

The Role of Political Journalism in Modern Indian Politics

Dr. Shrikant G. Shende, Assistant Professor, P.G.Dept. of Political Science, S. B. City College,
Nagpur, Maharashtra-440024
Mail Id: shri9977@gmail.com **Mob No.:** 09579779943

Dr. Reeta M. Dhandekar, Professor & HoD. Political Science, Sevadal Mahila Mahavidyalaya,
Nagpur, Maharashtra-440024
Mail Id: rita.dhandekar01@gmail.com **Mob No.:** 09890225020

Rajesh Kanire, Assistant Professor, Dept. of Political Science, Shri Niketan Arts & Commerce
College, Nagpur, Maharashtra-440024
Mail Id: kanirerajesh@gmail.com **Mob No.:** 09403355432

Abstract:

Since India gained independence on August 15, 1947, its political landscape has undergone numerous transformations. Various events have significantly influenced Indian politics during different periods. Prominent among these are the ongoing conflicts between India and Pakistan, natural disasters, droughts, unemployment issues, and the declaration of a national emergency, all of which have left a profound impact on the political framework of the country. During periods of political transition, journalism in India assumed a distinct role, which has led to its gaining exceptional importance in contemporary Indian politics. Traditionally, the Indian democracy is said to rest on three pillars: the legislature, the executive, and the judiciary. These pillars have consistently worked towards strengthening Indian democracy. However, in recent times, the media has emerged as the fourth pillar of democracy, carving out a unique identity for itself. The media plays a vital role in disseminating information about government schemes, decisions, policies, and political developments to the general public, acting as a bridge between the government and the people. Journalism, in recent years, has diversified into various forms. According to the *Oxford Research Encyclopedia*, the popularity of political journalism is growing steadily. This research article observes the current state of political journalism by compiling information about its growing prominence, characteristics, sources, and ethical considerations.

In India, political journalism has reached new heights of success. However, certain critical questions arise: Are the ethical standards of journalism being upheld in today's practices? Does the increasing importance of political journalism foster a conducive environment for democracy? Are ethical standards of journalism being compromised to benefit the ruling party or gain its favor? What role does political journalism play in ensuring positive progress for democracy? Has the Indian landscape evolved into one where some journalists and media organizations use political journalism

to further personal and financial interests? This research aims to explore these questions and reveal the realities of political journalism in India.

Keywords: Media, Political Journalism, Indian Democracy, Political Parties, Government, Values, Popularity.

Introduction:

In the context of Indian society, the role of the media has remained significant. Since the pre-independence era, the newspaper groups have played a crucial role. The journey from the "Darpan" newspaper to "Dinbandhu", "Kesari", "Maratha", "Bahishkrit Bharat" and "Mooknayak" has been one that has awakened social and political consciousness. In the pre-independence period, Indian newspapers played a vital role in raising awareness among the people against the British government. Newspapers like "Sanvaad Kaumudi" started by Raja Ram Mohan Roy, "Amrit Bazaar Patrika" by the Ghosh Brothers, "Kesari" and "Maratha" by Lokmanya Tilak, "Young India" and "Harijan" by Mahatma Gandhi, "National Herald" by Jawaharlal Nehru, and "Mooknayak" and "Bahishkrit Bharat" started by Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar, not only contributed to social reform but also played an important role in political awakening. They performed the invaluable task of instilling nationalism among Indians. During the pre-independence period, Indian leadership viewed newspapers as a powerful medium to convey their ideas to the people.

During the pre-independence period, newspapers were started with the aim of raising public awareness against British rule and their policies. However, over time, these newspapers changed their character. After World War II, many nations gained independence, and several adopted democratic governance. In these countries, the concept of political journalism began to gain traction. Today, political journalism has become a distinct and innovative branch within the field of journalism. Through political journalism, news about political events and developments at the state, national, and international levels is conveyed to the general public.

In recent times, various forms of media have emerged. The competition among newspapers has led to the commercialization of the press. This, in turn, has created an environment that undermines the original concept of journalism. While the need for newspapers to acquire information from both domestic and international sources cannot be denied, there have been instances in recent times where, in an effort to protect interests and stay close to those in power, the truth in news reporting has sometimes been obscured. This research article discusses these very factors.

Press Laws in Colonial India: A Historical Overview:

In India, laws regarding newspapers have existed since the British rule. The first law for the pre-censorship of newspapers was enacted in 1799, which was later repealed during the tenure of Warren Hastings. After that, in 1823, the then Governor-General of Calcutta issued an ordinance stating that a proper license must be obtained to publish a newspaper, and no one would be

allowed to publish a newspaper without one. In 1925, a similar ordinance was issued in the Bombay province. Similarly, several laws related to newspapers were enacted in India, such as the 'Metcalf Act' of 1835, the 'Press and Registration of Books Act' of 1867, the 'Vernacular Press Act' of 1878, 'The Newspaper Act' of 1908, and the 'Press Act' of 1910. Many of these laws imposed restrictions on newspapers. During the British period, newspapers were often used to awaken society against the British government, which the British did not approve of. As a result, they made numerous laws, but these laws did not uphold the autonomy of newspapers, which is also a truth.

The constant interference of the British in the autonomy of newspapers frustrated the intellectual class of India. To prevent this dissatisfaction from turning into a movement, the British government also took some steps, including making necessary amendments to some of the laws they had created. Amendments were made to the laws passed in 1908 and 1910 in the year 1922. Due to the 'Press Law Repeal and Amendment Act', newspapers gained considerable freedom. However, in 1930, Mahatma Gandhi launched the 'Civil Disobedience Movement', and under the pretext of this movement, the British government enacted the 'Press (Emergency) Act'. This temporary law, implemented in 1931, was made permanent in 1935. Thus, several laws related to newspapers were created during the British period in India. After independence, some of these oppressive laws were repealed, and new laws were created to grant autonomy to newspapers in independent India.

Shifting Paradigms: The Changing Face of Media:

In the early period, under the category of communication media, only newspapers existed as a concept. It was through newspapers that all information from around the world reached the general public. During this time, the day for each household began with reading the newspaper. Newspapers had a monopoly as a medium of mass communication until the beginning of the 19th century. At the start of the 19th century, the concept of electronic media emerged, and newspapers were gradually replaced by radio and television. Through these media, any news could be instantly communicated to the people, making it extremely popular by the 1990s.

However, during this same period, competition within electronic media increased significantly, leading to a sense of monotony in news reporting, and slowly, the popularity of electronic media began to decline. In the 1990s, mobile phones and the internet came into existence, introducing a new concept to the world of mass communication. This concept has become the most popular in recent times. Today, the majority of people around the world use social media. Social media is now the fastest way to disseminate any news to the general public. The speed at which news spreads like wildfire through social media today is unparalleled.

Thus, media has evolved with time, but there is no doubt that in this era of information and technology, all three forms of media, print, electronic, and social are being used to convey news to the masses.

Indian Democracy and Political Journalism:

The media is often referred to as the fourth pillar of democracy. The other three pillars, which have upheld democracy since time immemorial, include the legislature, the executive, and the judiciary. Despite the existence of these three pillars, the media has gained unprecedented importance in recent times. The reason for this is clear: today, the media plays a crucial role in conveying every government scheme, policy decision, the stance of the opposition, and other political developments to the general public. For this reason, the media is also referred to as the 'bridge between the government and the people.'

In journalism, various branches have emerged, with political journalism becoming an increasingly popular field in modern times. According to the Oxford Research Encyclopedias, the popularity of political journalism is growing day by day. There are differing views among scholars on the exact nature of political journalism. In their 1956 book "Four Theories of the Press," Fred Siebert, Theodore Peterson, and Wilbur Schramm proposed a theory that suggests the nature of journalism in any country or state depends on its political ideology, government, and economic system. This theory implies that political journalism is influenced by the political environment of the country. However, this theory cannot be universally applied, as political journalism would vary from country to country and state to state. The nature of political journalism cannot be the same everywhere.

In European countries, as democracy was developing, political journalism served as a bridge, conveying government actions to the public and the people's aspirations back to the government. Over time, as the scope of government expanded, it became less reliant on political journalism for these purposes. Political journalism then took on the role of critically analyzing government policies and commenting on political events. There is no doubt that political journalism has played a crucial role in the successful functioning of democracy in India. For democracy to succeed, the media must be autonomous. Except for the Emergency of 1975, the media in India has largely enjoyed undisputed autonomy.

Principles of Ethical Political Journalism:

In a democratic system, the development of political journalism is notably significant. This is because, in a democracy, governance is achieved through the majority's mandate, and political journalism plays a crucial role in shaping public opinion about the government. Political journalism is vital in conveying government decisions, the stance of the opposition, and their views to the general public. For an ideal democracy to emerge, the role of political journalism, its integrity, and its perspective must be exemplary. Therefore, it is essential for political journalism to be ideal. In this regard, the following values of political journalism are considered important:

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| 1. Inclusiveness | 2. Balance | 3. Analysis | 4. Objectivity |
| 5. Integrity | 6. Impartiality | 7. Social Awareness | 8. Transparency |

Political Journalism and its importance in India:

After India gained independence, the country largely experienced a one-party system of governance until around 1967. However, after 1967, significant political changes began to unfold in India. The emergence and growing influence of regional parties introduced various constraints on the central government. People started voicing their opinions against government policies and various programs that were being implemented. In a democracy, the presence of an opposition is crucial for its preservation. There have been instances in India where the voice of the opposition was suppressed by those in power. A glaring example of this is the imposition of the Emergency from June 1975 to January 1977. During the Emergency, restrictions were even placed on the autonomy of the press.

Journalism is considered the backbone of democracy, with political journalism playing a vital role in the protection and preservation of democracy. Political journalism has consistently worked to ensure that changes within a democracy are communicated to the general public. The relationship between political journalism and the public is unique and indispensable. In the Indian context, the importance of political journalism is unparalleled.

Political news, analysis, interviews, press conferences, events related to the political sphere, and political reporting through social media are all considered essential components of political journalism. In a democratic country like India, these elements play a crucial role. In fact, in every Indian household, the day often begins with reading the newspaper, making it an integral part of everyday life. This is why newspapers hold a special place in the hearts of the people in India.

The Role of Political Journalism in Leadership Development and Political Awareness:

The political progress of any country cannot move forward without competent leadership. It is the media that truly plays the role of bringing such leadership from the general public to the state and national level. The role of political journalism becomes even more significant in this context. If the media do not recognize the work of competent leadership, that leadership remains confined to a certain level. Political journalism helps in creating and preserving the image of such leadership, enabling it to gain recognition from local to national levels. At the same time, if a self-proclaimed leader is not performing effectively, political journalism has the power to expose and shatter that leader's image. Political journalism also plays a role in acknowledging the good work of emerging leaders, thereby enhancing their political leadership capabilities. It contributes to leadership development by assisting in various ways, influencing public opinion, supporting the goals of political leadership, and helping achieve success in elections.

Political journalism does not work only on one aspect of politics. Politics is directly related to the common people of the country, and it also plays an important role in creating political awareness among them. In a democratic system, people's participation is considered highly important, and media serve as a bridge by conveying the positions of political parties to the public and vice versa, especially during election times and beyond. This facilitates the democratic

process, and media, by closely observing the actions of those in power, help in creating a check on the government. Political journalism also scrutinizes government policies and compels society to think critically about them. In a true sense, political journalism plays the role of educating the public, making it an essential part of democratic society.

.The Changing Role of Political Journalism:

In the 21st century, knowledge is regarded as the source of power, and media is considered the primary source of that knowledge. Through media, we not only receive information, but it also shapes our understanding of the world around us. Knowledge and experience of an event help us associate meaning with its related elements, and media provides the information that builds this knowledge in the audience. As a result, media holds great power, not only providing knowledge but also influencing opinions, attitudes, and behavior, ultimately impacting our lives. The primary duty of the Political Journalism is to present truth and guidance to the public. However, the reality is that due to pressures from various individuals and institutions at different levels, personal and financial interests are prominently reflected in the information and broadcasting media. This often includes personal grievances and biases as well. In such situations, it is crucial for the Political journalism to adopt a perspective that considers the social interest of events. Otherwise, the public's view of the whole media changes, and a sense of skepticism towards the media develops among the common people. Most of today's newspapers are linked to some political ideology and are influenced by political leadership. In such circumstances, there is an expectation that the Political Journalism will perform a role aligned with public interest by shaping societal perspectives in a certain way. Private newspapers, owned by wealthy and powerful individuals, often fail to present the truth about events due to the pressures from these influential figures; instead, they tend to reflect biased and prejudiced views through their publications.

Commercialization of the Media:

In recent times, there has been an increasing influence of large industrial houses, builder lobbies, hotel businesses, as well as national and international companies on the media. Many news channels are even owned by industrial companies. As a result, the media often has to depend on the financial support of multinational companies and these industrial houses. Many industrialists, businessmen, and politicians have made significant investments in the media industry, and naturally, their primary motive is profit-making. Consequently, safeguarding the interests of these multinational companies becomes a priority for the media. The issues of the poor, the destitute, the oppressed, and the marginalized become secondary, while giving priority to advertisements from multinational companies becomes inevitable for the media. Overall, the growing market influence on the media seems to be overshadowing their sense of social responsibility. Similarly, these industrialists provide substantial financial support to various political parties during elections, and once that party comes to power, they work to benefit these same industrialists in various ways. As a result, newspapers or channels run by these industrialists also tend to protect their own interests while reporting on political matters.

Political Journalism and Potential Threats to the Media:

Political journalism and the media sector have been growing rapidly in recent times. Newspapers have been replaced by electronic media and social media. People have started to prefer instant news. With the increasing use of the internet, all information is now available at the click of a button. However, certain challenges have created potential risks for political journalism and the media, which are leading to a gradual decline in the credibility of the media.

1. Growing Competition in the Media: As previously mentioned, print media has been replaced by electronic media, and now electronic media is being overtaken by social media. Although the form of media has changed over time, people still want to read or hear the latest news first thing in the morning. This ensures that the media will not vanish. However, due to the intense competition within the media industry, the quality of news presented round-the-clock has noticeably deteriorated.

2. Fake News: In recent times, the media has fully realized that people have developed a liking for sensational news. This is why media outlets are continuously publishing and broadcasting such news. When television was first introduced, there was only one channel for a long time, and only important news was shown. However, as the number of news channels increased, the credibility of the news started to decline. Rather than delivering accurate and true news, sensational and shocking news is now being presented to attract viewers. Noticing the rising prevalence of fake news in the media industry, scholars in the field have labeled it as "information pollution."

3. Pro-Government Media: After India gained independence, media and political journalism became completely commercialized. To gain maximum government advertisements and other benefits, media outlets often show or publish news in favor of the ruling party. Most of the advertisements received by newspapers and other media outlets come from organizations under the control of those in power. Therefore, media publishers do not want to displease this class, and as a result, modern media is often very loyal to the ruling parties, making efforts to maintain a positive public opinion about the government.

4. Increasing Attacks on Journalists: Journalists have always faced various challenges in political journalism. However, recently, these challenges have turned into deadly enmities. While investigating political facts, journalists often come across information that, if published, could harm the reputation of a particular political leader or party. Fearing the end of their political careers, such journalists are often subjected to life-threatening attacks. Hundreds of journalists have even been murdered. Generally, we see journalists killed for covering corruption particularly in local politics. The International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) publishes a list every year, called "The Killed List," which names the journalists who lost their lives while trying to bring injustices to light. In the 2022 "The Killed List" published by the IFJ, there were names of 68 journalists who were killed worldwide. This number rose to 128 in 2023. Similar incidents have occurred in India as well. Some worldwide examples of the attacks on journalists can be given as follows.

i) Ram Singh Biling (03 January 1992): This incident is considered the first officially recorded murder of a journalist in India. Biling was a renowned human rights activist and journalist from Punjab. Through his newspapers, *AzadiAwaz* and *Daily Ajit*, he severely criticized the police and politicians for violating human rights in Punjab. As a result, one day while Biling was traveling to Jalandhar by bus, the police arrested him midway, and later he died under suspicious circumstances while in police custody. Many social organizations and newspapers accused the police, but the police department denied all allegations. Nonetheless, it is no secret that Biling's writing was the primary reason for his murder.

ii) Oleg Kashin (06 November 2010): Oleg Kashin, a London-based Russian journalist and columnist, was well-known for his political blog posts. These posts often troubled those in power. On 06 November 2010, some attackers suddenly assaulted him at his residence in Moscow. In the attack, one of his legs, fingers, and his jaw were severely injured. This attack was intended to deter him from his journalistic duties, but Oleg continued writing. In 2015, after a particular blog post he had written, a person named AndreyTurchak publicly threatened him, saying, "You have 24 hours to apologize. The countdown has begun." Interestingly, AndreyTurchak, who threatened Oleg, later became the Governor of Pskov and then the Deputy Speaker of the Federation Council.

iii) GauriLankesh (05 September 2017): The murder of journalist GauriLankesh is one of the most high-profile cases in India. GauriLankesh, known for her outspoken and bold views, frequently faced the ire of many political leaders. Her career as a journalist was controversial. On 23 January 2008, she published an article titled "Darodegilada BJP galu" in her newspaper, which led to protests by some BJP leaders, who even filed a defamation case against her. Despite this, she continued taking a stance against political parties. On 05 September 2017, when she returned home from her office in the evening, three unidentified attackers shot her eight times outside her house, leading to her brutal murder.

iv) LalitJha (25 March 2023): While covering a protest by Khalistani supporters outside the Indian Embassy in Washington, D.C., Indian-origin journalist LalitJha arrived at the scene to report on the demonstration. However, while interviewing the protesters, he was suddenly attacked. LalitJha narrowly escaped the assault, but the Indian Embassy expressed deep concern about the safety of journalists, even in a country like the United States.

The list of attacks on journalists is extensive. In India, cases of journalist murders are on the rise. Whether it's the murder of journalist Ram Chandra Chhatrapati in 2002, journalist J Dey in 2011, journalist Rajesh Mishra in 2012, or journalist TarunAcharya in 2014, there are numerous such examples. Many journalists continue to uphold the values of journalism, risking their lives. However, a more disheartening reality is that a large section of the media today, out of fear for their lives, has abandoned journalistic ethics and is seen dancing to the tunes of politicians. It wouldn't be wrong to say that political journalism has truly become a puppet of politicians.

To review the state of the newspaper business in India and set a direction for its future development, two newspaper commissions were established: the first on 22 September 1952 under the chairmanship of Justice G.S. Rajadhyaksha, and the second on 18 May 1978 under the chairmanship of Justice G.K. Goswami. Both commissions submitted their reports to the government, but the government made little use of them. Thus, although the media appears to have autonomy on paper, the reality is quite different.

Conclusion:

In any country, the media plays a crucial role in shaping, molding, and directing public opinion. Political journalism, in particular, has gained exceptional importance in recent times because it serves the vital function of delivering every piece of political information to the general public. Recognizing this role of political journalism, various political parties strive to maintain good relations with these media outlets. However, impartial and neutral media steadfastly uphold their ideologies with integrity and commitment.

In the meantime, as a solution to this, some political parties have started their own media outlets. Others have attempted to exert indirect control over journalists. This has led to a growing overlap between the media and politics in Indian political life. As this practice of using media to propagate the party's ideology has become more widespread, it is only natural that the neutrality of the media comes into question. A look at the ownership of various news channels and newspapers makes this clear, highlighting the close ties between political parties and the media. There are efforts to ensure that political journalists help build a clean image for these parties. Given this, the question arises: can newspapers that are bound to a specific ideology truly practice impartial and neutral journalism? The answer to this question is as clear as daylight.

In the true sense, the media should be fearless and free from pressure. If we think about the threats on journalists, so, it is the duty of the state to provide an environment in which journalist are able to carry out their professional duties without fear or favour. If the influence of dirty politics and commercialization is entirely curbed, then an unrestrained media can become a part of proper socialization for the people.

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