

ROLE AND FUTURE OF INDIAN MEDIA

S.N. Misra

Professor & Dean, School of Management,
Kalinga Institute of Industrial Technology, Deemed to be University,
Bhubaneswar, Odisha, India, Pin-751024
misra.sn54@gmail.com & dean@ksom.ac.in

Sanjaya Ku. Ghadai

Research Scholar, School of Management
KIIT, Deemed to be University, Bhubaneswar, Odisha, India, Pin-751024
ghadaisk77@gmail.com

DOI: 10.23862/kiit-parikalpana/2018/v14/i2/177863

ABSTRACT

Media acts as the fourth arm of democracy to supplement the Supreme Court in its role as the watchdog of the Constitution. It also acts as a talisman of common man's quest for socio economic justice. Noam Chomsky was the first to highlight how through several filters, consent is manufactured from media by the corporate houses. The paper brings how in the free market economy of India, similar filters are being used to promote the cause of nationalism, branding contrarian viewpoints as "anti national" and muzzling dissent. The contrasting report of Global Hunger Index (GHI) and Ease of Doing Business brings out the dissonance between the growth story and human development achievements, as reflected consistently in low Human Development Index (HDI). The paper laments that majority of the media do not cover the underbelly of rural distress, which the Socio-Economic Caste Census (SECC) Report (2011) captures. It also brings out how there is a harmony between social and economic indicators in China as compared to India due to strong political will. Of particular concern is the distressing situation of malnutrition of children as brought out by the Rapid Survey on Children (RSOC) report. One more area which is at the heart of impacting human development indices is the quality of primary education. Sadly post RTE Act 2009, guaranteeing right to education, the Annual Status of Education Reports (ASER) bring out how in terms of basic infrastructure and learning outcomes, there is acute shortfall as compared to the expected levels. The secondary education also shows a lack of vocational skill amongst children in the age group of (14-18) which is seriously impeding their employability. The paper strongly recommends that the press must play its role as an independent sentinel in a democratic system to project public opinion against apathy and high handedness of the governing class over the governed. A free media with an enabling environment and political neutrality is a surefire guarantee against potential fascist tendencies.

Keywords: GHI, HDI, SECC Report, RSOC Report, RTE Act, ASER

Introduction

Democracy rests on three pillars viz. separation of power, checks and balances of its institutions and accountability of the elected representatives to the people at large. The Indian Constitution provides for such a scaffolding; with the Supreme Court acting as a watchdog to protect its sublime character to ensure fundamental rights of equality, freedom and life to its citizens. The court has carefully constructed a “basic structure doctrine”, in the Kesavananda Bharati Case (1973), so that the Parliamentary legislative power comes under the scanner of judicial review. This was reaffirmed in the Minerva Mills Case (1980). Another arm of democracy that has emerged as a very powerful deterrence against transgression of individual freedom, deprivation of socio economic justice, has been media. As the fourth arm of democracy, it has become the barometer of people’s pulse and talisman of common man’s hope. Benito Mussolini, the high priest of fascism, had observed “Democracy is a kingless regime infested by many kings who are sometimes more exclusive, tyrannical and destructive than one, if he be a tyrant. It is the fear of being exposed by the media before the public that most of the politicians keep themselves under control to some extent”. Given such a pivotal role, media must play a responsible and unbiased role in playing its part without being influenced by any particular political party. It should treat everyone equally. It can be a catalyst for democracy to flourish and kindle the

embers of socio-economic justice of ordinary Indians, pitted against powerful lobbies and vested interests.

Perception of Media

Despite media’s proclivity towards sensationalisation the notion of guardian of media as public interest and as a conduit between the governors and government remain deeply ingrained. Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky in their seminal book “Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media” (1985) lamented how US media through different filters perpetuate editorial bias. Prominent amongst these are ownership and profit orientation of the media owner and large subsidy and patronage given by the government to media to promote their ideology and viewpoint. Chomsky observes that till disintegration of USSR (1988), “Communism bashing” was the editorial filter. It has now been supplanted by “war on terrorism”.

This paper tries to analyze how (a) filters operate in present day market driven India (b) sectors and issues where Indian media is paying scant attention and (c) the way forward.

Filters in India for Media

With growing ascendancy of Hindutva ideology, the predominant filter in Indian media is how to promote nationalism and bash up the so called “anti-nationals”. Debate is frowned upon and a contrarian view point is often met with hostility and even with physical force by organized lumpen elements, with the subtle support

of the state. India's 'growth story' is another filter where the media underplays our disconcerting picture in terms of human development indicators. The recent World Economic Forum meeting at (Davos) witnessed how the entire media was galvanized to sell India as the investment destination, by touting improvement in ease of doing business and Moody's rating of being a stable economy. Such one sided discourse does not take note of our pathetic rating in Global Hunger Index which has decreased from 97 to 100 as per report released by International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI). This index takes note of percentage of undernourished population, child wasting and IMR. The media also does not bring out the serious hiatus that exists between growth and the human development story that is seriously imploding the core fabric of India from within. One such segment is the Rural India where 75% of India's population inhabits bedeviled by serious deprivations on several fronts.

The Rural India's Story

The Indian media often fails to provide news coverage to this segment as P. Sainath brings out how agricultural correspondents in journalism have now come extinct. The farmer suicide is just a footnote in discussion, without debating on the underlying reasons that perpetuates them and how to bring to book those responsible for such human tragedy and accountability of the state.

The Socio-Economic Caste Census (SECC) Report (2011) documents the palpable neglect that India's rural sector is presently undergoing in several areas.

Table 1 : Major All India Findings (Rural)

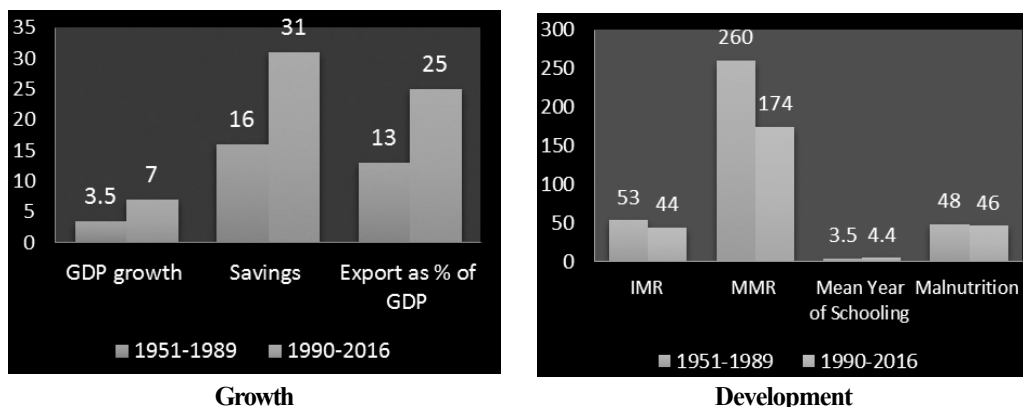
Parameter	% of Households
Land less	56%
Casual labour	81%
Salaried jobs	9.7%
Income Less than Rs.5000	74.5%
Access to Kisan Cards	3.6%
Illiterates	36%

Source: SECC Report 2011

It would be clear that the land reform measures have not made any significant dent in rural India. The land ownership remains heavily skewed. The promise of financial inclusion for the poor farmers through Kisan Credit Cards and promises of improvement in regular employment opportunity remain illusory. Close to 75% of rural population earn an income which is below the statutory minimum wage to an unskilled labour. The promise of doubling farm income in the budget of 2016-17 has remained as a rhetoric.

Growth, Development Disconnect

The growth development disconnect after economic liberalization in 1991 can be summed up as the following table would show.

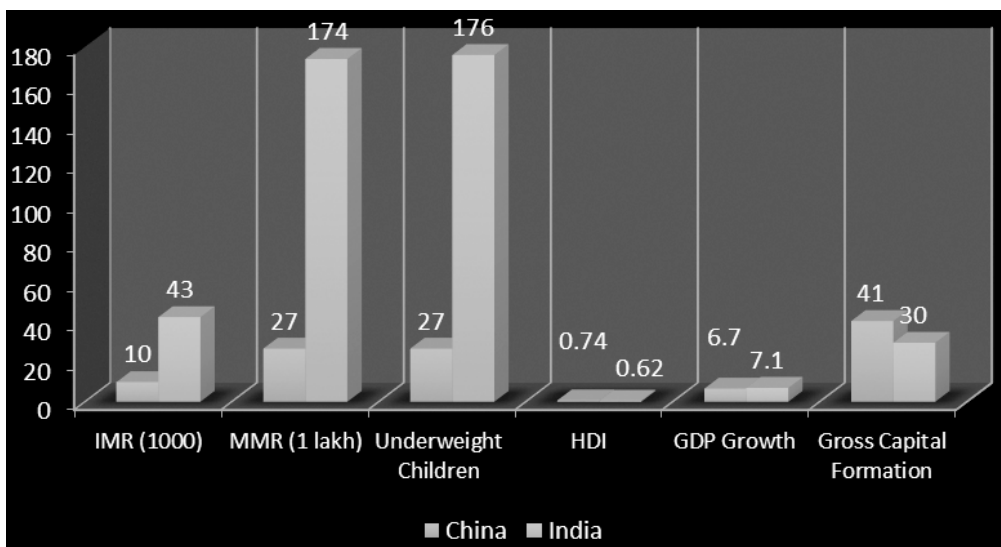
Figure 1 : Growth & Development Disconnect

Source: Economic Survey

This clearly shows how the growth in GDP, savings and exports nearly two fold, sit uneasily with low level of schooling and there is lack of concern for infant & maternal mortality. 46% of children suffer from malnutrition which is indeed most distressing despite having flagship

programmes like the ICDS. There is hardly any serious writing in the media or discussion on these distressing trends.

It would therefore be interesting to compare how China has fared compared to India in terms of growth and development after economic liberalisation.

Figure 2 : Socio Economic Indicators: India and China (2016)

Source: World Development Indicator 2017

It is quite clear that China has fared much better both in terms of growth and development compared to India. Most importantly its growth story is coterminous with human development of particular concern is plight of children in India in terms of micronutrient intake.

A Rapid Survey of Children (RSOC) (2013-14), by the Unicef documents the plight of our underfed children as brought out in the following table.

Table 2: Micro Nutrient Supplement ation (6 months-59 month)

Type	Vitamin "A" Supply	Iron & Folic Acid
Male	44.8	13.1
Female	45.6	13.8
Hindu	46.5	14.0
Muslim	37.5	9.5
Christian	54.5	21.4
Scheduled Caste	43.4	12.3
Scheduled Tribe	46	15.4
Others	46.4	13.5

Source: RSOC Report, 2013-14

It would be seen that there is very little variation in the matter of receipt of supplements amongst males and females, which is very low. This has severe implication on children being underweight and suffering from night blindness etc. The Christian community seems to have an edge over other religious communities. There is hardly any discussion in the media on these aspects.

The Plight of Primary Education

Post RTE Act, there is a significant increase in access to primary education as it has become a fundamental right (Article 21A). There is also discernible reduction in inequality between gender, caste and class in terms of access as mandated by the Millennium Development Goal (MDG). Yet the surveys by Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) bring out the deplorable condition in the primary education in terms of impact in quality by schools run by government. Basic infrastructure and quality outcomes as the following tables would reveal are very disconcerting.

Table 3: Trends in Enrolment in Primary Schools % in Rural India & Learning Outcome

Parameter	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2016
Enrolment in Government School	71.1	69.6	67.0	66.8	64.9	96
Enrolment in Private School	24.3	25.6	28.3	29.0	30.8	30.5
Standard 5 children can read standard 2 text	53.4	48.2	46.8	47	48.1	48.1
Standard 5 children can do 3/1 digit division	35.9	24.9	24.9	25.6	26.1	26.0

Source: ASER Reports

This clearly shows that enrolment in primary schools is on the increase, while the learning outcomes show a pathetic trend, with very little improvement over the years. There is also a tendency to gravitate

towards private schoolings from 24.3% to 30.5%, as they provide students better exposure to English and more serious teacher attention. The infrastructure facility also presents a disquieting picture.

Table 4 : Infrastructure Facilities: Comparative Picture

Parameter	All India		Kerala		Gujarat		Odisha	
	2014	2016	2014	2016	2014	2016	2014	2016
Library Books Available	78.1	75.5	94.7	93.6	92.3	87.8	88.0	82.1
Drinking Water Available	75.6	74.1	83.0	80.5	87.0	84.6	81.6	77.7
Girls Toilet Available & Usable	55.7	61.9	80.2	78.8	81.4	81.1	53.0	65.8
Computer Available	19.6	20.0	89.8	89.0	81.3	75.2	14.1	15.5

Source: ASER Reports

Annual Status of Education Report (ASER 2017)

The latest report of ASER brings out the disquieting position in regard to rural youth in the age group (14-18). Some of the disquieting findings are (a) 78% are engaged in agricultural work, (b) only 3.7% are availing of any long term vocational training, thereby weakening their employability. There is a shortage of 30-40% faculty in colleges, syllabus is outdated and the degrees given have nothing in sync with the industry

requirement. Discontinuance of students (50%) by the child attaining the age of 18, lack of interest (34%) in studies are the other concerns. Harsh Mander in his book "Looking Away: Inequality, Prejudice and Indifference in New India" documents how there is complete apathy of the rich and middle class to the plight of the marginalized. Some of the tell tale findings of the ASER report (2017) covering 30000 children, cutting across villages of 24 states in India, is shows the following trend.

Table 5 : Learning Outcome of Adults in Rural India

State	Identify Ownership on the Map	Applying Discount %	Read English
Bihar	17	44.2	55.9
Gujarat	64.1	16.4	64.3
Karnataka	82.4	57.9	55
Kerala	94.7	84.5	94.9
Odisha	45.8	37.3	68.9
Tamila Nadu	58.8	37.6	74.6
Utter Pradesh	13.9	33.1	37.4
Punjab	32.7	58.1	82.5
All India	42	57.7	58.2

Source: ASER, 2017

The data is self explanatory of the low level of learning by adults in the age group of 14-18 in rural India. This is adversely affecting employability of these children who enter into the workforce.

The Way Forward

There is a clear evidence that India, despite its strong democratic credentials, has not ensured simultaneous improvement in its growth and development parameters. The

reason for this is the political apathy about to the plight of the poor. The focus has been to sub serve the interests of the corporate sector. Media, as the fourth arm of the democracy, instead of unmasking apathy and unholy nexus between the government and the big corporate houses, has developed either a cozy relationship with the government of the day by showcasing the government viewpoint or looking the other way, for fear of reprisal. Prof. Amartya Sen had brought out how media in a democracy can be a powerful instrument against possible death due to famine. While most of the Indian media cover only urban India, analysts like Prof. Jean Dreze, P. Sainath and Harsh Mander are like whiff of fresh air as they bring out the angst of the poor and the marginalized in the rural and urban landscape poignantly. What disturbed Chomsky in the 1990s about media in the USA, is being repeated in India when the media owners and government are giving largesse in terms of advertisements etc. to ensure the nationalistic card is played ad nauseam.

Freedom of press is not specifically mentioned as part of the Right to Freedom 19(1)(a), in Indian Constitution. This is unlike the USA where the Bill of Rights introduced in (1791) prohibits Congress to make any law which abridges "Freedom of the Press". The Supreme Court in India, has however, been assiduously acting as a watchdog to ensure that the rights of media are not unduly trampled upon as in the case of Bennett Coleman & Co. vs Union of India Case

(1972). The eminent jurist Joseph Story wrote "It depends on the present age, if the national constitution will descend on its children in its masculine majesty; or shorn of its responsibility, it will become an idle mockery". The prevailing environment of fear and fascist tendencies seem to have emasculated the role and character of Indian media. It must, however, come out of this morass and play its primordial role as a great lamppost to defend the pristine character of our Constitution and preserve our secular and multicultural character.

References

Annual Status of Education Report (ASER), 2010-2017. ASER Centre, New Delhi

Dreze, J. & Sen, A. (2013). "*An Uncertain Glory India and its Contradictions*". Penguin Books India Pvt. Ltd, Panchsheel Park, New Delhi

Economic Survey, 2016-2017, Government of India. Retrieved from <http://indiabudget.nic.in/survey.asp>

Herman, E. S. and Chomsky, N. (1985). "*Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media*" RHUK Publisher.

Human Development Report, 2016. Human Development for Everyone. UNDP

Kesavananda Bharati ... vs State Of Kerala And Anr on 24 April, 1973. Retrieved from <https://indiankanoon.org/>

- doc/257876/ and Mody, Zia. (2013). *10 Judgements That Changed India*. Penguin India
- Mander, H. (2015). “*Looking Away-Inequality, Prejudice and Indifference in New India*”. Speaking Tiger Books.
- Minerva Mills Ltd. & Ors vs Union Of India & Ors on 31 July, 1980. Retrieved from <https://indiankanoon.org/doc/1939993/>
- Rapid Survey on Children (RSOC) 2013-14*. Retrieved from <http://wcd.nic.in/acts/rapid-survey-children-rsoc-2013-14>
- Report on International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI)*. Retrieved from <http://www.ifpri.org/>
- Report on World Development Indicators, 2017*. Retrieved from <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/26447>
- Sainath, P. (2000). “*Everybody Loves a Good Drought*”. Penguin India
- The Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS)*. Retrieved from <http://icds-wcd.nic.in/icds/icds.aspx>

