

Impact of Covid-19 on Freedom of Media: A Critical Analysis

Mr. Mohan Pathak

Research scholar, Dept. of Political Science, Rajiv Gandhi University, Arunachal Pradesh

Mr. Jonison Daulagajau

Assistant Professor, dept. of Political Science, Bihpuria College, Bihpuria

Abstract: *Media is considered as fourth pillar of democracy. It plays an important role in bringing the voice of the public to the Government. Apart from this, it is also a strong weapon which helps to expose all kind of wrongdoings of the Government and make the Government responsible and accountable towards the public. At the time of any crisis or emergency, the media helps people by providing reliable and authentic information as well as putting pressure on the Government to work for the victims. But it has been seen that after the outbreak of Covid-19 pandemic, the media community of the entire world have been facing different kind of challenges which directly harm their right to expression. The many developed as well as developing countries imposing restrictions over the media to hide their drawbacks from the people. It is reported by Reporters without Borders, 38 countries around the world restricted the freedom of the Press, the reporters are facing verbal attacks in countries like the USA and Brazil, and moreover, some journalists have been arrested in Algeria, Jordan, and Zimbabwe. Therefore, this study is an attempt to explore the different challenges facing by media that harm their freedom during the Covid-19 pandemic. The study is descriptive and analytical and based on secondary sources of data.*

Key Words: Covid-19, Media, Rights, Freedom, Challenges.

Introduction:

The term media, which is the plural of medium, refers to the communication channels through which we disseminate news, music, movies, education, promotional messages and other data. It includes physical and online newspapers and magazines, television, radio and billboards. It describes the various ways through which we communicate in society. Because it refers to all means of communication, everything ranging from a telephone call to the evening news on television can be called as media. The Chicago School of Media Theory defined media “the main means of mass communication,

esp. newspapers, radio and television regarded collectively; the reporters, journalists, etc., working for organizations engaged in such communication”(Oxford English Dictionary, 2008).The media plays a crucial role in making the people aware about current happenings of the society. It is also a significant tool, which educate as well as entertain the people. In present time media become voice of the people. Media can be classified into three important categories which are Print media, Electronicmedia and new age media. The newspaper, books, journals, magazines are comes under the category of print media, the television, Radio, films are comes under Electronic media and Mobiles phones, computers and internets are call new age media.

Democracy without rights to speech and expression doesn't have any meaning. Because democracy is a political system that empowers thepublic to freely criticize the Government as well as raised the questions against its incumbency. Media is a strong democratic weapon based on such principle of the democracy and it plays vital role in bringing the voice of the public to the Government. Moreover, it also exposes any wrongdoings and incumbency of the Government and forced to be responsive as well as accountable towards the people. Now days, media is also become mere source of political information and also an affective agent of political socialization. Becauseof decisive role of media, it considered as the fourth and last pillar of democracy. It has been seen for a long time that the media is playing significant role in every aspect of the society. In contemporary era, the role of media is rapidly increased and it playing role as a representatives of the public and also raise questions on behalf of them. The tremendous role of media is not only limited in domestic politics, it plays similar role international politics as well. In international arena, media playing an affective role in spreading prosperity and freedom, promoting international co-operation and security, ending terrorism, eradicate poverty and fighting with environmental problems(such as climate change, global warming) etc.

Moreover, media is also becoming a very effective tool to tackle with any kinds of crisis or emergency arising in the world from time to time. History shows that the media has played an influential role in various crisisand emergency by proving authentic information, putting pressure on the Government to work for the victims and also by spreading awareness about the crisis. Take for instance; in 2007 when there was world food crisis, the entire world was suffered from hunger, poverty and food riots, at that time the media community of the worlds were gave their active contribution to overcome from such problems by organized various debate and discussions (Yuksel, Karantininis and Hess, 2013). More recently, in 2015 when there was earthquake in Nepal and many people were lost their life, the media community

continuously reported all information and also helps to gather economic as well as moral support from the different parts of the globe. Apart from that, media has played a tremendous role during many crisis in the world. Because of its vital role during any crisis, it is known as one of the most important partners of communication. But it has been seen that after the outbreak of Covid-19 pandemic, the media community of the entire world have been facing different kind of challenges which directly harm their right to expression. Therefore, this study is an attempt to explore the different challenges facing by media that harm their freedom during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Objectives of the Study:

The major objectives of the present study are as follows:

- To know the role of media during in the midst of Covid-19 crisis
- To know the different challenges which harm the freedom of media during covid-19 pandemic.
- To provide some suggestions to enhance the freedom of media.

Methodology of the Study:

The present study is descriptive and analytical in nature. The information has been collected from secondary sources which contained Books, Journals, Newspapers, and Internet etc.

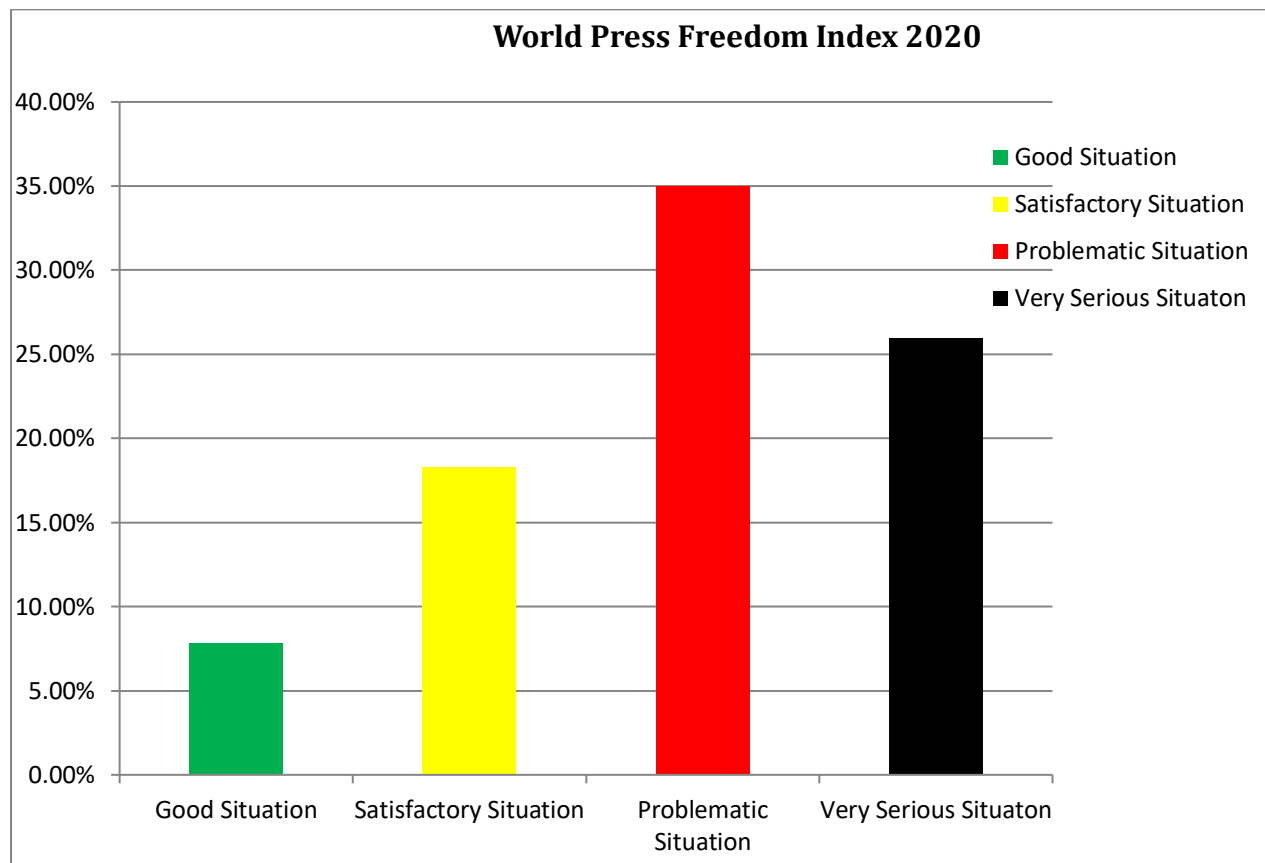
Discussion:

After outbreak of Covid-19, it is noticed that the role of media is rapidly increased and it started to play a decisive role in various way. A very active role plays by media during this covid-19 crisis is to bring the reliable and authentic information to the people. Besides that media also contributing to create awareness among the people about this pandemic. It is seen that many media houses organizing several awareness programmes on their respective channels to protect the people from the affect of this deadly virus and they also repeatedly requesting to the people to don't panic. The famous Indian news channel Times network launched an India fight corona virus, a consumer awareness campaign to spread awareness among the people and control the spread of corona virus (Bansode, 25 March 2020). Apart from that, the Hindu, ABP news, India TV were also organized several awareness campaign to combat the rapid spread of this deadly virus. According to the report of UNESCO, 93 young media leaders also raised their hand to launch awareness campaign

through their respective news channels to fight against corona virus (Report of UNESCO).

But at the same time it has been seen that the media community of the entire world has been suffering from different kinds of challenges which creates several berries in their free and fair reporting. The many developed as well as developing countries imposing restrictions over the media to hide their drawbacks from the people. As per the report of Reporters without Borders, 38 countries around the world restricted the freedom of the Press after outbreak of covid-19. Moreover, the reporters are facing verbal attacks in countries like the USA and Brazil and some journalists have been arrested in Algeria, Jordan, and Zimbabwe when they collecting reports about covid-19. The largest international organization EU, also warned that media freedom is under threat in several countries during the Covid pandemic. Moreover, the EU also condemned the act of restricting freedom of media. The Foreign minister of Germany also said that the independent journalism is being weakened during the covid-19 pandemic.

The 2020 World Press Freedom Index, compiled by Reporters Without Borders (RSF), clearly shows that the coming decade will be decisive for the future of journalism, with the Covid-19 pandemic highlighting and amplifying the many crises that threaten the right to freely reported, independent, diverse and reliable information.

Figure-1

Source: RSF's "global indicator" 2020

The figure-1 clearly shows the working environment of media community of the world. The figure reveals that only 7.79 percent working environment of media is good, 18.28 percent working environment is satisfactory, 34.97 percent working environment is problematic and 25.97 percent working in a very serious. Hence, it is seen that the working situation of media is quite dangerous. A very high percent of working environment is problematic.

Like other countries of the world in India also the media community is suffering from various challenges. It has been seen in the midst of Covid-19 that the Government of India imposed restriction over media to control the information about the crisis. As per the reports of RSF, on 25th of March 2020, the PM Modi had personally asked the editors of 20 biggest news mainstream print media outlets to publish positives news about the crisis (Reporters without borders, 12 April 2020). Moreover, on 31 March 2020 the Government of India asked the Supreme Court to direct the media to publish nothing about the pandemic without ascertaining the fact from the mechanism provided by the Government. The Indian Journalists such as Vidya Krishana and Rasmi

Puranik, who covering information about the covid-19 crisis also got threats of death and gang rape. Apart from this, many journalists have been arrested in different parts of the country that were collecting news about the covid-19 crisis.

Looking into the above discussion, it becomes quite clear that the widespread global pandemic Covid-19 has made an adverse impact on the Freedom of Media. The journalists across the world have been facing lots of disturbance in their day-today activities. Such pathetic conditions of the fourth estate create a big threat to the future of democracy. However, it is also a fact that there are some journalists, who spreading false news about the crisis and creating an atmosphere of panic among the people. Therefore, the Government of respective states should take legal action against such journalists. As Mahatma Gandhi said “The press is called the fourth estate. It is definitely a power, but, to misuse that power is criminal”.

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