CHAPTER IV
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4. Media Literacy Discourse and Social Dynamics

Discourse on literacy is as old as the human civilization. Literacy has always been a catalyst of change. The context of practicing literacy and its promotion is partly ideological and partly material, which in turn becomes phenomenological. Theorists who have dealt with the study of literacy have deliberated upon the condition of literacy and its impact on social change; as they argue, it was literacy that took the society to a new stage of modernity (Olson, 1991) and later to a postmodern condition with a change in the condition of our life and living. From varied contexts, literacy is related to different aspects of the world society. Benedict Anderson (2006) relates nationalist consciousness and the growth of capitalism in Europe to the practice of print literacy. Literacy has often been dialectically related to the growth of capitalism as Marshall T. Poe (2011) posits: “The simultaneous rise of mercantile capitalism, the bureaucratic state and reading religion in early modern Europe provided the historical context within which print culture could evolve” (Poe, 2011, p.109). Literacy as a historical category has not only evolved but it has also restructured the discourse of history which otherwise could have been different.

The development of technology and evolution of literacy are often seen from contradictory positions as it is believed that literate practice isolates individuals and society from one another. On this note, Robin Jeffrey (2000), asserting McLuhan has argued that though ‘print technology...isolates the individual yet also creates massive groupings by means of vernacular nationalism’ (Jeffrey, 2000, p.05; McLuhan, p. 258). As Jeffrey has rightly stated, the development of print and its literacy “did not simply involve the transmission and preservation of information. Rather, print transformed the way in which people thought and therefore behaved” (Ibid.). Further, Walter J.
Ong (2002) relates literacy practices to the changes in spatial dimensions of the society and writes: “print both reinforce and transform the effects of writing on thought and expression” (Ong, 2002, p.115) that substantiates the dialectical relationship between literacy and thought.

The mark of literacy practice is perceptible both the ideological and material settings which in today’s context are more fractured and fragmented. Such a condition has been experienced more through the transformation of the socio-cultural and political space with its locus lying in the construction of new and resistance identity\(^1\) (Castells, 2010) and the emergence of post-structural and post-anarchist\(^2\) (Newman 2005) politics. As K. V. Nagaraj points out: such situations have led to ‘Institutionalisation of Anarchy’ in the Indian political condition. It compels us to question whether the new literacy practices as a result of our increased consciousness promote a culture or a condition for anarchy. As a result we are experiencing a conflicting space across the world, not to exclude India, as noticed from the increasing number of identity building projects in the name of language and demand for separate statehoods to the social movements as a result of environmental consciousness, to anti corruption movement and women’s movement demanding equal rights and access to social space.

In contemporary society we virtually make our living in a contradictory space\(^3\) where a diverse set of ideas, images and experiences collide with one another. This is obviously a result of mediation and instant communication. In the networked society we are not only consuming matters, but also space in the form of symbols and psychic experiences. We call them symbolic spaces and experiential spaces. The symbolic representation of spaces and their mediation with the help of technology has led to the increased mobility of different categorical elements of the world which has led to a spatial disjuncture or contradiction often related with new literacy practices and its connection with the flow of spaces and construction of a fluid/liquid identity. Increased mobility of space both in its concrete and abstract senses have brought a rise in the level
of contradictions resulting in conflicts among people, communities and nation states on ethnic and religious grounds. In India, however, the contradictions are even more powerful as a result of its diverse characteristics not only in line with the ethno-religious features but also because of caste divisions and its reflection in policy and political discourse of the state. The mechanical reproduction of space, both in its abstract and concrete forms, has also brought disjuncture in the cognitive setups that have altered the spatial practices of everyday life. Though it has often been argued that such changes are the result of new literacy practices and a conscious engagement of the people in their social, cultural and political space, it is even seen that the changed conditions again demand alterations in the existing literacy practices.

The contradictions among the different contexts of practicing literacy are similar to the contradictions between tradition and modernity or modernity and postmodernity. As conditions of life and living, both modernity and postmodernity have come into existence with the conditions of human mind. For that matter, a postmodern condition as a contextual category requires a postmodern literacy to successfully overcome the challenges and to experience the life. Most arguably, it is possible through accepting the increasing differences in the material space and inculcating the value of greater tolerance towards the specific others that have been constituted as a result of historical discourses. Such an approach to literacy is not free from sacrifices, and is often questionable from a post-structural perspective. It has led to the birth of post-structural thoughts and its applications in everyday life from politics to social engagement.

Political conditions in today’s context have become what Newman (2005) terms as ‘post-anarchist’, “that no longer relies on the epistemological foundations of Enlightenment humanism or on essentialist conceptions of subjectivity” (Newman, 2005, p. 49). This has necessitated the need for an inter-subjective understanding among people belonging to different communities that would promote intercultural dialogue. In India, as throughout
the rest of the world we notice a predictable change in the condition of life represented through the way we engage ourselves socially, politically, economically, and culturally. It makes the promotion of media literacy an essential element to cope with the change. New literacy practices in a broader sense have changed the traditional ways of doing politics and governance and have changed the democratic structure. The emergence of digital governance in the information society has restructured the socio-political condition through a change in the existing power relations between the state and its subjects. The evolution of grassroots politics and occupation of the political power centre in the state of Delhi by the common man, just as it has happened in the case of Aam Admi Party's (AAP) ascent in Indian politics is a recent example of such transformation. The change in the economic environment is a resultant effect of the transformation of economy centred on agriculture and industry, to one centred on information and knowledge. Subsequently, it has also brought changes in the demographic structures and cultural conditions as a result of increased migration and mobility. It has changed the demographic structure of the Indian populace. Increased mobility of the space, both in its concrete and abstract forms have increased the consciousness of 'difference' and 'identity' often resulting in 'caste violence', 'racial violence' and 'gender violence'. In such circumstances, we cannot restrict the notion of literacy simply to the practice of reading and writing, as it has greater viability in social, political and cultural contexts.

The dialectic of literacy practices or conditions of literacy and human cognitive thinking have further affected our intellectual traditions. It has affected the conditions under which knowledge is produced and disseminated. If one observes, it can be noticed that the flow of knowledge has altered the centre periphery model of disseminating knowledge which is quite reverse these days. Along the way, it has also changed the concept of knowledge as a distinct category, where the production and dissemination of knowledge do not have a fixed location. In an Indian context, such a changing dimension of media, and the literacy connected with it, has affected the public discourse and
its resultant impact on the condition of public sphere, which seems to be more fragmented and fractured as a result of increased and diverse representation. Its reflections are further noticed in policy formulations and structural changes of the state, economy, and bureaucracy because of the state’s leniency towards a liberalist ideology, which sometimes become an unethical practice. Such unethical practices of the state and counter practices by its subjects often results in the formation of a conflicting socio cultural space. This has necessitated the need for conceptualising a category of media literacy and its promotion that would endorse peace and harmony among different sections of the society. It would promote mutual dialogue among different communities and minimise the level of conflicts and violence we face as a result of competing ideologies. Simultaneously, media literacy has also affected the public culture—i.e. the way of our engagement with the social and cultural space—affecting the spatial dimension of our society constituted as a result of the existing relations among the various social forces.

As one of the social forces, new modes of literacy practices have changed the circumstances under which knowledge is produced and disseminated among the masses. In one sense, it has maintained the status-quo in the case of knowledge production and dissemination; in another sense, it has altered the conventional narratives of the production and dissemination of knowledge that has taken the humanity to a chaotic condition as we face in different places of the world, including India. The study in this chapter has dealt with the impact of the changing notion of literacy/media literacy and its impact on social dynamics from different emerging perspectives. We have focused here more on the concept of literacy and its impact on the social relations of production as we argue that the condition of a particular entity is formed, as a result, the relations it establishes with many other entities. Such an idea of the reciprocal production of space is applicable in case of the condition of the public sphere to the condition of culture and society with their relations to media literacy/literacy as a force of production. Media literacy as a category establishes the relations with various spatial categories such as ethnicity,
culture, nationality, gender and even technology. For that matter the condition of the public sphere in an Indian context is highly dependent on the literacy practices of its citizens from varied contexts, starting from their ethno-religious affinities to techno-religious attributes. Media literacy either maintains the existing relations of production or brings a change in the relations of production along with a change in the conditions of our social, cultural and political experiences.

4.1. Media Literacy and Public Sphere

Media literacy as a concept has not yet been able to catch up the imagination of Indian intelligentsia unlike the European and other Western countries. Similarly, the concept of public sphere is less discussed and debated in an Indian context. Considering the diverse characteristics of the Indian public in terms of their social, religious, cultural, and political affinities, media literacy is considered to be essential in constituting a healthy public sphere. Public sphere, as a concept, has been widely debated in academics since the English translation of Jürgen Habermas' work, 'The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere' (German 1962, English translation 1989), and its introduction among the English speaking community. However, it has not got enough attention in the Indian academia. Except a few academic interventions; for instance, Rajagopal (2001), Bhargav (2005), Ninan (2009), and Chaudhuri (2010), which reflect upon the condition of public sphere in the Indian context, the relevance that has been given to its dialectical impact on the socio-political atmosphere in India does not seem to be enough.

In a global context, drawing the central idea on public sphere from Habermas, many critics (Calhoun 1992, Thomson 1995, Kellner 2000, Bohman 2004, Brandenburg 2003, Crossley 2004, Gardiner 2004) have elaborated upon the origin, structure, function, after all, the transformation of the public sphere, and its effects on public debate, discussion and consensus. Considering its scale and operation in the age of evolving media and technology, it would be a
Herculean effort to trace the origin and evolution of public sphere. Habermas himself, consciously or unconsciously, has conceded to the fact that it is quite a cumbersome process to go back to the origin of public sphere as he writes in the initial section of his influential book, The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere:

The usage of the words “public” and “public sphere” betrays a multiplicity of concurrent meanings. Their origin goes back to various historical phases and, when applied synchronically to the conditions of a bourgeois society that is inherently advanced and constituted as a social-welfare state, they fuse into a clouded amalgam. (Habermas, 1989, p.1)

At the same time, there is no universally agreed definition of ‘media literacy’, believed to have been coined in early twentieth century after the invention of motion picture. As of today, the most commonly accepted definition of media literacy is “the ability to access, analyze, evaluate, and produce media messages” (Aufderhide 1993, Livingstone 2004, Brian O’ Neill & Cliona Barnes, 2008). It deals with two aspects: one is technical, i.e. access to technology and its adoption/adaptation, and the other one is cognitive, which has much to do with critical thinking.

As far as the history goes, public sphere originally was a specific meeting place found in primitive tribal societies where people used to bring matters of public interest for discussion and an agreed upon solution through consensus. Since its inception in stateless tribal communities around the world, to the time of city states of ancient Greece, who supposed it “as a realm of freedom and permanence” (Habermas 1989, p.4), public sphere has been in the process of continuous evolution in its form and structure. This has been substantiated by German sociologist Jürgen Habermas (1989) through ‘The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere’, as also by many other thinkers in the later stages of the development of the theory of public sphere. However, the contemporary public sphere under the influence of technology is changing more rapidly than ever and strongly affecting the public discourse. It has changed the mode of interface among the constituents of public sphere and the
state. Media, as one of the constituents of public sphere, is playing a determining role in debates and deliberations. But the over-encompassing role of media, corporations and state in public and private domains has led to the degeneration of the public sphere. Reiterating from Habermas’s *Theory of Communicative Action*, John Michael Roberts and Nick Crossley (2004) write:

> The relationship of the individual to the state has increasingly become one of client or consumer of services, rather than citizen. Individuals have become increasingly dependent upon the state, losing the independence that is central to the citizen role.” (Roberts & Crossley, 2004, p.5)

Such a deteriorating condition of the public sphere often challenges its political functions, i.e. in the manner it used to act as a realm for political debates in Eighteenth century Great Britain, and as what Habermas terms it as bourgeois public sphere. Bourgeois public sphere was relatively small in size and it was characterized by free speech, genuine argument and a direct relationship among its constituents. But in the contemporary public sphere, the all-pervasive nature of media has reduced the distance ‘virtually’, but in reality, [new] media has created a hiatus among the constituents of public sphere, where freedom is restricted under the influence of technological infiltration/adaptation and corporate grip over media. Such a precarious situation not only restricts the public in exercising their freedom, but also exposes them to tainted and often manipulated contents such as false opinions and commodity culture. It has raised questions over the authenticity/genuineness of discourse in public debate which is more often controlled by media, and its involvement in frequent production and reproduction of opinions, information and ideas. Questions also arise on the pattern of consumption of media content and the opinion generated through virtual public debate as professional standards and normative principles of media suffer deterioration, as it is clearly evident from the age of propaganda to the recent paid news syndrome.

In such a critical state of mediations and structural transformation, in the case of both media and public sphere, the virtual circumference of the latter is
becoming wider, driven by technology that has led to denial of equal participation for all in public discourse and exclusion of the masses because of weak media literacy. It further raises questions on the rationality of the discourse in public debate where there is misrepresentation of actors, opinions and ideas generated through media debate, and mediated between the constituents of the public sphere, and between the state and the private sphere. The ever changing public sphere and media as part is creating a distance between media literates and partial or weak media literates. And it is becoming wider with the invention of every new technology and its adoption in the process of mediation. Such an evolving phenomenon has led to one way flow of information and opinion from accessed/dominant voice to the suppressed voice; from producer of media content to its passive consumers. At this critical juncture, ‘Media literacy’ defined as the ability to critically ‘access, analyze, evaluate, and produce media messages’ can be a solution to many problems in the cultural, political and social realms evolving out of the structural transformation of media and the public sphere.

Literacy and public sphere are intimately connected. As literacy is taking new dimensions with the invention of new technology and means of communication along with an increased mobility, its repercussions on the form and structure of public sphere is inescapable, because a healthy public sphere is dependent on literate individuals. The pertinent question that comes to the fore is: What does literacy actually mean and how does it affect the structure and functions of the public sphere along with the formation of public debate, discussions and consensus? Arguing with Douglas Kellner and Jeff Share (2005), we argue that literacy helps one in active participation in one’s culture and society as they write: Literacy involves gaining the skills and knowledge required to read, interpret, and produce certain types of texts and artifacts and to gain the intellectual tools and capacities to fully participate in one’s culture and society.
Such an explanation reinforces the idea of media literacy and its close connection with one’s culture and society. Literacy from this perspective is seen as a condition of individuals or a society for critical and intellectual evaluation of texts. Not only does it speak about texts in a literal sense but it brings many other social and cultural phenomena—starting from the production of images, sounds, music and video to the socio-cultural and political movements—within the purview of text. Hence the context of practicing literacy is varied along with the meaning of literacy. In such circumstances literacy is often seen beyond its functional perspectives, i.e. the mere ability to read and write. It is seen as what John F. Szwed (1981) considers the ‘social meaning of literacy’ that deals with: “The roles these abilities play in social life; the contexts of their performance and the manner in which they are interpreted and tested, not by experts, but by ordinary people in ordinary activities” (Szwed 1981, p.14). Literacy should be considered as a category that is essential for experiencing our everyday lives.

Literacy varies depending upon its social contexts. Interaction and dialogue take place in a specific social context that dialectically determines the condition of literacy and the outcome of the discourse or dialogue that has bearings on the condition of public sphere. Dialogue or discourse as part of literacy practice brings changes in the existing social context further demanding new literacy practices. Literacy varies from one socio-cultural setting to other socio-cultural settings. To exist, a particular geographical condition creates the need for a particular kind of language to be acquired that subsequently determines the condition of literacy. As a result of which literacy in countryside differs from the condition of literacy in urban centers. Literacy in Silicon Valley of US or for that matter Bangalore in India differs from the literacy of Easter Island, considered as the world’s remotest location in the vastness of Pacific Ocean. Literacy in politically most troubled region like Middle-east or Northern-Africa differs from the condition of literacy in the regions which are relatively stable politically and economically. Literacy practice and its condition are determined by many other factors starting from
geographical situation to cultural practices and political or economic condition of a particular region. In a mediated society we talk of media literacy that demands specific skills and expertise to encode and decode media contents. Media literacy hence deals with interpreting media messages and constructing meaning out of them.

Overall such an alteration is typified as virtual transformation of the public sphere, where public debates, discussions, and movements have gained illusory support and remained short-lived. Though such movements across the world like the string of uprisings in the Arab countries against dictatorial regimes or the Occupy Wall Street (OWS) movement in the US against defunct economy, to the anti-corruption movement in India led by Anna Hazare against defective democracy have gained momentum through cyber-activism followed by nonstop television coverage, virtually they have turned into media spectacles and mere eye-catchers. No doubt, to some extent such social movements have been able to reinvigorate the public sphere generating mass consciousness on local and global issues. But they have remained transient in character. Besides, the hyper real nature of media content, and its alleged involvement in manipulation and distortion of facts and images with the help of new technology raises serious questions over the techno ethical dimensions of sharing information and ideas and its implications on the dynamics of the public sphere.

4.2. Media and the Politics of Knowledge

Knowledge and power build an intriguing relationship in modern society. Francis Bacon’s aphorism ‘Knowledge is Power’ which is further emphasized by Michel Foucault holds true if we reflect on the condition of knowledge in the contemporary society. Both knowledge and power are intertwined in such a manner that it is hardly possible to draw a line between the two. Such an overlapping idea leads to an obscure and dichotomous state of how knowledge is acquired/produced, and how power is exerted over the subjects of the life-world. Considering this fact, the role of media has often been brought under
scanner. John Street (2001) in *Mass Media, Politics and Democracy* affirms that the familiar claim, 'knowledge is power', captures the most commonly cited connection between mass media and power. The whole concept of "Media (power) and the Politics of Knowledge" has undergone changes, with the transformation of the structure and mode of human civilization. Gradually the concept of knowledge has been transformed from the skills of hunting in the age of savagery, to the skills of persuasion and consent (in a Gramscian sense) in modern and civilized society. Similarly, the mode of transferring the existing knowledge to the generations next, has been transformed from direct-interaction to mediated-interaction and learning. Along the lines, such a process of construction and dissemination of knowledge has passed through a stratum of evolutionary phases before attaining its present form. Banking on the projects undertaken by postmodern thinkers such as Jean Francois Lyotard (1979), Baudrilard, Guy Debord and others, we analyze the role of media in constructing knowledge, and power exerted by different state and non-state agencies. Jean Francois Lyotard (1979) in *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* suggests that Power and Knowledge are the two aspects of the same question: who decides what knowledge is? Who knows what needs to be decided? In a mediated society, power and media have become identical. Ultimately, power lies with them who have control over information and its dissemination. Asserting Lyotard, Fred L. Casmir (1994) in *Building Communication Theories*, writes: “Ever since fundamental disagreements about the nature of human beings and human knowledge were developed in Greek thought by Aristotle, Plato, how we know what we know has been a major source of contention” (Casmir, 2013, p.14). It is true that knowledge is acquired through cultural participation. At the same time, individuals define periphery of their own culture. Both cultural events and knowledge supports each other and grow mutually. Such a dialectical process enriches both culture and the knowledge structure of individuals. But it seems, media has created a new sphere both for cultural practices and mediated interaction that has
somehow blurred the concept of interactive learning and knowledge which is a matter of inquiry.

### 4.2.1 Mediated Knowledge Warfare

Reflecting on the spectacular dimensions of the contemporary society, Guy Debord ([1967], 2002) writes: “In societies where modern conditions of production prevail, life is presented as an immense accumulation of spectacles. Everything that was directly lived is now merely represented in the distance” (Debord, [1967] 2002, p. 6). It is true that mediation of knowledge is not new as such. From ancient times of human civilization, the concept of knowledge has passed from one generation to the next. Initially, the diffusion of knowledge was as a result of conscious efforts by travellers around the globe who were in search of acquiring knowledge and its dissemination. The modes of acquiring knowledge were through engaging oneself with the realities of the world and learn from the experiences of prevailing conditions. Learning and its repatriation was meant for providing greater benefit to the public and also for individual salvation. The intellectual sermon during those years was based on reason and individual freedom, as individual was the sole medium of discourse on knowledge. Historical evidence and similarities found among the civilizations from Sub-Saharan region to Middle-East and the Indus Valley justifies the fact that there prevailed an inter exchange of ideas and knowledge among the civilizations. The dialectic between knowledge and realities is reflected in the ways of life and living from the days of ancient civilizations to the present. Knowledge has been transmitted as a result of the human endeavour to explore the world, in search of further knowledge and to experience new realities. At the same time, the invention of new knowledge made possible the movement of people from one part of the world to others. Starting from the invention of sea voyages that led to the discovery of continents around the globe and its divergent cultures, new forms of knowledge have changed the face of social interaction and learning that has led to the formation of new social, political and economic orders. The infinite sphere of
knowledge has further led to the discovery of new planets, satellites and their virtual claim and occupation for dominance. Media and communications as the product of new knowledge has made possible human inquiry into individual mind and simultaneously led to an outward expansion in the space. Eventually, it has led to the contestation of power and dominance starting from the individual sphere, i.e. the individual mind to the space. Only the medium of expansion is different. The outcome has been war among nation states for controlling the continental space for dominance over sea and outer space, for hegemony. The sphere of knowledge is so wide, it is not unbelievable that one day it may explore and engulf the whole universe and blur the concept of infinity. What next is obvious. It may lead to interplanetary wars, *inter-galaxial* wars and may lead to *universal hegemony* and power. Possibility of an intra-universal knowledge war to control the minds of the species in different planets of the universe cannot be denied as it is evident in the contemporary age of internet and new media among the nation states. What seems visible is that the unopposed march of new communication technology is motivated to gain control over the material resources of the earth and the planets of the universe.

The crisis in the Arab world and popular revolts to dethrone the monarchical leaders from the centre of power are the results and effects of the new media that could generate public support and participation for socio-political change is the opinion of intellectuals. But the world community should not forget that this new-media can also lead to new form of warfare which is evident in global electronic discourses such as “e-crimes, e-terrorists, e-wars” (Nayar, 2010). In the past, wars have been fought around the globe, especially in gulf regions, in the name of regime change with an obscure intention to gain control over the natural resources by the dominant powers. For this, the war efforts have been criticized. The question arise: whether the current crisis in the Arab countries is a new kind of warfare instigated by new media to deceive the world community? There may be questions over the source and anonymity of such resurgence. It may be an agenda of the nations of power to keep them away from the conflict zones by being virtually present. Is new-media, especially
internet, an invisible weapon, an invisible hand or a disguised agent of the
nations of power to create hostile conditions in the developing nations not open
to the global capitalistic model of development? Is such crisis is the result of
mediated information that builds our knowledge structure? Are stealing and
hacking new forms of knowledge in the media sphere to gain control over
national policy and decisions to favour the developed nations and their agenda?
Is the erroneous projection of territorial boundaries in the w.w.w is to create
tense situations among the nation states? Is war an experiment by the
militarized nations turning the peaceful regions into war zones? Is war a
business? The whole process of mediation of knowledge in the form of
information to war artilleries is leading the world community to a new sphere,
"The Sphere of Knowledge Warfare".

4.2.2 Knowledge and Power Play

In a mediated society where our positions and dispositions are determined by a
set of images both abstract and real, the concept of knowledge has also
transformed from an abstract idea about certain phenomena to their
representative versions. In the process of representation and reproduction
supported by technology, knowledge has merely turned into manufactured
versions of pseudo reality that we experience in our routine life. In the process
propaganda has replaced the essential concept of knowledge, and such a form
of knowledge is produced either to control or hoodwink the masses. The
construction of knowledge has become an apparatus in the hands of a limited
section of people to exert power. Media’s role here has been an apparatus in the
hands of state and its adjunct functionaries to control public mind, what Louis
Althusser terms it as Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs). In its contaminated
form, knowledge has become a weapon to manufacture either consent or
dissent. The acquisition of knowledge as a result of interaction with social and
material realities has been replaced by its wilful production and distribution
with the help of mass media operating as knowledge industry. Knowledge is
manufactured and distributed to manipulate the public mind and the whole
process of production is controlled by a handful of media magnate. In Media, both propaganda and agenda have acquired a new name ‘Public Relations’. Noam Chomsky (1997) in *Media Control: The Spectacular Achievement of Propaganda* says, “propaganda is to democracy what violence is to totalitarianism” (Outlook, November 1, 2010). In reply to a question, whether Propaganda enables the elite to dull the will of people depriving them of the capacity to make political choices in Outlook Magazine (November 1, 2010), Chomsky says, “That is clearly its goal, in fact its stated goal. Back in 1920s, it used to be frankly called propaganda. But the word acquired a bad flavour with Nazism in the 1930s”. The public is merely the onlookers of the political game between the elites, what we usually see in the modern liberal democratic society. The public only watch the participants of democracy. The work of Intellectuals and Media, Chomsky says is to make sure that they are quiet, subdued and obedient. What the elites want is to be protected from what Lippmann says “from the trampling under the rage of the bewildered herd- the public”. However, the viewpoints have been explicitly contrasted by Eli Lehrer (2005) in “Anti Chomsky Reader”. Lehrer argues that Lippman’s analysis has been twisted by Chomsky to support the notion of class conspiracy to brainwash the public, which is a discredited idea of “false consciousness” advocated by Marx. There is some sense of invisibility to the whole dynamics of media, propaganda and the manipulation of public thought to suit the interests of the so called three spearheads of liberal capitalistic societies, i.e. the corporate (the capitalist class), state (occupied by the political class) in a parliamentary form of democracy and the mass media. The murky picture of media, politics and the industry nexus is a global phenomenon under the influence free market economy where there is a sense of restlessness among the warring heads to expand their territories and to exert control over the masses. The role of media here has been the ‘fixer’ or ‘dealer’ engaged in betting practices and auctioning public attention for private interests. From a public service institution, media has transformed into merely public relation industries as a result of corporate grip over media content. Simultaneously, it has its
impact on the journalistic practices where adversarial journalism, as Murthy asserts, is in the process of continuous decay under the influence of free market capitalism (Murthy, 2010). Analytical content in the media is being replaced by objective and professional reporting/coverage just to eyewash the public. This syndrome is the direct effect of market dominance on media and it is evident in the sphere of journalism from the incident of ‘paid news’ and the recent case of ZEE news reporters extorting money for suppressing stories. As the whole aspect of our decisions and actions are presently determined by the knowledge structure constituted by mediated-interaction, the blurring boundaries between news and entertainment/advertising are creating deficits in the public sphere. Condemning such a precarious state the Indian journalism, the Press Council of India in its reports on Paid News (Dated 30/07/2010) has stated that the phenomenon of paid news has acquired serious dimensions. Today it goes beyond the corruption of individual journalists and media companies have become pervasive, structured and highly organised. In this process it is undermining democracy in India (Press council of India Report on Paid News, 2010). What are on the making all over the world are pseudo-democratic societies where there are very few participants, but a huge number of onlookers, mostly passive and docile. The whole atmosphere is the result of a knowledge structure that is controlled and colonized by the elite, political class and corporate class, and Media as their agent.

4.2.3 The ‘Power Play Model’ & ‘Ghettoisation’ of the Masses
The power play model above tries to analyse the nexus between media, corporate and politics, and their representative classes and their unitary effort to exercise power over the public/masses. The whole system is guided by production of goods, policies and symbols, and their dissemination to the masses with an intention to control their actions. The resulting effect is concentration of the public within the boundaries often set by a unitary sphere of Media, Politics and Corporate, which otherwise, may be called “ghettoisation” of the masses, limiting their freedom and choice.

The central motive of such massification starts from the primary objective of profit maximization, preceded and succeeded by mass production and mass marketing of goods and services. Here the work of the media is just to create an atmosphere favourable enough for the producers by producing cultures and cultural need through what Adorno & Horkheimer (1993) term as culture industry. The mere objective of the culture industry is to create artificial demand for the consumption of commodities by pseudo cultural practices, with the help of what Daniel Boorstein (1961, 1992) calls pseudo events. What is evident is that such a process has led to limitation of public choice, controlled by a knowledge structure produced by media engaged in symbolic productions; by corporate engaged in the production of goods and services; and the political class engaged in the production of policies, whereas, the masses are isolated and left alone as docile herd merely to consume policies, goods and/or symbols.

4.2.4 Knowledge and the Expansion of Virtual Territory

Reflecting on the condition of knowledge, Jean Francois Lyotard (1979) criticises the effects of modern knowledge on the global dynamics of power. He acknowledges to the fact that knowledge will be the major component in the world wide competition of power and dominance. Throughout the history, ‘communication’ as a concept has been expansionist in its approach.
Philosophers like Marshall McLuhan and Harold Inis have extensively critiqued on the expansionist nature of modern media and communication. The exploration of new knowledge and the development of media have moved side by side. Invention of new knowledge has led to the discovery of new land mass on the earth. The invention of the sea voyages by the Spanish and Portuguese merchants had led to a territorial domination by the European nations across the sea expanding their geographical territory over North American, African and Latin American regions in terms of trade, commerce, life, and living. Such an expansionist approach had its impact on the geo-political and geo-religious conditions around the globe leading to the birth of colonial empires. In the medieval period, the domestication of animals and the invention of wheel had also led to the expansion of agrarian territory and its claim and contestation among the agrarian communities of North African and Middle East regions believed to be the birth place of civilization. The induction of horses by the Greeks and Romans in their war artillery had an edge over their counterparts. Likewise, the invention of printing press had an impact on the national consciousness in Europe. Benedict Anderson (1983) in Imagined Communities ascribes the birth of nation states and the development of print press to its further subdivision, as a result of ideological imagination imposed by the press. Not only did printing press help in creating imaginary geographical boundaries but also it led to the creation of virtual communities by spreading and disseminating religious beliefs, as a result of which it became possible for Christianity to expand to almost all parts of the world. Under the impact of new knowledge and new forms of media, the territorial expansion does not remain only restricted to the invasion of geographical boundaries of the nation states but becomes micro in compared with its earlier counterparts such as print, radio or television which were macro in character. Invading the individual mind is the new form of expansion in the digital age virtually dissolving the whole human race into a homogeneous herd with a set of uniform needs and aspirations. Simultaneously, there is an explosion/implosion and
expansion/contraction of our knowledge structure with the invention of new technology and the digitalization of knowledge.

Human inquiry into the realities around and beyond the world is reaching new peripheries with the invention of new media technology, not only in case of information dissemination/access, but also in case of new discoveries and explorations. In the digital age the human race is wandering in search of knowledge in a non-place which does not have any direct link with the realities. Promod Nayar (2010) in Information Spaces, Digital Culture and Utopia, aptly describes new media as a space of knowledge and danger of discovery and errancy.

4.2.5 The Dilemma of Knowledge Society

There is much rhetorical discourse and hypnotic explanations about the information society/knowledge society and an informatization way to development. Informatization is the process through which new communication technologies are used as means of furthering socio-economic development (Singhal, 2007). At this stage media is taking the central role of minimising the existing lag or gap between the information haves and have-nots. There is a race among nations around the globe to transform themselves into information societies. The infomatization way of development’s ultimate aim is to convert the economy/society into a knowledge economy or knowledge society. That knowledge has brought prosperity is true, but the world community should not forget that knowledge has also brought along with it fear, destruction and devastations. Though knowledge has simplified human living to some extent, it has also led to many crisis situations and export of difficulties to places around the world. The first point to be noticed here is the monopoly in the production of knowledge led by the western nations. The poor and developing countries are merely the consumers of the knowledge imposed upon them by the developed nations ignoring the socio economic and environmental impact in the countries who adopt it. The knowledge producing
countries have utilized the developing nations as field of experiment as in the case of BT cotton, BT bringle and other genetically modified foods. Knowledge has always been used to produce more, to favour them who own and control the mode of production, ignoring the quality aspect and its repercussions on the biological and social structure of the world. Be it computerisation of the workforce around the world or the invention of more productive methods of producing food grains, quality is overshadowed by quantity under capitalism as dominant discourse. The second argument is against an imbalance in the production structure starting from the production of knowledge to the production of material goods and services. Though both knowledge and production establish a dialectical relationship, their rational coexistence cannot be neglected. Here the question arises: Is it possible and beneficial for all the nations to transform themselves into knowledge/information producing entities and the entire human race into knowledge/information consuming elements? The rat race around the world to transform themselves into information economies or knowledge economies is the cause of current food crisis, and rising prices of essential commodities a result of structural imbalance. There is a rupture in the ratio of production of different commodities as a result of lopsided turn towards information/knowledge. Information/knowledge is necessary as it is considered as commodities, but at the same time, there are other aspects which cannot be ignored. It seems practically impossible to transform all the labour force into information workers who will be engaged in the processing of knowledge. At the same time the entire productive landmass cannot be converted into information zones.

4.2.6 Knowledge and the Marketplace of Ideas: Who is Controlling the Marketplace of Ideas?

Media control and ownership is a contentious issue in the new age of media and communication. It affects the content of the media which ultimately has bearings on the knowledge structure of the society within the reach of media. Under the free market model, the market determines the structure and content
of the media. Free market model was thought of to make the sphere of media free from monopolistic control and provide an opportunity to all in the production and distribution of media messages that would lead to public participation. As the market model was free from any kind of direct state control and intervention, the existing media organizations with a wide network in terms of both manpower and infrastructure, take the opportunity to expand their operation and influence on both public and the clients from whom they generate revenue which include both corporate and political class. As a result of which, mass media as an institution of public interest has morphed into an agent of the political class and the corporate houses to exercise power over the masses. Instead of public interest, media is more concerned about the interest of the corporate and political class. The concept, ‘market place of ideas’ has turned into a paradise for them who exercise control over the contents of media. This typical situation is not restricted to only a few countries but a global phenomenon under the impact of media globalisation and liberalisation. Its resulting effect is the incongruity in news and information flows because of transnational media corporations and their concentration in the developed nations. It is noticed, the market place as a free space for creating and disseminating information is being controlled by a few media conglomerates monopolising over the content of production with a pro corporate bias.

4.2.7 Media and the Dysfunction of Knowledge

Throughout the history, ‘Knowledge’ has played a dysfunctional role in the existence of human race. It is an unending expedition by the human race to win over the nature that drives for inquiry and inventions. Knowledge has remained the medium of negotiation between the nature and men for fulfilling human desires. What occurs in the process is a counter discourse between the two. On the one hand, there are extreme conditions of the nature and on the other, the survival strategy of men through inquiry and knowledge which makes the men a dominant organism in the world. Nature has always exercised its supremacy over men, though; men are indivisible part of the nature. There is an internal
conflict within the nature that starts from the men’s unfulfilled and unlimited desires, and men have always tried to gain control over the situations either through pacifying the rate of change or limiting the pace of change. Besides, the change that is taking place as a result of natural factors, there is artificial change due to the interference of men in the law of nature to dominate its own race and for supremacy. The change is a result of conflict that starts at the individual level and expands to the space and the universe. These kind of conflicting situations have led to the growth of new class and institutions within the society to control the process of life. The Greek city states are the examples of such institutions to flourish in the Europe for political and social control. Media as an institution has provided a platform for public expression and paths to freedom. At the same time, media can be an apparatus for bondage as it has been used in the past by the merchant class and presently by the new-merchants who control their territorial business operations with the click of mouse. New Media also creates new realities for the masses to create their own individual spheres and actively participate in the political and economic process. It has changed the mode of social relationship and process of socialisation. Digitalisation of the communication and the hyper-real content of media is a weapon to falsify events and occurrences around the world. At the same time the nature of communication is now more inclusive as a result of its access and availability of new technology. The revolution in the information and communication technology has added new dimensions to the life and living of the people, as they are talking about a cyber-democracy with active public participation. The inclusive nature of the communication revolution is not only visible in the political circles, but its presence is also felt in the delivery of public service and general participation in the economic activities.

4.2.8 Mediated Knowledge and Democratic Deficit

There is talk in the public circle about participatory democracy and the role of media in facilitating a robust democracy. The role of new media, especially the internet, has been appreciated for providing a platform both for the political
agents and citizens for direct interaction. There is a utopian prediction that new media can be a weapon in the hands of the masses to restructure the centre of power. If we consider the case of electronic media, the predecessor of internet, throughout its history it has been utilised by political parties as an apparatus to propagate political agenda. It has been used more as a tool of propaganda than a tool for political participation. Electronic media, especially television has replaced the open parliament of the monarchy where free and open debate used to take place between the king and its subjects. Newsrooms of the television houses have replaced the political emporium of city states, where political debates are manufactured and produced. Often the political debates are formulated with some sense of affinity towards political ideology and represented by skilful political managers. Whatever may be the democratic situation, it is a construction or an artificial creation both by the political class who holds the centre of power and the media which lies close to the power centre to garner profits either directly or indirectly. John Street argues that

4.2.9 Knowledge and Intellectual Hegemony

“Knowledge and the intellectual hegemony”, though sounds vague and seems invisible to the public as there are very few supportive arguments that could clarify the obscurity between the two. The argument here is whether knowledge as a concept should be put into use for public benefit or private interests, which raise the issue of publicness of knowledge. As J. B. Thompson notes:

The publicness of the knowledge is circumstantial to the publicness of the individuals and the events. Prior to the development of the media, publicness of the individuals was linked to the sharing of common locale. An event became a public event by being staged before a plurality of individuals who were physically present at its occurrence- in the manner, for instance, of a public execution in medieval Europe, performed before a group of spectators who have gathered together in the market square (Thompson, 1995, p 125).

However the growth and development of media really made a rupture in the traditional publicness of co-presence. In the contemporary age of new
electronic media, what we are oriented towards is a set of mediated publicness, where public is represented by a hand counted influential intellectuals from academia, politics, bureaucracy and pressure groups and an orchestration of stage managed events that are being organised by media houses either to put forward their own views laden with ideological value or simply the view points of political and corporate houses represented by intellectuals. The most appropriate example of such kind of events in the age of new electronic media is the news hour debates often represented by a limited number of representatives (intellectuals), who appear frequently over different TV channels irrespective the eventual subject matter. Though this phenomenon is not new as such, it has been prevalent since the development of print media as a means of public discourse. So, what the media has offered to the intellectuals, is a place for hegemonic discourse of their ideas or the ideas of other state and non state agencies leading to a pseudo proletarianisation of intellectuals. The copyrights and patents for knowledge or ideas are more used to commercialize the whole concept of knowledge rather than giving rights to the individuals where knowledge loses its sense of publicnesss. The process of knowledge production takes us to a confounding state. Question arises, whether media can replace the human mind in a true sense as the centre for production of knowledge. Contemporary media has virtually taken the driver’s seat in matters of production of knowledge, no matter how beneficial it has been to the public. Media, with its inclination to the politics of knowledge, has changed the concept of reality where everything that we come across is mediated. Under the age of media and communication knowledge is not shaped by realities, rather reality is being constructed by media generating a gap/lag between what exists and what is represented. Though media has been able to provide a platform for socio-political freedom, it has also led the human race into a sphere of ‘conscious unconsciousness’, and ‘visible invisibility’. Knowledge has become a tool of ‘power play’ in its various formats, from propaganda to agenda and the chain of control lies with them who maintain control over media, “the knowledge industry”.

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4.3. Media Literacy: An Ideological Perspective

Media literacy as a social and cultural ‘category’ must be seen from an ideological angle to explore the terms and conditions under which the idea of literacy/media literacy is promoted and appreciated among the individuals and within a society. This, in larger context, enables one in deconstructing the ideological factors working beneath the social and cultural practices prevalent within a society. A structural functional approach in media literacy works as an ideological force for socio-cultural order and dominance, whereas, a post-structural approach to media literacy resists the indiscernible dominance and ideological forces inherent in institutional practices. Such dominance is present there in imagining a nation to empire building which are constructed through ideological interpellations in different forms. As David Hawkes asserts: “Like Gramsci’s ‘hegemony’ or Foucault’s ‘power’, the concept of ‘Empire’ designates a force which is at once ideological, economic and political; simultaneously subjective and objective” (Hawkes, 2003, p. 181). Then the concept of nation or empire indirectly becomes either cultural or political category with some ideological traces. It is constituted by both ideological and material forces inherent with a certain ideology.

From an Althusserian sense, it is argued here that media literacy as it has been promoted and appreciated has more been an ideology to support the existing socio, economic and political order. However, the idea of media literacy conceptualized in a revolutionary framework--from a post-structuralists frame--works as a counter narrative to the dominant form of social, political, economic, and cultural order, as it has been envisioned by Georg Lukacs, Richard Hoggart, Raymond Williams and E. P Thompson. But such a form of discourse with a critical tenor has not been the usual practice in literacy promotion. Rather, as been asserted earlier, it has been more functional in nature. Literacy discourse in the name of enlightenment has been more deceptive to the masses. Deception, in another sense, is nothing but a false ideology to maintain the existing order/condition of production that supports
the dominant class. Borrowing the idea of Karl Marx, Louis Althusser (2008) in his essay 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses' writes:

As Marx said, 'every child knows that a social formation which did not reproduce the conditions of production at the same time as it is produced would not last a year.' The ultimate condition of production is therefore the reproduction of the conditions of production. (Althusser 2008, p. 1)

In this context, it is argued here that Media literacy is both a material and ideological force for constituting and maintaining a particular kind of social formation. It acts as a categorical force for not only producing a particular socio, cultural and political order, but also, at the same time, reproduces the condition necessary for maintaining the existing order, that is often deceptive in nature. As Hawkes (2003) writes: “This involves reproducing the kinds of people who will be able to participate in the process of production” (Hawkes, 2003, p.118). As Althusser has asserts the power of the modern capitalist state to do this is dependent on two types of institutions: the Repressive State Apparatuses (RSAs) and Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs). If media literacy is an ideological or material force of production, then its primary objectives, in an Althusserian sense, would be to reproduce the conditions of production which is continuous and dialectical in nature. It is evident, as Media literacy in practice has been more authoritarian and dominant in its approach ignoring the libertarian potentials that have resulted in strengthening capitalism as a dominant mode of state functioning. In contravention to such a dominant perspective, media literacy can also be seen as an ideological force for the revival of socialism. To exist and sustain, both socialism and capitalism as modes of production, must reproduce their respective productive forces and their existing relations of production. On this note Althusser (2008) writes:

[I]n order to exist, every social formation must reproduce the conditions of its production at the same time as it produces, and in order to be able to produce. It must therefore reproduce:

1. the productive forces,

2. the existing relations of production. (Althusser, 2008, p.2)
Such an idea of media literacy is structural in character that emphasizes more of its functionalist perspective generating productive forces and the existing relations of production for maintaining the social order. Further, media literacy as it has been promoted, works as a ‘categorical force’ in reproducing the means of production. Borrowing the idea of Marx from *Capital*, volume two, Althusser writes:

[N]o production is possible which does not allow for the reproduction of the material conditions of production: the reproduction of the means of production.” (Althusser, 2008, p. 2).

In real sense, the way media literacy has been promoted is directed more towards the creation of surplus value, producing a condition for capitalism to sustain and to function as a dominant mode of production that emphasizes media literacy more as a means of consumption—of media texts to state policy—rather than a creative force for productive participation. As Althusser writes:

In order to think this mechanism, which leads to a kind of ‘endless chain’, it is necessary to follow Marx’s ‘global’ procedure, and to study in particular the relations of the circulation of capital between Department I (production of means of production) and Department II (production of means of consumption), and the realization of surplus value, in *Capital*, Volumes Two and Three. (Althusser, 2008, p. 3-4)

Realization of the surplus value is guaranteed through the centralization of the productive forces, where media literacy acts as a force for the production of means of production and means of consumption. Such a condition is prevailed through a conformist tendency created by media with the circulation of stereotypical images for a disciplined society in a Foucauldian sense, with uniformity in ideas and ways of living as explained by Herbert Marcuse in *One Dimensional Man*, foreclosing individuality and freedom. Under such circumstances, the very notion of ‘identity’ as an act of ‘mediation of the self’ is confined to a disciplined lifestyle, conforming to the existing order. Anything beyond such an ‘imaginary’ or ‘constructive field’ is considered to be non-identical with the rest of the society leading to a crisis of identity. It is
reflected in media and social construction of the meaning of Nationality, gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, femininity, masculinity and through many other social-cultural patterns. Such an elusive construction of the ‘self’ as ‘literate’ or ‘disciplined’ individuals by media ultimately results in control over ‘space’ as a ‘productive category’ or ‘location’, replacing the traditional productive categories of land, labour and capital. Such a controlled space is constructed through the interpellation of a submissive ideology in the name of ‘literacy and disciplinarity’, through schooling, education system, religion to mass media practices for generating labour power or productive forces to sustain the existing social order. Louis Althusser writes:

[The reproduction of labour power requires not only a reproduction of its skills, but also, at the same time, a reproduction of its submission to the ruling ideology for the workers, and a reproduction of the ability to manipulate the ruling ideology correctly for the agents of exploitation and repression, so that they, too, will provide for the domination of the ruling class ‘in words’. (Althusser, 2008, p. 6-7)]

Media literacy as it has been valued, in a wider sense not only includes acquisition of technical and cognitive capabilities for interaction with the material space, but also it includes ideological and physical conditioning of the individuals. Whereas the physical conditioning is materialized imparting technical know-how through schooling and education, the ideological conditioning of individuals takes place through religious and mass media discourses. The production of labour power is reciprocal to ideological subjection of individuals. Most often, such a form of ideological consciousness or false consciousness is interpellated into the individuals through a repressive system of law, police, and judiciary. Althusser writes:

The reproduction of labour power thus reveals as its sine qua non not only the reproduction of its ‘skills’ but also the reproduction of its subjection to ruling ideology or of the ‘practice of that ideology, with the provision that it is not enough to say ‘not only but also’, for it is clear that it is in the forms and under the forms of ideological subjection that provision is made for the reproduction of the skills of labour power”. (Althusser, 2008, p. 7)
The relationship between technical and ideological dimensions of media literacy is just like the base-superstructure metaphor in Marxist dialectic. Both technical and ideological dimensions of literacy move hand in hand supporting each other, creating a condition each for the other to be practiced.

4.5. Dialectics of Media, Culture and Violence

The dynamics of media, culture and violence is premised on the contradictory nature of the growth of human civilization. In a phenomenological sense, it is based on the perennial break between subjects and the objects in motion, and its resultant effect on social practice and media practice. The result of such disunity between the subject and object affects the condition of the world that is experiencing a tendency of conflict in the socio-economic, political, and cultural spheres where we are caught between the high promises of modernity and the severity of tradition along with the dogmatism of religion, race, caste, and gender. Reason for such a phenomenon the world over is often related to globalisation led by a revolution in communication, media technologies and literacy connected to it. To cite Appadurai (1990) “...today’s global interactions is the tension between cultural homogenization and cultural heterogenisation” (Appadurai, 1990, p.295). Such an ambivalent tendency is also experienced in national and regional spheres in India often in the name of unity, diversity, nationality, ethnicity, and many other unifying modernist projects. Further, capitalism, with its utopian promise for autonomy, freedom, and choice has led to the construction of a more disjunctive and conflicting social and cultural space. Media, as the prophet of modernity, has certainly bridged the difference between local and global as it was proclaimed by Marshall McLuhan (McLuhan 1964, 1994), facilitating transnational and transactional flow of information, ideas and people (Appadurai, 1990), and leading to an inter-exchange of culture, political values and economic benefits among nations, regions and localities. But it seems, media has failed in its effort to create a condition for modernity to flourish in many parts of the world, including India, and this has led to a shift in the overall ways of thinking and living experienced
through a postmodern condition. Though the modernist projects have succeeded in objectifying the world, they lag behind in fostering change within the minds of the masses to act in response to the emerging conditions which is further reflected through social practices and media practices—resulting, either in social-violence or media-violence—as it is evident in the increasing number of conflicts, violence, revolutions that pervade the globe.

Both media, and society, as foreseen by Herbert Marcuse (1964), have become one-dimensional in character emphasising only the objective reality, ignoring the subjective attributes and creating an ethical vacuum. Along the lines, media has also reduced the difference between time and space, creating a world of illusion, turning everything into real and immediate and multiplying the pace of change often driven by conflicts or contradictions. A similar tendency is perceptible in the regional and national sphere in India, where there is a movement of people from periphery to centre and at the same time there is a movement from the centre to the periphery. There are people who are coming closer to the centre of power, politics and economy breaking the long existing prejudices of caste, religion, gender—often backed by inclusive policies. At the same time, there is a sense of alienation and separation of certain sections from the mainstream. This has led to a diverse and cosmopolitan character of the material space where we live, work, and entertain ourselves. Such diversities often create new challenges both for media and society to act with restraint. The reconfiguration of the material space has not been adequately supported by the subjective domains, and what emerges out of such disunity are opposing tendencies of dominance or resistance, acceptance or rejection, autonomy or dependence, emancipation or control, enlightenment or deception, division or unification, individualism or pluralism, culture or anarchy, unity or diversity like many other phenomena that are self-contradictory in nature. Such contradictory and critical process of change or dialectical progress of the world raises question over the language we practice for our engagement with the material space. Media as a force of production is often challenged by these contradictions and oppositional tendencies, and drives itself into confusion
whether to act in line with its predefined objectivities or with a subjective interference. In this critical situation should we practice the language of ‘nonviolence’ instead of a violent form language that has long been the order of social and media discourse? Because it is possible only through nonviolence, to bring unity among the new and emerging subjects and objects, can we think of ‘nonviolence’ as a dialectical principle of change? Or can we consider nonviolence as a dialectical mechanism for subject-object unity?

Media has a much broader dimension than how it is generally understood. Similarly, the word culture has wider connotations than how it is perceived and practiced. Raymond Williams ([1958] 1993) in Culture and Society defines culture, ‘a general state or habit of the mind’, having close relationship with the idea of human perfection. He also defines culture as ‘a whole way of life, material, intellectual and spiritual’. Both culture and communication are forces of production that produce a particular form or condition of life. However, media as a force of production has promoted and appreciated a material culture ignoring the subjective dimensions and expanding the gap between mind and matter, further alienating the subjects from the objects that has often led to a culture of violence. Culture has never been a static condition, but a continuously evolving phenomenon. The invention of new technologies and communication, and their adoption in our routine life has given birth to a new kind of media-culture. Further, it is culture, which decides the way we engage ourselves with space and time that further determines our identity, existence or meaning of life. Culture has two aspects, one is cognitive and the other is material. Cognitive culture is subjective in nature and constitutes our ideas and thoughts, whereas the material culture constitutes our engagement with objective world. Culture is also consciousness that constructs a form of life or a concrete formulation, i.e. society. Social practices are often determined by culture, and in a hyper-mediated society, culture is determined by media, as a new form of consciousness which is seen often violent in nature. The noticeable fact is that both media and culture have encouraged a violent form of life resorting to violence in their general
practices. In such a situation, the question that arises is what should be the language of ‘media’ as a dialectical force. What would be the language of ‘dialectic’ as a force of change that has evolved over a long period of history, escaping itself from the prejudice of materialism and idealism? So far, it seems that media has produced a violent form of consciousness along with a violent form of life. This has created our need for an experiment with nonviolence as a literate practice that would sustain socio-cultural unity.

If we do a philosophical enquiry, we find that just like the base-superstructure metaphor, it is often contradictory, whether socio-cultural practice determines media practices or media practice is determined by the socio-cultural practices. The debate over such a contradictory process of evolution or revolution has been long-standing since the time of ancient philosophy to modern. Such a process of evolution known as ‘dialectics’, and its philosophy ‘dialectical philosophy’, is divided into two branches; one is ‘dialectical idealism’ that gives priority to ideas over matters and the other is ‘dialectical materialism’, which gives priority to matter over ideas. If we look at the recent incident of harassment of the girl (that took place in Guwahati on July 9, 2012) through a dialectical lens, one view that comes to the fore is that it is social practice that is determining the media practices, that subscribes to the Marxist idea that “it is not consciousness that makes a man social being, rather it is social being that makes a man conscious”. Further, if we take an idealistic turn, and consider that the media has replaced human consciousness in a hyper-mediated society, the other view that comes out to the fore is that it is media practice that is determining social practices as it has happened in the incident of Bodo-Muslim clash in Assam with its fall outs in other parts of the country. It seems the confusion over media practice and social practice is just like the long existing confusion between idealism and materialism.

The subject-object imbalance or disunity,—which is the cause of conflicting tendencies and violence—the dialectical philosophy has been trying to determine since years lies in the irrational growth of science, society and
language. In the process of evolution each of these phenomena has influenced the other. While on the one hand, substantial amount of research has been conducted on the growth and development of the philosophy of nature that has led to the growth of science, scientific inventions and discoveries leading to the objectification of the world, on the other hand researches on the two other philosophical systems have been negligible. Gradually and persistently science has overpowered the philosophy society and language. Along the line, the growth of positive philosophy, an outcome of scientific enquiry has brought disunity in the society with its separation of subjects from the objects, often experimenting through a language of violence. Here we can say, ‘violence’ or ‘disunity’ or ‘science’ that has conquered every aspect of our life, including media, can only be countered through the language of ‘nonviolence’. What we need at this hour is an experiment through the language of ‘nonviolence’ for unity of the self with others.

In the North-East India, as is the case in the rest of India and the world, conflicts and violence are regular ‘incidents’, and also ‘events’. They are ‘incidents’, when they are spontaneous, and turn into ‘events’ when they are organised, managed, created or manufactured as it is in the recent clash between the Bodos and the so called immigrant Muslims of Kokrajhhar district in Assam, that broke out on July 20, 2012, the violence later spreading to different parts of the country as a result of rumour mongering and hate campaign through the social media and mobile phones. Another such incident is the harassment and manhandling of a girl in Guwahati on July 9, 2012 and its coverage in the TV and its postings in various social networking sites that give a good idea how incidents turn into events through media culture which is often violent. Considering these facts, media in North-East, along with the mainstream media (both print and electronic, including social media) has a significant role to play in creating a condition for the restoration of peace which is only possible through nonviolent media coverage of the incidents that are taking place not only in this region but also in different parts of the country.
Over the last few years, Assam has seen many violent incidents, most of them occurring in and around its capital-city Dispur (Guwahati)—such as the incident of mob assault on an Adivasi girl on November 24, 2007, when she was stripped naked in the broad daylight followed by a violent and unethical media coverage of the incident; the serial bomb blast on Oct 30, 2008, and its violent reportage showing the charred bodies and destruction of public property by the angry masses; the violent clash between the police force, and landless people carrying out a rally demanding land rights and its violent coverage in the media. There have been similar other incidents taking place in different corners of the state from time to time. With the help of both print media and nearly a dozen 24x7 satellite TV news channels which are competing for visual space, the past incidents/events have got national attention. Further, a healthy base of internet users and social-media activism has taken the issues of North-East to different parts of the country irrespective of their scale and magnitude, affecting people from the North-East residing in different locations of the country. What is observed is that conflict and violence have been the key content among TV news media of Assam, followed by the mainstream media, expanding the horizon of conflict. Both media and the masses are so addicted to a daily dose of violence, that, when there is no such major violent incident, the media turns to petty isolated violence. Sometimes incidents such as a person being beaten by the public for committing a minor theft are shown with all violent aspects. Sometimes it so happens that the public informs the reporters to arrive and take visuals of them punishing a person for committing a minor offence. Aggressive projection of such incidents in the media often results in more violence with a multiplier effect and sometimes miscreants come out openly to assault women and other vulnerable sections with an objective—“violence for more visibility”, as it happened in the case of harassment of the girl in Guwahati on July 9, 2012 by a group of men or the assault of a Mizo girl a few years back in Guwahati city by a group of women (my emphasis). Such a phenomenon is often linked with the culture of violence through media including print, TV and the social media. While print media
such as newspapers and magazines have furthered the violence with their provocative headlines (often statements) and violent or appealing photographs, television has led the condition of conflict to worse by provoking more violence with its repeated and round the clock coverage. The social media is at its worst in the recent two incidents by taking them to different parts of the country without lapse of time often with violent and provocative comments. Such incidents which are now a regular part of our life and society urge for an introspection of our engagement with media and social space.

If we reflect upon the above mentioned incidents or the violent tendencies, it seems that it has grown out of the disunity of subject and object in both the cases of social practice and media practice. If we take the case of media, it has been violent because it has ignored its roles and responsibility towards the society. Either media has acted with too much of its subjective interference or with too much of objective responsibilities. And in case of individuals—irrespective of sex—a similar kind of disunity is perceptible because they do not know how to condition themselves with the objective realities or how to engage themselves with the changing social and material space.

The subject-object disunity in both media practice and social practice is further affecting our cultural practices leading to a culture of violence. Just as in the case of base-superstructure and material-ideal dualities, media and culture fit into one drawing upon the other. They are interdependent. Media often produces new cultures as pointed out by Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer (Adorno and Max Horkheimer, 1993) who see media as culture industry. But sometimes, cultural values have bearing on the media practices, ultimately affecting social practices. Even though media is appreciated for its attributes like freedom, autonomy and pluralism, they are often self contradictory in nature.
Chapter End Notes:

1. Borrowing the idea from Craig Calhoun (1994), Manuel Castells (2010) defines resistance identity as “generated by those actors who are in positions/conditions devalued and/or stigmatized by the logic of domination, thus building trenches of resistance and survival on the basis of principle different from, or opposed to, those permeating the institutions of society” (Castells, 2010, p. 8).

2. Saul Newman (2005) argues that post anarchist politics, in a radical sense, would challenge the dominant political systems founded on the principles of enlightenment narratives. With the oblivious nature of grand narratives in post-modernity, the social and political fields are increasingly becoming differentiated and fragmented. Under such circumstances, as Newman argues “radical politics can no longer rely on fixed rational and normative foundations to guide it...rather radical politics today must remain open to a multiplicity of different identities and struggles, particularly those that take place at a more localized level at the interstices of power”. (Newman, 2005, p.49).

3. Henri Lefebvre (1991) in “The Social Production of Space” gives a good account of the concept of contradictory space. Lefebvre contends that the concept of space itself is a big contradiction as it is very difficult to define and embody space. The difficulty in comprehending space results in the difficulty in attaining an absolute status in the condition of knowledge and truth from a Hegelian sense. Lefebvre is apprehensive of social space as a construct of ‘dualities’ as they cannot embody contradictions. Thinking and conceptualizing space leads us to a contradictory state as the concept of space is polyvalent that includes both concrete and abstract space such as geometrical space, historical space, physiological space, linguistic space, epistemological space, ontological space among others. In this context media literacy as a spatial category requires greater and wider understanding both from an epistemological and ontological stand point. As Lefebvre opines, “abstract space can only be grasped abstractly by a thought that is prepared to separate logic from the dialectic, to reduce contradictions to false coherence, and to confuse the residua of that reduction” (Lefebvre, 1991, p.307).

4. As explained by Saul Newman (2005), ‘postanarchism’ “is an anti authoritarian politics that affirms the contingency of political identity, the indeterminacy of history and the new possibilities of emancipation offered by postmodernity. Post-anarchism would be a series of politico ethical strategies that are aimed at the deconstruction of authority, exposing the domination and coercion behind institutions norms and practices that we tend to accept as normal or legitimate” (Newman, 2005, p. 49).

6. We consider that ‘identity’ is constructed through an act of ‘mediation of the self. Identity is a construct which is sometimes imposed and sometimes acquired. It is dialectically constituted as a result of the interaction between self and the other. Whereas the ‘self’, as we refer to ‘consciousness’ is conditioned by the other, the other is always molded as a result of intervention of the self. Identity is constructed as a result of the relationships we establish with other objects/subjects that we encounter within a spatial field. The construction of identity is an inter-textual activity. Identity is constructed as the way of our interaction with the socio cultural surroundings, also known as the socio-cultural space with a definite spatio-temporal dimension. For the concept of space, refer to Henri Lefebvre’s *The Production of Space*. (Trans.) Donald Nicholson-Smith. Blackwell, USA, 1991.

7. Henri Lefebvre in “*The Production of Space*” (Translated by Donald Nicholson-Smith. Blackwell, USA, 1991) takes a triadic approach to the production of space, where social space is considered a result of three processes of production: material practices of (re)production, forms of conception bound by ideology and institutional knowledge, and more symbolic form of representation and everyday imagination. The production of space is a critique of how state, capital; rationalist knowledge and phallocentric symbolism produces an abstract form of space.

References:

3. Ibid.
7. Ibid.
18. Ibid.
19. Ibid.
20. Ibid.
21. Ibid.