

Communication and Modern Civilization

Dr. Shilpa Chowdhary

Abstract-No group can exist without communication: the transference of meaning among its members. It is only through transmitting meaning from one to another that information and ideas can be conveyed. Communication, however, is more than merely imparting meaning. It must also be understood. In a group where one member speaks only French and others do not know French, the individual will not be fully understood. Therefore, communication must include both the transference and the understanding of meaning. Perfect communication, if there were such a thing, would exist only when a thought or an idea was transmitted so that the mental picture perceived by the receiver was exactly the same as that envisioned by the sender. And it is the skill of communication of the sender through which he crosses all the barriers between him and the receiver. This skill makes one well understood and accepted and many lives become smooth, livable and successful.

Key Words: Communication, Civilization.

Democritus, the Greek philosopher has rightly said "You cannot live in the same society a second time". This is just as you cannot step into the same place twice. It means that change in the human society is continuous, perennial and pervading.

It is only through change that progress in the society is brought about. More the change, greater is the progress. Human civilization has reached the present stage only due to social changes. Social change is the key to social progress.

Communication is one of the most powerful means of bringing about social change. Mac Luhan has developed a thesis of technological determinism which says that changes in the technology of communication bring about social changes. The revolution in the media of communication has accelerated the pace of social change in the last few decades. Radio, television, newspapers and other mass media have not only "shrunk" this world but have also revolutionized the values, attitudes and interests of the social milieu.

Communication is the master key to modern

civilization. It has affected the entire world immensely and wonderfully. The whole world has been reduced to a close neighbourhood. The distance of time and space has been almost removed and all barriers of castes, communities, creeds and colours have given place to mutual fellow-feeling, interrelationships and co-operative ventures. Robert M-Hutchins, a distinguished educationist, has named it "a communication revolution". In fact, today it has exerted inevitable influence on millions and billions of people all over the globe through various means and media. It is informing, entertaining and inspiring individuals in many ways.

Communication is a process of transmitting information and ideas from one person to another. It implies common experiences, mutual sharing or give-and-take. It gives different meaning to different people.

Communication assumes a democratic philosophy of life which implies the dignity and respect of all persons who enter into any kind of communication. It also gives freedom to learn and criticize. John Dewey, an exponent of democracy, has emphasized shared experience as

Dr. Shilpa Chowdhary has teaching experience of over 15 years. At present, she is teaching as Assistant Professor, Department of English, Sri Aurobindo College (Morning), University of Delhi, New Delhi. She has published various articles in national and international journals. She has attended and presented papers in national and international seminars and conferences.

a key element in communication. He says, "Communication is a process of sharing experience till it becomes a common possession; it modifies the disposition of both the parties who partake of it."¹

Willbur Schramm, an outstanding communication expert, has said that communication "is concerned with all the ways in which all information and ideas are exchanged and shared. Thus we are talking about both mass and interpersonal communication. We are talking about the spoken word, signal, gesture, picture, visual display, print broadcast, film - all the signs and symbols by which humans try to convey meaning and value of another."

An important task of communication is to promote development and without its support no project can be made successful. Balcomb (1975) has aptly mentioned that many ambitious projects have failed because of poor all-round communication. From his own experience, Mac Luhan has pointed out that the UNICEF and other agencies had supplied a considerable amount of audio-visual equipment to various projects but much of this was being poorly used. The hardware was there, but the software was very often left out to take care of itself. This means that proper dovetailing and adequate coordination as well as integration of the technical equipment used for communication purpose and the messages on information that are to be transmitted through these mechanisms are essential for effective communication. Thus, for implementing projects in every field, whether health or agriculture or education, the building of such overall communication system is technically called the "Project Support Communication".

It may be mentioned in this connection that at least four elements are required for communication: (i) source (ii) message (iii) channel and (iv) destination (Schramm, 1954). These involve both human and mechanical segments for communication. There must be person(s) to initiate at one end and receive at the other end, and a message to be conveyed by expression, gestures, spoken or written symbols

or by drama or photographed pictures. This process emphasizes the need for common understanding of language and word meanings based on similarity of experience and background for effective communication.

The source must have the correct message to be transmitted clearly to the receiver. It is also to be ensured that the receiver is understanding the message accurately and is also producing a desired response. Thus, communication must be a two-way process resulting in intercommunication based on mutual sharing of experiences and a continual feedback. Effective communication is, therefore, a two-way process.

With a view to making communication effective, motivation of the persons concerned is to be generated. People should think for themselves and on their own initiative. They must do whatever they think is right and desirable for them, and not just because they are told to do so. They are to function as project participants and not merely as project beneficiaries.

Without the need being felt by the beneficiaries themselves, the project, howsoever need based and useful, cannot be implemented successfully. A small example may be cited here. In a tribal village, women had to go to distant hilltops to fetch drinking water. Under the Community Development Project in that village, a well was sunk and sweet water was made available. But the tribal women were so used to bringing water from a high altitude and not oriented to drawing water from a well nearby that the well eventually turned to be a big dustbin.

Another interesting incident of this nature has been narrated by Matheson (1975). Many years ago, a big project was started in the vicinity of Rome to clear the Potine Marshes for eliminating mosquitoes and the diseases from the city and at the same time creating more arable land for cultivation of vegetables and fruits. But fishermen living in the swampy places and earning their livelihood from fishing grew irate at the prospect of swamps being drained out. They broke the walls of the water tanks that had been created to lead off the water and soon the ambitious drainage project

was completely wrecked.

These phenomena clearly indicate communication gap as the tribal community and the fishermen were not explained about these projects which were meant for a better and happier life. Matheson has, therefore, remarked that although tools and technology are available today to help improve the lives of people throughout the developing world, too many projects still fail to achieve their goals because communication experts and development planners often do not communicate effectively with each other or with the people they are trying to help. Unless the people themselves are made ready for the changes and feel the need for change, no project can be a success.

We may use various kinds of mass media and audio-visual aids but our message must be clear and should be communicated as effectively as possible. In order to facilitate this, audience have to be motivated through various means, most important of which is felt to be interpersonal communication. Matheson has again hammered this point when he says that finding the right message for the right medium for a specific audience is a constant challenge for communication experts and development planners and workers. Much has been claimed for the power of the mass media and it has certainly achieved wonders in bringing people instant information and in shaping lifestyles and beliefs. But when it comes to rural societies, especially where literacy levels are low and traditions deep-rooted, the effectiveness of mass media in bringing about change is very limited. Experience has shown that probably the single most effective means of communication is the

interpersonal dialogue between two or more people.

Every medium of communication has its own limitations. So it has to be selected according to the socio-cultural conditions of the clientele and be used in appropriate time and place with much stage. They must be integrated with the whole system and not just tagged on as an afterthought. Moreover, adequate awareness of the target population should be generated, their needs felt by themselves, their motivations created and attitude changed so that communication is made effective and social change facilitated for our desired ends.

References:

Ottaway, AKC (1962), *Education and Society*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London

Mac Iver R.M. (1950), *Society*, Macmillan, London

Ogburn, WF & Nimkoff (1947), *A Handbook of Sociology*, Keagan Paul

Balcomb, John (1972), "Communication for Development: Propaganda to Dialogue and Entertainment" in the UNICEF NEWS issue 84/1972/2

Schramm, W (1954), *The Process and Effects of Mass Communication*, University of Illinois, Urban

Dewey, John (1963), *Democracy and Education*, Macmillan, New York

