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SOCIO-ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL BASES OF DEVELOPMENT COMMUNICATION

by Brajesh Bhatia

As nations move from patterns of traditional society towards patterns of modern industrial society, spectacular developments take place in their communication. From one point of view, developments in communication are brought about by the economic, social and political evolution which is part of a nation's growth. From another, however, they are among the chief makers and movers of that evolution.

The structure of social communication reflects the structure and development of society. The extent of the communication activity - the development of the mass media and their audiences, the transfer of the individual communication roles of traditional society to organisations, the stretching out and multiplying of communication chains - reflects the economic development of a society. The ownership of communication facilities, the purposeful use of communication, and the controls upon communication reflect the political development and philosophy of a society. The content of communication at any given time reflects the value pattern prevalent among the society. The patterns of communication networks, which determine where information flows and who shares it with whom, reflect the configuration of culture and geography within a society.

The growth of modern communication is itself one of the phenomenon of socio-economic development. It runs parallel to the development of other social and economic institutions in a country, and is closely related to some of the indicators of general social and economic growth, such as literacy, per capita income, urbanisation, etc. There is undoubtedly a powerful interaction among these indices and the size of the mass media system. All essential elements of a society develop together. At any given time, it is possible that one element may be developing faster than others.

Lerner (1958) has advanced the best known hypotheses concerning the relationship of media growth to other elements of society. Only after a country reaches about 10 per cent urbanisation is there any significant increase in literacy; thereafter urbanisation and literacy increase together until they reach about 25 per cent, and once societies are about 25 per cent urbanised the closest relationship of media growth is with the increase in literacy.

The development of mass media is one of the requisites of a developing society.
Mass Media Today

Today, the mass media are developing on an unprecedented scale. Progress in the field staggers the imagination. The first television set appeared only a few years ago, but today there are over 300 million of them all over the world, with over an estimated 1,000 million television viewers. Radio has even greater potentialities: there are more than 22,000 radio broadcasting stations and 700 million radio sets throughout the world. TV and radio enable hundreds of millions to witness various world events including the landing of spaceships on the moon.

Print media continue to be a key channel for the dissemination of information: there are over 8,000 dailies in all countries -- apart from other periodicals -- with a total circulation of 390 million copies. This rapid development has spread to the other mass media too. There are nearly 250,000 cinemas throughout the world, with audiences totalling 78 million; and more than 550,000 book titles published annually, that is, roughly 1,500 titles a day.

Let us look at the mass media availability in Asia as compared to the rest of the world.

Asia occupies nearly one-fifth of the land area in the world, while it has to support 57 per cent of the world population. Population density in Asia is almost three times as compared to the world figure. Though in the last 15 years or so mass media have grown considerably in Asia, it is still far behind the world average.

About 20 years ago, Unesco drew up a rule of thumb for global development of the media and the standards laid down for this purpose were as follows:

100 copies of newspapers per 1000 population
20 cinema seats per 1000 population
50 radio receivers per 1000 population
20 television receivers per 1000 population

These targets were neither socially nor economically over-ambitious. However, for most of the Asian countries they have remained elusive and hard to achieve. The current situation in the Asean countries is slightly better as compared to their counterparts elsewhere in Asia. The table annexed provides the comparative picture among the five Asean countries. The figures may seem slightly out-dated but the purpose of giving these figures is not so much to compare but to indicate the trend with regard to the availability of mass media between 1960 and 1971.

It is clear from the table that all media do not grow at the same rate within a country which leads one to think that in addition to socio-economic development, the political system prevailing in a country that guides and places certain emphasis on the medium or media for informing its people may also have a bearing on the growth and availability of media.
Let us examine how the mass communication systems operate in different societies.

**Major Systems of Mass Communication**

Social communication - which involves surveillance, cultural transmission, and entertainment - is essential to society. Mass communication is one way in which social communication becomes institutionalised. Our society expects that certain news will be routinely handled through the mass media of communication so as to reach large numbers of people, from all walks of life, quickly and publicly.

Mass communications can also be conceptualised in organisational terms. Although the analytical distinction between social institutions and social organisation is important, it is usually difficult to distinguish the two in a descriptive account of a specific group or organisation involved in the mass communication process - say a television network, a broadcasting station, or a daily newspaper -- or in a descriptive account of a society's total mass media.

In its current state, most sociological of the descriptions of mass communications emphasises classification of mass communication system according to forms of media ownership and control. One example of a broad typology of mass communications systems is provided in Four Theories of the Press by Fred Siebert, Theodore Peterson, and Wilbur Schramm. They have found it convenient to view the communication systems of the world as operating, more or less precisely, under four major theories:

1. **Soviet-Communist**
2. **Libertarian**
3. **Social Responsibility**
4. **Authoritarian**

Under the first category, Soviet-Communist, most of the communication systems of communist countries may be grouped, including those of the Soviet Union itself. In these countries, the mass media - press, broadcasting, film - have clear and explicit mandates from the party and government as to their primary objectives. Above all, they are committed to carrying communist theory and policy to the masses, rallying support for the party and government, and raising the general cultural level of the people. To achieve this, the party and government exercise relatively strict control over the media and their operation.

The Libertarian theory dominates the Anglo-American and many other Western countries. Emphasis is upon the freedom of the media, especially from government control, although some government regulation, restriction, and operation may be found.

The third theory, Social Responsibility, is also in the Anglo-American tradition. This theory emphasises the moral and social responsibilities of the persons and
institutions that operate the same media. Among these responsibilities are the obligations to provide the public with information and discussion on important social issues and to avoid activities harmful to the public welfare.

Under the last theory, Authoritarian, the media, private or public, are clearly subordinate to the state and are restrained from expressing major criticism of the government or its officials or both. Such restraint may be achieved through a variety of methods, such as relatively strict government procedures of licensing and censorship.

Today, it is impossible to pinpoint a system operating in a country or a society on the basis of definitions mentioned above. In fact, in most of the countries it is a mixture of two or more systems.

SUMMARY OF DISCUSSION

Discussion leaders: Rosihan Anwar
Brajesh Bhatia

The discussion attempted to get an overall picture of the situations that either caused, occasioned or accelerated the evolution of the communication systems – more specifically the mass media - in Asia. It was seen that mass media's evolution, as has been in the West, began with the print medium. At the initial stages, it was a small community of missionaries and indigenous small-time entrepreneurs who started publishing.

In Indonesia, for example, Hajis who returned from Mecca began publishing newspapers, exposing the people to what they have seen and experienced in the Arab world. Through these newspapers, published mainly to propagate Islam, the readers also got their first glimpse of the happenings outside their own communities. Christian missionaries also began publishing newspapers and bulletins in order to inform their 'flock' of what happened within the Church and to exhort them to lead better lives. When large part of Asia was colonised, the colonial powers brought out their own newspapers to publish administrative orders, inform people about government measures, policies and programmes.

As the socio-economic infrastructure began to develop aided by greater transportation facilities, greater productivity and as trade and people's mobility increased, the print media grew stronger, more elaborate, and journalism steadily emerged as a profession. Whereas newspapers initially depended on government servants, missionaries and well-meaning individuals to help publish a newspaper, the steady growth of newspapers and magazines brought forth people who could be employed entirely on the production of such media. As Asia moved into the 20th century, there was a surge of nationalism in many countries, leading finally to freedom from colonialism towards mid-20th Century.
The struggle for independence gave rise to organisations and political parties determined to drive the colonialists away. The sudden surge of nationalism saw a mushrooming of newspapers and bulletins -- above the ground and underground -- intended to educate the people on their rights of freedom and self-determination. Media thus brought about a great deal of political consciousness which, in turn, helped the media and gave them a valid place in society. It was noted that some of the 'nationalist' papers are still in existence and are going strong, better equipped professionally and technologically.

It was also pointed out that the print and broadcast media in Asia evolved in two distinct directions: the ones that were owned and controlled by the colonial powers were of a conservative nature, depending on the colonial powers for their sustenance and the others, progressive and critical to the extent of being belligerent, depending on the people for their income. Between them, there was often unhealthy competition and as history would testify, many 'nationalist' papers were closed down by the colonial powers.

In the backdrop of the nature of media's evolution in Asia, an attempt was made by participants to find out under which major system of mass communication their medium/a could be categorised. The Philippines, Thailand and Singapore participants said that the print media of their countries came under the categories of Social Responsibility and Libertarian. Participants from Indonesia and Malaysia felt that the print media in their countries came under Social Responsibility, Authoritarian and Libertarian. Radio and Television are, however, government-owned or controlled in almost all Asian countries.

Although a broad classification under the four major systems of mass communication was possible, it was concluded that the Four Theories of the Press is too arbitrary and that the current Asian situation would lend itself to more detailed and different classifications.

The question of direct relationship between mass media development and economic development was also discussed. Although it is hard to determine which precedes which, it is generally accepted that socio-economic development precedes media development while media development could be a valid meter to read the economic development of a country.

The impact of advanced technology beginning with the moveable type and ranging out to camera and film, vacuum tube and radio, transistors and communication satellites was also discussed. It was noted that though there has been remarkable progress in the hardware technology, much less has happened in Asia to improve the 'software'. There is a heavy flow of information by way of reading material, films and canned television programmes from the industrialised countries of the West. Even the Asian situations are reported and interpreted by the West which has better and more streamlined modes of information transmission. It was stressed that this state of affairs tends to bring about an information imbalance and a certain "cultural imperialism" where the Asian audience is subjected to intense interaction with the western culture through the mass media.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Population (mid-year estimated in thousands)</th>
<th>Per capita income</th>
<th>Density (per 1000 inhabitants)</th>
<th>Copies of daily newspapers</th>
<th>Number of radio receivers</th>
<th>Number of TV receivers</th>
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<td>81</td>
<td>251</td>
<td>11,59</td>
<td>7</td>
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<td>3,571</td>
<td>417</td>
<td>921</td>
<td>143</td>
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<td>70</td>
<td>169</td>
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Explanations: Figures for years other than 1960 or 1971 in the respective columns are identified by superscript numbers, e.g., 70 indicates a 1970 figure.

Data not available

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