

# Mass media



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

Last year's biggest controversy in the Manmohan Singh Government was that of Nira Radia's controversial tapes. The 2G scam highlighted the involvement of big corporate like the Ambani and the Tata group. The tapping of Nira Radia's phones by Income Tax department tappe Radia's phone lines for 300 days in 2008-09, as part of its investigations into alleged large scale money laundering, tax evasion and financial malpractices by Nira Radia may be taken as invasion of privacy but it unveiled the bitter truth about lobbying at par with journalism.

Radia tapes controversy is about the involvement of nira radia in the planning of the news with some of very well known faces in the field of journalism. In the controversy the people involved from the media are Barkha Dutt, group editor, English News Channel, NDTV 24x7, Vir Sanghvi, editorial adviser, Hindustan Times, Prabhu Chawla, editor, language editions, India Today magazine and Rajdeep Sardesai, Editor in Chief CNN-IBN. There were many other official bureaucrats and industrialists involved in these controversy. But after the tapes were published there was a question raised on the credibility of the news media.

In the mainstream media there was total blackout in the nira radia tapes controversy as the many huge and famous names from journalistic field were involved in the telephonic conversation with nira radia. They were found out discussing many things related to 2g scam and the cabinet discussions. After these tapes were published to the people and media, media showed the least interest in this news. But the first ever article was published about the radia controversy and media practices is done by the investigative journalist J. Gopikrishnan of The Pioneer.

The title to this report was "Tapped Trapped" on April 28, 2010. This article talked about the involvement of Nira Radia and A. Raja in 2G scam. On November 29, 2010, the Outlook magazine ran a cover story and published transcripts of the Radia tapes with these comments: "India, the republic, is now on sale. Participating in the auction is a group of powerful individuals, corporate houses, lobbyists, bureaucrats and journalists..... Radia's conversations show how even cabinet berths can be decided by this select oligarchy..."

The tapes also paint a dismal picture of how everything—from cabinet berths to natural resources—is now available for the right price. The now controversial 2G allocation was just one of the many manipulations orchestrated by players in high places. "In the recorded conversations that are in the public domain, several prominent figures are heard in conversation with Radia. In today's world of competition where every news is important, news channels ignored Radia tape controversy. This news gained prominence on social networking sites such as Twitter and Facebook.

It is evident that journalism has grown a paunch and doesn't seem to cater to its "fourth pillar of a democracy" approach. Radia's tapes controversy linked lobbyists and journalists coming together and creating and establishing "news" rather than true investigative journalists. The controversy has brought into limelight eminent journalists like Barkha Dutt, Vir Sanghvi and Rajdeep Sardesai— all of whom are benchmarks of Indian Journalism. The foundation of Journalism is now in question. Does media have the right to play with information?

Or should it simply broadcast information? When the other news channels, news papers and the social networking sites talked about the radia tapes the news channels like NDTV were questioning the authenticity of tapes. When asked to the barkha dutt about her involvement she replied with a statement that her conversation with nira radia is a part of news gathering. But we expect journalists to talk to a lot of people from all walks of life. Journalists talk to politicians, businessmen, lobbyists, terrorists, criminals, Maoists. And they should in the interest of fair reporting.

However, it is not just WHO you talk to but WHAT you talk about that is also significant. But when we look at the telephonic conversation between nira radia and barkha dutt it seems that nira radia feeds the news to journalist. There was several names involved in this controversy like vir sanghvi, he wrote a clarification regarding his role in the controversy. Where he said that the authenticity of the transcript cannot be ascertained. Another media personality involved was rajdeep sirdesai, he is the editor in chief of CNN-IBN .

Where CNN-IBN carried out a show The Last Word -- the first of its kind weekly show in Indian television -- debates issues related to the media. Karan thapar conducted the show. Where the discussed and talked about the media as medium and its responsibilities. As we all believe in media as the fourth pillar of democracy. We have many expectations from media as the medium of awareness, information and current affairs. As media is very powerful medium which has great effect on the day to day life of the people even some or the other way media plays a role of a opinion maker.

So when media is bombarded with expectations and responsibilities at same time media enjoys freedom. But then the question arises after such kind of a controversy that do media have any limits for enjoying the freedom given to media. There were many reasons given by the media houses to denial this fact they intentionally they are ignoring the radia tape controversy. The some of the responses by media houses were The tapes have not been authenticated, This is an invasion of someone's privacy.

And so on. There have been a lot of justifications coming from those Journalists and their supporters about the Radia Tapes being sensationalized, as the conversations are just part of the " gathering of information" which any journalist does, in the process of finding stories. However for any keen reader who has followed the first part of these tapes on Journalists, and who will read this second part, it is evident that what we see is more than just innocent " gathering of information". When journalists gather information from their different sources, they are supposed to verify the source and the information from the source.

Where they completely ignored the many sting operations carried out by the media. After this controversy there is a question regarding the news we watch and the authenticity of such news items. But what is now happening is that media is an associate of the powerful lobbies- hand in glove with politicians and big time industrialists. So whether they actually do deliver news or they are simply a part of the speculation that favors these industrialists and politicians- is a question they will have to address. This leaves the common man with very few options or rather no option at all- given his dependence on info-media.

Nira Radia's involvement with these news channels is not just about lobbying or publicity- but about how she manipulates various news channels to play with her and patronize several news items. Her role as PR might even be justified, but the role of these eminent journalists is not. All their statements about questioning of the authenticity of the tapes are redundant when it is clear that they are plain stooges in Nira Radia's act. These tapes indicate how these journalists have been breaking the cardinal rule of journalism, to maintain a healthy distance from their sources.

To cater to their readers and viewers is one thing, but to cater to their exact need of providing them information is another. What is more interesting and distasteful and unprofessional is the anxiety and the willingness shown by these journalists(as evident in these tapes) to not only ingratiate themselves with her, but also willing to become a pawn in her scheme of things, completely aware, that her interests are partisan and not really in larger public interest. This is what provokes suspicion about the roles of these journalists, though admittedly no quid pro quo has been established so far.

Whenever the role of beaurocrats and politicians are involved in wrong doing, media questions them. However, when this estate- this constitution of our justice framework is involved in wroing doing, how do we keep a check on them? This Radia tape controversy has bought into limelight the procedure of news gathering and influence of powerful personalities on news channels. The authenticity as well as the accountability of these news channels towards the people of this nation is now not only in question but also in dispute.

Despite various norms and regulations by the Government such acts of lobbying in hand with media agencies are taking place. Do we need a new set of laws then? Then media itself has its own norms and regulations, but it caters to the people or to these powerful industrialists, who knows! The viewership can always be argued in clause that these are the only ways the common man avails information from. But the faith, the assurance that the delivered news is authentic, worthwhile or not- cannot be guaranteed. Whether or not this faith will ever be re-established, is a matter of time and jurisprudence.