THE DOMAINS AND METHODS OF TELEVISUAL DOMINATION

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Abstract: Media play a pivotal role in today's world. They play all-important roles in the formation of cognitive grips and worldviews, shaping public opinion, fashioning consumer habits and in formulating socio-political and cultural discourses. The astounding growth of global media corporates who developed in sync with the global market has resulted in media imperialism—domination of media corporates of the advanced nations over less advanced nations whereby the mercantile interests of the corporates are furthered and promoted. This unjustifiable trend had led to cultural homogenization which has resulted in the reduction of cultural pluralities. The pseudo public spheres generated by commerce-oriented media is detrimental to democratic participations; these pseudo public spheres have been deployed to 'manufacture consent' while giving a false sense of democratic participation. The present paper, in the light of the concepts formulated by Edward. S Herman, Noam Chomsky and Jurgen Habermas, examines the domains and methods of media domination with specific reference to television, and attempts to trace the antidemocratic patterns inherent in market-oriented media.

Key Words: **Media imperialism, Pseudo public sphere, Manufacturing Consent, Cultural homogenization, etc.**

Media nowadays play a pivotal role in formulating the agenda of a society's thoughts. They exercise the authority to select and reject subjects for thought. To be precise, the said authority is exercised by the capital that backs media. The same capital has the authority to decide who rules a given society. While being tools to create and bolster certain social conditions, media have also been deployed as weapons to annihilate even the slightest instances of dissent against the conditions that they favour. The world has already realized the fact that media are today the most powerful weapons to subjugate a given populace. Much like political and economic authority, media authority dominates people's minds and thoughts. They also redefine the tastes and preferences as per commercial interests. They erode certain beliefs and establish novel ones. A gigantically powerful media industry with masked demonism and alluring periphery has gained substantial power. Today, there are less spheres spared from their influence.

As news becomes business

The time of vigorous journalists who wrote fearlessly is over. There are no free media and unfettered journalists today. Gandhi opined that media has three responsibilities: 'firstly to understand the people's sentiment and express it, secondly to infuse lofty attitudes in the people, and thirdly to valiantly bring the social evils to light.' Swadesabimani Ramakrishnapilla, who was a veritable beacon in the field of journalism, used his pen for social reformation and annihilation of evil customs. Exile was the price for his fearless criticism of the king and his servants who were steeped in corruption. It is no exaggeration to say that there are no journalists of this kind today. Journalism nowadays is a commercial enterprise rather than a moral duty. Like every businessperson, the media owners' motive is commercial gain. Journalism was a moral duty till 1947. It was necessary to transform it into a profession; but it ended up as a business in the negative sense of the word.

In the nineteenth century, the capitalist powers gained authority and rights over news. Eventually, news became a business and the nascent business was monopolized by certain corporates using the power of capital. The ring combination including Havas in France, Wolf in Germany and Reuters in Britain dominated the news business. Later, The Associated Press of America joined this league.

The regional nature of news was effaced after the advent of this combination. This media colonialism resulted in the distortion of news and neglect of facts. Events happening within a nation were no more considered relevant only to its populace. The citizens of a Latin American country had to depend on a foreign news agency to know the tidings from their country. It led to a sorry state in which the events happening in a country were reported to its citizens as per the vested interests of a capitalist authority who gained media-monopoly in the country.

Manufacturing Consent

The global village anticipated by Marshal McLuhan is a fact today. A way of life or a cultural style, which in the past took centuries to travel beyond boundaries, today needs only a few seconds to spread across the world. These changes have influenced and thoroughly transformed the thought patterns of individuals and societies. Modern capitalism has identified communication technology which is progressing day by day as a means to transmute material conditions. Media have been redefined as means to conquer and rule the erstwhile colonies culturally, politically and economically. The capitalists made unrestrained use of media to replace the people's interests with capitalist interests . Thus the ground was prepared gradually for the formation of a Eurocentric media culture.

Today, media decides what should and should not become the subject for people's thoughts. During the first world war, Britain formed the Information Ministry and Propaganda Agency in order to spread warmongering hysteria among its people. Woodrow Wilson was elected as American president in 1916 as he was propagating anti-war sentiments throughout the country using media. During the second world war, Hitler gave much importance to propaganda rather than the army. Thus history gives enough proofs to corroborate the statement that those in authority can influence the general will and they can fashion the people's will as per their wish.

The Propaganda Agency that Britain formed during the first world war was known by the name Creel Commission. Walter Lipman, a journalist who worked as a member of the Creel Commission, put forward the theory of manufacture of consent by arguing that there is a novel art in democracy which aims at manufacturing the people's consent (Graber, 1990: 19). He theorised that whenever the governments are hindered by democracy, an exceptional employment of this art helps them transcend the barriers of democracy. It is a craft used to sabotage democracy without the people's knowledge. Lipman observed that such sabotages will be accepted by the people as parts of democracy.

In their *Manufacturing Consent* Edward. S Herman and Noam Chomsky confirmed that media exist for the protection and propagation of certain special interests. Media which take up the responsibility of forming pubic opinions are in fact working on the basis of their own vested interests and motives. These media employ different methods to materialize their motives:

- Selection of certain special topics for presentation.
- Projection of the anxiety of those capitalists who back the media enterprise as the common anxiety of society.
- Presentation of some subjects in certain special backgrounds.
- Filtered presentation of news.
- Presentation of news with the intention of influencing the readers and audience.
- Overly coloured and exaggerated presentation of news.

Those who conceive of the East and West as binary opposites and believe that the spring of democracy is celebrated everywhere in the West are in fact under the sway of the ruse called manufacture of consent. When they opine that repression of people's opinion and anti-people policies are dominating the whole of Soviet Bloc, they are in fact ignorant of the truth that in places hailed as paradises of democracy what prevails is the crafty deployment of manufacture of consent.

As Media Manufacture Mentalities

Today, media are capable of manipulating the subject and methodology of people's thoughts as well as manufacturing their consumer habits. Commercial interest is the main cause behind such manufacture of mentalities. The broadcast chain of American companies are spread across the globe. Apart from Americans, these companies are catering to approximately hundred million people across the globe; but their TV programmes never include the tradition, national heritages, and cultures of their non-American audience. Most of their programmes are jam-packed with elements intended to propagate consumerism. Therefore, regional cultures have been branded uncouth and are being eroded gradually. The dominant cultures assume universal importance to spread internationally. Those powers behind the construction of the dominant cultures use media craftily to destroy the dearly held idols of the audiences and to replace them with novel ones. Media play a pivotal role in deciding the position of key figures in the table of acceptance. They skilfully projected the images of Bush as a warrior of peace and Saddam Hussein as a terrorist. It is worthy of note that the media, in order to report the captivity of Saddam, used a belittling image of him being diagnosed by American dentists, and thereby succeeded in producing and propagating Saddam's image as a defanged snake. This is a case in point for the politics involved in the selection of images. These media even skilfully created a linguistic order to facilitate their politics. The C.N.N and B.B.C repeatedly hailed the allied armies' invasion of Iraq as Iraq Liberation Mission. Thus invasion was redefined as liberation.

It is also worth recalling here that during the Cold War, the western media termed the people and social condition of the Soviet Union as 'reds' and 'iron curtain' respectively. In the news broadcast against El Salvador, these media termed the patriots as terrorists. They redefined murders as social force. The word government was used in contexts for which fascism was the befitting word. Those who engineered the American intervention were placed on a high pedestal as counsellors of El Salvador . The T.V companies , during the Britain-Argentina conflict of 1982, termed the British army which initiated the attack as progressive force. Media followed the same trend when Israel attacked Lebanon in 1982. Media can interpret any liberation movement as uprising. They can also present protesting people as violent, wild crowd. Words and images intrude into our psyche and deform our thoughts. All these show the colossal power of the media industry to wipe out traditional beliefs in order to establish and nurture novel beliefs and interests.

Discursive formation of pseudo public sphere

Democratic awareness evolves in a country through the interventions of citizens guided by their civic sense. Such a society will have their unique convictions about the rights and wrongs in a society. Ethics acquired over time through their creative interventions is the base of their convictions. Media play a crucial role in the formation of such ethics which evolve through incessant refinement.

Public sphere is a crucial cultural dimension which frequently emerges in the discussions of modernity in relation to media. The argumentative spheres of media have played a crucial role in the formation of different nationalisms, and in encouraging various transmutations of modern democratic societies. Public sphere is an ideological corollary of all these.

The German theorist Jurgen Habermas is the one who theorized the relation between democracy and public sphere and the pivotal role media play in this relation. He defines public sphere as follows: 'By the public sphere, we mean first of all a realm of our social life in which something approaching public opinion can be formed. Access is guaranteed to all citizens. A portion of the public sphere comes being in every conversation in which private individuals assemble to form a public body.'

Public spheres are those shared spaces marked by active communications. Libraries, churches, temples, party offices, tea shops, barber shops, bars, etc. are usual public spheres of communication. But in certain complex places, people's participation in political deliberations and practices is very less. This lack of participation owes to the lack of public spheres. Habermas opined that true democratic formations are dependent upon public spheres which are free from political authority and other forms of power.

Even in places believed to be celebrating the spring of democracy, the political parties turn undemocratic once they become a part of the establishment because of the deficiency of public spheres. Public sphere evolves in a given society owing to the intervention of media which support liberal thinking. To some extent, establishments like B.B.C has been making such contributions. Edward S Herman observes that a public broadcast service which is free from commercial interests can leverage the development of democratic awareness. Public sphere can function properly only if it is free from the clutches of the state and mercantile interests. This trend could be seen in the media culture of places which have been historically more democratic.

If such a media culture evolves in other places too then the economic and political powers cannot suppress the marginalized people's endeavours to liberate themselves.

As Media Manufacture Pseudo Publicspheres

Visual media are inevitable in the formation of an informed society, and thereby a public sphere which bolsters democracy. But these days media have been manufacturing pseudo public spheres instead of the ones which should evolve naturally as an outcome of democratic participation. Media have opened all their windows to myriad domains of business. In fact, visual media are under the sway of the capital invested by corporates. Public sphere loses its efficacy and becomes a mere instrument of visual media's vested interests owing to the biased selection of subjects and choice of participants based on their stances. Habermas emphasised the notion that public spheres aid the growth of democracy only when they are unshackled from the fetters of politics and economics ; to borrow his words, 'Public sphere works most effectively for democracy when it is institutionally independent of the state and society's dominant economic forces.' Market oriented public spheres assist the formation of consumerist societies driven by the dictates of market.

The public spheres generated by the argumentative sphere of modernity's print media were effaced by the postmodern media. To be precise, the formation of a global media market, by and by, enfeebled democratic developments. The authority over media was absolutely monopolized by the businesspersons who invested hugely. Consequently, ideations against the commercial interests were curbed in the realm of media. This naturally led to the weakening of democratic formations. This suppression of thoughts leads to uninformed social spheres, and gradually ignorance envelopes the people, which renders them unorganized and apolitical. The ultimate result of all these is that the authority to plan and control certain crucial decisions for a given society's progression will be vested with a minority of elites.

The phenomenon of global media which lent uniformity to different mass media is a development of the recent years. Its origin is inseparably related to the globalization of markets. In truth, media turned into a vehicle for the corporate managements for the sale of their products.

Habermas' observations are immensely relevant in the Indian context. In Kerala, the print medium played an all-important role in the emergence and propagation of many a vehicle of renaissance, such as education, literacy, nationalistic movement, anti-caste movement, gender equality movement, democratic political awareness, and peasant organization. The public spheres generated by media played a crucial role in the development of quality and depth of public opinion and participatory democracy in Kerala.

In the first phase of the twentieth century, the pseudo public spheres generated and propagated as per the vested interests of the Indian media paved the way for socio-political and communal schisms, and anti-democratic tendencies. The newspaper revolution that took place in the 1980-90 period in the Hindi heartland, and Doordarshan's continuous broadcast of Ramayana and Mahabarata serials during 1987-90 period led to the revival of fundamentalism and religious nationalism in Indian politics. These regressive media drifts succeeded in obstructing the progressive and reformative growth of Indian society.

After its modernity, Indian society's cultural and political public spheres have been marked by caste, religious and communal schisms which are being ossified at present. Even though some media are very vocal in their criticism against such drifts, majority of our media have taken up the promulgation of this regressive culture as their covert agenda.

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