

THE FUTURE OF URDU JOURNALISM: OPPORTUNITIES & CHALLENGES

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ABSTRACT

Urdu journalism, in India, began from the publication of Jam-e-Jahan Numa. There was extensive growth in Urdu journalism from 1850s till independence in 1947. Urdu journalism, however, suffered heavily during and after partition. At the time of partition there were 415 Urdu newspapers including dailies, weeklies, fortnightlies and monthly magazines. After partition, only 345 remained in India as owners of 70 newspapers migrated to Pakistan. There was a gradual decline in number of publications and readership of Urdu newspapers after 1980s as a number of new newspapers and television channels entered the media landscape. The growing use of digital media over the past many years has influenced the communication channels of society across the globe. It has not only made things easier but the content can be easily accessed from any part of the world. The digital media holds a bright future for Urdu Journalism as well. A large number of audience has chosen Urdu language to create content for their digital platforms, which experts believe is a good sign for the future of Urdu journalism. The focus of this research paper is to understand the broad perspective of communication in Urdu journalism and to be familiar with the transformation of Urdu journalism from print to digital media.

Keywords: Communication, Digital media, Newspapers, Society, Urdu journalism.

INTRODUCTION

Urdu media has a huge audience and in a country with diverse linguistic spectrum, language binds together different communities. There are many factors involved in the development of any language but the role of communication is the most important factor in promoting the language or making it popular at the public level. Therefore, Urdu language also requires various fields for the promotion and publication. The role of Urdu journalism is significant in opinion making. Journalism is always bound to have some goals as it has to shape the public opinion, so its language cannot be the same as the language of literature but it is the language accessible to public. Urdu journalism is both, a source of

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information for the people as well as entertainment. Urdu journalism has proven its worth and importance in South Asian society.

Urdu newspapers and journals have always served as significant medium for social, political and national movements. During India's independence war and on several other occasions, Urdu newspapers have showed courage and truthfulness and have lit lamp in the darkness. Similar to newspapers in other languages, the contribution of Urdu language newspapers and journals have been immense in its glorious history.

During the revolt of 1857, Urdu newspapers acted as a medium in provoking Indians to revolt against the British. The services of Urdu newspapers were very important in relation to country and the people. Some of prominent newspapers were "*Jam-e-Jahan Nama*", "*Sadaq Al Akhbar*", "*Delhi Urdu Akhbar*", "*Hindustan*", "*Tahzebul Akhilaq*", "*Humdard*", "*Humdum*". After the quelling of the war of Independence in 1857, Urdu newspaper played a major role in overcoming the disappointment and sense of defeat from the peoples' mind. It created new vigor, freshness and special kind of energy in the life of Indian activists through articles and poetry. New India adopted a secular profession and Urdu journalism soon regained its courage and dedication. Within a few years, not only well-known newspapers like "*Pratab*" and "*Milap*" were established, but new newspapers like "*Hind Samachar*" (Punjab), "*Azad Hind*" (West Bengal), and "*Azad*" (UP) etc. were also published from different parts of the country. These newspapers carved the prestige for Urdu journalism.

Since the beginning of the 21st century, the scenario of Urdu journalism is becoming alarming. In the recent years, the overall circulation of Urdu press has decreased and this has happened in the prominent states where Urdu media was quite strong. Urdu journalists need to pay serious attention to its consequences. Today when the Urdu journalism and printing is in the era of offset printing and computer typesetting, the new generation of readers are not familiar with the difficulties of the past era from which Urdu journalism was suppressed for almost a century. The new technologies have opened up the doors for new opportunities. That is why digital media is the future of Urdu journalism. It is quite clear that the golden age of Urdu print journalism is gone and Urdu digital media is the future.

The profession of journalism consists of three basic components: administration, publication and trade. Most people consider it as a problem of administration and publication and forget that publishing a newspaper is also a source of income, it is a business in which capital is invested and profit is expected. The main source of income from newspaper is through advertisement. Advertisements are profitable. Publishing a newspaper without advertisement would be a losing business. However, in present scenario, advertising through print newspaper is not as profitable because print advertisement requires lot of staff as well as money too. In this digital era, people prefer to advertise online or through e-newspaper. The e-newspapers also provide subscription to their daily customers and take care of their needs. The organization also generates revenue through subscription. Subscription revenue is built upon establishing long-term relationships with customers and companies. Subscribers with active subscription will stay connected to what is happening

in community and this source of information is highly reliable.

Role of Urdu Journalism in Development of Society

Development of journalism in the society started after the advent of printing press. By the invention of printing press, magazine and newspaper started. In Asia, Urdu Journalism started in nineteenth century. Since its existence, Urdu journalism has showcased its strength and significance in the society. The prominent newspapers of nineteenth century -*Sadiq-Ul-Akhbar*, *Delhi Urdu Akhbar*, *Zamindar*, *Humdard*, etc. are very noteworthy. The impressions of these newspapers are still in the hearts of common people. *Sadiq-ul-Akhbar* and *Delhi-Urdu-Akhbar* have been famous for their boldness in speaking the truth and criticizing the mismanagement of the government. Because of their boldness these newspaper were banned for few years. "*Tahzeeb-Ul-Akhilaaq*" was a magazine, published during the period of Sir Syed Ahmed and its purpose was to open up the minds and outlook of Indian Muslims. This magazine had great impact on the politics, literature and religion. Newspapers and magazine have played a great role in awakening the suppressed feelings and emotions of masses.

Urdu journalism plays a very important role in societal life. Newspapers of all eras have made contemporary issues as their subject, and besides these, knowledge about, history, civilization, religion, society, laws and regulations have been disseminated that creates condition for mental, emotional and intellectual training.

AIM OF STUDY

The aim of the paper is to understand and analyze different phases of Urdu journalism. From the beginning of Urdu journalism to its peak phase when Urdu newspapers got popularized all over the Asian continent and the present scenario of Urdu journalism when the Urdu journalism is struggling for their identity will be covered in this paper.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Numbers of studies have been conducted on Urdu journalism. Most of the studies relate to historical background of Urdu journalism, comparative studies of English and Urdu dailies, growth and development of Urdu press, the changing role of Urdu press in digital communications, emergence of Urdu Press, impact of politics on journalism and many more. Some of the studies are briefly summarized.

Naim (2011) made an overview of Urdu education in India. Several prominent Urdu researchers such as Athar Farooqui and Ibn-e-Farid stated that since 1947, Urdu has become an exclusive language for Muslims in India. Yet, according to this paper, Urdu is not the language of Muslims. According to the 1981 census, it is clear that there is a large number of Urdu speaking people in India but on the other hand there are very few people who know Urdu as a subject. Therefore, there is no national weekly publication as far as Urdu journalism is concerned. Urdu journalism as a whole is at its worst, especially in what has been described as the "*Urdu heartland*". There is not a single flourishing Urdu newspaper in Delhi, UP or Bihar, certainly nor the types found in Kolkata and Bombay.

Emiko (2013) analyzed the development of the print media in South Asia, especially in the Urdu language and its impact on readers. He discussed the formation and development of the printing industry in South Asia, from the eighteenth century to the 1980s in Pakistan and India. Its aim was to redefine understanding of printing in South Asia and to reveal the systems that support the print media. Exploring the tastes and demands of the reader in Pakistan by using different surveys conducted by different organization such as *Bengali Academy* and *UNESCO* 1980, the paper found that in East Pakistan, more newspaper readers tend to be male and those of magazines and journals female. In 1980, UNESCO reported that there was lack of reading among the literate population. It further observed that a complicated relationship exists between publishers, writers and readers (UNESCO, 1980).

Adnan *et al* (2020) observed that during the past decades, western world has make a great benefit from immense development in information communication technology. The research work explored how effects of fast spreading technological means have affected traditional modes of Urdu news. It also explored the phenomenon of adoption of information technology and role played by media in this digital age to address the global audience. The paper analyzed news collection, influence of internet and extent of freedom of expression and its great impact on today's media in accessing and delivering information. People with Urdu language and digital communication can express their concerns and get information related to them.

Hussain and Shabir (2020) explored the development of journalism in Pakistani and Indian newspapers (*Daily Dawn*, *Daily Jang*, *Daily Times of India* and *Daily Sahafat* during 2012 to 2014). The findings showed that all the selected newspapers mostly covered the government related developmental issues, events, problems and activities as all selected newspapers are more focused on health, education, and infrastructural development related governmental activities, issues and problems. In short, media, especially newspapers of both countries are trying to use development journalism for the betterment of society. However, due to financial problems of media organizations, pressure groups, lack of awareness, lack of training of staff about positive journalism etc., they are not paying full attention to this concept.

Most of the research work cited above focused on the historical approach of Urdu journalism and the growth and development of Urdu newspapers in certain parts of the world and its declining trend in India. However, this research paper focuses on the future of Urdu journalism and the challenges and opportunities in digital age.

OBJECTIVES

The specific objectives of the research paper are as follow:

- Analyze the scope and future of Urdu journalism
- Explore the opportunities and challenges faced by Urdu journalism

The researcher adopted qualitative techniques to evaluate the collected data. The data was collected using secondary sources and analyzed through content analysis.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

The following sub-sections explain the challenges and opportunities faced by Urdu journalism especially in the 21st century.

Urdu Journalism: A Unique Medium For Mass Appeal

Urdu journalism has become an important profession in the present era. Urdu news organizations provide news and continue to attract the government and people towards the societal issues that can be political, social and economic. In contemporary times, Urdu newspapers have circulation not only in Pakistan and India, but also in the western and Persian Gulf countries. Urdu journalism is reviving the traditional way of writing Urdu columns and making digital blogs. Technologically, Urdu journalism is at par with other vernacular journalism. The advent of web technology has helped Urdu journalism to make it global. Broadcasting is the best medium for expressing public opinion on any issue. In this era, Urdu journalism has gained familiarity and popularity among the masses and Urdu journalism has succeeded in leaving its mark in regional language press as well. People prefer to consume media content in their native languages, or at least in the languages they are more familiar. During this period, Urdu journalism has also played an important role in the growth and development of Indian society.

Urdu Journalism: Role in Disseminating Scientific, Creative and Technological Information

Urdu journalism provides wider perspective in communication especially in editorial writing and translations. Urdu is one of the broad languages of the world, which has the ability and power to express the thoughts and concepts of other languages. Urdu newspapers and journals are publishing across the world and attract the commoners, writers and poets alike in many parts of world.

Urdu journalism plays a very important role in disseminating the information through editorials. In Urdu newspapers, editorial written on extraordinary news story convey the newspaper's opinion about the particular event to the readers. Editorials in Urdu newspapers such as "*Delhi Urdu Akhbar*", "*Oudh Panch*", and "*Akbar Jamboor*" had great impact during the war of independence. In present scenario, now editorial writing in electronic media has been started by "*Voice of America Urdu Services*" and its title "*Aaj Ka Idhariya*" based on US-government policy. There is an undeniable soft power of Urdu that extends far beyond its formal popularity.

Urdu Journalism and Digital Inclusion

With the advancement of technology much of journalism has changed over the years, the fundamental or the core principles of the profession remain unaltered. The basic rules related to on spot reporting, stories from the field, investigation are still the same. GD Chandan, who is also known as the 'Mobile Encyclopedia of Urdu Journalism', said that according to statistics, there has been a decline in the publication of Urdu newspapers and this trend is continuing (*Milli Gazette*, 2005). Interestingly, to attract a large audience some popular print publications including *Siasat*, *Inqilab*, *Hind Samachar*, *Kashmir Uzma* and

others have chosen to create content for their digital platforms, which experts believe is a good step for the future of Urdu journalism. The daily *Siasat* launched its e-paper on 30 October 2004. It was the world's first Urdu newspaper to enter the age of internet editions. The digital media has fast become a new reality. Urdu always had a tradition of radio transmission medium, which ought to be revived. This changing scenario has opened up greater opportunities for journalists and media organizations. They can now reach out to their audiences through the digital route. The invention of digital platforms has made things easier. People all over the world can access online news portals. If the stories are of high standard, relevant and interesting they will undoubtedly attract readers.

The first Urdu newspaper to start web-edition was Hyderabad based "*Siasat*". This newspaper attracts huge audience all over the world. Now Urdu is not limited to a particular community. It is a universal language. Some Urdu news YouTube channels have also started such as "*News18 Urdu*", "*DD Urdu*", "*24/7 Urdu News*", "*BBC Urdu Radio*", and many more. These channels provide ongoing access to content like video and audio and provide the high quality content to attract the viewer's attention. There are also numbers of YouTube channels where one learns Urdu and enhance one's communication skills. Some of the channels are "*UrduPod101*", "*Urdu Fairy Tales*", "*Urdu Kids*" etc. These channels are helpful to hone language skills and offer different types of programs. Their distinctive way of Urdu narration allows learning and analyzing certain unique Urdu words, phrases and sentences. This combination of elements will bring loads of entertainment and information. These YouTube channels polish Urdu Language skills and keep up-to-date especially on news and politics.

CAUSES OF DECLINE IN URDU JOURNALISM

Urdu's importance has been declining steadily since a mass of Urdu speakers and writers migrated to Pakistan from northern India and erstwhile state of Hyderabad after partition. Since 1947, Urdu has become a language exclusive to Muslims in India, and that the questions concerning the "development" of Urdu and Urdu education is considered only with reference to the Muslims. This is one of the primary reasons for the decline in the readership of Urdu media. It is true that most of the Urdu daily, weeklies, fortnightlies and monthlies largely reflect the mind of the Muslims in general. Another reason is that now people pay attention to English instead of Urdu. Urdu journalism in terms of quality of its content, professional standards and credibility is poor in comparison with English journalism. There are no specific training institutes for Urdu journalism. The foremost reason for the decline of Urdu journalism is lack of finance and government biasness.

Urdu journalism has seen many ups and downs and has left a deep imprint on the history, politics, economics and sociology of the entire subcontinent (India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Myanmar and Afghanistan). Urdu journalism has suffered and fallen quite a lot, yet not everything is lost. With financial assistance and prominent people getting involved with its rejuvenation, it can get back upon its strong feet again.

CONCLUSION

Urdu journalism is facing innumerable problems and challenges. The challenges started with the closure of many small Urdu newspapers due to lack of support from

the government and a decline in the content and quality of Urdu journalism. Readers of Urdu have decreased in North India and new readers have emerged in South India like Maharashtra. Urdu dailies still have their famous monochromatic and spotty news writing. Today private TV channels in Urdu are garnering an audience, state-owned TV channels also need to live up to its social responsibilities and promote progressive news and views. Doordarshan and the entire Urdu TV media needs to live up to its social responsibilities and promote progressive news and views.

Urdu as a language is not limited to a particular community; it is a universal language. Urdu journalism has seen many ups and downs and has left a deep imprint on the entire South Asian sub-continent. Despite passing through declining phase in terms of quality of writing and standard of language, the importance and status of Urdu journalism remain significant.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Following recommendations are proposed:

- Urdu knowing population is decreasing as Urdu is not a compulsory subject in schools. To reverse the trend, Urdu should be promoted as a subject at primary level of school education.
- Different digital media platforms such as *Netflix, Hotstar, Amazon Prime, YouTube* etc. need to promote Urdu language.
- Government should frame proper policies to establish institutions where proper and adequate training in accordance with the needs be imparted for the development of Urdu journalism.
- Journalists should use different kinds of Urdu dialects and it is time for Urdu press to reinvent itself by using Roman script to attract attention of the youth.

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