**Lecture # 5**

**Political Communication in Developed and Developing Countries**

Asian developing countries have some similarities with African countries but the socio-cultural and economic conditions of the people of Asian countries are different. Although in these countries the use of mobile phones has got tremendous boost, the use of internet is still very less in most of the countries of Asia. There may be several reasons for this but the most obvious reasons may be the low income and education levels of the general public to use internet.

In the developing countries of Asia usually governments have a strong control over media organizations and the media content is heavily influenced by the governmental policies. The states define the limits of media freedom and media organizations are not allowed to cross these limits. In these situations, usually governments misuse media for their own protection. Propaganda and censorship are common devices in the hands of governments in the developing countries. For example, in 2009 Reporters without borders listed 68 imprisoned internet users worldwide8. In countries like China, the governments have thousands of employees and civil servants in their internet police force. Their job is to continuously monitor the internet sources and if something against the government appears, they take action against the person responsible for the act.

But now there are also some positive signals regarding the positive use of new media even in the developing countries. The basic important thing is that free and independent media is necessary for democracy in the developing countries. Only a free media can guarantee the free flow of information in the society and can open horizons of participation among the citizens.

**Bridging the Gap between Developed and Developing Countries**

This is a fact that the gap between the developed and developing countries is becoming wider and wider day by day. This is because of the technological advancements and developments of the developed countries. Most of the developing countries lack in the technological developments. The other fact is that in the developing countries, only a few people have access to new media technologies especially internet. Especially, in some of the countries of Asia and Africa, the access to internet is very limited. In the developed countries like USA and European countries, almost everyone has a mobile phone and access to internet while this is not the situation in most of the developing countries.

This is the need of the day to bridge the gap between the advanced countries and the developing nations of the word, between the rich and the poor countries of the world. This is the age of new media technology where no one can live in isolation. This is the moral duty of the rich nations of the world to help the poor nations in providing them the new media facilities so that their people can take part in the process of political and economic participation. Once the gap between the developed and the developing nations is filled or at least reduced, the era of a true and fruitful communication between the world nations will begin. To achieve this objective, the developed countries should assist the developing countries to provide them technical facilities to facilitate their public.

Secondly, there is no justification to transfer the political role of mass media of the developed countries to the developing nations. Developing countries have their own socio-cultural situations and economic conditions. Many people cannot participate in the political discussions because of their own socio-cultural situations and the economic conditions of their societies. People of many countries of Asia and Africa have a very little access to digital media. Once the developing nations succeed to achieve the facilities of new media technologies, it can be expected a real positive political change in these countries.

**Situation in Pakistan**

It can be seen a tremendous advancement in the field of Media in Pakistan. Until 2002 there was only one state owned television channel (PTV) in the country while now there are 83 television channels licensed by the Government of Pakistan. Until 2002, there was not a single FM Radio station but now 124 FM Radio stations are working under the license of Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority. Twenty years ago only half dozen English and Urdu newspapers could be seen in the market but now hundreds of newspapers are available in the market among which almost two dozen newspapers can be called as International Standard newspapers. Furthermore, dozens of very high quality magazines are also available in market which attracts specific kind of audience like sports magazines, women’s magazines, political journals and general interest magazines etc. In short, Pakistani media got a big development in quantity as well as quality in the last one decade.

The Government has a very strong hold on Media in Pakistan. The state owned Pakistan Television can’t broadcast even a single line against the Government. Private TV channels are kept under strict observation by the Government Authorities and their broadcast is suspended when they telecast something against the Government policies. the Government pays huge revenue in shape of advertisements to those TV channels and newspapers who favor the Government policies and the media organizations that don’t do this, have to deprive of this money. Ultimately, media organizations support the Governmental policies to get a bigger share of the advertisements revenue. even the private media organization including newspapers and the television channels most of the time support the governmental policies to get a bigger share of the government advertisement. However, with the emergence of a number of media organizations in the country now people have different options to get the latest information and it has become difficult to hide the facts from the public.

The new media revolution has strengthened the communities in Pakistan just like the other parts of the developing world. In a nation of 170 million people, the number of mobile phone connections has exceeded the figure of 90 million. It means that almost every second person has a mobile. Most of the people have more than one mobile phone with them. The mobile phone and its use is the cheapest thing available in the country. Even the companies are offering their Sims almost free of cost. In Urban areas almost every person is having a mobile phone in his or her hand and people look busy in capturing the moments of their lives in their phones. The use of internet has also boosted with a great speed. Although more than half population of the country is illiterate and thus unable to use internet, the approximate number of internet users is more than 18 million. People living in the urban areas especially youth are very fond of internet. Seldom there is a home, office or shop, where there is no computer with an internet connection. Boys and girls are very fond of using Face book, Twitter and You Tube etc.

Use of new media technologies for political communication is yet in its evolution stage in Pakistan. Political parties have established their own websites showing their achievements, policies, objectives, manifestoes, etc. Even religious political parties have their own websites. These websites are updated on regular basis and they display the latest statements and activities of their leaders and their viewpoint on different national and international issues and events. These websites played a vital role in the 2008 elections of Pakistan. The workers of the political parties are also using the new media in support of their parties as well as propagation against the opponent parties. You tube is carrying hundred of such videos.

One of the important advancement in this regard, is the website of the Election Commission of Pakistan that played a significant role in the last electionsIt displayed the details of the election constituencies, the contesting candidates, the rules and regulations of elections, guidance for the voters etc. The website displayed the recent detail of the election results of different constituencies. Although these results were announced later than the unofficial results of the private TV channels, even then, these were authentic results and more reliable than unofficial sources. Even in the non-election timings, this website has the most updated information about the political parties, their party position, the lists of the members of the National and provincial assemblies and Senate etc.

Some NGOs also observed the elections with the help of their own websites and data bases. Some television channels conducted their on-line polls before the elections and predicted the victory ofthe ruling party of the country.

The workers and agents of the political parties made extensive use of mobile phones and short message service for political communication during the election campaign and the elections. Some candidates sent text messages to their voters to convince them to cast vote for them. The Election 2008 was perhaps the first election in the history of Pakistan in which new media technology was used by the Government of Pakistan as well as by the political parties of the country. Hundreds of websites are still working in the country for the political awareness of the general public. The political parties are running their own websites, updating them regularly and getting the feedback of their workers as well as the general masses.

This is a huge change in the political atmosphere of the country and it is hoped that with the advancement of the new media technology the political situation will be changed. It is also hoped that the new media technology will be helpful in promoting a political culture of tolerance and understanding. However, the challenge lies in the availability of the internet facility in the far flung rural areas where majority of the people are illiterate and thus unable to use new media technology. Furthermore, their financial problems are also a hurdle in the use of internet. Once these problems are solved, and the internet facility becomes available to larger segments of the society, there will be more positive change in the political attitudes and behaviors of people. It is expected that the new media technology will play a pivotal role in the next national elections of Pakistan.