

Is media the fourth pillar of democracy?



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Media as critics say plays a vital role in democracy. In India, media has always been considered as the fourth pillar of democracy. In the eighties public service broadcaster “ Doordarshan” was the only television channel. The number of national newspapers in circulation was exiguous. The 21st century scenario is different. While the print media has seen a tremendous upsurge with the number of national newspapers increasing in circulation, television news channels have multiplied in numbers. There are more than 25 national news channels and more than 70 national newspapers and magazines now delivering news and happenings across India and the entire globe every minute. Be it Arnab Goswami interviewing Rahul Gandhi in “ Times Now” or spin doctors from various political parties taking part in a debate in the “ Prime Time”, news channels television has always been a front runner in providing information related to almost every happening.

Is media really the fourth pillar of democracy in India is matter of concern today. While the role of media is to convey news, views and opinions of citizens in democracy, one must ask how much of the news is accurate. Are the journalists biased? Do they manipulate information? In our democracy media has the responsibilities to be honest, unbiased and more importantly exercise restraint to avoid unnecessary hype for the sake of gaining attention of the gullible public and thereby increase what we call T. R. P. (Television Rating Point).

Sadly media has weaponised political parties in India. During 2013’s Anna Haraze’s movement demanding “ Lok Pal Bill” to curb corruption, India witnessed social networking sites like Facebook, Tweeter playing crucial roles. Consequently it led to the formation of the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP)

which Robert Vadra, son-in-law of UPA Chairperson Sonia Gandhi described as “Mango People”. Hence, it is undeniable, social networking sites act similar to mainstream television media. BJP Prime Ministerial candidate Narendra Modi nicknamed “NaMo” in social media has used this platform quite effectively in the recent past than nobody could imagine. A Bunch of ministers in New Delhi used this platform but nobody was able to touch the height that “NaMo” achieved. So, you cannot deny the fact that social media which is treated as alternative media now comes under the umbrella of mainstream media.

Many of politicians own news channel. Now the question arises do these news channels play a role in their political careers? Here, I would like to highlight some of the facts of media that will raise your eyebrows; that will make you ponder whether there is a nexus between media and political parties in India. Many politicians use PR agency to highlight their so called achievement in social media like Facebook or Tweeter as well as in mainstream media. Many political parties have dummy columnists and unofficial spokesman to put forward their agendas in those media.

“The Hindustan Times” is one of the oldest national newspapers in India. Shobhna Bhartia is the Chairperson and Editorial Director of Hindustan Times group. Currently she is an MP in the Rajya Sabha and working for the Congress. Shobhna is the daughter of K. K. Birla who was elected a Rajya Sabha member in 1984 by the Congress party. Political affairs editor of “The Hindustan Times”, Vinod Sharma is well known debater. Mr. Vinod is a congress spokesman to all TV panels. Insight stories revealed he is behind the Rajya Sabha seat presently occupied by his boss, Shobhana Bhartia. Both

Vinod Sharma and Shobhna Bhartia's stand on many issues are pro congress. Veteran journalist Vinod Mehta, ex editor of " Outlook" magazine, is well known for his pro Congress and anti BJP stands. Presently his affinity towards the AAP is a cause of concern for the Congress. Vir Sanghvi, ex editor of " Sunday" the now defunct magazine was recently in news for all the wrong reasons of Radiagate scandal. He was another mouthpiece of the Congress party.

Narasimhan Ram (N. Ram) is a prominent member of the Kasturi family that controls The Hindu group of publication. The Hindu's N. Ram, ex editor in chief, was once a vice president of the Student Federation of India (SFI), the student wing of the CPM. Frontline is treated as one of the best national magazines of India. It is owned by N. Ram. He is referred to as the left wing editor and is famous for his stand favouring Maoist-Naxalite. Kumar Ketkar, editor of " Divya Marathi" and a well known debater in Times Now's " News Hours" is an unofficial spokesman of the Congress party. There are reports claiming that he is the one to prepare speeches for Members of the Congress during elections. He is one of the five privileged journalist who got invitation from the PMO (Prime Minister's Office) for a private press meet in June, 2011. Dileep Padgaokar, a veteran journalist and an interlocutor of J&K, has never expressed critical views against the Congress.

Shekhar Gupta, editor in chief of " The Indian Express" owned by Goenka Group, is yet another mouthpiece of the Congress. Mr Gupta hit the headlines recently for his views against ex General V. K. Singh in the " The Indian Express". A regular columnist in " The Times of India", Swapan Das Gupta, under the banner of " Right & Wrong", has been well known for his

pro BJP stand in his articles. Rajya Sabha PM and BJP spokesman, Chandan Mitra is the editor in chief of “ The Pioneer”. He is a regular debater in many TV panels in India where he speaks favouring the BJP. Tarun Tejpal owner and ex editor of “ Tehelka” magazine was recently in news for sexual insensibility. He is well known for his pro Congress stand. He has never exposed any scam of the Congress Party during the last ten years tenure of the UPA though he was one of the pioneers in string operation basically done by mainstream media to expose scams. He exposed ex BJP president Bangaru Laxman in 2001. His silence on scams during the UPA regime raises big questions.

CPM’s senior member of Politburo and Parliamentary Group Leader, Sitaram Yechury’s wife, Seema Chisthi is the Resident Editor of “ The Indian Express”. Mrs. Seema is known for writing blogs in the internet about left ideology and about her husband. One of highly circulated Hindi national newspaper is “ Dainik Jagaran”, promoted by Mahendra Mohan Gupta. Mr. Gupta has affinity towards the BJP is clearly reflected in his newspaper.

Prannoy Roy and his wife Radhika Roy are the promoters of the NDTV. Radhika is Brinda Karat’s sister, a Politburo member of the CPM. She is well known for her views against Ramdev, the yoga guru. Brinda’s husband Prakash Karat is the CPM Politburo General Secretary. He is currently busy making third front in Indian politics by having talks with Jayalalita and other regional parties of India. May be this is the reason why NDTV has never expressed any critical views on CPM and CPI. NDTV is pro Maoist and Naxalite thanks to Prakash Karat. Prannoy Roy’s first cousin Arundhati Roy author of “ The God of Small Things” also needs mention in this regard.

Another high profile anchor on NDTV is Sonia Singh, wife of Ratanjit Narain Singh, MP from “Kushinagar” constituency and Minister of State in Ministry of Home Affairs. She is famous for her pro Congress and anti BJP stands.

Nidhi Razdan, the beautiful lady who hosts the programme called “Left Right Centre” on NDTV is the present girlfriend of J&K Chief Minister, Omar Abdullah who recently divorced his wife Payal. Nidhi has never expressed any negative views on Omar Abdullah or his party “National Conference”.

The infamous Barkha Dutta who received the Padma Shri from the UPA Government has always spoken the pros of the congress. She was exposed in the Radiagate scandal in 2013.

Rajdeep Sardesai is the editor in chief of CNN IBN promoted by TV 18. He is the son of Indian Cricketer Dilip Sardesai, is famous for his pro Congress agendas. His father in law Bhaskar Ghose was the chief of Prasar Bharati (i. e. Doordarshan) during Indira Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi’s regimes. Bhaskar Ghose was well known for his personal loyalty to the Nehru- Gandhi dynasty. Now his daughter Sagarika Ghose (wife of Rajdeep Sardesai) and son in law use CNN IBN as a platform to promote the Congress. Now let us have an insight into the famous CNN IBN’s media personality Karan Thapar’s story. Before joining CNN IBN he was the host of “Hard Talk India” on BBC India. He is the son of General Pran Nath Thapar, brother-in-law of Nayantra Sehgal (daughter of Vijaylakshmi Pandit, niece of our first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru). Karan Thapar is believed to be a famous Congress stooge. Shuhasani Heider is another well known journalist on CNN IBN. She is the daughter of BJP’s Subramaniam Swamy. Mr. Swamy is famous for his pro Hindu agenda. His daughter has never pointed a finger at him. Though Times

Now, promoted by Times of India Group has displayed some positive prospects with the aid of services provided by journalists like Arnab Goswami. It is leading in TRP among news channels in India not because of Arnab Goswami's pro BJP statement but for the scams he exposed in the last three years that includes 2G auction scam, Commonwealth games scam, Caolgate scam, Augusta Wetland scam, FIRs against Jagdish Tytler, Former Railway Minister Pawan Kumar Bansal's job scam etc. But such positive prospects are a rare occurrence.

News 24, the Hindi news channel owned by Rajiv Shukla, the famous Congress MP in Rajya Sabha and Cricket administrator in BCCI is another platform used by the Congress to promote its propaganda. Presently this channel has been busy promoting image makeover for Rahul Gandhi ("The Congress Prince" as some people say). Similarly Star News, ABP News are reported to broadcast biased reports for the Congress. Whereas Aaj Tak promoted by the India Today Group, was initially known for its pro Congress activity, recently it has become an anti congress lobby. Aaj Tak was famous for Congress spokesman and Supreme Court Lawyer Abhishek Manu Singhvi's Sex CD scandal.

South India displays a much vivid misuse of media in politics. Most of the television news channels are controlled by leading regional political parties. Sun TV Network is owned by Kalanidhi Maran, brother of Dayanidhi Maran, ex Cabinet Minister of Communication and IT of the UPA government who has been exposed in the 2G scam. Sun TV Network owns "Sun TV", "Gemini TV", "Teja TV", "Surya TV", "Kiran TV", "Udaya TV", "Surjo TV" among other channels. Murosoli Maran, father of Kalanidhi and Dayanidhi, ex Union

Minister from DMK party published the following Tamil magazines- Kungumam, Muththaram, Vannathirai and Sumangali. Murosoli Maran's uncle M. Karunanidhi, ex Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu, from DMK party launched "Kalaaignar TV" in 2007 which is now controlled by his eldest son M. K. Azhagiri. One of the daughters of M. Karunanidhi is Kanimozhi, MP of Rajya Sabha from DMK party who had been imprisoned for 2G scam last year. Kanimozhi conducted programs in "Sun TV" and "Vijay TV". Those mainstream media controlled by DMK party are used for DMK propaganda in Tamil Nadu as well as in other parts of India.

The present CM of Tamil Nadu, Jayalalitha, from AIADMK party, is not far behind. She owns the Jaya Network that runs "Jaya TV" in Tamil Nadu. "Jaya TV" was effectively used by Jayalalitha to promote herself and her party in last Assembly Elections in Tamil Nadu. Cherukuri Ramoji Rao is a well known business tycoon from South India. He hails from Andhra Pradesh and owns "E TV", which produces contents in Telugu, Marathi, Kannada, Oriya, Bangla, Gujarati Urdu and Hindi. Mr. Ramoji is reported to be close to Chandra Babu Naidu, head of Telugu Desam Party. Mr. Chandra babu has used these electronics media for his party's propaganda.

Assam has also fallen prey to such media misuse activity. Mention may be made here of News Live. Riniki Bhuyan Sharma, wife of Dr. Hemanta Biswa Sharma, the renowned politician of Assam is the managing director of News Live. "News Live" has always extended its helping hands to the Congress. Jayanta Baruah a business man of Guwahati is the owner of "News Times Assam", a regional news channel. Jayanta Baruah had won a ticket for to Rajya Sabha from the AGP (Axom Gana Prarishad). He was not elected to

Rajya Sabha thanks to horse trading managed by the Congress. Currently News Times Assam is busy exposing the anomalies of the Congress in Assam. The “Dainik Protidin”, highly circulated Assamese news paper promoted by Jayanta Baruah is yet another paper that speaks against the congress. A monthly magazine that always speaks in favour of the congress is the “Eclectic North East”, one of the fast growing monthly magazines of Assam. Gaurav Gogoi (son of Tarun Gogoi, the Chief Minister of Assam) is one of the Directors of the magazine. Gaurav Gogoi will contest the upcoming 2014 General election from “Kaliabor” constituency.

In a nutshell, “The Hindu” is favoured by the supporters of the left as it reflects their concerns. “The Pioneer” is rightwings, the editor being a spokesman of BJP. “The Hindustan Times” is centrist, which favours the Congress. And so on. Be it official or unofficial, political parties have always produced their own spokesperson, groomed for specific television news channels. No doubt Journalists as responsible citizens have the right to freedom of speech and thereby hold political opinions. But what makes a Journalist complete is by being fair, honest and unbiased. A journalist interested in mere politics has always an option to join the political party of his or her own choice and allow journalism stay pure. Ashutosh Gupta, ex Managing Editor of IBN 7, who joined AAP recently, has set an example in this regard. Otherwise, it’s quite advisable that a statutory warning just as we find in cigarette packets be issued.