

## **DEMOCRACY IN MEDIA MARKET**

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**Buroshiva Dasgupta (Compiled by), *Market Media Democracy* (Kolkata: Institute of Development Studies Kolkata and Progressive Publishers, 2011), Pages 83, Price Rs. 180**

Free Media and Democracy in their ideal forms are non-existence. Both are within the ambit of Market which again is far from the ideal notion of ‘free market’. Advocates of the market, based on the arguments of ideals of ‘free market’ which exist only in ideas and theory, are hoisting the flags of imperfect, if not unethical, market all over the world. The aggression of this ‘real world market’ system has gathered tremendous momentum with the acceptance (imposition?) of LPG model and simultaneous revolution in the electronic communication system. Almost every aspects of our life including (specially?) media are now getting determined (if not controlled) by this ‘real world market’ system.

The present book ‘Market Media and Democracy’ is a good attempt to examine the above phenomena from the angle of the media world with a focus on media coverage of human development. The book is a documentation of two day round table discussion on it held at Institute of Development studies Kolkata (IDSK) during April 2010. Beside 17 papers, ‘Forward’ by Prof. Amiya Kumar Bagchi, ‘Sum-Up’ by Buroshiva Dasgupta and a resolution jointly taken by the participants are good addition to the literature of mass communication. Although the group is heterogeneous but it is dominated by the media personnel----- 9 are from media, 3 from Right Based organizations, 2 are development practitioners, one each from

academic and film line, while the field of work of one participant is not available. Almost all are active practitioners having long field experiences. Their contributions here are expressions of their rich personal realization and understanding. But the papers suffer from the lack of field level data (and not field stories) needed for strengthening their understanding of the cause-effect relationship among Market, Media and Democracy. However they have opened up a rich 'mine' for the media persons, civil society, researchers, and social thinkers.

These seventeen papers covered a wide range of issues. Common issues like functions and role of media, government intervention, and deteriorating quality of both print and electronic media have been well taken up by the writers. One major issue that has come up from these writings is the issue of 'paid-news' and 'private treaty'. Very existence of 'free media' is now under threat. Only one or two papers have noticed that the internet, sms through mobile phone and social-network like face book, twitter, blogs etc. are fast emerging as new media directly in the hands of the citizens. Recent incidents in Egypt, Libya and other Arabian and African countries are showing the strength of these media. There is need for more interaction among the media persons, social thinkers and the social scientists as well as more investigation and scientific research in this area.

N. Ram's article showed the future potential growth of newspaper in India and elaborated on the ideals of free media. He clearly stated the basic problem of 'Private Treaties' leading to 'paid news' where advertisement masquerades as news. For remedies his preference is in favour of self-regulation. of media and code of practice.

Sainath showed that the media contents are far removed from the reality. When there is huge retrenchment of media personnel, media were celebrating a grand recovery of the economy. Media were celebrating rural resurgence in India when two lakhs farmers, mostly from developed states, committed suicide in 12 years (1997-2008) and eight millions rural people quitted farming and vacated villages in search of jobs (1991-2001). When only 6 correspondents cover farmer's suicide in Vidharva, 512 correspondents were covering Lakme Fashion Show in Mumbai. The system of 'Private Treaties' between media and big corporate bodies is leading to the situation where media bodies are becoming puppets. IPL coverage which is an ABC (Advertisement, Bollywood, Corporate) event, 'paid news' of the election contestants are some of the glaring examples.

Paranjy Guha Thakurata indicated the danger of paid news ----- when a particular person is reading a particular news in a paper he is unaware of the fact that what he is reading has been paid for i.e. it is an advertisement pretending to be news. Paid news during election is very crucial. When advertisement of the contestants comes as news items, it adds to the credibility in the minds of the people. Paid news need be labeled as corrupt and banned.

Sharmila Tagore pointed out that due to corporatization of media it is considering individuals as consumers and not as citizens. News is becoming entertainment and called 'infotainment'. News

must justify itself as 'good stories', otherwise no matter how relevant, it does not exist. Low quality of the reporters and low coverage of the rural areas and rural people who are under privileged are important phenomena. She piously hoped for a media reform where neither the state nor the market determines what constitute news.

Shantha Sinha took us to a new area. Sinha showed how they in the Children's Right Commission are using the news paper reports for future research and survey. Sinha rightly pointed out the danger of appearances and participation of children in the TV shows (serials and reality show). Sinha demanded a child policy for 'reporting and shows' in print and electronic media following international and UN standards.

Sashi kumar argued that the corporate run media is a threat to democracy and to the freedom of media itself. With the process of corporatization media has started 'speculating' -----not simply in its financial sphere ----- but also in its vision and in the functioning of reporting. It is becoming populist and its functioning is being determined by the market demand (based on market surveys). Civil society has to build up pressures for a media reform. Social networking through internet is emerging as an important medium of news among the citizens.

Citing examples from the Debate on Prasar Bharti Bill Mahini Bhattacharya argued that we are very keen in discussing government intervention over media but almost keep silence on the corporate control over it. Some mechanism need be developed to resist the corporate control over media and she is in favour of government intervention in this regard. She argued that even the rural people are sensitive to media reports and it is important to study their response pattern. Accountability of the media to the people is required.

Andy Bhanot described the process of how a news agency (BBC) partner with civil society and government select the theme, design the programme, pre-test the programme before telecast, measure the impact and through all these build long term solution for development. The rigour they follow for broadcasting a programme is worth studying.

Alka Malhotra elaborated the impact lessons from broadcasting a serial aimed at entertainment and the education of the audience. Her descriptions of the interaction with the viewers and based on these lessons how the consequent changes are made in designing the next episodes deserves our attention.

Biraj Patnaik gave examples of striking similarities between the Indian media and the Indian Parliament on the question of low coverage of development news. FOCUS Report (2006) showed the coverage pattern of 'the Hindu' ----- 312 articles were on 'cricket' and only 32 articles on 'anganwadies.' Nearly one third of world's children suffering from malnutrition and homelessness are in India and only two questions related to child health were raised over a period of 4 years. Fast increasing use of twitter, face book, blogs and other social networks is indicating the emergence of a new powerful media in the hands of the citizens.

Vipul Mudgal viewed that not due to the demand of the readers but due to the good wishes of the gatekeepers of the newsroom, some development stories manage to get entry. His experiences tell that for the market controlled media what is preferred is 'catchy report' and not 'hard realities'. Mudgal raised another serious question----in the absence of constitutional power to examine governance and policy people can media act as a 'Fourth State'.

M. Prabhakar through his personal experiences in Assam showed how regional language newspaper can be very popular in motivating illiterate masses in the villages.

Two issues were touched by Antara Dev Sen. Like Prabhakar she also showed how regional language paper in Gujarat fomented Gujarat riot. The other issue related to the dominance of middleclass-upper-caste-educated-urban elites in media houses. By citing examples she argued that these characteristics of the media personnel influence and shape the public discourse and national policies and is the cause of low coverage of rural and underprivileged people.

Achin Chakravorty argued that the low coverage of development news is not policy-driven but he failed to give any convincing reasons behind the low coverage of development news except that these are 'crowded out' by the propaganda motivated stories.

Azizul Haque viewed that the media is a 'consent manufacturer' -----when large number of farmers committed suicide in Maharashtra, people re-elected the same party to power. In Kerala, government prevented suicide and people rejected the party in election. Media motivated the people to vote for.

Avik Dutta drew the attention towards the threat from convergence of technology and contents of media which are shaping the human thought process. Dutta pointed out one very important problem of print media----- since electronic media is fast telecasting news, print media faces problem in satisfying its reader with the same news.

A.K. Shiva Kumar clearly stated that the media has a very strong influence not only on the every aspect of daily life and thoughts of individuals but also on public reasoning, debate and attitude. He insisted on the media's responsibility of playing a more active role in keeping the critical human development issues in the public domain. He viewed that the desired media reform requires a strong interaction between media and civil society and also between media specialists and social scientists.