

# Role of Mass Media in the Study of Environmental Protection

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This paper attempts to highlight the role that Media has played in setting perceptions and creating awareness on environmental issues. In the past decades, sustainability and environmental awareness have gained media attention. Due to increasing media coverage, our society is becoming more aware of the effects that our activities put on the health of the environment. In this regard the media has a big role to play in making people aware of environment issues. Most recent steps by the Government of India for promoting sanitation 'Swachhha Bharat Abhiyan' has got success by the united efforts of the Government and media. Media has always covered social and environmental issues thus it is the most revolutionary device for spreading consciousness towards environment protection.

Environment is fundamental for all living things. Both developing and developed countries are facing serious environmental problems. While some of the problems might be alike due to their global nature (e.g. global warming, depletion of the ozone layer), others are specifically local ones. Unless the environment is protected, the existence of life on the planet Earth would eventually be impossible. Environmental awareness may be defined as to help the social group and individual to gain a variety of experiences to acquire a basic understanding of environment and its associated problems. Environmental awareness needs a political answer. The role of mass media is one of the most important factors underlying the knowledge of environmental problems: this can only be true on the conditions that first, mass media are accessible to large proportions of the population, second, are spending some time on environmental issues and third, people are interested in information on ecological issues provided by the media so that they view or listen to the corresponding programs as well as read newspaper articles or other written publications dealing with environmental issues.

## Introduction

Right from mother's womb, one needs unpolluted air to breath, uncontaminated water to drink, nutritious food to eat and hygienic condition to live in. These elements

are sine qua non for sound development of human personality. In the absence of these seldom all the faculties of man grow to their fullest extent. Man in order to survive, adapts itself to its environment but he rarely pays due attention for its improvement, either because of his indifference towards it or because of his lack of ability to improve or change it or because of his ignorance of it. The governmental organization too, had paid scanty regard for it. On the contrary, in the name of development and progress through industrial and agricultural revolutions, environment is being affected adversely day by day.<sup>1</sup>

Traditionally we are a pollution loving nation. We pollute air by bursting crackers on Dussehra, Diwali and on the occasions of marriages and other festivals. We pollute our rivers by disposing of our dead bodies and all other human and other waste. We take out so much wood from our trees for fuel that in many areas trees have become scarce. We are primarily a vegetarian nation, but our wild life is on the verge of extinction. We are lovers of cleanliness and, therefore, broom out all our household and other waste on the public streets. Any space is good enough for us to ease: we are a country which believes in open latrines.<sup>2</sup> Municipalities are oblivious of their duties and all city wastes, human and industrial effluents are allowed to flow in open drains and to flood the streets. We are equally fond of noise pollution: Godmen's voice must be heard by all, day and night, and our Ratjagas, Akhandpaths and azan must use loudspeakers and amplifiers; no one should be deprived from hearing God's and Godmen's voice—and Gods too are far away beyond the hell and heaven. Our voice must reach them; otherwise our spiritual needs will remain unministered. We are not less noisy in our secular matters. Our marriage and burial processions must be accompanied by bands, twists and Bhangras.<sup>3</sup>

All over this world the exponential growth of people, production, power, place & pollutants are having their impact on the water, air as well as on land cycles of nature to the detriment of mankind.<sup>4</sup> Environment has been defined to include water, air, land and the inter-relationship which exists amongst and between water, air, land and human beings, other living creatures, plants, micro-organisms and property.<sup>5</sup> Such a broad definition of environment by the prime legislation of the country, the Environment Protection Act, 1986, is bound to create complex equations both in terms of management and its protection. The quality of environment in this broad sense has been subject to constant pressure primarily from industrial threats. The reconciliation of the industrial activities with environmental values presents a big challenge. Industry needs to be conscious of the needs for sustainable development. This is because the debate of environment versus development has almost assumed clichéd proportions and it would not be unfair to suggest that now a time has come when the pitting of one with

<sup>1</sup> H. N. Tiwari, *Environmental Law*, 1 (Allahabad Law Agency, Faridabad, Haryana, Third Edition, 2005).

<sup>2</sup> Ibid

<sup>3</sup> Chetan Singh Mehta, *Environmental Protection and the Law*, 15 (APH Publishing House, New Delhi, 1991).

<sup>4</sup> Paras Diwan, *Environment Administration Law and Judicial Attitude Studies on Environment Protection*, 5-6 (Deep and Deep Publications, New Delhi, 1992).

<sup>5</sup> Section 2(a), Environment Protection Act, 1986.

another has to cease even at the debate level. It would now be prudent to approach the issue of environment protection with the consciousness that environment protection and development is a co-existing reality and the focus should turn to its complementarily rather than their commonly understood diametrically opposite position.<sup>6</sup> Mass-media can play a vital role in creating peoples' awareness about environment and conservation of natural resources. The electronic media can identify and bring to a halt forces affecting the natural and even the man-made environment. It matters much how the public mind can be mobilized to reduce pollution and promote environmental quality. Communication is helpful in creating people's awareness about environment pollution and conservation of natural resources. It contributes to dialogue and social actions. It helps to build local capacities and allows people to share their experiences. Communication maintains human richness during environmental disasters. It contributes to understanding between different cultures. Further, it helps to establish basic community services and emotional counselling process to enable survivors. Media have been a combination of print and electronic media. Print media includes newspapers, journals and magazines etc. while electronic media includes computer, television, radio, mobile phones and internet enabled electronic gadgets etc. etc. Both print and electronic media bring forth to the public different issues of public interest like nearby happening, environmental sustainability, awareness about personal hygiene etc. These media also highlight different environmental problems like pollution, ozone layer depletion, soil erosion, deforestation etc. this awareness generated by different media have their impact on people of different places. They become more aware and attentive to environmental problems.<sup>7</sup> The Government of India as well as our Parliament is increasingly supportive of stringent environmental legislations and Regulations. Various legislations have been enacted by Indian Parliament in last about 30 years to tackle the problem of environmental protection. Various Rules and Regulations have also been framed.<sup>8</sup>

The Government of India as well as our Parliament is increasingly supportive of stringent environmental legislations and Regulations. Various legislations have been enacted by Indian Parliament in last about 30 years to tackle the problem of environmental protection. Various Rules and Regulations have also been framed. Despite these legislations, Rules and Regulations, protection and preservation of environment is still a pressing issue. Today, the necessity of environmental awareness and enforcement is more demanding and urgent than ever before. The first question we have to ask ourselves is why despite provisions in Indian Constitution providing for Environmental Protection and many statutory provisions, the environment degradation continues. The answer to this question is quite simple. The main cause for environment

degradation is lack of effective enforcement of various laws. If we may say, though quite regretfully, that there is also lack of proper, effective and timely enforcement of even orders passed by courts, though it is a matter of some satisfaction that in last about two decades, the Supreme Court has pronounced number of judgments and orders and issued various directions with the objective of securing the protection and preservation of environment and enforcement of human rights of citizens, Right to Life in Article 21 of Constitution of India means something more than survival of animal existence. It includes right of healthy living. Therefore, when we talk of environment degradation, we talk of violation of rights under Article 21. The Supreme Court's orders and directions cover long range of areas whether it be air, water, solid waste or hazardous waste. The field covered is very vast such as vehicular pollution, pollution by industries, depletion of forests, illegal felling of trees, dumping of hazardous waste, pollution of Rivers, illegal mining, List can be unending. The Supreme Court has passed orders for closure of polluting industries and environmentally harmful aqua-farms, mandated cleaner fuel for vehicles, stopping illegal mining activity, and protecting forests and architectural treasures like *Taj Mahal*.<sup>9</sup> Landmark Judgment of 1996 expanding the definition of forest to its ordinary dictionary meaning, ban imposed on all non-forest activities on forest land without prior approval of the Central Government, the directions to constitute Expert Committee in each State to identify forests, directions for movement and disposal of timber, constitution of High Power Committee to deal with forest, the order constituting Central Empowered Committee for monitoring the implementation of orders in forest matters, orders on commercial vandalism indulged by various companies including multinational companies by painting advertisements on rocks around Rohtang Pass and Manali area in Himachal Pradesh, and the constitution of Environmental Protection Control Authority. The propagation and real and effective implementation of all these can go a long way in motivating people which would help in tackling the problem of environmental degradation. Various High Courts in the country have also passed similar orders. Various government records recognize the problem of environment degradation. Number of Annual Forest Reports issued by the Government of India mention about rapid depletion of forests though the said reports also mention that there has been some check because of the orders of the Supreme Court. The environmental problems of today whether it is air and water pollution, ozone depletion, land degradation, deforestation, destruction of ecosystem or mismanagement of waste all damage our natural environment and life on earth. None can afford to be complacent considering enormity of the problem and large area to cover. Every person and institution has to play the assigned role to the best of one's capability to save India's forest and wild life.

<sup>6</sup> Sanjay Upadhyay, Videh Upadhyay, *Environment Protection, Land and Energy Laws*, 3-4 (Lexis Nexis Butterworths, New Delhi, 2002).

<sup>7</sup> Available at [www.rierc.org](http://www.rierc.org) visited on 15/04/2018.

<sup>8</sup> Available at [www.supremecourtindia.nic.in](http://www.supremecourtindia.nic.in) visited on 15/04/2018

<sup>9</sup> *M.C. Mehta v. Union of India*, (1997) 11 SCC 327.

The communication media can play a positive role in the protection and preservation of environment. They can play an active role in alerting people about environmental damages, corporate failure to meet its legal obligations and truthful analysis of new legislations. The basic responsibilities of the communication media may include:

- reporting and publishing the truth;
- conducting thorough probes into issues relating to violations;
- highlighting the failure of government officials;
- not succumb to the pressure tactics adopted by governmental officials/ anti-social elements; and
- Forcing others to avoid making political mileage from issues relating to the violations.

The emergence of the Internet as a source of information, with its vast reach and accessibility, has been an extremely important development. The only drawback is the difficulty in ascertaining the reliability of source. Also this medium is available to only a limited population in our country. In the light of this, television and the print media can play more important role. Further, the radio has a large audience in the rural areas. Issues such as forestry, nutrition, women's health, children's rights, overall development, could occupy a top slot on a regular basis. Audio-visual media could rely on various documentaries on the environmental abuses, and facilitate awareness by interviews with environmental activists. The press has been very active in keeping the public well informed about various burning issues. The print media need to be more vigilant in exposing environmental issues. The role of the print media is of the utmost importance as the courts and other bodies, like the National Human Rights Commission, do take cognizance of reports published in the newspapers. Therefore, the Print Media must ensure truthful reporting. The glare of publicity can also result in prompt punitive and preventive action by authorities. The only caution that needs to be exercised is that in the zeal to expose violations, and in targeting violators, the media should refrain from actually trying an alleged violator.

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### Need for Public Awareness

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Man has acquired the capacity to change the environment more than any other organism on this planet. He uses much more material and energy for his agriculture, industry, transport, comfort, communication, aesthetic pleasure and even war than any other species on the earth. Human needs and greed's have disturbed the delicate ecological balance. Humans are depleting and degrading the vital life supporting systems including air, water and land to the entire living world. Any government at its own level cannot achieve the goals of sustainable development until the public has a participatory role in it. Public participation is possible only when the public is aware about the ecological and environmental issues. Mass-media can play a vital role in

creating peoples' awareness about environment and conservation of natural resources. It can serve this purpose by means of its multi-channel regional and network service comprising programmes such as talks, interviews, plays and documentaries etc. The electronic media can identify and bring to a halt forces affecting the natural and even the man-made environment. It matters much how the public mind can be mobilized to reduce pollution and promote environmental quality. Media research and media planning in the field of environmental protection and conservation of natural resources can be accelerated keeping in view the attitude of the people. These could steer campaign objectives, measure the effectiveness of advertising campaign, provide the information most relevant to the efficient use of media and transmit programmes on conservation of resources and maintenance of environmental quality. Communication is helpful in greeting people's awareness about environment pollution and conservation of natural resources. It contributes to dialogue and social actions. It helps to build capacities and allows people to share their experience. Communication maintains human richness during environmental disasters. It contributes to understanding between different cultures. Further, it helps to establish basic community services and emotional counseling process to enable survivors.

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### Types of Mass Communication

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Mass media can be categorized according to physical form, technology involved, nature of the communication process etc. Given below are the major categories of mass media.

#### Print Media

The printing press using moveable types introduced the method for mass production of texts. Before the invention of the printing press, books were expensive materials affordable only for the aristocrats and royal families. Printing reduced the cost of books and made them available to the common men also. Rapid duplication of multiple copies of handy texts led to the innovation of modern newspapers.<sup>10</sup> Print Media is the oldest one available to the marketers and advertisers. In terms of advertising billing it is the largest as compared to any other medium. Newspaper and magazines have two sources of income one from circulation and subscription, which may be referred to as circulation revenue, the second is from advertising, advertising revenue, which is substantial, is generated from the sale of space in the publication. Almost 50 to 60 per cent of the space is occupied by advertisements in most of the publications. Thus press continues to earn a large amount of revenue from advertisement billings.<sup>11</sup> At the same time, it suffers because of the escalating costs, lack of modern equipment and machinery and wrong government policies. Yet it is certain that the print media, particularly the Newspapers will continue to shape and mold the destiny of the nation through information and education. It will also continue to be an

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<sup>10</sup> Dominick, Joseph R, *The Dynamics of Mass Communication*, McGraw Hills Companies Inc., New York, 1996, p. 195.

<sup>11</sup> A. Helan,, *Prey for tomorrow*, Advertising Marketing (A & M) May 1992, p. 68.

effective and economical advertising medium for creating awareness. Image building, opinion molding and attitudinal changes cannot achieve success without press/print media. So the industrial products cannot do away with it. Therefore, print media is of paramount significance in the society in achieving both commercial goals and social objectives. Its effect cannot be quantified in commercial terms as it always wins the battle for mind. Print Media includes newspapers, magazines, books, Booklets, Brochures, Periodicals, Newsletter, Posters and Banners.

### Electronic Media

The history of electronic mass media starts with the invention of radio by Marconi. The first radio station was set up in Pittsburg, New York and Chicago in the 1920s. Following the USA, European countries also started radio stations for broadcasting news and entertainment content. The colonial powers like Briton and France set radio stations in Asian and African countries in the early years of 20th century. The next step in electronic communication media history was the invention of cinema. Following cinema, television broadcasting was initiated in the US on experimental basis during 1920s. But, the dramatic impact of television as a mass medium began in 1950s. Parallel to these, recording industry was also boomed in the western countries. In short, the term electronic media mainly include radio, television and cinema.<sup>12</sup>

### Radio

Radio broadcast which started functioning in India in 1927, is the oldest among the electronic media. A regular broadcasting service went on the air from Madras on July 23, 1927. The government took over in 1930 and started operating under the name of India Broadcasting service which was changed to All India Radio (AIR) in 1936. Since 1957 which is known as Aakashvani. Since then, a lot of improvements in the programmes and the extensive expansion schemes have let the radio to become the most popular medium. According to the 1984 survey of the Audience Research Unit of the All India Radio, nearly 90 per cent of the total population of India is reached by All India Radio and so radio is considered to be very popular with the advertisers who want their products to reach the rural masses. The popularity of the radio as a media, its usefulness and its effectiveness can be gauged from the table given below. It indicates the number of broadcasting centers, population reach out and area covered by All India Radio from the time of Independence to 1989. Despite the audio and video boom and Doordarshan's comparatively new found hold, AIR, sans all that glamour still dominates the scene, particularly in the rural areas and in the

remotest corners of the country where television has not made much headway.

### Television

In a developing country like India, the T.V. has so far reached only metropolitan and big cities. Now it is spreading down to the smaller towns. In the recent time, the television network has developed and grown tremendously.<sup>13</sup> Television as a medium everywhere in the world, is undergoing a revolution with cable and satellite technologies helping bring an increasing widening range of programme choices and advertising opportunities. But at present Doordarshan is facing stiff competition from the satellite, cable T.V. and home video. By the end of 1992, the country will have 15,000 cable networks, each with about 200 connections. So Doordarshan should try to understand the nature of the market. Even today, the network prime time serials have a viewership of 55% to 60% in Delhi but only 8% to 10% in Madras. So Doordarshan has to change its present strategies to remain in limelight, because viability depends on the orchestration of programming.<sup>14</sup>

### Cinema

Cinema is traditionally regarded as a part of the cultural life of a country. In India, next to the press, the cinema is the most widely used national medium reaching out even to the towns with population levels below five thousand. Respondents in a survey conducted by Tata Economic Consultancy services in the twin cities of Hyderabad and Secunderabad rated the cinema as the second most influential advertising medium, next only to the press. As the cinema attracts both the literate and illiterate population, it is very suitable for social marketing campaigns as much as for product promotion.<sup>15</sup> The relative share of print media, electronic media and cinema in the advertising market may differ from country to country, but there is one common denominator in all cases, i.e. the advertisers are in search of the largest potential audience, and they select their media accordingly. In periods of prosperity, advertisers need more space or time in the media at times of recession, the media need more advertising but the end result is identical: increasingly, the advertisements became the media message. In the next century ultimately with the quest for development, all the media would be highly technological, information oriented and options would be numerous.<sup>16</sup>

### New Media

The Internet has revolutionized the computer and communications world like nothing before. The invention of the telegraph, telephone, radio, and computer set the stage for this unprecedented integration of capabilities. The Net (both the World

<sup>12</sup> S. Bansal, A Bleak Picture, Business World, Aug. 1992, pp. 257-281

<sup>13</sup> A.D. Aggarwal, A Shift towards TV, *Industrial Times*, Oct 1984, pp. 18-20.

<sup>14</sup> Dibakar Panigraphy, P.K. Biswas Roy, *Media Management in India*, Kanishka Publishing House, 1<sup>st</sup> Edition, 1993, pp. 130-141.

<sup>15</sup> McQuil, Denis, *McQuil's Mass Communication Theory*, Vistaar Publications, New Delhi. 1994.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid*

Wide Web and the Internet- Note the difference between the Internet and the World Wide Web: The Internet is a computer network consisting of a worldwide network of computer networks and cables that use the TCP/IP network protocols to facilitate data transmission and exchange. Online and digital means of producing, transmitting and receiving messages are called new media. The term encompasses computer mediated communication technology. It implies the use of desktop and portable computers as well as wireless and handheld devices. Every company in the computer industry is involved with new media in some manner. The forms of communicating in the digital world include Mobile Phones, Computer and Internet.<sup>17</sup>

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### Media and Environmental Awareness

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The environmental emergency that we are facing needs to be addressed and analyzed “within a social frame of reference”. Media seem to be an interesting approach towards such direction. The great potential of the media in regards to the provision of information, the construction of knowledge and the cultivation of skills and attitudes, has been proved scientifically over the years. As far as the environmental issues are concerned, media either as a risk communicator, or as a promoter of data, information and good practices of any kind, should smooth the progress of people to become more environmentally responsible and cultivate an environmental awareness. Additionally, media (electronic or printed) could help people associate reasons and effects, thus to get informed and to reflect upon the given information, in order to understand the origins and the causes of the major environmental problems. To achieve this, different kind of information and ways of presentation should be exploited (Miranda & Blanco, 2010). Moreover, as Kapoor (2011) highlights, there is a need to use low cost and environmentally friendly technologies in order to cultivate ecological attitudes. All the aforementioned could be accomplished by the use of digital media, and especially the Internet. Firstly, the blending of text and multimedia contributes to the presentation and decoding of complicated situations and events, and secondly, the proper choice of internet-based approach could be low cost and “green”.

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### Governments’ Initiative- Swachh Bharat Abhiyan

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Swachh Bharat Abhiyan is a Clean India mission led by the government of India to make India a clean India. This campaign was launched officially by the government of India on 145<sup>th</sup> birthday anniversary of the great person, Mahatma Gandhi on 2<sup>nd</sup> of October, 2014. It was launched at the Rajghat, New Delhi (cremation of Mahatma Gandhi). The government of India has aimed to make India a clean India by 2<sup>nd</sup> of October 2019 (means 150<sup>th</sup> birth anniversary of the Mahatma Gandhi) through this campaign. This campaign involves the construction of latrines, promoting sanitation programmes in the rural areas, cleaning streets, roads and changing the infrastructure of the country to lead

the country ahead. After launching this drive a significant growth of 83% has been seen in household toilets construction since October 2014 and 7, 11, 74, 143 household toilets have been constructed since its launch. The total number of 3, 58, 853 villages are open defecation free, about 4, 465 villages are open defecation free in Namami Gange, 382 districts are open defecation free along with 17 States and UT are also among them.<sup>18</sup>

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### Conclusion

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Awareness creation activities carried out by the media and the various anti-environmental degradation clubs and organizations that deal with environmental protection have been unsuccessful. It is noted that both urban and rural people were not well informed about the mode of destruction and protection of the environment. One of the causes of the deep rooted environmental problems in a country is lack of awareness which is at the very heart of the inappropriate management and utilization of environmental resources. Thus, raising the awareness of a society through media is one of the strategies required for the effective realization of environmental objectives and goals. It is truly crucial to raise public awareness of environmental issues. Media's efforts to sensitize the public about environment issues and its continuing central role in the struggle against the cause of environmental problems are indispensable.

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid

<sup>18</sup> <http://swachhbharatmission.gov.in> visited on 06.05.2018