

---

# Media factor and Political Dimensions: An Exploration of Contemporary Indian Polity

---

**\*Mohd Anas**

\*Research Scholar, Department of Mass Communication, Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh: 202002.  
Email: mohdanasamu@gmail.com

---

## **Abstract:**

*The media is formidable pillar of democracy. A democracy cannot function effectively lest it supported by media activism where a free media guide and encourage the secular societal plural values to possible betterment of mankind. The balanced media with objectivity is the utmost requisite for successful democracy in the contemporary times. Transparency in the elections is not only about the freedom to vote and the knowledge of how to cast a vote, but also about a participatory process where votaries engage actively in democratic process through debate, discussion and have adequate information about parties, policies, candidates to reach at a consensus in order to make suitable choices among the available options. In a nut shell media provide a mechanism for building opinion and wide accord among the voter where it acts as significant player to democratize elections, safeguarding the transparency of democratic process. In democracy elections in absence of media freedom is considered a contradiction to norms. India is the one of the vibrant practicing democracy of the world as we entered in the world of democracy, the role and responsibility of mass media got enhanced manifold. Nobody can doubt about the constructive role of 'fourth estate' of democracy in the Indian context. The paper primarily aims to examine the Media responsibility in democratic system of governance. The paper also assess media impact and electoral politics.*

**Key words:** Media; Election; Democracy; Transparency; Political Dimensions.

## **Introduction**

*“One of the prime utility of media is to inform people about socio-political, socio-cultural, socio-economical and socio-ethical scenario whereby an informed citizenry can build a civilized, developed, peaceful, progressive, prosperous, independent and stable state”*

### **-Unknown**

In modern age of information and communication technology, Media provide high-tech audio-visual means of expression. The communication advancements have acquired an unparalleled

capabilities to deliver messages in very small time span. The Digi-tech media have transformed the world into village. Whatever the circumstances be, or social set up in which the media operate, Media impact tends to influence modern living in every aspect of life. Mediated contexts continue to influence attitudes, perceptions and decision-making of the people and contribute to desired change. Sometime media exert direct influence over the behavior pattern of the people some time it has indirect impact. Its impact over social, cultural, political and economic values could also

be explicitly determined. The Hypodermic needle theory has been revisited and (Fourie, 2001) suggest that media are still instrumental in penetrating and shaping the minds of the people. In spite of numerous alternative sources of information, in the world of politics too people largely depend upon media for choice, taste and preferences. Media have a credible role in the arena of contemporary competitive politics where it function through a major platform for the debate and discussion to reach a consensus for a best alternative in the fray. Thus media have immense potential to set a political agenda and attempt to trigger a line of political discourse that may likely to have enormous impact on the electoral trends in the society. Media convey various meaningful and useful messages through its surveillance, correlation, heritage transmission and entertainment functions (Baran & Davis, 2012).

Media creates awareness and update people with current issues and happenings of consequence. People have multiple information needs, among them information regarding Election is one of the most sought after information. Media provide not only essential information but also critical knowledge during the election period which is crucial to moulding and shaping the popular opinion (Lynda Lee Kaid, 2003). Man is a political animal so the information of the political scenario is one of the prime utility of the media. Media mobilizes the masses and set the political agenda. It helps building consensus through debates, studio discussion, opinion polls and surveys. With the increased participation of the people through effective feedback system, Media create an environment of politically informed decision making. The participative media facilitates

effective communication and better understanding of the subject (Shaw, 1972).

### **Democracy and Media**

On the role of Media in the democratic society one of the great proponent of the democracy Thomas Jefferson said that if he had to choose between a government without newspapers or newspapers without a government, he would pick the latter. He opined that newspaper or a mass communication channel are more important than a government to regulate and control the public. Infact media vehicles are platform to provide pluralistic approach to different opinions. J. Schumpeter, a political scientist well known for advocating a procedural definition of democracy, established that the democratic system is that institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions in which individuals acquire the power to decide by means of a competitive struggle for the public mandate". New definition of democracy reverses the definition of classical theory in which "each citizen has a rational opinion about every issue. Each citizen votes for a representative to carry out his opinion. Thus, selecting a representative is secondary (Schumpeter, 1976). In a democracy people are govern by a government directly chosen by them. They are free to elect a government of their own choice. Freedom of choice is the core of democracy. Democracy essentially depends on the following conditions (i) Multi party political system (ii) Right to free discussion and equal participation; (iii) Universal adult suffrage; and (iv) Periodic elections (Howard, 2004).

Democracy is a mechanism whereby the rights of the citizens are protected and at the same time fixing the accountability of the government towards the people. It insure that people are not discriminated on the basis of their race, religion,



ethnicity, or gender (Wang, 2001). The idea of democracy rests in the fact that constitutional law is supreme and no one is above the law, not even an elected person at the helm of affairs. Media through its vigilance and awareness function facilitates the rule of law. The mass media is the backbone of democracy. The media pour in multi-faceted political information that voters base their decisions on. They detect and highlight problems in our society and serve as a medium for deliberation by focusing the issue at the core. They are also the watchdogs that we rely on for uncovering errors and wrongdoings by those who have power. Democracy seeks the active participation of citizens and the media ensure citizens engaged in the business of governance by informing, educating and mobilizing the public. The contribution by mass media for upholding the above principles of democracy in a society is remarkable (Lichtenberg, 1990). Media ensures that citizens make responsible, informed choices rather than acting out of ignorance, misinformation or illusions. Through its watchdog function it keeps an elected representative accountable by ensuring that elected representatives uphold their oaths of office and carry out the wishes of those who elected them (Louw, 2005).

In an independent democratic state every citizen is entitled to have free access to the knowledge and information they require. The democratic political system depends on the efficient, accurate, and complete transmission of social, political, and cultural information in society (Mughan R. G., 2000). Thus mass media forms an integral part of democracy as it contributes to those factors that are intrinsic to genuine democracy. Democracy believes in the empowerment of individual and media facilitates

it through communication and ensures freedom of expression and freedom of Conscience (Costain, 2000).

### **Indian Democracy**

India is the largest practicing democracy of the world. The Constitution of India guarantee a secular, sovereign, democratic, republic and thus the word democracy became a part of our natural life (Kohli, 2003). A vibrant democracy provide for the most competent and suitable ones in our country to govern and eliminates the incompetent. The role of democracy in India is to fulfil the dream of every Indian to have inclusive growth along with the noble sprit of justice, equality, secularism and freedom to all (Lijphart, 1996). The constitution provides freedom to every Indian to caste vote irrespective of his caste, creed, religion, or sex. Political parties facilitate the collusion of diversified views and ideas. Every party adopts different identity politics. Some try to influence the people through caste politics while others by religion or some by linguistic identity (Chatterjee, 2008). The real democracy will come into being only when the masses are awakened and take part in the economic and political life of the country. Here media play a vital role by bringing awareness among common voters based on the priorities and social requisites by highlighting issues of significance pertaining to good governance, law and order, safety, security and inclusive development (Datta, 2011). A common man needs a minimum level of ability and character, like rational conducts, an intelligent understanding of public affair, independent justice and unselfish devotion to public interest for smooth functioning of a democratic government. The common citizen should also make to realize that communalism, separatism, casteism, terrorism etc. if allowed to raise their heads; it

will be deterrent and a threat to democracy. The talented and aspiring youth of today should be politically educated so that they can become effective leaders of tomorrow. Media with its potential function to inform, to educate, to build opinion make the democracy work with its legitimate values (Boix, 2006).

### **Need for the study**

*“The sole aim of media is service”*

**-M K Gandhi**

Media should act like a mechanism for free and balanced information to the masses. Its utmost duty is to report unbiased and objectively. It should function without any favor or fear. Its role should not be that of a blind critic or staunch supporter of any political party but it should be that of a constructive critic (Prasad, 2008). Free media strengthen the democratic structure of governance to insure the fundamental rights of the citizens which may be hampered if media serve the interest of a particular group or section. The study is an attempt to know about the political presentation of Indian media and how media project the images of the political parties and mobilize the public opinion either in favor or neutral. So the study aims to explore the media function and ethical norms of journalism in context of politics.

### **Methodology**

Explanatory and exploratory method with descriptive research techniques were used for the study. The researcher aimed to analyze the content to make out valid inferences through descriptive research approach.

### **Media and Elections**

India would not have been able to develop itself as the world's largest celebrated democracy in the absence of an independent media because it is equally daunting task to hold free and fair

elections without media. To ensure free and fair elections is mandatory that a strong and independent mechanism like media to support other institutional bodies. It is not only the sole responsibility of the Election Commission of India but also the different other democratic institutions to ensure that elections process is conducted free and fair without any tilt, inclination or bias. It is obligatory to media to keep a vigil on elections as a watchdog of democracy. The Indian mass media often reflects the social diversity and plurality of the country, especially during the time when general elections are headed. The prime concern and the central role of the media during elections is to highlight current developments at the same time focusing on various issues pertaining to the social concerns. It's a time when in many countries holding a free elections is itself a new phenomenon. In large parts of Asian and African continent where most of the states were British colony, free and sovereign elections are a development of the second half of the twentieth century, while many former Communist bloc could get the taste of democracy even more recently than that. Even the countries of Western Europe and Latin America as well were fully democratized only nearby before or after the Second World War with the extension of the franchise to women. Hence Europe, North America, and Latin America evolved a theory of the media as a "Fourth Estate", offering a check and balance on the activities of governments to fix the accountability (Shatrughna, 1991).

In election period media play a crucial role of link between political parties, politicians and the people. It's a peak time for media reporting when people depend on media content to update and enhance their political knowledge and

information about candidate and party specific. It helps them to be aware about the current election status. Similarly politician access media for their best publicity to garner popular public support. They use media vehicle to advertise their manifestoes and try to project them best option among others. Media facilitates a stage for the comparative analysis of various political parties and politician. It helps in establishing the facts and bringing the truth to the people. It gives people the reasoning power to assess a party or a leader on the social parameters (Davor Marko, 2010). Hence during vote cast when electorate set to elect their representatives, it becomes doubly imperative that the media provide them all information necessary for to make informed choices about whom to elect and whom not to elect into positions to work for them. Earlier in election it was observed how slogan of “feel good” and “India shining” dominated the media focus to woo the voters to their rhetoric (M, 2012).

Media create the personality cult as it can be noticed about the BJP leader L.K. Advani , A.B. Vajpayee and congress leader Soniya Gandhi, Rahul Gandhi (Gandhi & Sandhu, 2012). The most recent example of such media projection can be about Mr. Narendra Modi, the former chief minister of Gujarat, his name had been in media glare owing to his work as CM and his contribution to the development of Gujarat and presenting the state as the model state for rest of India. The former RSS Pracharak, known for his image of Hindutva leader (Puniyani, 2013), emerged out to be no. one choice for PM,s Post as displayed in the survey of many channels and papers. Riding over the tide of popularity in the media, the BJP PM Candidate, Mr. Modi give out public statements to polarize the majority

community. He spoke about his own identity as the Hindu Nationalist or while attacking over the opposition on corruption charges in his address to the media, he said that congress trying to hide in “secularism ka burqa”, (Bhatt, 2013). Though such developments aiming to polarize or appease majority community seemed to draw little attention of media rather the news about vibrant and developed Gujarat under the strong leadership of CM Modi dominated the mediascape. Similarly leaders apart media also makes images of the political parties. Media through its extensive description of governance of any party in any state or at center, can establish the image of that political party (CRAIG, 2004). During Pre-election reporting, media depicted positively about various BJP ruled states be it Gujarat, Chhattisgarh, MP and Goa while the non BJP ruled states failed to get the media attention proportionately. The development of Kerala, Bihar and Tamilnadu went rather unfocussed for any national media channel or paper. Similarly pre-election reporting is historic in its coverage devoted to crime, corruption, rapes and murders and failure of the Govt following mis-governance and policy paralysis. The work of the incumbent government like right to education, land acquisition, pension fund regulation, and food security, MNREGA or NHRM failed to attract media attention. People had little knowledge of the Government work the awareness about scams such as 2G spectrum, Commonwealth, Adarsh society, Coalgate and Railgate was common.

### **General Elections of 2014 and Media**

India is one of the most successfully nurtured and operating democracy of the world and Indian socialist secular democratic republic is guaranteed by the constitution of the country. Hence General Election are the very basis on which the

democratic value rests. The general elections of 2014 in India were historic event in the second most populous country of the world. India celebrated its democratic fest to elect representatives for the 16<sup>th</sup> Lok Sabha. It was unique in many senses with the multiple parties being in fray a huge no. of contestants tested their luck in this battle of the ballot. Among many parties two national parties dominated the political clout of the country namely BJP and congress. Since the ruling party was under unprecedented pressure from public and opposition following its rule of consecutive two terms therefore Congress was struggling to retain the power while BJP appeared to be at an advantage due to anti-incumbency against the ruling Congress. General elections 2014 were also first in Indian history when media was a major player including social media and other conventional media vehicles such as print and electronic media. Media played a crucial role during the elections to let people judge potentially capable party and leadership to govern the country by reporting extensively each and every aspect from the political viewpoint based on various issues including corruption, development, safety and security, health and hygiene, gender equality, law and order etc. (Hasan, 2014).

The General elections 2014 was in questions particularly for the divisive agenda where allegedly voters were heavily polarised on the religious lines and the role media played in it a very significant role leaving bounteous scope for analysis, debate and a certain amount of introspection. The studies and findings based on political principles suggest that when masses are divided on the religious, ethnic or linguistic line via provoking religious sentiments or rumour mongering and fact manipulation so as to spread

hate campaign, it results in the massive polarisation (Prior, 2013). Media carried forward an aggressive reporting campaign covering across the political arena. Never before had the media's role been as more important as seen during the general election 2014. At the same time, never had it been so effective to set the political agenda. In the elections of 2014 reports appeared charging opposition with the Polarization politics. It was held that polarisation was of such a degree that principal opposition party BJP had a clean sweep in many states including Gujarat, Rajasthan, Delhi, Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh. The party won most of the seats of Hindi heartland of the north and central India including UP, Bihar, MP, Chhattisgarh, and Jharkhand (Sinha, 2014).

If reports are to be believed it was assumed that the media coverage of the 2014 election started in December 2012 itself when CM Modi won the third consecutive election in Gujarat. The ground for him gained the momentum gradually and reached its peak following his declaration as prime ministerial candidate for the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). Though earlier the Aam Aadmi Party's (AAP) which performed outstanding in debut election in Delhi, was projected as only hope against the United Progressive Alliance (UPA), suddenly was replaced by BJP. There are reports which verify the supposition that media presented Mr. Modi one of the most capable leader at the moment who can drive the country out of the crisis by providing strong leadership, and thus fed up of a leadership vacuum BJP-cum-Modi became the only hope for the frustrated electorate. This ardent desire of decisive leadership turned into the answer to India's woes, had been propagated by the corporate sector and the urban middle class, which views the Congress as corrupt, dynastic,

and inefficient and a reckless with no potential leadership (Hasan 2014).

The General election 2014 set to be remembered for high voltage media reporting and its almost complete focus on individuals, the issues at the ground level were discussed rarely. So the political discourse in the run upto the 2014 general election took shape of presidential elections where media presentation suggested it as a contest between BJP PM Candidate and rest. Modi appeared the centre of the media election campaign with larger than life image, outshining all other elements of the political discourse and public agenda. Such an indispensable effect of this hype, hysteria or repeated rhetoric resulted into a Modi wave with absolute imprint on the voters. The ostensible Modi wave fostered on the basis of opinion polls, poll surveys and other media analysis. In nutshell media coverage of election by all account seem to predict Modi as most probable PM of the country. The media focus was entirely personality based, ignoring the larger issues involving the election campaign. Thus the other factors including the choice of candidates, local level alliances, and the performance of State governments failed to grab media attention (Hasan 2014).

Renowned political scientist and communication theorist Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky, in their 1988 book *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media*, discussed about the influence of 'propaganda' and 'systemic biases' in the mass media and explained how public consent for economic, social and political policies is sought and images are manufactured in the public mind, a result of the way advertising and media ownership is structured. Where to fix the media accountability for the willingness of the media to

undertake the poll propaganda and build up outstanding credentials of a party or leader regardless of whether it was an accurate representation of his real political intentions and personal ambitions?(ibid). It was the media agenda that shifted the focus point and coverage to AAP suddenly switched to BJP which can be cited a striking example of the media attention replacement. The positive media coverage to AAP changed suddenly once the party started hitting at corporate corruption involving top industrialists through their tough stand on electricity tariffs, power and energy supply. The party came in the line of fire has to face the wrath of the media with direct charge and counter charges. Further when AAP party leader Arvind Kejriwal went to Gujarat to 'inspect' and 'assess' the Gujarat model of development after which he raised the questions about crony capitalism in Gujarat. Though his call for inspection and examination went into wan when it could not impress the media to report it. Without media it is impossible in a country as large as India gaining a landslide victory like Narendra Modi in Lok Sabha election, media is one of the most powerful tool for one to achieve desired goals. It was felt when PM-to-sworn in Mr. Modi, during his first ever press conference after the poll victory, admitted that media has played a great role in his journey from Gujarat to Delhi. (Narita, 2014). Thus it was the powerful rhetoric which dominated media reporting to create a wave that made Modi most popular and able person to occupy the chair of Prime Minister of India (Upadhyay, 2013).

### **Conclusion**

Media is an important machinery to uphold and promote socio-economic balance, equality and fraternity among the people and act as a catalyst in strengthening the cohesive forces and

weakening the divisive forces to build a state based on constitutional provisions in the society to usher and maintain unity and integrity of the country. Media has a vital role in keeping the citizenry updated and informed of the current events and raising awareness of various issues in any society. It also has an extremely significant effect in formulating public views and way of thinking. Media is one of the strongest pressure group, having direct influence on the political process. It acts like a link between peoples and institutions through which public opinion is shaped and at times manipulated. Thus media's role becomes even more critical in exceptional periods, one of which is electoral junctures, when the media becomes a crucial player with its reach and approach to the public. The Electoral politics constitute a formidable challenge to the media, putting its impartiality and objectivity to the test. The media reporting of 2014 general elections was unique in many ways including its extensive coverage and sensationalizing the masses through scintillating political temperature. Media reporting was in question owing to its image projection of party leaders including Rahul Gandhi, Sonia Gandhi, Narendra Modi etc. The task of the mainstream media, especially domestic media outlets, should not be inclined towards the power center or it should not function as a mouthpiece for any government body or particular candidate. Its basic role is to enlighten and educate the public and act as a neutral, objective platform for the free debate of all points of view the relationship between politics and media thus lies at the core of democracy. This relationship needs constant rebalancing. Highest transparency and a permanent critical evaluation are of utmost importance. Despite their interdependence, the demarcation line between them must be

maintained. We need a sensible balance between media and politics for the survival and existence of democratic Society.

## References

- [1] \_Baran, S. J., & Davis, D. K. (2012). *Mass communication Theory: Foundations*. Boston: Cengage Learning .
- [2] Bhatt, A. (2013, july 15). *ndtv*. Retrieved nov 13, 2013, from [www.ndtv.com](http://www.ndtv.com): [www.ndtv.com/article/india/congress-hides-behind-burqa-of-secularism-during-crises-narendra-modi-392250](http://www.ndtv.com/article/india/congress-hides-behind-burqa-of-secularism-during-crises-narendra-modi-392250)
- [3] Boix, C. (2006). *The roots of democracy*. Retrieved from Policy Review: <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a9h&AN=19717856&lang=pl&site=ehost-live>
- [4] Caglayan, E. (May 2010). *media, Politics and slanted news coverage during the Election period-Case study of the news on AKP* . The graduate school of social sciences , Middle East University .
- [5] Chatterjee, P. (2008). Classess, Capital and Indian Democracy. *Economical and Political Weekly* .
- [6] Costain, S. C. (2000). Deliberation Democracy & the Media. *Critical Media Studies* .
- [7] CRAIG, G. (2004). *The Media Politics and Public Life*. Australia: Allen & Unwin.
- [8] Datta, S. (2011). SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY OF MEDIA AND INDIAN DEMOCRACY. *Global Media Journal* .
- [9] David Nicolas Hopmann, R. V. (august 2009). effects of election news coverage;how visibility and tone influence the party choice.
- [10] Davor Marko, L. T. (2010). *HOW THE MEDIA COVERED THE ELECTION CAMPEIGN*. Media Plan Institute, Sarajevo.



- [11] Fourie, P. J. (2001). *Media Studies: Institutions, Theories and Issues*. Lansdown : Juta Education.
- [12] Gandhi, J., & Sandhu, V. (2012). *Rahul*. New Delhi: Penguin Group.
- [13] Hasan, Z. (2014, April 2). Retrieved October 25, 2015, from The Hindu centre: <http://www.thehinducentre.com/verdict/commentary/article5843621.ece>
- [14] Howard, R. (2004). *Media and Elections: An Elections Reporting Handbook*. (A. Gibbs., Ed.) Institute for Media, Policy and Civil Society.
- [15] Kohli, L. D. (2003). The Success of India's Democracy. *The Journal of Asian Studies* .
- [16] Lichtenberg, J. (Ed.). (1990). *Democracy and Mass Media*.
- [17] Lijphart, P. (1996). The Puzzle of Indian Democracy; A constitutional interpretation. *The American Political Science Review* .
- [18] Louw, P. E. (2005). *The Media and Political process*. London: Sage Publications.
- [19] Lynda Lee Kaid, J. C. (Ed.). (2003). *The Millennium Election*. USA: ROWMAN & LITTLEFIELD P U B L I S H E R S , INC.
- [20] M, V. (2012, oct 10). *International New York Times*. Retrieved nov 13, 2013, from [india.blogs.nytimes .com: india.blogs.nytimes .com/2012/10/10/from-india-shining-to-india-whining/?\\_r=0](http://india.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/10/10/from-india-shining-to-india-whining/?_r=0)
- [21] Mughan, R. G. (2000). Media and Democracy; A comparative perspective. *Communication Society and Politics* .
- [22] Mughan, R. G. (2000). Media and the Democracy; A comparative perspective. *Critical Media Studies* .
- [23] Narita. (2014, May 17). *Oneindia*. Retrieved October 25, 2015, from <http://www.oneindia.com/india/lok-sabha-election-results-2014-how-indian-media-reacts-to-narendra-modi-s-victory-1449520.html>
- [24] plan, M. (2014). *First Reporting on media coverage of contestants during election campaign period* . Media plan Institute.
- [25] Prasad, K. (2008). *Media Law and Ethics: Readings in Communication Regulation*. Delhi: B.R. Publishing Corporation.
- [26] Prior, M. (2013, February 1). Media and Political Polarization. *The Annual Review of Political Science* .
- [27] Puniyani, R. (2013). Hindutva Agenda and Elections 2014. *Social Action* , 238-252.
- [28] Shatrughna, M. (1991, June 22). Media, Democracy and Election. *EPW*, xxvi.
- [29] Upadhyay, V. (2013, August 26). *Livemint*. Retrieved October 25, 2015, from <http://www.livemint.com/Consumer/XU1EhHP3O5EYJRg3wQGD9M/Election-campaign-parties-draw-battle-lines-on-media-platfo.html>
- [30] Wang, L. K. (2001). *media and democracy*.A

#### About the Author:

Mr. Mohd Anas is a research scholar in the department of Mass Communication since 06/02/2014. His research topic is "Mediated Politics in India: A Comparative Study on the Coverage of General Elections of 2009 and 2014 in Two Mainstreams English and Hindi Dailies"