

NEXT IAS

**DAILY EDITORIAL
ANALYSIS**

TOPIC

**Role of Press In Freedom Struggle and
Contemporary Significance**

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ROLE OF PRESS IN FREEDOM STRUGGLE AND CONTEMPORARY SIGNIFICANCE

Context

- Recently, **National Press Day** was observed with the theme 'Changing Nature of the Press', reflecting the evolving dynamics of the media landscape, and marking the day the **Press Council of India (PCI)** began its operations in 1966.

About

- The media, often referred to as the **fourth pillar of democracy**, plays a crucial role in nation building. Its influence spans across political, economic, and social spheres, making it an indispensable part of a functioning democracy.
- The press played a pivotal role in India's struggle for independence, acting as a powerful tool for dissemination of *information; raising awareness and consciousness; shaping public opinion; uniting diverse communities; criticising colonial policies; mobilising protests and movements; providing a platform for leaders; fostering nationalism; promoting non-violent resistance.*

Evolution of Press in the India

- Bengal Gazette (1780)**, founded by **James Augustus Hickey**, was the **first printed newspaper in India**. Known as the '**Calcutta General Advertiser**', it often criticised the British Raj, setting a precedent for future publications.
- The **British** introduced several **regulations to control the press** during the colonial period.
 - The **Censorship of Press Act of 1799** aimed at **preventing the French** from spreading anti-British propaganda, and was followed by the **Licensing Regulations, 1823**, which required newspapers to obtain a licence from the government.
 - The **Vernacular Press Act of 1878** targeted the Indian-language newspapers that allowed the Britishers to confiscate the printing presses and property of newspapers that published 'seditious' material.

Key Publications During India's Struggle for Independence and Their Impact

- Amrita Bazar Patrika (1868)**: Initially a Bengali weekly, it became a prominent English-language newspaper. It was known for its fierce criticism of British policies and played a significant role in mobilising public opinion.
- Kesari and Mahratta (1881)**: Founded by **Bal Gangadhar Tilak**, these newspapers were instrumental in promoting the cause of Swaraj (self-rule). Tilak used Kesari to inspire and mobilise the masses, famously declaring, "Swaraj is my birthright and I shall have it".
- The Hindu (1878)**: Established by **G. Subramania Iyer**, it became a leading voice against British rule. The Hindu was known for its balanced reporting and played a crucial role in shaping public opinion.
- Young India and Harijan**: Published by **Mahatma Gandhi**, these periodicals were used to propagate his ideas of non-violence and civil disobedience. They were crucial in spreading the message of the freedom movement to a broader audience.

Post-Independence Era

- The **Press (Objectionable Matters) Act of 1951** was enacted to curb the publication of objectionable content, but it was **repealed in 1957** due to its misuse.
- Later, the **Press Council of India** was established in 1966 to maintain the freedom of the press and improve the standards of journalism.

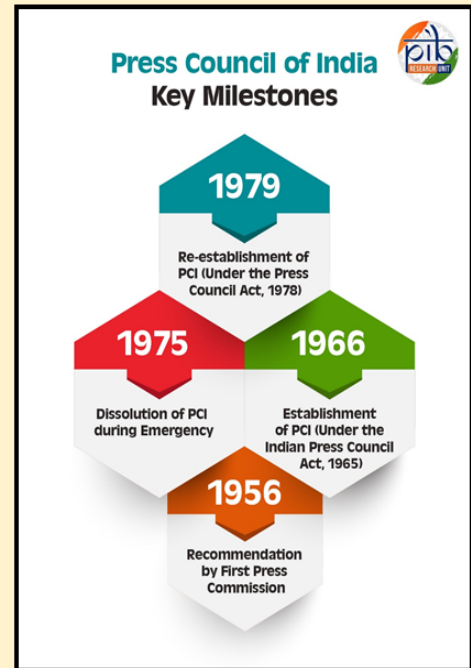
Evolution of the Contemporary Press

- Digital Transformation**: The shift from print to digital has revolutionised how news is produced, distributed, and consumed. Online platforms, social media, and mobile applications have made news more accessible and immediate.

- **Media Convergence:** The blending of traditional journalism with digital technologies has led to media convergence, where various forms of media (text, audio, video) are integrated into a single platform. This has enhanced the storytelling capabilities of news organisations.
- **Citizen Journalism:** The rise of social media has empowered ordinary citizens to report news, often in real-time. This has democratised information dissemination but also raised concerns about the accuracy and reliability of such reports.

Press Council of India (PCI)

- The **First Press Commission in 1956** emphasised the need for an autonomous body to protect press freedom and promote ethical journalism.
- The PCI was officially formed under the **Indian Press Council Act, 1965**, and began its operations on November 16, 1966.
 - ♦ Since then, 16th November is celebrated as the **National Press Day**.
- However, the Council was **dissolved during the Emergency in 1975**, and a **new Act, the Press Council Act, 1978**, re-established the PCI in 1979, reaffirming its role as a **quasi-judicial body with statutory authority**.
- It acts as a moral watchdog, ensuring that the press remains free from external influences and maintains high standards of journalism.
- It can take **suo-motu action or investigate complaints** related to unethical reporting or interference with press freedom.
- Its decisions are **final and cannot be challenged in any court**.
- Over the years, the PCI has played a crucial role in shaping the ethical framework of Indian journalism and safeguarding the independence of the media.
- The prestigious **Raja Ram Mohan Roy Award** is the highest accolade, recognising significant contributions to the **field of journalism**.



Role of Media in Nation Building

Political Sphere:

- **Promoting Democracy and Good Governance:** The media acts as a watchdog, holding those in power accountable. By exposing corruption, maladministration, and human rights abuses, it ensures transparency and fosters good governance.
- **Shaping Public Opinion:** Through news reports, editorials, and debates, the media shapes public opinion on various issues. It helps in creating an informed citizenry that can participate meaningfully in democratic processes.
- **Facilitating Political Participation:** Media platforms provide a space for political discourse, enabling citizens to engage with political processes. It includes coverage of elections, political campaigns, and policy discussions.

Economic Sphere:

- **Economic Development:** The media plays a role in economic development by disseminating information about government policies, economic reforms, and market trends. It helps businesses and individuals make informed decisions.
- **Promoting Entrepreneurship:** By highlighting success stories and providing information on business opportunities, the media encourages entrepreneurship and innovation.

- **Consumer Awareness:** Media campaigns educate consumers about their rights and responsibilities, promoting fair trade practices and protecting consumer interests.

Social Sphere:

- **Social Awareness and Education:** The media raises awareness about social issues such as health, education, and environmental conservation. It plays a key role in educating the public and promoting social change.
- **Cultural Integration:** By showcasing diverse cultures and traditions, the media fosters national unity and cultural integration. It helps in building a sense of national identity and pride.
- **Disaster Management:** During natural disasters and emergencies, the media provides critical information and updates, aiding in disaster management and relief efforts.

Challenges and Responsibilities

- **Misinformation and Fake News:** The rapid spread of misinformation can undermine public trust and disrupt social harmony. Media organisations must invest in fact-checking and verification processes to combat this issue.
- **Economic Pressures:** The shift to digital media has disrupted traditional revenue models, leading to financial challenges for many news organisations. This can sometimes result in compromised journalistic standards.
- **Censorship and Press Freedom:** Ensuring press freedom while balancing national security and public order remains a critical challenge.
 - ◆ Media organisations must navigate these issues carefully to maintain their role as the watchdog of democracy.

Way Forward: Responsibilities in the Modern Digital Age

- **Upholding Ethical Standards:** Journalists and news organisations must adhere to ethical standards, ensuring accuracy, fairness, and impartiality in their reporting. This is crucial for maintaining public trust and credibility.
- **Fact-Checking and Verification:** With the proliferation of information, rigorous fact-checking and verification processes are essential to combat misinformation. News organisations must invest in tools and training to ensure the reliability of their content.
- **Engaging with the Audience:** The digital age offers opportunities for greater interaction with the audience. News organisations can use social media and other digital tools to engage with readers, gather feedback, and foster a more informed and participatory public.
- **Promoting Media Literacy:** Educating the public about media literacy is vital. This includes teaching people how to critically evaluate news sources, recognize bias, and differentiate between credible information and misinformation.

Conclusion

- The media's role in nation building is multifaceted and indispensable. By promoting transparency, fostering economic development, and raising social awareness, the media contributes significantly to the progress and stability of a nation.
- As it adapts to the digital age, the media must continue to uphold its responsibilities and navigate challenges to remain a pillar of democracy.

Source: PIB



Mains Practice Question

[Q] Discuss the pivotal role of the Indian press in shaping the nation's freedom struggle, highlighting key publications and journalists. How has the contemporary press evolved, and what are its primary challenges and responsibilities in upholding democratic values and informing the public in the age of digital media?