

Political ownership of media in India: A Study

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Abstract-Media and politics will always have close ties. Politicians need media to get the exposure they need to win elections. A number of political leaders have their own media houses to propagate their views. The Entertainment and Media (E&M) industry broadly consists of four segments i.e. Television, Print, Radio and other media (such as Internet Access, Film, Out of Home Advertising (OOH), Music, Gaming and Internet Advertising). In today's technologically fast moving environment, media plays a significant role in the democratic process of a nation. It's inherent ability to reach the masses implies that it has a crucial role in building public opinion and creating awareness among the masses. It also plays a very important role in delineating the economic, political, social and cultural characteristics of a country. Thus, media pluralism is a cornerstone of democracy and this fact should be reflected in the plurality of independent and autonomous media and in diversity of media content. Print, television, radio and new media such as Internet are the most popular media. The Indian media landscape is witnessing several changes that may have far reaching consequences. Major players are looking for expansion of their business interests in various segments of the print and broadcasting sectors. Most of the Indian media houses are either owned or controlled by the so called political leaders. So, in this context this paper is an attempt to highlight and understand the political ownership of media in India.

Key words: Media, types of media ownership

I. Introduction

Eastern and Western societies are relying more on communication through various media and relatively less on face-to-face contact to organize and co-ordinate activities, to disseminate knowledge and information, to educate and entertain. Conditions of access to the media - the implicit and explicit rules governing who may and who may not distribute messages, the nature of the messages distributed, the terms under which messages may be received and by whom - are of vital political, social and cultural importance. Individuals and groups possessing and exercising relatively unencumbered rights to distribute messages through the media can influence large audiences and thereby help shape societal development; conversely, people prevented from so participating are muted and may be politically ineffectual.

Communication channels through which news, entertainment, education, data, or promotional messages are disseminated is known as Media. It includes every broadcasting and narrowcasting medium such as newspapers, magazines, TV, radio, billboards, direct mail, telephone, fax, and internet. Media is the plural of medium and can take a plural or singular verb, depending on the sense intended.

The important identity of a responsible media is to play an impartial role in reporting a matter without giving unnecessary hype to attract the attention of the public with the object of making money. After reporting properly the media can educate the public to form their own opinion in the matters of public interest. The media can highlight the short-comings of the official machinery in its functioning and bringing out the sufferings of the public in general. The idea that

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media should serve the society, particularly in the third world, in solving the problems people are facing has already gained momentum. Journalists, politicians and even the general public are talking about the necessity of harnessing the media. Media and politics will always have close ties. Politicians need media to get the exposure they need to win elections. Reporters have no choice but to cover the people chosen to lead government. But in election years, people who work in media should prepare themselves for the manipulation they'll likely face when a politician's quest for office runs head-on into the media's desire to seek the truth.

II. Media ownership: A look

Two important and interrelated factors help determine conditions of access to the media: the pattern of ownership, which shapes incentives for media use; and the bundle of rights accompanying ownership, which can modify, or even eliminate, restrictions that could otherwise inhere in ownership. The bundle of rights and duties is primarily an outcome of law, but also may be influenced by traditions and ethical precepts adhered to by the owners. The pattern of media ownership has 4 major constituents R.E. Babe (1996):

III. Owner characteristics:

Owners may be distinguished by the sector in which they reside: government, private or co-operative. Within each sector additional distinctions can be made. Moreover, managers of government-owned media can have varying degrees of independence from their proprietors, depending on the goals set for the media.

Likewise, in the private sector, many variations are possible: ownership can reside with family-run businesses; with large, professionally managed, publicly traded corporations; with religious, political or social organizations for reasons extending well beyond profit incentives; and so on.

IV. Concentration of control:

Concentration refers to the number and size of

competing outlets within a market or audience grouping, eg, newspapers in a community. Concentration indicates the degree of monopoly power enjoyed by the media owner(s) and hence the owners' power in determining conditions of access within the relevant market. The "marketplace of ideas" is premised on notions of equitable access to the media by all segments of society.

V. Cross-ownership:

Cross-ownership refers to common control over different media genres (eg, print, film, electronic). It indicates the extent to which intermedia competition thrives or is restricted.

a. Vertical integration:

Vertical integration is the extent to which media owners create, select or otherwise determine messages. It exemplifies the interrelationship between media ownership and the variable bundle of rights and duties accompanying ownership.

b. Influence of Media on politics and government

The media plays a significant role in the development of government. The media gives people access to be able to choose a political party, devise attitudes on government parties and government decisions, and manage their own interests. From newspapers to television to radio to the internet, the media is the most important factor in political communication and fund-raising.

The mass media performs six main functions, almost all with political insinuations: 1) entertainment, 2) reporting the news, 3) identifying public problems, 4) socializing new generations, 5) providing a political forum, and 6) making profits. Its influence is more prominent during political campaigns because news coverage of a single event could turn out to be the most significant factor in putting a candidate ahead. In fact, countless national political figures, including the president, plan

public appearances and statements to expand their influence through the media.

Candidates and their consultants consume much of their time devising strategies to get the most impact on television viewers. Types of coverage used by candidates for any office include advertising, management of news coverage, and campaign debates. The appearance of candidates in presidential debates is as important as the news coverage itself. In general people already have their own ideas when they view television, read newspapers, or log on to websites. This leads to "selective attentiveness" and acts as a type of filter that allows the viewer to pay attention to the details that agree with his or her own opinion. The media are more effective with those who have not formed a stable political opinion, whether it is on issues or candidates. Studies show that commercials and debates aired right before election day have the most effect on undecided viewers. Voters who have already formed their opinions are hardly influenced by the media to the point of changing their minds.

Not only does the mass media have extensive authority in political campaigns, but they can even exercise power over government officials and affairs. The media and the president both need each other; "The media need news to report, and the president may need coverage." Therefore, both the president and the media work hard to utilize one another. Public problems that receive the most media coverage are considered to be the most important ones by the public, giving the media an important role in the public agenda. The media provides the government with a better understanding of the need and desires of the society. Overall, the media are always present with new stories on political activities. Political discussions cannot be avoided in the print media, political stories are aired on television everyday, commercial radio airs political news every hour, and paid political announcements are encountered in all media during campaigns. The media remains important since they are the means by which people obtain current affairs both inside and outside India however bias it may be.

V. Political Ownership:

Media houses that are either controlled or owned by political leaders is known as political ownership of media. Many TV channels are now owned by politicians or are aligned with political parties is a well known fact to all. But the trend now is of politicians acting as de facto news editors. Some politicians are interested to take part in editorial meetings, and some of them who wish to remote-control the news selection. Political ownership is now a new trend and most of the political leaders they want to have their own news channel or newspaper in order to propagate their opinions.

An initial investment of Rs 100- crore is required to start a channel-and a recurring annual cost of Rs 1.5 crore is considered a good investment. Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) recently reducing the net worth of parties who want to start a news channel to Rs 15 crore from the earlier Rs 100 crore, channels will only mushroom. It is interesting to note that, 12 years ago, TRAI had recommended in the past that political parties must be kept out of the news channel business.

Of the eastern States, a remarkably vibrant political presence in the media space is in Odisha. The interesting phenomenon here is that the politicians themselves are editors of most of their publications. Former chief minister Nandini Satpathy's son Tathagata Satapathy, former MLA and now a Biju Janata Dal MP, is editor of the Oriya daily *Dharitri* and the English Orissa Post, under the aegis of the Dharitri Group, held by Navajat Printers and Media Pvt. Ltd. The group also runs the Orissa Institute of Media Sciences and Culture, a school for journalism started in 2008. Bhatruhari Mahatab, son of former Odisha chief minister Harekrushna Mahtab, and current BJD MP, edits the Oriya daily, *Prajatantra*, controlled by the *Prajatantra* Prachar Samiti Trust. Ranjib Biswal, two-time Congress MP from Odisha, a leading member of Odisha Pradesh Congress and prominent in the Board of Control for Cricket in India, is managing editor of the Oriya daily *Samaya* and of *Saptahika Samaya*, a weekly, both published by Ashirbad

Prakashan Pvt. Ltd.

The most vibrant of Odisha's media baron is Baijayant (Jay) Panda, who controls *Odisha Television Ltd* (OTV), owned by his wife Jagi Mangat Panda. Jagi Mangat is also the director of Ortel Communications Ltd and Orissa Television Ltd, which broadcasts the State's most popular television channel. Finally, there is Soumya Ranjan Patnaik, professor of Political Science at the Benaras Hindu University and son-in-law of former Congress chief minister J. B. Patnaik, who, along with his brother, Niranjan Patnaik, former industries minister, owns the *Sambad* daily, *Kanak TV*, and *Radio Choklate*, which are held by Eastern Media Pvt. Ltd., a Rs. 110-crore company(v).

In this context, Kolkatta is not also lagging behind, The Trinamool Congress has, over the past few years, built up its own base in the media room, courtesy *Kolkata TV*, controlled by SST Media Private Limited, reportedly financed by R.P. Techvision India Pvt. Ltd, when it ran into financial trouble. There is also *Sambad Pratidin*, owned by Swapan Sadhan (Tutu) Bose, once a blue-eyed boy of the former West Bengal chief Minister, the late Jyoti Basu, who is now closely associated with Mamata Banerjee, who has sent his son to the Rajya Sabha. *Sambad Pratidin* is controlled by Pratidin Prakashani. The Trinamool Congress also controls Channel 10, held by Bengal Media Private Limited owned by Santanu and Sudeshna Ghosh. Curiously, it was the Jyoti Basu connection that put M. J. Akbar and Tutu Bose together to launch the Kolkata edition of the *Asian Age*, an association that did not survive too many years.

In Andhra Pradesh, Jagan Mohan Reddy, son of the late chief minister, Y. S. Rajasekhara Reddy, has the newspaper and television channel *Sakshi*, both owned by Jagan Mohan-controlled Indira Television Limited (Sakshi TV) and Jagati Publications Ltd, the holding company for the daily *Sakshi*. *Sakshi* TV has had a photograph of Y. S. Rajasekhara Reddy on a top corner.

Andhra Pradesh has two other literally big political names in the media world: T.

Venkataram (Ram) Reddy, nephew of Congress MP, T. Subbirami Reddy, has a considerable media empire comprising *Andhra Bhoomi*, *Deccan Chronicle*, *Asian Age*, and *Financial Chronicle* that are held under Deccan Chronicle Holdings Ltd (in which TVR holds 21 per cent). The *Asian Age*, one may recall, was started with onetime Congressman M. J. Akbar, Venkatram Reddy, and the now discredited Suresh Kalmadi. K. Chandrasekhara Rao-controlled television channel *T-News*. The Telangana Rashtra Samithi chief controls the channel through the holding company, Telangana Broadcasting Private Limited. He says that he had borrowed Rs. 4 crore to invest in Namaste Telengana and Rs. 50 lakh for the *TNews* Channel

The Communist Party of India publishes The Marxist; five dailies in different Indian languages; several weeklies and fortnightlies in Assamese, Kannada, Marathi Oriya, Bengali, Malayalam, Punjabi, and Gujarati. Swadhinata, its Hindi weekly and *Abshar*, its Urdu fortnightly are published from Kolkatta. There are also Hindi fortnightlies, *Lok Samvad* (Uttar Pradesh), *Lok Jatan* (Madhya Pradesh), and *Lok Janvad* (Bihar). Besides, there are *Janashakti* (Kannada), *Ganashakti* (Assamese and Bengali) *Jeevan Marg* (Marathi), *Samyabadi* (Oriya), and *Chitan* (Gujarati). It also owns news agency, the India News Network.

"In Tamil Nadu, the channels are divided into two neat binaries-those that swear by Karunanidhi and those that swear by the AIADMK's J. Jayalalitha," says Maalan, a senior journalist who has worked with Sun TV before it temporarily snapped links with the DMK in 2007. He has also been with Jaya TV. On Jaya TV, Karunanidhi is always referred to as the chief minister of a minority government with outside support from the Congress. Unavoidably, the AIADMK chief's proclamations are carried without cuts or any editing. The channel also sings paeans to her. Not surprisingly, vice-president (news) K.P. Sunil says the fact that he has put in more than nine years in the channel is testimony to the fact that Jayalalitha does not interfere. But there are many who say that the AIADMK chief's writ runs on most decisions.

But channels controlled by political parties are now increasing day by day. In Andhra Pradesh, there are 14 news channels owned or partially bankrolled by politicians. In Karnataka, there are four, and in Tamil Nadu five. Kerala, West Bengal, Maharashtra and Uttar Pradesh have their fair share of channels linked to politicians. In all, there are close to 40 channels that are either funded by parties or are directly owned by politicians. The West Bengal government led by Mamata Banerjee recently proposed that the state government should itself set up its own daily newspaper and television channel.

VI. Conclusion

Day by day, the political leaders, they either own or control the media and they use it for their benefits. Due to the political ownership of media, the objectivity of news is no more. During elections, the political leaders use the media for campaigning purpose and try to induce the voters.

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