

Role of Newspaper in India

An efficient and fearless press is one of the pre-requisites of a democracy. It would be apt if we call the press a mirror of society. It acts as a watch-dog of democracy where ideas and majority opinions prevail. It is the duty of the press to watch the activities of the Government, highlight its failure when it deviates from the path of democratic pattern and thereby force it to make up for its lapses.

In Indian democracy, most of the people are impoverished, illiterate and inarticulate; hence the newspapers have a special responsibility to take over the role of spokesman for people of all classes, to act as a bridge between the government and the governed, to prevent social exploitation that can threaten the existence of democracy.

The first newspaper was published in India in the mid – 18th century by James A. Hicky. It was called Bengal Gazette. The oldest daily newspaper, the Bombay Samachar is being published in Gujarat since 1822. Ananda Bazar Patrika, Punjab Kesari And Time of India are the other old newspaper. Today the Indian press has 41 centenarians.

The Office of the Registrar of Newspapers for India (RNI) came into existence on 1 July 1956, on the recommendation of the First Press Commission in 1953 and by amending the press and Registration of Books Act, 1867. The Registrar of Newspapers for India, commonly known as the Press Registrar, is required to submit an Annual Report to the Government by 31 December every year on the status of newspaper.

The period for which the annual statements were to be furnished, was changed from the calendar to financial year in 2002. Earlier the Annual Report was compiled on financial year basis. The total number of registered Newspapers/ Periodical was 69,323 as on 31 March 2008. These were 7,710 dailies, 379 tri/bi-weeklies, 23,414 weeklies, 9,053 fortnightlies, 20,948 monthlies, 4,687 quarterlies, 605 annuals, and 2,518 of the other periodicities. (The figures have been updated only for the registered newspapers for the year 2007-08)

According to the report submitted by the Press Registrar for the year 2007-08, Newspapers were registered in 123 languages and dialects. Apart from English and 22 other principal languages listed in the Eighth schedule of the Constitution, newspapers were registered in 100 other languages and dialects mostly Indian but also in a few foreign languages too. Orissa has the distinction of publishing newspaper in 18 out of 23 principle languages Maharashtra came next with

publication in 17 languages followed by Delhi with publications in 16 principle languages.

Of the 69,323 newspapers registered as on 31 March 2008, only 9,072 submitted Annual Statement during 2007-08. The total circulation of these 9,072 newspapers was 20,71,08,115 copies per publicity day. The largest number of newspapers and periodicals registered in any Indian language is in Hindi (25,527). The second largest number of newspapers and periodicals registered in any language is in English (10,000). The state with the largest number of registered newspapers is Uttar Pradesh (10,799). The state with the second largest number of registered newspapers in Delhi (8,545).

The 2009 Indian Readership Survey findings show that the largest read local language newspapers to be Dainik Jagran (with 55.7 million readers) and Dainik Bhaskar (with 31.9 million readers), both published in Hindi. The Times of India is the most widely read English Language newspaper (13.3 million), followed by Hindustan Times (6.3 million), The Hindu (5.2 million). The New Indian Express is another widely read English Language newspaper (1.8 million). Malayala Manorama newspaper which is published in Malayalam crossing 1.8 million has the largest circulation in regional languages.

The most significant nationalist newspaper was Kesari, founded by BAL Gangadhar Tilak in Bombay in January 1888. He emphasized that the traditional role of press was to be vigilant about public affairs. From the early part of the 20th century till 1947, the most decisive driving force behind all change in India and also its press was Mahatma Gandhi. So, press played a dominant role during the pre-independence era.

In the post- independence era also, the role of the press was up to the expectation. After India's defeat by China in 1962, Nehru's policy of friendship with China was fully exposed. When Mrs. Indira Gandhi censored the press during the Emergency, she lost the elections due to lack of touch or awareness about the public mood. In modern days also, the press is playing an important role in educating people about the various issues which are directly or indirectly related with the life of Indian people.

In a democracy, newspapers are crucial both for the Government and the people. Newspapers inform the people of the programmes, policies and activities of the government, Similarly, they keep the government informed of the reaction of the people, their problems, grievances, hopes and aspirations. Newspapers thus serve as a bridge between the Government and the people. However, country ruled by a dictator, newspapers have to project the views. They do not enjoy freedom of expression. They cannot offer even constructive criticism.

Information is fed to the newspapers by a number of agencies. The Press Information Bureau is the central agency of the Government to give information to the Press on Government policies, programmes and activities, receive feedback from people and advise the Government on its information policy. Besides, India has four news agencies- Press Trust of India (PTI). United News of India (UN I), Samachar Bharti and Hindustan Samachar. Non – Aligned countries have also set up a News Agencies pool. It is being operated by PTI.

In the past, the in India played a great role by supporting the freedom movement launched by Mahatma Gandhi against the British rulers. Of course, the British always adopted a double standard while dealing with the English Press and the Vernacular Press. They tried their level best to gag the national press in India. Some of the editors of the newspapers were even jailed. Their only fault was that they criticized the British Government for its anti- India policy.

Newspaper circulations worldwide rose 2.3% in 2006 with Indian sales increasing most with 12.93%, the World Association of Newspapers (WAN) said on 4-06-07 Newspaper sales increased in Asia, Europe, Africa and South America, with North America the only continent to register a decline. Advertising revenues in paid dailies were up 3.77% in 2006, WAN said, China, Japan and India account for 60 % of the world's 100 best-selling dailies, while the five largest markets for newspapers are China, India, Japan, the US and Germany. The Circulation of Indian dailies Jumped 33% to over 7.86 crore during 2001-2005 even as global newspaper circulation increased 9.95% in the same period. Contrary to conventional wisdom, newspaper circulation is growing and new newspapers are being launched at a remarkable rate, The Paris- based World Association of Newspaper (WAN) said in a release on 6-02-207. Daily newspaper titles surpassed 10,000 for the first time in history, with India accounting for 1,834 dailies in 2005, up 22.8% from 1,493 dailies in 2001, according to world Press Trends

The newspapers in India have a great future. They can help in the development to our country. They can highlight the social, economic and moral evils prevailing in our society and suggest ways and means to eradicate these evils. The main social evils are untouchability, dowry, drinking, child marriage, etc. they can also mobilize public opinion against economic evils like smuggling, black- marketing, tax evasion, hoarding, ticketless travelling, etc. they can also expose and fight corruption. In this manner, newspaper can render great service to India and its people.