

Small Screen in the Indian Subcontinent: A Study on Five Decades of *Doordarshan*

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The obligation of a public service broadcasting media is very much crucial and tricky in a fast developing country like India, where it has to cater diverse audiences, cultures and languages. Historically, public service broadcasting has been vested with certain roles—an educator, entertainer and informer. But this concept is losing ground as 24 hour satellite channels are altering entertainment and educational needs and perceptions of the public to a greater extent which result in the tapering demarcation between commercial and public service broadcasting in India. The article tries to analyze or review the progress of Doordarshan (Indian Television) in its 54 years of its journey.

Keywords: Public service, broadcasting, *Doordarshan*, All India Radio, Prasar Bharati, satellite television.

Television in India has been in existence for nearly five and a half decades. At this juncture of its golden jubilee, ‘Prasar Bharati’, the autonomous body ruling the public service media—All India Radio and *Doordarshan* is giving the public a ray of hope. For many in India, television is synonymous to *Doordarshan*, the only visual Public Service Broadcasting in India. Television was introduced in India solely for educational and developmental purposes in 1959. Public service broadcasting in its ideal form is driven by a sincere vision of providing accessible, diverse, independent and high-quality content to citizens (Vasanthi, 2009). This public broadcaster looks at the challenges ahead, amidst the proliferation of private channels and the changing face of the media. The paper tries to analyze the 54 years of public broadcasting (television) in India. Beginning with exploring its origins in 1959, this article travel through its milestones in broadcasting, and ends with analyzing the pitfalls and challenges ahead of in public broadcasting comparing it to other public broadcasting services’ in the world. The future of *Doordarshan* arouse curiosity as it is faced with many challenges from multiple-channels or the bouquet approach, where priority is given to entertainment programmes by both audience and channels, thereby redefining public broadcasting.

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Even though experiments in television broadcasting were initiated during the 1920s in the US and Europe, the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting in India was reluctant to accept the demand from educational institutions, politicians, industrialists and the middle-class in urban areas for the introduction of television in India (Kumar, 2000). The government felt that television was only a luxury for a nation, which had yet to reach economic stability. However, in 1958, Philips demonstrated television usage in an exhibition at New Delhi, and also put forward an offer to provide Indian government with low cost transmitters. UNESCO's grant of 20 thousand dollar for the purchase of community receivers together with the United States' offer of some equipment was acceptable to the Ministry; this initiated the plan on an experimental basis. But the sole purpose was to inspect what a system like television could do to developmental programmes and formal education for a developing nation like India.

On September 1959, under the department of All India Radio, a television centre was established in New Delhi, covering a low power transmitter, the range of which was only 40 kilometers around Delhi. Unlike today, television was not a part of every household, but was provided to 180 'teleclubs' situated in and around New Delhi. Social education programmes began to be telecasted twice a week, each of 20 minutes duration. The programmes were modest, primarily concerning the importance of hygiene, civic sense and environmental consciousness. In August 1965, apart from these social education programmes, entertainment and informational programmes were introduced and the Federal Republic of Germany helped in setting up a movable studio at New Delhi. By 1967, the duration of the service was increased to three hours and the coverage of the transmitter was extended to 60 kilometers encompassing more areas in neighboring states of Haryana and Uttar Pradesh. The most significant programme was 'Krishi Darshan' (1967) produced with the help of the Department of Atomic Energy, the Indian Agricultural Research Institute, the Delhi Administration and the State governments of Uttar Pradesh and Haryana.

The visionary behind broadcasting development in India was Dr. Vikram Sarabhai, the brain behind Indian space exploration, who believed that a satellite television system could bring in further advancement to social and economical development through, at the time, an underutilized Indian communication system (Singhal and Rogers, 2001). As per his vision, a National Satellite Communication Group (NASCOM) was established in 1968. It recommended a broadcasting system in which communication satellites and ground based microwave relay transmitters be used. Accordingly, in 1969, the Department of Atomic Energy for a pilot experiment project called SITE (Satellite Instructional Television Experiment) signed an agreement with NASA for the loan of a satellite free of cost for one year which took off on August 1975. The broadcast service used NASA's ATS- 6 satellite to transmit programmes directly through the satellite to the receivers or community sets installed at schools (through earth transmitters) at 2400 villages, spread over six states—Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Orissa, Rajasthan, Andhra Pradesh, and Karnataka. The programmes on education, agriculture, health and family planning, were broadcasted four hours a day from earth stations positioned at Delhi and Ahmedabad. Programmes were planned and produced by All India Radio with the help of government representatives, academicians and social workers at

Delhi, Hyderabad and Cuttack. Additionally, ISRO (Indian Space Research Organization) set up its own audio-visual instruction division to plan and produce programmes according to schedule. Of these four hours, one and a half hours were dedicated to primary school children.

Even though programmes relating to agriculture, family planning, health and education had some effect on the public, it didn't make a deep mark in the societal and educational development in India. A SITE evaluation study was instituted by the Planning Commission and Space Application Centre, Ahmedabad who concluded that there were no appreciable gains in the adoption of agricultural practices or family planning methods. Technologically SITE encountered many problems. By the first month, half of the TV receivers were out of order giving valuable learning experience to software and hardware people of the media. But despite its failure, SITE was the most ambitious step taken by the country in television broadcasting.

Golden Age of Doordarshan

After attaining independence, the Indian government became sensitive and conscious of public service broadcasting, following which the BBC model of radio broadcasting was adopted. Since the radio's inception in India, it had been under the prejudices of the Congress Party, who ruled India for decades after independence until the present.

...with independence this legacy came under the control of the Congress Party, which brought to media policy its own experience, ideas and prejudice. Influential Policy makers in the new government were not at home with film, radio and recordings. Some were suspicious and even hostile to aspects of AIR's programming that hitherto had proved popular... (Jeffrey, 2006)

Perhaps, Indira Gandhi was the first minister who recognized the potential of public broadcasting for political propaganda. By 1970, the number of television sets drastically increased as the popularity of both television sets and Indira's government soared. In 1964, she appointed a commission under the leadership of Ashok Chanda to look into the workings of All India Radio under which television too functioned. The Commission submitted its report in 1966, when she became the Prime Minister of India, but the recommendations of the Commission remained ideal for years. It was during the national emergency period (June 1975-January 1977) enormous developments occurred as far as broadcasting is considered, even though it was a dark age for print media and for the society at large. By 1976, seven more transistors began operations in different parts of India – Bombay (Mumbai), Srinagar, Amritsar, Pune, Calcutta (Kolkata), Madras (Chennai) and Lucknow. As per the Chanda Commission report, Television and ALL INDIA RADIO was separated in haste making television broadcasting a separate department after understanding the wide acceptability of this new medium among the public. It carried out minimal effort for the sake of society and was moving away from its social responsibilities for which it was introduced, instead becoming a propaganda machine for the Congress Government.

India had many advantages: a tradition of media freedom, large number of talented English speaking journalists, an expanding computer and electronics industry, and a vast film industry with 70 years of experience. However, in a structure in which All India

Radio and *Doordarshan* are branches of government, dependent on the whims and pressures of ministers, it has proved impossible to create an imaginative, flexible and fast-moving organization... (Jeffrey, 2006)

For instance in the post-emergency election campaign, Indira Gandhi ordered the Delhi Station to screen 'Bobby' (1974), a blockbuster film, in order to minimize the crowd at the opposition party's rally. As such, for a major part of its development it was under government patronage which still continues in many ways even with Prasar Bharati being instituted as an autonomous body in 1997.

Institutional Setup and Nuances with Other Public Broadcasters

As per the view of John Reith, the first Director General of BBC that broadcasting should not be driven by market considerations, a license payment system was introduced so as to make funds for the financial activities of BBC and to increase their responsibility towards the public. Until the emergence of other private and satellite channels, commercials were unknown to BBC. But even with enhanced competition among broadcasters, BBC relies on license payment as their main revenue source. Because of the fear of public protest, concern is always given to adhere to their policies and accountability to their viewers. Today BBC education spans a wide range of activities – from programmes and resources for schools and the open university to campaigns like web-wise, helping people to become confident web users. It provides high quality learning resources on television, radio and the internet. Education is one of the first areas to fully embrace the digital age, and will be developing interactive multimedia learning packages for new platforms as they become available (Kishore, 2003). Its adoption of new media technologies in service is rather appreciable.

In America, Corporation of Public Broadcasting (CPB), a non-profit institution, is vested with the responsibility of public service broadcasting. It is engaged primarily in the production, acquisition, distribution or dissemination of educational and cultural television or radio programmes and it meets the needs of the public. A private corporation should be created to facilitate the development of public telecommunications and to afford maximum protection from extraneous interference and control. It encompasses a wide spectrum of functions which coordinates not only television, but radio and other telecommunications.

In Japan, broadcasting began as a public operation by Nippon Hoso Kokkai (NHK) as similar to India, but 'social responsibilities' are defined in Japan's broadcasting law. The concept of 'self regulation', 'social responsibilities' and the 'public interest requirement of media' are keys to achieve the harmony between 'freedom of speech and expression' and 'social order' under the liberal and democratic system (Kishore, 2003). The earnestness and sincerity of public broadcasting is evident in the NHK business report which says, 'We aim at broadcasting that is trustworthy and approachable. We will always be aware of the audience, make full use of new media such as the internet, and establish two way communications by absorbing many opinions, and reflecting them in the contents. In view of the new age of multiple media in the 21st century, we will endeavor to strengthen the basis of public broadcasting by enhancing the connection with the audience.'

Even though public service broadcasting of radio in India started by following the BBC model of transmission, television didn't maintain this similarity. *Doordarshan*, since its inception, relied on government funds and later on commercials, even though license fees were in currency until 1985. The control of broadcasting was completely vested upon government and the public had no chance to question this. By 1985, during the great television boom, advertising revenues allowed the abolition of license fees on television enabling the expansion of *Doordarshan* services. However, criticisms arose from the public that commercialization was evident in the programming. Committees appointed during a different period had diverse views on the control of public broadcasting services' in India. The Ashok Chanda Committee (1966) recommended for an institutional change to liberate the rigid financial and administrative procedures of the government because according to them it was not possible for a creative medium like broadcasting to flourish under a regime of departmental rules and regulations. Like BBC, it urged for a corporation set up by an Act of Parliament. But the B.G Varghese Committee recommended an autonomous Trust, also under an Act of Parliament, called 'Akash Bharati' which was to be independent, impartial and autonomous body.

In the wake of liberalization, privatization and Globalization Policy itself, there were uprisings on the part of administrators and officials to free public broadcasting from the clutches of political administration. The demand for autonomy for the broadcast media was gaining increasing support. Even though the National Front Government introduced the Prasar Bharati Bill in the first Parliamentary session in January 1990 to grant autonomy to broadcast media, the Bill was kept quiescent until 1997. Witnessing the proliferation of satellite channels, thinking that privatization would be the refreshing factor, the government ratified the Act on September 1997. Thus the Prasar Bharathi Board came into existence under whose supervision and guidance public service broadcasting survives till date. The major drawback was the inability to put the Prasar Bharati Bill into force when it was passed in 1990, which was a pertinent time, and it was too late when it was passed as the media scene had become crowded with private satellite broadcasters, sidelining *Doordarshan*. By analyzing the history of other public broadcasters of the world, it is evident that India probably may be the only state that delayed the recognition and formation of an independent public service broadcaster, even though the facility and service began decades before. It took almost four decades to make public broadcasting free from the clutches of government, but as it was formed as an act of parliament; it still remains under government consent and mercy.

Initially, programmes telecasted were only in English and Hindi (the national vernacular language). Later, upon the Varghese Committee recommendations, a three-tier system of broadcasting was introduced - national, regional and local - catering to diverse cultures and languages. At present, *Doordarshan* operates through a network of 1400 terrestrial transmitters that cover almost 91 per cent of the population and has 30 channels - 7 national channels, 11 regional language channels, 11 state networks and one international channel. Even though All India Radio too comes under the same governance of Prasar Bharati, they lack political coordination, making both work like separate entities.

Satellite Boom and *Doordarshan*

Indian economy was still dwindling because of its policy of 'self reliance', closing doors to the rest of the world in fear of cultural imperialism. But other than liberalizing political and economical policies, successive governments could not come out with a perfect strategy to uplift India's economy. It was inevitable that a policy like LPG was to be launched in India when it was facing the worst of an economic decline. As a result of LPG, CNN was the first private channel to operate in India through the live coverage of the Gulf War in 1991. Subsequently, Star TV owned by the media mogul Murdoch, went on air with its four channels. It was a tremendous blow to *Doordarshan* since the new channels concentrated more on entertainment and refreshing programmes, while *Doordarshan* clung on to development programming. While *Doordarshan* as a mass medium had succeeded enormously with development support communication and reached out to marginalize sections with local content in far-flung areas of the country, it had failed in its agenda of commercial broadcasting when the sudden inflow of satellite channels and foreign programmes conquered the small screen. One appreciated step taken by the broadcasting ministry was the introduction of color television prior to the Asian games. Nevertheless the sale of TV sets soared as people wished to watch the games from their own drawing rooms. By 1996, there were almost 20 satellite and cable channels vying up for commercials for their survival apart from the state broadcaster, which increased by 2001 to almost 250 channels, thereby splitting advertising revenue radically, affecting the state broadcaster depending upon commercials only. To add to their anguish, *Doordarshan* broadcasted programmes according to their national mandate not taking into consideration the nation's socio-lingual diversity - 'One shortcoming *Doordarshan* faced was its Delhi-centric view of India especially in news coverage' (Agrawal & Raghaviah, 2006).

Broadcasting has come a long way from the days of '*Hum Log*' and '*Buniyaad*', beamed from the government-owned *Doordarshan* for a limited time of the day, to the 300-plus channel, 24x7 scenario of the present, with 'Big Bosses' ruling the roost (Bapna, 2008). The concept of public broadcasting was tainted by these channels to 'broadcasting of public interest', in which they altered their contents accordingly. 60,000 cable operators that operating all around India were the reasons for the spread of satellite channels. *Doordarshan* too, cutting short their public agenda, stepped into entertaining materials and serials. This shift from state-dominated to a market oriented system was not good for a public broadcasting service in a developing country. '*Shaktiman*' and '*Surabhi*' initially collected many commercials but later on its audience too faded off with the alluring programme quality and uniqueness of satellite channels, though it had the largest number of channels in its bouquet (Appendix 1).

The failures of *Doordarshan*, as far as the introduction of private channels are concerned, is many faceted. One of the major shortcomings was its Open Sky Policy allowing anyone to operate private channels in India only restricting foreigners to hold a 49 per cent stake. Further, it didn't take any steps to regulate the number of channels or content. This can be attributed to the economic conditions of the country when the LPG policy was

introduced. The closed economic system attracted more loss rather than gain through huge licensing and import taxes. The television industry was one of the best businesses to attract more income through commercials and marketing.

First, by shifting its programming away from state-controlled propaganda and patronizing educational programmes it appears to offer the viewer's choice where none existed before. It also promises a choice in a wider socio-economic sphere as well. The cue is buried in its programming and advertisements, which are at the outset beamed to build a market for commodities, both cultural and material (Pendakur; 1995)

It reacted to the proliferation of satellite channels through re-structuring *Doordarshan*- both in contents and number of channels. Hence, its four regional channels operating in Delhi, Bombay, Madras and Lucknow, were merged into a single national channel named 'DD 2' or 'DD Metro', which turned out to be a purely entertainment channel with soap operas, film based programmes, sit-coms, and game shows. In the subsequent months, the coverage of this new channel was increased to include 18 months which now reach at almost every city. Together with it, more regional channels started operating from 'DD 3' to 'DD 6', increasing up to 11 channels at present. 'DD 1' remained true to its intended function when introduced in 1959, focusing on development programming and news bulletins. The remarkable shift in the content orientation of the public broadcaster was witnessed when *Doordarshan* was unable to find programmes to run in 'DD 2', and leased time to private channels. As such 'MTV', the icon of western culture, grasped that opportunity, jumping from 'STAR TV' to 'DD 2' in 1994.

Such a program would have been out of the question as recently as 1993 when Information and Broadcasting Minister K.P Singh Deo announced a 'befitting response' to the 'cultural invasion' by satellite television, suggesting that *Doordarshan* would respond with an indigenous programming strategy. But commercial competition has threatened *Doordarshan*'s audience and self- preservation has spawned a new ideology in *Doordarshan* which is in the process of reinventing itself, co-opting Western television to recapture viewers and advertising rupees lost to Zee TV and Star TV... (Sinha, N; 1996)

DD 3 was initially launched as a channel specifically concentrating on arts and current affairs, but came to an end soon after its launch due to political interventions in 1994. *Doordarshan*'s survival, being politically dominated, was hardly possible amidst the strict invigilation of the Ministry. The Congress government thought that the failure of their party in the by-election in some southern states was due to the activism of *Doordarshan* in current affairs. It the next year, however, DD 3 was re-launched, suspending current affairs and live coverage which would have bought both fame and credibility to public service broadcasting in India. Thus, the failure of public service broadcasting in India was due to the political control exercised by the country until 1997. Even after forming the Prasar Bharathi Board, this control prevailed as it was still under the consent of the state. By 1995, the competition was becoming critical. In order to compete with the growing popularity of STAR TV and Zee TV, *Doordarshan* started a 24 hour satellite movie channel through INSAT 2B, dubbed 'Movie Club', showing Hindi and English movies. However the channel was abolished four years later as its viewership declined because of its broadcasting of poor movies and repeated

telecasts. DD 3 along with this movie channel reflected the commercialised shift of *Doordarshan* from public service broadcaster to the market oriented body.

Despite the introduction of new channels and programmes, *Doordarshan* still was unable to get back the legacy which it enjoyed few years before the introduction of satellite channels. Gradually audiences began to be swept away by the private channels, leaving *Doordarshan* to be the medium of villagers, rural centric and for low-income people.

Technological Deficiency or Efficiency

Innovation was a necessity for achieving dreams and impossible realities (Chandiram, 2009). Technological innovations happen repeatedly; hence the success of any channel relies on how far these technologies are adapted into their working area. This adaptation was visible in the satellite channels programming and presentation.

Even though *Doordarshan* entered into media race, it was never considered a strong competitor by other commercial channels due to its clichéd and outdated contents and poor telecast and presentation quality, self-fulfilling the internalization of their role as a mere low-rated public broadcaster. In spite of the formation of Prasar Bharati, it was not able to maintain autonomy from the ruling party. Management structure and political pressure were the two main factors for the technological backwardness of public service broadcasting in India.

Doordarshan still uses the old technology and centrally controlled mechanisms of administration, old formats of camera, shoots, and up linking. Use of ultra modern ICTs is so minimal that it still remains as a laggard, resistant to technological innovation and change. At 92 percent, *Doordarshan* has the highest geographical coverage over the Indian population but it miserably fails to cater to these populations with the use of modern technologies like satellite direct live online broadcasts, internet protocol television formats and OB van broadcasts. Additionally, since it is not a for-profit enterprise, it does not have the requisite push for better programming. Despite being heavily funded and protected by the government, many critics have pointed that it continues to post losses regularly and has failed to deliver either quality educational or entertainment programmes.

From the standpoint of competition, it is high time *Doordarshan* underwent digitization in order to cater to a wider audience not in the sense of capturing advertisement revenue but for delivering quality programmes. For instance, news bulletins are the trademark of *Doordarshan*, which they boast as the perfect way of presenting current affairs to Indian society. The embargo imposed upon DD 3 when it was introduced in 1985, obstructed its journey to attain an incomparable position as a current affairs channel. As a result, *Doordarshan* still follows a traditional method of news processing and dissemination, resembling government declarations and gazettes, and not giving ample space for innovative, creative and attractive presentations. It should provide more autonomy and freedom to regional and language bureaus in creating their own news and news based programmes and should make roving reporters active in all places. But since it has a centrally controlled administration and because of strong political interference, often the news seems mechanical and peripheral

with no investigative depth. Even though regional channels are operational, they do not have much autonomy in production and distribution of content. *Doordarshan* often fails to get ample international news footage because it lacks cooperation with international news agencies and media groups except for its nurturing of some laurels in the field of reporting like Sasikumar and Prannoy Roy; it has yet to do anything remarkable.

For any television industry, whether commercial or public broadcaster, threats are evident by the proliferation of new media technologies like online content delivery, social networking sites, blogs etc, where contents are updated continuously. Many commercial channels have opportunistically harnessed these technologies as complements as opposed to adversaries. They have turned to new technologies for facilitating interactive relationships with audiences through websites, forums, and enquiry boards. All private satellite channels have digitalized, convergent and miniaturized technologies but public service broadcasting still maintains its antiquated status.

New media are emerging and convergence of technologies is taking place at a fast speed. Due to convergence of technologies, viz electronics, computer, simputer, telecom and broadcasting, new media is found to proliferate. The emergence of this new media with interactive dimensions, voices, visuals and data communication will cause qualitative changes in the character and contents of conventional mass media. These opportunities will have to be utilized effectively by Prasar Bharati (Kishore, 2003)

The reason for technological backwardness is that the focus of Indian broadcasting since the 1970s has been largely on hardware and audience expansion. Even though *Doordarshan* made possible for the proliferation of television in rural areas, it didn't do much to improve software techniques or quality aspects of programming. In 1982, the P.C Joshi committee was appointed to prepare the software plan for *Doordarshan* - 'An Indian Personality for Television'. The report ambitiously discovered the pitfalls of public broadcasting in India and came up with viable solutions. They emphasized the need for professionalism in *Doordarshan* and recommended to review and guide its performance. However, very few of the recommendations were enforced. In spite of its accessibility to all technologies, poor maintenance and the lackadaisical approach of management caused the ill fate of public service broadcasting in India.

Doordarshan was not always alien towards technology and innovation. In 2000, *Doordarshan* turned to BBC Resources to finalize two agreements; one to conduct an exhaustive audit of *Doordarshan* technical capabilities and the efficacy of its equipment worth 70 lakhs and the second to conduct a feasibility report for *Doordarshan* to phase out its analogue transmission and go digital, with BBC agreeing to provide aid of 1.3 crore. The target date for reaching digitalization was set at 2012, which was then considered as too ambitious. The then Deputy Director General of Prasar Bharathi, K. Kunhikrishanan said,

There have been a lot of complaints about the quality of transmission and BBC Resources was the best consultant in the field for conducting the feasibility study. The idea is to improve image and signals down to the last mile, which means down to the last receiver.

The choice of BBC Resources was an obvious one since BBC is also a public broadcaster and the first in Europe to go completely digitized. The European model was,

thus, quietly chosen over the American or the Japanese model and BBC Resources will advise *Doordarshan* on every aspect of going digital— from the choice of channels to be offered to viewers to the commercial viability of the switchover (Sarin, 2000). But by 2009, most of the channels have gone digital even before *Doordarshan* made any initial plan to do the same. On 21st November, 2001, *Doordarshan* became one of the first broadcasters on the sub-continent to migrate to automated operations, using OmniBus' solutions to automate transmission of its two channels from its headquarters in New Delhi.

It relies on OmniBus' robust automation for all fundamental, routine end-to-end processes, including management of ingest, line feeds, VTRs, scheduling and playout for both its sports and news channels. Without needing to increase its workforce, the station's operators enjoy optimised workflow, complete more tasks and concentrate on the traditional creative aspects of journalism as a result (Iain, W; 2004)

It also started its DTH (Direct to Home) service in 2004 dubbed DD Direct Plus, which was criticized because of the hefty fee laid upon other channels to carry them. *Doordarshan*'s DTH platform carries 19 of its own channels, 13 private channels and 12 FM radio channels. The private channels questioned the logic behind the official broadcaster's decision to levy a fee as the venture was aimed at popularizing the *Doordarshan* channels by offering them along with top private channels like Aaj Tak and BBC World.

Revenue Depreciation and Institutional disparity

The financial system of any entity decides its future, whether it is a government undertaking or a private enterprise. *Doordarshan*, even though in name is an autonomous corporation, is financed almost solely from government funds through the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting. By 1985, advertising revenue soared, paving the way to abolish license fees on television sets, as *Doordarshan* was the only channel available. The government had little idea about the upcoming proliferation of satellite channels. With their arrival, both the advertising revenue and popularity of the public broadcaster declined, making it impossible for them to generate revenue.

Despite the rich and highly experienced human resources they possess, sincerity towards the duty as a social broadcaster has been poorly performed by the officials. Unlike BBC, they are only answerable to the Parliament, not to the public. Red tapism, bureaucracy and bottle necks are rampant. Lack of transparency, both managerial and financial, limits *Doordarshan*'s credibility. Cronies, kith and kin of the ruling parties are appointed in the Prasar Bharati so no opposition parties will receive significant positive attention on any news bulletin or related programme. This makes the programmes partial, unbalanced, discriminatory and subjective, and not free and fair as any other public broadcaster like BBC or ABC where there is absolute freedom of expression. In spite of exploring the ways to improve the professionalism in the production of programmes and content, *Doordarshan* began to vehemently promote mass consumerism. Even though the funds may be meager, there are wasted on hardware maintenance and salaries.

The truth is that of the Rs. 5 crores a day that *Doordarshan*'s 27 and All India Radio's 215 channels cost the public exchequer, less than a fourth is accounted for by programme-related costs. The rest goes on paying salaries and maintaining rapidly obsolete

hardware. In a young industry, all programming staff in Doordarshan is over 40, get zero refresher training, and spend much of their time pushing files. And there are more babus and peons than programmers. Only one out of every 3.5 staffers in All India Radio is from programming, and one out of every 5.6 in *Doordarshan*. So you can imagine what sort of programming those 27 plus 215 channels offer. (Ninan, 2005)

Funding public broadcasting has cultural and philosophical basis. An immediate return is not expected as it is an investment for human and social development. The reason for *Doordarshan* to undergo commercialization is because of its lack of proper funding. It is in this matter that management and government need to put their thought - how can they wriggle free from the clutches of sponsorship and commercialization. In America, the Carnegie Committee was appointed to study the status of public broadcasting and concluded that society has communication needs which cannot be met by an advertising-led media system. They said public broadcasting as 'a civilized voice in a civilized community should be to know themselves, their communities and their world in richer ways'. Dr. S. Krishnaswamy, an Indian-based media analyst, examining the American Carnegie manifesto says,

... in the Indian context, the government should be able to underwrite and subsidize 90 percent of the recurring expenses in running the various channels. Sponsorship may be accepted on a limited basis for getting sponsorship credit lines- but with no product advertising, in the main channels of *Doordarshan*. The required resource can be raised through a system of taxation by which privately owned channels will pay a differential tax to a separate fund in order to finance *Doordarshan's* operations... the government should consider it a societal obligation to pay for hardware, renewals, salaries and all such other overheads in order to run the autonomous broadcasting channels under Prasar Bharati efficiently...

Commercial channels gain their revenue merely from advertisements and sponsors. It is true that advertisers decide the nature, content and form of programmes. But at the same time, public interest too plays a crucial role in their programming. If viewership declines, in fear of losing advertisers they rework their programmers' contents. Hence, financial resources are not the only reason for a channel's failure, but are entwined with many other decisive factors towards which management keeps a blind eye. In order to compete with private commercial channels, *Doordarshan* too entered the 'contemporary cultural' programmes to entice advertisers. But this is not the right way for a public service broadcaster to find funds. If social development programmes are worth seeing, appealing, enlightening and display high professionalism and expertise, there can be no way that audiences and advertisers will ignore the broadcaster. Solely creating more channels won't provoke acceptance from the public, so care should be given in checking poor quality programmes. It is not because of deficiency of financial resources, human resources or technologies that *Doordarshan* is losing its value, but because of the lethargic attitude towards the desired goal of social education. If maintained in the right way, *Doordarshan*, with its almost 30 channels, could be one of the richest public broadcasters in the world.

The stumbling block of professionalism is the lack of coordination between All India Radio and *Doordarshan* which comes under the same core governance group, Prasar Bharati. Unlike other public broadcasters of the world, there exists no cooperation and effective use of manpower of both media organizations. Both lack common internet based platforms

for podcasting, blogging and webcasting. Through this they could generate advertising revenue and expand their own marketing avenues, which would enhance global reach and accessibility. BBC and other public broadcasters are efficiently and effectively using the internet and exploiting the convergence of web based media. Globalizing *Doordarshan* is not possible unless they create an effective web based platform and to establish global credentials.

In fact, funding a public service broadcasting system should be constitutionally guaranteed and de-linked from the vagaries of political change and decision-making. This detachment from the government will also introduce much-needed professionalism and transparency in *Doordarshan*. The significant achievements and innovations made by *Doordarshan* are often overshadowed by inefficient organizational structure and systems. In fact, the greatest strengths of Prasar Bharati—its talented human resources, extensive hardware and facilities, rich archival programmes and countrywide network—are also its liability in the current organizational set-up because its increasing costs and maintenance burden are eating into its precarious budget.

***Doordarshan* and its Contemporary Status**

The public broadcaster must be a powerful instrument of social, cultural and political development and change rather than just an alternative consumer service. There is a general consensus about a public service broadcaster despite its place of origin – firstly, the signals must be available to all devoid of any discrimination of caste, creed or religion. Secondly, the programmes should be of good quality for the public good and social enlightenment, taking into consideration the needs of a diverse audience and thirdly, it should be independent, autonomous and free from any political pressure. As far as public broadcasting in India is concerned, the first criterion mentioned is well implemented, but this does not apply to the other two. Vast changes have been evident in public service broadcasting after the arrival of private satellite competition and commercialization, but this has not led to the establishment and implementation of a public service policy.

Up until 1991, when it monopolized broadcasting, *Doordarshan* made excellent social education programmes that triggered positive changes in social behavior. Some examples of such memorable programmes on *Doordarshan* include *Hum Log*, *Udaan*, *Rajani*, *Jasoos Vijay*, *Kalyani Health Magazine*, *Haath se Haath Milao* and *Kyunki Jeena Isi Ka Naam Hai*. But now the line between commercial and public broadcasting has been obliterated. The growing appetite of audience for entertainment programmes and increased competition made the public service mandate take a back seat and revenue maximization reached the forefront. Initially, *Doordarshan* amassed huge return from advertising revenue from privately produced programming, but this soon began to decline as popular channels like STAR and Zee gained a firmer hold in the market.

According to the social responsibility theory, the media has certain obligations to serve society's needs rather than the market. It expects journalists to answer society's need for truth, requires an open and diverse debate on public issues, and honest updates of current events. In this model, media ethics is automatic because the press is free to serve its purpose for the public, as opposed to special interest groups or advertisers (Coleman, 2009). Also it expects high professional standards and freedom of expression (Kumar, 2001).

... This often results in the common misconception that *Doordarshan* represents public service broadcasting in India. Constrained by the organizational set-up of Prasar Bharati, the concept or vision of public service broadcasting in our country has taken a different meaning altogether. Anything low on production quality and/or on development issues is now construed as public service. (Vasanti, 2009)

While there were exceptions such as *Surabhi*, *The World This Week*, *Ankon Deki*, and *Turning Point*, etc. *Doordarshan* rarely looked towards poverty, gender, labour, agriculture, science and technology as potential newsworthy programmes. It has yet to become an agent of social change in India. *Doordarshan* has often been controlled by editorial and political interferences. Minorities and aboriginals have often been underrepresented in *Doordarshan* programming, signaling a clear cut imbalance in *Doordarshan*'s programme agenda. Being actively involved in catering to tribal, aboriginal and minority audiences would have been a good opportunity for *Doordarshan* in the social reconstruction and rebuilding of India. *Doordarshan* also often failed in its political function. It has not been able to mould effective and powerful public opinion through its weak platform for discussion, debate and participation.

Even Health based advertisements are also often seen on *Doordarshan* but lost its vigor and vitality often in translation and context as many are based on North Indian realities. These advertisements have just been government public communication campaigns which often lack professionalism and quality. Since its origin, it has blatantly been tied to educational purpose and has at many times been a tutor in the field of academics. The responsibility that it has shown in educational service is a source of envy for other public broadcasters of the world. TV channels fully devoted to education are Gyan Darshan I, II and III, where the last is an exclusive channel for technical education. NCERT, UGC, CSIRT, DST, IGNOU's, and RRL's help and cooperation have helped in many ways for *Doordarshan* to effectively carry out its educational responsibility. Their programmes, software, lab demonstrations and class room teachings borrowed and telecasted by *Doordarshan* fulfilled many educational commitments. In this way, informal education, adult education, literacy campaigns, and non school population education were boosted by *Doordarshan*. But prominent institution like IITs, IIMs and other premier public universities were not given active roles by *Doordarshan* as a public broadcaster. 65 percent of the population has access to satellite channels either through cable connection or DTH. *Doordarshan* is viewed gravely by the remaining few who have no access to other channels, mostly those in rural areas and who are economically backward. As it was trailing with its family soaps and comedy series, 2012 ushered a novel spirit for *Doordarshan* when it shook hand with a private channels, Star Plus in telecasting the social service program 'Satyamev Jayate' with Aamir Khan taking the lead. This was a resurgence of the social outlook of *Doordarshan* even though the show is not from their production.

Future Challenges and Public Service Broadcasting

Just like any other public broadcaster, *Doordarshan* too is faced with many challenges in the present scenario of multiple-channels or the bouquet approach, where priority is given

to entertainment programmes by both audience and channels. The prospect of fostering broadcasting in the public service looks bleak amidst this present mediascape of sensationalism. However, *Doordarshan* is in hope of rejuvenating its broadcasting with innovative programmes and prospects. As *Doordarshan* is celebrating its 50 years of 'successful' existence, the Information and Broadcasting Minister Ambika Soni lauded the national broadcaster for catering to remote areas neglected by private TV channels. Soni sought suggestions from eminent filmmakers to rejuvenate the public broadcaster and invited stalwarts like Shyam Benegal, the eminent director to contribute meaningfully to DD again by sharing his outstanding works. The corporation began to come out with rating games to establish their reign over broadcasting. However at the wake of celebrating its 50 years of existence in 2009, TAM Media Research produced a much disputed data which placed *Doordarshan* at the top of the list according to viewership and channel share (Appendix 1). This came into controversy because as the private channels are always ranked according to their weekly performances, which always fluctuates, *Doordarshan* was evaluated based on an average scale of its viewership in 31 weeks, that positioned them as the topmost. This is even a matter of surprise that that period had not witnessed any novel programming contents from *Doordarshan* that gave it this supremacy. Therefore, while private channels are ranked according to weekly fluctuations in ratings, *Doordarshan* was 'established' as a top channel using the average ratings for these 31 weeks.

Doordarshan has decided to offer mobile television services on a private-public partnership basis. It has invited expressions of interest from prospective consultants to draw up a roadmap for implementation. *Doordarshan* had earlier launched Mobile TV services on a pilot basis in parts of Delhi using the DVB-H technology from Nokia. One of the objectives for proposing the PPP model by *Doordarshan* is to keep the terrestrial system under their exclusive control, but the controversial proposed plan is still under discussion:

There is also as yet no clarity on the technology to be used for the service. Though TRAI had suggested keeping the policy technology-neutral, DD wants to go ahead with only DVB-H – a technology being promoted by Nokia. But recently Nokia sold its DVB-H network division to Wipro, raising doubts over the future development of the technology. Analysts have also pointed out that Nokia has not launched any new handset that supports DVB-H, which could dampen *Doordarshan*'s proposed plan. (Thomas, T.K & Mohanty, M; 2009)

As it faces more competition from satellite revolution, *Doordarshan* has come up with many ambitious plans. By november 2013, Australian channel, ABC International (international service of the Australian public service broadcaster) will be available on DD Direct DTH as per the agreement signed between them. This could be considered as an initial step in other partnership activities like production, exchange of programs etc. As a move to return to the glorious golden period, *Doordarshan* has decided to retelecast popular series of 1980s like *Buniyaad*, *Chanakya*, *Parsai Kehta Hai* etc to attract audience. This is of significance, as for a section of society, this will place them in a nostalgic environment, while for a section (particularly for the teenagers and children), it is an opportunity to witness the television experience of their parents.

Conclusion

Doordarshan has the second largest terrestrial network after China's CCTV, but the position of *Doordarshan* is still in a dilemma, whether as a state broadcaster or a public service broadcaster. The idea of a public service broadcaster, as opposed to the dominant American model of market-driven commercial broadcaster, is of utmost importance for a fast developing country like India, where it has to cater diverse audiences, cultures and languages. The biggest concern of *Doordarshan* will be to institute a firm financial structure so that it can find sufficient funds to rework their programmes and be independent of commercials and sponsorship. Restructuring and re-focusing *Doordarshan* must be a priority as it still plays a crucial role in public service broadcasting. The channels must try to focus on relatively unexplored areas. In such a vast territory, with as many as 40 percent of the population living in poverty, leaving everything to market forces is an abdication of responsibility (Crawley, W and Page, D; 2001).

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Appendix -1

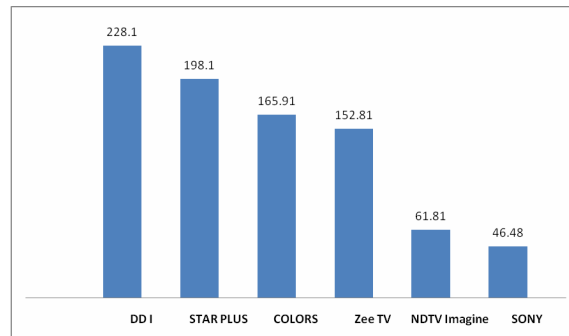


Figure: 1 TAM Viewership Report 2009 *Source:* www.tamindia.com

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