



In defence of vernacular press, its future and challenges in Kashmir

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Abstract

A society cannot proliferate unless it does not have freedom of expression. . But to run a newspaper you need funds where from the ideology of newspaper is declared. A newspaper should be viable and, if possible, prosperous but financial success alone will not make it an ideal paper. A staff of hard working reporters and an efficient editor are the backbone of any newspaper. An assessment of newspapers in Kashmir reveals some interesting facts. Today we have more than two dozen of Urdu dailies and about twelve English dailies, and then there are number of weeklies, monthly published tabloids and at least four News Agencies, yet the quality of reporting has hardly improved.

Key words:- Freedom of Press , local Newspapers, conflict, Challenges.

Introduction

For a healthy growth of democracy, it is very necessary to have freedom of press. Historically speaking, press has evolved as defender of freedom. It is neither a part of the state nor a part of the excluded and the dispossessed have-nots. In a democratic polity, the media is the 'borderland' between the inner circle of power and the dispossessed.

A society cannot proliferate unless it does not have freedom to express. Press has an immense role to play as a watchdog for healthy and transparent administration and as a liaison between the masses and the government. "It is witness to the tension between the forces of status quo" (Manchanda & Bose, 2004).(1)

With advent of 24x7 availability of news through various news organizations, the masses are bombarded with media content more than ever in the past. Moreover, there is real competition from parties for media space and time not only in daily hardcore reporting but also often in investigative reporting where the deciding matter is which source to accept. In other words, Editors and Broadcasters play an important part in shaping our social reality as they do about their day-to-day task of choosing and displacing news. In short, media set the 'agenda' about what they have to churn out of particular event. The idea of agenda setting asserts that the priorities of the press to some degree become the priorities of the

public. As Walter Lippmann in his book *Public Opinion* argues, the mass media create images of events in our minds and those policy makers should be cognizant of these "pictures in people's heads".

However, we cannot deny the fact that newspaper carries only those stories that do exist in reality if not objectively.(2) Part of the nature of newspaper's decision or judgement is a result of the social structure in which the newspaper operates. The characteristic differences between the local and national newspapers' environment do not differ because of the newspaper.

Press in India

India has advocated importance of free press, since it became independent, except for the brief experience of censorship under emergency regulations of 1975-76. Yet it suffers from many inadequacies like caste and religious affiliations, which still exercise a powerful influence on journalist as any member of society. Yet the journalists claim to be objective but the slant becomes obvious when it is reporting of foreign affairs or insurgency.

An Englishman, James Augustus Hickey, founded the first newspaper daily 'Bengal Gazette' in 1780 in Calcutta for the benefit of the local European community. However, Hickey did not hesitate in exposing the East India Company officials and Warren Hastings for his misdeeds, which of course invited the wrath of authorities and had even



undergone imprisonment. It will not be wrong to say that Hickey will be remembered as long as fearless journalism is respected in India.

Tharyan (1998) writes that before independence, press was largely considered a medium, a mission to encourage the freedom movement in India against British Raj. Many of the nationalist leaders were closely connected with newspapers and some were editors as well. Even the father of nation Mahatma Gandhi himself was a journalist and wrote extensively his views in *The Harijan* and *Young India*. In Lahore, Lala Lajpat Rai edited *The People* and *Bande Matram*. In Calcutta, C.R. Das was at the helm of affairs of *Forward* and *Liberty*. Annie Besant was editor of *New India*. Sir Pheroz Shah Mehta had a big hand in launching *Bombay Chronicle*.(3)

Although there were some pro-British Newspapers like *The Times of India*, *The Pioneer*, *The Statesman*, *The Mail*, *The Civil and Military Gazette*, they also maintained high journalistic standards but never backed freedom movement.(4)

Immediately after independence, the people expected that newspapers would serve people of India, and their main concern would be for the peoples of India. But to run a newspaper you need funds wherefrom the ideology of newspaper is declared. A newspaper should be viable and, if possible, prosperous but financial success alone will not make it an ideal paper. A staff of hard working reporters and an efficient editor are the backbone of any newspaper. An editor defines the ideology of newspaper and assigns the reporters their specified beats according to their choice and efficiency. In other words, a reporter's job is to collect information of events happening every day.

But due to commercialism, the role of editor and reporter has been compromised. It is the newspaper proprietor's decision which news to put and what the agenda of the day would be. It is the proprietor who decides the appointments of reporters and editor, which sometimes affect the credibility of newspaper. Sometimes the editor is chosen according to the accent and flexibility of owner to protect his business interests. For

instance, Punnoose Tharyan exposes some hardcore realities in his book *Good News Bad News*: if the proprietor wants tax relief for his industry, the editor publishes editorials, explaining the need for such relief in the national interest. Even the most high profile editors who claim to be independent and objective cannot escape from the pressures of proprietor.

In reality, the editors are docile and cowardly and, to use L.K. Advani's famous words, "ready to crawl when they are asked to bend.(53) In other words, the more the owners interfere in the working of the editorial department, the more the credibility of the paper suffers. And if right man is not chosen for the Editor's post, the newspaper will lose direction. As socio-economic tensions in country get activated, journalists tend to be engulfed by the crisis and become part of it rather than work as non-partisan observers in the emerging drama.

During a communal conflict, the news media provide a key role more than providing information. Most Indians are Hindus, though the country does have geographical pockets of citizens holding other religious beliefs – Christians, Muslims, Buddhists, Jews, Sikhs, and Zoroastrians. Muslims constitute the largest religious minority in India, second to Hindus. Ever since India attained independence in 1947 (and even before independence to some extent), the country however witnessed almost incessant conflict between the two religious groups.

Regarding the demography of conflict in India, we have both internal conflicts as Naxalism or regular communal outbursts, and external conflict as the recent Taj hotel attack in Mumbai, Tamils' LTTE of operating in both India and Sri Lanka, and Kashmir conflict. Of both the types of conflict, Kashmir forms a strategic position as Pakistan's involvement makes it a single major external threat for India, and rejection of India as a centre by Kashmir's operatives makes it difficult situation for India within its own boundaries.

Being the largest democracy in the world, the country is more politics driven, which often sidelines the other major issues until they ripen enough to explode. The political



slant is obvious in reporting of Indian newspapers. The evidences are silenced in the name of national interest. The interpretation of events is accepted uncritically on the government lines, i.e. status quo oriented with obvious reasons as patriotism and national security.(5)

Press in Kashmir

Maharaja Paratap Singh declared Urdu as the official language of state in 1856. Since then various attempts were made to publish newspapers. It was in '1867' that 'Bidya Bilas' or Vidya Vilas was published from Jammu, in Urdu and Hindi. It used to carry proceedings of Dogra Durbar and Maharaja's engagements. During this period, various attempts were made by journalists to start newspapers, but those were curbed by administration, as these could raise upsurge against the autocratic rule.(6)

Therefore, some Kashmiris started publishing newspapers from Lahore and other parts of India. Some of the newspapers published during this period are:

- 1 *Marasalle Kashmir* Lahore 1872
- 2 *Akhbar-i-Aam* Lahore 1881
- 3 *Khair Khoh-e- Kashmir* Lahore 1882
- 4 *Hamdardi-Hind* Lahore 1894
- 5 *Kashmir Darpan* Allahabad 1898
- 6 *Kashmiri Prakash* Lahore 1898
- 7 *Kashmiri Gazette* Lahore 1901
- 8 *Kashmiri Makhzan* Lahore 1905
- 9 *Safeer* Lahore 1914
- 10 *Subh-e-Kashmir* Lahore 1916
- 11 *Bahar-e-Kashmir* Lahore 1916
- 12 *Kashmir* Amritsar 1924

These papers dealt with socio-economic and political scenario of Kashmir, besides giving coverage to local issues⁷. Since there was ban on publishing and printing of

newspapers in Kashmir, some writers from Kashmir got their write-ups published in Lahore newspapers. Even one of the pioneering voice Prem Nath Bazaz started writing for a Lahore Urdu weekly *Akhbar-i-Am* back in 1928.8 In 1924, Lala Mulk Raj Saraf published a weekly newspaper *Ranbir*. *Ranbir* was pro-establishment in nature, although occasionally it was critical of government. Even after the publication of *Ranbir*, the press was not fully independent, and its Editor had to struggle very hard.

In 1931, Middleton Commission's report suggested that the basic cause of unrest among Muslims was the non-publication of newspaper in the state. Because of this report, the Press Act was amended, and newspapers began to get published with *Vitasta*. After a gap of three years, Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah published *Hamdard*, and Pandit Prem Nath Bazaz was its editor. *Hamdard* created political awareness among the masses and highlighted various evils of the then autocratic rule. During these days, *Martand* under the editorship of Pandit Keshap Bandhu was published. It served as the mouthpiece of Kashmiri Pandit Organization, 'Yuvakh Sabha'.

Later on during the people's uprising against the autocratic rule, *Khidmat* came into existence. Sadr-u-Din Mujahid was its editor. The paper was very popular at that time and paved way for new dimension to the people's movement. It served as a mouthpiece of National Conference, the then populist political party of the state.

In 1956, Khwaja Sanauallah Bhat started *Aftab*, which gained popularity soon among the masses. In 1964, Shamim Ahmad Shamim published *Aina*. *Aina* gave a new direction to Urdu journalism in the state and, within a short span of time, revolutionized journalism in the State. Later in 1969, *Srinagar Times* appeared on the horizon of the valley with G.M. Sofi as its Editor in Chief.(9)

Besides the above-mentioned Urdu language newspapers, the English papers in valley made their appearance very late on the stands although the need was always felt. To suffice to the needs of Pandit community and Muslim elites who used to



subscribe newspapers from Delhi and Lahore, Baldev Prasad Sharma laid foundation stone of English Press in valley in 1935 by launching *Kashmir Times*. The paper however did not flourish much until 1955 when Ved Bhasin revived it to make professionally competent enough. The paper became daily in 1964 and was shifted to Jammu from where it continues to get published until date.

In 1970s papers like *Herald*, *Kashmir Reporters*, *Mountain View*, and *Himalayan Herald* were published. The trend continued until late 1980s which had even changed the face of Kashmir's journalism. During 1989, the mass exodus of Pundits led to the heavy setback to the Kashmiri journalism, as many writers belonged to Pandit community. Soon after a number of new newspapers like *Greater Kashmir* which became daily in 1994, *Kashmir Observer*, *Mirror of Kashmir*, *Kashmir Images*, *Muslim Kashmir*, and *Srinagar Flash* hit the stands to fill the vacuum created by early insurgency of 1989.

An assessment of newspapers in Kashmir reveals some interesting facts. Take for example the number of newspapers published; in 1980s these were merely five or six dailies like *Alsafa*, *Srinagar Times*, *Daily Aftab*, *Kashmir Times*, etc. But after the insurgency in 1990s, the number kicked drastically especially in a Srinagar, the summer capital. Today we have more than two dozen of Urdu dailies and about twelve English dailies, and then there are number of weeklies, monthly published tabloids and at least four News Agencies, yet the quality of reporting has hardly improved.

Literature review

Lippmann⁽¹⁰⁾ in his book *Public Opinion* (1922) argues that our perceptions of the world are determined by what we see around us, limited by our access to information: (Man) is learning to see with his mind vast portions of the world that he could never see, touch, smell, hear, or remember. Gradually he makes for himself a trustworthy picture inside his head of the world beyond his reach. The features of the world which have to do with the behaviour of other human beings, in so far as their behaviour

crosses ours, is dependent upon us, or is interesting to us, we call public affairs. The pictures in the heads of these human beings...are their public opinions. The pictures which are acted upon by groups of people or by individuals acting in the name of groups are Public Opinion with capital letters. There are some reasons why the picture inside often misleads men in their dealings with the world outside. They are artificial censorships, the limitation of social contract, the comparatively meagre time available in each day for paying attention to public affairs, the distortion arising because events have to be compressed into very short messages, the difficulty of making a small vocabulary expressing a complicated world, and finally the fear of facing those facts which would seem to threaten the established routine of men's lives.⁽¹¹⁾

In other words, media thus influence our perception especially about which we know less. Peoples' perception of another religious community is thus determined by what they see in the media. Agenda setting theory⁽¹²⁾ and framing effects research⁽¹³⁾ argue that media agenda and its construction of images often affect audiences' attitudes and/or behaviour. Therefore, an application of these theories to this content analysis would give us a fair idea about current perceptions of the ongoing conflict in Kashmir and the role of media in Kashmir.

In a study undertaken by Sandhya Bhattacharya (2003)⁽¹⁴⁾ news stories on Kashmir in general were found to have made more references to Muslims than to Hindus. A total number of 39 articles (75%) referred to people belonging to the Islamic religion, while only eight stories (15.4%) mentioned people of the Hindu religion. Sandhya Bhattacharya carried the research for six months on two Indian newspapers, *The Hindu* and *The Indian Express*. The analysis of two newspapers indicated that news coverage of the Kashmir conflict does contain a religious bias. While this bias is not necessarily in favour of Hindus, it is certainly against Islamic communities.



She took a sample of 52 stories among which Muslims were framed as perpetrators of violence in 32.7% of the articles, while Hindus were framed as perpetrators in only 7.7% of the articles. Also the Muslims in general receive more media coverage than do Hindus. Muslims are also associated more with Pakistan than with India or Kashmir. More than half (54%) the news stories made some reference to militants. A little less than a third of these stories (32%) identified the militants as Pakistanis, while only 1.9% of them were identified as Kashmiris.

Clearly, news media in India seek to indicate that any source of violence in Kashmir comes from outside, and not from within the valley. It tacitly acknowledged that Pakistan does support certain militant groups. Varshney (1991: 1016) for example acknowledges that there is more than one type of militant groups operating in the Kashmir valley. By 1987 two kinds of militant groups had started operating from Pakistan – Islamic groups like the Hizbul Mujahideen, and the more secular Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF). The Hizbul Mujahideen, a fighting wing of the Jamaat-i-Islami, wants Kashmir to join Pakistan on grounds of religion, while the JKLF wants an independent Kashmir on the grounds of ethnicity.(15)

There were hardly any positive portrayals of Islamic people in the news coverage of the Kashmir conflict. Muslims are usually mentioned as victims of crime (19.2%) or more commonly, as perpetrators of violence (32.2%). Most articles referring to Muslims as violence perpetrators, however, dealt principally with militants, thus associating the religion (in the readers' mind) with terrorism, injury, and death. It is possible that such associations arise because of the nature of the topic itself – the Kashmir valley is after all a war torn area.

A surprisingly small number of stories refer to the plight of the Kashmiri people in the valley (both Hindus and Muslims, although

Muslims are now a majority there). According to many reports and studies undertaken, the people in Kashmir are now fed up of the politics played by both India and Pakistan in the name of solution of Kashmir issue. Pakistan supports Kashmir in the name of Islam, but simultaneously nurtures dream of coercion of state into Pakistan. Most of the Indian media frame Muslims as perpetrates of crime, which is often misleading for the readers about the actual situation. Moreover, the Muslims who are involved in the crime are usually designated as Pakistan based militants.

There are a number of studies undertaken by the MA students from MERC department of Kashmir University, and some of the noteworthy are included here also. A study taken by one of the students about the disappearances in Kashmir for the year 2003, analyzing the coverage by two local English dailies *Greater Kashmir* and *Kashmir Times*, from October 2003 to March 2004, reveals some interesting results. The study found that official quotes were missing in both the newspapers, which might be “apparently due to reluctance of officials to give their comments on issue.”(16)

Another study undertaken is about the ‘Portrayal of Human Rights in Print Media in Kashmir’ by Khurram Parvez. The researcher analysed two local English dailies, *Greater Kashmir* and *Kashmir Images* for 14 days (October 5 to October 18, 2003). The study found that most of the stories were desk based news stories, meaning that the newspapers carry a daily press release, which is handed over to them by the police. The study also points out that human rights issues are being reported in such a way that political par**Problems faced by regional newspapers in Kashmir**.ties use the medium for their political mandates.(17)

Kashmir Problem: an Overview



Warfare is the greatest affair of the state, the basis of life and death, the Way (Tao) to survival or extinction [Chinese proverb by Sun Tzu]. It must be thoroughly pondered and analysed. Sun Tzu's warning is relevant in the context of ongoing Kashmir conflict, because Kashmir lacks consensus over the motive of warfare, unity among the fighting groups and for using the sentiments of people properly. The conflict has been coined by different agencies with various names. The militant organizations and who support ongoing conflict call it 'freedom movement'; for locals it is movement / tehreek that swept the minds and ideologies of Kashmiri masses in the early nineties when every body had 'tehreek' in their mind. Another terms used to identify the on going situation in Kashmir is either recognised as insurgency or conflict. Here the researcher has used the term conflict as it covers all the dynamics, history and processes more widely than any other terms used.

The Indo-Pak relationship with regard to Kashmir discontent has generated a good deal of scholarly literature. Most of such writings are anchored in history – whether it is of post-1947 political, military and diplomatic events, or of the different streams of nationalism that gathered strength from the late nineteenth century, or of the Hindu-Muslim interaction that goes back twelve centuries. Today, roughly one third of the western part of Kashmir is administered by Pakistan and the remainder by India.

In August 1965, Pakistan infiltrators crossed the ceasefire line and resulted in the incidents of violence in Kashmir valley. Although on 23 September the Indo-Pak war ended in a ceasefire, it led to the emergence of guerrilla groups in Kashmir led by Amanullah Khan and Maqbool Butt under an umbrella as Jammu and Kashmir National Liberation Front (NLF) in Azad Kashmir.

In fact the intrusion was partly successful due to erosion of autonomy in the valley

which had invited wrath and distrust of local people against centre. Meanwhile, the motive behind the formation of National Liberation Front was to free Kashmir from Indian occupation. Maqbool who is considered a pioneer in Kashmir freedom movement crossed first the LoC in 1966 but was soon arrested and sentenced to death in 1968 but escaped to Azad Kashmir (Pak-occupied Kashmir – POK) with the help of local people.

Maqbool Butt who is more often remembered for his anti-Indian activities and adventures than his ideology became a hallmark figure for the activists (later termed as militants/terrorists) after he was arrested in 1976 and hanged in Tihar jail. In later years NLF, re-christened as JKLF, played a pivotal role in the ongoing era of militancy or insurgency since 1989.(18)

In 1987, Amanullah Khan had fled to England after Maqbool Butt took refuge in Pakistan and began to direct operations across LoC for JKLF. The organization soon earned name after young Kashmir youth as the HAJY group. The political unrest escalated in the valley after JKLF kidnapped Dr. Rubaya Sayed on 8 December 1989 to demand the release of their five militants. By 1990, the militancy had taken new look in the name of movement or 'Tehreek'. The movement was not confined to militants only but also became popular. Every Kashmiri began to recognize oneself as a part of 'Tehreek'.

Thousands of young disaffected Kashmiris in the valley were recruited by the JKLF and full-fledged freedom movement against 'Indian Rule' began in 1989. David Devdas writes: 'there was one slogan: 'Hum kya chahtey? Azadi (what do we want? Freedom). They all chanted, even little tots in the arms of mothers or fathers or grandmothers, proudly repeating it like a nursery rhyme. The insurgency was a response to the dissatisfaction and revolt against the corrupt government that came into being after the rigging, joblessness, and



monopolization of minority in almost all sectors regarding administration that led to the violent movement.(19) As J. Galtung says, the major cause of violence is inattention to the subjective reality of famous others, which Habermas means '*altera paris*' – listen to the other side. If you don't have capacity you are lost.(20)

The dominant prevailing view is that the Kashmir conflict is essentially non-resolvable for reasons of history, emotions and the stakes involved.(21) With the onset of movement, India constantly maintained that Pakistan has been training and supplying weapons to militant separatists. Pakistan insists that it only offers them moral support. During the past 17 years in Kashmir, thousands of people have been killed, several thousands are imprisoned without trial, thousands of women folk molested, and property worth billions of rupees destroyed.(22)

There have been several uprisings, notably in 1953, 1964 and 1988 and even the relatively calmer interludes have witnessed continuous peaceful protest met with unrelenting force. The scale of popular backing for it can be judged from the established fact that, on few occasions in 1990, virtually the entire population of Srinagar came out on the streets in an unparalleled demonstration of protest against the oppressive status quo.

According to Lord Birdwood, had the whole of Gurdaspur District been awarded to Pakistan, India could certainly never have fought a war in Kashmir.(23) Stories of bad relations between Moutbatten and Mohammad Ali Jinnah also added fuel to the Pakistani argument that Moutbatten was not well disposed towards Pakistan and hence not willing to see Kashmir go to the new Dominion. For over two months after the independence, the then ruler Maharaja of J&K had attempted to remain independent. The invasion of large numbers of tribesmen from the North-West Frontier of

Pakistan into Kashmir forced a decision on him. The tribesmen carried on along the Jhelum river road, the traditional route traversed by their forbears, the Afghans, towards Baramulla, the entry point into the valley, where the road led directly to Srinagar.

One of the important dates in the history of Kashmir of worth mentioning is October 24 1948, when Maharaja Hari Singh made an urgent appeal for help to the Government of India. However, Moutbatten suggested that it would be the height of folly to sent troops into a neutral state, where it could lead to clash of armed forces and in war. He, therefore, urged that the legal formalities regarding accession should be completed; but that it should only be temporary, prior to referendum, plebiscite, election or even, if these methods were impracticable, by representative public meetings.(24) According to Maharaja, the invasion from tribesmen had forced a decision on him and Moutbatten's insistence on accession before assistance had pushed him further than he may necessarily have wanted to go.(25)

After receiving the acceptance from Maharaja, Moutbatten once more stated that "the accession should be confirmed by a reference to the people, consistently (sic) with their policy that, in the case of any state where the issue of accession has been a subject of dispute, the question of accession should be decided in accordance with the wishes of the people of the State".(26) The plebiscite was also accepted and supported by the United Nations council. On its resolution of 13 august 1948, the United Nations Commission for India and Pakistan (UNCIP) appointed by Security Council proposed to determine the future status of Jammu and Kashmir, "in accordance with the will of the people."

However, the Commission recommended the withdrawal of Pakistani troops, tribesmen



and other Pakistani nationals from the state. India accepted the resolution within a week, whereas Pakistan raised a number of objections and evaded its acceptance till 20 December 1948.(27) However, the plebiscite never happened and accession resulted ultimately the eventual fate of Jammu and Kashmir to be part of India. After the historical accession, which Pakistan and the supporters of Muslim League in Kashmir never accepted led to the bitter relationship between India and Pakistan, and to resentment in Kashmir's people.

Challenges of a Journalist Working in a Conflict Zone

Audience enjoy, empathize and get worried what they see, watch, listen, and read through media about a place. But the real actors who dare bring the news to our television sets or in the morning newspapers are the journalists who dare fight a parallel war along with soldiers, combating most unexpected situations. Of course, conflict journalism can never be safe; but journalists can be trained how to look after themselves better. Too often, journalists are the only professionals on a battlefield who have received no preparation for what they are facing. And the plight of local journalists in the developing world who toil at the roots of the world information flow is particularly acute.(28)

The information and training is as much required to the journalists as to the soldiers fighting in battlegrounds. In a war zone, 'The bullet is a cheap, effective and relatively risk-free form of press censorship; it silences forever a troublesome reporter and intimidates colleagues, friends and family. Around the world, something like 90 percent of killers of journalists get away with it. At best, the authorities do not seem to care very much. At worst, they collude because they don't like prying journalists, either.'(29)

Of various media the most influential and comprehensive for the human mind is the news media. The news is meant to disseminate information and knowledge in most suitable way so that the recipients can understand and retain it easily. So it has a direct effect on human mind as compared to other forms like entertainment, drama, films where the message is hidden or subtle. News is direct and clear, short and immediate. With the advance in technology from print to visuals to the web version, there are consumers of news for every field.

Here, we focus on newspaper. Since the very beginning the news media, from Lippmann to Noam Chomsky the news has attracted a number of scholars to do a research on the effects of various news media on its audience. In fact, Lipmann (1922) long ago recognized that the news is strongly influenced by routine when he wrote: "without standardization, without stereotypes, without routine judgments, without fairly ruthless disregard of subtly, the editor would soon die of excitement."(30)

After industrialisation, economy greatly affected the news content as news organizations depend on the economic support in the form advertisements and, in practice, work less for public interest. There has also been a general decline of public regulation of media and an increased role for the market in shaping the media. Similar trends are seen in news organizations which are wholly and solely dependent on the finances generated through the sponsorships and advertisements.(31)

And while covering a conflict, language is the determinant factor how the outside world perceives the situation. This happened exactly while covering the conflict in Rwanda where for many days the term 'genocide' was omitted and instead the event was projected as tribal hatred.



As Fair and Parks (2001: 35) writes, "Since May 1994, Clinton's administration studiously had avoided using the term [genocide] in its Rwanda policy discussions, preferring any label that might provide some cover against critics of the U.S. government's non-intervention." (32) Very often African violence is discussed in news articles using terms like *tribal hatred* and *tribal warfare* that do not necessarily require action, but *genocide* carries a much stronger moral imperative for action. In fact, it was not until late March 1998 that President Clinton referred to the crisis as *genocide*. (33)

Especially while covering the conflict the impression is such that the conflict is unending and lingering especially without any solution. This trend is reported by De Varies, Lucas, Yang, and Devasthali while studying the regional conflicts in African countries. The public gets the impression that contemporary conflicts are irrational and unsolvable, and public support for efforts to do something about them is thereby eroded. This especially has become a problem for the African continent which in the public mind has become a zone of permanent and intractable conflict. (34)

Problems faced by regional newspapers in Kashmir.

1 Competition from other media and national and international newspapers

There is a considerable competition the local newspapers face both in print and broadcast market in Kashmir. The competition is posed even greater by television/radio channels/internet than compared to the competition between the print media. E.g Same event covered by many newspapers and other media present the story in their own version and editorial policy. Here the situation of local newspapers becomes most challenging, because they have to cope not only with the different versions presented by other newspapers but also the style of presentation, language and

approach to the news story. With mushroom growth of local channels the information and follow-ups on the same story keeps on changing while as the local newspapers have to wait to present their view till next morning.

Lack of staff and expertise

Most of the vernacular dailies and some English dailies do not have single reporters.

These newspapers are one-man shows or run by a family. What can be more dejecting for a local reader is that national and foreign news agencies are quoted by many local dailies for reporting local happenings. The story of Urdu newspapers is still depressing that they never had reporters. (35) In early 1990s when one leading Urdu daily was set on fire, the next day reporting of *Aftab* goes like this, "PTI ke numainde ke mutabik, Urdu akhbar *Daily Aftab* me kal bhayanak Aag lag gai" [According to the PTI's correspondent, an Urdu newspaper, the *Daily Aftab* caught fire]. This clearly shows that the newspaper organization does not have its own reporter.

In some newspaper organizations there may be one or two reporters who too are not full timers. They are either government employees; for them it is just a part time job, an adventure, another feather in cap, proof of being workaholic, and most important an excuse to get recognition from government.

2 Late Usage of Internet, Technologically laggards

With the help of internet, every paper has started their own web edition. But the vernacular press accepted this change very late as compared to the rest of world. While as the English newspapers have started their web editions about six or seven years ago it is only a couple of years that Urdu papers have embraced the change.



The web editions of the Urdu newspapers have only basic web format. Some of the papers like Aftab, Alsafa, and Kashmir Uzma have also added their archival section from this year. But one of the oldest and famous Urdu newspapers runs its e- version without an archival section. The reasons are same lack of professional expertise, the web designers have their knowledge in English so it is easier for them to develop web editions for English newspapers, but not all of them are familiar with Urdu keypads. Also the lack of funds is another major reason why

3 Exploitation by the Corporate Ownership

The journalist in valley are no less talented or under qualified, but small time investors who overnight become media owners pose great challenge for the journalists working in local newspapers. "It is so bad that every young, capable and honest journalist wants to run away from the conditions in the newsrooms of Kashmir, not because they don't have passion for journalism. They have proved their potential if provided better working atmosphere." (36)

Many newspaper offices stack the sub-editors in single room, sometimes the senior reporter itself subs the news stories other small time reporter. After completing degrees from the universities, the young boys and girls

The condition of urdu journalism is more pathetic. The low standard in Urdu journalism is due to poor salaries. This is something under the total discretion of the owner to get his message across through his own publication without professional confrontations and conflicts.

Another face of the story is the newspaper owners who run English newspapers have started urdu edition e.g, the proprietor of leading English daily, The Greater Kashmir have started their own urdu edition with

Kashmir Uzma ; the owner of Rising Kashmir runs another regional Kashmiri newspaper Sangarmal. So sometimes the bylines are shared by the two sister newspapers on news story which is published in both newspapers by the same reporter and is only translated in other paper.

4 Advertising market

The other most important element is the advertising among which most prominent for regional press is the State's major stake. The regional newspapers have become an innocent victim of this state advertising monopoly. These papers get advertisement through three ways one through State Information Department, another through DAVP and private ads but private ads have been monopolised by three to five newspapers, bulk of them by Greater Kashmir, its sister wing Kashmir Uzma and Aftab, rest of the newspapers work on the mercy of State Information department and DAVP.(37) So majority of local newspapers have no choice but to budge to the terms dictated by government.

5 Pressures by government and militant groups

One or the other forms of abuse by both government forces and insurgent militias have proved equally debilitating for the local press. Indian troops regularly subject print journalists to raids, detentions and interrogations, both to identify their contacts within militant groups and to reprimand them for disclosing human rights violations by military and police forces. In a few cases, journalists have even reported being beaten and tortured while in official custody. Militant groups periodically fire rockets at radio and television stations and have coerced most of the Kashmiri staff to leave their posts. And through threats, circulation "bans" and forced closures, militants also compel local newspapers to publish their groups' statements on a daily basis. Another heart



rendering incident where doyen of Kashmiri journalism Khwaja Sanaullah Bhat, founder and editor in chief of the daily *Aftab*, has been maimed number of times by both government and militants..In April 1990, the governor of Jammu and Kashmir ordered *Aftab* closed after the paper reported at length about a series of massacres by Indian forces. And even though a court ruling overturned the governor's order 10 days after it was issued, Bhat has continued to work under great duress, suffering frequent raids on his offices by Indian troops and the burning of his house by militants in August 1993. The harassment on journalists does not stop here one of the notorious counterinsurgency" group 'Ikhwan-ul-Muslimoon', led by a former timber smuggler known as Koka Parray. Ikhwan-ul-Muslimoon abducted two Srinagar editors in July 1995, did not release them until the entire Srinagar press agreed to print a statement by Parray criticizing the Hizb-ul-Mujahideen. In turn local newspapers and their readers paid a high price for that decision: an enraged Hizb-ul-Mujahideen forcibly closed one of the local printing presses and seized copies of local dailies in which the statement appeared. The press community promptly launched a protest strike, and for nearly one month no papers were printed in the capital.

6 Stagnant Market

Being torn by ongoing conflict over two decades the economic growth is often flat, stagnant without any big investors in the market. There is little scope of growth in regional media. It has also effected the growth of vernacular press. Despite the fact the intensity of militancy is reduced to great extent, but there is a radical increase in Muslim schools or madarssas which get sponsorship directly or indirectly by Islamic nations.

The extremist groups and religious groups see urdu press as their voice. Therefore,

urdu newspapers are forced to win and retain its readership and market through catering these radicalized ideology. Compare to the national newspapers which cannot take side with one school of thought or ideology, because of the availability of national level market and avenues. The trend with the regional newspapers is same in many parts of world as in our neighboring country Pakistan where local Urdu papers are suffering a same fate, in spite of being their national language.

According to the Executive Editor Muhammad Ziauddin of Express Media based in Pakistan, the policy of catering radical ideology by Urdu newspapers sells because the Urdu media consumers have a typical mindset--- a mindset born out of prevalent socio-political environment reinforced by what can be described as the 'officially certified truth' about the country's history, the reasons for its coming into being and a fictional interpretation of Islam's glorious past.(38)

Recommendations and Conclusion

Being one of the most influential and reached-out media in Kashmir, the vernacular press needs urgent attention of the concerned parties to uplift its standards to professional status. One must be mindful of the fact that improving the standards of vernacular media means improving the social – political standards of its own population. Thus, this remains the most crucial element in media development as well as stabilization of democracy through creating an informed public.

The first initiative should be from the corporate ownership of the media houses commencing with recruitment. Presently those who are being attracted to the profession (mainly vernacular press) at the entry level are with poor educational qualifications and low standards mainly due to the low salary structures. This chicken-



egg cycle must be changed with immediate effect. The employers should look at high educational standards in higher skills in its endeavors in improving the social standards in the profession.

The existing vernacular media community must be provided with continuous professional training in two fronts. Their skills must be drastically enhanced while exposing them to international best practices and their standard of working in an office should be improved. The ownership tends to invest heavy on the technology and machinery but not on the human resources. This phenomenon needs to be changed and more attention is required in investing on enhancing the professional and social standards of the existing human resources at the vernacular news desks that should necessarily include the senior level – especially the editors. This would pave the way for much needed change of attitude, aptitude and perception at large.

A change in the perception of the culture of vernacular press is direly needed. More perks, recognition and working standards are diverted to the English press in any media house (where both vernacular and English press exist) depriving the vernacular journalist. This culture of 'imbalanced treatment' or rather discrimination must end while introducing equal treatment to all journalists irrespective of their working language. Sometimes the owners of newspapers who run both English and Urdu, or Kashmir dailies should pay more attention to the vernacular press against the English press given the present context of working conditions. These professional incentives should include social security initiatives such as insurance schemes and other safety covers, especially for those who are working in vulnerable areas.

These measures would certainly attract skilled, educated youth to the profession which is sometimes lacking in the present

dynamics in the media field. The donor-funded media development projects should pay more thrust on the development of the vernacular press in the country. The donors should understand the fact that the desired outputs or

outcomes in good governance or other democratic goals could not be achieved without improving the standards of the vernacular press in the country. Media is not limited to urban centric elites, but its total opposite.

If one accuses the media of being corrupt, and put the main blame on the vernacular press, it's the responsibility of those same accusers to find answers to the next immediate question – 'why is it corrupt?' The answers to this simple question rely on a less-complex social research.

The most important factor in this entire process is the unity among different players in the media theatre. It is totally unfair to put the blame on corporate ownership if the journalist community is not prepared to the desired professional change. Thus, it is a collective effort of the owners, editors and journalists at large without excluding those of the government. The most cardinal responsibility of the state is to create the necessary socio-political environment for the professional enhancement of media. The last component is the market. It is learnt that the vernacular press in Kashmir is facing difficulty due to immobile and stagnant market due to ongoing conflict and political instability. This situation needs a drastic change. Lastly it is the responsibility of the media in informing and educating the reader. But it is only possible when the owners of newspaper, editors and journalists have consensus with each other and share the same responsibility towards the reader to shape the minds of reader in a positive manner at large.

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