

“CRACK IN THE PILLARS: WILL THE INDIAN DEMOCRACY SUSTAIN”

IS THE MEDIA AS THE 4TH PILLAR OF DEMOCRACY LOSING ITS CREDIBILITY?

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The word democracy comes from the Greek word *demos* which means "common people" and *kratos* which means "rule or strength" together they form the word *demokratia* which holds the meaning "rule of common people".

Abraham Lincoln truly said that ‘democracy is the government of the people by the people and for the people.’ Being a democracy is not a very easy task for no two person are alike and neither are their demands. It may be the best form of governance but it sure is not the easier one.

For a democracy to stay strong, it sits on a throne of 4 pillars that are legislative, executive, judiciary and media. If anyone of them weakens so does the democracy.

It is a known fact that India is the largest democracy of the world. It has a parliamentary system of governance. A **parliamentary system** is a system of democratic governance of a state where the executive branch derives its democratic legitimacy from its ability to command the confidence of the legislative branch, typically a parliament, and is also held accountable to that parliament.

A fair and unbiased judiciary helps settle disputes between individuals, individual and state, between different levels of government, etc. along with it, it interprets laws and limits the powers of other pillars of democracy.

While the other three had always been a part of democratic structure, media is a recent addition to it, but none the less it is very important.

Media owes its origin from a Latin root which means medium. It is the plural of word medium. It is a tool or medium of mass communication be it journals, television, newspaper, etc. all of them have a major impact in today’s society.

Media is used as a tool across the globe as a connection between those who are governing or in power and those who gave them power or are being governed.

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It is media that raises the voice of common man to another notch.

"There should always be room for the argumentative Indian, and not the intolerant Indian. The media must be the watchdog, the mediator between the leaders and the public," Pranav Mukherjee emphasized while delivering a seminal lecture honoring former press baron Ramnath Goenka.

Media has some basic responsibilities like they should be unbiased, be truthful, ethical, and should not spread misleading information. But as simple as this sound, it is not that simple to perform these basic responsibilities. For these responsibilities add to the credibility of any media and media house.

With such a huge responsibility on its shoulders Indian media is facing a time of crisis. The quality of Indian media has sunk to a great extend. Where it is supposed to make the common man see harsh realities, make him understand the world around it is printing and casting news for TRP ratings rather than sensible material.

"I think there is a credibility crisis, in that television news media in particular is driven by a tendency to put sensation above sense in the search for ratings,"Celebrity anchor and journalist Rajdeep Sardesai told DW .

All they need is spice for their channels to keep up the TRP ratings. It is thanks to this that people like Kanhaiya Kumar and Hardik Patel became over night celebrity.

People have certainly lost their faith in media. They can see through the sham media is putting on making media lose its own credibility. For their sensation a pity fight between two people becomes the grave issue of "Hindu v. Muslim" or "Upper Caste v. Lower Caste". A suicide becomes murder; murder becomes terrorists' conspiracy and so on.

The level of inaccuracy of media has increased over the years, when it actually should have rose because of advanced technology and better access to resources. Is it really happening or is someone making it happen?

This inaccuracy can't just be a coincidence when the concept of "paid news" is well known to us all. During the 2008 assembly elections, Hindi dailies published stories about candidates who had no particular news value, even predicting record victories for them. In 2003 Bennett Coleman and Company Ltd, publisher of *The Times of India*, started a paid content service to send journalists out to cover events for a fee.²

The credibility of news sold is not that thoroughly checked. A sting operation sort of investigation was conducted by cobra post showing how mainstream media houses do not even

² Scroll.in, *Five ethical problems that plague Indian journalism*

cross question the credibility of news sold to them under the title ‘Cobra Post Sting Operation 136’.

Along with this is the issue of political biasness. Most elite group of newspapers and News channels in India have affiliation with one or other political party.

Media’s influence is being used by leaders for fulfilling their own agenda. Those who use it rightly are face of the party, no matter their actual worth.

Whoever covers these leaders also get special privileges by them, they are protected and given other boons.

But what of those uptight journalists who want to cover a rather prevalent issue of grave importance? Either they are told to find something that’ll gain more audience, something sensational or if they do cover such issue, they are made to abandon it... with or without choice.

Shujaat Bukhari was a Kashmiri journalist and the editor of *Rising Kashmir*, a Srinagar-based newspaper. He was shot dead by unidentified assailants outside his office in the Press Enclave area of Srinagar on 14 June 2018.³ He had survived three assassination attempts on previous occasions.⁴

This is not the only case where a journalists’ life was risked. It scares many to the core that they willingly hide realities for their safety and that of their own. They’ll rather show fake news than publish a true one risking their life.

If it is not showing fake news then its covering news that hardly matter. It covers issues such as a star kid’s daily routine, celebrity lifestyle, etc. Maybe people are interested in these topics but are they more important than the problems faced by a common man.

When a celebrity dies the issues becomes a headline but when a debt ridden farmer tired of loan sharks chasing him commits suicide he hardly gets a little columns in a far away corner one hardly looks at, or even no mention at all.

And when he gets cognizance, it is either for some political benefit or other. His death is critically analyzed in unnecessary way, he becomes the scapegoat for targeting the opposition.

Common man is well aware of struggles of day to day life, showing it with a different mirror won’t change their perspective, what needs to be really shown is what is behind the curtain, what lays in the depth.

³ TimesofIndia.indiatimes.com, *Journalist Shujaat Bukhari shot dead by gunmen in Srinagar*.

⁴ Shujaat Bukhari, *Survival is the first challenge for journalism in Kashmir*

If they keep on with their current trend, media will be a medium but not of communication but of entertainment.

All these issues are well known before media and they still ask the question that how come are we losing credibility?

Is it really worth it, filling the pockets, instead of selling the truth?

All these reasons are slowly but surely making people lose their faith in media. Though not all media is alike, there still is a ray of hope willing to shine hard, behind the cloud of biasness but it needs a lot effort to come forward.

Not always the matter presented is all sham and no truth but with all this shenanigans it's very hard to tell them apart. While at times realities are hidden from one's purview, there are still matters that are brought to light so well that well deserved justice is served. For all will agree, that media had a great role to play, when it came to 'Justice for Nirbhaya'. Its times like these that faith in media is restored but it is never fully done.

It has a long way to cover for making itself as strong as it once was. The faith in media needs to be restored otherwise one of the four pillar of democracy will shatter causing the Indian democracy to scatter. Most will believe that the image and credibility of media has tarnished beyond repair. That nothing can be done for media to be fair for it is too far the road that it has passed the point of no return but in reality it is not so. People still read newspapers; they still watch news channels; there still is a hope for them but hope is when they see it. If they continue to be the way they are, it won't be longer that they won't be seen even as a medium of entertainment and would have lost their purpose of being.

Ghettoization of media is surely a big issue that needs to be tackled. For it won't let media absorb up the coming advancements and the bright future it has ahead. Battle of scale is surely going to continue because its predicted that there will be more media especially more mass media, but to absorb up the benefits it brings, its very much needed that media ghettos be tackled.⁵ If it's not done the media business will see a rapid fall, where it should have seen a bright future.

Credibility of media along with good quality media is one most important way to secure the media business and make a stand for battle of scale. Media is undoubtedly very important and if it'll lose credibility totally then either it be replaced with a better medium of communication or else the nation will shatter down. A throne can't stand still even with three strong legs for it needs all four of them strong and sturdy. Thus media need to gain its credibility and maintain it

⁵ Kohli-Khandekar Vanita, The Indian Media Business, Sage Publication, 4th Edition