

ROLE OF MEDIA IN DEMOCRACY AND GOOD GOVERNANCE

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ABSTRACT

Media is the plural form of medium and it is the means of communication. Whom does it communicate to? Obviously to the common Indian people. So the condition of the common man will depict the condition of Indian state.

Now we adopted democracy as a way of ruling ourselves but merely on the basis of population, we proudly say that it is the biggest democracy of the world. Do we have real democratic flavour in our life. Not really to the level of desire.

Good governance is a comparative term loaded with the ideals of accountability, transparency and enjoying the faith of common man. No government in the world can claim to have achieved all parameters of good governance but is reflected to a great extent in human development and human happiness index.

How do we govern ourselves? Through, representative democracy where the rule of law guides the life. The Indian constitution provides three handles for regulating the governance – legislature, executive and judiciary.

To examine the functioning of our executive which should enrich our democratic strength with the help of good governance, we need another handle or agency which should be without fear, unbiased and free from the control of government. Here comes the role of media. If it works in the right direction, it may force the government to be accountable and transparent. It will also keep the opposition political parties in balance and force them to behave positively. This is power of media and that is why it has been called “the fourth pillar of democracy.”

Now if all three (democracy, good governance and media) are connected to analyze the results in the proper perspective, the aim of the paper is fulfilled. If democracy is the way of providing good governance, then the media is the balance.

INTRODUCTION

Bird eye view of the nature and characteristic of democracy, good governance and media should be discussed:

DEMOCRACY

India is a representative democracy. The term democracy originated in the 5th century B.C. in the

Roman city – Athens. The term literally means, “rule of the people.”ⁱ Basically it is an art of governing ourselves. Democracy has been defined by many political scientists in different way but so far the most accepted definition is that of U.S. President Abraham Lincoln who said democracy is the, “government of the people, by the people and for the people.”ⁱⁱ

Having said this, we must understand that a democracy is as good as the people and society of a particular country. In the last 70 years India has

developed a lot but it is also true that we have to improve a lot. So the fundamental of any government would be the socio-economic-cultural and political traits of the country. Let us see few data:

- A. Population: 1.37 billion or 1,369 millions in May 2018ⁱⁱⁱ compared to 32.57 crores of America (2017) and 14.45 crores of Russia^{iv}
- B. Density of population : 416 people per square kilometer^v
- C. Per capita income: Rs. 9580 per month in Financial Year 2017-18^{vi}.
- D. All India literacy rate : 82% for men and 65% for women^{vii}
- E. Primary level dropouts : 4.13% in 2014-15^{viii}
- F. % of unemployed youth : 10.42% in 2018^{ix}
- G. Human development index : 130 out of 189 countries^x
- H. Global List of happiest country 140 out of 189^{xi} ways behind Pakistan, Bangladesh and China.

This is our economic condition. Obviously these factors influence the working of the democracy. Now, let us see few social data's which includes social condition of the nation:

- 1) **Doctors required:** The set standard by world health organization suggest that for 1000 people, there should be one (1) doctor and going through this Yardstick, India immediately requires more than 4 lakh doctors.^{xii}
- 2) **Women's exploitation:** 3.27 lakh of cases against women were reported and reported rape case is 34,651 in 2018.^{xiii} It may be noted here that India is a closed society and such incidents are related with the prestige of the country. Domestic violence is common among lower and even in the middle classes. Indian social mentality also discourages the reporting of such cases. These data's are Infact tip of the ice-berg.
- 3) **Number of caste:** India is a caste infected society. Divided mainly in 4 parts (General, OBC,

Schedule Caste and Schedule Tribe), there are about 3000 castes and sub-castes having mutual antagonistic interest. These castes are from Hindus sect, number is different in other sects and number combined together is fairly large.

- 4) **Religion:** There are 22 religions known in Indian society out of which 9 religions have been recognized by the state.^{xiv}

Such is the socio-economic condition of the country. Riots based on caste and religion is frequent and violence can be seen on any road of the any village and town.

Having analyzed socio-economic and cultural condition of the country, let us turn in short to the political condition.

Mainly there are two national political parties-Bhartiya Janta Party and Indian National Congress who have all India presence. Though, Election Commission of India recognizes eight political parties as national political parties. Number of registered political parties with election commission is 1841 with 52 state parties or regional political parties and number of unrecognized parties are 1785.^{xv}

Apart from the criminalization of politics, main problem with regional party is that they have a very narrow vision of problems and their solution. Two reasons could be counted:

- (i) There interest lies in a particular state and (ii) they do not aspire for national status.

Having analyzed the socio-economic, cultural and political spectrum of the country, let us turn towards the concept of good governance.

Any educated person would vouch for the following characteristic of good governance:

1. **Participatory:** A representative democracy implies that decision taken by the executive and amendments done by the legislature has been done by them as they have chosen their representative to act on their behalf. Therefore, all citizens, men and women must participate in

voting and influence decision making.

2. **Inclusiveness:** Once the government is formed, it is the government of India representing the entire country not only of those who voted for that particular party in power. Therefore, the policies enacted by the government must reflect the inclusiveness. Also in the formation of the government people from different regions, sex and different sections should be included.
3. **Accountability:** It is a both way phenomenon. Not only leaders and the government but also the common man must be accountable to the needs and environment of the country. On the part of government, accountability should be reflected towards the investment of public resources and the mass is suppose to support or oppose the policies of the government according to the interest of the country.
4. **Responsiveness:** The country is infected with many social, economic and political viruses.

People lack civic sense. Hundreds of crores are being spent on "Swachh Bharat Abhiyan". On the other hand there is no mechanism to question and pull up our M.Ps. Once they are elected, they become the king and voters are ruled as poor subject.

The government on its part is not willing respondent. Responsiveness curbs corruption. Even the right to information is being diluted. Lok Pal is no longer talked about. The permanent executives are not responsive and common citizens have no weapon to show the correct path.

ROLE OF MEDIA

Here in this situation, what is the role of media? Media earlier was only and only the Print Media. Other methods of communications were post card, inland letter and envelop. Now with the coming of T.V., mobile and internet nothing is beyond the reach. But before discussing the role of the media, let us see its changing structure.

Earlier, a collective group of editors use to

conduct the day to day affair of media. Slowly and gradually corporate houses started buying and also starting their own channel. Now editors have to dance on the owner's music and owner decides everything such as orientation of news and views of channels.

Today, the role of the media should be to make public opinion on real issues facing the country through news, views and discourses. It is suppose to motivate the common mass in such a way that at the time of voting, they choose a responsible government. What are the real problems, the country is facing? No doubt, nationalism and sovereignty of the country is important but poverty, inequality, lack of education, illiteracy, unemployment and health services are very important challenges facing the country. Health services and education is beyond the control of common man. The permanent executive is neither responsive nor accountable leading to exploitation and corruption.

Unfortunately, we come to hear about that only and only when some incident taken place. When raid is conducted somewhere and hundred of crores of movable, immovable and cash is found in a clerk's houses, it becomes news not the question of corruption.

Value system in the society and morality of an individual or a society does not attract any attention.

Media, thus never challenges and makes an opinion regarding such challenges, channels time and again discuss the communalism and casteism when the some religious or caste related riots come to force. Why it is so? The answer is simple. Now channels are no more fourth pillar of democracy. It is a business now corporate houses take care of their benefits.

Another reason is that no government of any political party wants that the real issues which confront India and really impact the life of a common man to the fore should become a point of real discussion.. In order to remain in power, rulers want to divert the attention of the common man

who is illiterate and lacks the analytical brain with the help of hype such as nationalism, Kashmir problem and Pak or China. This suits the government and the owner of the channels both. The government improves its seats during elections and owner get patronage of the ruling dispensation along with a lot of advertisement.

Now question arises whether government forces the media or media acts on its own? The answer is: generally government does not do it. There are a lot of constitutional safeguards to media houses and even to an individual.

CONSTITUTIONAL PROVISIONS SAFEGUARDING MEDIA'S AND INDIVIDUAL'S FREEDOM

Freedom of speech and expression

Freedom of speech includes the right to express one's own views, commitment to certain conviction and ideas freely by words of mouth, writing, printing, pictures or any other mode. This is one of the first and fundamental indicator of free society and concept of liberty. Here, this right is enshrined in the chapter III, article 19(1) (a) of the constitution. Supreme Court also upheld and expanded the ambit of this provision. When it observed that, "Freedom of the press is included in that wider guarantee. It is unnecessary to plead for the freedom of press in this country."^{xvi} Various international conventions such as by Universal Declaration of Human Rights, European Convention on Human Rights and Fundamental Freedom, International Covenant on Civil and Political rights etc.

Coming back to Indian perspective, Article 19(1) said, secures to every citizen the freedom of speech and expression.^{xvii} The Supreme Court widened the scope of "freedom of speech and expression" propounding that it includes the freedom to circulate one's views by words of mouth or in writing or through audiovisual instrumentalities. Preamble of the constitution itself ensures liberty of thought, expression, belief faith

and worship. The freedom of speech is "not confined to the newspapers, and periodicals, but also includes pamphlets, leaflets, circular and every sort of publication which affords a vehicle of information and opinion."^{xviii}

However, there are certain reasonable restrictions "only in the interests of security of state, friendly relations with the foreign states, public order, decency or morality, or in relation to contempt of court, defamation or incitement to an offence."^{xix}

Supreme Court further said, "It is the duty of the state to protect the freedom of expression since it is a liberty guaranteed against the state. The state can not plead its inability to handle the hostile audience problem. It is its obligatory duty to prevent it and protect the freedom of expression."^{xx}

Other weapon was provided to common man in 2005 by the government. This is through the right of information.

Right to Information

As I have already stated government officials were not very responsible and accountable to common people. Right to information act, 2005, specially empowers any body and every body with right to ask information from government officials. To keep it simple and affordable, any one can ask any question from any department by attaching a stamp with Rs. 10/- (ten) only. Now right to know, to receive and to share information with anybody publically has been accepted with in the right to freedom of speech and expression.

The Supreme Court in Secretary, Ministry of I&B, Government of India vs. Cricket Association of Bengal said that, "The freedom of speech and expression includes right to acquire information and to disseminate it. Freedom of speech and expression is necessary, for self expression which is an important means of free conscience and self-fulfillment. It enables people to contribute to debates on social and moral issues...It is the only vehicle of political discourse so essential to democracy."^{xxi}

CONCLUSION

We have studied to the relevant extent the concept of democracy, good governance and the role and changing nature of media in it.

Good grievance is to describe how public affairs are conducted and public resources managed. It should have transparency, accountability, effectiveness and inclusiveness.

Democracy is an art of ruling ourselves and conducting our business through representative democracy as it is the government of the people, by the people and for the people.

If the democracy goes berserk and the responsive rulers move towards dictatorial regime, there is a “watchdog of democracy” and that is media. Media works under the right to freedom provided in Art. 19(1)(a) of the constitution. Media has three essential ingredients.

- (a) Freedom of publication.
- (b) Freedom of access to all information.
- (c) Freedom of circulation.

With the help of these 3 ingredients, the media plays a very important role in the formulation of public opinion on issues of public importance. In fact, it is a permanent weapon of communication and control between the people and their elected representative in parliament and government.

Thus to sum up in few lines, I would say that media can force the representative institutions to follow the path of good governance if it works as a model educator. It can force the governing elite to be attentive towards core-issues the country is facing. The Journey of India from developing nation

to a developed nation will depend on the role played by media in the country.

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