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Media Ethics Country Paper on Pakistan

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Media Ethics
Country Paper on Pakistan

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INTRODUCTION

During the last fifty years in Pakistan, the number of people reached by mass media have risen and its role in their life has increased dramatically. Today the mass media affects all aspects of their life including political, social and personal life. It shapes their world view, it evokes 'primordial' values of good & evil, love & hate, envy & prejudice, compassion and altruism. It introduces them to cooking & stitching, sports and aerobics. It is a parent, a teacher, a role model and a friend. In other words it is a surrogate community and sometimes even a surrogate family. Its geographic scope is increasingly expanding beyond local communities to entire nations and now at a global level. The issue of ethics in media is therefore as relevant and as complicated as ethics in society. In political life the ethical issues of reconciling various sources of power dominate the discussion. In social life, the issues are that of reconciling competing social preferences across religious, moral, generational, ethnic and socio-economic divides. In personal life the ethical issues may relate to personality development of oneself and ones family.

As more and more of physical reality cedes the stage to virtual reality the custodians of this new space will be subjected to an expanding framework and newer dimensions of Ethics, and concerns about its observance will be enhanced.

A discussion about Media Ethics therefore is universal on the one hand because it addresses issues which are fairly uniform across the globe but particular in the sense that different societies may lie at a different point on the continuum of change which extends the role of media in political, social and personal life.

The expanding scope of media in our lives increases its functions and the relevant actors. The repertoire of functions and the cast of actors who play a role on the stage of media ethics is thus somewhat specific from society to society. And so are the nature of prompts and punishments or incentives and penalties which must be administered to give teeth to social consensus on a desirable Code of Ethics. And here of course we are confronted with the issue of social consensus and the unique ways in which various societies may strive to achieve a semblance of social consensus.

While all of this discussion may seem abstract, it has essentially emerged from reflections on the experience of Pakistan in its recent history spanning over half a century. The following section provides a sketch of the expanding role of media in the life of a Pakistani. It thus lays down the context in which the current debate on media ethics is being conducted.

THE GROWING ROLE OF MASS MEDIA IN PAKISTAN

Fifty years ago the country which is today Pakistan had a population of approximately 35 million persons; more than 80% or 30 million lived in rural areas, leaving an urban population of around 5 million. The rural areas were quite inaccessible as roads were poor, there were no telephones and electricity supply was quite uncommon. The mass media, as we know it today, was restricted to newspapers constrained by the limitations of literacy which were around 15% of the total population. Thus a literate population of less than five million dispersed across different key locations on a sizeable land mass of over 700,000 kilometers could be sparsely reached by newspapers, whose timely supply would obviously be constrained by the speed of trains and buses, if and where rail tracks and motorable roads were available.

This is not to say that mass media did not enjoy a significant role at that time. To the contrary there was a magic about the written word and a mystery about the nascent radio broadcast; and hence their reach and impact defied the calculations made through current techniques of audience measurement relying on reach, frequency and target rating points, without taking into account the magic and the mystery of the medium (much of which has in fact disappeared today, with time and other overreaching developments). Perhaps the mass media achieved its reach and exercised its impact by becoming an artifact in a social setting in which the word of mouth in the parlours of the rich and the famous and the 'hujras'

(community meeting places) and ‘tharas’ (street corners) of the commoners amplified any utterance in print and sound. The reach and impact flowed step by step in a complex social environment. The mass media essentially reached the real masses through the intermediation of an elite which resided mostly in urban areas and was privileged to access the media through education and financial capacity to buy a newspaper or owned an uncommon possession, the radio. The influence of the mass media in those days should however not be underestimated, if only by gauging the restrictions which governments placed on it and the enthusiasm with which political activists and social reformers aspired to mobilize it for their causes. But, it is quite evident that the direct audience of the mass media were quite small, and its true significance lay in its effective relationship with other social institutions notably the grass-root political and social organisation. In politics, the mass media (print media was the only option) was an important instrument with which the civil society could build its organisation to compete with a much better organised and ever encroaching (at the time) power of the colonial or the post-colonial state. The mass media helped build a grass-root organisation which in turn amplified the message carried through it. In social controversies the influence of the mass media rested on its ability to create a ‘rumour’ which travelled with its characteristic speed and distorted signal at each rung of a spiraling path.

The debate on media ethics was carried out to address these issues. The focus was primarily on politics and a tug of war between the state and various civil society institutions. An acrimonious issue was the extent to which the ruling group could claim to be the sole custodian and spokesman

for the state. The agenda of discussion was largely limited to the concerns of the state and the concerns of political rulers and oppositions. In more recent years the parameters of debate on media on media ethics have however gone beyond the concerns of the state and the concerns of political rulers and oppositions.

The new parameters are related to the social and cultural life and the field of business and commerce. These new battle grounds have become important alongwith the expanded role of mass media in our lives. We shall briefly discuss here the expanding role of print and electronic media in the life of an average Pakistani.

Print Media

During the last fifty years the urban population of Pakistan has grown nearly ten fold from a little more than 5 million to nearly 50 million. And despite pathetically low rates of literacy, the absolute number of literates have also grown more than 10 times, partly due to the growth in population and partly as a result of higher literacy rates. More importantly a vast network of roads, albeit of very poor quality, has brought most of the 90 million rural Pakistanis within the reach of urban centres. Air and road transportation has revolutionized during the same period. The newspapers are thus reaching larger numbers not just through the word of mouth, but directly. An average newspaper is read by seven or more readers because nearly half of readers read from a borrowed paper. Today, nearly 50% of Pakistan's adult population is a regular or casual reader of newspapers. For all readers combined the average reading time is a little more than thirty minutes. More

than 90% of the readership is in Urdu language and the remaining is split between Sindhi as regional language and English. The readership is split between the more expensive newspapers priced at Rs. 7-10 and the less expensive ones priced at Rs. 2-5. The former category of newspapers are considerably more voluminous than the latter and include several specialized sections on Sports, Entertainment, Business as well as more than one magazine each week. The larger volume allows them to extend the scope of their writings to social and commercial issues and to include a sizeable number of advertisements. The print media now earns approximately 2.5 billion Rupees a year from advertising which by Pakistani standards is a large sum. Newspaper readership is almost universal among the one million upscale households which constitute the top 5% of the socio-economic hierarchy in the country.

The purpose of this description of the current situation of newspaper readership in Pakistan is to show that newspapers are an important actor on the political, social and commercial scene of Pakistan. Their reach cuts across urban and rural areas, and various socio-economic classes. Only a few newspapers in Pakistan cater to narrow political or communal groups. In most of the cases they attempt to attract a cross section of political and social segments. This in itself suggests that newspapers are not an aid to supplement grass-root organisations with a narrowly focused or partisan agenda. They are increasingly a reflection of the broad spectrum of our society. This creates an interesting change in the attitudes of those who wish to use or misuse this medium for their partisan purpose; and this includes the ruling political groups as well as other important political, social and

commercial actors. It is futile for them to dominate it to the exclusion of their competitors, for in that case it would cease to be the collective arena on which they wish to compete. Instead they would like to disproportionately influence an arena which is otherwise driven towards reflecting the society in proportions approximating the reality. This change gives a new nuance to both the parameters of media ethics and the measures to ensure an ethical behaviour. It is interesting to note that the distortions of truth and fairness are today caused less by blatantly coercive and legal means and more through subtle or not so subtle use of infiltration, corruption and to use an even harsher word, black-mail. With greater resources at their disposal, the rulers have been more prominent and powerful players in this improper contest, but these means are not unknown in their use to political oppositions, ideologues of various cultural preferences and global players of all varieties, for causes which are justified by their national, emotional or commercial interests. The institutions of the state including the civil bureaucracy and the armed forces have also not shied away from this contest. By some accounts they have been the most vicious players. It is important to highlight these aspects of reality when we deliberate on the means to enforce an ethical behaviour in the mass media. Increasingly the distortion of truth and fairness is caused not through open sanctions, but through sneaky and crooked means; its remedy may require more than formal legal checks and a process which goes beyond a recourse to the traditional legal process.

Electronic Media

What is true for the expanded role of print media in our lives becomes considerably more important when we turn to the electronic media.

More than three fourth of urban households and nearly half of all rural households in Pakistan own a television set and watch it fairly regularly. An equal number own a radio set but only half of them listen to it with some regularity. Still the daily reach of radio is approximately 10 million adults. For television the number of estimated viewers on a given day are more than twice as many. The reach of television has certainly been helped by the fact that in the last twenty years, rural electrification has grown four times from 16% of rural households to more than 60%. In the case of television, an average viewer watches it for nearly three hours a day, and this duration has been on the rise. The rise in viewing time is correlated with the increase in transmission time and the increase in the number and variety (in terms of content) of channels available to a viewer. The medium of television is a major vehicle for shifting our lifestyles towards a virtual world. According to a recent study by Gallup nearly 40% of adults in Karachi are up and watching TV at 10:00 p.m; the comparable figure for late night viewing, during the some hours, was only 10% twenty years ago. The TV viewers receive information and form attitudes on many, though not all aspects of life from television programmes. Another study by Gallup on health and hygiene has shown that a majority of Pakistanis receive information about health from the mass media, principally television. Nevertheless it has its limitation, and a large number say that before they take a practical step on a

health matter they consult a personal friend or relative. But, the role of TV is pervasive; its viewers watch it for 3 out of let us say 8 hours during which they are not sleeping or at work. It is a major social institution which is rapidly integrating itself alongwith, and in some cases as a substitute of, family and neighbourhood.

The pervasive role of TV in our lives provides great temptation to political rulers and the adherents of social engineering. But, once again empirical evidence suggests that despite its impressive reach, perceptions about the effects of television in changing peoples' behaviour is somewhat exaggerated. The relationship between reach, awareness, attitude formation and behaviour change is far more complex than most political leaders or social engineers would like to believe. Empirical evidence from Pakistan shows that long years of prejudicial campaigns against political oppositions were quite ineffective in converting the loyalties of people to whom such campaigns were addressed. During 1977–88 the government of General Zia-ul-Haq carried out massive TV campaigns against Bhutto's Peoples Party. But, when elections were called in 1988, the Peoples Party polled a proportion of votes which was almost identical to what it enjoyed prior to the years of television campaigns against it. Television campaigns had failed to convert its target audience. However it may have produced the effect of consolidating the anti Bhutto sentiments of those who were already predisposed in that direction. The evidence for this appears through another study carried out in 1992 when an intensive TV campaign was carried out to show that Bhutto's Peoples Party was a terrorist organisation. The TV campaign focused on personal confessions by some prominent 'terrorists'

who had been captured. A study before and after the campaign showed that it had not converted even one percent of Bhutto supporters; however the campaign was quite successful among the anti Bhutto constituency: Many more among them viewed the Peoples Party as a terrorist organisation after the TV campaign than before it. From the other side of the political spectrum the anti Nawaz Sharif TV campaign by the Bhutto government during its tenures in government (1988-90 and 1994-96) failed to diminish his political support.

It is important to recognise the role of TV alongwith its power and limitations while we talk of developing a code of Ethics to regulate its use. Firstly, the freedom of expression on the air waves is not likely to drastically alter the political fortunes of leaders in government or the opposition. Secondly, television has considerable role in informing the people on social issues and affecting attitudes, but even there the behaviour change is often intermediated by traditional and personal channels of communication.

Advertising is an important part of electronic media, just as it is for the print media. According to current estimates the electronic media enjoys roughly an equal Rupee value of advertising with the print media: It is to the tune of Rs. 2.5 billion each year. Television is the principal beneficiary, since not more than 5% of total electronic media advertising budget goes to radio.

THE PARAMETERS OF MEDIA ETHICS

In the light of our discussion the parameters of media ethics should encompass both print and electronic media. Moreover the parameters of media ethics should span the political, social and commercial content of media.

If one looks at the recent deliberations on media ethics in Pakistan, the focus is primarily on the print media and on its political content; however discussion on the freedom of air waves is also beginning to surface through the legislation under consideration for allowing private participation in the operation of electronic media.

A number of practical moves are under active consideration in Pakistan. These include a law on the “Freedom of Information” another proposal for a law to form a “Press Council” and a law related to the broadcast media through forming its Regulatory Authority.

Both the draft law on the Broadcast Regulatory Authority and the officially supported move to form a Press Council include a section on Code of Ethics. Their reading leads one to the following conclusions:

Firstly there is a clear intent to follow the current global norms of a Code of conduct for the media through allowing a wide range of freedoms restricted only by such commonly, held considerations as “to ensure that programmes

and advertisements do not encourage violence, terrorism, racial, ethnic or religious discrimination, sectarianism or hatred”. There are nevertheless another set of wide ranging considerations like “Respect for the sovereignty, security and integrity of the state” and “Respect for national cultural and religious values and principles of public policy as enshrined in the Constitution”. This means that the effective Code of Conduct will in fact be shaped by precedence established through practice.

A proposed draft to form the Press Council goes into considerable details about the Code of Ethics, relating to

- Respect for Truth and Accuracy
- Respect for Privacy
- Refrain from inciting discrimination on grounds of race, religion, caste, sect, nationality, ethnicity, gender, disability, illness or age of an individual or group
- Refrain from sensationalism on issues of health, violence or brutalities
- Refrain from identification of victims of sexual offences
- Refrain from plagiarism, slander and libelous material

It also touches upon issues pertaining to the behaviour of media personnel on matters such as

- Refrain from biased reporting and publishing of unverifiable material

- Refrain from exchange of financial or other favours which are likely to create conflict of interest

It further refers to professional conduct regarding

- Prompt rectification of any harmful inaccuracies
- Equal and fair display to apologies
- Provision for right to reply
- Provision for opportunity to respond to allegations of wrong-doing

There is a notable difference of emphasis between the above list of refrains from those contained in the official Registration of Printing Press and Publications ordinance 1997. The list of refrains therein pertain to

- Offences against public tranquility
- Incitement to murder
- Advocacy against the nation's sovereignty
- Spreading of hatred against the government
- Exciting feeling of enmity among different national communities
- Seduction of government officials away from their national duties
- Attempted damage to Pakistan's foreign relations

On the whole the notion of Code of Conduct is being seen here as a judicial or quasi-judicial matter. Any departure from the prescribed code is hence a case for punishment or penalty. This is different from a concept of 'Rating' the media on its on-going performance and using the Rating as a basis for public approval or censure. The concept of Rating on a Code of Conduct developed through a consensual process is important for several reasons.

Firstly, ethical behaviour often lies on a continuum of propriety, wherein such clear departure from the norm which might call for formal punishment is hard to establish. There should of course be room for identification of cases of clear violation and the application of relevant judicial or quasi-judicial measures. But, there must also be the need to establish a mechanism to address the quality of behaviour on a Code of Conduct within the grey area of observance. Secondly, a given publication or media channel is unlikely to be a good or bad performer on all the issues at all times. Its departures from code of conduct are likely to be selective. Hence one may develop a procedure to rate media publications and channels either on an on-going basis, or through randomly selected samples. These Ratings would then serve as a voluntary guideline for the audience and the advertisers to judge levels of compliance or observance of the Code of Ethics. In a sense the formal compliance with the Code of Ethics would be judged through a judicial or quasi-judicial process, while the level of observance would be judged through a process of social sanctions administered through public ratings on the observance of Code of Conduct. Considering that the scope of mass media has extended to large and diverse sections of the population and its area of influence is much wider than politics or concerns of the state, the range of concerned parties is extremely wide and varied. Their perceptions of what level of observance of a code of conduct is tolerable is also varied. Thus it may be appropriate to treat the quality of conduct in media akin to how quality of education is judged in America through Rating of educational institutions, or the manner in which creditors are rated by Credit Rating Agencies and in a somewhat similar though not identical case, to the rating of movies.

ACTORS ON THE STAGE OF MEDIA ETHICS

It is important to identify the various actors on the stage of media ethics. They include the players, the spectators (audience) and the referees (judges).

Media organisations are today large corporate bodies with owners, managers and professionals. In an ideal situation it is considered best to separate the owner / manager role from the professional role of the media persons. It is presumed that such a separation would ensure that business considerations do not affect the professional judgement of journalists. Thus there is a clear distinction between professional content, advertising and ownership / management. In recent developments there is a tendency, especially in the electronic media, to breach these distinctions.

Programme content and advertising blend into each other in stage shows and other formats. Some of it is done overboard and in a transparent manner, in other cases the relationship between public relations advertising and programme content is not clearly identified. In its worst form the relationship becomes blatant extortion: If you oblige you get good and positive display, if you do not oblige you are not simply ignored, instead you get negative and scandalous display. This form of unethical practice, turning into black-mail is a serious cause for concern.

As the influence of media goes beyond political arena into social and commercial life, its function of vigilance and transparency assumes new dimensions. In political matters the journalists assumed an ‘adversarial role’

and ‘cronyship’ with people or institutions on whom they reported was looked upon with suspicion, and only a very fine and delicate combination of the two was acceptable. A good journalist had to safeguard his or her independence. In return they could claim privileged access to information. Such information was generally received at no cost and distributed at no cost to the media audience. It was all in the public realm, guided by (mostly) an unwritten social contract in which the journalist was perceived to be different from intelligence operators working for governments or business concerns. This feature of media was selectively misused by the intelligence community. But, by and large, the media maintained itself as a class different from spooks.

In an information economy in which information and marketing have become the center-piece of economic activity, such a distinction will come under increasing pressure. There is another emerging complication in this field. The tremendous expansion in the field of media in terms of number of publications and channels, quantum of content and global coverage combined with a communications technology which relies on decentralized personal equipment, a large part of media information gathering has been outsourced to free-lancing outfits. Clearly they are an important part of the most respectable media institutions, but not all of them behave with the same respect for journalistic code of ethics as is expected from the better known buyers of their services, who have a strong stake in maintaining their ‘brand equity’. A country such as Pakistan is an important case study because it displays in a more crude and transparent form the same ailments which may be present and growing in subtler forms elsewhere.

For example Pakistani newspapers have practiced for a long time a system of local ‘stingers’ in the districts. It is generally believed that they receive very little if any remuneration from their employers or appointing authorities. At one time it was believed that they were interested to offer their services and received their gratification from a sense of pride and perhaps the privilege of being considered among the local elite. As the role of media is expanding these positions have become more controversial; it is now alleged that the positions are purchased as an investment to extort financial gains through corrupt practices and blackmail tactics.

The increasing requirements of information by national governments, global actors and commercial institutions have created a situation in which it is becoming harder to distinguish between full time workers for media organisations who deal in the public realm only, part time stingers, sub-contractors (receiving outsourced work), hybrid organisations which combine work which is in the public domain with work which is exclusive and of a proprietary nature. There is a wide range of people belonging to media, academia, consulting organisations, diplomats, IT professionals, governments and intelligence outfits who are all doing fairly similar work. Some of them, such as journalists and academia, claim privileged treatment in the collection of information, in return for observing a code of conduct which is also distinctive. However when this relationship of trust is abused, the credibility of the entire relationship and its framework becomes suspect. This is quite characteristic of the situation in Pakistan. It has been caused through successive actions of the owners, managers, journalists, and other

actors involved in the broader field of information gathering and reporting. It is important then to take a comprehensive view of actors within the context of new information technology and a new economy which rests on information as a key and scarce resource.

It is within this new framework that actors who play the role of a referee or judge, such as standards councils and ombudsmen may acquire a more important role to play. It would be important that standards councils and ombudsmen should take a philosophical view of the situation from time to time, perhaps year to year during periods of rapid change, and give their views on the complex dilemmas under which freedom of information must be balanced by other considerations. Access to information on the one hand and prevention of misuse of information on the other hand are issues which may require constant vigilance. A country specific reflection on a periodic basis may provide much needed countervailing power to those who may be searching for corrective mechanisms in a situation of change. Such a review should also address the relevance of public interest justifications against freedom of access to information. Often such justification continue to remain operative even after the original circumstances which prompted their application disappear.

Considering that vast areas of our lives are affected by media, and the situation is constantly under change, giving birth to new issues all the time, the importance of standards Councils and Ombudsmen and Complaints Councils has become extremely vital. They must however be supported through research efforts in two ways: Firstly a philosophical review on a

periodic basis is essential to lay the grounds for evaluation. Secondly ongoing research support is required for a systematic empirical evaluation of the observance levels of an agreed code of ethics.

A very important actor on the stage of media ethics is the ordinary citizen or the audience of the media. In a way they are the final customers whose satisfaction is an important concern of the entire activity. It is the average citizen, whose views on freedom of information, the relative balance among the various wielders of power, and standards of moral behaviour are critical. The Standards Councils the Ombudsmen and even the Courts are eventually affected by the popular milieu, although their own judgements, are a means in themselves to shape popular attitudes, since the average citizen looks up for guidance to them. In any case it is important to constantly gauge public attitudes on the parameters and positions on a Code of Ethics.

It is interesting to note that in the case of Pakistan, there is, in recent years, a strong support for the independence of media from government control. It is possibly a result of the fact that independence of media has remained on the agenda of most popular political struggles in Pakistan's history, dating back to the 1960s (during Ayub Period), 1970s (during Bhutto period) and 1980s (during Zia period). Thus when popularly elected governments in the 1990s made an overt move to control the press, it was opposed by a majority of public opinion. Public opinion polls have also consistently shown support for pluralism in current affairs and news reporting on the electronic media. The most interesting evidence of public views against government control of the press comes from the episode of a bitter conflict between the Jang Group

of newspapers (Pakistan's largest Print Media Group) and the Government of Nawaz Sharif in 1998-99. The Government had charged the newspaper group of massive tax evasion, whereas the newspaper group claimed that it had been targeted for selective action because it had refused to accept government dictation concerning journalists critical of the government. Public opinion was sought on this row and Gallup polls showed a majority favouring the position of the Newspaper Group. This was despite the fact that the Government otherwise enjoyed popular endorsement; in fact the views of its own intending voters were responsible for the balance of views against it on this issue. It was also despite the fact that popular views were very critical of tax evasion. Clearly a majority believed that the government's attempt to control the normal functioning of the newspaper was improper. According to the survey held at that time 80% said the Government was acting wrongly and only 20% said the Government was acting.

From among those who intended to vote for Nawaz government, 75% still opposed him on his perceived bid to control the Press. This is not withstanding that trust in the press is not too high. Only 49% say they place trust in the Press as an institution, as compared with more than 80% for the military on one end of the spectrum and nearly 15% for the police on the other end of the spectrum.

The Press must also consider in its own enlightened interest that there is an indirect relationship between the credibility of the medium and the credibility of advertising carried by it. In a related question in a Gallup poll

on the credibility of advertising carried by the newspapers one third of newspaper readers said they did not believe that advertising carried by newspapers was credible. Unfortunately there are no time series data available to provide a comparative perspective (nor do I presently have access to any cross-country comparison, which would certainly be helpful), but tracking these findings over time might provide a good understanding of public perceptions about the Press.

It would be useful that an independent poll each year should evaluate popular perceptions about the ethical behaviour of various channels of the media including print and electronic. Its findings should be made public for discussion and deliberation. This exercise would also serve the purpose of providing a perspective on the ethical behaviour of media, which may not be necessarily be the same as that of the media itself or the standards councils.

As the world of media around us changes rapidly, it would be interesting to keep track of the varied perceptions of actors on this stage, the media people, the standards councils and the ordinary citizen who are the end consumers of the media product.

TYPE OF REGULATION & The Nature of Sanctions

At one time media was seen as a relatively limited phenomenon, limited in its reach and limited in the scope of subjects which it affected. Thus the sanctions were viewed mainly in two ways: Governmental restrictions in terms of licensing requirements or their revocation and damages in case of libel.

As the reach and scope of media increase and it becomes a very important social institution on a host of subjects, it becomes important to develop a new set of social sanctions to keep the media disciplined within the prevailing social **mores** of the society. Of course it is very difficult to define, evolve and enforce social **mores** and social sanctions. Nor can they ever be as precise and as enforceable as legal sanctions; in fact if they were so, the purpose of distinguishing the two would be lost. However it is very important to evolve standards of ethics for social behaviour and to enforce them. In a society such as Pakistan, such standards and their enforcement is present in traditional segments of the society and on those aspects of life which are less touched by the drive of modernization, such as family and primordial customs. But, we find it very difficult to deal with an equal level of nuance, tolerance, compromise or even discipline when it comes to modern institutions such as the mass media. This is why we find it very difficult to even perceive that it can be managed through self-regulatory means. We find it necessary to create statutory bodies through overriding role of government in their establishment, financing and administration. The non statutory bodies either do not remain functional or are split along

partisan lines and cease to be a collective forum. This is the reason why a Press Council in Pakistan is not being conceived as a self regulatory body; instead the current proposal is to establish it under a government statute, supported by government funding, albeit with a management controlled by private persons rather than government functionaries. Under the present circumstances this may very well be the only practical course. But it must nevertheless be considered a transitional arrangement, to be ultimately converted into a self regulating institution independent of the state. We must understand that the institution of state is receding and the forward thrust now rests with a host of new non-state institutions. In their broad concept non-state institutions are remotely related to how our traditional society managed itself, but they are essentially very different modern institutions. They are the bedrock of effective democracy in modern nation states and they will form the foundation of global governance of one or another variety in the 21st century. The mass media and information technology is shaping that future for us. It is important to visualize our upcoming institutions within the perspective of a future in which local and global society may look for solutions for its problems outside the ambit of the state.

CONCLUSION

Pakistan is entering a new stage in its history of discussions and debates on media ethics. A much maligned law on the management of Press and Publications has been practically revoked. It is in the process of being replaced by a new law regarding the print media. In the meantime the state monopoly of air waves has come under strong criticism and a new law which permits greater competition and pluralism in the electronic media is on the cards. As the role of media in society becomes wider in coverage and deeper in scope of effects, the need for developing media ethics through a process of social consensus become all the more important. The current debates in Pakistan do identify the broad parameters of media ethics, which have been reproduced in this paper.

Under the current scenario the importance of non-state institutions for defining and regulating media ethics has increased. But given the realities it may be advisable to initially establish standards councils under government statute with the essential aim of phasing out government role and relinquishing it to self-regulating entities in due course.

Corresponding with this approach would be the need for combining legal sanctions with social sanctions exercised through systematic compilation and disclosure of violations of media ethics. Finally, considering the rapidly changing and increasing role of mass media in society there is the need to regularly track this change and develop philosophic reflections on how they affect our society and the manner in which we should harness their socially desirable consequences, and prevent what is considered socially undesirable. If mass media and information technology is shaping our lives, an on-going discourse and reflections on its implications must lie at the heart of an evolving framework for Media Ethics.