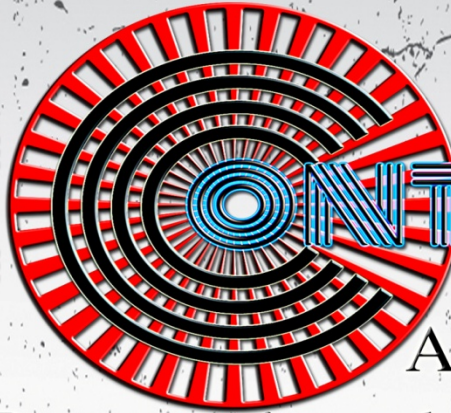


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**Cover Designing & Formatting
Suman Saha**

**Publisher
Dr. Susanta Kumar Bardhan
Suri Vidyasagar College
Suri, Birbhum, 731101, W. B.
Contact: +919434945037
Email: susantab_ciefl@rediffmail.com**

Role of Media in 21st Century: A Brief Study

Arup Roy

A capacity to communicate the richness of thought and feeling is uniquely human. This capacity was refined and facilitated in the 20th century by the media of radio and television, which will be even more important in the information society. Free and independent media are essential to democratic principles and practices. Broadcasting open to pluralism of opinion and cultural diversity offers the widest public access to the knowledge, education and information required by an active citizenry.

---Arne Wessberg, President, European Broadcasting Union,
(WEMF, Geneva 9 December 2003), Broadcasters' Declaration.

Famous thinker and educationist John Dewey once said with assertion, "*The media's job is to interest the public in the public interest*". This may be the point of departure of this writing in the view that it depicts very simply the primary purpose expected from the media to serve. However, in our article, we are interested to see the history of evolution of media since nineteenth, 20th to the beginning of 21st century. Then our task is to understand the role of media in the present day world situation and to draw a balance sheet of the power it plays in a gigantically increasing manner.

History of evolution in brief

It is true that in the broad sense very expression of humanity is a media of communication like artistic performance, novels etc, however, for us, the focus of the term „media“ will remain confined in the popular sense of the word.

The media as a medium for communicating social events like natural disaster, accidents, important information from the states, activities in cultural, political, economical etc affairs have been evolved in 20th Century. In this, the role of printed media and later the part played by Radio Broadcasting system is historically significant. However, the history of birth of media goes back to the history of democracy through the bourgeoisie revolution, particularly in Europe. It is first time in history, in the phase of capitalism, to serve the interest of radical bourgeoisie, to progress the radical ideology against feudalism the media evolved as a weapon and started to play great role in socio-political scenario. In this, the interest of bourgeoisie was in resonance with great mass of toiling people in the ascendant phase of capitalism. Vigorous technological development, thanks to the inner dynamics of the system, has added to the media of communication. Throughout the 20th century, all classes and strata have explored all possibilities of utilizing any of the mediums to convey their own interest and demands. Through this process, there develops an independent system of broadcasting and communicating irrespective of the medium of the state or this or that political/economical groups or parties. These agencies as a commercial system keeping concern of „profit“ develop highly centralized organs to make/cook news an unavoidable commodity. Journalism becomes a faculty of studies; definite syllabus and course modules have been developed throughout the world; being a journalist becomes a service under certain capitalist boss. A huge network with millions of workers active 24x7 hrs to collect, to make, to innovate, to propagate has been very much common now. The basic perspective still remains the propagation of democratically justified things as follows from the "broadcasters" Declaration" presented in the UN on 9th September 2003.

Role in the 21st Century

In order to understand the role of media today, we have to consider the various aspects of purposes it serves. In fact, what purposes does it not serve? Say internet, this is the latest media which can help explore everything we need, whether to buy or to sell, to know and to let know, to think and to make people think, to organize opinions and to be organized around an opinion, to research and to help research work and what not? In the same coin, we can say the various aspects of newspaper; TV channels mobiles etc all of which is serving a purpose in every moment as a global medium of organizing things. Thus we need to focus only on few points related to the fundamental purposes it serves without going into the immediate or apparent role. The capacity which is emanated from the role is to be judged on the basis of what ideological impacts it diffuses throughout the world through the vast network.

The fundamental role of „media“ is just not to communicate but to do it for different purposes which are linked, in the final analyses, with the social objectives. Media has to communicate or share information which society thinks necessary, be it politics or culture art, literature or language. At the same time the information it spreads also determines what the people will think today. So there is a dialectical interlink between this two aspects. Never before in history, has communication-highway been so vast and so indispensable for the world human community. It collects, edits makes it useful and distributes to the people. In so doing it actually enters into every aspect of social life in every corner of the world. We may put it in brief as follows:

1. The role in organizing mass opinion: Media, if thinks necessary it can spread an ideology, and consistently make propaganda in favour of this or that opinion. This in fact, helps both positively and negatively to the society. Whereas in case of election it plays a role to determine which Party will win over the electoral circus or in case of social injustice it can poke it nose to organize opinion of greater part of the mass so as to pressurize the state and fuel movement for this or that reason. On imperialist level it can bring in fore the inner nature of conflict between this and that fraction of imperialist powers or it can help hide the position of another power. Normally it stands in favour of democratic views, although how much democratic they are depends on who suffers from this democratic propaganda.
2. It globalizes the human community in making communication of knowledge, information-culture faster. Hence on the one hand as a result of the dynamics of the production system the globe becomes narrower in each passing day and on the other hand each national part becomes stricter to maintain its identity as a different part. Media thus brings forth the inner contradiction of the present system. However, it helps people what is there in other part. If we see so called war against terrorism, it was not so simple to propagandize by the countries if media is not there to represent their views. Today, thanks to the media, we can know any thing happening in the world then and there; we can also get analyses of it, which gives us scope to take individual position on a particular case.
3. In case of natural disaster or atmospheric problems media plays a positive role to communicate things in proper time.
4. We see enormous role of media to diffuse information of any kind of scientific discoveries, innovations to the world in no time.

5. Media gives common people to put forward their views; thus we are not just bound by the expertise of some experts; we can also communicate directly through media.
6. The cultural diversity of a nation or region is but easy to know without visiting the place. However, media has the scope to manipulate things in their desired way and this it also affects the way to have true knowledge on this. Media often presents something in a manner which may be more profitable. Hence it distorts the reality in its own way. Fortunately, this is also proved by the media itself.
7. It helps state in a crucial moment so that it can overcome certain crises; it has a role to manage crises of a state. In this, state has a control over the media and media also has a control over the state.
8. In education, media is playing a very positive role for us. It gives information for us about what are the new development in educational sphere, it displays courses, syllabus, gives guide to choose a suitable one for study. Also for getting service, it also helps us in many ways.
9. In case of sports and games media plays an obvious role.
10. One of the most important aspects of media must be taken into account, that is, the role of media in the evolution of LANGUAGE. Media with its own internal push compels the world to develop a newer and newer way of world communication. The language of people normally remains in the dynamics of spontaneous change; however, the media revolution has accelerated the process and thus trying to bring, even unknowingly, the human community in the world of a unity of language. It is not too far when there would be a bigger movement throughout the globe for coming out of the narrow orthodox concept and bondage of a language which would appear to be an impediment in communicating among masses.

In a word, media is the expression of present history and dynamics of world human society as far as the physical infrastructure is concerned. However, we may come to a balance sheet to conclude the essay as follows:

Media in 21st Century: unavoidable information monster and indispensable weapon for society:

Never before has the world offered such a wide diversity of media options. And never before has there been such a great risk of communication becoming so globally concentrated.

The globalization of communication creates both opportunities and threats at the same time. It creates new options for the individual to be informed, educated and entertained. It creates possibilities for cultures to be intertwined as well as to be enriched through a constructive cross-fertilization. However, if the sole control over this communication roadway remains in the hands of handful big economic power, then we must risk of having a divided world of content producers and consumers, later being a passive part of the system without having any authority to put forward their control and orientation in proper. And that translates into a loss of cultural identity and the creation of excluded groups in countries with smaller or weaker economies, not to mention a leveling down and running down of intellectual life as a whole.

Another important aspect is that in the dark deep forest of media, an individual gets at a loss. We can only know, but cannot centralize things. In each passing day media monsters is grabbing our power of independent thought by replacing of their own. Today media gives one no time to stop, but to follow; One who only

follows cannot grow independently and think from a wider perspective, because for media that is wider which it thinks to be wider.

On the one hand it has the aspiration to get hold of all human activities on the other hand being a product of commodity based social formation and a commodity itself it cannot surpass the law of commodity that is profit and loss. It cannot actually represent the position of future, it can only describe the past and present and tries its best to befit the human being with the existing decaying system. Thus it does not represent “progressive side” of social dynamics whatever its declaration be in pen and paper.

Media cannot prevent the decaying force of economic structure and the chaos enhanced from it, rather it just becomes a part and parcel of the same decadence.

But still, we cannot avoid it. We cannot just abuse it. It has been one of the expressions of social dynamics today. Its apparent utility cannot be denied. And at the end we may argue following José Roberto Marinho, Representative of WSIS for Latin America and Caribbean that:

a free media must provide each citizen with both a mirror and a window. In other words, like a mirror, it must ensure that each one has the right to recognize him- or herself in what is seen, heard and read. This engenders a feeling of belonging to society. At the same time, like a window, it must broaden horizons, allowing each and everyone to live new experiences and see beyond his or her own particular world.”

May be, this is an optimism or it may come true in future. Let’s hope for the better, if not the best.

On Author of the article:

Arup Roy is an assistant teacher in Physics in a high school at Suri, Birbhum West Bengal, India. He is involved in studying folk culture. He composes his songs and is a performing artist. He is available at esraj79@gmail.com