



Re-Examining the Role of Media in Perpetuating Peace, Development, and Social Harmony in a Twenty-First Century World

Dr. Niti Chopra

Associate Professor,

Faculty of Journalism and Communication,

M.S. University,

Vadodara, Gujarat (India)

Abstract: *This Paper outlines how media can play a role, through its many technologically enabled contemporary modes, in creating better understanding between people and nations through integrative pathways. Of the many subject areas within the ambit, concepts centered on this Paper were presented during the proceeds of the National Seminar on Peace, Development and Social Harmony jointly organized by Peace Research Centre, Gujarat Vidyapith, Ahmedabad and Institute of Advanced Studies in Education, Sardarshahar, Rajasthan. Hosted in Gujarat Vidyapithon 27-28 August 2014, the Seminar dealt with a topical and significant theme of universal concern.*

Keywords: *Media, Communication, Message, Development, Peace, Social Harmony.*

I. INTRODUCTION/BACKDROP

Media, since the time they evolved and perpetrated into society, have been fundamentally driven by technology. Over the last many decades, media aficionados have garnered information and understood the technical premise of media functioning from the elementary Four Wave Theories propounded by Marshall McLuhan, and many of the socio-cultural implications from theories put forth by other Communication experts viz. Sandra Ball Rokeach, Melvin DeFleur, and Denise McQuail, among others. There has never been a denial of the fact that media have irretrievably percolated into the fabric of society, and that they have tremendous influence on the minds of the people who consume the manifest content. Regulatory mechanisms have always been put in place in tandem with the growth in media, and until the end of twentieth century following the laid down norms was reasonably uncomplicated. However, with the advent of the medium of Internet in the latter part of the twentieth century, and its phenomenal growth at the turn of the century, many serious concerns have arisen.

II. CONTEXTUAL CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Media are essentially tools of Communication. And the ultimate purpose of all Communication is *TO UNDERSTAND, AND TO BE UNDERSTOOD*.

Understanding is indeed the key ingredient to all processes in the world, be they local, regional, national, international, or *glocal*. But certainly, the attributes and functional dimensions in media practices have never been simplistic, more so with the advent of New and Social Media conduits and interoperable, technically highly sophisticated mobile phones at our service, our entire planet has become a vast, interconnected playing field. In India, the traditional role of media, particularly that of radio and television was perceived to be one of imparting education and information.

By early 1980's it evolved to infotainment, and subsequently post Liberalisation, Privatisation, and Globalisation (LPG) in 1990, the phenomenon of *Internationalisation of Media unfolded* in a true sense, bringing with it many challenges and opportunities.

The definition of Development *Communication* articulated by Nora C. Quebral, a pioneering Communication academician from University of Philippines Los Banos;

“...the art and science of human communication applied to the speedy transformation of a country and the mass of its people from poverty to a dynamic state of economic growth that makes possible greater social equality and the larger fulfillment of the human potential...”¹, aptly sums up the understanding of the concept and pertinently implies the importance of communication tools to improve people's *life* circumstances. Peace, in a way comes from that wisdom of satisfaction when needs are met with, due acknowledgement is received, freedom of expression is enhanced, and a generic sense of security bonds society. This harmonisation is indeed a challenge, and takes for thoughts, attitude, and actions of people to be highly evolved in order to attain that perfect synchronisation.



III. CORE ISSUES

The role of media in perpetuating Peace, Development, and Harmony, is indeed a critical one. Media is perceived to be a double edged sword that can cut both the ways. Much damage is done to people, societies, and culture by the negative manifestations in and through the media. It is imperative that the positive edge is utilised to counter the negativity and to bring down the barriers in communication which otherwise sadly lead to conflict, regression in developmental processes, and an environs of disharmony.

There are today countless examples of local to global to *glocal* phenomenon of media manifestations— from use of print media options, to FM radio to different formats of television programming; as also with new media tools such as smart phones which can help hold even governments and others in powerful and responsible positions accountable, but they can also convey inaccurate information and promote violent agendas. It is thus important to be aware of both the positive and negative effects of the media tools and their potential for use in Peace Building.

There are some specific reasons why these imbalances are happening:

- Access to media products has become easier thanks to the ease of purchase due to competitive pricing and a vast range of available goods.
- Crass sense of commercialisation has pervaded the minds of media practitioners who commission programming without caring about its damaging effects.
- Consumers have now become Procurers, the vast possibilities of things to do with technology entices users to create, upload, and perpetrate any/all content of their choice.

IV. FUTURE CHALLENGES TO EDUCATORS AND PRACTITIONERS

It is imperative to uphold the balance in the core ingredients of the media ecology parameters. Upholding the true purposes of communication processes and media education endeavors has indeed become a challenge in the prevailing *information* environment.

Even though the media have evolved manifold in the last decade in terms of infrastructure and content-- the functions of *communication* remain unchanged.

The *Integrative* function of *Communication* which has always been the most important, takes on more significant hues in modern times, and perpetrates across all macro and micro levels of tasks and roles in society.

Asian theorisation of Communication emphasises the concept of “saharanikaran” (simplification) and “sahridaya” (being one of heart); both of which are indeed fundamentally oriented towards perpetrating “oneness”or “understanding”;which ultimately in effect lead to peace and harmony among people.

Media educators and practitioners, therefore, carry the responsibility of grooming young minds and future communication professionals to become sensitive to cultural differences as also to instill in budding journalists the importance to be honest, fair, and accurate, and to not distort information. Messages that manifest through the varied channels ought to convey correct information and lead to cultivation of healthy opinions and perspectives among the audiences and consumers. Apart from encouraging conceptual discussions, giving good examples, and channeling practical work on themes such as conflict resolution and such other that create and emanate positive vibes, using the available new technologies innovatively like in virtual classrooms situations or cross-cultural webcasts, etc. would also help students gain rich exposure, and cultivate the much required openness to life situations in other parts of the country and the world, as well as develop long lasting friendships with persons quite different from themselves.

V. CONCLUSION/CLOSURE

Cass Sunstein, Head of the White House Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs, Washington, USA, from 2009-2012, lauds the aggregating abilities of new information technologies, but has also raised alarms about the group polarisation occurring on the Internet, or the tendency for people to move toward more extreme points of view when they deliberate with other group members who have a shared identity.

“Group polarisation is occurring every day on the Internet,” he suggests. “Indeed, it is clear that the Internet is serving, for many, as a breeding ground for extremism, precisely because like-minded people are deliberating with one another, without hearing contrary views.”

Not everyone agrees with Sunstein’s predictions because there is the argument that online spaces give people access to many different and balanced news sources if they choose to seek them out. However, it is still worth considering what can happen when people surround themselves exclusively with like-minded communities. Among other things, it can reinforce negative stereotypes of anyone outside that group. It can also lead to a very harsh and intolerant level of discourse as “in groups” try to stake their positions apart from “out groups.”² Scholars such as Kristin Lord, Acting President, United States Institute of Peace, point out that increasing transparency and availability of information have a dark side. Information spread may make conflict worse if it



unhumanises others, facilitates violence, reinforces tensions, or exposes competing values. Increasing understanding about another persons' identity and culture --recognising a shared humanity--can be an important force for peace. Citizen diplomacy programmes the world over are based on this concept. While face to face dialogue is still seen as the best way to foster positive relations, new online tools are connecting people globally in entirely new ways.³

In summation, it may be said that helping young people recognise the similarities between faiths, and more importantly-- to respect and deal with the differences between diverse and conflicting world views with openness, excitement, and pride-- is ultimately the way forward to creating a world full of peace, development, and social harmony.

REFERENCES

1. Quebral, Nora C.(2012). *Development Communication Primer*. Penang: Southbound Retrieved August 25, 2014 <http://www.southbound.my/downloads/QuebralCruzPrimer2012.pdf>
2. *A Study Guide Series on Peace and Conflict for Independent Learners and Classroom Instructors: The Impact of New Media on Peace Building and Conflict Management*. (2011). Washington: United States Institute of Peace, Academy for International Conflict Management and Peace Building Retrieved August 26, 2014 http://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/Adan/2011-2012_study%20guide_final_full.pdf
3. Lord, Kristin M.(2006).*The Perils and Promise of Global Transparency: Why the Information Revolution May Not Lead to Security, Democracy or Peace*. New York: SUNY Press Retrieved September 11, 2014 <http://www.sunypress.edu/p-4333-the-perils-and-promise-of-globa.aspx>