Media and Social Responsibility

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ABSTRACT

Media plays a vital role in a democratic country like India. Because, a democratic system can run to its utmost potential when there is wide public participation which is not possible without people getting informed about various issues. This is where media steps in. Media historically evolved to inform, educate and entertain people. In the present century, mass media is influencing people’s life in different ways. Print media, being the leader over a considerable period of time has now got competition from Television, which is reshaping many of the social responses. Radio, apart from providing news and views, has also developed a flair for entertainment. Thereby getting a lot of acceptance, with the advancement of technology came new media with internet has indeed made it possible to disseminate information and ideas in real time across the globe. However, among all these developments there is a cause of concern. Is media really fulfilling its social responsibility?

Key words: Media, advancement, society, responsibility, global village.

Introduction

In recent times Indian media has been subject to a lot of criticism for the manner in which they have disregarded their obligation to social responsibility presently, there has been criticisms that media is primarily catering to the pleasure seeking tendencies to be a medium for acquiring new ideas and broader vision and a vehicle for change. Instead it is becoming a mere tool for fun and frolic. It is therefore, necessary to consider the alternative point of view about the role of media in the society and how it is failing in its primary role. The media is expected to perform and it performs a variety of roles in the society which can be briefly summarized as informative and educative roles. It also acts as a community forum.

In its informative role, media helps democracy function effectively. Informing the citizens about and helping them to make informed choices, media makes democracy to function in its true spirit. It also keeps the elected representatives accountable to those who elected them by highlighting whether they have fulfilled their wishes for which they were elected and whether they have stuck to their oaths of office. Media also increases awareness among the people about the government’s programmes, policies. proposals so that the people are aware of what the government is doing and on the other side the media highlights the issues and problems and concerns of the people to enlighten the government about what it has to do for the people. Thus, media serves as bridge between the government and the people. This informative role of India nourishes and strengthens the democracy and makes governance not only effective and efficient but also makes the government truly participative. To quote from the preamble of the India’s Right to information Act “Democracy requires an informed citizenry and transparency of governance which are vital governance which are vital to its functioning and also to contain corruption and to hold governments and their instrumentalities accountable to the governed (John, 2005).

It is also used for developmental communications. The Food and Agriculture Organization report says, “We have a media used without a development action without the media or communication support. Yet in a
real world the two would work hand in hand.” Today, that advice of the FAO became part of government’s agenda and media is effectively leveraged for developmental action (Joseph, 1993).

**Role of Media**

The media in its orientation role orients the behavior, perceptions and attitudes of the people in a particular way in a desired direction. For example, people have mistaken or wrong notions about various diseases like leprosy or HIV/AIDS. Many think that by touching people suffering from these diseases one would be infected. But when the people heard on radio or watched television programmers or read messages which tell them that by touching HIV/AIDS patients they do not get infected, that gradually helps in changing the perception and attitude of people towards the disease. Similarly, for eradicating polio there are special programmes and messages disseminated through the media. They inform people about the need for giving polio drops to children and about the day that is declared a “Polio Day”. Special arrangements are made to give polio drops to as many children as possible on polio Say.

The media also through its advocacy and campaign acts as an agent of change in development in shaping up the policies of the government in a particular direction. The governments of the day in their zeal often take policy decision in haste and sometimes they may lack a correct perspective or they may commit genuine mistake while initiating a policy or taking a decision. Media here plays a suggestive role when the government deviates from the correct approach or when it is bereft of ideas or shies away from taking initiative. Thus media plays a role as a corrective critic or constructive advisor. The media plays the role of a valuable educator by instilling and arousing civic consciousness among the people related to variety of subjects like sanitation, health, family planning, etc. and imparts valuable knowledge and skill to the students and adults as well as literates and illiterates. For example, it made farmers aware of new variety of seeds, new methods of agriculture and protection of the crops. Besides that, the channels like Gyanavani and Gyanadarshen have made the attainment of education a reality to many segments of the disadvantaged.

The traditional media with the help of the new media increased speed of media. That in turn has resulted in bringing people across the world closer and developed the new term “global village” “Global Village” means the whole world is shrinking and becoming a village. With the help of television, computer and internet one feels part of the event, happy or sad, happening anywhere in the world by watching the event live. For example the Mumbai terror attack in Hotel Taj. The television channels covered the incident live. And those who watched the incident they were both sympathizing and empathizing with the victims.

The wide variety of media like print, television, internet, mobile devices and video games entertain people as per the taste of the users. Besides, media also plays a vital role in promoting trade and industry through advertisements. The telecasting of latest updates about the products helps in boosting the sale of products. Media was used as a weapon of social change. In the pre-independence era, in India people like Raja Ram Mohan Roy wrote against sati, child marriage, purdah system etc. (in his newspaper ‘Miralat A khbar’ and ‘Sambad Kaumudi’) Nikhil Chakraborty wrote about the horrors of the Bengal Famine of 1943. Munshi Premchand and Sharat Chandra Chattopadhyaya wrote against feudal practices and women’s oppression. Similarly, after independence, mass media like AIR (All India Radio) and Doordarshan, the public service broadcasters in the country had the responsibility of providing educational programs apart from information and entertainment. However, it needs to be taken note of that the public service broadcasting system in the country was closely identified with the state. A monopolistic media structure under state control has the threat of becoming the mouthpiece of the ruling elite. The scenario was bound to change with the opening up of Indian economy in abid to integrate with the global system (Manuel, 2007).

It signaled the emergence of a competitive market in the field of media with public service broadcasters getting challenges from private entities. This, however, had the seeds of a new problem of ownership. Ownership pattern of media across the globe and in India is a cause for concern. There are big corporate houses who own newspapers and television networks. Concentration of ownership of media increases the risk of a doctored media. Media independence in such a scenario gives way to safeguarding the interest of the owners who may not serve social responsibilities.

The ownership of any media segment also affects the content. But with internet a relatively newer entrant in the field of mass media has proved to be more democratic than news-paper and television. Internet has provided the opportunity for citizens who are conversant with the medium to express their views about a number of issues. In many cases groups have been formed by like-minded people who discuss and debate over a number of decisions on the part of the government and seek new ideas for the way ahead.
The power of the internet can be easily judged from the developments in Egypt in recent times. Social networking sites like Face book and Twitter were used to garner support against the regime of President Hosni Mubarak. Internet has been used by various public service organizations and N.G.O.s to inform people about their objectives and also to make them aware of various initiatives on the part of the government as well as non government organizations for social upliftment. In internet the barrier to communication is minimal which helps in the formation of a participative environment. There is also greater empowerment of the users through higher level of interactivity and flexibility in choice of media outlets. The potential of the medium lies in its ability to be more personalized by offering user created content. Further, there is the threat of advertising revenues influencing media outputs. Those who control considerable wealth have the opportunity to sway public opinion in their favor with the help of mass media. In the 2g scam the Radio Tapes controversy brought in focus the journalist. Politician and industrial conglomerate rate nexus. Developments like these are a threat to democracy and undermine the media fraternity. A dvertisements in newspapers, television, radio and at time the internet have become a part of the present election campaigns. Candidates with better funds have the edge over others in being voted to office because they can buy newspaper space and considerable air time. Agencies like press Council of India need to be vigilant to stem the rot. To counter these problem pluralistic media organizations, these are financially viable and needs to be encouraged. Community participation is a goal that the media should strive for in a country like India (Rajendra Singh, 2007).

Conclusion

To conclude, a re-look at the role of the fourth estate is the need of the hour. The media should be a partner in national development. The owners and managers of the media must realize their responsibility towards society and aim to provide information that is authentic, reliable and free from bias.

Reference