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## Media Education: Challenges and Prospects

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*It is said that whoever controls the media; controls the world...*

*The greatest concern is to facilitate qualitative Journalism Education so that Media will be in safe hands...*

### **Abstract:**

*Being the world's biggest democracy, India provides media the most privileged position. Also called as the watchdog of democracy, it is called the fourth estate, after legislature, executive and judiciary. When media holds such prominent position in a nation; it also becomes important to analyze and understand the quality of media education in India. It took quite some time for media education to get introduced in India. It has traversed a long way and has gained great momentum. Media has become a major career choice of students today. The glamour and power enjoyed by media personnel is also a predominant reason for this popularity. It is a watershed period for media education today. With the growing demand and mushrooming of institutions offering media education, there is a need to look at the quality of training being offered. The authors of this paper being academicians try to look at the gap existing between media industry and educational institutions. The paper also provides an insight into the road ahead for media education in India.*

**Keywords:** Media, education, Technology, Society, Infrastructure, Research, Media literacy, and Agenda setting.

### **INTRODUCTION:**

The year 2020 marks a century of media education in India. The growth of media education in India is by itself an interesting journey. The demand and scope for media education in India is huge. India has provided a huge market for institutions offering media education. With every passing decade, the number of institutions are moving up in numbers. Media is an inevitable part of society. Every nation across the world has seen the media boom. It has taken control over the society beyond imagination and understanding. It would be impossible to even think of this world functioning devoid of media. From newspapers to television, social media to magazines, every individual is addicted to the usage of media every day. Social media is the latest platform available for expression. With this

growing demand for media, the institutions have blissfully included it as a part of curriculum in colleges. Media education is offered both at graduation and post-graduation level. Media education has taken a predominant position in the current day. The demand for media as a part of curriculum has grown manifold. The number of institutions offering media education is a proof for this. This paper is conceptual and it tries to critically analyze the working of media education. It highlights the need of media education in a nation like India and aims at understanding -

- The need of media literacy
- Challenges faced by media curriculum in the state
- Possible remedies for betterment of media curriculum

It took quite some time for media education to be introduced in India, even after the first newspaper 'The Bengal Gazette' was launched. The credit of introducing media education in India goes to Annie Besant. She started Journalism as a discipline through The Theosophical society in 1920. Since then Journalism course has come a long way. One should note that since its inception media education is being offered at the graduation level and not prior to that. As Dr. Mrinal Chatterjee mentions in her article '100 years of media education in India' Dr. Annie Besant paid special attention to professional journalism. An added practical training to the students was arranged in the office of 'New India'. Varied attempts were made by various universities to facilitate Journalism as a course. Aligarh Muslim University too took initiative to introduce a diploma course in Journalism in the year 1938. However, it was the Punjab University which became successful in establishing a proper department of Journalism. This was in the year 1941. University of Madras was a pioneer to introduce Journalism in South India, followed by University of Calcutta. Maharaja College, Mysore under the guidance of Nadig Krishnamurthy gave a new direction and shape to the course in Karnataka. Bangalore University introduced the course in the year 1973. As stated earlier, Journalism was basically introduced at the graduation level. Almost all the universities facilitated this course at graduation level or as a diploma programme. Very few universities went on to introduce Journalism at the Post Graduation level. It is interesting that Journalism has always been offered as one of the optional subjects at the graduation level. Since beginning, English literature has been one of the popular subjects that was offered along with Journalism. This holds good even to this day as we can come across several colleges offering Journalism with English literature as a popular combination across the nation. Setting up of Indian Institute of Mass Communication (IIMC) is a watershed event in the history of Media education in India. IIMC was set up in New Delhi in the year 1965 and has ever since strived for establishment of professional standards in Journalism education. To add to the glory, various media houses have also come up with their own educational institutions offering media education. Times of India established the Times School of Journalism in the year 1985 while The Indian Express started The Asian College of Journalism in the year 1994. Eenadu Journalism School was set up by Eenadu

newspaper. Pioneer media school belongs to The Pioneer, NDTV runs the NDTV Broadcast training programme. Tehelka school of Journalism also has its own fame while the Statesman has The Statesman Print Journalism School to its credit.

It has been a century for media education in India. The course is in much greater demand with every passing decade. As per the statistics provided by Shiksha.com there are more than 1000 colleges offering Journalism as a course in India, while the number in Karnataka falls above 100. What has been the quality of media education in India? Have the institutions met the demands of the industry efficiently? The authors in this paper tries to look at media education critically. The paper throws light on the status and challenges of media education and it tries to analyze the gap between media academics and media industry; if any.

India is the biggest democracy in the world. Media plays a very significant role in a nation like India. It is called the 'fourth estate' and the 'pillar of democracy'. Whatever changes the media might undergo, whatever technological advancements might occur, it is true that the traditional media, newspapers, radio and Television hold a predominant position than the social media here. India has seen the media boom like never before. The popularity is taking an upward curve constantly. From the start of first newspaper to first radio station, first television to internet, cable TV and DTH to social media; the growth is phenomenal. When the nation opened its door for Liberalization, Privatization and Globalization, the number of private channels functioning in the nation mushroomed. The revenue earned by media and advertising forms a significant share. With such increasing demand for media, it also became a necessity to introduce media education in schools and colleges. The statistics provided by FICCI in its report in the year 2020 clearly identifies the fact that growth of media in India is real. The report says that Media and Entertainment Industry grew by 9% in the year 2019 with revenue of 1.82 trillion. The report further states that the industry in India is expected to reach 2.42 trillion by the year 2022.

With such magical numbers it is not at all surprising that media education has also gained momentum over the years. Media education cannot be seen only from the revenue point of view. It is important to comprehend the contribution of the course towards the society. The curriculum should be designed in such a way that media professionals with quality are churned out of the institutions. The benefit of a good media course will definitely go to the public. Better media professionals mean better reporting or coverage of events, quality journalism that is based on facts and unbiased in nature. Hence the responsibility of media schools in providing proper training to the students cannot be neglected. K.G. Suresh in his article in Indian Express says that the contribution of Journalism and Mass Communication towards nation building and social transformation has been immense. Talking about the current day media education in India, he says that presently there is no regulation as vis-à-vis media education. Consequently, teaching shops have sprung up in every nook and corner who are exploring

the students attracted to the glamorous side of the profession. Except for a couple of courses approved by UGC, no effort has been made to standardize the media curriculum or to improve the quality of faculty.

To critically analyze this statement, though it is true that media institutions are mushrooming and there are media courses offered by every alternate institution; it is also true that there is an increasing need for media institutions in the current day scenario. With the increasing number of newspapers, radio stations, television channels, advertising agencies and PR firms there is a great demand for media education. The institutions can nurture the students and teach them the technicalities of the profession. Without proper training, the media professionals will be directionless. It will be a great burden on the channels if the journalists are devoid of any training and hence the institutions are performing a great job by providing practical exposure along with theoretical knowledge about media. Further K.G. Suresh says that the need of the hour is to establish a media commission of India which would ensure that the loopholes are taken care of. He further opines that Mass Communication should also be an integral part of all programmes at secondary and senior secondary levels particularly in the stream of science and humanities. In fact it should be offered as optional subject right from class IX. This would ensure that media students have another career option as teachers in schools as well.

This write up by K.G. Suresh definitely needs a detailed analysis and understanding. There is a dire need to introduce media education at school level. Providing opportunities of media literacy at school level shall make every individual more familiar with media and its functioning. The students shall get familiar with the career options available in media.

Ankuran Dutta and Anamika Ray in their chapter 'Media Education in India: A Peer Perspective' published in the book 'Education for a Digital World 2.0' writes that Media literacy ensures knowledge of how media works.... In this world of media saturation, the people should have the capacity to navigate as well as comprehend the message being conveyed to them in each and every moment. They further say that media literacy is to help people learn how to communicate, assess, create, care and contribute for the welfare of the society.

Majority of the population in India are just receivers of messages passed on by media. The society has very little understanding of working pattern of media, the technologies used and the production techniques. The participation of majority population is restricted to being passive receivers. Only those who are trained in media schools or colleges are aware of the technicalities involved in media profession. At this junction, the term 'Media Literacy' has gained importance. It refers to the familiarity of various media and the communication happening through them. People should be aware of the messages being passed on through the media. The Agenda Setting theory of mass media becomes relevant at this point where majority of the audience are absolutely unaware of the fact that media sets the agenda. Propaganda techniques of media are beyond the comprehension of a common man. Media

houses or its editor decides what sells or what should make to the headlines of a newspaper or channel. The public passively receive the same without having any authority or a voice in deciding what should be the news. Further, the statistics provided by Digital 2021: INDIA states that Internet penetration in India stands at 45% as on January 2021 and the percentage of social media users in India stand at 32.3% as on January 2021. (Data Reportal). This is a mirror reflection of the fact that social media has not reached the majority of the population in India.

Media houses should develop a rapport with the public. They should be aware of the need, likes and dislikes of the public. The media can do justice to the society when they get the pulse of the audience. Media houses in India, especially the newspapers have definitely tried their best in establishing communication channels with the public. Creating media awareness at the school level was also one of the motives behind this. The NIE (Newspaper in Education) programme that started decades back by several newspapers aimed at inculcating reading habits among children and also at making kids familiar with their brand of newspapers. Though the hidden agenda was increasing sale of the newspaper, one cannot neglect the fact that students got familiar with the style of writing of a newspaper, the concept of news and language. The Hindu, Times of India, Vijay Karnataka and many other papers took this initiative of providing newspaper to the students in various schools free of cost. This definitely can be seen as a positive trend in imbibing media awareness among children.

#### **PRESENT STATUS OF MEDIA EDUCATION:**

The number of institutions offering media education is a reflection of the demand the course has gained during the current times. There are nearly 1000 institutions offering media education in India. (Dr. Mrinal Chatterjee, 2020) of which nearly 200 institutions are in Karnataka. The demand today is not just in the areas of Television and newspapers. Media has grown much beyond TV and print journalism. The latest demand in the job market is for Public relations, advertising agencies, creative writers, e-content developers, media researchers, graphic and animation designers etc., there is an urgent need for the educational institutions to include these aspects into the curriculum. Though it is true that PR and advertising are taught efficiently; one cannot neglect the fact that the rest of the above mentioned areas get poor or no practical coverage in the syllabus of many universities.

The importance of Media education has taken leaps and bounds. But there is also a need to concentrate on certain areas. The media literacy should not be restricted to mere theoretical knowledge. Media education is something much beyond communication models and theories. It shall not be sufficient to merely theoretically teach students about page layout, video editing, camera operations, production techniques and reporting. It is equally important to provide practical exposure or hands on experience to the students on all the above mentioned areas. There is a need to bridge the gap between media institutions and media industry. Both should walk hand in hand and back each other for the success of the entire media profession. One of the major hindrance the state is facing in terms of media

education is the infrastructure. The facilities provided by the private institutions against the government colleges also differ strongly. The private institutions are much ahead of the government colleges in creating facilities for learning. This statement is truer in reference to the media education at the graduation level. Majority of the Journalism departments at the graduation level in the state are mere advocates of theoretical knowledge. A well set up studio with equipment has been a dream even today. But one must acknowledge the fact that Universities are well equipped and provide better facilities to the students. Hence one of the areas of concentration should be towards establishing media labs that are well equipped and offer technical knowledge to the students during their stay at the college.

The syllabi taught in Journalism schools or colleges do vary considerably. And once again, the facilities offered in Government institutions and private institutions also vary significantly. The curriculum introduces students to the basics of Journalism at the graduation level – such as introduction to communication, media history, media laws, reporting techniques, advertising and Public Relations. The students are trained in various areas of Journalism over a span of two years. From page layout designing to video editing the students are prepared to face the challenges of media industry. The educational institutions are doing a commendable job in preparing media professionals. The institutions are facilitating the students to emerge as successful individuals in media. But it is also true that the media institutions are criticized frequently.

As opined by Keval J Kumar India is a third world country and therefore the aims it pursuits in media education are different from those in Europe. For India, the emphasis is rather on development and liberation. Kumar believes that media education should lead to democratic communication. According to him, a major aim of media education is making the media more accessible to society, so that they can be used more efficiently for public interest and welfare instead of being simply useful for the producer's profit.

There is also a need to revise the curriculum of Journalism and Mass Communication from time to time. Media industry is highly dynamic and requires timely restructuring of the syllabi. The Journalism syllabus of several universities in India have not undergone a change for decades. Media curriculum should undoubtedly include the latest trends in the industry. Media is a dynamic area of study that is ever changing and is never constant. Such being the case, the syllabus cannot afford to be outdated. The syllabus of every university or college should undergo a revival every two years or five years at the maximum. Continuing to teach the unaltered syllabus for decades will do more harm than good to the society. International relations, Data Journalism, political communication, economic journalism and its aspects, New Media, Blogs, Social media, Fake News, Paid news, Media Commercialization are topics that are more relevant in the current media scenario. These topics hold more importance in the current media scenario. Media education can be effective only when the

curriculum is revised frequently. The curriculum should be designed in such a way that equal or more importance is provided for practical learning. Enabling the students to use the various equipment, exposing the students to the production techniques becomes vital in creating successful media professionals. There has been a constant blame game between the media institutions and the media houses in India. The media houses often blame the institutions for not preparing the students for the actual media world – for not providing practical expertise among the students. They find it a burden to further train the students who have passed out of institutions with degrees in Journalism. On the other hand, the colleges also blame the media houses for absolute lack of cooperation from the media houses. The institutions are of the opinion that the media houses should provide more cooperation and help in training students at the colleges. However, to prove this wrong there are several universities that have an MOU with various media houses. But one must not forget the fact that these facilities are more accessible to the post-graduation students rather than the students at under graduate level.

In her research article titled ‘Media Education in India and United Kingdom: A comparative study’, Anuradha Mishra Gaur from the Vivekananda Institute of Professional studies, Delhi states that “In order to improve media education in India the major thrust areas should be curriculum design, role of academic bodies, infrastructure, faculty development and proper government policies. The media education should be so reformed that the curriculum is made keeping in mind the need of industry and emergence of new technologies. There should be more emphasis on practical assignments....”

The internship programme which is mandatory at the post-graduation level should also be introduced at the graduation level. This provides better exposure to the students and enable them to acquire higher practical knowledge and hands on experience. The percentage of students who pursue higher education is not very impressive in India. The statistics of number of students pursuing higher education in India clearly indicate that there is a constant dip. Several students enter media houses immediately after graduation and the current curriculum at the graduation level completely blocks the opportunities of acquiring hands on experience at the degree level.

Another issue of concern is the lack of research that takes place in schools and colleges. The media schools should facilitate students to conduct research in various topics related to media. Opportunities for conducting research are umpteen in media. Radio, Television, Social media, usage of language, gender issues, advertising are areas where tremendous research work can be conducted. One can surely say that there has been lack of research activities from students as well as faculty in the media schools. Research findings can go a long way in planning and designing programmes, concepts portrayed over media, kind and quality of reporting and so on. It will have a direct effect on the messages passed by media to the society. Increased research activities implies better performance of the media; understanding of the loopholes existing in the media and provides space for improvement.

When we take a look at the present status of media education in India, we should also try to

take a peep at the media education programmes offered at different nations. A comparative analysis of media education offered in India and other nations draw a clear distinction regarding the quality of education. Though several media institutions in India have acquired international fame and are sought after for admissions; it is also true that few countries like UK and USA offer better facilities to the students of media in terms of industry exposure, infrastructure and technology. Anuradha Mishra Gaur in her article based on comparative study of media education in India and UK states that the range of courses offered in India is very limited whereas UK universities offer very vast and distinct range of courses to the students of media. She further opines that the designing of the course in UK is based on contemporary needs whereas in India the course content is outdated and does not meet the contemporary demands. In India there is delinking between thematic, conceptual and theoretical framework of media education (Das, 2011)

### **ISSUES/PROBLEMS IN MEDIA EDUCATION:**

The greatest challenge faced by the media industry today is that it is unable to meet the expectations of the industry. However well trained the students are, the buck of low standards in professionalism in journalism is constantly passed on to the shoulders of media institutions. The industry at various occasions screams out loud that they have to make the cubs (fresh journalists) unlearn whatever has been taught in the institutions. Much time goes in providing fresh training and shaping them as successful journalists is a common comment heard at various interviews, seminars and conferences. Dr. Ankuran Dutta and Dr. Surbhi Dahiya in their research article titled 'Media Education in India: Curricula V/s Skill Gap' state that 80% of the media professionals who were their research sample opined that though the fresh graduates come with good technical skills, they lack general awareness and writing abilities. They further say that during their research a media person revealed that fresh graduates need to be spoon fed in the initial one year. Most journalists rely on search engines like Google and hence they are called Google journalists of the organization.

When we look at the demands of media industry, it is the practical knowledge and expertise that becomes more important than grades and ranks. Even after securing a gold medal, a student might fail to be a good journalist; but at the same time, a student with just degree or much lesser qualification but with great language or writing abilities might become a renowned journalist. Though preference is provided for students with journalism degree during interviews, there are umpteen cases where students from science, engineering, medical or any other stream who can get a job because of the skill they possess. Anybody can be a journalist irrespective of their educational background. This can be a blessing for individuals who have a passion for media, but can be a drawback for media students.

There is also a need to provide training to the media faculty at regular intervals. It is true that the faculty are excellent with theoretical knowledge in the field of media, but lack the professional or technical expertise required to teach the students. Be it page layout designing, printing technology,

blogging, writing a report, editing techniques, camera operations and so on the faculty should also be updated with the latest trends of industry; lacking of which shall impact the students, later the media industry and in turn the society at large.

It is also important for the media education to inculcate values and ethics of Journalism among young journalists. There is a huge gap between what is taught in the classrooms and what is practiced in the profession. Media's credibility is at stake more today than ever before. Fake news, sensationalizing news, bribing the journalists, political control over channels and editors have costed media its credibility. The media institutions should also try to instill ethical values at the institutional level. This can go a long way in upholding the professional standards.

#### **FUTURE PROSPECTS:**

Media has been dominant in the past, is dominating the world today and shall definitely continue to dominate the world in the future. The print media, electronic and online media – all shall have its own prominence. E-newspapers, e-magazines, e-books and watching live TV online has become possible not only through computers or laptops, but today one can easily access media over a smart phone. With technological advancements, media has become more and more flexible and user friendly. One can carry the world in a phone is so true. When we talk about the future of media academics, the nature of media education might alter or undergo changes. But the essence shall remain intact. Certificate courses, Diploma courses, integrated degree courses in Journalism are all nothing but a mirror held to the growing necessity for more media professionals. The future also has a greater demand for media education at the school level. In the days to come, media education and literacy shall be a part of regular curriculum at the schooling stage. This is already a reality in UK and USA where media literacy is the target. To attain the same media is introduced to the students at a very early stage. This will definitely be a reality in our nations too.

But media institutions being owned by media houses can be detrimental. Media education should aim at creating minds with fresh and independent thoughts; to question freely, to become the voice of the voiceless, to stand with the society rather than political parties or politicians, to re-build the faith in democracy, to fight for the nation's welfare. The danger of creating puppet journalists who work as per the whims and fancies of the media owners can do unimaginable harm to the society. Only when students are trained and taught to question freely, the society might expect to receive right answers. To sum up, good Media education can create great media professionals. The responsibility of shaping the media professionals of tomorrow lies greatly on the shoulders of media schools or colleges.

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