

Determining the Senate's Influence on Media Coverage of Senate Proceedings (1985-1999)

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Abstract

This research article analyses the influence of Senate over the media coverage of the Senate proceedings during 1985-1999. The period of Zia after restoration of democracy in 1985 was basically a semi-Presidential form of Government so the functioning of the Parliament in Pakistan was undermined. The media was covering the Senate's proceedings but due to several restrictions, the media was unable to public the same wordings of Senators. Therefore, Senators had severally objected on media related issues as the institution was in institutionalizing itself. The study examines the Senate's efforts to establish and maintain boundaries with the institution of the Media. This study examines the specific initiatives undertaken by the Senate such as limitation on media about presentation of distorted proceedings, false, misreporting and non-representation of reports, and limitation on jurisdiction of media to determine its superiority on the institution of media. The study employs an analytical methodology, including primary data from Senate Debates, as well as archival and secondary sources for investigation. The research asserts that the Senate had a crucial role in enacting legislation to restrict Media. The motions opposing the media due to its false, distorted, or misreporting determined that the Senators strictly disallowed the media to encroach the boundaries of Senate. The limitation on jurisdiction of media imposed by Senate's legislation also determined the authority of Senate was expanded over media.

Keywords: Senate of Pakistan, Media, Boundary Development, Legislation, Institutionalization

Introduction

The Modern Democracy is contingent upon the presence of free and impartial Media as it serves as fourth pillar of the state. The media reflects popular opinion, and effectively acts as a constructive opposition when criticizes government policy. It will effectively fulfill these functions when there will be a supportive atmosphere, abilities of thorough reporting will present, and it follows the ethical and professional standards. The media has critical role in fostering the freedom of expression, but unfortunately the history of Pakistan is replete with several instances of laws that undermined media in the name of guise of safeguarding national interests. Several measures were taken, such as the enactment of the Press and Publication Ordinance in 1963, the establishment of the National Press Trust in 1964, and Registration of Printing Presses and Publication Ordinance in 1988.

The Pakistan Broadcasting Corporation was established following Pakistan's independence as a direct successor of the Indian Broadcasting Company. At the eve of independence, Pakistan had only three radio stations located in Dhaka, Lahore, and Peshawar. After a year, in 1948, new stations were established in Karachi and Rawalpindi and then stations were established in Hyderabad in 1951, Quetta in 1956, a second station at Rawalpindi in 1960 (Shahid, 2011). The formation of Pakistan Television in 1964 diminished the importance of Radio, but the media's influence on politics was limited. Media was bound to obey the government and it is evident from restrictions on PTV to not to show a single shot of Benazir Bhutto during Zia rule (Parveen & Bhatti, 2018). Despite this factor that media was bound to government, the Senators occasionally highlighted media related issues in Senate during 1985-1999. This study unveiled that why Senators had raised points on media and how it signified itself over media.

Establishing Boundaries: A Factor of Institutionalization

Nelson Polsby's study "The Institutionalization of US House of Representatives," outlined the establishment of boundaries as key aspects of institutionalization (Polsby, 1968). The jurisdiction, area of authority, and limitations of an institution defines the boundaries, while the uniqueness of an institution in comparison to other institutions distinguishes it from its surroundings (McGuire, 2004). The institution will be characterized by well-defined boundaries from other institutions, which allows it a significant level of autonomy to grow

and evolve in its specialty. The boundaries of an institution should be clearly identifiable so it would make it evident that any attempt by one institution to incorporate the limits of another is an effort to extend its own outside boundaries.

History of Dysfunctional Print Media in Pakistan (1947-1985)

The history of print media in Pakistan is replete with disasters as both the leaders and the general public had failed to develop an independent media. The suppression on Pakistani journalism started in 1948, when three progressive magazines were banned by Muslim League administration. When ban was expired and journals re-appeared in the market, it was ordered to produce a security deposit under the Safety Act Ordinance of 1948. The editors were unable to provide security so they were arrested (Hassan, 2001). The first attack on freedom of press in 1948 opened the doors for additional attacks on media and media was not granted license to work freely in the name of security and safety of national interests.

Another measure was taken by Ayub Khan when he seized the PPL group on April 18, 1959 for the reason that they included news which threatened the security of Pakistan. They were alleged that they got financing from foreign sources. During his dictatorship, the press experienced a significant and devastating setback especially when he enacted the “Press and Publication (Amendments) Ordinance” on September 2, 1963. Under this ordinance, he initiated his assault on press by seizing control of the autonomous newspapers including Pakistan Times, *Imroz*, Morning News, *Mashriq*, and the weekly publication *Lail o Nahar*. The National Press Trust, under this ordinance, assumed control of fourteen well-established daily and weekly newspapers (Parveen & Bhatti, 2018). This level of pressure hindered media’s creative output and media was transformed into a mere occupation of reproducing different government narratives. Even though information required for a dynamic public opinion never exceeded from the records of Information Ministry (Jabbar, 1972). After the end of Ayub era, the allegiance of NPT was shifted to Yahya Khan. The Ayub government also controlled Associated Printing Press (APP), utilizing an ordinance, so the condition was that the authoritarian rule witnessed a significant opposition from public but the Pakistani media greeted him as a military ruler (Mezzera & Sial, 2024).

After elections 1970, power struggle between Zulfikar Bhutto and Sheikh Mujeeb was started so media in both factions became entirely divided with opposing forces. East Pakistani

endorsed Mujeeb and his six points, while West Pakistani media was denouncing these points as a threat to Pakistan's unity along-with portraying Mujeeb as a traitor. Nobody prioritized the national interests and media acted as a tool and had not presented an accurate portrayal of the subject.

After assuming power, Zulfikar Bhutto expressed his desire to establish a cordial relationship with media and he spoke amicably for press. However, this relationship quickly came to an end after termination of Z.A. Suleri. In 1972, the government revoked print quota for *Jang* in Quetta and sent notice to other newspapers, including *Nawa-i-Waqt* and *Imroz*, while 'The Sun' in Karachi was also prohibited in July 1972, in accordance with the Press & Publication ordinance (Hassan, 2001). The government ceased the national advertisements to the *Dawn* and imposed penalties on several other newspapers. The government also banned 'the Frontier Guardian' and 'the Shahbaz,' 'the Outlook' and 'the Mubright', 'the Zindagi' and a number of weeklies edited by Mujeeb-ur-Rehman Shami (Parveen & Bhatti, 2018). Conversely, a period of democracy was about to start after promulgation of constitution of 1973 but before that *Dawn* cautioned that a constitution bestowed by a solitary individual or a single political party, regardless of their overwhelming majority, cannot be impervious to future challenges or guarantee protection against subversion (Dawn, 1973). Another step taken by Bhutto government was the foundation of National Press Commission in September 19, 1973. The constitution was favored by 'The Pakistan Times' but other newspapers did not warmly welcomed it, But very soon Bhutto's dominant personality made the media to be on its way.

In 1977, Zia-ul-Haq imposed Martial Law and adopted the friendly approach towards the press to acquire the sympathies of media at earliest. Media once again welcomed martial law as an editorial in *Jang* commented that the action taken by the armed forces was become inevitable because the country had reached the brink of disaster (Khan, 2009). However, this relationship was short-lived and Zia arrested eleven journalists and whipped four more for arranging a meeting at a public area, hoisting flags and initiating a hunger strike (Hassan, 2001). Zia's Islamization also caused imprisonment and flogging of journalists. When he postponed elections and dissolved political parties in October 1979, he censored newspapers and commanded all government departments, to acquire exclusively NPT publications (Khan, Hussain, Qaiser, & Alam, 2021). In 1983, Zia terminated nine experienced journalists due to signing of a memorandum that called for an end to the mistreatment of the Sindhi

community. He restricted the press under the pretext of upholding Islamic values and traditions and implemented numerous Islamic regulations. In 1985, he restored the Parliament and non-party based elections were held for National and Provincial Assemblies while Senators were also elected through new Assembly members.

Senate's Legislation about Media

The media in Pakistan always worked under the prescribed rules and it did not overlap the limitations of Senate. A number of observers opined that several institutions including parliament remained superior to the media. Generally Government controlled the media and remained under observation and guidance of Government (Hussain, 2020). Pakistan was not a totalitarian country but numerous strategies were used to refute opposition leaders' hearing (TNA, 1976). As "The Guardian" reported that government tightly controlled the trust newspapers, radio and television and opposition hardly received any publicity (Afridi, 1977). The second Government of Benazir Bhutto allowed opposition for personal explanation at any time. In spite of this, Senate of Pakistan occasionally highlighted the malpractices of Media in sense of misreporting or on publication of distorted or non-representation of proceedings.

Limitation on Media about Presentation of Distorted Proceeding

Pakistan passed Broadcasting Corporation Act in 1973 to safeguard the procedure of broadcasting and to grow the media for public service. The code of conduct for broadcasting assures that expunged parliamentary proceedings shall not be broadcast and only fair proceedings of the parliament will be released by media (Pakistan, 2024). It is obvious that Parliament formulates the rules for media and in case of breach of limitation can call a question from broadcasting management. Even Zia's Martial Law imposed several limitations on media but allowed to work in the country. It was witnessed in the Senate that Senators severally raised the point that government media distorted their debates that they had done during the session.

In December 1985, Molana Kausar Niazi tendered that Pakistan Television telecasted the distorted proceeding of the House and reported falsely about my presented privilege motion. They even had not aired voting about Sharia Bill, which was done yesterday. The distortion was held in 27th October's proceedings. PTV accused Molana Kausar Niazi that he said

Shalimar recording company records Indian songs. The matter was denied by Minister of Finance so the presenter withdrew his motion. However, he had not withdrawn motion as Minister of Information assured that primary inquiry had been done and after detailed inquiry, the report would be presented to the House. On the other hand, the powerful Minister of Finance presented prohibition on Sharia Bill, it was rejected and the House favored the bill with more votes. The voting showed the sovereignty of the House, but this was also distorted by the Television authorities and they did not air the voting of the Senate (Pakistan S. o., 1985).

The Information Minister, Mr. Hamid Nasir Chattha replied that the both issues, which Senator Niazi raised, were mentioned in the special report. He found no attempt on the part of Pakistan Television Corporation to distort the facts so no breach of privilege held. At this part, Chairman added that one was the privilege of the House and other was the privilege of the entire nation. The only question was that PTV projecting the national interest or not. Either they conducted all conformity with the national aspirations or not. This might be done by them but that not constitute a breach of privilege of thus August House. The House necessitated that it suggest the ways and means of how to improve working of the PTV not by a privilege motion but by resorting to other device either bringing a law. Keeping these things in mind, they may were incompetent so the honorable Minister must look into their competency (Pakistan S. o., Senate Debates, November 12, 1985).

False, Misreporting and Non-Representation of Reports

The Constitution of Pakistan confers the freedom of press under article 19, which explains the Freedom of Speech, etc. However, the freedom does not mean the breach of law by airing false news or inadequate reporting. The code of conduct for media broadcasting prohibits for airing the defamatory and false reports. Due to false reporting Senate brought the reports under the consideration of House to call a question from the press. It was also to develop the boundaries over media by disallowing false reporting as well as critic reporting to some extent during that time.

After the fall of Dhaka, Biharis Muslims due to persecution opposed Bangali language movement and liberation of Bangladesh and supported Pakistan's armed forces (BBC, 2022) so they confronted retaliations from Mukti Bahinis and paramilitaries (Schendel,

2009). The Supreme Court of Bangladesh ordered in 1972 that they were eligible for Bengali Nationality but they had chosen the repatriation to Pakistan (Hofmann & Caruso, 2011). They came to Pakistan and the process of their rehabilitation was started. Senator Mir Ali Nawaz Khan Talpur addressed to the House on 12th of December 1985 and asked for fair and equitable resettlement of Biharis in all provinces of Pakistan instead of Karachi only, to avoid placing additional burden on Sindh Provinces.

Daily newspaper, Jang published a report on the next day that he simply supported the repatriation of Biharis, (News, 1985) which was against the facts. Senator Ali Nawaz on this misreporting stated that A.P.P. report created serious misunderstanding and resentment amongst the people of the interior Sindh. The Senate should direct A.P.P. to clarify the omission. The Information Minister, Mr. Hamid Nasir Chattha denied that and presented a teleprinter release issued by A.P.P. Mr. Ali Nawaz Khan Talpur supporting the resolution, said that the Muslim brothers living in Bangladesh should be shifted to Pakistan. He said those brothers should be settled in all the four provinces. Jang is a private newspaper and if it misreported then the news agency was entirely liable for the news and Ministry had no responsibility under the freedom of press. Iqbal Ahmad Khan further commented that these private newspapers set their headlines according to their will and even did not publish news provided by A.P.P.

Mr. Javed Jabbar asked to Mr. Chairman to reassure the press as to what the Senator meant, so that such a misunderstanding could be avoided in future. He further added that there was no mechanism for clear instructions or identification of senator to be provided to the press in the Senate Secretariat. There should be a briefing mechanism so that if there would be any misunderstanding it can be clarified. Mir Ali Nawaz Khan Talpur also asked for assurance from Mr. Deputy Chairman that the media would never again misreports (Pakistan S. o., Senate Debates, December 15, 1985). This clearly showed that Senators demanded the check and balance over media about false or inadequate reporting.

In spite of assurance about the proper reporting, the Pakistan Television did inadequate reporting and coverage of the discussion held in the Senate. Prof. Khurshid Ahmad and Lt. Gen. (Retd) Saeed Qadir raised the point that PTV covered Senate's proceeding held on December 11, 1988, was incorrect, arbitrarily selective and it failed to represent the

substantive discussion made by the House. They had not reported that a large number of Senators walked out from the House. Mr. Javed Jabbar, Minister of Information stated that government instructed PTV to appoint more than one or even two reporters to assign the task of recording. The government allowed the members of the Parliament to express their views on the electronic media at any time. So that if any inadvertent distortion took place the citizens can literally hear from the mouth of members (Pakistan S. o., Senate Debates, January 15, 1989). Chairman asked PTV to make sure that such lapses would not take place in the future.

After four days, the House witnessed another privilege motion for blackout of news by PTV regarding visit of the Chairman Senate on tomb of Quaid-i-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah. Dr. Noor Jehan Panezai moved motion that a delegation of the Senators accompanied with the Chairman Senate representing the whole Pakistan visited *Mazar-e-Quaid* on January 11, 1989 for *Fateha*. A team of PTV was present there to record the event but they did not air the report while daily *Nawai-e-Waqt* reported this on January 15, 1989. This blackout was an attempt to lower the image of the Father of the Nation as also the image of Senate of Pakistan. Minister of Information and Broadcasting also supported the motion for admissibility and clarified that blackout of the report was not with the consent of Ministry. He admitted that the error was deliberate and inadvertent but editor or officials did not do this consciously.

The motion was referred to the standing committee (Pakistan S. o., Senate Debates, January 19, 1989). The admissibility of motion proved that the House expanded the importance of the report regarding to Senate and bounded the media to broadcast the steps taken by the Senate of Pakistan. This also indicated that Senate tried to gain importance in public through proper reporting and transmission of their steps.

Senator Bisharat Elahi filed a Privilege Motion on November 5, 1991, based on an article that ran with the headline 'Dr. Bisharat's Empire of Billions' (Weekly, 1991). According to the mover, serious claims were made against him in the article, which diminished his credibility as a Senator and damaged his public profile. He said the claims levelled against him were baseless, and he offered to testify before the Senate Privileges Committee in any investigation. The Minister of Parliamentary Affairs did not oppose the motion and motion held in order (Pakistan S. o., Senate Debates, November 5, 1991).

Daily Pakistan Lahore reported that, “List of 112 smugglers was handed over to the Government including Ayub Saeed, brother of Senator Behrawar Saeed and son-in-law of Senator Abdul Wahid” (Pakistan T. D., 1993). Akhunzada Behrawar Saeed said the newspaper wrongly showed a person as my relative, which was involved in drug smuggling. He clarified that Senator Abdul Wahid even did not have son-in-law and Ayub Saeed was not his brother. He cursed investigation agencies and the newspaper as well. He raised a question that why they provided a list to newspaper agency as it was confidential. This caused defamation and made me suspicious in the eyes of public. Chair ruled motion in and referred to privilege committee (Pakistan S. o., Senate Debates, February 21, 1993).

Press often published that kind of news that was against the reality and it needed specific research. However, due to misreporting, sometimes it not only breached the privilege of the Members but also hurt their sentiments. It was witnessed that Senators filed motions about false reporting that caused allegations, detracted their credibility, and lowered them in the eyes of the public. The step to make a direct statement on electronic media by Parliamentarians strengthened the members of the House and indirectly to the House as well. It reduced the chances of misinterpretation and inadequate reporting for the coming instance.

Limitation on Jurisdiction of Media

The electronic media was established in Pakistan to enlighten the public through healthy amusement, as well as instill the awareness about history, heritage, present challenges and development as well as information about world. The broadcast policy involved national and worldwide interests that had always been driven and guided by the cardinal principles of educating viewers about the values and about disciplined society. The electronic media programs were quite focused on Islam, education, entertainment, and culture. The media was liable to follow the code of conduct provided by the government.

During Martial Law, Zia imposed several limitations on Media by passing Press and Publication ordinance in 1977. In different times, Senate opposed these laws and tried to repeal those laws and finally on 10th of July 1988, Senate passed a resolution to repeal the ordinance. However, on the same day House passed another resolution that the

electronic media would be bound to reflect the Islamic moral values with more effectiveness on T.V. programs. The House opined that Pakistan Television Corporation should make concerted efforts to give ideological and moral orientation to its programs especially Islamic moral values (Pakistan S. o., Senate Debates, July 10, 1988).

Prof. Khurshid Ahmad, the mover of resolution stressed that television must be used for the information, education and entertainment. It did not mean the information shared by the government channel only symbolize the government, it must criticize the government if it did wrong. On the other hand, entertainment did not mean that it promotes western life style and it must demonstrate valuable information. We did not demand that PTV broadcast sermons whole day but we need Islamized characteristics and moral values in its transmissions. Minister of Information, Ilahi Bakhsh Soomro asked to give some time for switching the programs. He agreed that television must function to educate, inform and entertain. He added that PTV was working according to moral values and rules provided by the government and they already tried to do best for the ideological and moral standards (Pakistan S. o., Senate Debates, July 10, 1988).

Under the code of conduct for broadcasting, media could not air or publish the expunged proceedings of the House. On July 15, 1993, Syed Abdullah Shah told the House that newspapers reproduced the exact words that were expunged by the Chair and the Members withdrew the words. Prof. Khurshid Ahmad asked the Chair to send a show cause notice to the editor of newspaper. Mr. Chairman said that it was against the laws and morality as well. He ordered to media persons to not to publish such kind of proceedings again. Prof. Khurshid said that Fasih Iqbal, Chairman Information Committee should discuss the matter with Press Committee (Pakistan S. o., Senate Debates, July 15, 1993).

It indicates that Senate played its vital role to limit the jurisdiction of T.V. Channels to broadcast the programs within the provided limits. The purpose of raising the points was to control the media from unlawful reporting and to limit their jurisdiction. Due to freedom of expression and freedom of press, the Senate cannot directly get control over media but with limiting its jurisdiction, Senate expanded its boundaries to media.

Conclusion

The smooth relationship between media and governance is an important factor of developing democracy. If a nation possesses unrestricted media, it creates conducive environment for democracy and helps to foster genuine democracy. However, the politics of Pakistan is majorly regarded as non-democratic due to lack of democratic values, personal interests of politicians, impractical role of the media and majorly the Military dictatorship. The weak democratic politics of Pakistan and oligarchic situation caused inadequacy in media as the government's strategies of suppression attacked on media progression. In case of institutions, Senate also wielded a substantial influence over media. The media of Pakistan was not much empowered during the Zia's period. Gradually, media got freedom; meanwhile, Senate expanded its boundaries towards media. The House set limitation about distorted proceeding of the House, condemned false, misreporting and non-representation of reports. The gradual development of inner and outer boundaries opened the fact that Senate made itself a well-institutionalized organization.

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