**Is Indian media free? Analyse**

**Introduction**

The freedom of speech and expression is of paramount importance and the Press is undoubtedly the most powerful watchdog of public interest. A free press stands as one of the great interpreters between the Government and the people.

**Freedom of Indian Media**

In India before Independence, there was no constitutional or statutory guarantee of freedom of an individual or media/press. In 1972 the Supreme Court held that although Article 19(1)(a) does not mention the freedom of the press, it is the settled law that freedom of speech and expression includes freedom of the press and circulation. It had earlier observed that the Press has the right of free propagation and free circulation without any previous restraint on publication.

However, India slipped in the annual World Press Freedom Index of by Reporters Without Borders (RWB) for the second straight year, falling two places to rank 138th among 180 countries in the latest list released in 2018. The country was ranked 136th in 2015, gained three places to 133rd in 2016, and fell back to 136th last year.

According to RWB Prosecutions were also used to gag journalists who were overly critical of the government, with some prosecutors invoking Section 124a of the penal code, under which sedition is punishable by life imprisonment. No journalist has so far been convicted of sedition but the threat encourages self-censorship. Also, per the report, last year, 11 journalists murdered, 46 attacked, 27 booked in police cases and 12 threatened for reporting.

While this continued low ranking is worrisome, Chandramauli Kumar Prasad, chairman of the Press Council of India (PCI) rejected it claiming the rankings “were based on opinion or perception” and not on statistical data. The major perpetrators, according to the report are the police officials, politicians and political workers, followed by right-wing activists and other non- state actors.

Conclusion

It is whether the press will get due freedom and if political parties are ready to address it through their manifestos. It would be a wonder if civil society stands up and makes the matter personal enough to emote over. And it would be even more powerful if journalists themselves came together to protect their right to expression as it is their diversity and plurality that will help us learn more about the length, breadth and width of what our nation is while checking the powers that be as the Fourth Estate.