

# **FUTURE OF PRINT MEDIA**

\* JUSTICE G.N. RAY

I feel delighted to address the gathering here in Surendranath College for Women. I have learnt that this college is devoted to the education of girl students from diverse background for the last 60 years. The college which was originally founded by renowned nationalist Sri Surendranath Banerjee, in 1948 to serve the partition affected families, is today one of the most prominent colleges in central Kolkata in the field of journalism and mass communication.

Today, when we are facing ongoing rapid transition from print media to online media, there is a big and natural question mark about the future of print media. However even before I address the issue in depth let me say that the printed world is here to stay far more in future and no e-communication module has the capacity to replace it.

## **History of the Print Media**

For about 600 years printing has been the basic tool of mass communication, storing and dissemination of information and knowledge. From about the second half of the last century electronic media has somewhat taken over the mass media world by a storm but the print media has not lost its sheen and its social relevance.

\*The modern printing in India originated in Goa in 1550 by Spanish Coadjutor, Brother John de Bustamante, also known as Indian Gutenberg. The first language printing press with vernacular types was established in 1557 at Vaipicotta.

\* Future of Print Media (PCI Publication)

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\* Inaugural address by Mr. Justice G.N. Ray, Chairman, Press Council of India at the Seminar on "Future of Print Media" on 17<sup>th</sup> February, 2009 at Surendranath College for Women, Kolkata

In India the concept of the freedom of the press can be referred back to the Mughal Era. An emperor like Aurangjeb allowed great freedom in news reporting, but the reports sent by the news-writers were often unreliable. The East India Company's news-writers were under greater control than under the Moghal Emperors.

The first attempt to start a newspaper in India was made in Kolkata in 1766 by William Bolts, the well known author of consideration on Indian Affairs.

On January 29, 1780 the first Indian newspaper, the **Bengal Gazette**, two pages, twelve inches by eight, popularly known as the **Hicky's Gazette** was published. During the later half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Anglo- Indian press established firm foundation in India. In 1861 there were 11 Urdu newspapers and 8 Hindi newspapers. \*By 1870 the press in Indian languages was growing rapidly. There were about sixty-two Indian languages newspapers in Bombay, about sixty in North-West Provinces, Oudh and the Central Provinces, some twenty-eight in Bengal, about nineteen in Madras (Tamil, Telgu, Malyalam and Hindustani). There were about 100,000 readers and the highest circulation of any one newspaper was about 3000.

\*\*Today the number of newspapers has grown to 99 million copies daily. Indian newspaper sales increased 11.2 percent in 2007 and 35.51 percent in the five year period. Newspaper advertising revenues in India were up 64.8 percent over the last five years.

Even when the electronic media is running the roost, the print media has actually grown in circulation and readership.

\* Future of Print Media

\*\* WAN Report: World Press Trends 2008

Though it is found that newspapers are facing hard times, but circulation world wide increased by \*2.57 percent in 2007, taking global daily sales to a new high of over 532 million copies.

The global paid - for circulation world wide increased 2.57 percent year on year and 9.39 percent over the last five years.

However, when free dailies were added to the paid - for daily circulation, global circulation increased by 3.65 per cent year on year to 573 million copies.

Free dailies now account for nearly 7 per cent of all global newspapers circulation. Print media remains the world's largest advertising medium with a 40 per cent share.\*

Timothy Balding, chief executive officer of WAN (World Association of Newspaper), said, “ Newspaper circulation has been rising or stable in three quarters of the World's countries over the past five years and in nearly 80 percent of countries in the past year.”

\*\*With literacy level rising to approx 551 million people in India, more people - rural and urban - are reading newspapers and magazines. The reach of print media has increased to an estimated 316 million readers. Print media has also attracted the global investors with maximum foreign investment in this segment. Currently Indian government has allowed Indian editions of foreign magazines publishing news and comments - periodicals falling under the news and current affairs category with 26 percent foreign investment.

\*WAN Report

\*\*Lintas Media Guide 2008

The year 2007 saw launches of many niche magazines. The print media industry has the potential to grow, as approx. 236 million people in India are still not tapped by any publication.

A survey of Indian Media and entertainment scenario jointly conducted by FICCI and Price Waterhouse Coopers recently assumed that in view of increasing literacy, there was a possibility of future growth and expansion of print media in future.

From 1990s India has witnessed an explosion in electronic media, online news services. Media has acquired such great control on the mind of the masses that it now somewhat controls their behavior to a great extent. Today compared to the print media, electronic media has grown faster.

The Indian press is experiencing a fundamental transformation because of changes occurring in the larger polity and the economy. Liberalization, globalization, and competition from the electronic media are forcing the media to adopt new technologies, become more professional and be more sensitive to the market structure. Today India's print media structure offers a product line that is dizzying in its diverse array of languages, ownership structure, and topics.

While Indian economy was growing at around 8 per cent, the media and the entertainment sector had a compound growth of 17 per cent. It is estimated that by 2008-09 it would be about Rs. 52,000/- crore. \*A report for the World Editors Forum points out that newspapers must innovate, integrate or perish. Greater emphasis needs to be placed on comment and opinion. While newspapers survived the competition from television, the challenge is more serious now in the digital age. The report indicates that the

\* An article by Dina Nath Mishra Pioneer dated 5<sup>th</sup> October, 2008.

most communication form of news consumption will be through the digital media.

The challenges ahead call for new thinking. The newspapers today face twin challenges: how to adapt to and monetize digital distribution and advertising revenue; and how to meet the fourth estate's obligation of "feeding them spinach with the ice-cream" in the interest of the civil society.

Print media is changing rapidly. The changes in technology and marketplace are responsible for the development.

In societies where these technology driven changes are more advanced, as in the West, there is a trend decline in newspaper readership and circulation. In other parts of the world, print media has maintained its place particularly in India and China.

In India almost all newspapers are completely accessible through the Internet and provide up to-date news and information. Major changes that can be expected are in the field of technology used in the printing and the number of units per each organization. Newspapers are by no means obsolete. The traditional benefits to the reader are obvious, but today's customers expect more. Newspaper organizations now-a-days identify themselves as a commercial enterprise and the newspaper as a commodity, rather an institution to serve the society.

In over two hundred years of its existence, the newspaper media has survived many challenges - from radio, television and now online, as also from time to time setbacks due to the shortages of essential inputs like paper and import restrictions etc. It has done this essentially by staying in step with the whirl of technology - seeing it not as an impediment but an impetus to growth.

Today, as we all are aware that media industry like any other industry is facing the recession. In a complete change of mood from a year ago newsprint prices are falling from the sharp high they reached in the middle of the year. They are still higher than they were a year ago. Advertising is dropping fairly sharply. Group M, the media arm of the world's leading communications agency WPP, has projected for 2009 that the average growth rate across media will drop by 50 per cent which is half the growth rate of 16 per cent in 2008.

The press in modern times has become a powerful social institution known as '*Fourth Estate*'. It facilitates the exchange of thoughts and helps to solve many complex processes on a large scale in the shortest time. The press becomes an indispensable weapon to stir the conscience of the people, to enlighten them with new ideas. The press is also an instrument to develop modern culture ushered in the science and arts.

Newspaper reading is a habit. The importance of print media has not diminished with the advent of electronic media. The fact remains that the print media still holds its own position which can never be threatened by the onslaught of new media. In fact print media can benefit from the new technology.

If the print media is to survive the onslaught of the electronic media and retain its glory as the thinking media, it has to look inward and do a serious introspection.

At no time in the history of the Indian press, the need for self-evaluation has been greater than now.

Press Council of India in its publication 'Future of Print Media' has given following recommendations for promoting and strengthening the print media.

## **1. Third Press Commission**

Nearly two decades have elapsed since the Second Press Commission in India had examined the status of the print media and submitted its report in 1982. The UNESCO sponsored Mac Bride Commission's report (Many Voice one World-Communication and Society, Today and Tomorrow) is also over two decades old. The world has changed considerably in the interim period with the emergence of a unipolar world, global market and fast development of the Internet civilization and culture. Media is in a flux both within and outside India. The number and variety of newspapers has multiplied in the last two decades. A revolution has also occurred in production and communications technology.

At the national level, it is time that a Third Press Commission is set up to study and suggest ways and procedures to enable print media to fulfill its functions in the new environment.

## **2. Internal Ombudsmen**

To promote credibility and response to readers' reactions the institution of Internal Ombudsmen may be strengthened/created in big newspapers. Newspapers with a minimum circulation (say 1 lakh per issue) may be required to appoint an independent Ombudsmen.

## **3. Cheaper newsprint for small papers**

Genuine small newspapers may be helped with subsidized newsprint.

#### **4. PIB Website**

PIB Website already in operation may be strengthened and harnessed to the maximum possible extent to provide readable language services, photo services, feature service (including science service), cartoons, comic strips and so on.

#### **5. Rural telephone exchanges**

More and more rural telephone exchanges should be provided for better news gathering facilities for newspapers-big and small.

#### **6. Convergence benefit**

Many Websites are doing extremely well by combining audio-visual and the print media. Since the future of the media is considerably in the convergence technology, a special media technology committee may examine if the Indian print media can benefit from the convergence.

#### **7. Co-operatives of small newspapers**

Co-operatives of small newspapers in particular, may be encouraged to run cost effective modern printing presses, internet connections and organize workshops for journalists and printers for improving the overall quality of small newspapers.

#### **8. Insurance cover for journalists/editors**

Journalists/editors should be provided adequate insurance cover by owners and insurance companies through special

schemes to protect them from pressure, forced resignations, risk of life and so on.

#### **9. Annual Accounts**

Newspapers should be required by law to publish their annual accounts, with full details of how much is spent on news operations and how much is diverted for other purposes.

#### **10. Social Audit of Press**

Social audit of newspapers should be undertaken with regular periodicity to evaluate and assess their performance vis a vis the society and its problems, particularly of its weaker sections, and the development needs of the nation and the inputs provided by the press to redress them.

#### **11. Media Watch Groups**

Media Watch Groups at regional/local levels should be encouraged to monitor the contents of the newspapers at regular intervals, with a special eye on the suppression of important news, distortion and manipulation of the news, planting of news, violations of journalistic ethics, etc.

#### **12. Companies and Co-operatives of journalists**

To ensure security of job and independence of journalists, the companies where the journalists have a major shareholding as in some other countries and co-operatives of journalists should be encouraged.

### **13. Neighbourhood or Community Newspapers**

The neighbourhood or community newspapers should be encouraged not only to publicise more local news, the problems and issues affecting the local population and encouraging greater interaction between the people and the press and more effective day to day participation of the people in the governance of the country at all levels.

### **14 Access to information**

The legislation on access to information from all authorities from local to the national level and from all institutions whether in the private or public sector whose activities have a bearing on public welfare should be insisted on. Ultimately, it is the media which can deliver the benefits of such information to the people and also pursue it. The media also then does not have to depend upon speculation or unreliable secondary information to inform and educate the people.

Even though in the present day scenario, the future of Print Media is not bleak but has the potentiality to thrive, care and caution should be taken by the Print Media to ensure its role of being watchdog of the nation in the true sense justifying its position as Fourth Estate . The erosion of journalistic ethics, increasing propensity to be driven by market forces like any other commercial organization, to derive more and more profit at the cost of sacrificing the role of Fourth Estate, playing in the hands of big commercial enterprises and corporate sectors from which large revenues are received by the Newspapers, have put a serious question mark on the credibility of the Print Media by and large. The unhappy trend in resorting to

sensationalisation of news and trivialisation of news contents in the pursuit of earning more profits are disturbing phenomena in Media scenario including the Print Media globally and India is no exception to this malady. It is unfortunate that serious issues to be addressed by the Newspapers have taken a back seat to accommodate sensational news and inside stories of popular cine stars, sports personalities, artists, political figures etc with a view to gain cheap popularity and earn greater profit. Profit cannot be the only motive of a Newspaper. The profession of a journalist is more a mission than just a profession. In India, media enjoys freedom of speech and expression. Even though such freedom guaranteed by the Constitution of India to its citizens had not been specifically mentioned for the Media, the Supreme Court of India at the earliest opportunity, declared such right for the media in 1950 itself. Unfortunately media is assuming greater freedom of speech and expression in it than that of a citizen even though the media does not enjoy any greater freedom of speech and expression . Being the voice of people the media enjoys same freedom of speech and expression with all the limitations which a citizen enjoys. Rights have corresponding duties and obligations and media will do well in remembering such duties and responsibilities to body polity and should not make inroad on the privacy and dignity of the citizens by assuming liberal latitudes being enjoyed by the media. The Print media and for that matter media as a whole must act with the orientation of Bahujan Hitaya Bahujana Sukhay (for the welfare and well being of many) and if the paramount interest of the nation remains the goal to be achieved by the media, many of the shortcomings and degeneration in the media functioning can be overcome. I am confident that the rich tradition of India's Print media will not be allowed to be tarnished

and the Print media will be held high in esteem by not only the readers in India but readers all over the world.

Namaskar.