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2nd Year, BBA LL.B.**PAID NEWS: A THREAT TO INDIAN DEMOCRACY****ABSTRACT**

The media's active and vigilant engagement is vital in a democratic society. It is critical to believe that the media speaks for the people, represents society's interests, and functions as a check on government. This approach guarantees that the government is open and accountable. Through this function, the media helps to ensure successful governance. The sacredness of media has been put into question in every community in today's changing social climate. As the world's largest democracy, India is tremendously concerned. The menace of bought news is the country's mainstream media's most recent and widely reported moth-eaten condition. 'Paid news' is a phenomenon that goes beyond individual journalists' and media organisations' wrongdoing. In this circumstance, how can the media fulfil their job as a watchdog in a democratic system? How can the media represent the interests of society and speak for the people? And, more importantly, how can good governance be ensured? These are some of the issues and questions raised in the research.

KEYWORDS

Democracy, governance, good governance, media, paid news, corruption

INTRODUCTION

The media's watchdog role is critical in a democratic society where citizens need to know what their leaders are up to. The media's principal democratic job is to act as a check on the government. The media should keep a close eye on government operations and expose official power abuses without fear.¹ The belief that the media speaks for the people, represents society's interests, and acts as a check on the government is crucial. This method holds the government accountable and makes what it is doing visible so that citizens can judge it. In a democratic society, the media plays an important role in ensuring good government.² Transparency, accountability, and involvement are all principles of good government. Democracy is a form of government that is based on the active agreement of the people.

As a vital source of public knowledge, the media could be a platform for encouraging the development of these good governance ideas. However, in today's changing social climate, the media's sanctity has been called into doubt by a number of quarters. The media's role in the democratic system has changed in tandem with its evolution from a mission to a profession, then to a business. The media sector, like every other business, has made profit its ultimate purpose. Paid news is the most recent and widely discussed topic in relation to the media industry's departure from its core tasks in India. How can we expect justice from the media in this new era of paid news? In a democratic system, how can the media fulfil their watchdog role?

GOVERNANCE

The concept of "government" may be traced back to the dawn of human civilisation. However, the term's scope and meaning have subsequently been greatly enlarged. As a result, there is no agreement on the definition and scope of the governance word. Over the term govern, there is no agreement among scholars and funding bodies. The World Bank defines the term governance in two ways. The first definition is concerned only with the use of political power to manage a country's affairs. The second definition focuses on the use of power in the administration of a state's social and economic resources for development. To summarise, governing is a decision-making process and the procedures for implementing or not implementing choices. Governance is

¹ Curran James, *Media and Power*, London and New York, Rutledge, (2002)

² Strong C., *Modern political constitution*, London: Sidgewick and Jackson (1972)

defined as "the act or process of ruling, of exercising control or power over the conduct of subjects, a system of regulation" by the Oxford dictionary. Governments are one of the actors in governance at the same time. Other actors in the governance process include the military, civil society organisations, the media, political parties, and non-governmental organisations (NGOs).³

GOOD GOVERNANCE

If we understand the essence of Aristotle's essential remark that "the state came into existence for the sake of mere life, but maintained for the sake of excellent life," we can trace the origins of the concept of Good Governance back to the Ancient Greek period. We may trace the components of Good Governance that we addressed in modern times if we look into the word "good life." Through their social contract conceptions of the formation of the state, political philosophers such as Hobbs, Lock, and Rousseau stressed the importance of good governance. Governments, according to John Lock, are only allowed to govern as long as they can protect the people's interests or the people's trust in them.⁴ This is how the concepts of democracy by consent and good governance were established in government theory and practise. "Predictable and intelligent policymaking; a bureaucracy infused with a professional culture; an executive arm of government accountable for its acts; a vibrant civil society engaged in public affairs; and all behaving under the rule of law," according to the World Bank.⁵

ROLE OF MEDIA IN DEMOCRACY AND GOOD GOVERNANCE

The media is critical in fostering a healthy democracy and guaranteeing good governance. As a vital source of information, the media has long served as the beating heart of a democratic society and good administration. Norris believes that the media plays three important roles in democracy and good governance. The role of the media as a watchdog over the powerful is critical, since it promotes accountability, transparency, and public scrutiny. The media's second key purpose is to serve as a civic platform for political discourse, facilitating informed electoral choices and actions;

³ United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and Pacific, what is Good Governance? <http://www.unescap.org/pdd/prs/ProjectActivities/Ongoing/gg/governance.asp> (2012)

⁴ Sabine George, History of Political Theory, New York: Hault, Rineheart and Wintson (1961)

⁵ Yadav Lal Babu, Role of Media in Promoting Good Governance, <http://www.jdhr.org/publications/media-and-development> (2001)

and the media's third job is to set the agenda for policymakers, enhancing government responsiveness to social problems and exclusion, for example.⁶

By revealing policy failures, public official malfeasance, judicial corruption, and corporate scandals, the media can play a vital role in promoting transparency, accountability, and public scrutiny of decision-makers in their 'watchdog' function.⁷ Investigative journalism has the potential to expose the government's hidden documents to public scrutiny and critical analysis, as well as hold officials accountable for their actions. The media also uncovers machinations and violations of basic human rights. It also condemns election rigging and provides objective analyses of the election process and results, as well as ideas for reform. The media also plays an important role in mediating between the state and citizens through debates and discussions on big problems of the day, as well as informing individuals about their leaders' positions on such subjects. Only various opinion and distinct voices may be heard in public debates if the channels of communication represent the cultural and social plurality and diversity of the society in a fair and balanced manner.

People should have the right to know about all of the government's activities, particularly those that touch their life, liberty, and property. People require a great deal of information in order to make informed judgments about their participation in the state and civil society. Appropriate knowledge enables citizens to make informed decisions and select the best course of action for them. As a result, the media assists people in learning about what is going on in the world and socialising them with pluralistic principles. The media makes public services more responsive to the public by disseminating information.⁸ By making people aware of their rights, the media has played a critical role in the protection of rights. The media is also encouraging people to be more aware of global political developments and stimulating debate by drawing attention to all societal problems, such as institutional failures, corruption, inefficiency, and illegal activities.

PAID NEWS AND MEDIA

⁶ Norris P., *The Role of the free press in promoting democratization, good governance and human development*, New York: UNESCO (2006)

⁷ George A Donohue, Philip Tichenor et al, 'A Guard Dog Perspective on the Role of the Media.' *Journal of Communication*, 45(2), 115-128 (1995)

⁸ Yadav Lal Babu, *Role of Media in Promoting Good Governance*, <http://www.jdhr.org/publications/media-and-development> (2001)

Corruption in the media is not a recent occurrence. It predates the media itself. In this broad remark, India is not an exception. The media is an integral aspect of today's society. It would be absurd to expect the media to be devoid of all forms of corruption if there is corruption in society. However, when compared to the executive and legislative branches, media corruption was extremely low. It was a one-time occurrence, and the journalists had taken great care to avoid such behaviours in the future.

The media houses were likewise quite concerned about maintaining their dignity. However, in recent years, media corruption has surpassed the corruption of individual journalists and media organisations. Today, media corruption has evolved into much more institutionalised and organised forms of corruption, in which media receive funds in exchange for publicising information in favour of specific individuals, corporate entities, political party leaders, and election candidates that is disguised as "news." Many notable politicians and journalists have warned about the dangers of bought news. According to the Press Council report, opposition leader in the Lok Sabha Sushma Swaraj stated that the paid news menace began as an aberration, progressed to a disease, and is now an epidemic.

WHAT IS PAID NEWS?

Paid news refers to articles in newspapers, magazines, and online stories that show beneficial circumstances for the individuals or institutions who paid for them. These types of news are similar to advertisements, however they lack the 'ad tag.' It's been going on for decades, but what's worrying is that the practise looks to be becoming institutionalised now, not by dishonest individual reporters, but by media organisations themselves. This issue was raised by the Press Council in its most recent report on paid news. "The phenomenon of 'paid news' goes beyond the corruption of individual journalists and media businesses," according to the research. It has become pervasive, structured, and well-organized, eroding India's democracy in the process."⁹

The report also claims that the culture of paid journalism has permeated throughout the country's media. Another method of compensated news is private treaties. "Private Treaties" are agreements in which corporations pay media businesses in shares in exchange for advertising and other

⁹ Paid News: How corruption in the Indian media undermines Indian democracy.
www.thehindu.com/openion/columns/sainath/paidnews (2013)

preferential treatment. SEBI "considered that such brand-building initiatives of media companies, if not accompanied by sufficient and adequate disclosures, may not be in the best interests of investors and financial markets, as it would obstruct them from making a fair and well-informed decision."¹⁰ The 'paid news' phenomenon is a menace that threatens to eat away at the core ideals of a free and open media, and eradicating it is essential for a healthy democracy and good governance. The paid news problem appears to be intractable as an organised phenomenon, involving lawmakers and politicians from all political parties, as well as representatives from various corporate media outlets who coexist in a symbiotic relationship.

CORRUPTED MEDIA UNDERMINING DEMOCRACY AND GOOD GOVERNANCE

News must be clearly objective, fair, and unbiased, and it must maintain a distinct separation from advertisements. What happens when the line between news and advertising blurs, or when "news" is provided to benefit a specific politician or business behemoth by selling editorial space? In such cases, it is difficult for the reader or viewer to distinguish between news broadcasts and advertisements. As a result of the media's incorrect and misleading information, readers and viewers are confused. In the end, these activities jeopardise the very essence of democracy and the people's involvement in decision-making.

Paid news poses a significant danger to democracy and good governance. It has a variety of effects on the democratic process. To begin with, paid news forces the media to give up its independence. A media that is not independent is nothing more than a tool in the hands of the authorities or special interests. Second, the media deceives citizens with paid news. The reader of the newspaper or television viewer is duped into believing that what is essentially an advertisement is actually independently produced journalistic information. In the end, this conduct is detrimental to the democratic decision-making process. How can people make informed decisions about the government if they don't have all of the facts? The third critical question concerns the media's role in human rights protection. No market-regulated media can absolve themselves of their responsibilities to the public. Their every move might be influenced by the strings of advertising.

¹⁰ Sainath P., Paid news pandemic undermines democracy, The Hindu, Kochi, 10 May (2013)

When the media is forced to promote corporate interests, it is only inevitable that the rights of the most vulnerable members of society are violated.

Above all, the media's paid news culture jeopardises the country's democratic process. In election season, paid news practises are highly active. Many candidates refuse to reveal the amount of money they spent on "paid news" articles. The candidate for election is in violation of the Conduct of Election Rules as a result of this process. Because of the enormous influence of paid news in the media, an increasing number of editors have shifted their focus away from readers' interest in news and viewpoints and toward promoting their publishers' financial achievements. The unfortunate result is that news and opinion coverage in the press is scant and sparse, with a focus on individuals rather than topics, and a focus on today's sensations rather than follow-ups.¹¹

The Election Commission of India appears to be the country's only organisation dedicated to combating the harmful practise of "paid news." The phenomenon of misrepresenting advertisements as news could be restricted to some extent if other groups, especially those claiming to represent the interests of journalists and other media professionals, took a more proactive role in combating this fraudulent practise. Unfortunately, this is not happening at a large rate.

CONCLUSION

The function of parliamentary democracy requires the participation and comprehension of every member of society. It's also critical to maintain excellent governance. The single most important prerequisite for good governance is a free and fair media. However, due to market influence on the media sector, a huge proportion of existing media are unable to take on this task.

The practise of "paid news" puts the country's independent media, as well as strong democracy and effective government, under jeopardy. It poses a severe challenge to the Indian political system. In this context, the media should consider if such activities are beneficial to society and the media sector as a whole. Advertisements should be easily distinguishable from editorial content. Credibility is the lifeblood of the media. The media should understand that if it lacks integrity, it will cease to exist. They should be free of any pressure from diverse interest groups. They must stay away from all forms of political and commercial control. Above all, the media

¹¹ J B D'Souza, Journalism: Profit over People, Economic and Political Weekly, 35(19), 1597-1598 (2000)

should be given the investigative power they need to reveal the truth to the public and fulfil their role in supporting good governance.



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