
The Role of Media in a Democratic Society

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ABSTRACT:

At present the role of media in a democratic society stands unresolved. Various roles have been assumed by the media like educating and entertaining the general public and acting as the forth pillar of the state or a fighter for freedom of expression or a neutral body with no leanings towards any party. But all these roles are unfructuous. The real role of media in a democratic society is to act as a facilitator between the three pillars of a state, to act as an educator for warring political rivals, educating the general public to act as loyal and worthy citizens of the state and to adhere to the existing national constitution. The role of neutrality often suggested and exhibited is not suited for a country which has yet to find its identity, unity and integrity. Hence, it is proposed that role of media be determined in the light of the concept of democracy and democratic practices or lines of action in framework of national honor, dignity, identity and security.

KEYWORD: Media; Identity; Society; Democratic; Integrity; National-honor

A democratic society organizes its affairs by sending its representatives through one man one vote system so that they can formulate policies, rules and regulations according to the nationally proclaimed constitution. The affairs of the State are dealt by the governments framed from time to time. The courts adjudicate between rival parties according to the existing rules and regulations based on constitutional articles. The executives run the system. So three pillars of state are the legislative, the judiciary and the executive. The centrality of these three pillars has never been disputed. The scientific advancement in modern times has brought technologies, based on scientific investigations, closer to the doors of general public. The comforts of life have increased because of the new audio-visual technology available to them. The old name of communication media used for newspaper, magazines etc. is being renamed as mass media of communication. So the name media brings to light not only the print medium, but also the photographic medium and sound medium. As such even film is a part of mass media communication. We can say that mass

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media has entered our lives so much that its absence amounts to denying oxygen for our social lives.

The media can also be considered as life blood of a democratic society. It keeps the general public and all echelons of State governance in close contact and promotes a cooperative sharing of information necessary for the healthful state of our national existence. A sense of national unity prevails in all segments of society because of the fuller authentic flow of information. So the role of media emerges from the primary purpose of creating cohesion through promoting national dignity, national solidarity and national security keeping in view the manifesto of our national life i.e. our constitution. There can be no doubt about this sacred role of media for a society. The concept of democracy needs to be attached with the concept of nationalism. Both these concepts are complementary. Hence, media needs to promote the concept of democracy as well as the concept of nationalism. Both these concepts have their own connotations also. The media acts as a conscience of the society and it's a big role to play.

Let us take up concept of democracy first. I shall try to introduce it with an example from "playing a game." Any game we play has its own rules and every member who participates in it has per force to act on the rules which are binding and no aberration is acceptable to the referee. If some member exercises his own will to transgress the rules and expects to still consider himself a member of the competing team needs to be expelled from the field. The role of media is to act as referee.

Now let us move forward after accepting first premise that's rules have priority, our constitution has a priority and this must remain the motto of media to adhere to it in letter and spirit. The second premise on which it is built is that all the members have equal rights. One man one vote is a physical manifestation of equality. The real essence of this equality lies in recognizing all human beings equally dignified and respected. The honor of each individual is binding on others. Human beings are all honorable and there is no justification of taking away this status of one individual by another individual whatever, his social positions. Unless this requirement of democracy to treat each member of the nation as equally respectable is met, the game of democracy cannot start in its true spirit. Each individual member of the nation has to be an active participant, not a bystander looking at the arenas of provincial and national assemblies. Their opinion needs to reach the status of informed opinion based on the information provided by the media as well as other sources of information. Media's role is to keep general public in picture about the behavior of their representatives inside and outside the assemblies.

Media's role is to inform the general public of how the game of

democracy is being played by their representatives. The situation becomes more complex for individual citizens when they find that their representatives are not performing as expected of them and they have been tricked and deceived through the deceitful means and they have played foul by ignoring the main goal of democracy i.e. bringing maximum good to maximum people. The political leaders become selfish and advance their own interests ignoring the public good. The individual voter becomes confused about his own position whether to remain a member of his debased party or to change his loyalty to some other better representative. It becomes a duty for media to unearth the truth and bring it to the notice of general public without prejudice and within an objective analysis. The yard stick for judging the conduct of political leaders should be their loyalty to the constitution and, the people and land of Pakistan. The evil doers are to be condemned in general discussions if it is established in the light of court of law. Media should avoid entering into such risky situations by giving time to the supporters of an evil in the name of equal opportunity.

The pious role of giving true picture to people should not be compromised. A convicted leader cannot claim equal opportunity of defense at the TV platform. Neither the supporters nor their spokespersons be absolved of abetting the crime. If media starts providing such a facility to the law offenders, no one will be deterred from committing a crime against the society. Is it morally correct to give publicity to crime and its supporters in the name of impartiality and objectivity? This question is equally valid for individuals as well as groups or political parties to answer. Such allowance of obliterating difference between good and bad conduct amounts to glorifying crime and bad conduct. Neutrality between good and bad is a bad policy. How can we establish rule of law in a society where crime gets glorified through false excuses in open platforms in press conferences or debates at the TV forum. Where is the supremacy of law and where is loyalty to the democracy and constitution? Can't we place such actions in the category of media's responsibility to educate the public?

The character traits needed in the game of democracy are trust and fair play. Democracy demands mutual trust, mutual responsibility, mutual justice, mutual welfare, mutual cooperation, mutual deliberations, mutual decisions, and mutual obedience to jointly arrived at decisions. If some player violate the necessary rules of fair play, how can we call the whole exercise as democracy in action? Unless individuals show loyalty and honesty in their dealings, the process of democracy gets vitiated. Media should not stand guardian over his hate able political nonsense which can

affect media's own reputation.

Media should educate the general public as well as all the government functionaries that respect for the individual, fair play and rule of law are corner stones for the foundation of democracy in any nation. I know it is easier said than done, but I cannot ignore the importance of the very basis of a democratic way of life. The temper of the whole nation needs to be changed according to the dictates of democratic living. The job of media is tremendous and its realization must reign in their own mind and in the minds of leaders of all walks of our national lives. If the audience and the players start following the rules of the game, we can say that the game of democracy is being played well.

The media is an evaluator, a judge, a referee of all the events of national life performed by all functionaries of the state. It is a lofty role and more dignified role than the role the media claims for itself by claiming as fourth pillar of the state. Let not media degrade itself by taking pride in being fourth pillar of the State which at any rate does not exist on ground. The other three pillars of the State come into being through a system, whereas media exists only as adjunct of some tycoon having money and influence. Media should not call itself a fourth pillar of State. Its actual role is strengthening the bonds between three pillars, like a conduit, through evaluating and transmitting essential information obtained from them and educate the general public of how the game of democracy is being played. Be a referee rather than a player. Be a conscience of the nation rather than a baseless fourth pillar. Media is maintaining its sanctity and dignity in Pakistan. It has not degenerated into a tabloid, indulging in polemics ghetto or yellow journalism as has happened in the western world.

It is important to mention in this context that present day turmoil in our political situation may not drag media into a much lower level of a pressure group, rather it should be handler of the pressure groups. An occasional mention about the hiring nature of some media men should not be so disturbing to take a position of staging a rally. Media need not create polemics against themselves and also should not assume some angelic quality in themselves which can keep them stainless in murky social environment by posing a self-righteous stand, you cannot correct the misperceptions about yourself. Don't your critics know that media owners demand adherence to their policies and that beggars cannot be choosers, hence there is no need to display a sense of unity by forming pressure groups against your critics?

Do not feel complacent over your success in obtaining freedom of expression and search for truth. These are only sign posts for achieving

your end purpose and that is to use these instruments of policy to attain the final purpose of national unity, security, honor and dignity with loyal efforts. It is important for each Pakistani to become an honorable member nation of the comity of nations. Let not events deter you from reaching the root cause of these events. Discussion on events is never so fruitful as discussion on issues and problems. There are hosts of problems afflicting our nation. More time should not be wasted on frivolities and a sincere attempt should be made by saner elements of news media anchors to keep general public focused on real problems. For examples "crime incidents" are getting more attention and very little attention is being paid to the root causes and their elimination methods. Similarly other events like "price hikes" and "interest groups" should be tackled in a rational manner.

The claim of objectivity and search for truth do not appear at times, to be the cause of your existence. Accept this truth that exorbitant pay packages doled out by media owners to some individuals do cause concern in the minds of critics. "Lafafa" culture is a common term and graft by some land tycoon is understandable.

The level of competence in the professional field needs to be raised. National issues should be discussed and time should not be wasted by pitching three or four persons against one person in a discussion. More often than not the spectators get baffled by the dust raised and personal honor and respect totally gets flouted by the sly remarks or tongue-in-cheek attitude and a veneer of the compere. The real national issues are clouded by mutual recriminations of disputants and the poor anchor ends up the session with no remarks. Now it is up to audience to reach the truth of the matter. The basic reason for holding a discussion in democracies is to accept arguments of others, convince others and reach a compromise situation on the national issues. Issues need to be addressed and resolved. Variety of opinion is not enough, it must result in unity of opinion. Any activity or discussion falling short of a tentative solution is just a waste of time and a blow on national harmony and collaborative attitudes. Such discussions tantamount to more harm than good. More usual than not the audience does not come out wiser on the issue and tussle between opposing parties get tougher and tougher.

What a great service of media for a democratic way of living whose basic job is to educate general public and become a watch dog safeguarding the interests of general public and provide authentic information to them to make wiser decisions later. Let us be more positive about our situation in the country and start paying more attention to the task of national cohesion and resolving national issues through mutual help and cooperation. Only media is in a position to take up this gigantic challenge for which it is

meant. Right to access of information is granted to all the citizens and media is best suited to perform this task as a true representative of all the citizens of Pakistan. Media is the very spirit of the body politic and it is a loftier role than any other. Don't isolate media by calling it as the fourth pillar of the State. Rather it is a scaffold which binds the three pillars together and aids in strengthening the whole structure of the State – a much nobler end of the problem solver for the nation and a watch dog for the nation. No doubt, there are many illustrious figures both from the old and new lot of audio visual field anchors and analysts who are drawing huge audience and are keeping up the integrity and dignity of their profession. They do not remain tied to the apron strings of their masters. Their mission surely appears reformatory and is not tainted with any contingency compulsions. They have been acting as respectable journalists and are free lancers outshining in every TV channel. They have positive attitude about their task of national service and do not indulge in sparring with other rivals in the field.

Some anchors, however, do not yet realize that their job is to bring about conformity, cooperation, tolerance and keeping the decorum of the willing partners in the game of democracy. How many of them advised the political leadership not to wash their dirty linen in public, hardly any. Provide the opposing parties a platform to create a wholesome battle ground, but let them keep the national interest and national honor in view all the time. How many have condemned the babble of some politicians about the Center as uncompromising? Can such statements serve our national interest when our politicians earn praise from the world bodies and world media? Has any media stalwart advised sobriety and serenity to these politicians. Should media allow open threats of consequences hurled at the Center and complaints to be televised and not move even a finger? Should news media encourage the old tactics of political parties to seek foreign assistance for obtaining power in Pakistan? Where is your sense of honor and dignity of our dear homeland Pakistan? I think it is better to find daddies in Pakistan than from abroad. Of what use are the anchor's wisdom, scholarly accomplishments and professional skills for? If the general public smells a rat in all this, will they be reading too much into it? If you don't try to gain favor by overlooking such glaring damage to the solidarity of the state, your esteem in the eyes of general public shall increase tremendously. Pleasing both sides and playing Mr. Jackle and Mr. Hyde is not the role of media. Nation needs loyalty and commitment. Our media should enliven itself by fostering a positivistic approach in itself – a real concern for all that we hold dear, our public and the state alike. Wipe out the fogs of objectivity and neutrality from your goggles. Sift the right

from the wrong or corn from the chafe and become a real conscience of the nation.

It is the job of news media to realize that it is a mass media and not a preserve of a few wealthy band of tradesmen. It should clearly enunciate the basic rules of game of democracy which is being played by the political parties. Unfortunately, the players of the game lack enough training in skills, comprehension and vision to run democracy. The spirit of mutuality has never been exhibited by them in dealing with national problems. Mutual recrimination and mutual distrust prevail in the political arena.

Let us take an example of corona virus which is being handled by political leaders. Our national calamity is corona virus pandemic and it needs a very serious thought to deal with an invisible enemy. The way the problem has been addressed by the political circles needs better insight and brightness of thought. The whole nation has to confront it with full knowledge and measures needed to fight it and terminate it.

Let us discuss how our leaders and the media should have tackled the problem of fighting an invisible virus. The strategy of dealing with it is made by each country of the world as per its own conditions. China, Italy, Spain, Russia, Japan, India, Iran and Turkey have devised their own strategies. The WHO has acclaimed that the enemy virus cannot spread readily if precautions like use of sanitizers on occasions of possible exposure to it, like wearing face mask, like keeping two meters social distance and like abstaining from large gatherings of people. So, this is a universal strategy to be adopted for restraining the attack of the invisible enemy.

So far so good. Every country is following it as far as possible. One tactics to deal with the enemy, adopted by China in Wuhan, was to put the whole city into quarantine for two weeks i.e. nobody to move out so that chances of spreading through contact are ruled out. They succeeded in controlling its spread because people were provided means of sustenance at their places of residence by its system of provision of food to everyone. Quarantine by lockdown of entire city was within the capacity and control of the Chinese government. If any nation can do it, this tactic might be useful for them, but if a nation lacks tracing and locating of the people to be put in quarantine areas, it would not adopt the same tactics. Insistence on quarantining the entire area would amount to lack of common sense. If total lockdown is not feasible and also not advisable, what should be done? Entire lockdown at any rate is not a remedy, it is only a precautionary measure. By keeping people confined to their homes, you cannot come to know of the presence of the enemy. Hence, it is necessary

that only those small areas should be made quarantine where the enemy has struck. The concept of smart lockdown is a good alternative tactic to take first step towards dealing with the otherwise un-located invisible enemy. To ask for a fixed policy of total lockdown is absolutely nonsensical. Fluid situations demand fluid policies. To ask for a fixed policy in an ever changing situation is awry and unwise. To ignore the tactics of find and fight contained in smart lockdown, as and when needed, and consider it as no policy is even more so. To fight an invisible enemy, it is necessary to locate him and fight. It is the only sensible way of fighting with an invisible enemy and no other. How can stamping of total lockdown enable us to adequately locate the enemy, rather energy is unnecessarily applied in those areas where the enemy does not show up its appearance. To consider total lockdown is not a solution, but its avoidance. It would be dereliction of duty and lack of commonsense to insist on clamping total lockdown. To take pride in implementing it as the most favorable choice would take us further away from seriously tackling with the invisible enemy whose presence is also not known. The enemy would remain safe, but total lockdown would cause disaster to the entire nation by lowering national production activities, lessening revenue earnings by the government, lowering the standard of living of a large body of people and by pushing the lower middle class towards poverty line. The choices of our nation need a careful attention to the repercussions in each case.

A tight rope policy is needed when the two or more competing forces are equally strong and one cannot be ignored at the cost of the other. On the one hand is fighting the invisible enemy whose strength is as yet unknown and on the other the breakdown of the backbone economy of the entire nation.

The job of the news media is to put the public wise on the issue of corona virus by putting before them the problem and its possible solutions. The covid-19 problem as such must be tackled. The questions to be raised should be such which need logically arrived at solutions. The exact nature of the pandemic needs to be placed before the public along with logical arguments for the solution. Scientific data should be discussed. The fact of the matter is that you only try to tackle the situation where its raises its head, but what about the situation which is lying in wait about which you can have no knowledge. This amounts to saying that you can only save yourselves by observing precautions and you cannot do anything else to eliminate it completely unless proper vaccine of medicine is prepared by the scientists. So, the best approach can be logically adopted by living with it with full alertness that it can attack in unexpected places and

unspecified time. So, the only best course is to live with it because we don't know when it will come to its end. The public in general is reluctant to practice precautionary measures. The federal governments and provincial governments have now to teach some kind of self-discipline and obedience to rules. If they disobey, they may be made examples for others to become law abiding citizens. The general public can disobey the government restrictions at their own peril.

The news media shall have to rise up to the occasion and take up the role of national reformation. The present day practice of pleasing both the rival political parties and keeping general public undecided about the right or wrong of each won't help in the task of national reformation. Also ignoring the education of general public about national affairs would defeat the very purpose of news media. The weaknesses of general public also be highlighted and general public must be asked to think for itself and not in terms of contending political parties. To continue the parallel from game playing, one may say that the political ruling party and the rest of opposition parties are supposedly playing the game of democracy. Let the general public know that the leaders of both the contending parties are not competing with each other to provide help in reaching the goal of maximum good of maximum people. But the irony of the fact is that opposition does not accept the legitimacy of the ruling party's leader and the ruling party does not accept the faithfulness of the opposition leader. Yet the game is being played just for the fun of it. The audience stand divided between the warring camps who have forgotten their joint task of providing maximum good to maximum people of Pakistan. The times are very critical as the general public is likely to lose confidence in the abilities of both the contending parties to deliver the goods. The present day stupor is not likely to last for long and very soon the fans of both contenders would feel sorry for what they chose as their representatives. If the one who stayed away from voting for either parties joins the voices of the disenchanted fans of the contending parties, there would be a pandemonium. The general public will be too glad to the change the umpire if the news media does not fulfill its role of an umpire for the national game of democracy.

Although news media does not legitimately belong to the general public, being a child of an Aristocratic minority the general public would be too glad to own it as its more faithful representative. News media should not claim roots in the pillars of the state. The status of a faithful umpire and representative of general public is more honorific and legitimate. To claim that media is the fourth pillar of the State is to make a tall claim. The fourth pillar has no legitimate foundation in the structure of the State or of

the general public. The birth of media owned by the state is understandable, but the media owned by a select coterie of wealthy owners is not at all a pillar of the state. Its loyalty to the State is neither stated by the media nor exhibited in its daily broadcasts. Other three pillars of the State do take oaths to adhere to the honor, dignity, security, identity, sovereignty and unity of the State. This basic element of loyalty to the state is exclusive in the case of media owned by aristocracy. Mixed loyalty is neither worthy of a claim nor worthy of trust. Loyalty pledged cannot be shared.

What does loyalty entail? Its foremost principle is to work in unison, close cooperation, clear understanding, and proper coordination with other three pillars of the State in order to stand shoulder to shoulder with them. All the pillars of the State must be committed to uphold the dignity and honor of state under all circumstances. This should be the motto to be known to everybody and to be propagated always in order to be trusted as a loyal companion. As the things stand, this impression about the news media is completely missing. The existing situation is that media needs its own unity in its ranks. The media itself owes its existence to the money doled out by the interested parties to them from time to time. The workers in media houses keep on changing loyalties and are running from door to door hoping for better wages. No doubt, some media men have been acting very wisely in spite of being employees of the wealthy masters. Some anchors do possess the artful artistry of acting as multi-purpose plugs and they are put to their best uses by some other organizations at the same time. The only saving grace for news media is provided by many seasoned freelancer analysts who are in the profession of expert analysts because of their personal as well as national interests. Occasionally the spark of national sentiment does show itself which comforts the viewers that such an endeavor by a few stalwarts shall be shared by many and a clear focus on national security, national honor, national integrity, national identity and national integration shall appear every now and then.

Finally one caution is to be kept in mind while educating public. Education means commitment to the cause. The quality of loyalty to the state and its people have yet to be developed in our masses. The task of creating awareness for national integrity is more important than showing neutrality or objectivity to them. Loyalty is a higher virtue than neutrality in matters involving national identity, national dignity, national honor and national security.

It is all very well to notify before the beginning of the decision program that the views expressed by participants are their own and the media is not to be held responsible for it. This declaration does not absolve the media

from showing its loyalty to the state and its people and correcting the aberrations of the discussants. To put them on proper rails is the sole responsibility of the media anchors because media is providing them the forum for self-expression. The arena provided to participants should not turn into an arena for cop fighting or bull fighting. To be truthful is better than being neutral.

Media can ride the tide of times and remain in ascendance if it carves out its own role as a true representative of the general public and a servant of the nation. In order to find out its new role, media should pay heed to Dr. Allama Muhammad Iqbal's advice which is

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زمانے کے سمندر سے نکالا گوہر فردا