

## Role of Media

### 37.1 INTRODUCTION

Communication is the function of life and as a function it is inextricably linked with it. Life is impossible without communication. It is, therefore, said that communication begins with life and ends only when life ceases to exist. In other words, it is co-terminus with life for example the cry of the new born baby could be described as the first act of communication. Through cry the child tries to share his response with other. Communication begins co-terminus with life can also be described as a fundamental and vital activity. It is fundamental because human society primitive to modern is founded on man's capacity to transmit his desire, intention, feelings, knowledge and experience from person to person and it is vital because one's capacity to communicate with others enhances the individual's chance for survival, while its absence is generally regarded as a serious form of personal inadequacy. In a democracy media plays a very important role as a communicator. One of the basic postulates of a genuine democratic society is that those who hold and wield power do so in trust for the people and the government is accountable to its citizens for its functioning. Consequently citizens are entitled to know the true facts about the working of the governments and the conduct of public functionaries because this enables them to make informed decisions and to play their role in enforcing accountability. Informed public opinions is one of the most potent check of maladministration and corruption on the other hand the legislators enact laws on the basis of information communicated to them by the citizens sometime directly and sometime through the leaders, interest groups and political via mass media. Thus, there is close link between media, Government and its citizens. Communication can take place only through the media.

In the present lesson we are going to study the role of media as a medium of transmitting information, knowledge values and attitude in socio-economic and political development. At the same time we shall be discussing how various factors such as the influence of big business, government control etc. that hampers effective role of media and how we can ensure freedom of our media in the interest of the effective functioning of our democracy.

### 37.2 OBJECTIVES

After studying this lesson you will be able to :

- describe the meaning of media and identify various media of mass communication;

- describe the contribution of media as agencies of moulding public opinion in India;
- analyse the role of print media in influencing and disseminating emerging issues of Indian politics;
- understand the increasing contribution of electronic media in highlighting the emerging issues of Indian Politics;
- identify the factors such as the influence of big business, government control etc. that hampers effective role of media; and
- suggest measures for ensuring media freedom in the interest of democracy in India.

### 37.3 MEDIA OF MASS COMMUNICATION: MEANING AND FORMS

Communication involves the sharing of information, attitude and experience. It is a process of transmitting a message from a source to an audience through a channel. For example, a conversation is the most common kind of communication. The person who speaks is the source, the person who listens is the audience. What is transmitted is the message. The spoken voice carried through the air is the channel. Another example is the news item in a newspaper. The message is everything the news says or everything a reader might understand from it. The audience is everybody who reads the news item. The source are the news makers, reporter or the editor. The channel is the printed words or the newspaper itself. This type of communication can only take place through certain media. Thus media is the instrument through which communication of information, knowledge, values, attitude and experience from one person to another takes place. For example Radio, T.V., Newspapers, persons are the medium through which information reaches from persons to person, from people to Government and from the Mass to the leader. A mass medium, says Wilbur Schramm, "is essentially a working-group organised round some device for circulating the same message at about the same time, to large number of people". Such a definition excludes the folk media group media and natural communication such as rumour, education and preaching, where communication is not mediated by a device further the term mass suggest that the modern media are mass and mass culture.

As generally interpreted the mass media are the press, cinema, Radio and Television they are so termed because their reach extend to vast heterogeneous masses of the population living in a wide and extensive area of a country and beyond. Thus the media of communication can be categorised as under the following major heads:

- i) Print media like papers, magazine, Journals, books etc.
- ii) Electronic media like T.V., Radio, Cinema etc. A part from these two major heads the media of mass communication can be categorised under certain other categories. These are:
  - a) Traditional social structure relating to family.
  - b) Person to Person Contact, otherwise called informal face to face contacts.
  - c) Political Structure such as interest groups, trade unions.

#### (i) Family

Of all the medium of communications the family has the most pronounced and consistent role in political communication. There is also a tendency for the older generation to believe that family training is a crucial element in determining the way the children turn out. On a

much wider front the family has long been regarded as one of the earliest and most important agent of political communication. The influence of the family is indeed great in determining what children come to believe and how they behave.

(i) The children adopt similar attitude towards the political community, regime, norms and even towards particular political parties as their parents. The transmission of fundamental political values by the family from one generation to another provides an element of stability and continuity in the political life of nation. Since the children generally tends to agree with parents in political matters it is difficult for society to make radical breaks with the past.

**(ii) Person to Person Contact**

Although family is the most intimate of all human associations, there are others particularly peer groups of friends and work associates which also involve close personal contact. As children grow older, they have increasing contact with people outside their home. When distance increases between parents and adult children the peer groups influence the attitudes of the adult children. This influence is increasingly evident when the adult children move into new occupation and new life circumstances. At offices, clubs and other types of gathering people in general discuss about the politically relevant matters such as parties, elections, legislation etc. This type of person to person contact plays a vital important role as a medium of communication.

**(iii) Political Structures**

Political structures such as interest groups, trade unions political parties and legislatures are the most important formal media of political communication. We can discuss them briefly.

**(a) Interest Groups and Trade Unions**

Interest Groups and Trade Unions are a group of people who have a common belief and faith in any particular issue concerning to the society and to pursue the government in achieving the goal and at the same time does not want to gain political power. These groups align themselves to any issue or problems faced by the society and try to influence the government to come out with a legislation in their favour. In this way they play a major role of via meida between the people or society on the one hand and the government on the other hand.

**(b) Political Parties**

In a democratic system political parties are a group of persons who have a common belief and faith in any particular issue and who contest elections with a view to gain political power. Those who win the election they form the government and those who do not sit in the opposition. The role of the government is to formulate various policies and programmes and implement them for the betterment of the people by considering the people's needs and aspirations. The role played by the opposition is to check the government where it goes wrong in formulating and implementing the policies and programmes. The role played by both the government as well as the opposition are vital in a democracy. In this way they play an important role as communicator.

**(c) Legislatures**

In a democratic set up legislative bodies such as Parliament, State Legislative Assemblies play a very significant role of communication. The Members of these bodies are the representatives of the people from all over the country. Through them the needs, aspirations and grievances of the people, if any, ventilated on the floor of the house. On that basis the Parliament prepares legislation which affect every aspect of human life. In this process the human needs and various legislations have a very close link which affects each other and play as a medium of communication.

## 37.4 MEDIA AS AGENCIES OF INFLUENCING PUBLIC OPINION

The concept of public opinion came to the lime light in the wake of democracy. When Governmental policies gradually became the function of opinion rather than of force and when the expression of opinion has been guaranteed by the constitution, the role of public opinion in Government came to be generally recognised. The phrase public opinion in its present meaning as the agency for the conditioning of public policy was introduced by France. Jean jaeques Rouseeeau was the first political thinker to use it on the eve of the French Revolution. He said "the real will is the will of the state and it is also called the general will". A public opinion may mean anything ranging from an undisciplined mob to an articulate minority. Again opinion may be rationally or irrationally formed, or expressed.

In the present scenario any collection of individual opinion is now designated as public opinion. This may be the opinion of labour unions, business organisations etc. A public opinion becomes politically significant when its influences is brought to bear on matters of public policy. Public opinion as William Albiq defines it, "is the expression of all those members of group who are giving attention in any way to a given issue".

In a democratic state public policy is a function of public opinion. To quote said "under a democracy, public opinion becomes an active propelling factor. The people regard the Government as a mere agency to which they have delegated power without releasing it from the obligation to obey orders". Thus public opinions is an integral part of political system. It can be moulded by knowledge, values and attitude of the people.

In the previous part, we have learnt that through mass media like T.V. Newspaper, Radio, communication of information, knowledge, values and attitudes takes place from a person to another. This type of communication may also takes place from the Government to the people and vice versa. Since media is the instrument through which information, knowledge, values and attitudes from one source to another takes place, it can play an important role in influencing public opinion in a society. For the facts relevant to the formation and changing of public opinion, almost every one has to be dependent in the print as well as electronic media. As the newspapers are available at a very cheap price, their influence in moulding opinion, with the spread of mass education, has increased. Most of the newspapers publish the details of legislative debates, speeches of eminent personalities, announcements of Governments and parties and various other news. Not all of them are political; but still political news are popular for the readers. So, every newspaper takes pain to collect political news and make delicious dishes out of them. The representation of facts is not the only function; their interpretation and systematization into a particular view point are also undertaken by the newspapers. Almost every paper has a tendency and dogma. These are high-lighted in the editorial columns. Even the manner of news flashing in headlines or elsewhere on the columns betrays the peculiar character of a newspaper. The readers read the news and come to align themselves with a particular paper. Grievances are ventilated and views expressed by the public through the newspapers. For this purpose most papers earmark a few columns for its general readers. The Government takes note of them and carefully studies public reaction against its measures through the mirror of the newspaper. Thus, in the crystallisation of public opinion, the newspapers play a vital part.

### Intext Questions 37.1

Choose the correct answer —

- (1) Which country first introduced Public Opinion?  
 (a) France (b) Italy (c) England

- (2) Public opinion was first introduced in —  
(a) French Revolution  
(b) Russian Revolution  
(c) None of the above
- (3) A public opinion becomes politically significant when it influences  
(a) Social policy (b) Cultural policy (c) Public policy.
- (4) Under democracy public opinion becomes important because  
(a) It restricts the government from maladministration.  
(b) People like to express their opinion freely.  
(c) None of the above.

### 37.5 ROLE OF PRINT MEDIA

The role of print media in the process of mass communication is of special importance. Print media like newspapers, journals and magazine are the basic and oldest channels of communication between one source to the other. Because of development of roads and communication newspapers are being circulated in every small village in India even if situated in a very remote area. Print media are being printed in every regional language to facilitate the readers to get information and knowledge in ones own mother tongue. In India where more than 50% of the people are living below poverty line, where they cannot afford to have expensive devices like T.V. Radio to get information, for them newspaper is the cheapest medium of mass communication.

Before independence, the print media played a missionary role of helping in creating public opinion against the foreign rule. This they did for more than half a century. The whole country was up against the foreign rule which eventually ended in 1947. The achievement of independence brought in a real challenge for those in power and also those not in power. This meant an altogether different role for the press.

In the present situation a glance through the newspapers will bring out the sad state of things as of today-like all round lawlessness, insecurity, cruel treatment of women, agitation, types of corruption, increased crime, predominents of muscle power and complete loss of pride in our country and so on.

While the above list shows the negative side of the present situation, there is also the positive side. This is marked by the tremendous progress in infrastructure, industries growth, development and availability of human resources, progress in agriculture, space, telecommunication and electronic media network.

The press has to play the role to maintain the integrity of the country by highlighting the consequences of separatist and fissiparous tendencies. Those agitating for the division of the country on linguistic and parochial basis have to be exposed through the press. Our country is wedded to the concept of secular state where people belonging to all religions and faiths have a right to live as Indians. The events of the past years particularly, have given alarm signals that the attempts at promoting fundamentalism have to be fought as a national cause. The press has to help to form public opinion in favour of secular states on the plea that every Indian, irrespective of his/her religion has right to live in this country.

There have been cases where the print media has inflamed emotions of people of one religion against people of another religion. This is not a healthy sign. The press has to play its role

with caution and help in promoting mutual understanding, tolerance in the principle of "live and let live"

There is no doubt that the press has to highlight the ills of the society. At the same time, it has a duty to project the positive side as well. The various progress made by the country in several fields has to be brought out by the press so that the people at large feel motivated for still better results.

### 37.6 CONTRIBUTION OF ELECTRONIC MEDIA

The electronic media is of special value as it can reach millions at home, overcoming the barriers of literacy. They do not depend in the physical facilities, of roads and communication for reaching their target. Because of the introduction of the electronic media, urbanisation is no longer an essential condition for wider mass communication. In India where 80% of the people are living in rural areas having 55% of literacy rate and where people cannot read newspaper, radio and T.V. and films have played a significant role. The newspaper is undoubtedly powerful but it is less direct than the broadcast media and certainly less intimate. The emotional response created by Smt. Indira Gandhi's midnight broadcast talk on Pakistan's aggression in December 1971 was many time greater when heard on the air than the printed news in the newspaper the next day morning. The sad, soft voice, expressive of pain at the unfortunate turn of events, but firm in declaring the nation's determination to resist aggression had an effect on the listeners which no other media except radio and television could have provided. The effect of television on the children and the adolescent is considerable. It is of great help in mass education of children and others and in informing and educating people on national programmes and development efforts. Democracy needs widespread understanding by people of the national objectives and attitudes, the details of welfare programme and the methods of selection of people's representatives, the working of different political parties. All these aspects can be dealt with effectively by electronic media such as T.V., Radio and Film etc.

### 37.7 FACTORS HAMPERING EFFECTIVE ROLE OF MEDIA

The fundamental right of the freedom of the press implicit in the right of the freedom of speech and expression, is essential to political liberty and proper function of democracy, the rule of the people. Democracy can thrive not only under the care and guidance of public opinion and the press is the vehicle through which opinion can become articulate. Thus democracy can flourish only in an atmosphere where there is a free interchange of views. In performing the role the mass media is being influenced by so many factors such as Government and business organisations. It needs to be noted that in our democracy, the freedom of the press as such is not a fundamental right under the constitution. It is derived from guarantee that "all citizens have the right to freedom of speech and expression under Art. 19(1) of Indian Constitution." Art. 19(2) qualifies this by stating that the state can by law impose reasonable restrictions on the exercise of this right in the interest of the sovereignty and integrity of the country, the security of the State friendly relations with foreign states, Public order, decency and morality or in relations to contempt of Court, defamation etc. Apart from this there are some laws that affect the freedom of the press. The principal among these are the Official Secret Act, the Contempt of Courts Act, the Parliamentary Privileges etc.

As far as the restrictions imposed by the government are concerned there have been period of aberrations, as during the Emergency when the press was sought to be muzzled through pressures and censorship. Many a time instances can be seen that the political party/parties in authority use the press as a means of transmitting their message to the people, their party

ideology etc. Sometimes one comes across some news items that the press men got assaulted and abused by the party in power because they tried to depict the facts about some mismanagement in some sectors of the government. Many a time the journalists themselves alien with the Government and only publish the merit of government by intentionally ignoring the shortcomings for their vested interest which could also play a negative role in the process of freedom of the press. In this way the media plays an one sided game by communicating the ideologies and merits of the Government. As a result such activities completely debar the citizens from knowing the facts about the working of the Government and the conduct of public functionaries which stop them to take part in the process of decision making and to make them accountable. This type of influence from the side of Government could put our democracy in danger.

Another major constraints to the freedom of the press flow from the ownership of the press. The freedom of the professional editors is increasingly being influenced by the big business organisations (Owner of newspaper). Proprietors are increasingly asserting themselves and reducing editors and journalists to the positions of the managers and clerks. The journalists hardly have any freedom to write down the facts as these are. They are pressurised by their owners the capitalists class to produce such news by which they can earn profit. (elaboration needed).

### Intext Questions 37.2

Fill in the blanks :

1. .... are the basic and oldest channels of communication.
2. .... media overcame the barriers of literacy.
3. Because of roads and communication ..... are being circulated in all parts of India.

### 37.8 FREEDOM OF MEDIA : WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE

The relation between the press and the Government and big business is always a sensitive issue. Governance is mainly the role of the government and the media has to tell the people how the government is doing its job. The press has to stay vigilant and objective as there are more vested interest in government today. Therefore, it must never be expected to be the lap dog of any establishment. A political leader's commitment to the freedom of press is tested when he or she can ensure it not only to the section of the press that supports him or her, but also to the section that oppose. If the press assumes peace with the Government, democracy will be threatened. Therefore, it calls for tolerance on both sides. Those in authority are keen on using the press as a means of transmitting their message to the people. Here it is the right and responsibility of the press to use its discretion so that it does not become the mouthpiece of any establishment. Because a press in a democracy has the right to hold its own views and transmits them to the people through its pages. According to the opinion of our present Honorable President Shri K.R. Narayanan "to mind, the freedom of the press is not just a slogan from the larger point of view, but is an essential attribute of the democratic process. I have no doubt that even if the Government dislikes the liberties taken by the press and considers them dangerous, it is wrong to interfere with the freedom of the press. By imposing restrictions you do not change anything, you merely suppress the public manifestation of certain things, thereby causing the ideas and thought underlying them to spread further. The responsibility of the media can be attributed as a leader by telling the people about constructive ideas by exposing evils in society and by highlighting the issues that affect common men."

Media persons often feel restrained by measure of political leaders' threat. Newspapers owners and sometime by their own prejudices therefore journalist had to be free from fear of various political parties including that in power, Newspapers owners, their colleagues and oneself. This attitude would ensure freedom of the press.

It may also be mentioned that the finances of the newspapers, All India Radio and Doordarshan should be scrutinized by the comptroller and Auditor General and its reports should be placed before parliament as suggested by Verghese Committee which was formed in 1978.

As India launched its scheme of autonomy for the electronic media, the political parties can give it a big push by arriving at an understanding or accord, written or unwritten that who ever may be in power, the professional in the field of media will be free to report controversies fairly and objectively.

Furthermore, the Government should come out with a clear cut legislation and implement it to ensure freedom of the press. In this regard the centre has piloted the Prasar Bharati Act granting Autonomy to Akashvani and Doordarshan. The Act has amended the Official Secret Act 1923 and the Indian Evidence Act to ensure easy access to all information relating to government activities and decisions. To keep it up Prasar Bharati should be a Corporation with both characteristics of being a job specific outfits with social concern. The independent nature of the Board members and its structure should be adequate to balance the various influences.

Prasar Bharati should be the national agency an official spokesman and supreme custodian of the interest of the nation in respect of information order. Thus it may continue to do public service covering the full sweep of information, acting independently the government should retain the control but not monopoly. In case of deadlock, the government will prevail but in this dispensation the quality of information will not suffer because we have a professional journalists and publicmen including Judges to guard the freedom of the Press. This will not be a control Press regime but a competitive and mutual re-inforcing information order under which the three functions of the press i.e. inform, educate and entertain will be performed effectively.

In conclusion we may say that the Press is the only medium which can cover all aspects of human endeavours. Lapses on its part occasionally should not be taken to mean that it has ceased to be relevant. Without free and fearless Press there cannot be democracy and without democracy social justice cannot be ensured.

### Intext Questions 37.3

1. Article..... of Indian constitution guarantees all citizens the right to freedom of speech and expression.
2. .... is essential to political liberty.
3. Sometimes..... play a negative role in the process of freedom of the press.

## WHAT YOU HAVE LEARNT

In this lesson, you have learnt that in a democratic set up, media plays a very important role as a communicator. Through media only citizens are entitled to know the conduct of the government and it enable them to make informed decisions and to play their role in enforcing accountability. Thus there is close link between media, government and its citizens. In performing such functions as a communicator both the print as well as electronic media are being influenced by various factors such as big business concern, government control and

sometimes by the vested interest of the journalists themselves. Some important steps have been taken to ensure media's freedom. However a lot more needs to be done both at governmental and people's level to have a free media for the successful working of democracy.

Besides the governmental efforts to ensure media's freedom, at the people level too we need to be very vigilant to the extent possible to have an independent press through which we can easily communicate our knowledge, values, attitudes and beliefs. Because without a free and fearless press there can not be democracy and without democracy social justice can not be ensured.

#### **TERMINAL QUESTIONS**

- (1) What do you mean by media?
- (2) Discuss briefly how media influence public opinion.
- (3) Write a note on print media's role in emerging issues of Indian Politics.
- (4) Write a note on Freedom of media.
- (5) What are the major steps taken to ensure media's freedom.
- (6) Write Short Notes on;
  - a) Contribution of electronic media
  - b) Big business control over media
  - c) Various medium of mass communication

#### **KEY TO INTEXT QUESTIONS**

- 37.1
- 1) a
  - 2) a
  - 3) c
  - 4) b
- 37.2
- 1) Print Media
  - 2) Electronic
  - 3) Newspaper
- 37.3
- 1) 19(i)
  - 2) Freedom of speech and expression
  - 3) Journalists

#### **Hints to Terminal Questions**

- 1) Please refer to section 37.3
- 2) Please refer to section 37.4
- 3) Please refer to section 37.5
- 4) Please refer to section 37.7
- 5) Please refer to section 37.8
6.
  - a) Please refer to section 37.6
  - b) Please refer to section 37.7
  - c) Please refer to section 37.3