

four functions have become the "new gatekeepers" of media in India determining the direction, priorities and pre-occupation of media in India. That is when the concerns of media shifted from content to carriage and to growth aspects (with that cross media ownership gained ground and media moguls were no longer limited to behind the scene). They tilted the balance against the journalists. The bargain has been more between the owners and the Government with new gatekeepers tilting the scale. Civil society does not figure in that process. Had journalists unions at regional and national levels not there, the media in India would have become by now satellites of corporate, foreign and Indian. How else influential *EPW Journal* would have described that as "fourth estate on sale" (2010) in the context of paid news debate. Demand for increasing FDI further into news media too is gaining ground. When I analysed this phenomena and brought it out for the first time in the country - it took me three years (1999 - 2002) to get an article (paradigm shift in media operations) published - as if the news media was not prepared to take a critical introspection. It was the *Frontline* which published (2001) my analysis on paradigm shift in media. Has media changed further in this regard since?

For the second time in a week last month (October 2011) the Government was found in a quandary, indicating how weak the Government is and how powerful the big media establishments have become. The Government had to yield on two of its initiatives. One was on modality of renewal of licenses of broadcasters and the second was withdrawal of an important provision from the Press and Registration Bill 2010. These two instances remind once again what the country is missing- a national policy. Interestingly, the same week the Election Commission disqualified for the first time, a legislator in Uttar Pradesh from contesting elections on finding evidence for the allegation of

paid news. India has a national policy on a wide range of issues and sectors, marginal and mundane including. Mass media is perhaps one of the few important services that we do not have a policy - despite several compulsions over the decades for a national policy. How come? A Cabinet decision of 1955 (on foreign investment into media) remained a policy for more than three decades. Even Supreme Court direction has not made a difference. Having a policy does not give the kind of flexibility! How else we would have free for all media scene as we have today. What else explains the Government dropping last week of October 2011 an important provision from the Press and Registration (PRBP) Bill of 2010 before tabling it in the Winter Session of the Parliament? And it was supposed to have been an outcome of Cabinet Sub Committee deliberation on paid news. (*Financial Express*, October 24, 2011).

This provision would have saved journalists from the blame for paid news syndrome. Forty years ago when I got into the first NRS, I did not realise that I was laying foundation for media research in India. And that I will be part of certain critical decisions of the time (1970-95). But seeing the way important decisions were taken in the last decade without rational or a debate, I wonder to think where we are heading with two fundamental aspects of our democracy-free and fair elections and free and independent media. As I also pioneered election studies in India (1970-2010), I know the linkage between the two.

Fifteen years ago when Journalists Unions approached me to depose before the Wage Board on the performance of the media in the country (the establishments were arguing that press was operating in loss), I told them that unless unions close their ranks and leadership emerge out of them, journalist should not rely on Wage Board for too long, particularly because editor leaders were no longer around. Today I see the

situation even more delicate with no visionaries around to offer a holistic perspective or to take a bold introspection.

Every few years journalists have to lobby for appointment of a Wage Board and Government obliges as if it was a favour to journalists and then journalists had to rally around again to get the Wage Board recommendations accepted and face resistance in getting them implemented by the media establishments. Had there been a national media policy, journalists today would not have been in such a vulnerable situation. The dilemma is best evident the way paid news revelation was taken up and forgotten even after Cabinet's sub-committee to consider the matter and a Parliamentary Committee looking into. Election Commission had even for the first time disqualified a - MLA from contesting an election as paid news was proved, and the Press Commission proved itself blatantly that it goes by the interests of the big bosses of media.

These recent two instances of October 2011 bring out the dilemma. That the provision for disclosing sources of revenue of news media has been dropped from the Press and Registration Bill 2010 was neither reported by any news media or countered by any leader either way despite the Bill was in public purview for several months awaiting introduction in the Parliament (except one financial daily) obviously because that is not in the interest of media establishments. Whereas the other notification making renewal of broadcast license conditional was all over in news media as if it was an assault on media - all that within 24-hours after the notification and in the next 24-hours the Government had backtracked that decision, forgetting that today we are in a transparency era with RTI Act. Both the initiatives would have ensured some transparency and would have even enhanced the credibility of media.