**Media Literacy and media landscape in Bangladesh**

**Media Landscape:**

Bangladesh has a long and proud history of mass media. The first printed newspaper was published in our country in 1780 (The Bengal Gazette), the first newspaper in Bangla was published in 1818 (Samachar Darpan). Radio broadcast began in Bangladesh in 1939 while Television started to operate in 1964. In its long journey, the mass media in Bangladesh has gone through a lot of changes and developments and now it stands on a strong footing.

Media in Bangladesh is very active and vibrant. Especially, over the last three decades, the media has emerged as more vibrant and expanded in size and diversity. Rapidly increasing numbers of newspapers, TV channels, FM Radio, community Radio, online news portals are producing news and views incessantly to a huge number of audiences. Technological advancement has brought the receiving device out of four walls. Mobile phones are now being widely used to watch TV, listening to Radio, reading online newspapers and also online version of print newspapers. Social media and digital applications have wide opened the horizon of a virtual world, unimaginable three decades ago.

As Bangladesh has a huge population of 160 million, the prospect of media market is very high here. All people have media access and they are media responsive. Media has a vital role in informing, educating and entertaining the people. Indeed, the media in Bangladesh plays an important role in making people aware of different socio-political issues. Media responsiveness in Bangladesh is evident in the sheer numbers of media. Currently 1119 dailies are published in Bangladesh, 26 private TV channels are operating along with 4 state-run TV channels. More than a dozen private TV channels are in the process of starting their operation. Beside 12 Government Radio stations 22 FM Radios and 17 Community Radios are in operation now. A few more have been given license to operate shortly.

It may be mentioned here that although the number of print media was considerably good even before 1990s, there were only state-run electronic media in Bangladesh namely, Bangladesh Television and Bangladesh Betar (Radio). Since the spectrum for broadcast was widely opened due to technological inventions, Bangladesh, too, took the benefit of it by opening its sky for private entrepreneurs. The Government of Bangladesh, under Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, took a liberal policy in this regard allowing the first private satellite TV channel to come into being in 1996.First radio station in private sector started operation in 1999. In the early 1990s there was only one mobile phone operator in Bangladesh but the Government in mid 90s allowed more operators to compete leading the sector to thrive over the last two decades. The number of cell phone users has reached nearly 120 million.

With the development of media, journalism has also been established as a respectable profession in Bangladesh. Journalist community is very active and organized here. They have professional unions from central to sub-district levels and there are press clubs at grass roots level across the country. There are extensive opportunities for education and training on journalism in Bangladesh as most of the general public universities and many of the public universities have journalism/ communication departments. Government Training Institutes like National Institute of Mass Communication (NIMCO) and Bangladesh Press Institute (PIB) provide training for working journalists and media personnel.

Now we can have a look at Radio and TV broadcast scenario in Bangladesh-

**Radio Broadcast:**

State owned: Bangladesh Betar has been market leader since 1939 and currently it has 12 stations. It broadcasts programmes mainly in Bangla. It also broadcasts some programmes in 5 foreign languages namely English, Hindi, Urdu, Arabic and Nepalese. It also broadcasts programmes for ethnic minorities in Bangladesh. Programmes include entertainment, news and current affairs.

Private FM Radio: First Private FM Radio station started its operation in 1999. In the last decade Bangladesh has witnessed strong growth in this sector. They have become popular with young people. They offer music, other entertainment programmes, news and current affairs.

Community Radio: Target listeners are rural communities in Bangladesh. 32 stations have been granted licenses of which 17 are operating currently. These specialized, not for profit radio stations aim to inform and analyze information that is relevant to people living in rural areas, with a particular focus on agriculture, health, education, disaster management and on children and women issues.

Foreign Broadcasters: Major International news agencies like the BBC, Voice of America and Deutsche welle broadcast programmes in Bangla which are quite popular with the listeners.

Online Radio: A recent trend, which mainly caters to online fans of Bangladeshi music.

**Television Broadcast:**

State- run Television: Bangladesh Television (BTV), the state- run television started its operation in 1964. There are 4 Government TV channels now (terrestrial and satellite). They broadcast programmes which include entertainment, education, information and news. As public service broadcasters many of the programmes are dedicated for providing education and information on public interest issues.

Private TV Channels: First private TV channel came into being in 1996. At present 26 private TV channels are operating in Bangladesh. All of them are satellite channels broadcasting news, entertainment and other programmes. 19 of them are general, 6 news channels and 1music channel. More 16 satellite private channels are in the process of starting their operation.

Foreign Channel: More than a hundred foreign channels are broadcasting in Bangladesh through satellite transmission. Some of them are international news channels like the BBC, CNN and Al Jazeera.

Emergence of new media in the media system of Bangladesh is a new reality. The country is now connected with Information Super highway by SEA-ME-WE 4 submarine cable. Only a decade ago few students on the university campuses had laptop computers. But now it has become a common gadget used by the students and young people as well. There are computer and internet facilities in Government and private offices, on university campuses and in strategic points in all cities, towns and union headquarters. These facilities have reached even the village areas. All the people of Bangladesh have web access through computers or smart phones. People can access to electronic and print media directly or through online since electronic media and newspapers have their online versions.

Taking the benefits of the new media Bangladesh is connecting itself with the global media landscape. Expansion of social media is very remarkable here as the number of cell phones has reached nearly 120 million. This advancement of technology has initiated revolutionary changes in the world of communication on the one hand and on the other, its misuse is causing some adverse affects too. To prevent its misuse the Government of Bangladesh is taking some steps to formulate some laws and rules in this area. The Government is facilitating the convergence of various digital technologies with a view to bringing the overall media system under well management system. In order to ensure better communication services Bangladesh is going to launch its own satellite namely ‘Bangabandhu Satellite’ in the orbit this year which will widen the broadcast spectrum even more. Primary Service Area (PSA) of it will be Bangladesh and neighbouring countries while Secondary Service Area (SSA) will be South East Asia, Europe, MENA and East Africa depending on orbital slot.

Due to the advancement of media we have become the citizens of a global village. Media is our window to the world. Modern communication facilities and media are bringing the people living in different places in the world closer making an opportunity to get to know and understand each other, which is essential for world harmony.

**Media Literacy**

Our age is the age of information. At this age of superabundance of information all citizens should learn to judge the reliability of news reports and other sources of information that is passed along their communication network and media outlets. The concept of media literacy has emerged from this realization. The objective of media literacy is to enable the citizens to use their critical reasoning faculty so that they can make rational use of the news and information they receive from various media sources. In other words, media literacy enables them to judge the reliability of news and information to prepare them for taking informed decisions.

As we mentioned earlier, Due to some technological inventions we have access to unlimited sources of information, as if, we are submerged in the world of information. Super abundance of information also creates confusion among its receivers. So the readers/audience should learn what information or to what extent of a piece of information can be accepted or rejected. Mass media has a great influence in our everyday life. It can be said that it contributes to mould our current culture. Analyzing mass communication is a set of skills essential for survival in today’s society. If we (readers/ audience) do not learn to control the mass communication that dominates our world we should expect that it will continue to control us. Hence, the necessity of media literacy.

In the media reporting, ethical aspects are sometimes ignored which causes damage to individuals and institutions. There is a lack of quality and in-depth analysis of reports as desired by the reader/audience. Media management does not seem to care much about needs and expectations of the audience. On the other hand, the audience is unaware of the difficulties and constraints which media faces in making media products and distribution. The gap between the producer and the consumer is high. So media literacy is essential for both the audience and the media personnel.

Media literacy is context and culture specific. Every individual lives in their own cultural context and they decode and internalize information based on their own context. On the other hand, each medium supplies information that is the product of the objective of the provider. So, there is no ‘non-involved’ supplier of information and neither it is ‘neutral’ in the conventional sense. Therefore, it is the responsibility of the consumer to decode the media product and learn what it says and how that may serve and harm. The better media literacy of the audience the better chance of verifying information served to them. At this age of multi-media, media literacy has become even more important. Since media and the audience have interactive roles, the audience can influence the market if they are media literate. If the clients are not satisfied, suppliers can lose their market. Moreover,

If the audience critically analyze the media product and question about its reliability, media organizations become cautious which ensures their accountability to the audience/ readers.

In the context of Bangladesh, we have mentioned earlier that there is a great prospect of media market here due to its huge population and easy accessibility to media. People are politically conscious and highly responsive to media. News and talk shows are very popular items produced by media. Even ordinary people show interest in discussion on current socio-political issues. Therefore, in the context of Bangladesh media literacy is very significant.

In the study of Communication media literacy is becoming an important subject and many universities in the world are teaching media literacy as an independent subject of study. Some universities of Bangladesh have already introduced the subject in their curricula. It may be mentioned here that in Bangladesh there are 37 public, 92 private and 2 internationally funded universities. Most of the general public universities and many private universities have mass communication and journalism departments. So there is a great prospect of media literacy study in Bangladesh. Beside the universities, there are training institutes for journalists such as National Institute for Mass Communication and the Press Institute of Bangladesh run by the Government. Since media literacy education is also necessary for the people working in media, these institutes are taking initiatives to introduce media literacy in their curricula.

In addition to the initiatives taken by individual countries, OIC Media Forum, IBRAF can also play an important role in promoting media literacy education in the member countries. It can facilitate cooperation between member countries in this area. Some member countries have great facilities for media education which they may offer to other countries. IBRAF can coordinate in this regard. IBRAF can also launch a media literacy forum for the people of the member countries using social networking system. It will create awareness among people about media literacy which may help reduce the dependence of the media of OIC countries on Western sources, which often portray Islam and the Muslims negatively. IBRAF can also organize regional seminar/workshop on media literacy to promote the subject making guidelines for member countries.

Media literacy, on the one hand, can make us informed and responsible citizens and on the other, make the media accountable to the audience. By the interaction of the media and the audience in a positive way we can make healthy and balanced societies which can eventually contribute to make a world of harmony.