



Mains Practice Question

Q. Genuine engagement with media ethics seems to be declining in the present times. Discuss the ethical issues that plague Indian journalism. (250 words)

10 Sep, 2020 GS Paper 4 Theoretical Questions

Approach

- Introduce by briefly explaining the significance of the media in a democracy.
- Explain the term media ethics and its need in journalism.
- Discuss the ethical issues that plague Indian journalism.
- Conclude with a way forward.

Introduction

- Media acts as a watchdog of public interest in a democracy. It plays an important role in a democracy and serves as an agency of the people to inform them of the events of national and international significance.
- It is the means by which people receive a free flow of information and ideas, which is essential to intelligent self-governance, that is, democracy.
- However, Media is mandated to follow certain ethics (known as media ethics) in collecting and disseminating the information viz., ensuring authenticity of the news, use of restrained and socially acceptable language for ensuring objectivity and fairness in reporting and duty to provide an opportunity to reply to critical opinions as well as to critical factual reportage and Respect for privacy.

Body

Need of Media ethics

- The absence of objective journalism leads to the false presentation of truth in a society which affects the perception and opinions of people. As observed in the Cambridge Analytica case, the biased news coverage on social media platforms affected the Presidential elections in the U.S.
- The chase for sensationalism and higher TRP rates as observed in the coverage of 26/11 terrorist attacks in India risked the internal security of the nation.
 - Many times the sensationalism-driven reporting has compromised the identities of rape victims and survivors despite Supreme court guidelines.
- Trial by media does not follow the due process of law and can reduce the public trust in institutions of governance like the judiciary.
- With the advent of social media, technological changes, the reach of media has grown profoundly. Its reach and role in impacting public opinion have made it even more important to ensure its objectivity, non-partisanship calls for the enforcement of journalistic ethics.

Ethical issues in Indian Journalism

- **Paid news and fake news:** The issues of paid news, media trial, non-issues being presented as

real news while the real issues are sidelined, the news is being doctored and fact distortion for profits and political favour, fake news are important concerns which are influencing public and impacting national security.

- For instance, fear-mongering through the media has led to mob lynchings, attacks on the migrant population and can also manipulate public perception and can instigate hatred, violence, and disharmony among the various communities within society.
- **Opaque private treaties:** Private treaties is the practice where a newspaper enters into ad-for-equity deals with private firms. Often, such clients of publishing companies get favourable coverage.
 - The trend of private treaties is growing considering the financial gains to the media houses, but at the cost of the reader, his right to honest and complete reporting and importantly, freedom of the press.
- **Blatant blackmail:** Journalists are supposed to enlighten people, help them form opinions and highlight social evils. Instead, they are seen blackmailing people and extorting money.
- **Widening legal regulatory gap:** The Press Council of India (PCI) has failed to address the unethical issues of media like paid news and other unethical practices. This, in turn, has widened the regulatory gap.
- **Infotainment Titus and English elitism:** Infotainment Titus plagues the local language media more than the English media. Salary disparities exist between the English and local language media staff. Advertising revenue, too, is higher for English papers as opposed to local language papers despite greater readership.
 - All this highlights the greater issue of English elitism and the associated prestige at the cost of our local languages and the many who speak them.

Conclusion

- In developing countries like India, the media have a great responsibility to fight backward ideas such as casteism and communalism and help the people in their struggle against poverty and other social evils. Hence, having journalistic ethics in place becomes very important.
- It is important that the media stick to the core principles of reporting like truth and accuracy, transparency, independence, fairness and impartiality, responsibility and fair play.