Political Puzzles and Prospect of Media in Pakistan

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Abstract

Pakistan's road to its destiny has not been smooth since its creation in 1947.While passing through several social, political and economic crises; the state has been deeply fissured along its ethnic and religious lines. The former East Pakistan has turned into Bangladesh after the bloody revolt of Bangalis against the elite of the former West Pakistan now Pakistan while the remaining ethnic groups (Bloch. Sindhi, Pushtoon etc) of the country were frequently voicing their concerns regarding what they claim the Punjabi dominance and unfair division of resources. Adding to this, the state has also become a shuttlecock among the interest groups, particularly the military, religious parties, feudal lords and industrialists. The country witnessed the wars, military and democratic regimes and economic crises. It attained atomic capabilities, constitutional amendments. Masses indulged into ideological and liberal clashes and finally entered into the 21st century with the country's biggest posture as a front line state for war against terror. With the overview of the country's situation, this article deals with the media birth, its growth and its current situation especially of electronic media. The media's puzzles and prospective in national integration has been also discussed. Particularly, the overall focus remained at the point that how the media could contribute in achieving national goals. The past government's efforts to take control over media were also picked briefly.

Key words: Media, masses, Pakistan, coverage, nation building

The media assists the government in the planned beneficial development of the country and nation building. Another group of social critics want the media and the government to work in concert

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to ensure the beneficial development of a nation. The Pakistani media born, nourished and contributed in the situation. No matter what the nature of the problems remained, the media has long been played its role in creation of values and nation building. It entered into 21st century with more confidence and power. Despite some problems, the media of Pakistan emerged as powerful establishment.

The ruling vision in Pakistan had been to resolutely educate, civilize, and integrate the so-called uneducated, unruly ethnic groups so they would become citizen subjects whose national and cultural identity was tied to Islam and the Urdu language. This was the vision of a unified Pakistan perpetuated by the West Pakistani ruling elite. It became very strong in the latter day policies of General Ayub Khan, who felt threatened by the resentment of people after he lumped all Western Pakistan's provinces into "One Unit." General Ayub Khan saw television as an instrument for articulating and perpetuating his rule through this ideological vision.

Pakistani oligarchs' experiments in defining its Islamic heritage and ideology have had a boomerang effect. The years of supporting Islamic religious parties and funding Islamic zealots in Afghanistan and Indian-occupied Kashmir have internally radicalized Pakistani society, deepening the fissures between different Islamic religious sects. The state in Pakistan has become, what we can call, a "state-under-siege" from various interest groups, particularly the military, religious parties, and the feudal politicians.

The relationship between the state, the media, and religion in Pakistan, as Gitlin's (1987) suggested that "the forms of mass-cultural production do not either spring up or operate independently of the rest of social life" (Gitlin 1987: 510). The media in Pakistan operates with several peculiar features tailored to the ideological vision of the Pakistani elites. Pakistan Television programs, just like other cultural aspects of the state, are conceptualized mainly in contradistinction to India's national culture and identity. They are adapted keeping in view the state ideology, viewers' tastes, religious parties' demands, and the general marketing requirements. At a larger level, none of these categories were fixed, and they were frequently reassembled circumstantially. With the passage of time reputation of Pakistan's media have sullied due to its failure in thoroughly comprehending affairs. It seems that media contributes to multiply wording over issues and crisis instead of spreading true root

causes and facts of the issues. Media coverage of political issues is heavily episodic instead of thematic. There are numbered of political talk shows and debates on all news channels of Pakistan. Any issue discussed in those programs has no ending and determining word that could help people to understand that either there is solution to these issues or not? Every political program discusses same issue under different names of the program. There is no difference in the information displayed by each program even the views of politicians from different political parties give no hope and track towards the solution of issues. If these programs demonstrate issues successfully then it could help people to pressurize government in a right way to solve the issue.

Media and Judiciary are two independent pillars to save the country from sudden slippage. Judiciary put down number of good decisions in her little age of independence which is only one year. Whereas media is older then judiciary and it shows no positive alterations in people's attitude towards the ridiculous change. Pakistan's media should understand that it presents the country which is of high importance not only for Islamic world but also for peace in whole world. Media should become highly sensitive towards its responsibilities while presenting this country to the world and guiding the people of Pakistan to bring out the country from the sea of issues.

The society and culture are threatened in Pakistan. The patterns of life are changing because of impact of education and electronic media, which have to be facilitated in a positive manner

The exercise of power in Pakistan provides an example of what (Gramsci, 1971) meant by hegemony, whereby the dominant classes exercise power through both the coercive state apparatus and also through ideological persuasion. In Pakistan, the dominant cultural values and ideologies are reproduced through both coercion and persuasion in several ways. The coercive nature of power is displayed through military spectacle as the photograph of the Pakistani military suggests. The ideological persuasion is rehearsed through the whole body politic of cultural production, including media.

The media in Pakistan, particularly electronic, has brought to fore the visions of one's own self, the national Islamic identity of Pakistan. Nevertheless, over a period of time it has also brought unfamiliar enemy visions into the familiar national culture. First it was the introduction of VCRs, then the satellite channels through dish

antennae, and later fast-growing, often illegal, cable and Internet companies have expedited the process of consuming images without borders.

In 1989, there was only one channel available to Pakistanis. But these days average middle class family in the urban areas of Pakistan had access to more than 50 channels. In recent years, the Pakistani state has liberalized its media policy. This liberalization of media was providing incentives to local entrepreneurs to start FM radio and satellite channels. Some Pakistani business groups have started new satellite channels for Pakistani viewers.

But in past, the situation was totally different. Yusuf , writing about the censorˊYhip of television in Pakistan, reports that during the last years of Ayub's government in East Pakistan, women newscasters and announcers were barred from wearing a bindiya, which was deemed as resentative of "Hindu ." The songs of Bengali poet Rabindarnath Tagore were also banned on television and radio for similar reasons**.** (Yusuf, 1997)

Aslam Azhar [the first managing director of Pakistan Television] ... once recalled that on asking Bhutto to identify the holy cows for PTV [Pakistan Television], he was told, "I am the only holy cow." From that period in its history, PTV has, to its credit, some of the finest and most memorable plays, documentaries, talk shows and satirical programmes ever produced in Pakistan, even though resources were limited and the technology outdated (Zaidi, & Zaidi, 1997)

Pakistan Television of the 1970s is remembered for the dedication and professionalism of producers and playwrights. In some ways, there was perhaps an urban literati bias, particularly in television dramas, as most of the television professionals were from urban backgrounds. But also during this period, the door for regional nationalities in Pakistan was opening up, with more and more participation of regional performers and intellectuals.

According to Aslam Azhar, in the 1970s there was a strong recognition of the importance of the "Indus Valley Culture" for the future base of modern Pakistan. The emphasis was on reinvigorating Pakistan's indigenous regional cultures. Regional folk performers from all the four provinces were discovered and introduced on television. Some of them, like Khameesu Khan

from Sindh and Reshman from southern Punjab, became legends throughout Pakistan. It seems that during the 1970s, a more secular and liberal ethos prevailed on the television screen, with the supposed aim of modernizing Pakistan along a secular, western line. Depending on the characters they were playing in a program or drama, Pakistani men and women would as often as not appear in jeans, trousers, or other western clothing. This was not meant to model the European/American way of life but rather to represent the cosmopolitan character of Pakistan, the ethos that the new leadership was hoping to steer the nation towards.

Kathak dance performances were common on television. Women singers, like Runa Laila in her tight bell-bottom outfit would, sing pop songs. Iranian and other Middle Eastern pop music was frequently shown on television, with much more gyrating of the upper and lower torso than people would ever imagine in present-day Pakistan. Khanum Gogosh of Iran, a pop music icon in the pre-Ayathollah Khomeini period, was as popular in Pakistan as he was in Iran. Commercial ads for cigarettes and clothing were produced showing European women wearing swim-suits or smoking cigarettes. Yet, in this period, Yusuf (1997: 64-65) writes, "The nation's morals were not considered threatened when women were shown in swimsuits." At this time the discourse about showing immoral and obscene pictures of women on national television was mute; this argument did not come to the surface until later.

This nascent period lasted until 1977, when Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's government was overthrown by the military general Zia-ul-Haq, Bhutto, the demagogue, was executed in 1979 by the order of his handpicked military general. Images and sound bytes of Bhutto disappeared from the screens of Pakistan Television as long as Zia-ul-Haq lived. Administration of the state- controlled media would not even utter the name Zulfikar on air lest it invoke the name of a hanged man.

In the next eleven years, from 1977 to 1988, each day on television Pakistanis saw a general, first in khakis, later in a black achkan (a subcontinental style coat) as his cloak, with a dagger of religious language and a tenor of piety. Pakistan was to change and with it television in Pakistan, which came of age with my generation viewing mullahs and their tirades against working women and against what they considered obscenity.

Pakistan Television programs, particularly Urdu dramas, became heavily focused on family, nation, and religion. Lipsitz (1986), argued that Pakistan Television dramas, not withstanding their laissez-faire approach, function as a means to the ideological legitimation that the Pakistani elites have sought.

There are a plethora of new dramas and frequently regurgitated old dramas on Pakistan Television (Ginsburg, 2002) Their producers and playwrights believed that they were conveying the "reality" of Pakistani society. Most producers and playwrights produced apolitical dramas in their bid to acquire sponsorship and to entertain the viewers. They preferred not to touch controversial and political issues. Other producers and playwrights combined a social work stance with entertainment in order to give a positive outlook to their dramas. A very few wrote and produced radical plays and succeeded in bringing up political issues that may well be considered subversive to the dominant ideology. One reason why there were so few thought provoking dramas on television was that several producers and playwrights have been victimized in the past by the successive governments. Therefore, many of them are cautious and prefer not to confront the state authority. The political dramas on Pakistan Television were usually produced during a more tolerant and democratic government in power.

From 1978 onwards, the government began to intervene very deliberately and consciously and the locus of decision-making shifted away from PTV [Pakistan Television] to somewhere in the government, to the Ministry of Information (Ahmed, 1990: 34-45).

During the Zia-ul-Haq period, Pakistan Television was used to its full extent to propagate what the Pakistani military ruler desired. Television producers self-censored the programs they were producing. Pakistan Television staff who didn't comply with the military's policies were forced to resign. A list was prepared containing over fifty well-known poets and writers, including Faiz Ahmed Faiz, Hajra Masroor, and Shaukat Siddiqi, who were banned from working for Pakistan Television and the Pakistan Broadcasting Corporation (PBC) (Niazi, Z 1994).Concurrent to Islamic codes of conducts, the Zia regime prohibited women from dancing and put limitations on the depiction of men-women relationships outside marriage in television programs.

Following the former prime minister Nawaz Sharif's injunction, several television programs and advertisements were put on hold and/or censored. For a few days pop music was banned. There was stem criticism of the Prime Minister in the press. But, as Senator Pervaiz Rashid, Chairman Pakistan Television, said in an interview, "Very soon you will notice things will be back to normal" During the period of 1997-99, the popularity of Pakistan Television was rising and falling. In 1998, Pakistan Television was broadcasting programs via satellite but many families in Pakistan were switching to Indian satellite television (Zaidi, & Zaidi, 1997).

During the period of 1997-99, the popularity of Pakistan Television was rising and falling. In 1998, Pakistan Television was broadcasting programs via satellite but many families in Pakistan were switching to Indian satellite television.

This was also considered that the media promulgate issues in a way that it raised public immediately just after the news bulletin whereas public mostly did not know that what should be their role and reaction in that particular issue. Though, with the passage of time reputation of Pakistan's media have sullied due to its failure in thoroughly comprehending affairs. And it was also claimed that that media contributed to multiply wording over issues and crisis instead of spreading true root causes and facts of the issues (Gallup survey,2009)

The growing popularity of television viewing throughout Pakistan has also set the different ideological blocks, particularly the religious right, in action to streamline their political agendas. Some of the religious parties have actively striven to influence the national media in order to cleanse the "immoral and obscene images from television." They had been trying to control the media through threats and acts of violence. In recent years, the religious parties have furiously resented the viewing of satellite channels by Pakistanis. However, in the absence of their control over the airwaves and satellite channels, they were mostly threatening the government-controlled Pakistan Television. They were occasionally venting their anger by burning local theatres, and electronic and video rental stores in the regions of Baluchistan and NWFP provinces, where they were politically dominant. Reports in the newspapers on the Internet (Dawn*, June 10, 2003) have indicated that in many major cities in Pakistan, the religious parties have unleashed their party activists to deface consumer billboards showing women. They consider them obscene

and immoral as well.

The age of watching only one-channel Pakistan Television was slowly disappearing from Pakistani homes (Rettalick & Farah, 2005). Pakistani citizens/viewers have seized upon the change brought about by the satellite channels in their private and public viewing spaces. In Islamabad, the urban, educated, affluent citizens switched channels according to their likings. They did not necessarily appreciate and watch the "narratives of the nation" as they used to watch them in the past. The rural citizens/viewers in the small town of Harappa were also accepting the change that was taking place in urban Pakistan regarding the media.

This change will not necessarily lead to a complete break from the past. It will not bring any change in the social structure, nor it will perhaps bring political and economic revolution. In the long run this change will facilitate Pakistani citizens/viewers to learn, know, and understand, through the eyes of non-national media, many foreign cultures, multiple visions, and conflicting views. This change, however, may assist in unfolding an era of tolerance and democracy in Pakistan.

Ali (1993: 93) stated that "I have encountered ideas, images, thoughts and expressions of identity by the common people that challenged essentializing Pakistani identity and culture." People's heterogeneous discourses and practices have always questioned the state's legitimacy. The state whose elites are ideologically captivated by the beleaguered nationalism of the 20th century finds people questioning what it is to be Pakistani.

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The society and culture are threatened in Pakistan. The patterns of life are changing because of impact of education and electronic media, which have to be facilitated in a positive manner (Jafari, 2008) With regards to media's role in promoting national cohesion and unity, Media can shape public perceptions on these issues but does not create or solve these problems. The media can be a force for national unity only if it adheres to an agreed code of ethics. A liberal media policy is a prerequisite to play its due role as a vehicle for national unity and cohesion. We are a highly polarized society, segmented along ethnic, sectarian, ideological and gender issues. Faltering economic growth and stagnant social development have only reinforced these tensions. Without achieving economic solvency and the promise of a better future, our national cohesion will remain under stress. Our biggest fault line is the rising demographic pressure on our resources. We need to launch a sustained media campaign to bring this pressure down. This is one area in which media can play a pivotal and non-partisan role.

The strengths of electronic media include the viewer ship which has reached to eighty six million according to 2009 Gallup survey.   Since more than 2000, TV cable operators have emerged as audio-video platforms promoting and influencing the society. (Gallup Survey, 2009) Meanwhile, increasing influence of internet and TV channels are raising power potential of these audio and video platforms. It is not making values but just making the people aware of events and happenings. The media is often blamed for social ills to the determinant of identifying the real causes of the problems. We have to see the impact of the dynamics of the society, the governmental culture of power and governance, and various policies and actions, instead of putting blame on media. The relationship between electronic media exposure and behaviour is very complex and many other factors do intervene. It has been impossible to prove that the media has direct "effects"; however it has impact on public opinion formation.

There is a general consensus that the term nationalism denotes sentiment and consciousness, which bind people together. (Mann, 2005) It reflects a state of mind and a realization nurtured over time. There is no set pattern or sequence in which the process of National Integration should be attempted. Karl W Deutsch is of the view that just as a house can be built from different construction materials in varying sequences, National Integration

too can be attempted in a similar manner. (Mann, 2005) It may generally involve following five tasks, the creation of a sense of territorial integrity; the establishment of a national central authority; the bridging the elite-mass gap; the creation of a minimum value consensus; and the devising of integrative institutions and behaviour, ensuring adequate representation of all groups in institutions and decision-making processes. (Banton, 2000). The media can play an important role in this regard to highlight the values of nationalism, in the country.

The concept of National Integration is subject to a wide range of interpretations. However, two definitions which catch the essential spirit of the concept include, the creation of a National Political System which supersedes or incorporates all the regional sub-cultures (Alter, 1989), and the creation of a common national consciousness, a common national consensus and a common national identity. These two definitions appear adequate for working purposes as they underline both the political as well as the socio-cultural ingredients of the process of integration. National cohesion refers to the bonds or "glue" that binds members of society, community or other groups together (Alter, Peter 1989) The most obvious bonds are ideological, ethnic, linguistic, religious, cultural and historic. However, the homogeneity of a nation is no guarantee of successfully bonding together as a cohesive whole. The extent of the threat posed to the integrity of a state by the multiplicity of languages, races, religions etc., depends on a variety of factors but there are basically two requisites (conflict of ideology and economic decline) which must be present before a country may be deemed to be faced with a problem of national disunity . (Hechter, Michael, 2000) The Pakistani society is in transition, and it faces challenges but still the national interest is to make Pakistan as a unity-in-diversity and there is an ever-growing need to develop a harmonious society. In to each other; instead issues of institutional lag run through them.

Integration or cohesion is an ideal, it is not a thing but a process. It is dynamism ruled by an inner necessity, being guided in a direction chosen by itself as a goal or rather a series of goals leading to a certain direction. (Alter, 1989) National integration and social cohesion is the capacity of a society to ensure the welfare of its all members, minimize disparities and avoid polarization. A cohesive society is mutually supportive community of free individuals, pursuing these common goals by democratic means. National integration and social cohesion is at risk in Pakistan because of many impeding

factors, which originate within the country or influenced by external reasons. It may also be a complex outcome of interaction between the country forces and stresses and influence of global scenario (Lawrence, 2005)

Pakistani society has some fault lines in national cohesion and integration. The uncertainty about peace, security, bad-governance and system of justice has generated a sense of deprivation in the society (Jafri,2008) The stake holders in maintenance of national cohesion and integration are State Institutions, Judiciary, Defence Forces, Law and Order Machinery, Political Parties, Civil Society, Public Opinion Groups, and electronic media . (Diamond, 1997). The media in Pakistan as a source of immense influence and change has also come and has to stay as fourth pillar of the State. The state policies against the aspirations of people and pressure groups are being exposed in the media. The electronic media has also occupied globally a significant and very central position.

We are a highly polarized society, segmented along ethnic, sectarian, ideological and gender issues. Faltering economic growth and stagnant social development have only reinforced these tensions. Without achieving economic solvency and the promise of a better future, our national cohesion will remain under stress. Our biggest fault line is the rising demographic pressure on our resources. We need to launch a sustained media campaign to bring this pressure down. This is one area in which media can play a pivotal and non-partisan role.

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and the erosion of value and moral consensus. Integration or cohesion is an ideal, it is not a thing but a process. It is dynamism ruled by an inner necessity, being guided in a direction chosen by itself as a goal or rather a series of goals leading to a certain direction. National integration and social cohesion is the capacity of a society to ensure the welfare of its all members, minimize disparities and avoid polarization. A cohesive society is mutually supportive community of free individuals, pursuing these common goals by democratic means. National integration and social cohesion is at risk in Pakistan because of many impeding factors, which originate within the country or influenced by external reasons. It may also be a complex outcome of interaction between the country forces and stresses and influences of global scenario.

Media has to play an important role in alleviation of the socio-political problems of Pakistani society. The media has emerged as an effective tool, globally, and at home for building favourable/unfavourable opinions and attitudes of the masses for the preferred themes, to achieve the desired objectives. If applied positively, its contribution in achieving national integration, socio-economic uplift and in building a cohesive, tolerant and forward looking society cannot be over emphasized.

The Pakistani media can play its role to enhance national cohesion and integration, can give the right direction and can still play a vital role to create awareness in all the spheres of its reach (Jafri, 2008).

The media can play an important role in mobilizing the masses on sensitive matters, concerning issues of external security. (Mann, 2005). The public opinion support is a significant tool to defend against the external threats. This will sensitize the public at large to the dictates of national security, cohesion and stability. The media can play a very important role to strengthen the democratic process and democratic institutions in Pakistan. (Mann, 2005). The media can assist in promoting a culture of tolerance, mutual co-existence and may help in evolving national character to strengthen democratic process. Good governance can be best achieved by strengthening the institutions of the country along with internal and external accountability mechanism (Mann 2005) The media as a watch dog can play significant role in scrutinizing the public policies through analysis and also with the feedback of public at large. It is observed that

the media reporters are extremely useful sources in providing initial leads to probe into the scandals, mismanagement, nepotism and various corrupt practices causing loss to public exchequer.

The domestic environment especially the political instability directly affects the national security (Mann, 2005). Pakistan can project any national policy globally to get support of international community if the internal political environment is peaceful. The media can play an important role in voicing public opinion to generate support for the government policies. The media can also peruse the politicians to a national political agenda, for institutional stability.

Conclusion:

Througout its history Pakisani media has been controlled by the state. Although it has been able to influence the cultural, social and political perceptions of the people of Pakistan. The government controlled media has brought to fore the visions of one's own self, the national Islamic identity of Pakistan. Nevertheless, over a period of time it has also brought unfamiliar enemy visions into the familiar national culture.

The media in Pakistan has recorded tremendous growth in a limited time period. In terms of audience both the television and the radio has significant reach. It can be termed as the fourth pillar of the state. The electronic media has impact (both positive and negative) upon generating public opinion on national issues. There are serious socio-political and socio- economic distortions that have caused fault lines in national cohesion. The media, besides the society, has a direct linkage with the politics as well. The electronic media is an agent of change but the direction of change depends on the reported information. The media has constraints and limitations, like vested interests, corruption, political motives and monetary gains. Because of lack of objectivity in its activities the creditability of the media is sometime questioned. The media reporting is also,at times, scandalous and unrealistic to define an issue. This aspect of the media needs improvement. The main thesis of this argument is that the electronic media is not the master of the events because of its structural constraints,therefore,the myth of powerful electronic media is not true. The electronic media is striving hard to become more effective pillar of the statecraft.

It is the formative states and need to learn a lot from its shortcomings. There should be serious and sustained efforts on part of the media planners and managers to build the capacity among the rank and file of the media in terms of accepted principles and norms of responsible journalism if it has to become a vibrant instrument of nation-building, cross cultural harmony and institutional good will. It should not be the mere pedagogy but instead reflected in their strategic policy-making and action.

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