

Lecture- 04



3. Soviet Communism

With the revolution in Russia in 1917, and practice of Marxism, there appeared a very different approach to deal with media. The media was tied to overall communist ideas and defined in a very different way. The theory to control media possessed following features:

- a) Closely tied to the communist ideology.
- b) The media is collective agitator, propagandist and educator in the building of communism.
- c) No private ownership of the media.
- d) The government is superior to the media institutions.
- e) The media is supposed to be serious.
- f) The soviet theory does not favour free expression, but proposes a positive role for the media, the society and the world.
- g) Press contributes to success of the state.
- h) Only legal party members can publish and no one can criticize party.
- i) Government has “influence” over the press.
- j) closely tied to a specific ideology—the communist
- k) media organizations in this system are not intended to be privately owned and are to serve the interests of the working class
- l) both the soviet and the authoritarian acknowledge the government as superior to the media institutions.
- m) The mass media in the Soviet model are expected to be self-regulatory with regard to the content of their messages

The Soviet theory differs from the authoritarian theory in that the media organizations have a certain responsibility to meet the wishes of their audience. This theory is derived from the ideologies of Marx and Engel that "the ideas of the ruling classes are the ruling ideas". It was thought that the entire mass media was saturated with bourgeois ideology. Lenin thought of private ownership as being incompatible with freedom of press and that modern technological means of information must be controlled for enjoying effective freedom of press. The theory advocated that the sole purpose of mass media was to educate the great masses of workers and

not to give out information. The public was encouraged to give feedback as it was the only way the media would be able to cater to its interests.

4. Social Responsibility Theory:

This theory keeps certain areas free for the Press but at the same time puts lot of responsibility on media. As discussed in the beginning that the media is not just seen as an enterprise like others in the business sector of any society, but due to its unique nature, society expects a particular role which media must play in getting rid of social evils, educating people, criticizing government policies and exposing other wrong doings in a society. The sense of responsibility has been emphasized more in this theory as compared to any other. The basic premise of the theory is as follows:

a) Media has certain obligations to society.

b) It must show truth, accuracy, objectivity, and balance.

c) The media should be free but self-regulated (codes of conduct, and ethics)

d) The media according to this theory is pluralistic: diversity of society, various points of view, forum for ideas.

e) The media ownership is a public trust. Therefore, a journalist is accountable to his audience / readers.

MCQUAIL has further enlisted certain other premises of this theory, which are as follows/
THEORY IN POINTS:

a) Media have important function to fulfil in society (support democratic political principles);

b) Media are under obligation to fulfil their social functions (transmission of information and creation of a forum for different viewpoints);

c) Independence of media emphasised in relation to their responsibility towards society;

d) Media should meet certain standards.

e) Media should accept responsibilities towards society;

f) Media should fulfil responsibilities by setting professional standards with regards to the supply of information and the truth, accuracy, objectivity and balance of their reporting;

- g) Media should apply self-regulation;
- h) Media should avoid publicising information that can lead to crime, violence or social disruption, as well as information that can offend ethnic or religious minorities;
- i) Media collectively should represent all social groups and reflect the diversity of society by giving people access to a variety of viewpoints and opportunity to react to them. Society is entitled to high standards and intervention justifiable if the media fail to meet these standards.
- j) Everyone should have access to press (letters, opinions)

According to the theory media must be controlled by community opinion and ethics. Media cannot violate people's rights. Press can be free and be comprehensive and objective but at the same time must be socially responsible. The social responsibility theory is an outgrowth of the libertarian theory. However, social responsibility goes beyond "objective" reporting to "interpretive" reporting. media has certain obligations to society which it must fulfil in all circumstances:

· In formativeness · Truth · Accuracy · Objectivity · Balance

Media as a whole is pluralized, indicating "a reflection of the diversity of society as well as access to various points of view". A truthful, complete account of the news is not necessarily enough today, notes the Commission on the Freedom of the Press: "It is no longer enough to report the fact truthfully. It is now necessary to report the truth about the fact." Today's complex world often necessitates analysis, explanation, and interpretation. The emerging theory does not deny the rationality of man, although it puts far less confidence in it than the libertarian theory, but it does seem to deny that man is innately motivated to search for truth and to accept it as his guide. Under the social responsibility theory, man is viewed not so much irrational as lethargic. He is capable of using his reason but he is loath to do so. If man is to remain free, he must live by reason instead of passively accepting what he sees, hears, and feels. Therefore, the more alert elements of the community must goad him into the exercise of his reason. Without such goading man is not likely to be moved to seek truth. The languor which keeps him from using his gift of

reason extends to all public discussion. Man's aim is not to find truth but to satisfy his immediate needs and desires.

It is the press, therefore, that must be the "more alert element" and keep the public informed, for an informed populace is the cornerstone of democracy. Today's large media conglomerates, however, may not function naturally as a public forum, where all ideas are shared and available. "The owners and managers of the press determine which persons, which facts, which versions of these facts, shall reach the public," writes the Commission. In this same light, Siebert, Peterson and Schramm warn:

“...the power and near monopoly position of the media impose on them an obligation to be socially responsible, to see that all sides are fairly presented and that the public has enough information to decide; and that if the media do not take on themselves such responsibility it may be necessary for some other agency of the public to enforce it.”

The Canons of Journalism, adopted by the American Society of Newspaper Editors addresses these same obligations when it calls on newspapers to practice responsibility to the general welfare, sincerity, truthfulness, impartiality, fair play, decency, and respect for the individual's privacy. Siebert, Peterson and Schramm also note that "freedom of expression under the social responsibility theory is not an absolute right, as under pure libertarian theory....One's right to free expression must be balanced against the private rights of others and against vital social interests.”

Western media are controlled by capitalist economic interests (prevent them from publishing the Marxist truth). Communist press is equivalent to no profit motive. But it does not mean that it did not foreground special and elite interests in Soviet society. This theory at all times upholds the principle of social responsibility and works in the interest of public at large. It may therefore be understood that:

- a) Media should act in the interests of and be controlled by the working class;
- b) Media should not be under private control;

- c) Media should perform positive functions for society, such as socialisation (to make people conform to desirable norms), education, the supply of information, motivation and mobilisation of the masses;
- d) Media should respond to the desire and needs of their recipients;
- e) Society has right to use censorship and other legal measures to prevent and punish antisocial publication;
- f) Media should reflect complete and objective view of world and society in terms of Marxist-Leninist principles;
- g) Media should support communist movements everywhere.

A brief critique of libertarian and social responsibility theories/ A political critique:

- a) Journalism in capitalist societies functions in the interests not of society as a whole, but of dominant groups and classes.
- b) Concepts like free press, democracy, the public interest, objectivity, neutrality seen as myths.
- c) All research processes – including journalism – seen as value-laden and methodological decisions political.
- d) There is Concentration of ownership and control of media (lack of diversity), and the declining vitality of publicly funded media/cultural institutions like public broadcasters (due to privatisation).

There are a number of other problems with modern media:

- Lack of democracy within media organisations;
- Governmental secrecy;
- Institutionalised racist and patriarchal codes;
- Commodification of culture
- The democratic process requires the participation of ordinary citizens as much as those who are prominent.
- Bias against independent thinking.

- Journalists have to remain impartial and value neutral ã therefore no longer the need nor the opportunity to develop a critical perspective from which to assess the events, the issues, the personalities he or she is assigned to cover.
- Bias against the journalist: Objectivity in journalism effectively erodes the very foundation on which rests a responsible press.

It is utmost essential to understand that news is never a mere recording or reporting of the world but a synthetic, value-laden account which carries within it dominant assumptions and ideas of the society within which it is produced. Media practices do not reflect a genuine public spiritedness but rather a concern to boost sales or improve ratings. The increasing media emphasis on infotainment has accompanied the depoliticising of civil society. For example, it likely would not be socially responsible to report how the terrorist, using some new method, evaded security measures and smuggled a bomb onto a commercial airline.