
**A COMPARATIVE LITERARY ANALYSIS OF JOURNALISTIC
IMPEDIMENTS IN WESTERN AND INDIAN NEWS MEDIA
THROUGH VINOD MEHTA'S *LUCKNOW BOY: A MEMOIR***

Dr. Brindha K¹, Assistant Professor and Head, Department of English, Chikkanna Government Arts College, Tiruppur, Tamilnadu

Premanand K², Ph D Research Scholar, Department of English, Chikkanna Government Arts College, Tiruppur Tamilnadu

Article Received: 02/08/2024

Article Accepted: 06/09/2024

Published Online: 07/09/2024

DOI:10.47311/IJOES.2024.6.9.13

Abstract

Democracy relies on the governance of its responsible citizens and the watchful media. Media plays a significant role in shaping society's intellectual and informative individuals. Media has become the public eyes through which people observe the world, much more precisely in how it projects. This devious media approach led to control of public opinion through its authority and dominance. Media has become the delineation of social and political life, depicting each state of excellence through detailed and deliberate contemplation. Political interferences strongly influenced the media soon after the world wars. The surplus power that media possesses changed the course of action. It paved the way for materialism and corruption to control the media industry. Private ownership and propaganda-based journalism started to dominate reality, which is the repercussion of power politics in journalism in both Western and Indian media. Indian media is modeled on Western methods and ideologies. The fundamental model of form and structure is drawn from Western institutions. Vinod Mehta, one of the renowned journalists in India, reveals the transgression of media and journalism in India through his work and puts forth the light on the darker side of news and publishing media through his personal experience as an editor and proprietor for more than four decades. In his *Lucknow Boy: A Memoir*, he presents the impediments of journalism and the political and social pressure that influences the media industry.

Key Words: Journalism, Politics, News media, Impediments

Introduction:

Democracy relies on the governance of its responsible citizens and the watchful media. A society is made up of various social and cultural variables that help to lead a harmonious social life for every individual. Life has been made serene because of the perpetuation of political and economic unanimity. In order to maintain

this unanimity of the State, Thomas Jefferson advocated the necessity of well-educated and well-informed citizens. Media plays a significant role in shaping the intellectual and informative individuals of society.

Throughout these years, media-enhanced intellectual deliberations and function as highly reliable sources of information. This devious approach of media led to control the public opinion through its authority and dominance. Media has become the delineation of social and political life which depicts each state of excellence through its detailed and deliberate contemplation. The development of technology in the field of media has intensified and expanded its growth.

Media has become the public eyes through which people observe the world, much precisely in the way in which it projects. The power that it possesses in the contemporary world has mediated the political and economic benefits of media authorities such as the owners, the editors, and the reporters. Political interferences strongly influenced the media soon after the world wars. The surplus power that media possesses changed the course of action. It paved the way for materialism and corruption to control the media industry. Private ownership and propaganda-based journalism started to dominate reality, which is the repercussion of power politics in journalism.

Comparative analysis of news media:

Indian media is modeled on Western methods and ideologies. The fundamental model of form and structure is drawn from Western institutions. Vinod Mehta, one of the renowned journalists in India, quotes in his memoir *Lucknow Boy: A Memoir*, "The famous Sunday Times (London) 'insight' module gave me the inspiration for both pages" (LB 99) for his Sunday paper. However, the transition of space and time influences the power relationship in an unlikely way. He reveals the transgression of media and journalism in India through his work and puts forth the light on the darker side of news and publishing media through his personal experience as an editor and proprietor for more than four decades. In his *Lucknow Boy: A Memoir*, he presents the impediments of journalism and the political and social pressure that influences the media industry.

Compared to the Western media, Indian news media is made of imperfections, imperfections of society, political interceptions, and power domination. Mehta elucidates, "Newspapers are products of imperfection. They are written under great pressure and great hurry" (LB 270). In the Western scenario, news corporations control the political parties and influence government policies to extend their dominance. Whereas in Indian media, the situation is diametrically opposite, where the government and political authorities influence the media. They utilize their wider reach and language abilities to influence the masses with their policy-making. George Orwell, in his "Politics and English Language," says, "The great enemy of clear language is insincerity. When there is a gap between one's real and one's declared aims, one turns as it were instinctively to long words and exhausted idioms,

like a cuttlefish spurting out ink" (7). These words of Orwell clearly exemplify the diplomatic use of language. Most of the journalists and editors are caught between the real and the declared selves, which causes the transgression of language, resulting in insincerity towards the profession and truth.

Mehta says, "I am sickened when I hear a politician or tycoon or editor endlessly spout words like principle, integrity, patriotism, national interest when most of the country knows that the spouting individual got to where he is by continuously violating what he preaches" (LB: XIV). Throughout these years, newspapers and broadcasting media have been used as a tool to embed political ideologies with their presumed falsification. With the selective use of vocabulary and management of thoughts, these authorities influence and persuade common people. Mehta expresses the exploitation of institutional power in Indian society and puts forth his loss of faith in the flow of institutional power with reference to politics and media.

He propounds, ". . . to misquote the poet, Shelley; journalists are the unacknowledged legislators of democratic societies" (LB 260). The real duty of journalists is to maintain the social order and to make sure that the serenity of society is sustained. Because of the interference of politics and institutional power of media in the duty of journalists, the news is subjectively influenced. Mehta also brings out a few real-life incidents that co-exist with the intervention of power in the functioning of media. He cites an incident from his experience in Indian Post, where the proprietor of the news magazine intervenes in the publishing of an article about the then Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi:

A news article about a woman giving birth in a taxi, whose way was blocked by Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi's convoy, was the kind of stuff that hurt the powers that be. The paper emphasized the article by quoting the doctors attending the woman that a further delay would have proved fatal to the infant. (LB 121)

The intervention of power:

Indian news media is conscious about not confronting those who are in power. The social hierarchy strongly commands not to infuriate politicians for the general causes of people. In situations like this, the owners of the publishing industry control the freedom of journalists and editors for the mere support of politicians. To justify his standpoint, Mehta opines, "The most searching disapproval was uttered by a former English prime minister, Stanley Baldwin. Talking of British press barons in 1931, he said they exercise 'power without responsibility the prerogative of the harlot through the ages'" (LB 261). The ethical approach of media is corrupted by the direct influence of the proprietors who model their companies on the base of wealth and economy.

Compared to the Western context, in India, the level of the threat to life and direct suppression by those who are in power is high. In one instance, for writing against one of the former PM's son-in-law, the press was raided, and the government officials looted all the documents during the investigation. The power is misused to

suppress the freedom of the press in India. "For the pukka journalist, however, it is not important how close you are to the prime minister, but how close you are to reality" (LB 268). Regardless of all these impediments and interventions, the press still attempts to bring out the truth, and democracy prevails in a few places only because of the efforts of the media. Orwell, in *All Art is Propaganda: Critical Essays*, states:

In our age, there is no such thing as "keeping out of politics." All issues are political issues, and politics itself is a mass of lies, evasions, folly, hatred, and schizophrenia. When the general atmosphere is bad, language must suffer. I should expect to find-- this is a guess which I have not sufficient knowledge to verify--that the German, Russian, and Italian languages have all deteriorated in the last ten or fifteen years as a result of dictatorship. (230)

As of Orwell's understanding, media has such political interventions that are a bit high compared to other industries. The monopoly of the press might cause dictatorship or the capitalistic imperialism of information. The political interferences are high in media in *Lucknow Boy: A Memoir*, a representative text of Indian media. This shows the excessive influence of power in the media for political propaganda and idealizing individuals. This may cause a monopoly on media or a capitalistic change in the future, causing the destruction of the freedom and morality of the press.

Transgression of form:

In proving their assumptions of Orwell, the transition of media, which took place in the press and media houses, ensured the transgression of form and content. Mehta informs, "I devised India's first political diary- half gossip, half buzz, and a little fact" (LB 115). He also informs that the Western form of tabloid journalism influenced the Indian news media and states, "Mostly when Mr. and Mrs. India wake up in the morning and read their paper, they want their views of the world confirmed, not challenged" (LB 266). Modeled on audience-centered journalism, Mehta explains in a magazine interview, "I want to create a first-class newspaper . . . and inside that newspaper, I want to package a first-class magazine. So, I am offering the reader a bonus, a first-class newspaper, and a first-class magazine every day" (LB 114-115). As a result of the transition, the blend of form, amalgamation of information, and entertainment preoccupied the news media with the record of events and gossip. "As you must have noticed, there are departures in content, style, and design. I believe the days when a newspaper's mandate was confined to news and views, however comprehensive, are over" (LB 115). Mehta detests the transition of media, but still, for survival, he accepts the changes that took place in the industry.

The transition of media and the involvement of technology in the field of press and media have revolutionized the industry. The traditional norms are replaced by the institutional powers of media and politics. Media has become a tool of political propagation and popularity. Sensationalism and gossiping have replaced ethical journalism. For example, the editor of a publishing house asked Mehta for his biography of Meena Kumari to find out whether "Meena Kumari, as rumored, a

nymphomaniac?. . I could come to no definite conclusion on the issue which the publisher was very keen for me to investigate" (LB 77). The intervention of media in the private matters of celebrities and politicians, mainly for such sexual intricacies, deeply for sensationalism and readership, presents the demoralized state of media, both the Western and Indian media.

Mehta states, "In fact, members of the fourth estate are notorious for being opinionated" (LB 265), which means that the transitional media has emerged as an opinionated one. Its affiliation with political parties and business barons expresses ideas in a way that persuades the masses for the commodification of products and policy making. Because of this affiliation, the restraints of media have become burdens. When Mehta attempts to publish any sensational article about politicians or celebrities, the proprietor intervenes and persuades him not to publish such articles regarding them. At one point, he lists eight individuals and says, "Besides the eight luminaries listed against whom no story could be carried, he included a line which in its truthfulness and naivety was breathtaking: '. . . these persons can seriously jeopardize our business interests'" (LB 120). The institutional power struggle and the change in view of artists and journalists caused the lack of involvement in the creation of art. Satyajit Ray, one of the best filmmakers of the transitional period, is condemned by a journalist about his film *Asani Sanket* in his review:

Unsurprisingly, the review was a vitriolic condemnation of Ray's alleged bourgeois tendencies. Even before Nargis accused Satyajit Ray of exporting poverty, young filmmakers like Saeed Nizra charged Ray with lacking 'commitment' to India's poor. In his review, Saeed was unsparingly critical of Ray for 'not providing solutions to conflicts' and glorifying poverty through lyricism and aesthetics. (LB 88)

The transitional media projects the signs of bourgeois tendency in its outcomes. The above-mentioned situation explicates the lack of attachment to the social problems in the media industry. The idea of glorification of social issues to persuade the audience is dominant. Though the media has been dominated by power struggles, it has contributed to self-regulation and social agitations at some point. The corruption in the media institution, especially from an editor, will decimate the production of news. Mehta propounds, "A corrupt editor meanwhile corrupts a publication top to bottom" (LB 263). He quotes, "No one has spelled out better than Orwell how corrupt writing produces corrupt societies and vice versa" (LB 57).

Corrupt Writings:

Corrupt writings influence people in a negative way and deceive them in a presumed way. For personal benefits, a few media authorities are tying up with businessmen and politicians, who use them for the development of their prosperity and popularity in society. Power-centered journalism aims at sensationalism and mediocre bourgeois tendencies, which strongly influence media. This state of non-reliability insists, ". . . the need for independent journalism is greater than ever" (LB 139), which the technological development has provided through the internet. The emergence of the new media is a blessing in disguise because, though it has numerous

drawbacks, one of the important blessings is that it has opened up the way for collective journalism. Mehta, through his experience in this media industry for more than four decades, explicitly expresses:

I believe the political class in India takes the media far too seriously. Listen, we are just a bunch of guys and gals sitting around a table pretending to decide your fate . . . We have deadlines to meet, and we have to be first with the news. We make mistakes. Mistakes of judgment, mistakes of fact. Hype is part of our business. It is not part of yours. For us, every disagreement is irreconcilable, every verbal spat is an all-time low, every small turbulence in government means the government is falling, and every change in foreign policy is a sell-out. (LB 232)

Through these lines, he redefines the transitional understanding of news media and constitutes the internal power structures that influence and organize the unanimity of institutional economic needs. Even though the sensationalism of media is part of the business, it affects the social and political life of individuals. The impact varies based on the class and social structure.

Conclusion:

Regardless of the territorial differences, the institutional and political influence of media are predisposing the readers' minds to presumed ideologies and strategies of policy making. The institutional and political interventions are predominant in both the Western and Indian media, whereas compared to the Western media, the politics in Indian media dominates and persuades news outlets for personal welfare and political idealization. Media is more concerned about sensationalism and bourgeois tendencies of the present age. Class structure plays a significant role in content-centered media, and the elite class is especially always in the limelight.

References:

- Louw, P. Eric. *The Media and Political Process*. Sage, 2013.
- Mehta, Vinod. *Lucknow Boy: A Memoir*. Penguin Books India, 2011.
- Mcchesney, Robert W. "Farewell To Journalism?" *Journalism Practice*, vol. 6, no. 5–6, 2012, pp. 614–626., doi:10.1080/17512786.2012.683273.
- Orwell, George, and George Packer. *All Art Is Propaganda: Critical Essays*. Harcourt, 2009.
- Orwell, George. *Politics and the English Language*. Penguin, 2013.
- Underwood, Doug. *Journalism and the Novel: Truth and Fiction, 1700-2000*. Cambridge Univ. Press, 2011.