

# Mass media — gross exploitation

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In the literal and simple sense, the media includes the means through which a news, opinion or theory is transported and spread from one place to another. Modern sociology defines the media by answering the question: Who says what to whom, how and with what effect? While answering the question, it describes the media as "the transmission by professional communicators (who) of a continuous flow of a uniform content (what) by means of a complex apparatus (how) to a large heterogeneous and geographically dispersed audience (to whom)."

Generally speaking, the media provides three kinds of connections: i) inter-populace or masses to masses; ii) government to subjects; and iii) inter-states i.e. between different countries.

It can further be segregated into two categories, i.e. print and electronic media. The former includes newspapers, periodicals, journals and magazines while the latter includes radio, television, telephone, E-mail and Internet. Media not only transmits the news to the masses but also equips them with new religious, political, economical and social ideas and theories thus manoeuvring and manipulating public opinion. This very aspect of media's significance draws the interest of sociologists in mass communication. Their interest was also stimulated by developments in technology allowing the reproduction and speedy transmission of messages. It began with the rise of popular press, followed by invention of film, sound broadcasting and audio-visual equipment. As a result, all of us live in a world of media-constructed images that, presumably, significantly influence what we think and how we partition our attention, time and other scarce resources. So pervasive has been the media presence that issues relating to these influences have also drawn attention of researchers from disciplines other than sociology.

Another predominant feature of media is that it works as a bond adhering different organs of state at primary level and operates as a bridge at international level for establishment of World Order. Its importance and role compelled the political scientists to stretch the primitive tri-organ state theory to tetra-pillar theory, recognising and accrediting the media as a fourth pillar of state.

Gone are the days of conventional weapons of war. Even in those days when violence was a prerequisite to success, the pro-

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paganda had its value, though a little. The present age is of democracy and popular governance aptly characterised by features like liberty, freedom and non-violence, governed and regulated through media and propaganda. Today popular movements can not be over-run and bulldozed through violence and coercion. Baton charge and tear gas shelling are no longer effective means to disperse a procession. But through instrumentality of media, any movement can be defused and the steaming sentiments of people can be brought to a normal degree and vice-versa.

It would not be irrelevant to quote a drama written and staged by the famous columnist Munnoo Bhaj during the 70's under the caption of "Juloos" (Procession) revealing how a public procession is dispersed without resorting to force by local administration. Many means were suggested and applied but all in vain. At last, some sage among the administration proposed to disorient the sense of direction of the processionists. The formula worked.

A same game is being played by imperialist powers through media. The media under their control feed the people with information and ideas of their choice ultimately leading the people's intellect astray and consequently extending, prolonging and stabilising their dominion. An evaluation of third world masses' intellectual level will corroborate the above conclusion. Let us probe the working methodology of imperialists and its repercussions.

As the governance in third world is based on exploitation, the media and press are made subject to certain unjustifiable restrictions and limitations thus lessening the role and importance of media. Threats and warnings faced by "The News" during the previous PML(N) government over publishing a poem titled "Ha-ay yeh Mera Pakistan-Ha-ay Yeh Tera Pakistan" crystallises the view.

State of affairs of PBC and PTV needs no comments.

Even international news agencies and channels like BBC and CNN are not free and impartial as believed. They are bound to get their license renewed after every four or five years to keep them under the fold of the government.

There is always an abundance of occurrences and episodes in Pakistan media generally and in print media particularly. Unnecessary details are limelighted while real underlying causes and factors are kept behind the curtain; unveiling of which is the actual duty of media and press. Sizzling and thrilling stories/news are given preference over the sensible, serious and thought provoking articles to habituate the general public to this flimsy taste. Especially Urdu newspaper are worse in this regard arguing, "we can't be blamed! it is public demand". But at the same time the difference between the attitude of English and Urdu newspapers cannot be over looked.

The reason being that the audience of English papers is more literate, prudent and intellectually mature whose appetite can not be satisfied by sensational stories and scandals. Moreover, the above mentioned class is small in size and divulsion of facts in this case becomes affordable for those at the helm of affairs. The only excuse available to urdu papers is the strict policy of successive governments towards them due to their large circulation and influence over the general public.

Non issues are publicized to divert public attention from real and substantial problems. For a dominant part of the 80s, while the country was still suffering from chronic corruption and problems like price hike, law and order situation, sectarian clashes, regional and ethnic prejudices, suspension rather non-existence of fundamental constitutional rights, the martial law regime was highlighting the Afghan issue with an intensity making one

wonder if Russia had attacked Pakistan instead of Afghanistan. A street joke about the news bulletin of Radio Pakistan was:

*Assalam-o-Alaikum Yeh Radio Pakistan Hai, Ab Aap Afghanistan say khabrain sunain*

This is Radio Pakistan. Now listen to news from Afghanistan

The most recent example of connivance between PTV and PBC was during the executive-judiciary tussle. Their partiality towards people in power is nothing new but this time PTV went a step further by deliberately ridiculing the apex court by displaying cartoons and caricatures.

When all the international news agencies were showing footage of attack on Supreme Court Building by the workers of ruling party, our esteemed corporations under the auspices of the media manager first tried to ignore the event failing which attempted to diminish its intensity with the help of a micro lens and finally throwing the blame in the lap of the always available opposition.

It is a long story of omission and commission on part of PTV, but an example which relates to one of the most sensitive issues takes the cake. The Kashmir issue on PTV is highlighted in a disgusting way. Instead of presenting the national stance on the issue in a logical, convincing and reasonable way, PTV leans towards silly propositions like "Kashmir Quiz".

A close observation of our khabarnama both on PTV and PBC would reveal that the news about Indian atrocities in held Kashmir remain the same day in and day out, the top slot do not even bother to change the death toll in Kashmir and the figures varying between 6 to 10 appear in rotation. Whenever there is serious event, it becomes conspicuous by a change in the usual death toll. I do not want to deplore the media war Pakistan is fighting against India, but the point is that it should be handled with diligence, rationale and prudence instead of making it a laughing stock.