

Growing Crisis of Credibility in Modern Indian Journalism

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Abstract

Indian journalism is the backbone of diffusion of information in society. It aims to provide information to its citizens and plays a decisive role in shaping their future plans, supporting their present endeavours and recollecting past lessons. Journalism has been, and is, a most helpful source of wisdom for the common public as well as government and private organisations. With the help of digital media, credible and authentic sources and lightning speed reporting keeps people abreast of all the latest events and occurrences and forewarns them of any imminent danger. The purpose of journalism is aimed to provide more trustworthy environment for society with authentic information based on researched data. But in the present 'Kali yuga' is not that easy. The deprivation and hypocrisy of the present era is affecting modern Indian Journalism too. The one area which represented authenticity and credibility is deviating from its primary goal. The present paper aims to focus how Indian Journalism is transforming into 'Yellow Journalism' and losing its credibility in the mad pursuit of financial gain and fame at any cost. Common people are becoming the victims of this delusional and sensational journalism. Considering every aspect of journalism present paper also tries to highlight the prospective and progressive scope of journalism.

Introduction

“Journalism is what maintains democracy. It is the force for progressive social change,” said American author Andrew Vachss (Verma). In India too journalism is accepted as the fourth pillar of democracy. It aims to give the voice to the voiceless, educate people of their rights and state the facts for the upliftment of the society. Journalism is anything which gives information, keeps people up-to-date, educates them and makes them aware of social, political and other areas in an impartial, objective way. It can be in the form of reporting, documentary writing, photo journalism, editing or other media like newspaper, television, social media etc.

Cambridge Dictionary defines Journalism as, “the work of collecting, writing, and publishing news stories and articles in newspapers, magazines or broadcasting them on the radio and television.” English literary critic and poet, Matthew Arnold, commented, “Journalism is literature in hurry” (Mehta

222). Journalism paves the way for the growth and development of the society and carries great import, both on the national and international level.

History and Growth of Indian Journalism

In India first printing press arrived in the year 1556 through the efforts of Jesuit missionaries. It was brought from Portugal and installed at the college of St. Paul in Goa. *Hicky Bengal Gazette* published and edited by James Augustus Hicky and started in 1780 was the first printed English newspaper of India. Then in 1816 first Indo-Anglian paper *Bengal Gazette* was started by Gangadhar Bhattacharya. Earlier the majority of newspapers dealt with the need of European community of Calcutta. Later on the attention of Britishers was drawn to the cultural and philosophical history of India through Journalism. Soon the spark of revolt started to take place in the hearts of many Indians and hundreds of newspapers raised their voice against ruling British government

and demanded freedom of expression. The heat of revolt started many campaigns and movements against the colonizers and in this agitated journey of India's freedom struggle for independence many English, Hindi and other newspapers played the vital role which include *The Hindu (1878)*, *Amrita Bazar Patrika (1868)*, and *Hindustan Times (1924) etc.* (Narayanrao 16).

Since then Indian journalism has been the voice of Indian Democracy. Journalist suspends his own opinions and judgments about what he see and what he report (Verma), and state the facts as it is, and gives the chance to the readers to decide themselves and judge on their own. Journalism opens wider scope to be explored in front of the society directly or indirectly. Whether it is the educational field, research field, security or affairs of national importance journalism has become an integral and indelible part of the fabric of society.

Discussion

Journalism holds the power to give the voice to the voiceless and stand against the oppressor. 20th President of the United States, James A Garfield once said, "the printing press is the most powerful weapon with which man has armed himself for the fight against ignorance and oppression" (Mehta 223). Through the power of journalism one can raise the voice against the wrong and reclaim the rights and liberty from which he was deprived of. Journalism has proved to be a very helpful and thought provoking art which gives information, idea, wisdom, inspiration and power. Being motivated, encouraged and inspired by many thought provoking and inspirational documentaries and stories, youth of the nation find its path of life which in turn, proves to be a great help for the welfare of society and national growth.

However, any powerful tool should be used and handled carefully as it always has two sides, Journalism, just like any lethal weapon can be used either way, to harm or to protect. The great French General Napoleon Bonaparte, once famously stated "three hostile newspapers are more to be feared than a thousand bayonets" (223). The profundity of this statement cannot be undermined, more so in the contemporary scenario. On one hand when news and reporting can inspire a citizen to do right, an incautious reporting can harm the psyche of the responder to devastating proportions..An improvident reporting can be proved hostile to the national peace and harmony of the public in particular, and humanity in general.

In recent times journalism in India has taken a very critical form. Journalism which is supposed to state facts only, has become the means more of entertainment, propaganda, sensation, increasing and amassing TRPs and essentially turning into money making. Irrespective of the truth, only because of the sensational headlines, exaggerated remarks, fancy words and over sounding tone of the reporters a mere trivial news takes the form of national emergency. These sensation and provocative news plays decisive role in forming public opinions which is unethical. Common people, being affected by these frequently replayed news, suspend their own sense of judgement and react impulsively. In one way or another media and other sources of journalism have become the opinion generator for the masses and their own judgement becomes highly affected by the media's manipulative representation of reality, which of course has already spread its giant tentacles, ensnaring the gullible viewer, because of the sensational and provocative reporting.

Today's news is not propaganda free. It has become a money-making industry, viciously competing against one another to increase TRP and

viewership for financial gain. Unlike earlier times when news media, irrespective of political or other pressure, used to focus on facts and reality, today's journalism has taken a complete volte-face. It would be in the fitness of things to recall the greatness of reputed Indo-Anglian author and astute journalist Khushwant Singh who was the ideal columnist, whose columns were highly influential. He was the first editor in the history of Indian journalism to take over the editor's page for himself. Instead of adding his own mug shots and creating sensational headlines, he reflected and represented only the facts. He was awarded with the 'Honest Man of The Year' in the year 2012 by Sulabh International (Kumar 574). Appreciating this kind of commendable Journalism V.S. Naipaul termed this as "an appetising way of writing. --- Khushwant has always been a selfless encourager of Indian talent. It's his own brand of patriotism" (575). Many such stalwarts of journalistic writing as Khushwant Singh or Ravish Kumar ensured that journalism rise above bias or any form of agenda orientation and be valued as an ethical, non-biased, impartial, propaganda free information provider and educator.

But journalism now a days, whether by deliberate intent or accidental chance, seems to be paving the way to dramatize and sensationalize weak, spurious and lurid news. Considering the present times, today's media seems to play safe. It no longer reports news neutrally and is sometimes forced to lean towards a political party or other influential organisation that has a hold on it. Referring to this kind of sensational and biased Indian mainstream which supports the ruling party of India, NDTV Journalist Ravish Kumar coined a pejorative term that is "Godi Media" (Singh Bal). This Godi media ignores the fact which goes against the ruling party and seems to chant even trivial jobs done by it.

In recent times journalism either through print media or digital media is delivering highly demanding and more likable news regardless it is the fact or manipulation of the fact. The less likable and less entertaining news is being ignored by media as their major concern now a days is not to report the fact but to run their business. Mocking this business driven media Arun Jaitley, former Information and Broadcasting minister of India, on 8 May 2015 said that there was a "flood of channels but dearth of facts" (Flood).

What fact or detail is read in newspapers, watched on television or listened to on the radio, is either garnished by some pompous, bombastic and superfluous words or exaggerated in order to attract the attention of maximum number of audience irrespective of its effect on the mind and psyche of the people. In addition, many other visual effects are created such as use of large and bold fonts, dramatic colours, attractive and theatrical photography in an attempt to embellish the most trivial news. Sometimes not bothering to verify the news, or ascertain its veracity, media plays along with the rumours. Newswith fictional makeover and exaggerated remarks spreads fear and panic and creates an increasingly frightening environment among common people. News broadcasting of Covid-19 pandemic is the most recent example of such journalism. Journalism during this period while being the most helpful source of information and support for public as well as government, could not resist being the most terrifying source of fear, national discord, mental trauma and panic among the masses too. Agitating the masses by its sensational and overly creative headlines and reporting, journalism spread panic and enveloped the entire nation in fear. Many cases of suicides were reported during Covid-19 pandemic which were committed out

of terror, panic and depression. The news media can be held responsible for it to some extent.

Sensational journalism which is universally known as Yellow Journalism has become the current trend streaming across channels and print media. In an attempt to advertise their channels and increase the viewership digital media now a days has started different kinds of programmes in the name of journalism such as TV debates or debacles, where they organise well orchestrated and well planned debate cum entertaining programmes. Whatever the agenda be their focus is more on to what the audience wants to listen or receive and not what the fact is. Organising such programmes, media takes the form of someone superior and starts to judge everything and also seems to pass its verdict even before the legal proceedings of the court. Regardless what the reality is, media statements seems to uphold the most desirable verdict which focus on most demanding outcomes for the audience. Now and then different legal authorities of India have been criticising such misdeeds of journalism as in March 2018, the then Chief Justice of India, Dipak Misra said that, "journalist cannot write anything they imagine and behave as if they are sitting in some pulpit" (Chief Justice).

In July 2022 N.V. Raman, former Chief Justice of India, accusing media as a threat to democracy also stated,

"of late, we see the media running kangaroo courts, at times on issues even experienced judges find difficult to decide. Ill-informed and agenda driven debates on issues involving justice delivery are proving to be detrimental to the health of democracy. Biased views being propagated by media are affecting the people, weakening democracy, and harming the system. In this process, justice delivery gets adversely affected. By overstepping and breaching your

responsibility, you are taking our democracy two steps backwards" (Incapable of).

A similar sentiment was also expressed by retired Chairman and Chief Executive Officer of the International Harvester Co., John L. McCaffrey, who said, "it is peculiar that Presidents don't do better. Heaven knows they receive plenty of advice from the newspaper" (Mehta 222). Using the freedom of expression to excessive and elaborate lengths, journalism seems to misuse its power. By shelving all the ethics of journalism and democracy it sometimes acts beyond the limits of dignity and decency. It becomes a serious threat to society when journalism in place of stating facts and following its rules and ethical guidelines seems to deviate from its path. Breaching the lines drawn by itself and misusing the right of freedom of expression it sometimes acts beyond the lines thus harming the democratic rights.

Journalism is like a naked sword that hangs threateningly on society's head. With its sensational and exaggerated statements it can make the accused person the vicious villain even before the court trial. The accused has to face the brutal treatment of print or digital media which cannot be reversed even if he is proven innocent by court. In recent times media trials have become the threat for national peace and harmony. Many a times it has instigated communal violence and disrupted the peaceful co-existence between people and communities. Unity in diversity specifically religious harmony which is the mainstay of Indian democracy seems to be weakening and Godi media is accountable for it to some extent.

Considering these sensational news people seems to have lost the trust of news media. Being cautious by nature, most people think twice before they believe anything said to them via news broadcasting on TV channels or published in newspapers, Hence journalism is to a great extent,

losing its credibility as a trusted agency of truthful and honest reporting.

Journalism though undergoing this spate of credibility crises currently, is also on the path of self-renewal and rejuvenation. Nothing is permanent, no matter how bleak or dark the effect might be presently. After every winter comes spring, after every fall comes the rise says economics and after every crisis the era of prosperity takes birth into world and that eternal cycle of regeneration is set to soon take place in the field of journalism too which will contribute to the growth and success of Indian society. Going by amazing continuous growth and development of Indian democracy, journalism will take more trustworthy, more tolerant and more noble form than ever. There is infinite hope yet.

Conclusion

Journalism in today's scenario is suffering from the crises of credibility and authenticity. These crises laid down by yellow journalism is not only the threat for democracy but for journalism itself too. The scope of journalism is wider than expected, it can be used for more noble, highly influential and motivational goals that can generate spectacular outcomes. Media, specifically digital media needs to behave responsibly. The power of media voice should be used to educate and energise people to build a prosperous progressive and peaceful country. Aspiring youth of India is full of hope and inspiration. The zealous and scholarly attitude of Indian youth can be used to give the way to a more noble and a better form of journalism. Journalism in the hands of philanthropic aspirants can make the country more prosperous, plausible and radiant than ever.

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