

## **Digital media: cross-currents, problems and prospects**

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Change is perhaps the only constant in the socio-economic and political evolution of human life and societies. No individual, institution, ideology or faith system can be above this and anyone or anything trying to defy this universal law of nature is lost for ever. Media in all its forms across the world is also subject to this universal law. Right from the time when media in its print incarnation had started making its presence felt this important institution, considered as fourth pillar of democratic rule and society, has undergone many changes. With rapid improvement in printing technology and induction of competent manpower the print media continued to rapidly gain in market share reflected in higher and higher readership and advertisement revenues. There are still news papers like 'Asai Simbun' (Japan), New York Times, Washington Post, Los Angeles Times (USA), Peoples Daily (China), The Times , The Guardian , Daily Telegraph (England) and Le Monday (France) that print millions of copies for sale. Needless to say, major news papers have played decisive roles in socio-economic changes in many countries of the world including armed revolutions.

But the rapid and path-breaking advancement in technology towards the end of eventful twentieth century impacted the media also in a decisive way as new forms of media outlets including 24x7 TV news channels , websites etc emerged . Since the 10<sup>th</sup> Asian games of December 1982 in New Delhi the then prime minister Rajiv Gandhi gave a major impetus to the growth of electronics media which made major progresses in the years to come . A plethora of private news and entertainment channels emerged on the Indian media sky as well as internet driven websites which continue to flourish. While this has brought the world nearer to our home in the form of fast serving of news , a lot of new sets of problems have also accompanied the growth. What happens in remote Chhawmanu area of

interior Tripura can be heard and seen within a few minutes in international news channels like the BBC or CNN, let alone Indian channels. This invasion of electronic wonder in the media arena is what is known as digital media.

The problem however lies in the fact, as evident from the developments of the last five years, that lot of confusion peddling, catering of downright falsehood, twisted news and other evils based on ideological leanings continue to dominate the digital media. In India over the past five years opposing or challenging the government on political issues has become synonymous with speaking or acting against the country. One female journalist, affectionately appreciated and admired by Hafiz Syed , a UN-designated terrorist, once sought to justify the massacre of Kashmiri pundits by secessionist terrorists. In another instance of perfidy a well-known TV anchor had announced the death of Osama Bin Laden in her channel , prefacing the news with the sage observation : ` Osama Bin Laden has been killed but his human rights have been violated'. These are only two glaring instances of perfidies as we have TV journalists who openly sympathise with the Pakistan-paid stone-pelters. Such instances including brazen distortion of history and current politics are so glaring that they demean the very idea of India. So is the case with websites and other forms of media.

What has happened is a very unhealthy and ill-informed polarization of the media which considers nothing sacrosanct-even objects and symbols of national pride , history and glory are sacrificed at the altar of service to chosen political parties.

A significant development related to mushroom growth of media is the advent of social media since the opening years of this century. All the names of the social media outlets are now well known as billions of people post comments-some with an element of truth , some with distortions both in comments as well as photo-shopped pix . This has given voice to the voiceless but this media is more prone to misuse. Relatively restrained are

'blogs', 'Twitter' et al mainly because of express identity of the contributors. But the media , at least in India, would do well to remember that the fundamental right to freedom of expression as enshrined in Article-19 is not absolute or untrammelled. Right is always tempered by duty and freedom by responsibility. Besides, all six freedoms enshrined by Article 19 are subject to 'reasonable restrictions' . Moreover, there is also the Section-51 (A) which ordains ten fundamental duties on the part of Indian citizens of all hues . Sub-section –III of this article debars all from doing or uttering anything prejudicial to national integrity , solidarity and unity of India. Once this lesson is internalized , the media will never find itself in the eye of storm so repeatedly as it does now. The Press Council of India deserves to be further empowered to achieve this goal and its observations should have mandatory outcomes and implications.