Revisiting Governmentality in the light of the Human Security Paradigm and the Role of the Media

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Abstract:

Governmentality as an endeavour to "direct the conduct" of the citizenry must invariably aim at fulfilment of the concepts of human security and culture of peace. In this context, adoption of a two pronged strategy involving constructive social communication reflecting "relative truths" and building the capacities of citizens need to be highlighted. In the light of this contention, the existence of a free and fair media facilitating access to "truths" (in the sense of projecting all competing interpretations or relative truths) is something which is integrally connected with the process of governance in the contemporary period in terms of enabling and empowering the citizenry to be rational decision makers and steer the public sphere for the collective good, guided by a spirit of critical inquiry. Accordingly, the present paper tries to revisit the idea of governmentality in the light of the Human Security Paradigm and the Role of the Media.

(*Key Words:* governmentality, constructive social communication, human security, media, collective good)

A dominant theme in the contemporary political discourse is that of "governmentality" put forward by Michel Foucault. The fundamental thesis of the concept of governmentality is to "influence the direction of the conduct of the governed" in a meaningful direction. In so doing, the state must be cautious to recalibrate its relationship with its citizenry as an exercise in democracy and openness rather than a primarily power relationship. As a corollary, it becomes imperative that efforts be made to foster institutions and practices that promote constructive social communication, which in turn influences the "conduct of the governed" in a way that the bedrock of civic engagement itself becomes invariably intertwined with issues of sustainable human development.

Against the appreciation of the concept of governmentality as a combination of "government" and "rationality", the question of governmentality itself, it could be argued, could be revisited in the light of a two pronged strategy, in that while on the one hand it directly involves the need to influence the conduct of the citizenry , on the other hand, the agenda of the state itself must be governed by a spirit of innate "goodness" free from any doctrinaire imposition of values. This spirit of innate "goodness" ought to be geared towards generating social capital and trust- building across ethnic and communal divide in a way that equity and justice are cherished as shared deals by both the state and its citizenry. As a corollary, it may be contended in this sense that the idea of governmentality could be associated with two fundamental concepts in the present political discourse – the concepts of of "human security" and "culture of peace" . The concept of "human security" has its origins in policy statements emanating from the United Nations in the mid-1990s and in particular the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)'s *Human Development Report* of 1994.[i]

As a matter of fact, human security is a people-centered doctrine concerned with how people live and breathe in societies, how freely they exercises their many choices, how much access they have to market and social opportunities and whether they live in conflict or in peace.[ii] The concept of human security itself has two dimensions- *Freedom from Fear* and *Freedom from Want*. The *Freedom from Fear* approach constituting the Narrow School of thought focuses on threats of violence, often called "freedom from fear". It focuses on the threat of political violence including war and other forms of direct violence to individuals and communities, by the state or any other organized political actor. This approach is also called "Humanitarian" or "Safety of Peoples" approach. The *Freedom from Want* approach constituting the Broad School of thought argues that human security means more than a concern with the threat of direct violence. It expands its focus beyond violence with an emphasis on development. Human Security is not only "freedom from fear" but also "freedom from want". The broad school focuses on threats arising from underdevelopment and hence addresses the root of human insecurity. Furthermore, the Report divided the threats to human security under seven broad categories. According to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) 's *Human Development Report* of 1994, the more localized threats can be understood in relation to the seven values of human security. These are summarized below:

- *Threats to economic security*: These include lack of productive and remunerative employment and absence of publicly financed safety nets

- *Threats to food security*: These threats arise due to lack of an 'entitlement' to basic food resulting from insufficient access to assets, work and assured incomes

- *Threats to health security*: Such threats are seen in the form of infectious and parasitic diseases, respiratory infections, diseases of the circulatory system and cancers on the one hand and lack of safe water, air pollution and lack of access to health care facilities on the other

- *Threats to environmental security*: These threats include declining water availability, water pollution, declining arable land, deforestation, desertification, air pollution, natural disasters

- *Threats to personal security*: These threats are observed in the form of violent crime, drug trafficking, violence and abuse of children and women

- *Threats to community security*: Such threats are manifested in the form of breakdown of the family, collapse of traditional languages and cultures, ethnic discrimination and strife, genocide and ethnic cleansing

- *Threats to political security*: Manifestations of such threats include government repression, systematic human rights violations, militarization

Significantly, human security is concerned with sustainable human development- development, which is pro-people and generates growth but distributes its benefits equitably and across generations, regenerates the environment rather than destroying it and empowers people rather than marginalizing them.[iii] It also means enabling all individuals to enlarge their human capabilities to the fullest and to put those capabilities to the best use in all fields- economic, social, cultural and political. Strengthening peoples' abilities to act on their own behalf and on behalf of their communities is instrumental to human security.

As for the other pertinent concept of " culture of peace" it was on September 13, 1999, that the United Nations General Assembly adopted the Declaration and Programme of Action on a Culture of Peace [iv]. The Programme of Action include eight action areas which are listed below:

1. Culture of peace through education

2. Sustainable economic and social development

3. Respect for all human rights

4. Equality between women and men

5. Democratic participation

6. Understanding, tolerance and solidarity

7. Participatory communication and the free flow of information and knowledge

8. International peace and security

The above action areas are interlinked. A culture of peace may be defined as a way of life governed by a set of values, attitudes, practices, traditions and modes of behaviour which incorporates the following : Respect for life and promotion of all human rights and fundamental freedoms; promotion and practice of nonviolence through

education and dialogue; peaceful settlement of conflicts; sustainable development in order to take care of the developmental and environmental needs of present and future generations; equal rights and opportunities for women and men; right to freedom of expression and opinion; upholding the values of freedom, justice, equality, democracy, tolerance, solidarity, cooperation, cultural diversity, dialogue and understanding at all levels of society and among nations; respecting the territorial integrity and sovereignty of other nations.

According to Ambassador Chowdhury "The transition from a culture of war to a Culture of Peace requires the transformation of individual behavior as well as institutional practices. Learning to live in peace and harmony is a long-term process, and begins with the development of inner peace, and nurturing attitudes that promote the expansion and integration of peaceful principles. Education and awareness-raising play a key roles in this process."[v]

Now, governmentality as a theoretical framework based on the choice policy decisions could be taken and implemented must encompass within its fold the concerns for human security and that of fostering a culture of peace even as the means to achieve the same have to be explored. Thus, in the ultimate sense, the endeavour to rationally direct the conduct of the citizenry as the primary agenda of governmentality must invariably aim at fulfilment of the concepts of human security and culture of peace. In this context, adoption of a two pronged strategy involving constructive social communication reflecting "relative truths" and building the capacities of citizens need to be highlighted. In the light of this contention, the existence of a free and fair media facilitating access to "truths" (in the sense of projecting all competing interpretations or relative truths) is something which is integrally connected with the process of governance in the contemporary period in terms of enabling and empowering the citizenry to be rational decision makers and steer the public sphere for the collective good, guided by a spirit of critical inquiry. Media is considered as the fourth estate of a democracy which has been acting as a watchdog of the society, keeping vigil on the three organs of the state, namely, the legislature, executive and the judiciary. Media could potentially play a significant role in ensuring that the government is accountable to its citizens. It is equipped to transmit information from the grassroots to the highest echelons of power in the state. In order to play its role constructively, media requires freedom from any sort of influence pertaining to its ownership or other related aspects. Press freedom is an integral part of a democracy and a free flow of interaction and exchange of views lends credibility to the policies, initiatives and views on the part of the government. With the advent of technology and rise of the internet, the new media forms have succeeded in influencing a large section of the masses and it holds the potential to influence the government-citizen relationship to a great extent by facilitating online discussion forums, interactions, direct feedback facility, etc. for increased engagement in the governance process. Media messages help in providing information to the public from around the world and thus create knowledge and experiences conforming to Foucauldian notion of 'power-knowledge'. Arguably, therefore, the media can play a powerful role in the activation of the citizenry by providing them a proactive mode of engagement with the government, which in turn fosters a culture of public vigilance and democratic participation based on an equity rather than hegemony.

The motive of the media is to communicate to the public what happens around the world. The people become particularly reliant on different forms of media – print, electronic or social media forms – to know and experience what is happening. Media are often accorded the credit for setting of agendas for the public and thus help in focusing public interests on particular subjects. Though most of the times the audience so not absorb media messages uncritically. The mass media as an institution has the potential to influence the thinking of the masses and in turn, can play a constructive role in strengthening the society. Pertaining to its inherent ability to reach a large number of people simultaneously, media has been utilized to disseminate messages to spread awareness and build opinion. The agenda setting role of the media has often been regarded as a force for betterment of the society. The drives taken up against smoking, adoption of a healthy lifestyle, road safety measures, etc. owe their success to the agenda setting role of media. The truth that we know or experience is largely based on the mediated view of the world. This 'truth' tossed at the public again and again at a relative interval and in a planned manner could essentially play a role in influencing and then bringing about positive or negative changes in the way one acts in the society. The powerful tool of mass media along with interpersonal communication, Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) and new media forms goes beyond the act of simply delivering the message to touch the lives of people by positively influencing the social determinants that shape human interaction. This effective and powerful of communication is exercised by the Social and Behaviour Change Communication (SBCC) programmes aiming at promoting healthy changes in the community. The communities need to be informed and motivated to adopt healthy behaviour practices and bring about necessary changes in societal and behavioural attitude. Strategic approaches such as advocacy, optimum utilization of mass media, community media platforms along with social mobilization could aid in bringing out effective results. A strategic implementation of Information, Education and Communication (IEC) countrywide for the Swachchh Bharat Mission of Indian government has succeeded in making India open defecation free (ODF) over a period of few years, with the focus on attaining success through social and behaviour change. Media helps people in a way by shaping their subjective understanding of reality (that is, our beliefs about the world) and over time the media consumers tend to believe that the real world resembles the one presented in the media. Psychologist Albert Bandura focused that children assimilate many social behaviours by perceiving others, hence, exposure to television characters may motivate children to use identical approaches in their own lives. The same interpretation may apply to the modelling, as stated in the social cognitive theory, of particular judgements and set of values.[vi] Media has played a vital role in inculcating positive attitudes in people pertaining to fight against racialism, gender bias, poverty, and other issues the society is suffering from. The socio-psychological information flows that continue to affect people could cause various effects on the mental development of a person. One such example could be the neo-vaishnavite movement initiated by Sankardeva in Assam in the latter half of the 15th century, which ushered in an era of socio-cultural renaissance strengthening the moral fabric of the society at the time. The saint used various media including *Ankiya Naat* to popularize the philosophy of humanity and brotherhood. The continuous dissemination of messages through these media over time impacted the social structure, economy, linguistic base and other related dimensions

and impacted the public to conduct their lives based on the positive teachings of Sankardeva[vii]. All forms of media, including traditional, print, electronic, have focused on the provision of a public sphere for free public discussions and dissemination of important information to the public. With the advent of technology and new media forms in the world, new ways of seeing emerge from the bio-political and mediatic conjectures of the present. According to Foucault, "not so much the State-domination of society, but the 'governmentalization' of the state" is essential, which indicates towards the unreasonable nature of the interference of the government in the realm of media[viii]. The public supports a press that reports fairly, accurately and provides information of public concern, which may in turn pressurize the government to maintain transparency. The government which can accept criticisms could maintain a positive relation with the press. The government thus perceives media as an appropriate vehicle for communicating their programmes and policies with the public and they are informed about the public interest issues. The recent trends in media such as citizen journalism have led to the achievement of self control and impart social values.

Since media play a massive role in shaping people's attitude, beliefs and opinion and even moral stands, it must be vigilant of its negative impact, and hence, adhere to the basic principle of ethics such as accuracy, objectivity, truth, fairness, impartiality, etc. Ethics provides moral cohesion to the individuals and institutions of a society. The Press Council of India framed a code of conduct in 1995 to act as a guide for the media in India, though in the later years several codes of conducts have been formulated to guide the professionals of print media, advertising, public relations and others. The inclusion of internet in the realm of mass communication media has also brought various issues related to ethics, pertaining to its unique characteristics of immediacy, flexibility, interactivity and worldwide. And above all, the journalists must practise integrity in their work, being responsible towards their organisation, society and clients in any situation, keeping in view Immanuel Kant's categorical imperative. As the freedom of the press is inherent in the Article 19 of the Indian Constitution itself, with the grant of Freedom of Speech and Expression, the media practitioners should also shoulder the responsibilities and the reasonable restrictions attached to the exercise of this freedom.

The internet expands the space for freedom of speech, providing platform to all to voice their opinion. United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948 enshrined free expression in Article 19. If people are not free to share information and express their ideas, opinions, and political views, and the corollary to that, if people are not free to receive, they would not be sufficiently well-informed to take appropriate political choices. The role of media is to be the 'eyes' and 'ears' of the public in monitoring and reporting the happenings. The press many a times plays the role of advocates of democracy and good governance, especially in developing countries, by improving the basic living conditions. The social media platforms are being utilized extensively for targeted audience reach by public health communicators for health promotion and behaviour change interventions, which can help in achieving BCC objectives despite the many challenges of social media usage[ix]. The interactivity, ease of access and the mobile nature of social media help in the better dissemination of the messages. Theorists have tried to categorize different functions of the press within the government system. Frederick Siebert's *Four Theories of*

the Press categorised press systems into 'authoritarian', 'libertarian', 'Soviet-Communist' and 'social responsibility', to which Dennis McQuail (1987) added two more – 'development model' and 'democratic participant'[x]. The democratic participant theory advocates the expression of ideas without fear and with absolute freedom and the availability of a platform for expression. The theory challenges commercialization and monopolization of privately owned media. The advancement in technology and development of new media technologies added a new dimension to communication facilitating participation of public in the democracy through various forms of interpersonal communication such as through twitter, email, and so on. Participatory communication approaches are powerful tools to bring in transformation in society and empower people at the grassroots level. In the recent years, participatory approaches to communication have reinforced the emphasis on structural and social change. Participation of the common citizen in the development programmes have been a concern since a long time, and in the recent years, it has gained voice and become a stronger concern. It is considered that a particular programme or project could become successful only with the active participation of all the stakeholders. The community radio and community television plays a significant role in eradicating social evils, illiteracy as well as poverty. There has always been a quest for participation of the 'voiceless', the marginalized sections of the society in the decision making process. The other media forms like blogs, podcasts, etc. fulfil the need of participatory communication in the present networked society.

In a nutshell, mass media have become a part of the community life, influencing the audience and affecting change while playing a significant role in information delivery and assisting in attitude formation of the people. This in turn impact the patterns of behaviours and cultural values in the society. The democratization of communication especially by the social media and participatory media platforms as focused in individual liberalism, emphases on the participation in public discourse. The attitude of the government to allow freedom to information could only lead to people-centred and sustainable development.

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