ROLE OF MEDIA IN INDIAN DEMOCRACY

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ABSTRACT

Media organizations are considered as the fourth estate in modern democracies because of its role in generating public awareness, shaping public opinion and forming popular perceptions. But how far they are successful in performing these functions of a 'watchdog' over the activities of various governmental and private institutions or acting as independent representatives of the public is still dubious. In India the role of media seems to score very low in terms of both these dimensions. However, this is not to say that there is a complete absence of responsible media in the country but compared to its role in the time when media was not a tool in the hands of corporate world or of the governmental interest its role as a bridge between the government and the citizens was more eloquent and empathetic. Therefore through this paper an attempt would be made to analyse the role of media in shaping public opinion and consolidating democracy in India and what are the factors that influences it from performing its functions independently.

INTRODUCTION

Living under an era of Liberalization, Globalisation and Privatization modern societies could not imagine to live without a vibrant mass communication. Media in this sense is regarded as the fourth estate of democracy next to legislature, executive and judiciary. It plays an important role in generating public awareness, shaping public opinion and forming popular perceptions. Since the first printing press was invented, followed by the introduction of global economy the boundaries of media have expanded to include audio-visual and social media also. Gradually, with time all these three types of media-print, audio-visual and social-mushroomed around the world with an enhanced role. The manners in which reports are filed and news is disseminated came to have a considerable impact on shaping public opinion and even influencing foreign policy of states as well as promoting regional cooperation.

Therefore, if ideals like liberty, equality and justice form the roots of the tree of democracy likewise media and journalism formed the branches of it. A democratic regime can run to its utmost potential when there is wide participation on the part of the general masses. However, such participation is made possible when the media in that particular regime is vibrant and free enough to create public awareness and shape public opinion. Accessibility to right information not only helps in making responsible informed choices but also serves as a 'check' on the government one elects. In this way media plays an important role in bridging the gap between the people and the government for which they are also called the fourth pillar of democracy.

In the South Asian region most of the post-colonial countries have adopted to democratic ideals and principles and the media acts as a yardstick for them to keep up to those principles of democracy. Moreover since the countries of the region are historically, socio-economically and culturally interconnected, the role of media assumes even more significance. However, unfortunately, the media in different countries of South Asia is yet to show essential maturity and wisdom in enabling an environment of mutual trust and confidence. The discourses in media are often mired in narrowly conceived nationalist templates which far from bridging differences, escalate them, causing irreparable harm to regional understanding. While tension and conflict

among states and communities find more news space, shared history and culture are conveniently ignored. All this results in media adding to interstate and intra-state conflicts and increasing the political temperature rather than acting as an agent of change and reconciliation.

This is not to say that there is a complete absence of responsible media in the region. Many programmes in audio-visual media news channels like NDTV, Times Now etc, or reality shows like '*Sabdhan India: India Fights Back*,' '*Gumrah*,' and other social media sites like Facebook, twitter, watsup etc have contributed significantly in rendering both national and international unity whenever there is any kind of injustice or intolerance shown towards one another within a democratic set up of a country. Similarly, in case of print media, joint media initiatives like the one between the Jang group of Pakistan and the Times group in India launched *Aman ki Asha* (Hope for Peace) Newspaper through which they did try to create an environment of trust to contribute to India-Pakistan peace process. Groups like South Asia Free Media Association (SAFMA) have also endeavoured to bring together scholars, retired bureaucrats, politicians and media person together in South Asia to promote people to people contact.

Thus, the role of media is shaping and presenting public opinion on a variety of issues in South Asia has indeed been gargantuan. Therefore taking this as the background, an attempt would be made in this paper to analyse the role of media in shaping public opinion and consolidating democracy in one of the greatest democracies within South Asia i.e India. In addition the three basic objective of this paper would be: Firstly, to analyse what are the factors which influences media and its approach towards creating public awareness in the country? Secondly, to understand, If media in India play a role in promoting jingoistic nationalism and thirdly, does media also influences foreign and security policies of a country? followed a the conclusion towards the end.

WHAT IS MEDIA?

Media in general refers to the storage and transmission channels or tools used to store and deliver information or data. In short, it is the main means of mass communication. It creates messages with embedded values and disseminates those messages to a specific portion of the public in order to achieve a specific goal. As such, it can create awareness, perpetuate issues, establish priorities, narrows the democratic deficit and mould societies (in passive but effective way). Thus, it is a form of information generator, educator and entertainer. This means of communication to general public have evolved over years. In the beginning of civilisation, we only had the ability to transmit messages from person to person, through letters and conversation. Later, humans developed written languages and messages were recorded through record players. This method further evolved with the capability to copy written messages over and over again. In the twentieth century media took the form of mass media which includes print media and electronic media. Print media, being the leader over a considerable period of time has now come under competition with audio-visual media, which is reshaping many of the social responses. The impact of visual media is direct and effective—as it is said, "a picture conveys thousand words". However, radio too apart from providing news and views has also developed as a flair for entertainment, thereby getting a lot of acceptance. At first, radio was the electronic media of choice. This later evolved into television in the form of audio- visual media and eventually came the electronic media. Electronic media is enjoying broader use every day with an increase in electronic devices being made. The meaning of electronic media, as it is known in various spheres, has changed with the passage of time. The Internet is arguably one of the most effective tools in electronic media for communication. It has indeed made it possible to disseminate information and ideas in real time across the globe. Social media sites like-Yahoo, Facebook, Twitter etc., have diminished all barriers to communication and made people-to-people

contact much easier and faster. Further, with every advancement in technology and software manufacturing new mobile phones are launched every year which have further given an edge to media, to spread its reach and information within the palms of an individual to around the world.

MUTUALITY BETWEEN MEDIA AND DEMOCRACY

Media plays a gargantuan role in deciding the art and act of democracy. At the same time, the role of media has also been widely debated in a democratic system. During early ages people used to rely on the news which media delivered around the country. So, when something was published or telecasted in media, one could infer the truth very easily. As such, media is looked upon by the people a responsible tool which provides them exclusive first hand information from different parts of the world and even helps them in making right choices while electing a Government for the their country and realising their rights and responsibilities in a democracy. Democracy believes in the empowerment of individual and media facilitates it through communication and ensures freedom of expression and freedom of speech. Thus, through such services to the society media is actually in a way helping democracy to function in its true spirit. However, media to operate in an ideal democratic framework needs to be free from governmental and private control. Press freedom and democracy are two sides of the same coin. Curtailing press freedom harms democracy and vice-versa. It needs to have complete editorial independence to pursue public interests. To this end, democracy provides the space for alternative ideas to debate and arrive at conclusions for the betterment of society. Therefore, it is the responsibility of each and every citizen to ensure that democracy is enhanced to a better level—democratic institutions should be protected and strengthened so that it helps deliver development. The misdeeds of some politicians should not tarnish the system. Democracy is not desirable just for the sake of democracy—it is the competition of political ideas

and the leadership skills of candidates that must lead to improvement in people's lives. Building on this idea, although media plays a significant role in generating the principles of democracy but at times due to various external factors independent institutions like media too gets tangled between the game of politics and self-interest. To this end let us discuss the factors which influence media in its approach towards disseminating information and rendering public awareness.

FACTORS INFLUENCING MEDIA

Media as an institution has many layers within it. It is not a monolithic entity. Besides, acting as armour for the citizens of the country against every socio-economic and political ills, the media is also held as a sword by few sections of the society forcing it to act against the citizens at the sametime. In fact, media censorship and media freedom are two things which cuts off the wings of media to act autonomously. There is also the issue of media ownership—by political parties, interest groups and business houses. With their vested interests, the owners sometimes dictate the line a media group would take at the expense of neutrality. Some of such influences are discussed below:

Governmental Influence:

The media acts as a channel of communication between the Government and the citizens of a country. In subject to the domestic laws of a country the media often tries its best to play it safe and not to provoke government's wrath. According it also helps people to express their grievances against any laws which are against the interest of the fellow citizens. But, the media is also severely constrained by government laws promulgated from time to time to have a control over the media. For instance, the government control over newsprint and advertisement provides it with a handle through which it can really strangle a newspaper and force it to toe the government line while reporting on foreign policy and domestic issues. Moreover, media reporting is

sometimes ideologically motivated and there are planted stories by the security agencies to project a particular point of view when it comes to analysing bilateral ties within the region. The governments with the enormous resources at their disposal have the ability to influence the content in this regard. For example as an analyst explains, "referred to variously as perception management, strategic communication, public diplomacy and, recently, global engagement, these activities involve the promotion of policy through carefully crafted PR campaigns, exploitation of links with journalists and media outlets and, most generally, taking advantage of the considerable resources at the disposal of governments in order to attempt to dominate the information environment." In Bangladesh, according to an analyst writing in the context of the problems faced by the visual media, "Media people used to get various directives and advices from the caretaker government (2006-2009) authorities on do's and don'ts of programming agendas." In India, the Press Council plays the role of the regulatory body. But from time to time, the government has placed restrictions on issues that cannot report citing national security reasons—the main excuse under which press freedom could be curtailed without any question.

Influence of Corporate Interest over Media:

Since the time corporate houses have entered the domain of visual media and opened television channels in their bid to expand business and also further their economic interests the role of media too have turned more business oriented rather than rendering service to the public. Now ownership of media can be used as an effective bargain for political favours. There is a contrarian argument also that the government's influence is in clear discount as corporate greed has risen to an extent that government's inducements have stopped shaping media orientation. For example, in India, which could also be true of other South Asian countries, the phenomenon of media getting out of governmental control is summed up by Sanjaya Baru when he writes, "...given rising budgets of private media organisations, Government freebies and junkets have declining influence in shaping media thinking on major policy issues." Moreover, there are corporate houses opposed to government policies who through their media outlets propagate a totally contrarian perspective on the way the government functions. The media, thus, becomes a powerful tool in the domestic political context by propagating a particular view point it considers profitable and serves its business interests. In this regard Leonard Silk, an economic correspondent of the New York Times points out that, "Can a newspaper simultaneously be both a business serving its own interests and affect to be a quasi-public institution serving everybody's best interests as defined by the newspaper itself?" According to him, the reality is that, profit as a motivational factor in modern communications corporations has fundamental importance to the practice of ethical, responsible newspaper and television journalism. Yet, many editors and news directors resist the thought that they are involved in a 'business' manufacturing a 'product' that must compete and win in the marketplace just like any other product." In other words, the role of media had changed. This change brought about a modest and sporadic pace in print and later in the TV news channels with ever increasing assertion of proprietors as managing editors and executive editors running their organizations as corporate houses aiming on increasing profits. A couple of decades ago, editors were editors. Now, they have become editor-managers. They direct the editing of the newspaper with one hand and, with the other; they manage their corporate interests. Editors now use the jargon of corporate world to describe their newspapers. Of course, effective corporate management may increase media profits; but managers are less concerned with social responsibility or public accountability. Same is the case with the news channels. With the cut throat competition among them for TRP, many TV news channels have indulged in, if not in illegal, unethical practices- some in the name of sting operations crossing the line and breaching the rights of citizens and others in the name of

mythology and cultural rituals promoting superstitions. This is all done to arrest the eyeballs. Audience are not individuals for them; they are considered mass only statistically important.

However in a globalized world, the growing marketing concept in media management regards newspapers and television news as brand products to be produced in response to marketing research, to be promoted and marketed just as any other commodities are. If the concept is permitted to run unrestricted through management ranks, what news items are created - and for whom-is decided by marketing experts whose goal is not fearless coverage of the news on its newsworthiness, but, rather, attracting the right affluent readersèkaudience who in turn will attract advertisers. Thus, organizations to whom profit is the main consideration give a low second place to accountability and responsibility. Only an informed public opinion and an alert and committed corps of journalists can motivate and maintain the public opinion and pressure needed to ensure that social responsibility comes before profit.

Influence of Non-State Actors over Media:

Media in South Asia is threatened by militants and terrorists of all hues and reporters are often forced to be careful about serving news in deference to the diktats of such non-state actors. There are instances of fringe groups in India threatening journalists of publishing or showcasing news which are against their interest or reputation. In contemporary times, cyberspace is prone to censorship, surveillance and manipulation in ways that are even more sinister than mainstream media. The medium that gives space to citizen journalism and freedom of expression is also being used by terrorists to post videos of hostage beheadings, and inflammatory racist, xenophobic and extremist rhetoric. For Example, the videos of ISIS terror footages and videos of beheading the innocent people in the name of Islam in Syria. The state's response, even in countries with long traditions of free press, is more surveillance and

control in the name of countering terrorism—blogs are banned or keywords censored from search engines. The kneejerk reaction is: if there is something sensitive on YouTube, do not just disable the link but ban the You Tube. In many countries like Pakistan and China You Tube is banned.

Therefore keeping in view the above account of the various influences over media one can say that media cannot shirk its social responsibility. They have to play a constructive and positive role and focus on issues related with vital aspects of society and detract themselves from the trivialities. Apart from being the Fourth Estate and watchdog over the government and other private institutions, media persons are also social lubricators aiding the smooth running of a technologically advanced society. As such, while reporting on developmental issues the media should concentrate on process based reporting and not on event based. In India the media has significant influence is creating awareness and generating public opinion but at the same time the role of media-print, visual and social-within the democratic nation is widely debatable. To this end the role of media in the South Asian region, particularly India which is one of the largest democracies in the world needs to be discussed.

ROLE OF MEDIA IN INDIAN DEMOCRACY

Media in India have mushroomed extensively with about 82,000 newspapers, over 800 television channels and 61.3 million internet users while other countries have a proportionate presence of print and audio visual media as well as penetration of internet. This has resulted in media acquiring unprecedented space in society and politics of the country. But, the role of media in India is not just confined to disseminating information and entertainment. In a country where there is large scale poverty, unemployment and underdevelopment media plays a significant role in educating the masses in regard to the opportunities and fundamental rights that each

individual enjoys as well their responsibility towards the nation as citizens of the country.

However, as the structure of media has been passing through a massive and continuous flow of change in form, content and ownership pattern, more challenges are accumulating to understand how public discourse, especially within the media, can be handled towards enabling a transparent, well informed policy response with positive human rights outcome, within the country and across nations. In this regard, some of the positive and negative role of media within Indian Democracy is discussed below:

Positive Role of Media in Indian Democracy

It has helped in bringing about revolutions whether through generating awareness at a mass scale about the Right to Information Act or the various Yojanas and policies which are focused towards inclusive growth and development undertaken by the Indian Government. Social media or visual media both plays active role in dissmenting detailed information about major events and movements to the drawing rooms of the people. Whether earlier it was 'India Against Corruption' or Anna Hazare Movement or the Parliamentary elections of recent, past during the year 2014, the media gives so much live coverage to these events that people are inspired to step out from their homes and take part in such mass movements or campaigns. Likewise issues related to demand for autonomy or separate state e.g Boroland for Boros in Assam or Gorkhaland for the Gorkhs of West Bengal, has brought people on the streets and it has forced government to become flexible and agree to talks with the activist groups, and the live wire which plays a significant role in keeping these talks alive are the media.

Besides this, investigative reporting in print and visual media has helped in exposing large scale corruptions which have robbed the nation. The Jessica Lal murder case, The Commonwealth Games Scam, the Adarsh Housing Society Scam, Cash for Vote Scam, the Bofors Scam, Nirvaya Rape Case or the Rohith Vermula suicide case some of the highpoints of the Indian media coverage. Across newspapers and television channels voices have been raised when the bureaucracy, politicians or other public functionary have misused their political power. There have also been initiatives to promote community media for the citizens to air their concerns. Here the importance lies more in participatory communication right from the grassroots rather than communication which flows top down. Various television channels have also given the space for ordinary citizens to air their views in the form of citizen journalists thereby promoting democratic participation. Newspapers have educated the masses by informing them of the developments in the field of science and technology. They have also expressed strong views against prejudices which harm the society.

The social media, a relatively newer entrant in the field of media, has also proved to be more democratic than print or visual media. 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 in social networking sites by likeminded people who discuss and debate over a number of social issues on the part of the government policy formulations and seek new ideas for way ahead. However, though at present this remains limited to the urban social space, it is slowly penetrating the non-urban locales and its impact has been phenomenal in terms of the space it provides to the people to interact and exchange views especially with controlled visa regimes that characterises the people-to-people contact in the region. For instance, social networking sites like Facebook and Twitter were used to garner support against the Delhi Gang Rape where people showed their support by featuring a 'Black Spot' on their Wall on their Facebook page around the globe.

Internet has been used by various public service organizations and N.G.Os 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 organisations for social upliftment. In social

media 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. Further, the different mediums of media also keeps the elected representatives accountable to their duties, by highlighting whether they have fulfilled their wishes for which they were elected and whether they have stuck to their oaths of office. Thus, media acts as a trump card for common man. It shows people what they can actually do and what they ought to do.

Negative Role of Media in Indian Democracy

In contemporary times there are changes in every possible field and one question that needs to be answered is that 'did the changes affect media?' Currently, the media too has become a very big business. Although the number of channels compared to early nineteenth century has showed an upwards trend but not in the quality. Every media channel is looking for TRP ratings more than some reputation. In recent times, Indian media has also been subjected to a lot of criticism for the manner in which they have disregarded their obligation to social responsibility. Dangerous business practices in the field of media have affected the fabric of Indian democracy. Post liberalisation transnational media organisations have spread their wings in the Indian market with their own global interest. These are big multinational corporations who own a chunk of the mass media market ranging from newspapers, television, radio, book publishing to music industry. Five of world's largest media conglomerates include General Electric, Walt Disney, News Corporation, Time Warner, Viacom and CBS. In India there are big players like the Times Group and ABP who rule the roost in the media arena. Therefore, in a bid to open up the Indian market 26 percent foreign direct investment has been allowed in news publication and 74 percent has been allowed in non news segments by the Government

The media in contemporary times have become obsessed with hard core politics, conflict, and confrontation for the simple reason that it does not need much effort and costs less than incisive, investigative reporting. This is because it is easier to find government officials and experts to talk about big plans for new superhighways and flyovers than to interview proponents of electric public transport. Agriculture, land reform or the environment get scant coverage because they do not tend to be relevant to city-dwellers. It is not surprising, therefore, that stories about the new economic paradigms that offer simpler, cheaper, and more relevant alternatives for a majority of population, are either ignored or covered scantily by the mainstream press. This is why across India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Nepal, hundreds of millions of people have no access to sanitation but still there is not much mention of this in media coverage. In these four South Asian countries, a total of some 300 million, most of them women, cannot read or write, 300 million people drink water from contaminated ponds and streams. But, the fact is this kind of news or information hardly makes their way as headlines of a newspaper or news channel.

Further, the impact of globalisation over communication technology is boundless. It has increased the perviousness of the media too. There is now a constant flow of real time global news in all the three sources of media. Robinson argues, "this has impacted how governments form foreign policy, as the scope for calm deliberation is reduced and policy-makers are forced to respond to whatever media houses focus on. So how the 'reality' of regional conflict (or issues of disputes) is represented and constructed in media, and how that construction shapes the mind-set of the people and creates their attitude towards neighbouring countries in South Asia, is impossible to generalise. In fact, the regional hostility of India with its neighbouring country Pakistan would have ended so far, if the media and the politicians wouldn't have kept the issue alive through highlighting or constructing the wrongs of each other rather than the peace initiatives undertaken

by both the countries. Similarly, in recent past, certain media houses in Nepal portrayed the Indian aid and evacuation effort in Nepal in the aftermath of earthquake and Chinese rescue operation differently interpreting Indian aid as an attempt to influence Nepalese politics and Chinese aid as benign devoid of any foreign policy motive. All these instances only confirm the potential role that the media can play in instigating politically and ideologically motivated violence, sometimes blatantly pursuing the political interests of particular political parties. Thus, the socio-political and economic context of media in South Asia is embedded differently in different countries which determine their behaviour and aspirations thereby constraining their capacity to play a greater role in shaping the discourse on regionalism.

Likewise another disturbing trend that has emerged in the present media houses in India is the use of media in the battle between rival political groups. In fact, this new phenomenon is in operation in India with newspapers and news channels taking sides while presenting facts. In addition, sensationalism has become a part and parcel of media today to gain TRP. A relatively insignificant news is presented again and again highlighting not much what actually happened, but what all could happen. Every channel is trying to capitalize on the fear factor or the mere gossip material. Now-a-days rather than casting programmes which would generate national unity and integrity more attention is paid on the news which would keep societal evils like identity politics or religious issues alive. For example, The Aamir Khan issue over intolerance, the Rohit Vermula case over caste politics, the Asharam Baba Case or the recent issues over granting martyrdom to Afzal Guru in Jawaharlal Nehru University etc. To this end, Coronel argues that, "promotion of hate speech in place of constructive debate and creating an atmosphere of suspicion rather than social trust has the danger of making people cynic about the democratic setup leading to its breakdown."

Thus, media or journalism is a field that requires an individual to balance the ethical aspects of invading another person's privacy with getting the information they need to cover a specific story. Instead, it is getting increasingly common to find out what a certain celebrity has said or done yesterday in today's newspaper and magazine tabloids. For example, the entertainment media is more interested in covering how much weight Ashwariya Rai Bachan has gained or lost or which celebrity couple had divorced. Agreed that private lives of celebrities' interest people, but celebrities are human beings too and their privacy should be respected. In order to sustain interest of the viewer, news channels have stooped to lower levels; everything from witchcraft to celebrity weddings and 'sting operations' (real or staged) get aired with an aura of national importance. With so many competitors around, each channel looks for newer ways to attract viewers and in the process completely sidelines its primary objective. Thus, our society has become so fixated in watching and reading about others that they had forgot to realise the real problems and drawbacks that paralyze our country from reaching the heights of development.

Besides this, one of the most negative impact of media is 'Paid Media'. Paid News is a scandalous phenomenon in Indian media, in which mainstream media (with a few exceptions) were found to be systematically engaged in publishing favourable articles in exchange for payment. The Election Commission of India has detected hundreds of cases where politicians paid money to newspapers or TV channels to carry glowing reports on them. Bennet & Coleman, which owns the Times of India, is reported to have asked celebrities and rich people to pay for favourable coverage. They have offered a "private treaty" agreement which accepts an equity stake in a company in return for favourable coverage. Similar practises by other media companies came to light, such as a steel company sued Television news company Zee News for allegedly demanding advertisements so as not to telecast shows in relation to the Indian Coal allocation Scam.

Likewise politicians like Ashok Chavan, Narottam Mishra and Umlesh Yadav etc were caught by Election Commission for arranging publication of news items, masquerading as advertisements, in newspapers praising themselves for State Assembly elections. Therefore, because of such corrupt media practices, people are gradually losing their trust or belief over media.

As such, if media loses its power of public trust and act as pawns in the hands of the Government and corporate world or other external sources, then this would lead to adverse consequences. The citizens would not only lose hope over media as a generator of their opinions to the Government as well as the interpreter between them and the government. Instead, the entire society would turn chaotic and instable with least amount of tolerance left in them to find solutions to regional or domestic problems. This would ultimately immobilize democracy. Wright and Rogers states that, "such processes undermine the autonomy and effectiveness of the news media as the 'fourth estate' of the political system serving the public interest by helping to create an informed citizenry." Therefore, the role of media in Indian Democracy requires a new breed of journalism i.e, one without mental borders who have the energy and understanding to move beyond the traditional classroom concepts of reporting and writing, reporters who do not just report but look behind the headlines to examine cause and effect, and constantly explore regional or international linkages to national problems. In this regard, investigative journalism should be encouraged in order to go in-depth and behind the scenes so that in the process it could effectively strengthen democracy and defend the free press. They need to be multidisciplinary and be able to investigate how development is linked to politics, the economy and national priorities. The role of the media should not be a public address system for the already influential rather it should show the loop holes that lead to underdevelopment and low growth.

CONCLUSION

Hence, keeping in view the conditions of the country in terms of growing conflicts and violence, increased corruption levels and rising poverty leading to intolerance in the society the responsibility of media as the fourth state of the country increases. Citizens in India can re-elect a Government, if they are not satisfied with its performance only after a gap of five years but it is through media through which they can put forward their grievances before it every day. In short, media acts as the voice of the citizens of the country, at the same time even the media should also be accountable to the general public. Therefore, press freedom should become a blessing for the people of this country.

However, such a blessing could turn into a curse when manipulations set in. When media turns into a mere business conglomerate, news is nothing but a commodity. In this regard, rather than presenting the culture and traditional values of various states of the country, which is a hot-spot of diversity which would lead to unity and tolerance more focus is given on the news of religious intolerance, ethnic-conflicts and preaching of hate-news in the name of 'national interest.' To this end, Guha Thakurta raises a question in the context of India, "If India's biggest corporate conglomerate is also India's biggest media company, what it does to diversity of opinion, plurality of opinion, what it does to unfavourable news coverage?" He therefore points out when big business interests get into media business as, "they influence what comes out into public, what is heard and read…The greater the monopolisation and corporatisation of media, the less the space for smaller voices, differing voices, dissenting voices." Therefore, media has its own interest and biases and with corporate overtaking of the media houses, the media-government collaboration is likely to continue. This led to the Minister of State for External Affairs, General V.K. Singh, to call the phenomena as "presstitute."

In spite of such tendency to control the media, in recent decades, the media in South Asia

has undergone dramatic transformation. It has tried to probe and serve issues which were regarded sensitive from the governmental viewpoint such as corruption in high places, mal-governance, plight of the minorities, behaviour of the security agencies, etc. This is due to intense competition among the media houses to earn viewership or TRP's and establish their credibility. Moreover, the rise of the social media has made it imperative for the mainstream media to be even more investigative and objective in its coverage of issues of public interest.

Therefore, it is necessary that media should self-monitor or self-censor so that professional integrity and ethical standards are not sacrificed for sensational practices. The self regulatory mechanism across media organisations need to be strong enough to stop anomalies whenever they occur. Agencies like Press Council of India need to be vigilant to stem the rot. Big media conglomerates are a serious threat. To counter this problem pluralistic media organisations which are financially viable need to be encouraged. Media should understand the possible effects of their reports on public. Whether its politics, crime, business, fashion, education or parenting, media guides us and sets trends. It is not just a profitable business endeavour, but it's an enterprise which carries a huge moral responsibility on its shoulders. This field thus demands honesty, moral courage, high moral values, discipline and a truly educated and enlightened background. It should guide us towards truth and from darkness towards light. Community participation is a goal that the media should strive for in a country like India. Thus, media is called a pillar of society and a healthy society is not possible without a healthy media.

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