Media Initiatives in Strengthening Inter-Ethnic Unity in Afghanistan

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Abstract

The main purpose of the present paper is to analyse the role of the media in strengthening interethnic unity in Afghanistan. The media is considered to be the best tool for influencing public opinion, which is currently being pursued by governments and various private institutions to influence public opinion in order to achieve political, social, cultural and economic goals. Findings show that media messages help people in imagining of better live and better understand humanity. Because society needs to be aware of change and this awareness can only be reflected on a large scale through media. Seventy percent of respondents confirm the ability of the media to strengthen interethnic unity.

Keywords — *Media, Television, unity, awareness, conflict, Freedom of Speech, Afghanistan.*

I. INTRODUCTION

It is more than half a century, the people of Afghanistan suffer tremendous problems caused by internal wars, ignorance, discrimination and ethnic blasphemy, and these disputes have become the greatest challenge to achieving a national unity and permanent peace. The combination of political parties over the past decades in Afghanistan shows that in this country, more than any other factor, ethnicity has been more controversial and has always been the biggest obstacle to national unity process. In Afghanistan there is not even a political party consisting of all ethnicities.

In this case one of the most important thing that Afghanistan's people need, it is nothing but living in a peaceful atmosphere, united and without interethnic conflicts.

After collapse of Taliban in 2001, the media have grown both in quantity and quality aspects and have played a significant role in raising public awareness in Afghanistan.

Analysing the role of media in interethnic unity in Afghanistan can be very helpful for both government policy makers and media owners to play a powerful role in solidarity in Afghanistan.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

So far, no scholars have specifically investigated the role of the media in strengthening interethnic unity in Afghanistan. The closest research on this issue outside of Afghanistan is a research paper by Morteza Nourmohammadi, Professor of International Relations at Allameh Tabataba'i University in 2017 entitled "The Role of New Media in Resolving International Disputes" (Nourmohammadi, 2017: 61), and Published in the Journal of New Media Studies. Although the article discusses the role of the media in resolving disputes, but on the one hand, he addressed only new media; not all media, and on the other hand, he has discussed international disputes that are completely different in nature and origin Apart from ethnic conflicts.

Another research on this issue was done by Arben Fetoshi, The Role of Media in the European Integration Process: Kosovo Case (Fetoshi, 2017).

Questionnaires responses and focus group discussions with students and men show that ethnic conflicts have different causes. Ethnic bias, low level of community awareness, administrative corruption, foreign intervention and non-institutionalization of the foundations of democracy are among the factors mentioned by respondents. In this research, first, the relationship of each of these elements to the increase of ethnic conflicts is examined and then explain the role and ability of the media in relation to each of these elements.

III. RESEARCH METHOD

Both qualitative and quantitative methods are used in this research. The method of data collection is based on the questionnaire and focus group discussion.

Area sampling technique was applied to select sample for research. The research was carried out in Mazar-e-Sharif, located at the north of Afghanistan. Because Mazar-e-Sharif is the only city in Afghanistan with four ethnic groups (Hazara, Tajik, Pashtun and Uzbek) living almost equally in numbers.

Respondents in the age group of 18-45 were considered for the study. A total of 100 respondents were selected using simple random sample method. A questionnaire was administered to hundreds of men and women equally and the respondents were selected from among the four major ethnic groups (Hazara, Tajik, Pashtun, and Uzbek). Respondents were divided into four categories of 25, female students, male students, and adult male and female adults. This formed the quantitative data.

The qualitative data was derived from discussion and interview with focus groups. There were also two focus group discussion with each adult men and women and students that that the total number of focus group becomes eight focus group discussion. Ten participants were attended in each focus group discussion.

Hypothesis: The media plays an influential role in strengthening of inter-ethnic unity in Afghanistan.

IV. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK - SOCIAL LEARNING THEORY

One of the theories about the social effects of the media is the social learning theory of Albert Bandura, which is particularly related to mass communication. According to this theory, humans do not often learn what they need for guidance and action, not just from experiencing and direct observation, but most of them are learned indirectly, especially through mass media. Bandura's main claim is that most human behavior is perceived by the behavior of others and learned through the pattern. (Mahdizadeh, 2014: 59)

Social learning theory believes that individual learns the proper behaviors through studying and viewing examples of the media, which in fact understands which categories of behaviors are rewarded which categories of behavior are punishable.

The four main social learning processes in Bandura's pattern are: Attention, Retention, Production, and Motivation.

We focus on media texts that relate to our lives, our needs and our personal interests. So remember what we learned and add to the previous knowledge stores to remember it when it's needed. If we do not remember the observed operation, the implementation of the patterning is not possible. The

production process, that is the practical application of the lessons that lead to rewards and punishments; the correct reproduction is the result of the test and the error. Ultimately, the motive is to continue the route more or less. (Mehdi-Zadeh, 2014: 60)

V. OPERATIONAL DEFINITIONS

Media: Media means the instrument of disseminating messages, news and information using the following tools: Electronic Media: radio, television, cable network, and the Internet; Print Media: newspaper, magazine, (weekly, biweekly, monthly, quarterly, annual), gazette, Poster and bulletin; (Afghanistan Media Law, art 3)

Ethnic Group: An ethnic group has a distinct cultural tradition that its own members identify with and that might or might not be recognized by others (Tichler, 2011:221; Glazer and Moynihan, 1975).

VI. FINDINGS

A. *The role of the media in raising awareness*

After the factors of ethnic discrimination and intervention of foreign countries, the third factor raised by respondents of the questionnaire and participants on ethnic conflicts was the low level of awareness and the non-sufficient level of their social and political insights. In an average, 15% of respondent have responded that lack of awareness can be cause of conflicts among different ethnic groups.
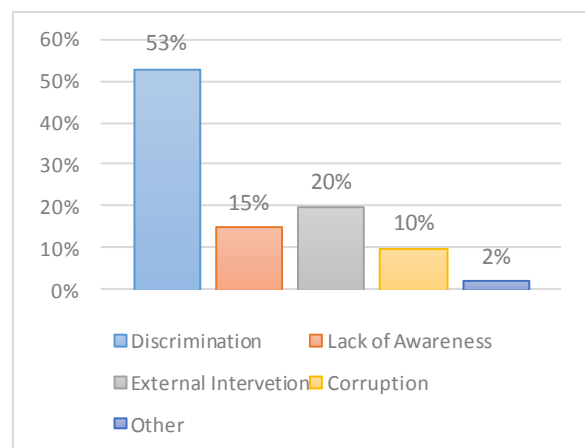

Figure 1: Causes of interethnic conflicts

The experiences of the countries of the world and the history of development of the countries show that it is impossible to achieve a calm and prosperous life and to overcome ethnic conflicts until the intellectual base of the society is not rightly established.

Perhaps this is why God emphasizes on the intellectual base of the community and explicitly states that God does not change the destiny of any nation until it is changed in thoughts and in their opinions. (Ra-ad, verse 11, Holly Quran)

Interethnic unity in Afghanistan is directly related to the intellectual level of the community, and if the people of Afghanistan are not mentally prepared to accept each other, to achieve interethnic unity will be difficult, and even impossible. To achieve this goal, the level of awareness and insight of the community must be highlighted.

Here, awareness raising is about issues that can help the people to understand and accept each other's culture and rights, and recognize national interests. As long as we do not have the enough and accurate knowledge of each other's culture, religions and beliefs, and we do not respect each other's rights, and so long as we do not recognize our national interests from the ethnic interests, we will never be able to interact with each other and peacefully live together.

It is clear that one of the most effective instrument to raise public awareness is the media. Because educating is one of the main functions of the mass media. The media educates the people about the real needs of audiences who focus on social development. (Hasan, 2013: 127)

B. Role of Media Strengthening Interethnic Unity

One of the techniques that media use in broadcasting is regularly repetition of the messages.

Robert Zajonc of the University of Michigan has demonstrated in a laboratory setting that, all other things being equal, the more a person is exposed to an item, the more attractive it is. (Pratkanis, Anthony Aronson Elliot, 2000)

On the other hand, psychological researches have shown that the system of beliefs and personality of humans, as well as the majority of human achievements depend on the function of the unconscious mind, and the media, by sending repeated messages, have a great deal of influence on the unconscious mind. According to psychologists, the first factor for planning the unconscious mind is to receive a signal or a message repeatedly. (Azmandian, 2006: 100)

The media raise the level of awareness of people in society, so that individuals themselves have the ability to recognize what is in the public interest and prevent those that endanger the public interest. For example, an abusive tradition that does not have any logical support is the refusal of marriage between to different ethnic groups.

In general, if we look, in Afghanistan, all the ethnic groups are not interested in marrying their members with members of another ethnic groups. This belief not only widens ethnic distances, which in many cases leads to conflict between the two ethnic groups. However, there is no any obstacle to the marriage of different ethnic groups in Islam and human rights.
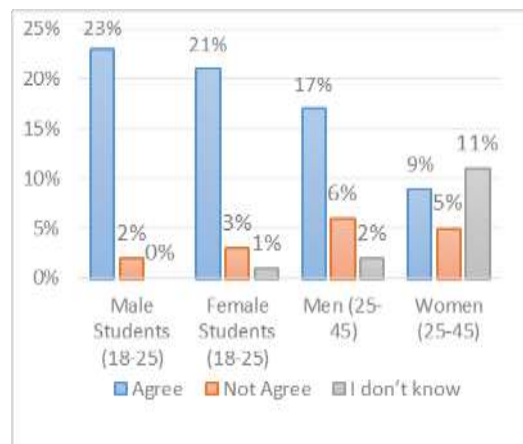

Figure 2: Role of media in strengthening interethnic unity

As you see in the above table, 70 percent of questionnaire respondents are agree that media can play role in interethnic unity in Afghanistan.

Afghanistan is a country where tribal, kinship and ethnic dependencies are much important at the same level among different ethnic groups, and people have a particular respect for these types of ties. The family structure in this country is such that the existence of a small family relationship between the two families can prevent the occurrence of many social problems and abnormalities that may result from the lack of this relationship. One small relationship between two families from two different ethnic groups can create unity between two tribes and will influence on ethnics.

Bartal and Rosen, have introduced an indirect peace education model in uncontrollable conflicts. Instead of waiting for the conflict to end and use the Peace Education Model to resolve the conflict, they recommend that the model of excellence education be a form of education that is consistent with other aspects of peace education such as identity, Environment, ethnic unity, human rights and conflict resolution skills. (Normohammadi, 2017: 74)

In the Bartal and Rosen model, media can play a very active role. Because information is the most basic element of the implementation of this model and mass medium are tools that can send information

to a large number of audiences in the least time, by writing articles in print media and websites, as well as launching a conversation program and The debate on radio and television calls for the audience (the two probable sides of conflicts) to think and contemplate.

C. Inter-Ethnic Unity and Freedom of Speech

Article thirty-four of the constitution of Afghanistan, which refers to freedom of expression, invokes explicitly that every Afghan has the right to disclose his thoughts by means of speech, writing, image, or any other means by observing the constitution declares and it is only possible to achieve this right in a democratic system.

One of the issues that has always fuelled ethnic conflict is the lack of discourse space and the openness of the door to dialogue. "Now, Afghanistan is a democratic country in terms of the political structure, it is clear that the quality and efficiency of democracy is directly related to literate and aware citizens. There are many media outlets, including print, audio, video, and online in Afghanistan, where most people, especially young people, have access to media, so there is a good opportunity to create constructive discourse regarding to important issues, and media must be used effectively". Said Hakim, one of FGD participant.

D. Relationship between Corruption and Ethnic Conflicts

Another essential prerequisite for interethnic unity is justice and the fight against corruption.

On the basis of transparency international's annual Corruption Perceptions Index 2017, Afghanistan is the fourth most corrupt country in the world.

Corruption from two addresses can lead to ethnic conflicts. First, Corruption makes people unable to work on a merit basis. This makes people think they have been victims of ethnic discrimination.

Secondly, those involved in corruption are trying to maintain their personal status by fomenting ethnic conflicts. They know well that ethnic conflicts gives them the possibility to easily discriminate again other ethnic groups and will always be supported by their ethnic group against other ethnic groups and even against the law.

The media can play a very important role in eradicating corruption; first of all, media inform the people by different political, social and cultural programs and directly or indirectly educate then to stand up against corruption. The people also can share their opinion, experiences and problems related to corruption through the media.

Second, media, along with the role played as a communication bridge between government and citizens, also monitor the functioning of government institutions. Providing documentary reports and accurate information on the functions of government institutions are outstanding works media can do to prevent corruption in Afghanistan.

However, the role of the media in influencing and opinion making cannot be overlooked, but the magnitude of this influence is on the youth, which fortunately, the largest population of Afghanistan is youth.

young people use media resources to spend time, solving personal difficulties, affecting friends, declaring independence from parents and other institutions of power, and for building up and maintaining individual and collective identities... (Lull, 1379: 239)

Galton believes those media outlets that focus on the suffering of people from all sides, and identify all the evil people, empathize and promote understanding. This makes the parties involved in the conflict more ethical and cautious in using violent means. Making the conflict more ethical and cautious in the application of violent means. People are less likely to support conflicts if the tragedy of war or conflict and its catastrophic impact on the masses are accurately outlined. (Galtung, 2002: 268)

VII. CONCLUSIONS

Media as an influential institution of public opinion, can enhance the unity among peoples, promote democratic values and strengthen freedom of expression. The media can stand up to corruption by providing documentary reports as well as monitoring government functions.

The media can change people's vision regarding the modern universal values, such as democracy, human rights and women's rights, and teach them that all human beings are equal and there is no difference between humans.

On the basis of professional independence and ethical codes of journalism, the media gains credibility among audiences. Because people usually believe that the media can handle their problems as a tribune of the people.

A mass medium, at whatever level it seems balanced and impartial among its audience, will gain more power to influence people's thoughts and beliefs.

The impartiality feature makes people more confident on the media and accepts what they receive through the media and put into practice in their lives.

Hence, the media are the most effective means of strengthening interethnic unity and eliminating ethnic conflicts, and with the functions they can help the Afghan government in the direction of nation-building.

The media can inform their audience in the form of various programs in different fields, and help them find better information from their surroundings.

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