

Media Freedom in India – Aggressive Implementation of Neo – Liberal Policies – Strengthening Corporatisation – Hindutva Politics

The NDTV, which is familiar for an independent line critical of the government policies, has recently been taken over by Adani Group in a hostile way. The progressive and democratic individuals and journalists seriously protested it and expressed their fear that the residual free media will be under threat with this takeover. As usual, the Comprador Bourgeoisie government did not count it. The intolerance of dominant forces reached to its peak where they will not tolerate the existence of criticism itself. This incident clearly shows that the corporate forces will go to any extent in utilising undemocratic and cruel methods to suppress and end questioning. It seems that the government assumes that the negation of criticism and question will sustain its dictatorship and reign of terror uninterruptedly. This becomes an effective instrument for the ruling class to make the media afraid of the government. The media, which is trapped/arrested in the vicious circle of fear and terror will not dare to question the government policies in future. It will confine itself in the “patriotic circle” popularised by the BJP government and appreciates the exploitative and destructive policies and system. In the present context, where the questioning of government is equated as anti-nation, anti-Hindu, the NDTV broadcasting programmes, the channel proprietors, editors and journalists are attacked with false allegations, defamation cases, threats and trolls. All these threatening activities against NDTV and its staff will come to an end with the takeover of NDTV by Adani’s group. Now, it will be strengthened as a powerful Godi – Media in admiring the domination of Finance capital and its allied aggressive implementation of exploitative neo – liberal policies.

In fact, the survival of exploitative imperialist capitalist system will not be separated from the negation of all the democratic institutions including political and human rights. The democracy will not exist in the everlasting critical crisis in the lives of majority. Therefore, all the democratic processes have continuously been humiliated. The violation of people’s rights legalised. The complete destruction of nominal media freedom is part and parcel of it. The global media which is in the grip of Finance Capital has been working for the interests of Monopoly Capital.

When the BJP came into power in 2014, clear cruel collusion will be seen among the corporate forces, comprador bourgeoisie government and hindutva politics to continue exploitation at the maximum level without any hindrances. With the aggressive implementation of neo – liberal policies to strengthen globalisation, all the masks of democracy uncovered. The oppression and exploitation continuing as if it is ‘legal’. The violence and suppression transformed into democratic tools. The autocratic governments

are emerging through elections. To negate the development of working class consciousness, the dominant forces and ruling classes have been provoking people and dividing them based on religion, caste and gender and aggressively raising contradictions among people. They are trapped in the circle of violence which resulted in the rise of mutual attacks and formation of lumpen mobs. For this, they need strong grip on the media. Therefore, adopting various measures to end the remaining minimum freedom of media.

Corporatisation of Media – Freedom of Media:

The media freedom all over the world is declining at an accelerated speed for the last 15 years. The centralisation of media ownership in few corporate forces is the main reason for this trend. The media turned out into a perfect for – profit commercial model. In addition, the strong spread of the policies of religious fundamentalism resulted in the aggravation of the demise of media freedom. This clearly states that the monopoly capital and the politics of religious fundamentalism will mutually strengthens one another. Consequently democracy will be confined to the lessons of Constitution. The fundamental democratic rights and liberty will be terminated. The rise in the autocracy leads to strong decline of media freedom.

Mc Millan and Zoido's study in Peru in 2004 reveals that the democracy will prevail only on paper. The ruling president will bribe media, opposition parties and judiciary through police chief to project that theirs is democracy. However, the bribe given to media is 5 times higher when compared to all the opposition parties. The bribe amount given to one single media owner is 100 times higher when compared to a political leader.

To silence the powerful media, the autocratic government gives excessive amount of bribe. As high as 90 percent of the content of world media is supplied by only Four Corporate institutions – Comcast, Walt Disney, 21st Century Fox news Corp, Times Warner Holdings. This clearly indicates the prevalence of high level monopoly in media. In US, which is popularised as matured capitalist country, 90 percent of media ownership is concentrated in 6 monopoly organisations – Comcast, News Corp, Disney, Via com, Time Warner, CBS. According to Forbes in 2016, all the main newspapers are under the ownership of 15 billionaires. Similarly, in the entire Europe which publicised as the symbol of democracy, media monopoly is much stronger. The news papers market is concentrated in the three monopoly organisations in Britain. The strong Corporatisation in the media ownership naturally results in the demise of media freedom. UN Human Rights Director Peggy Hicks clearly states that this is a dangerous trend. She further, says that the media freedom should be revived from the human rights perspective. The media ownership will have plenty of advantages in articulating the news for the benefit of dominant countries/ classes.

During the Gulf War period, Rupert Murdoch in his news Corp which have 150 news papers strongly supported the US invasion of Iraq. Later on, he is rewarded in the form of permission by Federal Communication Commission of Media Regulation Authority of US to run operations in US, by bulldozing all the domestic laws and norms. His Star TV dominates

entire Asia continent. He uses his media holdings to advance the political agendas of US, Australia and Britain with supportive arguments.

The World Bank in 2002 in its World Development Report entitled "Building Institutions for Market" allocated one chapter exclusively on the role of media in development. The commercialisation of media is realised and strengthened. The media, which is concentrated in the hands of monopoly capital has been strongly corporatised and taken the form of "for profit commercial model".

The report of "Freedom in the World" prepared by Freedom House states that the media freedom has been declined to a dangerous level in 16 so called democratic countries - Serbia, Austria, Europe, Israel, India and US. The strong legal structure prevails in US and Europe to control the Corporatisation of media. The laws have no power to control monopoly capital even in the field of media.

The media freedom became further critical in alleged non-democratic countries such as Russia, Myanmar, El Salvador, Tanzania, Nepal, Malian.

It is interesting to notice that in Ethiopia, Malaysia, Armenia, Ecuador and Gambia, the media freedom improved owing to reformative leadership. While in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya, the progress in the media freedom is excessive after 2011 uprisings. This clearly indicates that the achievement of political and human rights including media freedom is possible only through people's movements.

Media Freedom in India - Strengthening of Corporatisation:

For whose benefit, the media will function determines media freedom. Discussing people's issues from people's perspective, criticising and questioning government policies and existing structures from the perspective of ensuring decent lives to all will be the true media freedom. In this context, the media freedom will be determined by the stage of development of existing exploitative capitalist system and the ideology that determines government policies.

Independent India, though declared as mixed economy and Welfare State, since beginning the controls are imposed when the capitalist' exploitation exceeds certain limit. The eradication of exploitation is not the goal. Therefore, the media freedom will lie in this accepted framework. Consequently, one can see imposing restrictions, bans since beginning on the writings, reportings from the perspective of left ideology which aimed at the total abolition of exploitation. Moreover, the owners, proprietors, editors of mainstream media belongs to elite class in independent India. They suppressed and side - tracked the agenda of non - elite class. The media is always biased towards elite class. Lobbying of higher officials, publicity of government programmes are normally continued. Therefore, the media freedom continued within the framework of the goals of Welfare State with Intellectual discussions and the expression of the opinions of opposition parties.

However, the rules of Welfare State could not stop/ control the spread of monopoly capital and strengthening of monopoly in the entire economy. For the development and growth of this trend, the globalisation entered into India in 1990-91 on the name of New Economic Policy. This has removed the mask of Welfare State. The implementation of neo-liberal policies on the name of l'assez-avoir accelerated. In line with this unimaginable changes entered into the media sector also. Media became commodity and a business for profit. Media transformed into an industry speedily. Our Union Cabinet in 1955 took a decision not to allow Foreign Investment into media. The liberalisation policies could abolish this decision 'successfully'. As a result, excessive flow of Foreign Investments can be seen. In 2018, the flow of foreign investment is to the tune of \$ 8-10 billions in TV sector alone. The growth rate of flow of foreign investment during 2003-2015 increased from 26 percent to 49 percent. The rapid increase in mergers and amalgamations can be noticed among media organisations. The main reason for this trend is as high as 25 percent profit margin in Indian media sector while it is only 10 percent in US. The corporatisation, centralisation and monopoly strengthened in Indian media. This resulted in the demise of true news and sensational news became important. More than 70,000 news papers and 24/7 news channels emerged. The media which is in the control of monopoly capital works with the aim of benefiting capital. In this process, the significance of advertisements is increased. Its goal is to raise consumerism. The unification of media ownership has been increased excessively during 1994-2005. The value of media sector in 2021 is as high as \$ 21.5 billions and expected to increase to \$ 54 billions by 2026.

The revenue from advertisements became main source in which the government advertisements occupied more significance. The goals of the interest of monopoly capital and comprador bourgeoisie government are not different. They are same. The media which depends upon the advertisements come from these two sources, will function within the limits of the interests of dominant forces and organise discussions to that extent.

The corporate media will not focus the issues and challenges related to the critical lives of majority such as unemployment, poverty, agrarian crisis, farmers suicides, rural distress, denial of education and health services to majority, hunger and malnutrition problems, slums, drought, loss of livelihoods. Its broad capacity will not mention these problems at all. The paid news increased aggressively after 2009 general elections. The News Papers and TV Channels could create variety of paid packages in various quantities for the contestants. Higher rates will be charged to broadcast negative news relates to opponents. All the people consider these conspiracies and concocted stories as realities. The people are provoked and sidetracked with false news. The corporate media will popularise superstitions. Moreover, the working of journalists and editors will be determined by the political linkages and commercial interests of the media owners. No autonomy. In these conditions, the small media organisations working from the people's perspective cannot compete and survive. They are subjected to various pressures, attacks and defamation cases from the powerful corporate forces and comprador bourgeoisie

government. They are compelled to sell their organisations to corporate media. Which further strengthens monopoly in the media sector.

Even State governments could articulate their advertisement expenditure as a tool to control the media. The editor of 'Pindar' an Urdu Daily in Bihar is forced to resign by the government as his news paper did not highlight the programme participated by CM & the ownership accepted it. As a reward, the government has increased advertisements to the daily from just Rs one lakh in 2006-07 to Rs. 24 lakhs in 2008-09 and Rs. 48 lakhs in 2009-10. The Rajasthan government brought an ordinance which banned journalists from reporting any obligations against bureaucrats and judges until the State Government sanctioned prosecution. The journalists who violate it will be punishable for 2 year jail. The Rajasthan Pathrika has boycotted the coverage of government programmes as a protest to the ordinance. The government stopped giving advertisements to this daily since 2016. Still worst conditions will prevail in Jammu and Kashmir. The 'Anand Bazar' a Bengali Daily has faced abnormal delay in the release of advertisement amount from the government as the daily criticised government. As the same CM re elected the ownership changed the editor.

Aggressive Implementation of Neo - Liberal Policies since 2014 - Hindutva Politics -

Media Distortion:

BJP came into power in 2014 and Narendra Modi became Prime Minister. Since then, the government started implementing neo - liberal policies aggressively so as to transfer entire wealth of nation to monopoly capital especially to Ambani and Adani. For which, they could mould hindutva politics as a powerful tool. To broadcasting of anti-minority hate aggressively increased, mainstreamed and legitamised. The communities divided and polarised. The nature and shape of media changed radically with hate, cruelty and brutality. Media Freedom deteriorated to the bottom. Distortion strengthened. The media, people and progressive organisations should be silenced. They should not be allowed to question about the destruction. In this process, it is excessively popularised that questioning government, prime minister and politics itself is serious anti-national. Accepting and admiring the transfer of entire Nation's wealth to monopoly capital became the indicators of patriotism. Spread of hate politics, provocation of violent mob attacks on Muslims and other minorities became the symbols of extreme patriotism. The attacks increased on the media, organisations, journalists, people and people's organisations who questioned and protested these activities. They are subjected to a variety of cases including defamation cases, attacks, humiliation, harassment, intimidation and trolls. All this charges became normal routine activities.

The Bobby Ghosh, the editor of Hindustan Times compelled to resign for writing on 'Hate Crime'. The Owner of this daily Shobhana Bhatia is the daughter Of K.K. Birla. Similarly, Harish Khare, editor of 'The Tribune' forced to resign as he exposed the deficiency in the Civil Information Protection System. The Parajoy Guha Thekurtha, Editor of Economic and Political Weekly pressurised to resign as he wrote an article on the kind of government favours received by Adani Group. Otherwise, the ownership should take defamation case. The trust

bowed down without a fight. In Varanasi, a journalist attacked and subjected to a defamation case for his report on giving bread and salt to the school students is the violation of government nutrition norms. All of us know about the murder of Gouri Lankesh. Rana Ayyub, a progressive Muslim women journalist has been stopped by Mumbai airport authorities and did not allow her to go to address a Journalist Conference in London, as she questioned the attacks and trolls of Hindu fundamentalists/nationalists. The Muslim journalist Siddique Kappan is in the jail since October 2020 because he wanted to go to Hathras to report the rape and murder of a young dalit woman. From 2017 onwards, BJP - led government in Uttar Pradesh imposed criminal cases on 66 journalists and as many as 48 journalists are subjected to physical attacks. According to "Committee to Protect Journalists" a fake Auction App 'For Sale' has been created and the list consisting of 20 Muslim women journalists including Rana Ayyub is released to insult and defame them. This is the policy of BJP 'Reporters without Borders' state that India is on par with Yemen in terms of media in danger. India is recognised as third most deadly country in the world. The sedation cases, defamation cases, attacks, online trolls, religious intolerance on media and questioning activities has been aggressively increased after BJP came into power. Moreover, since then abnormal rise took place in liquor, trafficking, illegal gambling, fake medical clinics. The journalists who report these activities are subjected to mafia attacks. The mafia will not hesitate to kill the journalists. Incorporation of Pegasus, an Israel spyware into the individual computers is another form of attack on thousands of journalists.

The Human Rights Organisations have seriously condemned the attacks on media and demanded the release of journalists who are detained on the politically motivated charges on May 3, 2022 on the eve of World Press Freedom day. They are - Committee to Protect Journalists.

Freedom House, PEN America, Reporters without Borders, International Federation of Journalists, CIVI CVS, Access Now, International Commission of Jurists, Amnesty International and HR Watch.

Social media also in the grip of government. Through the law amendments, the government acquired to remove any tweet. IT cell is established to manufacture a variety of lies and false news. This could convert entire media as 'Godi Media' perfectly. Print and Electronic media in India are functioning as its extension. IT cell is having its own laboratory -: WhatsApp University as said by Ravish Kumar. This will create and popularise false history speedily. It could change Nehru's clan, religion and birth and show him as a villain. It will not spare M.K Gandhi who is also subjected to the distortion of IT cell. It can create 'patriotic' mob and violent mob attacks. Ravish Kumar worries that people who are the grip of fear moulded as Robo - Public to accept and admire what is said by 'Godi Media'.

Formation of Godi Media:

P. Sainath says that media is not working for corporates but "media itself is corporate". Media itself commoditised and works for profit. Modi, after becoming Prime Minister did not conduct a single press conference. It became difficult for the media to get

any information related to parliament except to its followers. Immediately, the government has raised its expenditure on advertisements since 2014, it has been increased to \$ 170 million per annum. The advertisements became a powerful tool to control media. The share of advertisements revenue in the media revenue is increased abnormally. Gradually, the dependence on advertisements increased. Media became the business of Ads.

News papers by 2018 are 1,18,239 and among them 36,000 are weekly magazines, 880 Satellite TV Channels. Among them more than 380 are 24/7 News Channels. More than 550 FM Radios and innumerable News Websites. Social media strengthened with the platform of Face book, Twitter, WhatsApp, YouTube. Media is filled with fake and false news. Despite growth in the number of media organisations, monopoly and concentration of ownership centralised.

In 2012, Reliance Mukesh Ambani entered into media by making investment in debt ridden Network 18 which lead to the establishment of largest media conglomerate. This consists of number of Hindi, English, regional language news channels and business news channels. Recently we have witnessed the hostile take over of NDTV by Adani Group. In the similar way, the Reliance has took over Network 18 in 2014. This resulted in the resignation of Rajdeep Surdesai, Editor - in - Chief of CNN - IBN.

ETV news channels of UP, Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, Urdu channels, Entertainment Channels of Marathi, Kannada, Bengali, Gujarati and Oriya languages have gone under the control of Reliance. The share of Reliance is to the of 49% in ETV Telugu news channel and entertainment channel.

Zee media corporation is part of the Essel Group conglomerate, led by Subhash Chandra ex MP of Upper House selected with the support of BJP. It works in the entire India with its powerful effective patriotic TV network. Republic TV, Aaj Tak TV, Times Now etc 'patriotic' channels have been strengthened to humiliate, troll journalists, editors, media channels which question the government. Thus, perfect 'Godi Media' is strongly established. This is clearly exposed during corona crisis period, 2019. The government itself is the culprit for the spread of disease with its election campaigns, Kumbh Mela, Donald Trump trip. Thousands of people taking bath in rivers on the name of pushkara have not been questioned or at least mentioned by the media. Rather, successfully popularised that Muslims are the cause for the spread of pandemic with its Hate news and provoked violence on Muslims. Media fails to talk about the destruction of public health system by government itself and did not mention about seriousness of Farmers movement but creates false news to blame the movement that it is cause of spread of second wave of covid-19. The entire world stunned by looking at the pitiable conditions of lakhs of migrant labour who backed to their homes on foot with the sudden declaration of lockdown but the media as well as the government failed to see it. The media forgot to talk about the serious, critical issues of people but diverts the attention through the continuous programmes on the marriages of celebrities, their pregnancies, luxurious lives of wealthy, space trip, exposing of film stars. The comprador bourgeoisie government

along with monopoly capital have successfully made the people and youth as lumpen mass without any working class consciousness.

The entire media irrespective of their form, has strong unity and no difference of opinion in showing that the present prolonged critical crisis is due to malicious individuals. The media neither accepts nor shows that the emergence and strengthening of crisis is the consequence of natural functioning of exploitative capitalist system. Therefore, it always diverts people's attention towards the billionaires like Adani and steep fluctuations in the value of their wealth. Moreover, the media denies to understand as to how these powerful individuals dictate the government to create enormous opportunities of exploitation for the capitalist class at the cost of nation's interest. In this process, exploitative policies will be formulated and passed through the institutions of constitution. There will be strong and mutual co-operation between national and international exploitative classes. Due to the failure of media to recognise and expose the roots of exploitation, it simply confines to the discussions related to the election of a different mainstream political parties to get some relief. In this process, it will consciously avoid arguments related to the eradication of exploitative structures from roots.

Will crisis and destruction stay permanently? The building of socialist society is the only way to realise media freedom inclusive of political and human rights. But it is a serious challenge to the revolutionary forces to unite the people who are divided and fragmented by hate politics. How to raise the working class consciousness among people is a great problem in front of us. Therefore, it is necessary for the revolutionary forces to build new forms and methods of alternative structures of cultures, literature and media as for the rights of the people.