

Revolution in Vernacular Press – A study in Andhra Pradesh

By Shankar Chelluri

Submitted to the University of Westminster, "The Changing Face of Journalism in India" conference at 309 Regent Street, London on 12 September 2011

This paper will look at the revolution in three dimensions:

- a. Circulation and Readership figures of Telugu dailies in AP
- b. Use of technology in Telugu dailies
- c. Ownership pattern and political leanings

I will be using primary and secondary data for the above study.

Andhra Pradesh has emerged as a large media center in the last two decades with some of the largest vernacular media houses in India based here.

Circulation and readership figures of Telugu dailies in AP:

Eenadu is one of the largest vernaculars daily in India with over 12 lakh copies and a readership of over 50 lakh. In the mid-nineties, Vaartha from the Sanghi Group managed by the Congress MP Girish Sanghi tried to break the stranglehold of Eenadu and joined by Sakshi in March 2008; but both are still not successful. The Average Issue Readership (AIR) as per IRS 2011 has Eenadu show a marginal decline at 59.08 lakh as against 49.88 lakh for Sakshi while Vaartha has long lost the race.

Use of technology:

Technology as a game changer has been extensively leveraged by the vernacular press in AP. While Vaartha started with facsimile editions in mid-1990s, Sakshi rode on the Internet wave for transmission and also introduced colour printing for all pages. The advertising space in these papers also witnessed lot of changes. As Hyderabad acquired a national outlook and is the ideal product launching center in India, the advertising also acquired national hues.

Ownership & Political Leanings:

The ownership pattern of vernaculars changed and now uses the medium as a propaganda vehicle. The political leaning of newspaper and TV channels in AP is amply reflective in their reporting style. A dimension of caste-based ownership has also skewed the news reporting style and is

being leveraged to counter stories from the rival groups. In this melee of acquiring licenses, the need for unbiased & balanced reporting took a major beating.

The issues plaguing a rapidly growing industry is lack of skilled and trained journalists, some media houses falling for paid news during elections and the malaise of the breaking news syndrome. This paper tries to explain the vernacular press scenario and the significant factors that affect their growth and proliferation/success in AIR.

Shankar Chelluri manages a boutique consultancy firm in Hyderabad, India. He has over 20 years experience in News Reporting, Public Relations & Corporate Communications. He completed his Masters in Economics from University of Hyderabad in 1993.