CHAPTER 3

CONCEPT AND GROWTH OF COMMUNITY

JOURNALISM

3.1 DEFINING COMMUNITY

A community is a group of beings sharing an environment, normally with shared and common interest. If we talked about human communities ‘intent, belief, resources, preferences, needs, risks and a number of other conditions may be present common affecting the identity of the participants and their degree of cohesiveness’ (Virtual University of Pakistan). Generally, geography, history, ethnicity, economic condition, political identity, profession, gender, age, religion and of course language is some common factors of defining community. But within a specific category as mentioned above may have some sub categories where a distinct community may occur. Within the economic condition, a rural and urban and also semi urban type of communities may be there. Also within a linguistic community, there may be religious divisions.

Community may also be defined sometimes in the geographical areas. Plain area, hilly areas, some specific regions due to accessibility may also have a different identity of a community.

The word community originally comes from the Latin word Communis which mean ‘common, public and shared by all or many’. The term has also denoted the meaning of togetherness, local or smallness and intimate. So a community must be
small and hence its togetherness brings the intimacy to the community. The word ‘Community’ is used in the English language since 14th century. The concept of community then further developed in the later part i.e. 19th century. (Definition and characteristics of communities). The earlier Latin word originally denoted the development of a social grouping and nature of relationship among them. But in present day, this word in English incorporate the greater meaning to contrast the dynamics and relationships of residents both in local and complex urbanized or industrial societies. According to Ontario Healthy Communities Coalition – communities are usually identified as three major types in present days, viz. 1) Geographic communities which share physical space; as a result residents come into contact with each other by virtue of proximity, rather than intent. However they should have a sense of belonging and hold at least some values and symbols in common. 2) Communities of Interest which is sometimes referred as ‘communities within communities’. The members of these communities choose to associate to a group on the basis of common interest or shared concerns. 3) Virtual communities which is new concept coming after the internet dominating the communication system.

Though we have discussed the concept of the community here but it is very difficult to define the community in social science. The dictionary meaning does not always cover the modern concept of community and thus the attempts of defining community by many scholars in different ways. Some of the definitions given here:

Community can be defined by the development of relationships and systems within a location or organization (Stamm & Fortini Campbell, 1983). This concept
emphasizes mostly on the relationships i.e. friendship with the other members of
the community, location or duration of stay in that place with a relationship to the
peoples or neighbors, their participation in the community works, their services to
the people of their locality and sharing of their thoughts or exchange their views
for the up-liftment of the community. This is almost like to the modern societal
concept of community of a small town or locality which has at least some common
institutions of the society.

The most essential characteristics of a community is a group of people. This is the
fundamental and most essential element of a community. Also the group of people
should have a definite locality. But it does not mean that they have to inhabitant in
that area always, they may migrate to other places also but their primary identity
will be from their original place of inhabitant or that territorial area. For example
many Assamese peoples are living other parts of the country or in foreign
countries, but as they are originally from Assam so they are counted as a member
of Assamese community. Also it is important that majority of the members of the
community or group should reside in a close and static territory. In case of
Assamese, majority of the Assamese peoples are residing in Assam and sharing the
common place and language, so they are Assamese.

To become a community, members of the community or group should have a
community sentiment which works as a bonding among the members of the
community. As because they share the common living area for long time and they
have a belongingness of that place or locality. So they are also emotionally
attached with the place and the members of community. This emotional identity is
the key factor that makes them separate from the other communities. By birth the
people of a community are become member to that community. So in other words, the permanency is there.

Members of a particular community are similar in number of ways. They share same locality, have the same culture, language and also the physical structure, trade and customs, tradition etc. The community has a definite social structure to follow and in their social life. They also share a common name according to their characteristics or place.

Though community is primarily a fact of bonding on the major basis of language or dialect but there are other factors also which make a bonding community. Specially in the country like India, where various cast, class, geography, religion, profession are there, the definition of community even more complex. In India for example, have the caste system in various society thus make a community though not very large in most of the cases, but have a strong community bonding among them. Also classes make the community bonding. Rural-urban or semi urban areas also make a community. In some cases, the profession or the campus makes a community, just like the Oil fields employees colony or tea industry employees comprises a community in Assam. Tea community though has a campus as physical boundary, but as a emotional bonding even ex-tea labourers or employees are also included in the tea community. An interesting phenomenon is the tea community in Assam that is based on the immigrant labourer population from various parts of India to Assam. It may be mentioned here that this tea community in Assam included more than thirty different linguistic and geographical communities of India. During the process of assimilation they are emotionally attached and formed a group hence make the tea community in Assam. Another
interesting characteristic is seen amongst the Karbis in Assam. According to the place of residence, they are differentiate as Hills Karbis residing in the Karbi Anglong District enjoying the facility of Scheduled Tribe status and on the other hand, the same Karbi people residing in the plains areas in Assam are not getting the same status. Hence, there is a division of two groups or community within the Karbi community.

A community may also be ‘imagined’ community or a special community outside the geographical or location constraints which may shared physical characteristics such as identification of ethnic group (Viswanath, K. & Arora, P, 2000). There is some other physical condition which formed the community such as sexual orientation, profession, status of citizenship identity etc. A community may also be on the basis of the political affiliation. Most of geographical boundaries are also due to the political influence, hence makes a community.

In Assam, major communities are based on the linguistic characteristics followed by the geographical locations. There are also dialects which also makes a sub community within the larger Assamese community such as Kamrupia, Goalparia etc which otherwise a geographical location. Here mutual intelligibility is of one sided many a case. For example, the Goalparia or Kamrupi dialect is not cent percent mutually intelligible to the standard dialect speakers of the same Assamese linguistic community.

Community overlapping makes the concept of community very complex and “Understanding the community entails understanding it in a number of ways. Whether or not the community is defined geographically, it still has a geographic
context- a setting that it exists in.”(http://ctb.ku.edu). The concept of community may be overlap often. A member of a community may be the member of another community or more than one community based on their trade, gender, culture, education, religion etc.

3.2 Defining journalism

In many cases, we understand the process of mass communication synonymous with the activity of journalism. It may be because, the activity of journalism happened through the mass communication media. But mass communication is not always only the confined to the activity of journalism. It may go beyond that. Where mass communications includes the greater areas of activities including the motivating people, informing people and entertain people through the mass media, journalism is only a part of these activities of mass communication.

Main objectives of journalism are to inform, to interpret, to guide and to entertain. Through the activities journalism makes people educate by imparting the information and interpretation of anything new happenings in the world. The information may be of immediate importance or may be important in long run. The information whether it is important for the human race in short time or long run, this affects the life of the people anyway. So we need every information which can change our life or livelihood in our lifetime or the next generations to come. If we considered this activity only, then also journalism is un-ignorable to any human being for a better life. Besides these four major objectives of journalism, it performs other some important functions also. Circulation of advertising is one of
the such important function through which vast mass information send to the mass people which we hardly taken into the purview of journalism or news.

To gives news is the prime function or first concern of journalism. Because of the news function of journalism, it enjoys the protection in the society. News circulation among the mass people gives it’s a sense of responsibility, which in return journalist get rights and privileges in the society. For the function of news or reporting, an individual in society feels a sense of security and identity.

Journalism though have many functions and objectives, but mainly related to the news, is it soft or hard news. All that happens in the society or in the world, if such happenings have the interest for the people, all thought, action

and ideas which have relation with the society or people or greater interest of the human being and other creatures in the world became the materials for the journalists.

Though act of journalism we are experiencing every day, but the definition of the term ‘journalism’ is not same for the interpreters. This differs according to their point of view. If we go through the meaning of journalism in dictionary, the journalism is “the activity or job of collecting, writing and editing news stories for newspapers, magazines, television or radio” (Merriam-webster.com/dictionary/journalism). This definition also goes on as its full meaning giving a description of activities like “the collection and editing of news for presentation through the media, writing characterized by a direct presentation of facts or description of
events without an attempt at interpretation and writing designed to appeal to current popular taste or public interest.”

According to The American press Institute, journalism is the ‘activity of gathering, assessing, creating and presenting news and information. It is also the product of these activities.” (American Press Institute). The activity of gathering news or information may be professional or not. Earlier definitions of the journalism was mainly included some mass media like newspaper, magazine, radio or television, but now along with these some new mass media also emerged. These new kind of mass media should have to be counted when we talked about the medium of content delivery system of journalism in modern era.

Journalism should give the truth to the people without any biasness. So as it is said that every man is a political person, it is very hard task for a journalist to maintain his or her status as neutral person in producing news or information when they do journalism.

3.3 Society, human civilization, communication and civil society

Journalism has a relationship with the society as it is part of it. In the society, information is anyway precious. In the modern time, thus journalism through its activities of gathering information and guided the people for various new things is more applicable for everyday living. Society means a group of people with some common characteristics sharing among them. So in this common sharing process, the media can play the role of catalyst to minimizing the gap of ideas and thought of the members of the society. Society needs a constant connection among the
members for effective development of the society which also is done with the communication process. But the journalism or through the mass communication process it can be done in a vast scale with minimum time frame with the same intensity.

The story of human civilization is a story of development of communication process. Since the ancient period the communication were present in the group of human being. Gradually after development of language the group of human being became a society in true sense. And this could be happened only because of the communication.

The modern society along with the concept of democracy and development, the activity of journalism for communication became more important. The journalism with the mass media is playing a crucial role in uniting and exchanging the ideas, feelings and freedom. Democracy also leads to freedom, where the journalism has a great role to play. Journalism is also a bye product of the democracy which gives platform to express the every body’s idea and feeling.

3.4 Concept of Community Journalism

Community Journalism is as its name suggest is community based media. This is local oriented, small and unique for a particular community. Community Journalism though it is small but should be very professional in news coverage with a special focus on the small community of a city, suburbs, small towns, small administrative or geographical area which forms a community. It is not about the big community such as metropolitan or state or the national news. But it may cover
the wider topics of national or even international level according to the importance or effect that news has on the local readers. So community journalism concentrate on the effect the news have whether it is local or national in coverage.

In the discourse on theories and functions of journalism, many scholars used different terms to refer to Community Journalism such as Public Journalism and Civic journalism. These terms are used interchangeably very often to represent the concept of community journalism with a common goal or to do well for the public, civic society or community with the concept that journalist is a member of that community who gathers new stories for good or development.

The term Community journalism was first used by Kenneth R. Byerly. He was a newspapers publisher and later on joined as professor at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in 1957. He was teaching a course called country weekly newspaper production. Byerly was not satisfied with the title of the course, because it covers only the weekly newspapers of the countryside. There are also some newspapers same in nature in the urban areas. Also there were some daily newspapers along with weeklies of same nature. So with the name of weekly newspaper of countryside, the course was incomplete for Byerly as it does not have the reflection of other newspapers of same nature. Byerly used a new term for his course as ‘Community Journalism” which means all newspapers published in aim to serve a particular community or society irrespective of its place of publication and periodicity.

The term community journalism is a comprehensive and guided the newspaper publisher in second half of the last century. It covers the newspapers published
from the rural areas along with, sub urban and district headquarters. These newspapers have the same categories of news with a focus on the local news and other news which is more relevant to that area. Community journalism, as many people thinks, is not always the not for profit, but these newspapers has also a strong policy to make profit and sustain in that environment. A major difference of the big newspapers or metro newspapers with community newspapers is that community newspapers formed a relationship with the local people or in technical term the members of the readers or community. Byerly (1961) in his book *Community Journalism*, explain the concept of community journalism as “Community newspapers today are burgeoning in big city and sub-urban areas and have new strength in small cities and towns. They offer much in employment, satisfaction, income, service, and ownership. A reason for success of these …… newspaper is their “friendly neighbor’ relationship with readers. This affinity also creates problems for community newspapers which differ from those of the metropolitan press.” (Kenneth R. Byerly, 1961). Here, the term community newspaper was synonymous to the community journalism. His concept of friendly neighbor is also he describes as the nearness to people which is the unique characteristics the community newspapers have and big newspapers or metropolitan newspapers don’t have. This is also a problem sometime for the journalist or editor to accommodate the story in their newspaper.

Community Journalism is also responsible for transforming scattered peoples to make a group through its practice of development journalism. Robert C. Moore and Tamara L. Gillis (2005) have described the community journalism from the development point of view. They describe the developmental activities of one
greater society as many of the developed countries helped the underdeveloped countries with money or cash to improve the societies and economy. It was not so effective because of inefficiency, lack of experience and corruption which led to a new initiative of the donor countries to operate projects with providing materials to be used in development rather than cash. But a dependency on donor countries was remaining for a long time permanent improvement of livelihood. It was experienced and felt that without transforming the people into a bonded community, there was no commitment. Also the efforts of the donor countries were never sustained. Thus the need of developmental journalism which is also can be said as a part of the community journalism. So, community journalism encourages journalists to go into the depth of the problems of a society or community to address the basic value and principles of journalism in with a motto of social change and do community empowerment initiatives. W. Schramm (1964) described this phenomena of community journalism as an extension of mainstream journalism for maturing a community to help nations grow and to assist in the rapid increase in the productivity of society. He advocated the media for its ability to work as a force multiplier in bringing development and social change. Media, according to Schramm, is able to ‘broaden horizons, focus attention and raise aspirations, create a climate for development, help change attitudes or valued practices, feed interpersonal channels, confer status, enforce norms and help form tastes’ through its three great communication tasks – as watchmen, as participants in the decision process and as teacher. (W. Schramm, 1964)

Very often we found that many people mixed the idea of community journalism with community media. Community media is an institution with a limited
community focus specially a geographical community. It is a medium which is located in the community area.

But community Journalism is a process which connect a specific community with their media whether it is print, electronic or digital. Community Journalism works in raising the consciousness among the people. This also helps to identify the issue of a community and takes part in resolution. Though community journalism helps the people to solve a problem or resolve an issue but it actually try to involve the community to solve their own problem by themselves.

In the process of community journalism, the journalists goes into the depth of the community on various issues carefully listen to them. This characteristic of community involvement by the journalists creates a positive environment towards the relationship between the media and the people of the community. It has also an impact on the creating social or community bonding among the members.

Though the meaning of the two terms ‘community media’ and ‘community journalism’ are different but these two has the same goal—i.e. to serve a particular society or community for the development. Both of them are aims at to improve the community lives better by providing them required information in a customized manner, increase participation in the community affairs and try to involve the community to search for the needs for betterment of lives. In other words both ‘community media’ and ‘community journalism’ has an agenda set for the respective community.
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