Just because something is not a lie does not mean that it is not deceptive . A liar knows that he is a liar, but one who speaks mere portions of truth in order to deceive is a craftsman of destruction.”

- Criss Jami

Media has played a significant role in establishing democracy throughout the world including India. Since 18<sup>th</sup> century the media has been instrumental in generating awareness and in spreading knowledge across the masses especially in the American Independence movement and the French Revolution . Media did the same work for India also . Media has played a very critical role even in colonial India. Media is like an eye of an eagle which keeps an eye on the activities of a state.

In our Independence media did the same work. The fallacies of British ruled government being good for the growth and development of colonial India were shattered by means of the media. Media has proved to be the sole source of information for our citizens (i.e. our Indian brothers) of colonial India to become aware of the arbitrariness and brutality of the British Colonial rule.

Media played very significant role in communicating the non- humanitarian acts to the people of India. Media is considered as the fourth pillar of democracy along with Executive , legislation and Judiciary and rightly so.<sup>1</sup>Media was not only used after independence but before independence also. From pre- independence India where Mahatma Gandhi used journals “ Young India” and “Harijan” to communicate his message to the people of his country and also to organize National Movement in the country at the wider level. But today we use different/ newer method/media like social media.

## **II WHAT DOES DEMOCRACY MEAN ?**

The world democracy has been conveniently interpreted as the right to vote. In a study , Ober has analysed the word “Democracy”. The origin of the word democracy is Greek word ,a combination of Demos (the people) and kratos (power), thus meaning “the power of the people” which, in turn , means “majority rule” by the people or their elected representatives. It is generally construed as the power to vote and elect a government. However, Ober ( 2008) discuss how the word democracy actually means “capacity to do things” and not just “majority rule” . It is the power to be able to participate in the democratic process of a country , and not just power to vote a popular government to power. In democracy, every citizen has a right to freedom of expression. This also means that one can express in without the fear of any repercussion and without the fear of authority, and that the citizen and the authority are on an equal platform during the changes.<sup>2</sup> In short, in a democracy all citizens have equal right to voice their concerns, and to speak their mind.

In the recent elections 2019 Lok Sabha election it is apt to say that although role of media has undergone massive changes it still remains a critical pillar in the Indian democratic system . Media has played its very important role very well. However, it is necessary for the progression of media it is necessary that media of that should be free from any constraint and ill-pressure. However, the Independence of this crucial fourth pillar has often been threatened which has led to the doubts about its reliability and authenticity. Press censorship during the 1975 National Emergency to the more recent shutdown of a news channel during reporting of the 2016 Pathankot attack and Pulwama attack show restricted press freedom , with NGO reporters without borders ranking

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<sup>1</sup> <https://opentextbc.ca/mediastudies101/chapter/media-and-democracy/>

<sup>2</sup> Dr. K. John Babu, Media and Human rights

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.India has been ranked 140 and its abuses score is 65.25 as compared to the 2018 which has decreased to -2 in World press freedom index . Index indicating the same the World Press Freedom Index takes into account factors like pluralism , self-censorship, media independence, transparency, violence against journalists and media persons. India is being criticized in world for its sensationalism and manipulation of the fact by selective portrayal of the audiences like mostly news is presented to the masses by concealing facts.

Social media has added to the Fire of Sensationalism. With the urgent need to know the information and dispense it amongst the masses first has often led to mis-reporting of fake news resulting in controversies and defamation in some cases. For example GPS chip in 500 and 2000 Rs. notes after demonetisation.

In common parlance social media is seen synonymous with Facebook , Twitter, WhatsApp, LinkedIn etc. However, social media goes beyond this and has a broader scope. It is an umbrella term that refers to various websites in application that enables users to create share content, interact and to participate in social networking and to put out their views on the social networking. Social media has been often described as a “Silent Revolution” of the “21st century”. Movements initiated from these platforms like - #MetooMovement , #BlackLivematters and various schemes of the Government of India also have been launched from these platforms and are communicated to the masses.

United Nations has made internet access a human right. Recently Supreme Court has declared right to Internet access as a Fundamental right of every Indian . It is said that social media is a light arm of anarchy, because it can be used as a measure to disturb the tranquility of any Nation and to a very extent this is true it affects the peace of a nation . Social media is being used by terror organisations like ISIS to fulfil their agenda and disturb the political and economic stability of the country as this affects very badly. Social media is being used by Isis to promote religious fundamentalism and favouritism in the country.<sup>3</sup> Recently last year a scene of Bhojpuri was circulated in West Bengal which led to communal rights in society and polarisation of society . Social media is also used for spreading fake news deliberately so that a particular segment of people can benefit from that joke, rumours . For example few years back a news spread that there was lynching of north eastern people in Bangalore which resulted in mass Exodus from the Bangalore of north eastern people . Another rumour spread that there were some people who slaughtered

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<sup>3</sup> Andrew Dewdney and Peter Ride, The new media handbook , London And New York, Taylors and Francis Group

cow and the public in fit of Rage of anger they lynched the people. Another incident that took place in up that there were some people abducting children. This rumour spread so fast that people without any reason targeted some people and burst their anger on another people. Every political party use media selflessly to promote their policies agenda and illiciting support for their campaign. Social media also become a platform to glorify political leaders prior to elections. With no proper regulatory Framework in place for social media, this avenue is often violated to spread fake news, a tool for propaganda as well as foreign interference in domestic election. Social media sometime prove to be adda of some religious people as they are staunch followers of some particular group because of these views violence in society is there.<sup>4</sup> Last year a guy in Mumbai try to resorted to suicide because he was threatened by people of religious Organisation own his views on a religious topic. If media can create a war between two parties it can create peace also. Indian government's external affairs ministry did a tremendous job in providing relief to foreign citizens of the India. Another example is Delhi Metro which uses its Twitter handle to inform the open and closure of gates. Social media became the voice of voiceless people of the society. Movements like #Metoomovement started which allowed the women to come and file a case against a sexual harassment at workplace. Jon Ranson has said that it has given voice to the voiceless people. Personalities like Nana Patekar, director Harvey Weinstein and various personalities were there which were caught in this. Social media has played an important role in economic front social media is being used on all interfaces for the promotion in their products. Social media is a medium to raise a voice against government policies and social evils prevailing in a society. Now there has emerged a fifth pillar of a democracy i.e. Social Media.

Social media has become means of free speech and expression guaranteed under the article 19 of Indian constitution this can be manifested from the Supreme Court decision on right to internet as a fundamental right. Social media is proliferating a very good ideas and effecting both positively and negatively there is a need to regulate it. Government should come up with a legislation to regulate social media. Just like a car without the handle is of no use same is with these platforms if they are controlled they can prove to be very dangerous in future. There is need to focus on privacy front as well so that the data cannot be used as a threat to personal and national security. Awareness and awakening about use of social media in need to be increased specially among the youth so that they can maximize on positive front of social media and minimise its ill effect.

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<sup>4</sup> Silvio Waisbord, Media Sociology, Jaipur, Rawat Publications.

Indeed social media is a double edged sword if not handled with care might cause harm to you badly . It has transformed the way thinking . it has led to violation of privacy, fake news .

In US where democracy is said to be started has also been in news due to its scandal in election.<sup>5</sup> The Cambridge Analytica scandal where in Facebook data was stolen and has been used to influence the people behaviour towards their respective candidates . Social media's gruesome face has been seen in the US 2016 elections.<sup>6</sup> Media bias varies in its form sensationalism to story selection and placement as well as omission and selection of content while portraying a story. Often holistic view is deleted and biased extreme labels are promoted to define groups and politicians.<sup>7</sup>

Moreover a recent research project called Media Ownership Monitor carried out in India by reporters without borders and data leads has found excessive political control over media. And the news over which political parties have their influence loses its credibility . News reported within person's pressure not only loses its credibility but also its authenticity.<sup>8</sup> Like it may not be suitable take a name of a news channel but there are various channels which are owned by the members of the party in power then how can we expect that the news provided by the channels will be given in an impartial manner and will be giving authentic matter. The gradual crippling of democracy is also evident from the concentration of media content in a few hands like 76% of Indians use social media and radio is also owned by the state so it is monopolised. Amartya Sen sees the media as a watchdog not just against corruption but also against disaster. He said "There has never been a famine in a functioning multiparty democracy .A free press and the practice of democracy contribute greatly to bringing out information that can have an enormous impact on policies for famine prevention a free press and an active political opposition constitute the best early-warning system a country threatened by famine could have."<sup>9</sup>

The key issue is the lack of proper regulation of media in India and toothless nature of the Press Council of India. The lack of regulation has increased cross holding and corporate and political lobbying and ownership. The increasing rate for TRP to get advertising revenues had further led

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<sup>5</sup> <https://democracy-reporting.org/country/social-media-and-democracy>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.frontiersin.org/research-topics/11319/media-democracy-and-governance>

<sup>7</sup> <https://legaldesire.com/role-of-media-in-democracy/>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.vox.com/policy-and-politics/2019/1/22/18177076/social-media-facebook-far-right-authoritarian-populism>

<sup>9</sup> <https://legaldesire.com/role-of-media-in-democracy/>

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to more sensationalized news with minimal forces on development like social welfare government schemes and awareness of the general masses with the rise of social media . Urgent reforms are need of the hour to revamp the outdated regulation for media in India. When Press Council of India was formed in 1978, media only comprised of newspaper, journals, magazines and TV channels . With increase of internet social media platforms are at its peak so they must also be regulated within the same ambit . The Tamil Nadu government has initiated steps in this regard for social media accountability by proposing to link Aadhaar with social media accounts. Anti-nationalist use media for the radicalisation of the youth and it targets the miserable sections of the society for the polarization of the politics also being promoted by the media while also encouraging hero worship tendencies. The era where media was considered as a guardian of a country and constitution . Keeping a check on the government and encouraging substantial debate among the masses on critical national issues to participate in democracy is starting fade away. The aforementioned quote by the states that selective truths can lead to weapon of destruction. In the same manner you must look at creating genuinely Independent and transparent system for the media and ensure ownership restricting in cross holding .The Leveson Committee Department of 2012 of UK can be a great static point to adapt into the Indian context ensuring right to free speech in press while curtailing exploitation and misuse of the same . As Victor Hugo said, “No power can on earth can stop an idea whose time has come.” Today this power is social media.