

→ MEDIA IN PAKISTAN.

Outline:

(1) Introduction:

Thesis statement:

Though media in Pakistan is a vital catalyst for democratic governance, national unity, and positive state image, its credibility is tarnished by sensationalism and biases, and further undermined by challenges to broadcasters and mediahouses, necessitating robust framework to harness full potentials of media.

(2) Significance of Media in Pakistan.

(3) Constructive Role of Press in Pakistan.

(a) Operates as Watchdog of State.

(b) Conveys Critical Information to Educate and Alert the Multitude

(c) Upholds Rule of Law to Ensure Democratic Governance.

(d) Bolsters Soft Image of Country through Women's Inclusion.

(e) Fosters National Cohesion and Inclusivity in Divided Society.

(4) Destructive Tendencies of Broadcasting.

(a) Offers Free Publicity to Cause of Terrorism.

- (b) Sensationalism Plague in Media
- (c) Pervasive and Deeply Ingrained Urban Bias of Press.
- (d) Role in Perpetuating Gender Based Violence

(5) Challenges Before Media Industry.

(a) Predicaments of Journalists.

- (i) Absence of Perks of Hard Posting.
- (ii) Escalating Threats of Violence and Intimidation Against Broadcasters.
- (iii) Abysmally low wages and Lack of Job Security of Journalists.

(b) Concerns of Media Houses.

- (i) State and Non-State Imposed Censorship
- (ii) Lack of national Media Policy.
- (iii) Negligible Presence of Women in Media Industry.

(6) Frameworks to Ensure Optimal Functioning of Media.

- (a) Structural Overhaul of Regulatory Bodies.
- (b) Emphasizing Journalist Safety through Comprehensive legislation, judicial Oversight and Training Programs
- (c) Institutionalization of Media

(7) Conclusion.

Information is the oxygen of modern age and media is the most comprehensive repository of information on the globe. It is the most popular forum to get news from North to South or East to West. Exceptional events like wars, conflicts and overthrow of government are at the discretion of media. Take away the fourth estate and all would change. The word 'civil' would disappear from the concept of civilization. Does media hold similar significance in Pakistan? Is there any affirmative role of media in Pakistan? Are there destructive dispositions? If yes, what are those? How can Pakistan remove stumbling blocks in way of free Press? Though media in Pakistan is a vital catalyst for democratic governance, national unity and positive image of state, its credibility is tarnished by sensationalism and biases, and further undermined by challenges to broadcasters and media houses, necessitating robust frameworks to harness full potentials of media. In Pakistan, media holds paradoxical role to play. On the one hand, it enlightens the polity, engenders national unity through representation of all and sundry. On the other hand, it provides a platform for terrorists ideologies and sensationalizes news, undermining

reliability. Additionally, industry itself grapples with appalling challenges ranging from threats to broadcasters to plight of women in media houses. However, through overhauling edifice of regulatory bodies like PEMRA and putting journalists' safety as first priority, Pakistan can safely unlock prospects of free media industry.

This essay will start off by casting the spotlight on undeniable significance of media in Pakistan. As the discussion unfolds, the binary nature of media will be unveiled, exposing its constructive peculiarities and destructive aspects. Once this is done, the essay will formally introduce deeply ingrained challenges, hindering optimal performance of press. Ultimately, the discussion will culminate in proposing some cogent strategies to equip media as beacon of hope and truth.

To begin with, significance of media in Pakistan cannot be negated. It is the mighty sword that has power to topple government, highlight institutional injustices and amplify the voices of marginalized people. As Thomas Jefferson once said, "The press is the best

instrument for enlightening the mind of man, and improving him as a rational, moral and social being'. With its far reaching impact, media of Pakistan has capacity to drive economic growth through projection of government's projects and showcasing rich cultural heritage to the world. In the social sphere, media is a blessing in disguise for oppressed people. For example, shows like 'Shabir tou dekke ga' (Shabir will bear witness) spotlight local issues such as family disputes and resource shortage, bringing government's attention. Moreover, media industry provides employment to over 150,000 people, thus media holds pressing importance for general populace and governing bodies.

Having highlighted the media's importance in Pakistan, now stage is set for exhibiting media's transformative potential in shaping the country's democratic fabric and social landscape.

Firstly, mass media examines working of government through its role as a potent watchdog of states. It ensures free and fair elections, since traditional forms of rigging such as ballot stuffing is no more possible due to presence of camera. For instance,

Pakistani media aptly exposed rigging in Azad and Jammu Kashmir elections in 2011. Similarly, the media holds government officials accountable for their actions and policies, uncovering nefarious cases of corruption. For example, the press of Pakistan appositely unveiled tax evasion and money laundering in Panama Paper case, leading to ouster of incumbent government. Furthermore, the press, through its gatekeeper functions, exposes human rights violation including forced disappearances, tortures and extrajudicial killings. Hence, media operates as scrutinizor of state.

Secondly, media of Pakistan is the only force that ensures speedy flow of necessary information, thereby educating and altering the masses. For instance, media is highly influential in conveying warnings about plausible calamities like severe weather patterns, economic conditions, political upheavels, probable military overtake and different threats. Thus, media equips the society to counter the danger. Not only that, press makes people well aware of their socio-political and economic rights. Owing to mushroom growth of TV channels and newspapers

, people today are enlightened and informed about their rights, surroundings and weaknesses of government. Such as media through its reporting exposed the purchase of 'Rental Power Projects' at a very high price and its fallouts on the power consumers. Thusly, media reporting has crucial role in enlightenment of polity.

Thirdly, law and order in nationally integrated society is also upheld by media, fostering democratic leadership in Pakistan. Press of Pakistan promotes rule of law by functioning as undleeping and vigilant guardian of the rights of the ordinary citizens. Moreover, free media of Pakistan is the most dangerous foe of tyranny. For instance, the lawyer's movement buoyed by media support was a catalyst in Musharraf's expulsion from power in 2008. Similarly, Chief Justice restoration movement in 2007 is a classic example of upholding rule of law. Therefore, Pakistani media has vantage in sustaining law and order in country.

Fourthly, the inclusion of women in Pakistan's media landscape bolsters soft image of country by depicting its progress &

towards sustainable Development Goals:
Gender Equality. In the similar vein, participation of women in press is a real achievement as noted by UN Women, "Women participation in the media is essential for promoting gender equality and challenging stereotypes." Previously, educated and seasoned women were indulged in print media; however, with the advent of electronic media, women are equally joining, paving the way towards breaking the shackles of chain of traditional gender roles. Moreover, presence of women in media can bolster confidence of international media and investors, resulting in amplified soft image of country and significant economic gains.

Fifthly, fourth pillar of state has the power to build a cohesive national society by eliminating all the differences maligning national integration. Through broadcasting of national sports such as recent coverage of Arshad Nadeem, media provided a ~~platform~~ platform for common celebrations and pride. Similarly, in backdrop of crisis, media plays a crucial role in unifying citizen as it happened in 1965 war, earthquake of 2005 and floods of 2022. What is more, media in

The recent past contributed and supported national efforts against war on Terrorism. Additionally, content in local languages enhance cohesion by making information accessible to broad audience, creating a sense of belonging among diverse linguistic groups.

But, like Janus, the Roman God of contradictions, the media wears two faces, one that enlightens, and another that misleads. As we shift our gaze from its benevolent influence, it is pertinent to confront the darker side of Pakistan's media landscape.

Undeniably, mass media of Pakistan has many perilous aspects, but its role in free propagation of terrorist ideologies being the most pervasive. The melodramatic display of graphic images from attacks by media, provides terrorists with the oxygen they need to air their nefarious cause. Moreover, sensationalized reporting of terrorists attacks and their aftermath fosters a sense of fear among people, prompting government to implement harsh counter-terrorism measures. These operations itself lead to human right abuses. As Yoram Noah Harari aptly puts in his book "21 lessons for the 21st century" that "The theatre of terror cannot succeed without

publicity. Unfortunately, the media often provides this publicity for free. Thus, the obsessive coverage of terrorists groups by the media inadvertently advance the terrorists agenda.

Besides, providing platform for terrorists, media often resorts to sensationalism owing to intense competition among them to break the news first. This Throony practice not only thwart the veracity of news but also compromises the plausibility of journalists. Over and above, plague of sensationalism shifts the focus from delivering high quality content to merely capturing the fleeting attention of audience. This is particularly true in case of crime reporting, where the media exaggerates or misrepresents the facts to grab interest. Such pervasive shift has resulted in abandoning responsible journalism in favor of sensationalized headlines and controversial stories. at the expense of objectivity and ~~authenticity~~ authenticity.

Coupled with above twin issues, urban bias stand acutely rooted in media of Pakistan. As noted by renowned journalist, Hamid Mir, "The media's obsession with urban issues is a reflection of its

disconnect from the rural populace". Due to this bias, concerns of marginalized people continue to be unheard. For instance, the press focusses on political tussles, pollution in Lahore, while ignoring or underreporting the teething troubles of rural population.

Furthermore, Pakistan's media is concentrated in metropolitan cities, with limited presence in underdeveloped areas like North-western FPK and Balochistan, keeping these regions as "media dark".

This compels local population to rely on feudal lords, nawabs to amplify their voices, whilst remaining disconnected from government. Consequently, this neglect perpetuates regionalism and separatist tendencies. Thus, urban bias remains a pernicious aspect that warrants attention.

In the similar fashion, media holds an upper hand in engendering gender based violence through reiterating stereotypical gender roles in advertisements. As UN Women's Executive Director, Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka notes, "The media has critical role to play in shaping cultural attitudes and challenging gender roles". However, in Pakistan, the media objectifies and sexualizes women through frequent advertisements, creating a culture that tolerates and justifies sexual harassment and violence

against women. This is further exacerbated when cases of gender based violence are under-reported or misrepresented, adding fuel to the woes of Pakistani women. As Pakistani activist, Marvi Sirmed, emphasizes, "The media's failure to report gender based violence accurately is a failure to uphold human rights". Hence, due to such attitude, gender based violence is reinforced by perpetrators, undermining efforts towards gender equality.

The preceding paragraphs enunciate the detrimental aspects corroding the very fabric of 4th pillar of state. Now, the succeeding paragraphs would shed light upon stumbling blocks before media, hampering its capacity to function optimally.

Among the plethora of challenges confronting the media in general and journalists in particular, lack of perks of hard posting remains the most ubiquitous. The term hard posting refers to practice of reporting and serving in conflict zones. For instance, journalists of CNN serving in war torn areas of Afghanistan would get ultimate benefits, security, compensations and higher wages in comparison to broadcaster working in safe horizons of New York. However, in Pakistan exact opposite is true; the journalists bra-

deceasing in air-conditioning rooms of Karachi and Lahore get handsome salaries, exorbitant services and privileges, whereas those hired in war-ravaged fields of Balochistan earn meagre income, negligent amenities and inadequate shielding. This grim picture highlights the vulnerability of reporters in Pakistan, battling the threat of non-existent security environment posed in sensitive zones.

Additionally, Journalism in Pakistan becomes one of the most dangerous occupation. as reporters often encounter incidences of violence, threats, kidnappings and death threats. Such heinous acts are engineered by diverse quarters ranging from militants, religious outfits to unidentified state actors and powerful corrupt officials. For instance, Mushtaq Sarqi, a Sindh TV reporter from Karachi was beaten, kidnapped and tortured for his reporting and said he was attacked for asking wrong question during political party's press conference. Similarly, death of Ahsan Sheroif in Kenya underscore that even exiled journalists of Pakistan are not safe. Such dismal picture of media in Pakistan breed a culture of fear where journalists become obliged to self censorship to save themselves, hampering the coverage of critical issues. Thus, threat to safety of reporters pose a significant hurdle

to the functioning of media.

● Apart from this, one of the most formidable challenges confronting the journalists is low salaries and shortcoming in job security. Journalists in Pakistan are not duly paid with increased pressure at work exacerbate the woes of broadcasters. For example, in 2009, ARY Digital Network was accused of not paying salaries for 3 consecutive months. In a similar vein, most journalists of Sindhi language media appear to leave the profession for better jobs available as they are financially weaker to their counterparts. The result of this vulnerability is brain drain of talented journalists thus, media outlets rely on inexperienced and untrained journalists to fill the gap. Thus, negligible salaries and lack of job security pose a significant challenge to journalism.

In the parallel context, state and non-state imposed censorship is robbing the media of its integrity and hence, audiences and influence. The suppression of free expression restricts the right to dissent and undermines the foundational principles of democracy. As George Washington notes that, "If freedom of speech is taken away, then dumb and ~~st~~ silent we may be led, like

sheep to be slaughtered'. A robust media is necessary for assuring transparency, exposing corruption and protecting citizens. When censorship restricts these liberties, democratic culture is undermined and power rests in few hands.

For example, in 2018, PEMRA suspended the license of BOL News for 30 days for airing speech by a politician, who criticized the judiciary's handling of high profile case; citing defamatory content against the judiciary. This example illustrates how media content is censored as a tactic for vested interests.

Besides above mentioned obstacles, the vacuum of national media policy presents a serious impediment to seamless functioning of press in Pakistan. Shockingly, media of Pakistan is flooded with ordinances and acts; however, uniform national media guidelines have never been formulated compelling media to undertake its functions without specific directions. Furthermore, owing to non-existent oversight national media framework, powerful moguls find an opportunity to influence media houses by silencing dissent. Additionally, without national media blueprint, unlicensed and unethical media outlets proliferate, fostering uneven playing field diluting the credibility of legitimate broadcasters. Hence, in the absence of nationally

integrated media strategy, press of Pakistan cannot flourish.

As far as the presence of women is concerned, there is negligible participation of women is there due to unfavorable policies and environment, which discourages women from pursuing journalism. According to IJWMP's Global report on the Status of women in the News Media of Pakistan, there are little numbers of news companies having gender equity policies, none have sexual harassment policies and fewer than half have maternity leave policies.

Moreover, women's presence in media is also condemned by narrow cultural and religious fictions. Furthermore, women journalists are excluded from leadership roles in the country's \$2bn media industry. Thus, presence of women in media outlets is nominal.

The discussion, so far, has navigated the treacherous terrain of hurdles to media, signalling grave outcomes. However, this essay will now put forth certain pragmatic frameworks to ensure maximum prospects of press in Pakistan.

Primarily, structural reformation of regulatory bodies is the need of the hour to address challenges faced by the media. The

Current media ~~via~~ regulatory bodies yields colossal powers to state through strict control of regulatory bodies like PEMRA, PTA and others. The state and government need to unshaken regulatory stronghold over media to ensure press freedom and fair competition in media industry. The government should not have veto over content of media, unless exercised through legislation in extreme conditions. Moreover, the reformed regulatory bodies should publish an annual credibility index of media outlets to raise public awareness and build pressure on the media for enforcement of ethical standards.

Secondarily, to ~~be~~ make media industry thriving, safety of journalists should be ensured through various measures including legislation, judiciary and funds. In case of any attack on journalists, all newspapers should write a joint editorial to strangle the government and agencies. Moreover, media houses should be obliged to arrange trainings for journalists working in conflict zones, they should also be bound that they will insure journalists and media workers. The lives and liberties of journalists under threat should be protected. Journalists, being eyes and ears of the society, ought to be granted consti-

tutional protection. The federal and provincial governments should operationalize their existing laws on journalists safety by establishing respective bodies therein.

Lastly, to harmonize media activities and use their potentials to create positive changes in society, an institutional approach of media is needed. Mass communication Institute (MCI) must be established. Everyone involved in the process of editing and investigating must be registered member of the mass communication institute (MCI). National Media University should be established and made functional at an accelerated pace.

To conclude, media is a vital pillar for Pakistan and indispensable tool for growth and prosperity. As an actor of socio-economic and political change, media stabilizes or destroys a society. It is considered as part and parcel of nation's power potential as it determines the reason to grow or decay of a nation. Press and nation rise and fall together. Media, as a whole scrutinizes the working of government

, enhances the knowledge of public and communicates all the happenings to the multitude, while greatly contributing to social justice. Media has emancipated women, exposed corruption and developed awareness. However, role of media as a double edged sword cannot be denied. It promotes ideologies of terrorists, sensationalizes news thereby deteriorating the reliability and authenticity of news. Moreover, Pakistani media is under cage of certain challenges including ~~the~~ non-remunerative postings in war torn areas, low salaries of journalists and plight of women in media houses, which more or less hamper actual strengths of media. Hence, institutionalization of media, reforms in oversight bodies and security for journalists is pressing necessity. To pave the way for free and independent media.

"The free expression of the hopes and aspirations of people is the greatest and only safety in a sane society".

~ Emma Goldman.