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**THE ROLE AND IMPORTANCE OF THE MEDIA IN SHAPING A MODEL OF DEMOCRACY IN INDIA**

By

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**Abstract:** Changes in the Indian media are important because - on the one hand - have significant social and political implications, on the other - reflect the processes of socio-economic transformation in the country. In independent India, media development was primarily related to political system and economic development model, shaped after 1947. In 1990, the Indian government adopted a law, The Prasar Bharati Act, that abolished the monopoly of state television and its control by the government. New regulations of the media market in 2005 made the media become a pillar of Indian democracy. The growing importance of the media, especially television with greater availability of satellite TV shaped increasingly awareness of the social and political layers of the poor.

**Key words:** Indian democracy, media, press evolution, Indian independence, technological revolution

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**INTRODUCTION**

India is a multicultural and democratic country. In shaping the national consciousness and promoting liberal democracy model, media played a significant role. Development of media was influenced by British heritage and national liberation movement activities, as well as by achieving by India independence. The dynamics of change in the media market in India in recent years have been also affected by the processes and phenomena such as economic reform, liberalization and openness to foreign investment, globalization of economic processes and the technological revolution. Changes in the Indian media are important because - on the one hand - have significant social and political implications, on the other - reflect the processes of socio-economic transformation in the country.

**GENESIS AND EVOLUTION OF THE PRESS IN INDIA - FROM COLONIALISM TO INDEPENDENCE**

The development of the Indian press was initiated at the beginning of the nineteenth century by Christian missionaries who, in 1816 released "Samachar Darpan" (Mirror of News), a newspaper in Bengali language. From this period sales of magazines published in local languages significantly increased. Over the decades, the phenomenon turned into a national movement. One of the manifestations of this phenomenon was the rise of interest in political and religious processes that were happening in the mid-nineteenth century and had reformist character. Their premise was mainly dissatisfaction with the social and economic situation. Indians also tried to emphasize a distinct identity, referring to their cultural values.

At the end of the nineteenth century and in early twentieth important theme of Hindu nationalism revival was searching for their own identity in the face of spiritual and material dominance of colonial powers. At the same time some Hindu thinkers such as Vivekananda, referring to the Bhagavad Gita, encouraged the Indians to be active in the world (Chatterjee, 1993). The views of revival, issues of identity became main topics addressed by the rapidly growing Indian press. At the same time the fact that the press was coming out in native languages meant that its significance in shaping socio-political awareness was increasing. This

aroused growing concern and apprehension of British authorities. In 1878 Viceroy of India, Lord Lytton in special act (Vernacular Press Act) prohibited the issuance of the press in Indian languages. The only language, in which newspapers could be issued, was now English. Lytton's decision contributed to the development of nationalist and national press published in English (Rothermund, 2008).

The press and presented by it opinions and views influenced the shaping of the political movement with the anti-British characteristics. In 1885 the Indian National Congress was formed. Initially, it put forward proposals for the reform of British rule in India. Over time, however it became more radical. Prevalence of ideas of Mahatma Gandhi, the launch of civil disobedience movement meant that Congress has become a universal movement, especially after 1920. Mahatma Gandhi also had an impact on the style and development of the Indian press, for which the model had to be British newspapers. At the same time the Indian press was closely involved politically, promoted slogans and ideas presented by the main factions in the Indian National Congress. During World War II the Indian newspaper, referring to the slogan "Quit India", published by Congressional leaders, refused to defend India by British forces and opposed conceptions counts on the cooperation with Japan and Germany. Press also opposed to the concept presented by the Muslim League, which has opted for an alliance with Western countries. India, according to most of the press, after independence should in fact strengthen cooperation with Asian countries, to become a superpower, promoting peaceful cooperation and emphasizing the cultural and civilizational bonds of Asian countries.

National movement, a common respect for the history of the struggle for liberation from British control, achieving independence united Indians, affecting their perception of the world, and thus the development of the press and presented in it opinions (Wainwright, 1994).

## **ROLE AND IMPORTANCE OF THE MEDIA IN SHAPING THE INDIAN MODEL OF SOCIO-POLITICAL AFTER INDEPENDENCE**

In independent India, media development was primarily related to political system and economic development model, shaped after 1947 (Gerlach, 1988). Despite the freedom of speech, government exercised control over the radio and television. At the same time Indian press was struggling with the problem of distribution. Lack of resources and technologies meant that, especially in the early years, the main dailies could not always reach on time. However, this problem was solved quite quickly. Magazines such as "The Times of India" (issued in Mumbai and Delhi), "Statesman" (in Calcutta), or "The Hindu" (in Madras) covered the range of the whole country. The main purpose of the press was to build and strengthen the unity of India.

Power of the state was evident also in electronic media. The government already had a monopoly on television and radio. They were to promote the vision of India's multicultural democracy. In the years 1960-1990 the government tried - with varying effects - using state television and radio (All India Radio and Doordarshan TV, controlled by the Indian Ministry of Information and Broadcasting) to promote economic development model.

In the early 80s of the twentieth century significant changes started in Indian media market. The number of television sets increased significantly. In addition, a process of commercialization television began. In 1985 in Doordarshan the first soap opera was emitted (lasted 17 months). At the same time the increase in the number of receivers and audience helped with large growth of the middle class. Television programs were geared more to the audience. For the first time in Indian history TV advertising value exceeded the value of advertising in the press and on the radio. The years between 1985 and 1990 marked a media boom.

## **INDIAN MEDIA AT THE BEGINNING OF THE XXI CENTURY - NEW TRENDS**

The processes of globalization, market reforms, and above all the technological revolution and the growing importance of the media in world politics, internal wars transmission in the Persian Gulf in 1991 – they all played a key role in the transformation of media system in India. The growth of political pluralism was accompanied by an increase in media pluralism. In 1990, the Indian government initiated a process of deregulation in own media market. The government adopted a law, The Prasar Bharati Act, that abolished the monopoly of state television and its control by the government. However, no stable coalition in

parliament, the economic crisis and a lack of stable government meant that only in 1997 this law could be adopted. This did not mean, however, that in the period 1991 - 1997 processes of liberalization of the media market have been hampered. In 1991 Hong Kong territory began the first private television broadcasting intended for Indian viewers - Star TV. Following that, Zee TV, Sony TV, Sun and Gemini inception. Existence of a competition meant a decrease of advertising revenue for public television.

Essential for the development of a new media order was the Supreme Court decision, which stated that satellite links and air are public domain that one cannot claim as property. This decision opened the way for the independence of the public media and gave the opportunities to open radio and television stations by private businesses.

The dynamics of changes were reflected by numbers. Between 1989 and 1994 the number of newspapers published daily increased from 2538 to 4043. Their total circulation increased from 20 million to 32 million. Also, the number of channels and private television stations increased to 50 in 1997, and to almost 100 in 2009. These changes also resulted in the evolution of the advertising market.

However, despite the increase in the number of private radio stations and television, Doordarshan's public television still plays the most important role. It reaches more than 330 million people in India (in comparison, private stations reach over 70 million). Over 50% of the public television programs are broadcast in Hindi, just over 21% in English and 25% in other languages. Private stations are dominated by English language. Since 2005, due to the new legislation and regulations, further liberalization and deregulation of the media market has been progressing, with a rise of regional stations (Sarma, 1999).

### **THE IMPORTANCE OF THE MEDIA FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF DEMOCRACY IN INDIA**

The years 1989-1991 were characterized by instability, frequent decays and weak coalition governments. Some authors point out that India was affected by the crisis concerning the governance of the country (crisis of governability). Lack of stable political situation made it difficult to amend laws on the media market. Since the 90s, however, there was a growing awareness of the fact that the dynamics of internal and external changes also force the necessary transformation of the sector. The liberalization, openness to investment and new policy towards the Indian diaspora meant that since 2005 Indian media market has been fully open to foreign investment. At the same time the changes in the media market, such as the growing importance of regional stations, corresponded with the transformation of the political system in India.

The growing importance of the media, especially television with greater availability of satellite TV shaped increasingly awareness of the social and political layers of the poor. Although since the 60s cast system played an important role in state, from 90s untouchables, lower castes and disadvantaged started to play more and more important social role. There are about 150-160 million of Untouchables, also known as Dalits (Zelliot, 1991). In addition, at the end of 90s, after more than 50 years of independence, in most states prime ministers were representatives of medium or lower castes. In August of 1997 K.R. Narayanan, who comes from the untouchables, became a President of India (Narayanan, 1997). Furthermore, in July of 2007 first time in history, a woman Pratibha Patil, became a President.

New regulations of the media market in 2005 made the media become a pillar of Indian democracy. Greater availability to the media, especially of the poorer, as well as breaking the government's monopoly on the media, uncovered many system imperfections to Indian public (Mitra, 2003).

Political fragmentation and conflicts between casts had a negative impact on the image of India as the largest democracy in the world. India can thus be described as a soft state, which is one of the causes of the difficulties that India faced in the implementation of its superpower aspirations in the international arena (Bhutani, 2004).

Thanks to Bharatiya Janata Party there has been no riots in India since 2002, comparable to those of the 90s. It also seems that support for radical groups, nationalist falls, as evidenced by the election to the Indian House of the People (Lok Sabha) in 2004. This was demonstrated by opinion polls. The vast majority of respondents accepted the democratic system, the principle of free elections, advocated a peaceful solution to the problem of Kashmir, was opposed to the establishment of a common civil code for all citizens of India and condemned the destruction of the mosque Babar (Mitra, 2001).

The political scene in India stabilised after the 2004 elections. The government of Manmohan Singh - whose coalition supported the UPA (United Progressive Alliance) was in progress of implementing new liberal economic reforms and further liberalization in the sphere of the media market (Kronstadt, 2004).

The need to build coalitions, the emergence of regional stations and their growing importance, strengthened the role of regional parties, castes and ethnic groups, not only at the state level, but also nationwide. This had an impact on India's foreign policy. Indian National Congress or the BJP had to resign from the more radical slogans or demands for electoral pragmatic solutions or were forced to build consensus on key issues. Political fragmentation, the emergence of numerous social movements, paradoxically did not weaken democracy, but strengthened it. It activated passive lower castes and included them in a public political discourse (Adeney, Wyatt, 2004).

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Rashma Awtal is a student of a Degree in Journalism. She has been also a member of Association of Young Jurnalists in Mumbai, since 2012. Awtal is now a senior member in the Association and helps young people in local community to get interested in journalism. Privately, she is interested in political sciences and social studies.