

## Constructivism and Spin doctoring in Indian Mass Media since Globalization-Prospects of Credible Alternative Media – An Analytical Study

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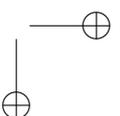
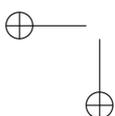
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**T**HE history of Indian journalism could be divided into a number of ways. Some classify the history of Indian journalism into pre-independence and post-independence (Sundeeep R Muppidi, 2008) eras. But to my deep study and comprehension, the history of Indian journalism could be divided into four categories: 1. Pre-independent era 2. Pre-emergency era 3. Post-emergency era and, 4. Post liberalization or globalization era.

In doing so, I am trying to discern the media trends between specific periods and to correlate them (the trends) with the contemporary political situations prevailing then. It is also my aim to gain important insights in the transitions of history of Indian journalism as to its consistent and avowed role as a fourth estate and to arrive at an outline where it exhibited deviant behavior. In the process the study presumes to speculate the future of the Indian traditional media vis a vis the *alternate media* which is coming up as a strong contender. Towards this I begin with the pre-independence era firstly as it had immense potential to give leads to the initial character of the media in the immediate post independent era.

“The pre-independence phase started with the acknowledged history of the first news paper in India in 1776 by William Bolts, even though it wasn’t until 1780 that James Augustus Hicky started with the *Bengal Gazette*, also known as Hicky’s *Gazette* (Keval.J.Kumar, 1981:63, Sundeeep R M, 2008), writes Sundeeep R Muppidi. According to him, this phase was marked by the different news papers with two distinct ideologies: One was run by the Englishmen who supported the British rule, while the second was mostly by the educated Indians who promoted nation-building and, later, the freedom struggle.

Commenting on the rigor of fight and the suffering the Indian press had put up and undergone during the British period, M. Chalapathi Rao (popularly



known as MC, a veteran freedom fighter and journalist) writes, “The over 200 year history of the Indian press, from the time of Hicky to the present day is the history of a struggle for freedom, which has not yet ended. There have been alternating periods of the freedom and of restrictions amounting to repression. The pioneering works on the Indian press, like that of Margarita Barns, were stories of arbitrariness and despotism, of reforms and relaxation. The story of the Indian press is a story of steady expansion but also one of press laws”.

Margarita Barns (1940) opined that, “Political and social corruption was rife among the British, sent to rule the country when Hicky, a printer by profession, launched his *Gazette* ‘in order to purchase freedom for his mind and soul. He described the *Bengal Gazette* (later called *Hicky’s Gazette*) as ‘a weekly political and commercial paper open to all parties but influenced by none. In fact it was a sheet of scandals”.

Though, James Augustus Hicky’s *Bengal Gazette* was founded in 1780, more than half a century-and a half after the first English news paper was launched in London, the historians consider Hicky as a dubious pioneer in Indian journalism, says N.Ram (Foreword to *Journalism in India*.2001:xiii). According to him ‘the honor rightly belongs to James Silk Buckingham, an intrepid Whig Campaigner and a progressive thinker and writer whose achievement belongs to the early nineteenth century. It was James Buckingham who was the first to give recognition to the voices of Indian freedom struggle (N.Ram: 2001: xiii).

Interestingly N.Ram divided the pre-independence period of journalism in India into several stages. 1. *Preparatory phase* (1780-1818). 2. *Adversarial Phase* (1818-1947). Further *adversarial phase* was divided into four stages. Stage I (1818-1868), Stage II (1868-1919), Stage III (1919-1937) and Stage IV (1937-47).

In doing so, N.Ram clearly established how the adversarial role became more and more striking and led to the foundations of the nationalist and anti-imperialist struggle. In the process, however, two lines or trends became quite apparent. One was to support the colonial rule and its policies, while the second one was attacking the colonial rule. These developments led to the establishing of a pro-raj news dailies such as *Times of India and the Statesman*, and an attacking print media—*Anand Bazar Patrika* (1868), and *The Hindu* (1878).

Stage III (1919-1937) had especially seen the differentiation of the Indian press polarizing into 'moderate' and 'radical' in the *adversarial role*, a most important observation that N.Ram (2001) made about these media trends during this time. 'The founding of the Indian National Congress in 1885 reminds us that the history of the patriotic Indian press pre-dates the history Indian party politic's, opined N.Ram (2001: xiii).

During Stage IV (1937-1947) media not only became quite assertive, but also began to take advantages of new technological developments to launch a tirade against the British Raj. The rivalry between the pro-British press and the pro-independence press became quite intense. Jawaharlal Nehru founded *National Herald* in (1938) which continued to be a flag ship and ideological news paper of Indian National Congress during and after independence.

The brief sum up of the media developments in the pre-independent era offered us insights as to how the media performed the *adversarial role* during the British rule and in what spirit it moved on to the stage of post independent era.

Tracing the establishment of the deep *adversarial* and *constructive role* the media played in the pre-independent era is quite essential and central to my present study in order to find how the *constructivism* and the *adversarial role*, which continued to the post-independent era and later, assumed different contours in alignment with the different political regimes that came into power in the run up to the arguments whether the media credibility as a loyal opposition in the future continues or would it yield space to *new media* replace it as an *alternate media*.

Before dealing with the role of *adversarial journalism* and *constructivism*, in the post and immediate after independence – August 15, 1947, I wish to deal with the mood and the behavior of Indian media with regard to its relations with the then governments. Such an understanding or perception is very important to distinguish the media behavior and response both after the independence, prior to emergency and post emergency and during and after globalization.

To begin with, the following paragraph establishes the mood of the Indian press as on the date and after the independence.

In the first flush of freedom, the press rode which the current and was sympathetic and cooperative with the new national government which was faced with a deluge of problems plunging the country into strife and bloodshed and

instability. A section however had not got over the hang over of colonial rule and indulged in fanning communal passions and hatred in scurrilous writing. Sensational journalism became a fashion with some and the country's interests ceased to be paramount. A Bengali editor is quoted by a writer as having confessed that he adopted a communal policy 'because playing down riots and disturbances curbed his sales'. 'Even the newsboys', the editor is quoted as having said, 'refused to touch my paper if my rivals report a large number of deaths than I do'. The leaders who were running the government and who had earlier established complete rapport with the press during the freedom struggle were now saddened that the press as a whole was not with them in meeting the challenges faced by the new-born government. They (the press) seemed to behave, the leaders thought, as an opposition force as they did so during the British regime when the need was to play a constructive and cooperative role (Rangawsami P. 2001: 167).

The above paragraph aptly sums up the then mood of the Indian press, despite India being newly liberated from the colonial rule.

Commenting on the mood of Indian print media in the immediate post independence, Sunanda K Datta Ray (2000) writes that, 'The 1950 Constitution divided authority between the Central Government and the states – 25 of them now-in a finely balanced union whose sovereignty rests with the people. However, Congress's long hold on power at both Central and state levels identified the party of independence with the country, and made nationalism synonymous with the former's secular socialist creed. Even independent publications were for a long time unquestioning supporters of Congress and, therefore, of the governments it dominated (2000: 47).

Frank Moraes, editor of the *Times of India*, described the attitude of Indian editors in the early years of independence as follows:

In the early years of independence, Indian editors had to make up their minds on what attitude they should adopt vis-à-vis Nehru's newly established government. . . . I decided after some reflection and consultation that since Nehru was faced virtually with no opposition in Parliament and since a democratic government could not effectively express itself in the absence of an opposition, the press should take upon itself to function as an unofficial opposition outside Parliament, exercising that role with responsibility and circumspection.' (Witness to an Era: 1977).

The Hindu, writing on the same subject opined that even barely a year after freedom was achieved the suspicion and distrust which clouded the relations between the alien government and the nationalist press ‘continued in a very perceptible manner under the Free India government’ (Rangaswami, 2001: 167). It further said that in the new circumstances the ‘Press may be expected to take a more detached as also a more responsible view of its obligations on the one hand to the government of the day, and on the other to the people as a whole, opposing official policy when it must, supporting it when it can and at all times bringing instructive opinion to bear from different angles on all important issues so that the people may decide with full knowledge (Rangaswami, 2001: 167).

Jawaharlal Nehru was one of the earliest in the government to voice his displeasure against the press. He wondered, at the All India News Papers Editors Conference in 1952, ‘For whom do we want the press freedom—for the writer or for the owner to coerce employees to write against his conscience?’. Seven years later Nehru again, in his speeches made during 1959, both in Chandigarh and Bombay, questioned the bonafides of the editors. He said it had been taken for granted that editors of Indian news papers could not be expected to realize or speak the truth when discussing certain aspects of state policy. He recalled Stanley Baldwin’s (British Prime Minister) remark about news papers that ‘they enjoyed power without responsibility in India who could stand up to news paper owner and to advertisers’ (Rangaswami, P. 2001: 168).

On the other hand, the irony of the Indian press that time was that it was largely dependent on Nehru and Nehru’s speeches, statements and policies related to various national and international issues, writes Rangaswami (2001). It was difficult to sell a paper without Nehru or his statements in the first page. ‘Having a press meet with the editors of the media is a luxury for both Nehru and the media’, says M.V. Kamath (2009), former international correspondent for Times of India and the former editor of *Illustrated Weekly of India*. Similar views on Nehru’s press meets were expressed by Dr.N.K.Trikha (2009), former Editor of Navbharat Times, (a sister publication of Times of India) in his direct discussion with the author.

C.Rajagopalachari, the last governor general of India, said once that, ‘the Congress had dominated the political scene and the press instead of providing

informed criticism was nothing more than a body of political propagandists' (Rangaswami: 2001:169).

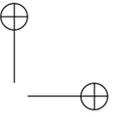
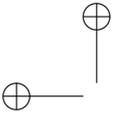
Thus, from the foregoing, it is clear that the print media both before and after independence to a large extent continued to play an *adversarial role* or *role of constructivism*, a portion of print media blindly supporting the government notwithstanding.

Having established the initial character of the media in the immediate years after the independence as *adversarial* and *constructivist*, the rest of the study is carried forward to analyze whether the media retained the *constructivist* behavior entire length and breadth of post independent era. As mentioned earlier, for the sake of convenience, I preferred to divide post independent era into certain phases such as pre-emergency, post-emergency and post globalization. Towards achieving this task, I adopted the following methodology.

## Methodology

The study is grounded in historiography and I followed a simple *descriptive* and *analytical* method using multiple methods of inquiry as is normally adopted in *qualitative communication research* (Lyndlof T.R. and B.C.Taylor, 2004). The study not only historically peeps in to the roles performed by the media-a select few print and television channels as a non-probability *convenience sample*- both before and after globalization, using primary and secondary sources (including available literature and documents), but also analyzes the opinions expressed by *a convenience sample of media professionals and academics*, besides readers, a method followed earlier by Vinod Pavrala and Kanchan Mallik (2007), Shakuntala Rao and Navjyot Singhal, (2007), Shakuntala Rao, (2008), Sevanti Ninan, (2007), Sundeep R M, (2008) besides my own observations.

Questionnaires – questionnaire A (Broad-Annexure I) and a closed end questionnaire B ( Annexure-II with Specific answers-‘yes or no’ only) were addressed to them ( media professionals) with regard to the current and the future of Indian mass media as a credible public service institution, and the prospect of *alternative media* replacing the existing *spin-doctored/market driven journalism* of the print and electronic media. About 110 media experts



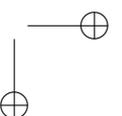
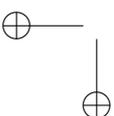
(both professionals and academics) were contacted with the above questionnaires over e-mail, sms-messages and mobile phone and answers were elicited. While 54 people responded in full, 24 offered some conditional answers for all or have taken only a few questions and others excused themselves stating 'busy schedules', 'lack of time' or 'revert back to you soon', etc.

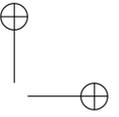
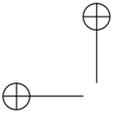
## Research Questions

Using the above method, I tried to seek the answers for the following questions:

- RQ 1:** Is there a steady change in the *adversarial* or *constructivist* role of media since Independence?
- RQ 2:** Is the change in the *adversarial* or *constructivist* role specific to a point of time or a phenomenon that continued to progress into future?
- RQ 3:** Which is the time or period when *spin doctoring* began to foray into the Indian media?
- RQ 4:** Is *spin-doctoring* limited to the manipulations of a single political party or a phenomenon that all the political parties tended to resort to?
- RQ 5:** Has globalization contributed to the enhancement of division in the *adversarial role* of the press and thus indirectly engendered the *spin-doctoring* to grow faster in the media?
- RQ 6:** If the *adversarial* role or *constructivist* role began to disappear with the *market driven journalism* or *spin-doctoring*, will the *alternate media* continue to surge forward to replace the *mainstream journalism* one day?
- RQ 7:** What is the perceived role of *alternate media-blogging, twittering and facebook* in the near future-viable or unviable?

By analyzing the news content and journalism practices – both of the current and the past – and pitching them against the answers offered by the media professionals and general public, the study seeks to evaluate the prospects





of the viability of the present media lasting for a long time and/or foresee the chances of alternate media soon replacing the present media as popular voice.

### **Operative definitions of the terms of discourse**

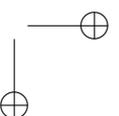
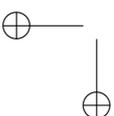
The operating definitions used in the study are taken from the Eric Louw's work-*The Media and Political Process (2005)*—which elaborated how media behaved in spin-doctoring synchronizing with the changing political theories from time to time, especially in democratic countries of the world. Similarly the definition for the *market driven journalism* and the *behavior of the corporate media* in pursuing the market driven journalism is based on the work of Beam Randal A (1995-2003) who did an extensive survey of the print media in the US where the market driven journalism first set in and spread later to the rest of the world.

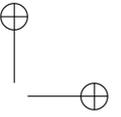
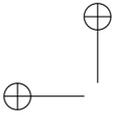
#### **Objectivity:**

It refers to the attempt made by empirical science and by liberal journalists to avoid subjectivism/bias. Objective knowledge and objective journalism—which are informed by empiricism—are geared towards ensuring a correspondence between what is described and the world out there.

#### **Constructivism:**

Constructivism is a way of seeing and understanding the world based on the premise that as human beings we experience the world mentally—ie. we relate to the world through our minds. Hence knowing becomes an internal process. For constructivists, it is our minds that structure the world for us by actively engaging in a process of 'construction'. This stands in contrast with the claim of objectivists/empiricists that we know the world because our senses give us 'access' to the 'world' out there. Constructivism does not approve the hundred percent *objectivity* in media-ized communication. Nor does it believe that media acts as a mirror of the society. The main stream model of liberal journalism believes that its practices result in stories that are accurate in reflection of reality. ie. Journalists believe they simply hold a mirror up to society, and describe it 'the way it is'. This notion of 'journalism as





a mirror of society' has been disputed by constructivists who have analyzed the media (Tuchman, 1978). Although constructivism is a theory of knowledge, it is especially well suited to understanding the processes of media-ized communication (Eric Louw, 2005).

**Media-ized Communication:**

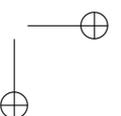
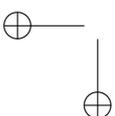
Media-ized politics refers to the way in which professional communicators now script the performances and appearances of politicians. A significant amount of time and energy of politicians and their professional support staff is now focused on impression management and public relations (Eric Louw: 2005).

**Adversarial role:**

It refers to liberal political system of a practicing democracy where the press or media acts as a watch dog or fourth estate. Evolved by Shultz in the years from John Delane, the journalists in this type of journalism act with the following presumptions: To be necessarily critical of politicians (adversarial), to champion the citizen rights against the abuse of the state power and to provide a platform for debate. They also believe in favoring a spectacle of sensation.

**Spin-doctoring:**

It is a term first used with reference to Ronald Reagan's media team in a 21<sup>st</sup> October 1984 New York Times editorial. Spin doctors are professional impression managers who have become the interface between politicians and journalists. Journalists see spin-doctors as practitioners of the dark arts and demagoguery. Spin-doctors are experts in 'hype' and the arts of tele-visualized politics i.e. they craft the 'faces' of politicians and script and stage manage political performances. To be successful requires that spin-doctors know how to use media to their advantages and calls for being familiar with the journalistic practices and discourses. Spin doctors are usually pro-market, pro-government and pro-industry oriented (Eric Louw, 2005).



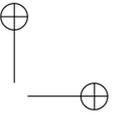
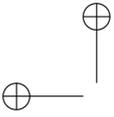
**Market driven journalism:**

Randal Beam (2003) defines market driven or market oriented journalism as ‘an organization which selects target markets for its product, identifies the wants and needs of potential customers in its target markets, and seeks to satisfy those wants and needs as efficiently as possible’. For a news organization, a strong market orientation implies that the newspaper, magazine, or television station will aggressively seek to determine the kinds of information that readers or viewers say ‘they want’ or ‘need’ and will provide it, says Randal Beam (2003). According to Beam Randal, *market driven journalism* is the journalism yielding space to the entertainment, celebrities, sports and crime which would more cater to the sensual pleasure of the citizens than the basic needs of information and enlightenment. In the process, media churns out a lot of information about other areas of news consumption than the news *per se*. The public services becomes lesser conspicuous, accountability narrows down and adversarial role of the press, ie. playing a loyal opposition gradually fades out. Editorials which suit the corporate and industrial needs become prominent.

**Globalization and Glocalization:**

Opening up of native markets such as satellite services, telephone and mobile sectors, banking, trade and industry, and the media including traditional forms of entertainment for a change to the western, especially the US generated genres and formats has been described as globalization a term which could be construed as an extension of Marshal McLuhan’s ‘global village’ (Shakuntala Rao,2008). Due to globalization, a cultural change begins to sweep the states and the nations which often regionally begins to evolve in its own way combining both the western methods as well as indigenous methods, and both together often referred to as ‘glocalization’ (for instance there is an Indian version of reality shows, interactive television programs) as Shakuntala Rao tried to put it (2008).

The above terms of discourse have developed over a period of time as the media passed from one phase to another. In order to explain the transitions that occurred in the history of Indian media in the post independent era especially before and after emergency, and before and after liberalization and



globalization, a grasp of these terms would be more relevant for appropriate citations of incidents which stand as examples of these transitions.

A number of media professionals and academics whom I contacted as part of this study with the questionnaires offered a number of incidents to support these changes in the histories of transition in Indian journalism. Some of these are from their own writings on the subject and some are in the form of replies to my personal communication.

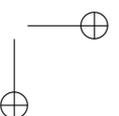
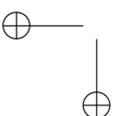
## Results and Analysis

In my study I tried to document the past journalistic practices and the present journalistic practices in the post globalization era (See Table I). I have also summed up the characteristics of market driven journalism (See Table II). In fact I supplied these tables together with the questionnaires, as mentioned in 'Methodology' to several media professionals and academics to know their reaction and to what extent they concur with these observations.

In addition to the above mentioned references many of the academics fully agreed (ie. Hundred per cent) agreed with these observations on the current scenario of the media.

Most of them (80%) have agreed that though there is spin-doctoring of Indian media even during the British rule, the commitment of many editors, who were also owners of the press that time, could not be doubted as much as today when consumerism has overtaken the reality and truth. Most of them (same 80%) also believed that media-ized communication was the time when Nehru had penchant for writings in his appreciation in the media. His group of press advisers used to do this media-ized communication for him. The respondents also were of the view that during Indira's time the media-ized communication turned into perfect model of spin-doctoring.

About 75% were of the view that there was significant constructivism (objective approach) during the early days of freedom struggle than later. The same percentage (75%) also concurred that there was a gradual decline of constructivism over the years after independence and the media always tried to find the ways to augment its revenues and in the process, in order to get more advertising, the media toed the line of government thinking.



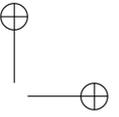
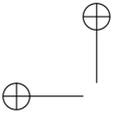
About 60% of the media professionals including academics felt that in the post independent era, the governments under Nehru and Indira Gandhi had exercised a lot of control on the import of news print and allotment of advertisements to the media. Usually the media which opposed the government was at the receiving end of ill treatment and humiliation. It had affected the constructivist approach of the media which tilted towards hype and spin-doctoring.

About 80% of the 54 full respondents found that spin doctoring was a post independent phenomenon and entered mainly during Indira Gandhi era. At the same time, they were of the view that spin-doctoring on the lines of alignment of political ideology of the media existed even before Indira and independence too. But it reached the market proportions for profit yielding only during the post liberalization.

About 50% believed that all political parties including oldest Congress, Marxists, BJP to modern groups like Janata Dal, RJD, Telugu Desam, DMK, AIDMK were in a position to send the spin-doctors to media and indulge in manipulation of media pull outs in their favour. In India today almost all political parties have their own print and television media institutions and as such, holding Congress alone for spin-doctoring is not fair, says N.K.Trikha, a former editor of Navbharat Times.

Whereas former correspondent to Times of India, M V Kamat did not believe that alternative media can replace the force of a conventional journalism, as many of his ilk, about 75% of academics and professionals attribute the present rise of 'citizen journalism' (blogging, facebook, orkut, twitter, flickr, etc) to emerging new media where people can speak from the depth of their heart and state facts which the mainstream journalism may or may not report in the 'constructivist' perspective without 'hype' or 'spin-doctoring'.

About 72% of the respondents to my questionnaire agreed that the present standards of reporting failed to elicit the desired confidence of the readers in the print media. They responded saying that the manipulation of news and planting of stories against political rivals has become intense since the time of VP Singh's Fairfax deal and implication of his son in St Kitts scandal. Further, politics, crime, graphic presentations of incidents, too many photos, sex and sleaz in the first page and local pages, relegating the public service and issues of public sphere to inner pages had taken away the public inspiration in the media at urban and rural level.



As such many respondents were of the view that they have least doubt that the alternative media or new media could be a major source of information in public sphere and there is a fairly good chance for the people to rely on these sources for reliable and relevant information in future than the print and electronic media.

## Discussion

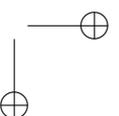
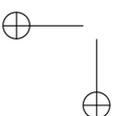
### Pre-independent era:

I have dealt with a number of examples in the introduction as to how the Indian media played an *adversarial* role during the pre-independence time. As could be understood from the discussion done on the subject, there was always a section of media which sided itself with the government—especially pro-Raj and had churned out stuff in favor of it. In those days, the lead role of this kind of journalism was shared by two prominent news dailies—*Times of India* and *The Statesman* (Rangaswami, 2001). *The Indian Express*, *the Hindustan Times* and *the Hindu* shared between them the adversarial role in keeping with the moderate and radical voices of the politicians they endorsed. However, the Indian Express always appeared to be more aggressive and true to its brand description—*journalism with courage* with stories exposing the government and the politicians, an accurate description for *adversarial* role of journalism. The Hindu and the Hindustan Times appeared to be more *constructivist* whereas *The Times of India* and the *Statesman* allowed them to be the choice of the government with *spin-doctors* freely operating both from the industry and political establishment (Sunanda K D R, 2000: 52).

As mentioned before, the Indian media establishment has shifted into the post independent era almost with the same ideals and mandate.

### Post independent era-Pre-emergency era:

Most of the times during Nehru time, the press passed through the phases of establishing itself in India through appropriate legislation. The marked events were concerning the formation of Indian Constitution, with press falling in the domain of articles 19 (1) a which is restricted by article 19 (2)a. It was



during this period basic structures like the office of the Registrar for Registering News Papers had been established. The first Press Commission (July 14, 1954) under the chairmanship of G.S.Rajadhyaksha, which was formed in its 3 volumes of recommendations, suggested formation of many press related structures in India. The media reaction during the times of Nehru for first general elections, famines, communal riots in Ahmedabad, Reorganization of states on linguistic framework, China's war, etc have been engaging the media attention. At national level, the lead role was that of *The Times of India* and the *Statesman*, both of which solidly stood by the side of Nehru (Sharad K: 1981:78-111).

Commenting on the victory of the Congress in the first general elections, the *Pioneer* and the *Times of India* held the views that, Nehru, not the Congress has been voted to power in the so called Congress states (Sharad K: 1981: 78-111).

Speaking on the media role immediately after independence, Sunanda (2000) writes, that even independent publications were for a long time unquestioning supporters of Congress and, therefore, of the governments it dominated. "In spite of carping, Indian politicians, especially regional leaders found it even more useful after independence to control and cultivate papers in their backyards. A veteran Orissa politician, Harekrushna Mahatab founded the Oriya daily—Prajatantra. The family of Sharad Pawar, Maharashtra's most prominent Congressman brought the paper called –Sakal, a Marathi daily. Tamil Nadu Chief Minister Karunanidhi founded Murasoli meaning 'drumbeat'.

James Cameron, veteran journalist, wrote that it was uncommonly difficult to find out what was going on anywhere if one depended on an Indian newspaper (1978). He further wrote, that the media lacked the 'purposeful' stubbornness of the communist press; nor did it have the meretricious stupidity of the pop press of the West, it was just semi-illiterate, ill-argued, initiative; when it was not boring, it was exasperating. The news papers occasionally professed to be combating pressures from government which was quixotic since the Indian press was a processing plant for government hand outs and for convoluted obfuscation Indian government handouts have to be read to be believed or otherwise as the case may be.

Arun Shourie has remarked that a 'distressingly large' number in the profession today are not even good professionals. 'Many of them', he said 'have

incestuous relations with their subjects—in particular with the government authorities.

In the pre-emergency era, between 1966-1975, it was Indira Gandhi who ruled India with a greater assertion of her authority during which time her cabinet remained more or less as marginal entity. It was Indira who took any decision during this time and the cabinet usually approved it without a fuss on it. Though under her leadership, India emerged strong and defeated Pakistan in 1971 war, with the first ever nuclear explosion going up in Pokhran having sent a wave of shock down the spine of the world leaders including the US, the USSR, China and the Britain, the image of Indira began to blur in the Indian media. Especially the reporting of Bangalore session, the controversy regarding Ms.Gandhi's policies of bank nationalization, and the selection of the Presidential candidate, which caused a split in the Congress, represented an anti-Gandhi lobby by the major newspapers in the country (Sadanand, K: 1981:118).

However the *Times of India* and the *Patriot* were all praise for Indira for her bold decisions including the abolition of Privy Purse to the erstwhile kings. But, the failing economy and the increasing corruption in the government led to simmering discontent across the nation. Further the dispute centered round her election in 1971 was regularly followed by the media till the judge pronounced the election of Mrs. Gandhi as null and void. This led to the nation wide protests and agitations demanding Mrs. Gandhi's resignation, which she point blank refused to comply with. She went ahead amending the Constitution to ensure that she clung to the authority. On June 26, 1975 she proclaimed emergency. This was the turning point in the history of Indian Journalism, says Sadanand K (1978: 137). Except a few media organizations like the Indian Express, many news papers succumbed to the pressures of the emergency. The press became sterile and the circulation of many papers had sunk down.

Commenting on the government control on media during emergency, Sunanda K Datta-Ray writes that 'nineteen publications were banned but none was substantial, and only five were in English. Several small magazines defied emergency diktats, risking suppression and worse, but the Indian Express, published from 12 centres, was the only major publication to take a stand against censorship and appear with blank spaces'.

“While its proprietor, Ramnath Goenka, seemed ready at times”, writes Sunanda K Datta Ray (2000: 57), “to cut a deal with Mrs. Gandhi, its crusading editor, Arun Shourie, emerged as the regime’s implacable foe. The impact on the media was dramatized by the contrast between the Express and the loyalist Hindustan Times, which had only a few months before sacked its distinguished editor, B.G. Verghese, for taking Mrs. Gandhi to task when India swallowed the Himalayan Kingdom of Sikkim. The Indian Express offices in Delhi were raided, electricity lines were cut, and newsprint withheld. The Hindustan Times Chairman KK Birla, GD Birla’s son and a nominated member of the upper house of Parliament, became Express supreme as well ” noted Sunanda Datta K Ray (2000: 57).

From this point onwards the Indian journalism entered the era of magazine journalism. The Indian Express had sufficient material to publish for a long time to come, having suffered for a long time under emergency, by serially publishing the stories of emergency and Shaw Commission findings and proceedings. Arun Shourie took the lead in exposing the corruption during the Indira’s regime. According to Vinod Mehta (1999) and Rangaswami (1989), in no uncertain terms Arun Shourie was certainly the hero of Indian media.

#### **Post emergency era:**

The Second Press Commission (1982) said in its report: “Many foreign observers have commented on the preoccupation of the Indian press with politics and politicians. There would be nothing wrong if it were preoccupation with politics in the large Aristotelian sense of concern with the building of the society, which shall make the good life possible. The preoccupation, however, is largely with the petty politics of conflict between and within political parties and with the sayings and doings of ministers and other prominent politicians.”

In the post emergency era, observed Sunanda Data K Ray (2000), the media took active interest in unseating Rajiv Gandhi who had then fallen out with his Finance Minister, Vishwanath Pratap Singh who was the darling of the media, especially of the Indian Express. Rajiv’s defeat in 1989 was a victory for the press. But it could also have been political manipulations or collusion. Or, a mix of all three (2000; 59).

Especially it was a worst time for The Hindu, a South based leading national daily as N.Ram started reporting with Chitra Subrahmanyam in Geneva

on the Bofors case against Rajiv, a fact that did not go down well the throat of Kasturi the founder owner of The Hindu. He apparently found something fishy in the concerted campaign against Rajiv by the Indian Express and the political parties. When he declined to print the story against Rajiv, N. Ram came out of The Hindu and published his continued investigative stories on Bofors scandal against Rajiv unraveling one by one who was behind the scenes and who was the actual beneficiary of Bofors kickbacks amply implying in several ways that Rajiv himself was at center of the scandal and the major beneficiary, besides Ottavio Quotrochi, an Italian business man close to the wife of Rajiv Gandhi and the Hinduja brothers (Rangaswami P: 1997: 276).

When V.P.Singh became Prime Minister, after the defeat of Rajiv in 1989 general elections, many editors and journalists were given plum positions in his government. Eminent journalist Kuldip Nayar was sent as High Commissioner to London. It marked the beginning of media pundits openly aligning themselves with the different schools of political ideology. After VP Singh's government fell, and when Atal Bihari Vajpayee became the Prime Minister, Arun Shourie joined his cabinet as a Union Minister.

In the post emergency the magazine journalism took a swing and many journalists who were in the news papers quietly shifted to magazines with high salaries. To compete with these magazines, the news papers had to undergo technological and architectural revolution in their lay out and design (Robin Jeffery, 2000)).

Identifying the exact point of genesis of market driven journalism, as a harbinger of ensuing globalization and privatization, Sunanda Datta K Ray writes that, 'curiously, the period just before and after emergency witnessed two separate press revolutions. News dailies in Telugu, Hindi and other languages heralded a flowering of regional papers in the Indian languages (2000:58).

At the same time, Indian Today in Delhi and Calcutta's Sunday transformed magazine journalism. Modern technology, attractive design, effective use of color and snappy prose tapped new readers, especially the young, writes Sunanda Datta K Ray (2000:58).

Robin Jeffery (2000) traced the growth of vernacular press and the changes it had undergone in the wake of magazine journalism taking a boost. He stressed that localization of news and expansion of news domains into cultural components such as life styles, food habits, supplements on local festivities,

women, educational institutions, career pages on education and counseling have become the source of filling up the pages. Top it all, he further observed that crime, sex and sleaze had given additional market edge for each paper. By 1990s, most of the papers had undergone changes from the elitist point of readers to mass culture, explained Robin Jeffery (2000).

This marked the beginning of the market driven journalism, though it did not make a visible impact on the readership till liberalization and globalization were ushered in 1991.

### **Post Liberalization era: Market driven journalism vs Alternative media.**

Noting the tremendous sociological changes the globalization and privatization brought into the Indian society, Sunanda K Datta-Ray (2000) points out to the paradox that this market phenomenon generated by 1997 in Indian media. "If the English press keeps alive the hallowed principles of John Stuart Mill and Walter Bagehot, holding them up as models to inspire and admonish politicians in Delhi, it is the humbler Indian language regional press that ensured that by 1997, 60 per cent of urban dwellers and a quarter of the rural population read news papers regularly. With circulation going up steadily, these publications have made democracy meaningful at the grass roots. They often work with local social and political forces, enabling growing numbers of people to voice grievances, organize collective action and demand redress" writes Sunanda K Datta Ray (2000:50). At the same time, she brought out the irony in the media role too saying that, 'The media too, bristles with ironies and inconsistencies. It does not boast uniform characteristics. So many press functionaries, from owners to reporters, are more anxious to be power brokers than opinion makers that it might be apposite to adapt Oscar Wilde and say that good newspapermen join the government before they die.'

Her comment on the failing media's *adversarial role* in the post globalization is even acerbic and pungent as she went on to add that 'If media publicists who used to parrot the fashionable theory of 'natural adversaries' are now acquiescent, it is because they have tumbled to the rewards of flags of convenience.' (2000:50).

Sevanti Ninan claimed in 'Through the Magic Window: Television and Change in India, 'that consumerism is somehow sinful'. Gandhian spirituality and Nehruvian socialism demanded uplifting editorial content to atone for the

'sin' of making profits. Virtue lay in a heavy diet of stories on development, religious harmony and distributive justice (1995:18).

Many other wonderful events began to unfold on the front of media in the post globalization. One such important but silent event was that almost all the professional editors were shunted out of their positions by 1995. The owners silently took over the editorships themselves. Though The Hindu and the Indian Express and the Malayala Manorama and Eenadu had always their owners as the Editors, the other papers, such as Times of India, Hindustan Times, Anand Bazar Patrika, and Telegraph, and Statesman which hitherto allowed professionals to man their editorial offices gradually bid adieu to them and owners themselves took over the editorship.

The Times of India has gone a step further consciously to blur editorial and managerial designations, writes Sunanda Datta K Ray (2000: 61). Without a full time conventional editor, the Economic Times of Times of India, had done a very good business in the post globalization marking an end to the era of Editor's sovereignty. As a result, writes Sunanda Datta K Ray, that 'not many arresting and independent by-lines are to be found nowadays in Indian papers.' (2000:62).

Shakuntala Rao and Navjit S Johal (2007) found that Indian print media was less concerned about the newsroom values and accountability and showed irresponsible trend of commercializing news and trivializing it. According to them, accountability is the ability of media to arouse public opinion regarding an issue and make the government respond to it as happened in the case of Jessica Lal.

Writing about the revolution of Hindi news papers in the heart land of India, Sevanti Ninan (2007) traced that the upsurge in the post 1990s was due to the synchronous working of several factors such as increased literacy and political awareness among the rural people due to the BJP and Mandal politics, besides the tilt of the bigger corporate media from the elitist class to literacy class. Secondly, she also noted that the rural revolution in the Hindi heart land was also a post television phenomenon. People who happened to access the television got excited at the developments and the reportings seen on the small screen and liked to curiously know more about them in the print media next day (S.Ninan: 2007:88). Thirdly, there was a phenomenal localization of news in the form of additional supplements which placed emphasis on the local crime, politics, entertainment and life styles. All this added to the

growing popularity of Hindi news papers region wise and by 2006, the Hindi news papers occupied the top 5 positions among the top 10 positions throwing English news papers like the Times of India to go for 11<sup>th</sup> position (S.Ninan, 2007: 16).

The mushrooming of business papers and magazines has become manifold over night. Innumerable publications catering to various categories of market interests such as computers, life styles, women, cuisine, interior decoration, photography, etc began to surface. Some of them are from reputed media houses. For instance, Front line and Business Line, Business World, and Financial Express are some from the leading news paper houses. All these not only garnered the advertising revenue from the matrimony to real estate, the editors who are also the owners of these media argue that the globalization and privatization reflected the collective conscious of India (Sunanda Datta K Ray: 2000:62).

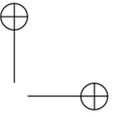
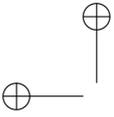
Today if papers criticize the government it is only from their business perspective, not in the public interest, for not giving some more sops as third generation economic reforms are still not in place in full swing for which these media houses are anxious about. Critics of the press say, writes Sunanda Datta K Ray (2000:63), that it (press or media) enjoys the best of many worlds.

Criticizing the so called public service these media houses are purportedly flaunting to the outside world, Sunanda Datta K Ray writes that 'profit driven privately owned news papers take credit for performing a public service. They speak in the name of democracy but function under a mandarin class of editors who take their orders from hard headed capitalists.'

Ajit Bhattacharjea, Director of the Press Institute of India, says that the press teaches morals but that 'most dangerous development to affect the press is corruption'.

Press is becoming more mass based and less pontifical. It has become more vigorous but less responsible. Glossy pull-outs and the emphasis on sport, entertainment, food and fashion serve hold a mirror to society while setting achievable goals for readers, says Sunanda Datta K Ray (2000: 63). The importance given to local news means that tangible issues are replacing abstract ideas as matters of editorial concern, adds Sunanda Datta K Ray (2000:63).

Where as 'citizen journalism' has been the off shoot of crisis reporting and war reporting, according to Allan Stuart and Einar Thorsen (2009), Sevanti



Ninan (2007) has found a different breed of ‘citizen journalists’ who would do reporting in interior rural India in a manner which cannot be subject to much of ‘gate keeping’. She has coined them as ‘multipurpose human beings’ very humorously and traced the origin of this kind of ‘citizen journalism’ to the rise of rural revolution of Hindi news papers in India (2007:114-115).

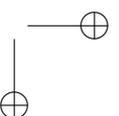
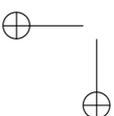
At the same time, Sunnda Datta K Ray writes that ‘in the long run, the Internet, radio and television are bound to play a significant part in shaping a civil society based on energetic economic activity. According to her, ‘the Internet, the white hope of the future, is catching on rapidly. Cybercafés are sprouting at street corners, every self-respecting news paper has its own website and there is a talk of millions of surfers joining every day newly to this growing alternate media (2000:62).

As such, both in the view of the respondents who reflected on my questionnaires and in the view of media professionals and former and current journalists, the new media emerging as a strong alternative to mainstream media is imminent.

The study cautions the mainstream journalism owners and practitioners that deviating much from the constructivist approach and giving place for hype and spin-doctoring might temporarily may yield huge returns but in the long run it might distance its readership from it once for all and may lose the game totally to alternate media.

## Conclusions

The study historically peeped into the past and present journalistic practices from the point of view whether the constructivist approach of media has been totally adhered to by the print media in its long history spanning both pre-independent and post independent era. The study further examined whether ‘spin-doctoring’ and ‘hype’ existed even during pre-independent era. It also further analyzed since when the decline of ‘constructivist’ approach has begun in the history of Indian media and how the post liberalization and market driven journalism had hastened the transformation and metamorphosis of ‘constructivist’ role of media into a totally ‘market driven’ and ‘spin-doctored’ media.



The study using triangulation method and through questionnaire and personal discussion with media professionals found that the initial commitment of media professionals, majority of who were the freedom fighters for 'constructivist' approach gradually faded out in the immediate post independent era. Further, some media even during pre-independent era allowed the spin doctors to transform the news in favor of British as pro-Raj press. This phenomenon, to some extent, was inherited by the Nehru's administration in the post independent era, and truly, according to some media experts, Nehru enjoyed the media manipulation to mobilize public opinion in his favor or Congress favor to rule the country for the longest period of 17 years.

It was only after Indira became the Prime Minister the media manipulations of news/content became intense and the pre-emergency and emergency era had seen the worst of the scenario of spin-doctoring. Though some media like Indian Express had the privilege of boasting to resist the spin-doctoring and media control by Indira, all said and done, it was not always the case given Goenka's leanings to compromise with Indira when it came to business. However, the Indian media as main stream journalism continued its journey to maintain accountability to public and serving the public sphere though it started making deeper shifts from its earlier formats to magazine journalism. Localization of news, change in the formats, use of color prints and mast heads, combining new forms of content into the front page content, topping up political content with crime, sex, sleaze and sports, and entertainment had increased the circulation and advertising revenues of the media. Both vernacular press such as Hindi and Telugu had achieved regional booming business in the circulation.

However, the intense spin doctoring and market driven journalism alienating the readers from the mainstream press has begun in the phase of liberalization and privatization. Frustrated by the commercial trends of the mainstream, people looked for an alternative media. The present study both from the sources and from the responses of the academics and media professionals found that sooner or later the alternate media is going to be a big curse for the main stream journalism.

**Table I. Showing the differences in Journalism Practices in the Past and the Present**

<b>Description of items</b>	<b>Past Journalistic Practices (1950-1980)</b>	<b>Present Journalistic Practices (1990-2008)</b>
1. Common headlines	All news papers used to report common news items of national/international/regional importance with rare deviation.	No two news papers report common news items of national/international/regional importance. A deviation to this is very rare.
2. Importance to PM / CM / President's speeches / announcements	Such news items used to be in the first page as banner headlines	Most of such items are carried into inner pages.
3. Tributes to national leaders on important dates	Such tributes used to appear in the first page with photographs. Even govt. advertisements appear in the first page only	Such tributes appear in inner pages. Even govt. advertisements appear in the inner pages.
4. Crime reporting	Only inner pages	First page banner headlines
5. Narration of Crimes and sketches and photographs of criminals	Very rare/less and not in the first page at any cost. Very rarely deviations could be found.	First page full with sketches, graphs and incident profiles and photographs of victims (ghastly too) and criminals (in heroic posture)
6. Political spat / criticism	Less political spat covered-only prominent political leaders criticism found in the first page	Spat between all political leaders big and small alike fills the first page.
7. Advertisements in first page	Very less and not in the banner or at anchor point of the page. Mostly inner pages. Deviation very rare.	Anywhere in the first page including banner headlines. Even first page full except mast head.
8. Color photos	No color printing in the first page. Only black and white photos.	Full of color printing and a number of large and small color photos in the first page.
9. Reporting of Sports and entertainment	Occasionally in the first page such as winning a match or series with a black and white photo.	Full first page with banner headlines till the bottom of page – full coverage including color photos of celebrities and events
10. Informing Public and Value based reporting	Such reporting was high and a twice verification system followed with good gate keeping.	Less informing public and no proper verification system or efficient gate keeping. Planting stories to defame rivals is high.
11. Page layout	Black and White, no color and no cramming for photos till 1985s.	Color clumsiness and cramming space with photos and adverts.

**Table II. Showing Characteristics of Market Driven Journalism**

<b>S. No.</b>	<b>Description of Content of Market Driven Journalism</b>
1	Readers want information on what might be called the 'private sphere'—life style, entertainment, recreation, news to use.
2	Behavior of strong market oriented papers differs from the weak market oriented papers in the sense weak market oriented papers offer more information about 'public sphere' as opposed to strong market oriented papers which offer 'private sphere'.
3	The size of the corporate sector which offers information determines the characteristics of market oriented journalism.
4	Weak market oriented papers relatively reflect investigative journalism as opposed to strong market oriented journalism.
5	In market driven journalism, editors of strong market papers spend less time on content and more time on lay out, graphics, type faces, pictures and grabby headlines. Such layout and make up is considered as navigational tools for the readers to make an easy reading as they are facing crunch of time.
6	The market driven journalism concerns with mass culture and shifts from elitist class of information.
7	Mass Culture products often focus on 'lowest-common-denominator content' in order to build the largest possible audience.
8	Extensive photos, graphics, and summary boxes and navigational tools might be viewed as effective tools to appeal to audience with comparatively low level of education.
9	News papers with strong market orientation would place more stress on visual content than news papers with a relatively weak market orientation.

(Sourced from Randal Beam's Work: Content differences with strong and weak market orientatations. 2003)

**Annexure I****Questionnaire A (Broad)**

1. How was the role of print media during the freedom struggle?
  1. Good – adversarial 2. Neutral – Constructivist 3. Bad—Pro British
2. How was the behavior of print media immediately after the freedom of India?
  1. Good – adversarial 2. Neutral – Constructivist 3. Bad—Pro-Nehru
3. How was the attitude of print media after the Nehruvian era?
  1. Good – adversarial 2. Neutral – Constructivist 3. Bad—Pro-government
4. How did you find the role of electronic media (mostly radio) during Nehru’s period in post independent era?
  1. Good – adversarial 2. Neutral – Constructivist 3. Bad—Pro-government
5. How do you describe the role of print media during the period of Indira Gandhi?
  1. Good – adversarial 2. Neutral – Constructivist 3. Bad—Pro-government
6. How do you describe the behavior of print and electronic media during the phase of coalition and political instability (1989-91)?
  1. Good – adversarial 2. Neutral – Constructivist 3. Bad—Pro-government
7. How do you describe the behavior or role of print and electronic media immediately and after liberalization and globalization?
  1. Good – adversarial 2. Neutral – Constructivist 3. Bad—Pro-government
8. How do you put your satisfaction on the overall role of current practices of print and electronic media?
  1. Good – adversarial 2. Neutral – Constructivist 3. Bad—Pro-government

**Note:**

1. Please see the operating definitions used in the study for adversarial and constructivist terms is attached.
2. Pro-British, Pro-Nehru, Pro-Government all refer to the *spin-doctored journalism* suggestive of political and industrial spin doctors acting as insiders in favor of industry, feudalistic forces and capitalist markets.

**Annexure II****Questionnaire B (Specific): Closed end with the 'yes/no' only**

1. Did Indian print media represent the voice of people during the freedom struggle?
2. Were you happy with the role played by the media in support of freedom struggle?
3. What do you think of the media that represented the pro-British—patriotic or non-patriotic?
4. Was there spin-doctored journalism in the Indian print media during the fight against the British?
5. Were you happy with the Indian print media character and behavior after independence?
6. Did Indian print media focus on corruption and failure of delivery of public good to the people by the government during Nehru era?
7. Did the print media during Nehru's era indulge in one way praising of the Nehru?
8. Did Nehru or his government meddle with the freedom of press during his 17 years of long stint?
9. Did you like the attitude of Nehru towards the print media and electronic media?

10. Did you like the role played by the media owners/proprietors (many of who are freedom fighters) during the Nehru's time?
11. Was the media afflicted with the disease of sensationalism during Nehru's period as much as today?
12. Did you like the attitude of Nehru in keeping Radio and TV under the state control?
13. Did the radio and TV reflect the popular perception, needs and aspirations of the people during Nehru's era?
14. Was there a radical change in the role of media after Indira Gandhi became PM?
15. Were you happy with the role of print media before, during and after emergency?
16. Was Indira right in curbing the freedom of press during the emergency?
17. Were you happy with the role played by the media during the period of Rajiv Gandhi in exposing the Bofors scandal?
18. Was it all right if the media began to align itself with specific political ideologies of some politicians during the instable political era-1989-91?
19. Were you happy with the role played by the media during and after globalization which started in 1991?
20. Do you appreciate the current trends of corporate culture and market driven attitudes of print and electronic media?
21. Do you believe that the present media is in a position to reflect the popular voice and true problems faced by the public?
22. Do you believe that there is a need of alternate media to express the popular voice other than traditional media like print and electronic –Radio and TV?
23. Do you foresee a bright prospect of alternate media replacing the traditional media—print and radio, and TV?

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