



Biased Media is a Real Threat to Indian Democracy

Whoever controls the media, controls the mind

— Jim Morrison

Media plays a crucial role in any democratic society by providing information, shaping public opinion, and holding those in power accountable. However, the rise of biased media poses a significant threat to the democratic fabric of India. In recent years, Indian media has come under scrutiny for its biased reporting, sensationalism, and lack of objectivity.

Media serves as the **fourth pillar of democracy**, alongside the executive, legislative, and judiciary branches. Its primary function is to inform citizens, facilitate debate, and act as a watchdog over the government and other powerful institutions. In India, a diverse and vibrant media landscape has emerged since independence, comprising print, broadcast, and digital platforms. However, the proliferation of biased media outlets has blurred the lines between news and propaganda, posing a grave danger to democracy.

Biased media outlets in India often **prioritize sensationalism over substance**, resorting to **inflammatory rhetoric** and **divisive narratives** to attract viewership or readership. This sensationalism contributes to the spread of misinformation and the polarization of society along religious, ethnic, and political lines. Moreover, biased reporting can sway **public opinion**, **influence electoral outcomes**, and undermine the credibility of democratic institutions.

The phenomenon of biased media in India is exacerbated by various challenges to **press freedom**, including **political pressure**, **corporate influence**, and **legal threats**. The concentration of media ownership in the hands of a few conglomerates limits the diversity of viewpoints and fosters self-censorship among journalists. These challenges impede the media's ability to fulfill its democratic mandate and hold power to account.

Political pressure on media outlets is a common phenomenon in India, where governments often seek to control the narrative and suppress dissenting voices. Media outlets are made manipulated by giving them ads by the political parties for suppressing the truth and spreading rumours and fake news.

Corporate interests often wield significant influence over media organizations through ownership or advertising revenue. A prime example is the **Reliance Group**, one of India's largest conglomerates with interests in various sectors, including media. Reliance's ownership of **a certain media platform**, which controls several news channels and digital media platforms, has raised concerns about editorial independence and bias. Critics argue that Reliance's business interests may influence media coverage to favor its corporate agenda, thereby compromising journalistic integrity.

The consequences of biased media on Indian democracy are far-reaching and multifaceted. It erodes public trust in the media as an impartial source of information, leading to widespread cynicism and apathy towards democratic institutions. It undermines the pluralistic fabric of Indian society by fostering intolerance and bigotry towards marginalized communities. It compromises the integrity of electoral processes by manipulating public opinion and influencing voter behavior. Overall, biased media contributes to the erosion of democratic norms and values, posing a serious threat to the future of Indian democracy.

During the **COVID-19 pandemic**, misleading stories about the death toll and government responses deepened the crisis. Twitter censorship of critical tweets and pro-government channels blaming farmers' protests for **oxygen shortages** distorted the truth and undermined trust in the media. This jeopardizes their ability to report objectively and hold those in power accountable. Attacks on journalists who expose corruption or criticize political leaders endanger press freedom and democratic functioning.

Sonam Wangchuk, the renowned **climate activist** and **educationalist**, recently concluded his **21-day climate fast** in Leh, Ladakh. During this period, he sustained himself solely on water and salt, drawing attention to critical issues affecting the region.

Wangchuk's fast was a powerful statement, emphasizing the need to **protect Ladakh's fragile ecology** and **indigenous culture**. He emphasized the importance of character and foresight in addressing Ladakh's concerns. Wangchuk's fast garnered support from various **socio-political bodies** in Ladakh, including the **Kargil Democratic Alliance**. Members of the KDA also joined him in hunger strikes, amplifying their collective voice but big news channels and media houses ignored incident and did not provided proper coverage.

Moreover, the Sushant Singh Rajput case became a media frenzy, with sensationalism overshadowing more critical matters. The media's obsession with Sushant Singh Rajput's death transformed a tragic suicide into a relentless investigation, streamed live day after day.

Instead of focusing on the actual tragedy, the spotlight shifted to an actress portrayed as the evil intriguer and the perfect cinematic vamp.

The arrest of actress, after relentless pursuit, was celebrated by those addicted to this media spectacle. The media's gossipy edge often carries deep shades of misogyny. The private-public separation blurred. While the media chased actresses and sensationalized the Rajput case, other crucial issues in the country were sidelined. The **Bombay High Court** recognized the harm caused by **trial by media, obstructing fair criminal case** investigations. The media's role should be to inform, not to manipulate public sentiment.

The practice of accepting money from political parties to publish favorable stories or suppress negative ones, often referred to as "paid news," undermines the integrity of journalism and erodes public trust in the media. This phenomenon is particularly prevalent during election campaigns when political parties seek to manipulate public opinion and gain an unfair advantage. One notable example of paid news occurred during the run-up to the 2014 general elections in India.

Media showed one sided news about **CAA-NRC** and misled minorities that led to widespread protest in country. The media played a significant role in shaping **public perception of the CAA**. Some channels sensationalized the issue, focusing on specific narratives while ignoring broader implications. The trial by media approach led to **polarization** and **misinformation**. Social media also played a role, with **fact-checkers** attempting to **correct misinformation**.

Addressing the issue of biased media requires concerted efforts from multiple stakeholders, including **policymakers, media professionals, civil society organizations**, and the **general public**. There is a need for stringent regulations and mechanisms to hold media outlets accountable for ethical breaches and misinformation. Media literacy programs should be implemented to educate citizens about the importance of critical thinking and discerning reliable sources of information. Independent media watchdogs and ombudsmen should be empowered to monitor media content and address complaints from the public. Additionally, promoting diversity and plurality in the media industry through initiatives such as community media and public broadcasting can help counteract the influence of biased media conglomerates.

Biased media poses a grave threat to Indian democracy by undermining the principles of **transparency, accountability, and pluralism**. Its sensationalism, misinformation, and propaganda have the potential to subvert democratic processes and foster social division. Therefore, it is imperative to address the root causes of biased media and implement reforms to safeguard press freedom and media integrity. Only by upholding the highest standards of journalistic ethics and promoting media pluralism can India realize its democratic aspirations and uphold the rights of its citizens.

Even if you are a minority of one, the truth is the truth.

—Mahatma Gandhi

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