

Essay on Media: Its Role and Impact in Bangladesh

Hints: Introduction, Media culture, and environment: The Bangladesh perspective, Media crucial for forging one world, Information policy is an imperative need, Concluding remarks.

Introduction

The establishment of Fort William College and a printing press by missionaries at Sri Rampur mission saw a profusion of printing materials in Bangla. By 1818, two periodicals were brought out from the Sri Rampur mission, namely DigDarshan and Samachar-Darpan. Thus, began the journey of the print media in the subcontinent. The Calcutta Public Library was established in 1837 and the Indian Press and Registration of Books Act were adopted in 1867.

Media culture and environment: The Bangladesh perspective

The media culture of Bangladesh can be traced back to the discovery of the Charya Binishchaya, considered to be the ancient written verses by Buddhist monks. But we had oral culture centuries ago that had preserved experience, holy verses, social rules and customs, and many family memories. This oral culture was transmitted to media culture with the introduction of printing material in the 18th and 19th centuries, and sound and visual material in the 20th century. Hence, in the true sense, the time of the media culture of Bangladesh can rightly be counted from between the 20s and 30s of the last century. The period saw several Bengali Muslims editing dailies and periodicals, the most notable being Azad, Mohammadi, Shawkat, Dhumketu, etc.

After the partition, owners of these newspapers and periodicals

started shifting their establishments to Dhaka, the capital of then East Bengal. The shifting process took at least three years. Meanwhile, radio became a strong force for socio-economic uplift. Besides, it also became a political tool for the propaganda of the government in power. Television, which came up on December 25, 1964, lost its credibility on the same day. Both the national electronic media are following the colonial legacy, even after the emergence of an independent state through a bloody liberation war of 39 years ago. They were so abused and misused that BTV used to be called 'Shaheb-bibi-golamer bak-sho.'

Media crucial for forging one world

Technological advances have nowadays altered the media definition and reach altogether. The media now includes cable TV satellite broadcast, video on demand, Internet, global TV news exchange, and broadcast data services. Radio Bangladesh began its journey in 1939 while BTV in 1964. Although both made a beginning at different times assuming different names in the colonial and post-colonial era, they are still under strict government control. Three political alliances who led the pro-democratic movement, against auto-cratic-rule in 1990 in a joint declaration on 19 November 1990 spelled out that all state-owned mass media including radio and television should be made independent and autonomous organizations to make those fully neutral and to ensure unobstructed scope for publicity of all political parties contesting in the elections.

But the subsequent democratic governments did not keep their promise. While the government in 1991 did not pay heed to the question of autonomy, the government in 1996 constituted an eight-member autonomy commission headed by a former secretary cum a presenter and vocalist of BTV as its chairman proved to be a fruitless effort in the long run. A similar commission was also formed back in 1989 with a former

cabinet secretary as the chairman, which mainly tried to address the organization's structural problems of both radio and television. The recommendations put forward by that commission were not made public.

In fact, the introduction of the terrestrial channel in the country under the government patronization in 1998, has pushed BTV to a formidable challenge. ETV used to enjoy the technical facilities of BTV to cover the distant places of the country as well as a large number of expatriate Bangladeshis through satellite. The two other private satellite channels namely ATN-Bangla and Channel-I could not cope with ETV because of their lack of privileged technical facilities. Moreover, ETV's unquestioned news coverage and news treatment demanded state-owned BTV's freedom to some extent to establish its credibility. On the other hand, the government exploited the situation by undertaking the old motto of divide and rule policy and engaged BTV to conduct propaganda of a particular national personality and the party itself without fulfilling the election promise. News and opinion of the opposition almost remained absent on television. This trend has established bad precedence in the state-owned media of the country.

Information policy is an imperative need

A simple guideline can save national TV and Radio. Freedom of speech is a fundamental right of a citizen. The right to freedom of expression of every citizen and freedom of the press is guaranteed in Bangladesh except in a few cases. Article 39(2) of the constitution ensures that freedom. Everybody may agree with me that in Bangladesh, the press enjoys unfettered freedom.

Here the government officials or PID men do not call the newsroom at the late hours to convey some directives, leading to stop-press. We see nowadays many dailies that occasionally claim themselves as

largely circulated ones, carry numerous stories on national and community issues reflecting their own opinion and alignment. Besides, a variety of columns ranging from national to international issues and highly personal thoughts by journalists and non-journalists are being published by our national dailies and periodicals. During October general elections in 2001, BTV had to compete with three other satellite TV- channels including the terrestrial cum satellite one ETV.

ETV's mounting popularity was marred at that time because of BTV's both quality and quantity-wise electioneering coverage. Most noteworthy is that in the past the national- media stood at least four times along with the people to face natural calamities with fortitude. BTV rose to the occasion timely sending visual messages to the world community to draw their attention and bring assistance for the distressed. BTV could make it possible through ASIA VISION satellite news exchange in a couple of hours which had not been possible by innumerable Bangladesh missions abroad for days together. Here lies the commitment of the media that is sometimes also described as one of the pillars of society. Its positive impact is numerous while carrying out social responsibility through three major themes:

Information;

Education;

Entertainment What BTV lacks and in fact the country's national media required-(a) Regulatory framework;

Transparency;

Reform and modernization;

Code of conduct

BTRC which allocates frequency to Broadcast media can formulate a code of conduct for the private TV channel or it can be incorporated

in the broad-based communication/ information policy of the government.

It may be mentioned when national policies were being formed, the United States, unlike most countries, did not choose to have stations owned and operated by a government agency or government-funded public corporations. Instead, it chooses a hybrid system for the new medium. A station's equipment would be privately owned, but its right to broadcast would be regulated by the government and limited by license.

Concluding

remarks Although the information media, in particular, have to maintain a balance between the Three- Ms: pure factual research and reporting (mere facts), social-political evaluation and message (mission), and the economic requirements (market), it is not enough for media- people themselves to think that they are doing a good job. In the absence of a comprehensive communication policy, in a developing country like Bangladesh, it is the shared responsibility of the media men both print and broadcast journalists to build integrity among the people utilizing their unique capacities to make men and societies aware of their rights, harmony in diversity and foster the growth of individuals and communities within the wider frame of national development in an interdependent world.