



Role of Newspaper in Political Consciousness

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In the realm of political science if any concept has gained immense importance than communication takes pride place. Perhaps no decision by the policy planners can be made if proper data is not communicated to them in time. Again, perhaps the socio-economic and religio-cultural systems may not be kept in equilibrium if data is not communicated in time to proper places and by proper channel. At the way a person can't take any decision without knowing about it and here communication channels fulfil this gap. Hence, communication has got its own significance. Etymologically, communication means dissemination of information and ideas. In modern times, different sources of communication viz, telecommunicational and news media are two powerful streams for providing desired communication. In political segment which plays an active role in socialising the people, articulating in them different demands, aggregating them and channelising to the governing system for their fulfilment which ultimately helps in educating the masses. In this context, some hypothetical questions emerge in the mind, whether media has played any role in the political awakening and socialising of people or community ? whether it acts as an effective instrument in generating interest in any community in the society and whether it is instrumental in resolving socio-economic and political problems ? Are youth interested to read the editorials to achieve keen knowledge about bearing problem of political social system ? While trying to seek the answer of these queries in an empirical mould, we have persued a study in the Meerut a prominent city of Western Uttar Pradesh. The city is of great historical significance, economic prosperity, political influence and religio-cultural conflict. The city is more rich in the field of higher education and medical education. Thus, Meerut is the institutional centre of primary education to higher education and important publishing centre of national, regional and local newspapers. In such an environment, the significance of the proposed study gets much more importance. Before discussing different aspects of the study under taken, it may be of relevance to understand the concept of communication and also the concept of news media.

In a democratic system, the governors of political system are accountable to the people and people keep a watch on their functions and performance for the society. To maintain this two way traffic effectively, a very strong communication channel is required. In a traditional society, the communication is based on mouth to mouth relay of the news or views on which the community formulates its opinion and reacts accordingly. However, in modern times, due to the communication revolution things have transformed a bit. Besides mouth to mouth channel of news transfer, now newsmedia and electronic media have come up very strongly and successfully in an attempt of making the democratic institutions and processes more effective. It seems necessary that news may be gathered from the groups of persons. On the basis of accumulation of such news that policy is made, correctional steps are taken and policy is implemented effectively to satisfy the needs of the common masses. Newspapers are being considered as most active agent of the political socialisation process and to make the process effective and continuously, it is desirable that the newspapers should have a pro-people approach with its presence in the remotest place. It is with this reason that governments in developing countries including India try to strengthen its information policy by providing a push to the newspapers at regional and local level to strengthen the communication system with in the whole system. Government of India has followed this policy in the post-independence period. In this perspective a question of academic interest comes up whether such papers have remained successful in fulfilling their allocated duties, that is, whether they could socialise the people, educating masses, articulate demand in them, aggregate their views on the burning issues, continue the social change process and communicate with the people or person in the government or administration and whether they could bring public policy to the door step of the community and individual. In nutshell whether the newspaper has remained successful in making people politically conscious for set up the democratic and secular culture in the society. To find out the answers of all these queries in, otherwise an awakened community of Meerut (Western U.P.), the present study has been taken up and it has been conducted with empirical tools and techniques.

To begin the study tries to identify the meaning of the concept of communication which in most simple term has been defined as the process of the collection of information with an objective of persuasion of the individual or community and dissemination of informations about policies and decisions to the masses. As stated earlier, media performs this important task in a democratic society. The term media may be considered as process which concludes an abiding faith amongst the people for democratic institution values and decisions of the system. Thus, media at one point is the harbinger of democracy and on the other most prominent channel of communication with the local masses. In democracy, its significance is undoubtedly most important to mobilisation of people's opinion and leaders considerations for the nation. This mobilisation is at the highest motion during the period of national crisis war or any emergency. The entire process has been tried to be summed up in a model in the first chapter.

The next chapter looks into the process of evolution of the media in a society. In India the first newspaper came out in Calcutta with the title 'Bengal Gazette' in the year 1780 followed by 'India Gazette' (1780), 'Madras Courier' (1789), 'Bombay herald' (1789) and 'Madras Gazette' (1775). Thus, one conclude that the news media emerged in India two centuries before under British colonialism. Since thereafter, the process started and the newspapers started to be

published from each big city of India playing a dominant role in the national movement for the independence of the country. In the present, according to the annual report of Registrar of Newspapers for India, 58469 newspapers, magazines and journals are being published from different states of the country in different languages as on 31 March 2004. It has performed very significant work in education the masses and making them aware of the fast changing phenomena of the society. The government also constitute a Press Commission to regulate the media policy and act as a watch dog on newspapers's working. In 1978, the Second Press Commission was established which submitted its report in 1982, making a number of recommendations about ownership of the press and role of press in making people aware of the happenings in the national and local settings of the system. Howfar, local and regional newspapers have remained successful in performing in local environment, we have chosen rather an economically developed, politically conscious, economically healthy, socially charged and religiously sensitive city Meerut of Western Uttar Pradesh for our study purpose. It may be noted that Meerut is situated in the Dowab created by the rivers Ganga and Yamuna having a glorious history of about 6000 years. It has its legacy beginning from the epic age of Ramayana and Mahabharata and coming down to the present. In the midst Mauryas, Guptas, Wardhans, Sultans and Mughal rulers have ruled the city in different ages. The city made an imprint on the movement for indendence where-in a number of humanries made their presence felt as result of which the local community got entised and brought the independence and its door step. In post-independence, the town took strides in the process of development as indicative of its agricultural and industrial life. The city has made progress in areas of communication, education, health and infra-structural assistance. In such an up coming city, how the people took the news media into consideration in context of their role in making the people politically conscious may be a point of study. The number of newspapers (2016) in the city reflects the reach and power of the print media and its hold on the public opinion. Hypothetically, if the response is positive, one may conclude that newspapers have a positive and vital role to play in the integration and development of the diverse society. However, if it is negative, the future of the newspaper in making the people vigilant in a vibrant democratic system seems to bleak.

In the above perspective, it seems relevent to observe how the news media has grown in the city of Meerut in last a century and half. In the persent, no national or regional newspaper with any consequence can avoid local community like as Meerut. Perhaps for the reason that Meerut provides a large chunk of readership. However, the story of newspaper and its readership in this city begins from 1830, when the first monthly newspaper came out in English language with name of `Meerut Observer'. Since thereafter, the growth rate has been quite rapid monthly, fortnightly, weekly and even annual magazines and newspaper got published from the town. For instance, if seven monthly magazines, two fortnightly and eight weekly and an indential number of annual magazine and newspapers got published by the turn of the century in the span of seventy years, then pre-independence period saw fourteen monthly magazines, two fortnightly, three weeklies and five annual newspapers, that is twenty four newspapers in all are being published from the city in less than fifty years. Since thereafter, there had been a stupendous growth in the publication of newspapers from Meerut. About twenty three newspapers, one fortnightly, nine daily newspapers and thirteen other newspapers could seen light of the day in the post-independence period. Whereas in the 19th century most of the papers were brought out in English and Urdu languages, in early part of 20th century, English took a back seat and Hindi and Urdu newspapers got published with great zeal.

Before independence, local newspapers were the part of freedom struggle by the publishing of nationalist poems, articles and literature, their nature was literary. But now, it has been change totally, it may not be out of place to mention that these newspapers covered almost all areas whether it was making of news and views or providing a philip to the education, to the health, to science, to geography and to political, the newspaper remained successful in socialising, articulating and aggregating people's interest and compelling governmental system to resolve the problem of the people. They also push the process of social change process, build up new values and developmental process of the society. They help to maintain law and order for getting the peacefull environment. A cursory glance speaks that in post-independence era during Indira Gandhi period the newspapers came out in maximum numbers followed by Janta Party rule of three years and Nehru-Shastri period of two decades. During 1981 to 2003 period an astounding number of newspapers, 206 in number, got published from Meerut. This indicates that Meerut has shown an effective contribution in the area of political development as indicative table 2.2 of the chapter. Thus, this increasing rate of regional and local newspapers must be understand in the context of regional and local issue based politics a new trend of political culture. We may see this phenomena all over the country.

The main function of newspapers seem to be cultivating political consciousness amongst the masses. To evaluate the political consciousness, we have a communication model propounded by Karl W. Dewtsch. This communication model indicates that if the process of socialisation, political mobilisation, articulation and aggregation of the interest in the community is intense, it may be considered that community has got consciousness'. From this point of view, we look towards the functions of the newspapers in the local community. It becomes evident that the family, school, peer group, colleges and government institutions, all contribute in direction of views formulation and thinking attitude of a person.

Over and above what is the role of media, to confirm the view point, we have taken 200 purposive samples from the sampled local community and fed them with a pre-prepared schedule and put certain questions to them asking whether newspaper is helpfull in increasing the process of educating, political participation, building the leadership to maintain secularism, continue the social process and building political consciousness amongst the masses through different news items. Response pattern of the respondents indicates that newspapers have played a positive role in increasing the process of political participation as well as development of political consciousness. Similarly, their role in building up the leadership is immense which is indicative of their being projecting the ideas of community leaders, praising the works of the youth and aware them to their rights and public welfare. Local and regional newspapers promote the local and regional leaders in the politics which is a main feature of Indian politics today is regional politics. Overall, about seventy-three percent of the respondents accepted that newspapers have played an effective role in building political consciousness in the community. As to the role performed by the small and regional newspapers, the views of the respondents is not very stimulating because of these paper's self professional interests are dominant like as about 40% pages of the newspapers are covered by advertisements although they are the part of information partially. But sometimes newspapers ignore their duties towards society and public considerations. However, about the role of national newspaper, it is quite encouraging. Keeping this conclusion into consideration, one may criticise the media policy of the government.

However, it is significant to note that strong strides have been taken by the democracy in the country in last fifty eight years. In this context, role of regional and local newspapers, however minimum, can not be sidelined due to this fact that the increasing the number of these newspapers, language and their circulation. They are more popular in regional and local areas than the national newspapers. They provide the informations and articulate the demands of local communities to local administration and leadership. As a fact of matter the newspapers have played a vital role in bringing out desired social change and maintaining the secularism in the society. People want more effective and positive role of regional and local press towards the society.

Conceptually, speaking social change is an observable difference in social phenomena of any period of time. If the role of newspapers in bringing out in social change in last fifty eight years of independence is of any consequence, its imprint can largely be felt in the society. This has been accepted by seventy six percent of the respondents. Thirty two percent of them think that newspapers provide views by debating on social issues and problems such as dowry system, child marriage, no-widow marriage, social and religion conflicts, relationship of social and political system and so on, and thus, they help increasing an environment in which the society moves towards modernism and development in a true sense. Further, newspapers also in stimulating an upward circulation in the society. Obviously, with such upward mobility in the society that caste and sub-caste system gets a jolt. On the other hand, the minority-majority conflict is also repaired and that way newspapers help in strengthening secular polity as visualized by the Constitution in our country. In this context, as referred earlier, in comparison to national newspapers, the role of smaller and local newspapers may be of immense significance. Yet, the intensity is wide enough for the reason that in local community, national newspapers have little dent whereas regional and local newspapers have a wide spread appeal amongst the readers and therefore these are more effective because of these newspapers know the nerves of masses with in the areas. They know the emerging issues and social, economic problems at the ground root level. Thus, it may be correct to mention that the medium and small newspapers have a vital role to play in nation building in the years to come, but it has a need to improvement in a institutionalized manner.

There are some new trends come into the popularisation of regional and local newspapers specially state wise. These are also causes of increasing number of regional and local press.

1. Regional and local newspapers publish the advertisement of particular state government services. This factor appeal the youth of colleges.

2. Every person wanted to know about their sourandings, this requirement is fulfilled by only regional and local press.

3. Regional and local press help to increase regional politics arising by local and regional issues and demands of particular area or region.

4. But it has no meaning that national newspapers are losing their importance. National newspapers are more popular and effective in metropolitan cities and educated elite class. The people who have no so much concern about local interests and demands, like as government servant, prefer national newspapers to get more analysing reports of economic, political, social and educational issues. It was noticed during field study, the percentage of the reading habit of editorials, developmental news and economic news is losing in the age group of 18 to 25 years.

They have very superficial attitude towards newspapers because of electronic media and so called modern style of life. They are attracted by advertisements of consumerism and western culture based news. They have no concern about the 16th November i.e. a Press Day in the comparison of valentines day. It is no good sign of conscious development in the context of nation building, political participation, and political culture understanding the depth of social political problems. Another factor is that must be noticable, the regional and local newspapers generally do not work in accordance of press councils directions. There should be a system to check if and inspire these papers to ful-fil their duties in the concerning of public walfare as well as national interest. Media Policy must be followed by all types newspapers of the country and media persons take their responsibilities more sincerely to build up the political conciousness and development of political culture. The conclusion the present study in a sentence is that regional and local newspapers play vital role in a democratic system but it will be more affective and relevant in future they will realise their duty more sincerely.