

Influence of the Global North on the Newspapers in India, with Special Reference to the Hindi Newspapers

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Abstract: This paper tries to study the role of the Global North in knowledge creation for the Global South. Through a study of research on newspapers in India, the paper attempts to probe the question as to how the neoliberal consensus emanating from the Global North dominates the discourse in newspapers in the Global South. Thus, liberalization has seen trends like tabloidization, emphasis on infotainment and advertisements and the decline of the editor. The global media firms based in countries of the North, through their immense resources and global reach, set the agenda for the media of the South by highlighting the international events they consider 'newsworthy' and even influence the perspectives on the event. This is analytical research on the newspapers based on an analysis of the trends in newspaper publishing in India, especially with reference to the Hindi newspapers in India.

Keywords: Media, Hindi Newspapers, Infotainment, Global South.

1. INTRODUCTION

It is a famous dictum that 'eternal vigilance is the price of liberty'. Newspapers play a very important role in creating this vigilant and conscious public which keeps a check on the policies of the government of the day. The objectivity and credibility of news is impacted by various structural constraints under which newspapers publish. This paper thus tries to examine these structural constraints, which go on to influence the international coverage in Hindi newspapers. This paper discusses the evolution of the Hindi newspapers in India and their development through history in an attempt to understand the major trends in news. It finally concludes by observing how the neo-liberal market structures the content and pattern of news in the Hindi newspapers in India.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

For the purpose of understanding how the reading public gets to see the international events, this study attempts an analysis of the recent trends in these newspapers with the help of an in-depth study of the key research in this field. The paper is based on a study of secondary sources but some of them are firsthand accounts by journalists themselves and some are reports by scholars written after interviews with media persons or after some fact-finding. With the help of these studies, the paper analyses the trends in newspapers in India and hypothesizes that the discourse of the Global North dominates the newspapers because of the neo-liberal system in which they operate.

3. EVOLUTION AND GROWTH OF HINDI NEWSPAPERS IN INDIA

It is in the pre-independence years that some of the most established Hindi newspapers of post-independence India were also born. The *AJ* started its publication in 1920 on the stated objective of having an independent national language daily. However, the fillip in the print media came after the emergency in India in 1975. Various factors were responsible for this change. The end of emergency proved to be a boon for the newspapers. As Robin Jeffrey says, "The immense curiosity

created by the 'emergency' generated a market for anyone with a story to tell and a press to print it on" (Jeffrey, 2010, p. 39). Spread of Indian language newspapers got a tremendous boost from factors like growth of literacy and spread of technology in the 1970s and 80s. The offset printing technology was a major boost for the newspaper industry. The Hindi newspapers gradually inched their way to the top of the readership tally. This has been attributed to a number of factors like the rise in literacy and purchasing power of people. The rise in rural readership contributed towards a major increase in overall readership in the last quarter of the 1990s. The 21st century heralded the victorious rise of Hindi newspapers which soon bypassed the English language newspapers in terms of circulation. A very important factor which helped the spread of newspapers was the changing political scenario. Two simultaneous political movements popularly known as "mandal" and "mandir" gave a boost to Hindi newspapers as people were drawn into the vortex of politics through these developments (Ninan, 2007, p17). "Mandal" and "Mandir" were two major political mobilizations in India related to religion and caste respectively. Mobilization around "Mandir" related to demands for the construction of a Ram temple in place of an old mosque attributed to the Mughal emperor Babar. On the other hand, the "Mandal" was an agitation for the demand for reservation by the Other Backward Castes in India. Both these politicized the masses and led to a demand for news amongst hitherto marginalized sections as well.

Some Trends in Newspapers in India

As a result of various socio-political and economic developments in India, some important developments happened in the newspapers, some of which are – localization, tabloidization, decline of the editor and dependence on advertisements.

3.1. Localization: Despite this concentration of newspaper publishing in metropolitan and big cities, the newspapers have tried to localize their coverage to a large extent. The Hindi media reached the stage of unprecedented localization in the 1990s. Newspapers started a drive to reach the masses and thus tried to bring the news of their localities to them. Sevanti Ninan maps the course of "India's local newspaper revolution" which gathered steam in the mid-1980s. Ninan attributes this to three factors, "Literacy expanded, purchasing power increased and better communications made it possible to print newspapers from a number of small towns and deliver them to semi-urban and rural areas in the morning" (Ninan, 2007, p. 65). Lowering of costs of newspapers also helped in their spread.

The spread of literacy in the 1990s helped newspapers to expand to interior areas to reach new readers. This is said to have a direct bearing on the circulation of newspapers. Robin Jeffrey avers that "... in making people into newspaper readers, literacy and political participation precede raw purchasing power and advanced printing technology" (Jeffrey, 2010, p. 32). He gives the example of states like Orissa, UP, Andhra and Karnataka which did not show any significant increase in per capita income, nevertheless showed that newspaper circulation increased with increasing literacy.

Another important factor is the spread of the democracy to the rural level. The Panchayat elections spurred grassroots political participation which led to an increasing appetite for news amongst the rural masses. This led to mushrooming of various local newspapers which carried the news of local elections, local problems and concerns. The localization of coverage also carried various issues like the state of civic amenities and infrastructure and their governance (Ninan, 2007).

3.2 Tabloidization: Tabloidization of newspapers is a widespread trend not only in India, but internationally. This happens when consumerism starts dominating the newspapers and serious socio-political analysis and content take a back seat. In India, the newspapers seem to be following this pattern. Globalization and its media, including televised programmes and cinema brought about a shift in the pattern of news also, even in interior areas. It was first in the urban areas that the political space was overtaken by columns on health, food, career, lifestyle, fashion, corporate events, gadgets, cinema, sports and religion to cater to the tastes of the ambitious middle class. Later on this pattern spread to the smaller towns and villages (Ninan, 2007).

The standard of news and analysis also touches all time low as newspapers devote less space to news analysis and opinion columns. The newspapers seek to lightly entertain rather than induce readers to think critically about the issues of the day. The newspapers in India are witnessing a trivialization of content as sensational stories and entertainment dominate, as noted by various commentators (Randev, 2014).

3.3. Decline of the Editor: The office of the editor was envisaged as the focal point of the newspaper, as it was the editor who was responsible for the selection of content and for giving an orientation and direction to it. For the Indian society which had just emerged from a national freedom struggle impregnated with ideals of social revolution, the role of the editor was associated with fearless journalism, who would courageously take up the cause of truth and social justice. He was the

person who would make this profession into journalism of ideas and inspiration. However, the end of 1980s and the onset of liberalization, brought about the demise of the editor in journalism. *The Times of India* tried to pronounce that all it wanted was to be commercially successful which could be done with the help of efficient managers, a task for which editors were ill-suited. While in most of the English language newspapers, the owners and proprietors assumed the office of the editors, in the Hindi newspapers different editors were hired for the multiple editions. As regards Hindi newspapers, Mrinal Pande comments: "... of all the Hindi language newspapers only my paper (*Hindustan* – author) has a creature called the chief editor – and whether this post will remain once I leave is a moot question. No Hindi paper has a professional editor; the owners are the editors and they have an editorial team working for them. And these are papers which have circulations running in crores, *Dainik Bhaskar*, *Dainik Samachar*, and *Punjab Kesari* have 22 to 23 editions" (Pande, 2006, p. 62).

Many of the changes in the Indian newspaper scenario were set in motion by Samir Jain, the owner of *The Times of India*. Thus, business imperatives and not editors were supposed to drive newspapers. Before the commercial reasons overpowered the newspapers, the editor was supposed to be a journalist of repute who could decide on the content of the newspapers, thereby maintaining the standards of objective and fearless journalism. However, the editors were considered unnecessary in the era when profit motives were deciding what was to be published rather than journalistic values. Auletta comments that, "Rather than worry about editorial independence and the wall between the newsroom and the sales department, they (the Jains) propose that one secret to a thriving newspaper business lies in dismantling that wall" (Auletta, 2012, p. 54).

Even in Hindi newspapers the idealism associated with journalism finally gave way to commercial concerns with liberalization. The idea behind newspapers was no longer that of giving fearless criticism and comments, or of championing social concerns. The idea was to sell a cultural product, via aggressive marketing and offering stuff which was palatable to the common man's taste, and not so controversial as to disturb the newspaper's relations with the government and advertisers. This was something for which the office of the editor had become redundant. Journalistic standard thus became a casualty. To quote R.C.S. Sarkar, "Journalistic freedom is the heart of freedom of the Press. The effective exercise of journalistic freedom depends largely on the editor. The freedom and independence of the editor is the crux of the matter" (Sarkar, 1984, p. 246). The policy however, was now decided by the proprietors and the only criteria were profitability and the individual political ideas of the owners.

3.4. Dependence on Advertisements: The newspapers published in India are heavily dependent on advertising revenues. Kohli-Khandekar points out how advertising dominates the newspapers, "It is economically debilitating for publishers to sell for Rs 1-1.50 newspapers that cost anywhere between Rs 4-7 a copy just to print. (This does not include fixed costs)" (Kohli-Khandekar 2006, p. 38). The process of newspaper production as explained by Jyotsna Sahay can be studied to understand how newspaper space has been colonized by advertisements and how primacy is given to their interests, "Assume there are twenty blank pages, which are to be converted into a newspaper. First, all the advertisements are placed as per the conditions and premiums dictated by the advertisers... most newspapers desire to have a 60:40 ratio of ad and editorial. Editors call the space left for them a 'news hole'... After the blank papers have been pasted ... ads, the papers are sent to the editorial department for filling up the rest of the space" (Sahay, 2006, pp. 77-78).

The newspapers have to be sold in such a manner that their circulation increases with stories that sell and do not disturb the "buying mood" of customers. The catch phrase is "infotainment". Advertisements intrude into the space for news and views so much so that it is common to find newspaper cover page to be devoted entirely to some advertisement than to the headline. The focus of the ad-driven media is to turn the common people into consumers and the Indian society into a society participating in the global consumer carnival.

4. THE WORLD OF HINDI NEWSPAPERS AND THE WORLD

Interestingly, the fact that the English and Hindi newspapers in India cater to different reading publics also impacts the kind of content that these newspapers carry. Besides political news, the appetite for which remains in India because of the causes discussed in preceding sections, there are regular pages on religion and spirituality, career opportunities, supplements for women with columns on health, lifestyle and celebrities. People with requirement for a well-informed account of national and international events and deeper analysis, like academicians and bureaucrats, do not prefer to read Hindi newspapers for this reason. Hindi newspapers often don't have a full page dedicated to international news. The international news has to share space with news that could not find place on the pages given to national news, as well as columns on sports, weather forecast, health and developments in Science and Technology. The Hindi newspapers have pages titled *desh-videsh* (national-international) for this task. On the other hand, the English newspapers (like the *Times of India*, *Hindustan Times*

and *The Hindu*) have full pages dedicated to international news. Interestingly *Hindustan Times*, the English counterpart of *Hindustan* has a full page dedicated to international news which *Hindustan* lacks.

It has to be noted that some major agencies like the Press Trust of India (PTI), United News of India (UNI), and Asian News International (ANI) provide a steady flow of news to these newspapers. Besides these, the Reuters (headquarters in London) and AP (headquarters in New York) remain an important source of international news. Studies have pointed out the phenomenon of “information imperialism” wherein news in India is heavily dependent on the foreign sources and therefore gets impacted by the point of view of the global North (Yadava, 1984, p. xxxii). Further the media in the Global South, because of this dependence focuses more on news coming from the North, the news of Global South remaining low because the foreign news agencies bother less about them (Van Dijk, 2013).

5. CONCLUSIONS

The print media in India has evolved along with the changes in the socio-political conditions of the country, the rise in literacy, the changes in economy and technology and the rise in the purchasing power of people. Changes in technology have allowed newspapers to get better paper quality, with colour photographs and supplements. Yet this has also led to a decline in the standard of newspapers, as drive to reap maximum profits have driven papers into price wars and tabloidization. The newspaper business has unseated the editor from his commanding position and newspapers have witnessed de-politicization of content and a focus on infotainment for kicking up the sales, a task for which the manager, rather than the editor is best suited. This paper attempts to track the various constraints on the Hindi newspapers which shape the content of news and views. Factors like profit orientation of media, advertisements as major revenue source, sources of news influence the content of news and tilt them towards news values emanating from the Global North. Infotainment, a focus on the rich and the powerful individuals and countries, high priority given to the issues of high politics while neglecting the issues like development are some of the important trends in Hindi Newspapers. These trends point towards the need for upgrading the standard of newspapers as they do play a significant role in educating the people. The study points towards the need of devoting much more resources to the development of the news infrastructure in India and suggests training of the journalists in values of objective and serious reporting.

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