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Journalism

Teaching Political Journalism in India : An Introductory Study

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ABSTRACT

Political journalism is accepted as an important area of journalism. The origin of political journalism can be traced back in parallel with the rise of democracy. Although due to industrialization and free press in Europe, political journalism originated much earlier than South Asia and India. The origin of political journalism in India can be traced back to

British colonial India. After Independence political journalism in India has achieved more professionalism and stability. Even being the most important beat in reporting in any media be it broadcast, print or radio journalism, political journalism is not taught as a separate discipline in journalism colleges and institutes. The present paper focuses on evolution of political journalism, present situation and how it is taught in Indian institutes

KEYWORDS: Political Journalism, Evolution, Teaching, Academicians, curriculum, India

Evolution of Political Journalism:-

The notion of political journalism which is adversarial, critical and independent of the state was first formed in the early seventeenth century, against the backdrop of the English Civil War and its aftermath. In that conflict, which pitted the forces of absolute monarchy against those in favor of democratic reform and the sovereignty of parliament, journalism played a key role (Conboy, 2004).

The foundations of modern political journalism lie in the seventeenth century between the monarchy and parliament which led to the English civil war and parliament which led to the English Civil War and subsequent progress towards democratization. Before these events journalists like all in feudal society, were subjects of the absolute monarchy, subordinate to the demands of church and state. Early periodicals such as *Mercurius Gallobelgicus, launched* in 1594, provided coverage of politics, military affairs, economic trends and the like, but always within strict restrictions on content imposed by the feudal state (Jorgensen, Hanitzsch, 2009).

But as capitalism developed and legitimacy of feudal power began to be challenged by a rising bourgeoisie, journalists started to take sides in the intensifying class struggle. As conflict between crown and parliament grew into civil war in 1640s England, controls on the content of the press were loosened, and titles proliferated in response to the rising demand for news and analysis. The news books of this period – forerunners of the modern newspaper- were more than merely reporters of information but "bitter and aggressive instruments of literary and political faction" (Raymond, 1996, p.13). Journalists took sides, becoming partisans and activists in the shaping of political reality, as opposed to mere reporters of it.

The publication in 1644 of John Milton's defense of intellectual and press freedom, *Aeropagiyicia*, consolidated the emerging culture of critical, committed political journalism, provided ideological legitimation for the early public sphere which it formed. Henceforth, there was growing demand for political coverage that was "free" from the restrictions of state and religious authority; the technological means of providing such coverage through print media; and growing numbers of literate readers, empowered as citizens and able to take advantage of this political coverage in individual and collective decision—making.(ibid) The first daily newspaper in English, the Daily Courant, appeared in 1703, Daniel Defoe's Review, described by Martin Conboy (2004, p.60) as "the first influential journal of political comment" launched in 1706.

To become true profession political journalism required an institutionalization of journalism as a true profession (Kuhn, Raymond, Neveu, Erik 2013) several changes in the mid-nineteenth century press triggered a process of role redefinition. The first change was the freedom of press. In USA in 1791 through the First Amendment, in Britain in the mid-nineteenth century with the abolition of taxes on knowledge and in France in 1881 with the passing of historic Press Act, helped the press to proliferate. The rise in literacy and the extension of vot-

ing rights and of politicization combined with urban development of the industrial revolution to create and channel a potential readership interested in politics. Technical progress (including railways and rotary press) the growth in advertising all lowered the cost of production and distribution of newspapers. Journalism became a profession, clearly different from political or literary activities. In this new situation, political journalism is first of all the simple application to political news of the rules and practices which structure the young profession of journalism: the importance of news-gathering and the institutionalization of a specific order of discourse.

Second change developed within the journalism field. Broadcast journalists, especially from television channels, came to occupy dominant position in this field. Considered by their colleagues from press as mere readers of dispatches, unable to create depth of analysis traditionally the domain of press journalists, they slowly began to reverse the power balance. Their rising strength came from the central position assumed by television in the political field. It is also because of 'live' news that gave the broadcasting media the power of speed. Finally, the weight of the audience gave the legitimacy of the ratings to broadcasting journalists and anchormen, a new regime based on audience and instantaneous coverage.

Another remarkable change in the journalistic field came from the recruitment angle. More educated journalists, trained to practice a more thoughtful/analytical journalism, influenced by developments in the social sciences and especially the growth of opinion polls. The rationalization of political journalism was visible during the Roosevelt presidency in the United States and thirty years later France (Bloniaux 1998). It dramatically changed the relationship with politicians, allowing journalists also to mobilize a *vox popili* unerringly fresh thanks to the endless flow of polls. Fourth development in political journalism came from the creation of private networks and loosening of direct governmental control over radio and television. Combined with the growing weight of the advertising revenue in the funding of public networks, reinforced greater competition for audience and in political

These all changes influenced the 'packaging' of news, the traditional ingredient of journalistic practice. In political journalism it assumes a prominent importance due to double-bind logic created, on the one hand, by the pressure for ever shorter formats of articles and sound bites and, on the other; by the growing flow of media events and institutional communication produced by political sources. More than ever, the political journalists must select and reselect political information and wrap it in attractive packaging (Hallin 1997)

Political journalism in India

The origin of political journalism varies from one nation to another. In India the birth of political journalism can be traced back to the colonial India, when India was fighting its struggle for freedom. Historically politics formed the central theme of press in India. Freedom fighters, social reformers and political leaders used press as strong weapon to fight colonial power.

Many of the nationalist leaders were closely connected with newspapers and some were editors as well. Even the father of nation Mahatma Gandhi himself was a journalist and wrote extensively his views in *The Harijan* and *Young India*. In Lahore, Lala Lajpat Rai edited *The People* and *Bande Matram*. In Calcutta, C.R. Das was at the helm of affairs of *Forward* and *Liberty*. Annie Besant was editor of *New India*. Sir Pheroz Shah Mehta had a big hand in launching *Bombay Chronicle*.

Immediately after independence, the people expected that newspapers would serve people of India, and their main concern would be for the peoples of India. But to run a newspaper you need funds wherefrom the ideology of newspaper is declared. Some pro-British Newspapers like *The Times of India, The Pioneer, The Statesman, The Mail, The Civil and Military Gazette,* they also maintained high journalistic standards but never backed freedom movement are still selling and flourishing.

The importance of the print media is more explained by the role of the press during India's struggle for independence. A major break with the old tradition came in 1975 with the impositions including press censorship. The emergency experience signalled the end of one kind of journalism and heralded a more vigorous, investigative style of news gathering and writing. It also paved the way for greater coverage of human rights issues and the conditions of marginalized social group (Prusty, Nalini Kumari (1997).

In India, the role of press has never been underestimated, because the press is a fundamental institution of society which plays a very vital role in creating, shaping, and reflecting the public opinion in a democratic society. Intimately concerned with the functioning of the state and the policy it follows, its contribution to socio-economic and political development is quite significant.

Being the largest democracy in the world, the country is more politics driven, which often sidelines the other major issues until they ripen enough to explode. So the political journalism is important and main focus of Indian newspapers.

In present situation the political journalists work in great strain other than covering the event and getting it published or aired in time. These pressures range from the owners of the media of the organization, advertising/ commercial pressures/ priorities, labor and technological issues, political pressures of ruling parties and opposition parties, possibilities of government censorship and lobbying. (Ravindran, 1997, Vilanilam 2005).

Present Journalistic Trends:

When anyone can publish today with the help of new media which allows everyone to be a source of news, the issue of the confusion about who is a journalist looking into is worth. Moreover, it is both useful and interesting to look at the future of the media and how they can influence social movements and societies to help them become better. (Menelaou, Nikki 2014)

The position of the media's political journalist looks rather lugubrious. Either they play the entertainment card, in which case they stand a good chance of being outplayed by entertainment hosts or non-specialist journalists, or they stay in a position of 'critical expertise' are also visible in the press. A political journalist is more and more caught in a trap of communication, mirroring in real time, without distance or research, seeing only what the powers are ready to let it see (Plenel, 1994:98).one might wonder if the very success of this journalism does not have a boomerang effect. Journalist's criticism of corruption (Uriarte 1998) or of a 'crisis of representation' (Neveu, 1993) - triggers a disenchanted perception of politics.

The crisis also comes from the dramatic growth of the imperatives of audience and profit maximization. These stimulate a market- driven journalism (Underwood 1993; McManus 1994) and an organized rationalization of journalistic rhetoric and formats (Barbier-Bouvet 1994). The result of more and more profit maximization on journalism, when broadsheets like times of India, Hindustan Times & Asian age devote more space to cooking, celebrity news, television schedules and soft news.

The pressure is more visible in the journalists who work for television, like NDTV, AAJTAK, STAR NEWS etc where the professional achievement is based on speed and 'live' coverage makes the distance and time for analysis required by 'critical expertise' increasingly difficult to achieve. Even in the press, one of the impacts of the race for audiences is to value in each and every news section the culture of scoops and scandals which allows for an original combination of investigative reporting and sensationalism. This new journalistic culture sharpens the competition for news slots to the detriment of political journalists. Paul Goupil, a leading member of the newsroom at the leading French daily Oust-France, comments: 'Politics is losing ground. The weeklies give it less space. There is a move away from it. For journalists, it is better to cover the contaminated blood affair than the Socialist Party Conference. (Interview, 8 July 1993).

Elections which are one of the most important aspects of political journalism, keeps the journalists always on tender hooks. Be it campaigns, announcements and the voting process the political journalists are always on high alert. This how one of the India's veteran political journalist Rajdeep Sardesai asserts, "One of the professional hazards of being a political journalist is that you are expected to predict exact election outcomes. It's meant to be your USP, the basis for your dinner invite. Yet, over the last few weeks, as one has been repeatedly asked to predict election 2009, the response has been to simply and honestly say, "I don't know." (Sardesai, Rajdeep 2010)

Prerequisites of a Political Journalist:

The working days of political journalists are dominated by an unspectacular routine, the tedious exercises in networking and requirement to turn redundant and unspectacular political routines into exciting news. To sum up all the responsibilities here are some inherent qualities that define political journalist:

Networking:

Networking in the political domain poses specific challenges. Unlike local reporters, state reporters work with informants from the elite. In this context, engagement with leaders is driven by the desire to gain admission to the inner circles of political power and turn social closeness into a career advantage.

Social accounts recognize the importance of reciprocity in exchange relations between politicians and journalists (Manning 2001). In writing up reports news personnel take into account their obligations to their sources. Their knowledge and influence is valued which gives them significant influence over politician's practices of public image making. The mutual desire for closeness, as well as the eagerness of both sides to engage with each other's priorities, creates shared arena. The reasoning in this shared area influences political dynamics and press coverage. (Rao, Ursula (2010).

Avoid being a spin-doctor:-

The value of the news article exceeds its content and the intentions communicated through its content. It is a commodity fetish that foments social relations. The worth of the printed news as the commodity is generated in social actions reflecting the assumption that access to mass media arguments influence. News releases its power to act as catalyst in social relations. (Ursula Rao, 2010).

Politicians often accuse their opponents of claiming to be honest & seek the truth while using spin tactics to manipulate public opinion. Business and politicians alike are increasingly hiring journalists as their communication advisors & for many journalists it means a permanent career change. (www.nordiclabour journal.org)

It brings bad name & suspicion on their objective reporting. Jakiob Hoyer who was editor of Jyllands Posten, Danish daily broadsheet newspaper, recalls that when he was given a new job as spin-doctor, he had to clear out his desk at the newspaper and leave the building immediately and it was something like a shame because media lose out on insight into politics which they cannot get otherwise. (Preisler, Marie 2014)

Travel to key constituencies to gather information:

Elections are the peak time for political reporting, but it is the time when political journalists are showered with news from all corners. So they should be interested in collecting information from all corners &

travel vigorously to cover all the relevant information. Not only are excellent contacts vital for getting stories but to be a good journalist, you never know who might be in a position to open doors for you as ones career progresses. (Gunn, Shiela 2011)

Knowledge about the beat: -

Famous British journalist Peter Riddell, asserts that to be a good political journalist you need to be interested in politics, develop a good understanding of what has happened in politics in the past thirty or forty years. (Gunn, Sheila 2011)

It is important to develop an understanding of what is the agenda of the political party? How do you feel strongly about that political party? What are the past achievements of that political party?

With the passage of time the journalists develop the skills and are more concerned with ability to decipher and divulge the tricks and hidden tactics of politicians. The interpretative evolution of journalism reaches a new stage, evident in the huge number of articles and reports whose goal is to decipher hidden agendas, moving beyond the evaluation of a leader or a parliamentary bill.

Patience to Unravel the Important Information:

Sometimes to write a news story is not so laborious task, if the information in given prior in form of press release or press briefing, or if covering a speech of politician. But political reporting is much more than a pack reporting. When elections are over, press conferences are not held so frequently, the news is not available so easily. The political journalist has to unravel the facts to dig out news worthy item.

In present situation where 24*7 cycle of relentless rolling news, of fax machines, mobile phones and parliament live on radio, TV, internet, blogging tweeting is so rampant, the job has become much more challenging. Sometimes a press conference where journalists are invited to inform about the news which a political leader wants to disclose can provide useful information to the journalist more that what he/she was expecting.

In January 2000 Ram Prakash Gupta went on his first official visit as chief minister of Uttar Pradesh to Delhi. He had invited journalists to a press conference for this occasion. The conference was a courtesy to the press, to get to know each other and discuss political view. Towards the end one of the reporters raised a question regarding the Ayodhya controversy. He wanted to know whether present Chief Minister also a leader of BJP supported the demand for temple to Ram at Ayodhya. This event has caused lot of unrest among the Muslim & Hindu communities since 1996, when the mosque was illegally destroyed by Hindu Fundamentalist, & BJP government had actively created a movement to demand the construction of temple at the mythical birthplace of god-king Ram in Ayodhya (see Brious 2005, Davis 1996, Elst 2003, Engineer 1990, Hartung 2004, Nancy et.al1995, Rajgopal 1994, 2001, van der Veer 1997)

The question of the fate of the temple took Ram Prakash Gupta by surprise. And his response that he openly admitted that he personally supported the temple project, by saying that 'temple should be built as peacefully as the mosque had been destroyed'. The TV journalists had their quotation of the day, and the press a perfect headline. (Rao, Ursula 2010)

How Political Journalism is taught in Classrooms:

Browse any institute in India that teaches mass communication & journalism, what their focus is to introduce the students with the elements of news writing, and concept of news. Their main focus is teaching reporting, writing news, the ethical and legal issues in journalism. Here in this research paper the author has taken three institutes in India teaching mass communication & Journalism, viz, Asian College of Journalism in Chennai, A.J.Kidwai, MCRC Jamia millia Islamia in New Delhi, And Indian Institute of Mass Communication in New Delhi.

To make them aware of journalism they are given training of basic journalism skills, how media organizations work and how the editors edit the copy.

Rarely any institute teaches the political journalism as a separate

paper. The students are taught about the various beats that later on they make their preference which one to choose. According to every beat the students have to write assignments, give presentation and have to finish class exercises. It is only during internships that they are exposed to the real situation of reporting. But even then they have to report many things and are yet to be assigned any specific beat.

It's only at the time of recruitment which happens after a lot of legwork and after facing number of rejections if the recruitment does not happen in campus. The trainee reporters are assigned tasks to report from health, page 3, environment, etc. but a journalist who has at least two to three years of experience tries hands on political journalism. We can find a small number of women who do political reporting and are mostly seen doing features, page 3, or health.

The curriculums of journalism colleges or institutes are limited to educating a student about the craft of journalism. How theories, models and concepts have influenced the thinking of journalism. But the real techniques are cached only in the field, after you join an organization. Contacts which forms the key element in political reporting happens only after hand on experience in field and many years of hard work.

Some of the journalism institutes in India like Asian College of Journalism make sure to provide students of journalism to provide cross platform and multimedia journalism gaining currency, students across all streams are exposed to the fundamentals of storytelling for the web, including an introduction to some of the state-of-the-art tools and applications, recording and producing audio and video, search engine optimization and photo journalism. During this course, all students are required to attend a series of substantive lectures, designed to introduce them to the history of the media, to the legal and other aspects of professional journalism, and to many of the critical economic, political, social, and environmental issues of our times. These lectures, offered by outstanding scholars and media practitioners, reflect a central conviction of the Trustees: that journalist, especially in Asian countries today, have an important role to play in increasing public understanding of the fundamental and often complex problems of our societies, avoiding the traps of superficiality and dilettantism. Critical analysis of the existing news media is another important element of the curriculum in the first term. This exercise helps future journalists become aware that the way in which an event is viewed and reported depends to a great extent on the imperatives of the medium in question and on restrictions imposed by shifting outside influences. There are at least five courses that students have to attend in first term i.e. Reporting, Writing and Editing; Tools of the Modern Journalist; Key Issues in Journalism; Media Perspectives; and The Media, Law and Society. In second term the students begin to specialize, and learn to report, edit, and produce pieces in the form required by the particular stream they have chosen. Under the guidance of professionals, they develop their skills in interviewing, researching and news gathering, and sharpen their ability to recognize and develop stories. They use the Internet and other information and data resources to discover new angles to the stories they are working on as well as new ideas for stories. Students in the print stream begin to publish a regular lab newspaper, while students in the broadcast streams start producing TV and Radio news programmes and documentaries. New Media students produce a weekly e-zine of news and public affairs (www.acjnewsline.org)

Another Premier institute of Mass communication & Journalism, Anwar Jamal Kidwai, Mass communication Research centre, Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi, launched a course namely MA in Convergent Journalism.

Launched in 2007, the Convergent Journalism course was conceived as a timely response to the changes that journalism confronted with the rapid transformation of the global mediascape. The Masters Programme offers an integrated education in Print, Broadcast (Radio and Television), Online, and Photo Journalism. The course seeks to produce skilled and trained journalists, for all the four streams of journalism as reporters, news writers, copy editors and producers. The graduates of the course are expected to develop a sound knowledge of national and international issues and distinguish themselves by their professionalism and commitment to media ethics, social concerns and issues of human rights and civil liberties.

Students are educated to use and integrate old and new media for a wide range of social interventions. They are expected to have a sound awareness of contemporary issues like democracy, urbanization, migration, environmental sustainability, technological change and the many implications of the process of globalization. (www.jmi.ac.in)

One of the leading institute teaching journalism in India is Indian Institute of Mass communication which was inaugurated in 1965 by the then Minister for Information and Broadcasting, Smt. Indira Gandhi. IIMC is an autonomous body funded by Government of India through the Ministry of Information and broadcasting Govt. of India. Initially the institute organized training courses mainly for Central Information Service Officers and undertook research studies on a modest scale. Then gradually IIMC started training communication professionals working in various media/publicity outfits of the central/state governments and public sector organizations. Over the years the IIMC has expanded and now offers post graduate diploma course in English Journalism, Hindi Journalism, Urdu journalism and Advertising & PR. It was started for the purpose of improving the standards of communication journalism in country. One of the important fact of the institute is that it has produced one of the noted journalists in Indian media like Deepak Chorasia, Editor-in chief India News, Nidhi Razdan, anchor of NDTV 24 *7, Chitra Subramnuim, known for breaking the infamous Bofors Scandal. Also IIMC is responsible to produce notable academicians in media like Vartika Nanda known for her books Tinka Tinka Tihar & Television & Crime Reporting in Hindi.(The Hindu 05/27/2004)

How Academicians Teach Political Reporting?

After years of experience in journalism, in different media organizations, many journalists try their hands in teaching the students of journalism. Initially it does not happen as a full fledged job, but offer as guest lectures. Because by teaching on part time basis gives them freedom to continue as a journalist and also utilize their experience in teaching.

There is no denying fact that there is nothing more valuable for teaching their craft than showing students how the professionals do it. (Epstein, Holly(2009). From interviewing and reporting to photography and page design to making ethical decisions, the real actors i.e. are the best guide. Even in India the teachers who teach the theoretical background were usually from other fields usually from sociology, political science or history.

One of the Doyens of journalism K. M. Shrivastava who has covered many political events in India & abroad like Urido Conference, World Energy Congress, is of opinion political journalism is much broader, one can meet large number of leaders, attend summits, conferences, follow events while in teaching one is confined to students. As an academician you teach students how to cover those events. (Interview 24-07-2015)

On asking how theory and practice interact in journalism classes, most of the journalists turned academicians agree, that journalists learn from practice and experience in the field, however principles of communication theories are useful in understanding the communication which is the basic job of communication. (Interview 24-07-2015)

All the academicians advocate the usage of more and more practicals rather than teaching only theory in the classrooms. e.g. K.M.Shrivastava, who started his career in academics in 1985 as as Head of the department of Journalism and Mass Communication in Punjabi University Patiala believes teaching journalism through practicals and encourages students to learn from practicals and had started a student's newspaper back in 1985 namely 'Patrakar' to provide the necessary exposure to the students. His book News Reporting and Editing first published in 1987 has become a standard text, has a separate chapter on Reporting Parliament. When he became course director of News Agency Journalism Course at Indian Institute of Mass Communication, he encouraged the foreign working journalist participants of the course to function as New Delhi correspondent of their media houses back home.

Another journalist turned academician Vidhanshu Kumar Assistant Professor in Amity University, teaching Journalism and New media, believes in teaching journalism with including more practicals and by analyzing the political situation the country is going on, "I try to make

it as practical as possible. For example last year during 2014 elections, I did a project in which students reported on the election and their stories were published in portal created for the purpose. (Some of the stories were picked up by rediff website and are available on http://www.project-india.com/") (Interview22-07-2015)

But there are also some drawbacks, about how media industry, the policy makers and academicians lack of interaction. One of the faculty Tawheed Rehman rues, "academicians who have been in the media industry know the nuances of industry much better, inform the students with a much better perspective, but are seldom counted when it comes to implementing the policies of government about media". (Interview 20-07-2015)

Conclusion:

In Indian media schools the political journalism is not taught as a separate subject, but as type of reporting. the students reading journalism are introduced to the topics, like covering elections, media ethics, press conferences, parliamentary proceedings, etc which are the main themes of political journalism. Yet politics which is the most important news story for any news media is not taught as separate subject of journalism. Also many media practitioners turned academicians admit that they teach students what they have learnt in field and not much what has been mentioned in theories.

Due to digitization the landscape of media is changing rapidly, citizen journalism, social networking sites like face book, twitter, and the news moves more rapidly than before becoming breaking news on media channels. The institutions teaching journalism are now turning to convergent journalism and teaching new media technology. But one cannot deny the fact the writing and reporting style of a mature trained, experienced journalist is much more explicit than an amateur writer who breaks the news on face book or twitter. So the traditional way of teaching writing skills to improve the writing skills of a journalist is still valid. One of the known preeminent journalists and theoretician, James W. Carey, few scholars could match his writing skills and fewer still could match his intellect. James Carey in his famous theory on journalism known as 'ritual theory' wherein communication-the construction of symbolic reality-represents, maintains, adapts, and shares the beliefs of a society in time. In short, the ritual view conceives communication as a process that enables and enacts societal transformation. So the journalists whose primary duty is to inform the people in best possible way have to go through training and understand the nuances of journalism. The best way to understand the skills of journalism, ethics, and exposure to various kinds of media is possible only through class rooms which later on serve the base for a journalist professionally.

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