

# INDIA

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Once again I draw your attention to the difficulties India has had to encounter and her struggle to overcome them. Her problem was the problem of the world in miniature. India is too vast in its area and too diverse in its races. It is many countries packed in one geographical receptacle. It is just the opposite of what Europe truly is, namely one country made into many. Thus Europe in its culture and growth has had the advantage of the strength of the many, as well as the strength of the one. India, on the contrary, being naturally many, yet adventitiously one, has all along suffered from the looseness of its diversity and the feebleness of its unity. A true unity is like a round globe, it rolls on carrying its burden easily; but diversity is a many-cornered thing which has to be dragged and pushed with all force. Be it said to the credit of India that this diversity was not her own creation; she has had to accept it as a fact from the beginning of her history.

- Tagore, 1917; p.136.

## **Introduction**

India, by virtue of its multi ethnic diversity, cultural plurality and lingual uniqueness, is a major laboratory for Communication and Media Studies scholars. It is a fertile ground to understand the historical significance and the importance of the role of communication media in most plural societies. It is also an important site to understand how communication policies change with changing times and how large public service media organizations can and should respond to such challenges. The broadcast scenario in India is also a good example to understand the ramifications of state-controlled media acting as cultural guardians and the changes that occur when such monopolies are challenged.

For nearly 30 odd years, the government-controlled television network, *Doordarshan* (meaning distant vision) was the only available network to Indian viewers. It was only in the 1990's that it started facing intense competition from private satellite television channels from within and outside the country. This created a peculiar situation for the Indian government.

On the one hand, successive national governments had pursued a policy of centralization and monopoly control over All India Radio and Doordarshan, while on the other, their economic liberalization policies (from the 1980's) had led to increasing decentralization and market liberalization, encouraging the entry of foreign satellite television players into the domestic Indian market (Shields & Muppidi, 1996). Thus, the Indian government seemed caught between these two opposite concepts and hastened to create the autonomous Prasar Bharati Corporation that would oversee Doordarshan and All India Radio and also regulate the private players.

This chapter will explore the issue of pluralism in public service broadcasting in India. It will especially explore questions of government policy, network autonomy, freedom to produce and media plurality using the case study of the Indian 'public service' television network 'Doordarshan'.

## **History of India**

The Republic of India gained its independence from the British Empire on 15<sup>th</sup> August, 1947. It was formed after the British partitioned the country to create India, East Pakistan<sup>1</sup> and West Pakistan. The partition was done supposedly to protect the Muslim minorities from the majority Hindu population. India adopted a secular manifesto in its constitution and today is home to a Hindu-majority that co-exists peacefully with a number of other religious groups including a substantial number of Muslims (second or third largest Muslim population in the world), Sikhs, Christians, Jews, Buddhists, Jains, Parsis, etc. After independence, the nation was further reorganized on a linguistic basis in 1950.

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<sup>1</sup> East Pakistan later broke away from West Pakistan to become Bangladesh

In India, at least 1652 languages are spoken as native languages (Manorama Year Book, 1989) with 18 officially recognized in the Eighth Schedule of the Indian constitution. Among these, at least five (Hindi, Telugu, Bengali, Marathi and Tamil) have more than 40 million native speakers and another five (Urdu, Gujarati, Malayalam, Kannada, Oriya) have more than 20 million native speakers in India. Among the rest, many have at least more than a million native speakers (Manorama Year Book, 1989).

### **Constitutional Guarantee for Pluralism in India**

The Indian constitution ensures a legal right to pluralism in Indian society. The Preamble of the Indian constitution guarantees to all Indian citizens the following:

1. **JUSTICE**, social, economic and political;
2. **LIBERTY** of thought, expression, belief, faith and worship;
3. **EQUALITY** of status and of opportunity; and to promote among them all
4. **FRATERNITY** assuring the dignity of the individual and the unity and integrity of the Nation;

In addition, the Fundamental Rights embodied in the Indian constitution act as a guarantee that all Indian citizens can and will lead their lives in peace as long as they live in Indian democracy. These civil liberties take precedence over any other law of the land. They include individual rights common to most liberal democracies, such as equality before the law, freedom of speech and expression, freedom of association and peaceful assembly, freedom of religion, and the right to constitutional remedies for the protection of civil rights such as habeas corpus.

In addition, the Fundamental Rights are aimed at overturning the inequities of past social practices. They have also been used to successfully abolish and prevent discrimination based on religion, race, caste, sex, or place of birth. The fundamental rights also forbid trafficking in human beings and forced labor. They go beyond conventional civil liberties in protecting cultural and educational rights of minorities by ensuring that minorities may preserve their distinctive languages and establish and administer their own educational institutions.

Originally, the right to property was also included in the Fundamental Rights. However, the Forty-fourth Amendment, passed in 1978, revised the status of

such property rights by stating that "No person shall be deprived of his property save by authority of law."

Freedom of speech and expression, generally interpreted to include freedom of the press, can be limited "in the interests of the sovereignty and integrity of India, the security of the State, friendly relations with foreign States, public order, decency or morality, or in relation to contempt of court, defamation or incitement to an offence"

The six fundamental rights as per the Indian constitution are the following:

1. Right to Equality
2. Right to Particular Freedom
3. Cultural and Educational Rights
4. Right to Freedom of Religion
5. Right Against Exploitation and
6. Right to Constitutional Remedies

The *Right to Equality* ensures that the State shall not deny to any person equally before the law or the equal protection of the laws within the territory of India. It also prohibits discrimination on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth. The constitution specifies the following:

- “(1) The State shall not discriminate against any citizen on grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex, place of birth or any of them.
- (2) No citizen shall, on grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex, place of birth or any of them, be subject to any disability, liability, restriction or condition with regard to—
  - (a) Access to shops, public restaurants, hotels and places of public entertainment or
  - (b) The use of wells, tanks, bathing ghats, roads and places of public resort maintained wholly or partly out of State funds or dedicated to the use of the general public.
- (3) Nothing in this article shall prevent the State from making any special provision for women and children.
- (4) Nothing in this article or in clause (2) of article 29 shall prevent the State from making any special provision for the advancement of any socially and educationally backward classes of citizens or for the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes.

The Indian constitution also guarantees all its citizens the right—

- (a) To freedom of speech and expression;
- (b) To assemble peaceably and without arms;
- (c) To form associations or unions;
- (d) To move freely throughout the territory of India;
- (e) To reside and settle in any part of the territory of India; and
- (g) To practice any profession, or to carry on any occupation, trade or business.

The Right to Freedom of Religion is also enshrined in the constitution. It provides the Freedom of conscience and free profession, practice and propagation of religion. Specifically it lays out that “Subject to public order, morality and health and to the other provisions of this Part, all persons are equally entitled to freedom of conscience and the right freely to profess, practise and propagate religion”. It also provides the Freedom to manage religious affairs, “Subject to public order, morality and health, every religious denomination or any section thereof shall have the right—

- (a) To establish and maintain institutions for religious and charitable purposes;
- (b) To manage its own affairs in matters of religion;
- (c) To own and acquire movable and immovable property; and
- (d) To administer such property in accordance with law”

The Indian constitution also ensures Cultural and Educational Rights by specifying protection of the interests of minorities.-

1. “Any section of the citizens residing in the territory of India or any part thereof having a distinct language, script or culture of its own shall have the right to conserve the same.
2. No citizen shall be denied admission into any educational institution maintained by the State or receiving aid out of State funds on grounds only of religion, race, caste, language or any of them”.

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### **Boxed Item**

Some of the other Articles in the Indian constitution that ensure and guarantee all rights to Indian citizens and their right to pluralism are the following:

**Article 345.** Official language or languages of a State:-

Subject to the provisions of articles 346 and 347, the Legislature of a State may by law adopt any one or more of the languages in use in the State or Hindi as the language or languages to be used for all or any of the official purposes of that State:

Provided that, until the Legislature of the State otherwise provides by law, the English language shall continue to be used for those official purposes within the State for which it was being used immediately before the commencement of this Constitution.

**Article 346.** Official language for communication between one State and another or between a State and the Union: -

The language for the time being authorised for use in the Union for official purposes shall be the official language for communication between one State and another State and between a State and the Union:

Provided that if two or more States agree that the Hindi language should be the official language for communication between such States, that language may be used for such communication.

**Article 347.** Special provision relating to language spoken by a section of the population of a State: -

On a demand being made in that behalf the President may, if he is satisfied that a substantial proportion of the population of a State desire the use of any language spoken by them to be recognised by that State, direct that such language shall also be officially recognised throughout that State or any part thereof for such purpose as he may specify.

**Special Directives: -**

**Article 350.** Language to be used in representations for redress of grievances: -

Every person shall be entitled to submit a representation for the redress of any grievance to any officer or authority of the Union or a State in any of the languages used in the Union or in the State, as the case may be.

**Article 350A.** Facilities for instruction in mother-tongue at primary stage: -

It shall be the endeavour of every State and of every local authority within the State to provide adequate facilities for instruction in the mother-tongue at the primary stage of education to children belonging to linguistic minority groups; and the President may issue such directions to any State as he considers necessary or proper for securing the provision of such facilities.

**Article 350B.** Special Officer for linguistic minorities: -

There shall be a Special Officer for linguistic minorities to be appointed by the President. It shall be the duty of the Special Officer to investigate all matters relating to the safeguards provided for linguistic minorities under this Constitution and report to the President upon those matters at such intervals as the President may direct, and the President shall cause all such reports to be laid before each House of Parliament, and sent to the Governments of the States concerned.

**Article 351.** Directive for development of the Hindi language: -

It shall be the duty of the Union to promote the spread of the Hindi language, to develop it so that it may serve as a medium of expression for all the elements of the composite culture of India and to secure its enrichment by assimilating without interfering with its genius, the forms, style and expressions used in Hindustani and in the other languages of India specified in the Eighth Schedule, and by drawing, wherever necessary or desirable, for its vocabulary, primarily on Sanskrit and secondarily on other languages.

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### **Ownership Structure of Indian Public Service Television**

Television was introduced in India on September 15, 1959, as an experimental educational service under a \$20,000 grant from UNESCO and with help from the United States. The basic purpose of this experiment was to train personnel and evaluate television as a tool for education and national development (Rao, 1998). Initially, the range of the transmitter was forty kilometers around Delhi and programs were beamed twice a week.

From August 1965, entertainment and information programs were started, because of public demand and pressure from manufacturers (Kumar, 1981). This was the beginning of regular television broadcasts in India but was still limited only to Delhi and surrounding areas. The program content focussed on development, education, news and entertainment (Malhan, 1985; Rao, 1998). In 1972, a second television station was set up in Mumbai, followed by a relay station in Pune.

Mody (1988) contends that this rhetoric of introducing television as a tool for national development was a familiar path in most developing countries before it was completely usurped for entertainment purposes. However, in the Indian context, Kumar (1998) and Luthra (1986) suggest that strategic national security considerations also prompted this introduction, especially the need to counter Pakistani television programming. This can be supported by the fact that television stations in Srinagar and Amritsar were soon established. These were later followed by television stations in Calcutta, Chennai and Lucknow in 1975 (Rao, 1998). The number of television sets had grown from a modest 22,000 in 1970 to cross the 100,000 mark in the mid-seventies (Kumar, 1998).

### SITE

The Satellite Instructional Television Experiment (SITE) was an important landmark for Indian television. It was conducted from August 1975 to July 1976 in 2400 selected villages around the country. This experiment was possible because of the U.S. government's loan of the ATS-6 NASA satellite to the Indian government. The primary objective of SITE was to evaluate the potential of satellite television in rural development. Specific instructional programs were produced and beamed to the selected 2400 villages in the states of Andhra Pradesh, Orissa, Karnataka, Rajasthan, Bihar and Madhya Pradesh. Most of the programs were in the areas of rural health and hygiene, adult literacy, agriculture, nutrition and national integration.

SITE was also used to telecast celebrations of Independence Day, Republic Day and other national events, nationwide. While official reports were euphoric about the success of such telecasts, independent evaluations suggested that they were not so dramatic (Kumar, 1998).

Started as a part of All India Radio (AIR), within the Information and Broadcasting Ministry (I & B ministry) of the federal government, television was

constituted as a separate media unit, Doordarshan, only in 1976. Being a part of the Information & Broadcasting Ministry, Doordarshan's policy was based on the objectives of the Ministry itself.

The objective of the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting is to inform, educate and entertain the people. The media units of the Ministry seek to create a climate of awareness of the directions of development and ensure people's participation in the implementation of the government's plans and programmes (Doordarshan-1994; p.1).

### **Doordarshan**

Doordarshan, was separated from All India Radio, and constituted as a separate organization, as per the recommendations of the Chanda Committee. The 1982 'Asian Games' held in New Delhi marked Doordarshan's transition to color broadcasting. This also provided the impetus for a rigorous growth in Doordarshan's network across the country (Muppidi, 1998). As Malhan (1985) points out, 'during 1984 alone the government commissioned one new transmitter a day for a period of more than four months taking the total number of transmitters to 172 and covering about 52% of the country's then 800 million population'. What was significant about this growth was the fact that most of these television sets were concentrated in the four metropolitan cities of Delhi, Mumbai, Chennai and Calcutta (Singhal and Rogers, 1989).

As stated earlier, one of the main purposes in introducing television into the country was to discover what it could achieve in community development and formal education (Kumar 1981; Singhal & Rogers, 1989; Pendakur, 1991; Skinner, Melkote & Muppidi, 1998). In line with this purpose, over the years, Doordarshan's main objectives have crystallized into the following:

- a) To act as a catalyst for social change;
- b) To promote national integration;
- c) To stimulate scientific temper among the people;
- d) To disseminate the message of family planning as a means of population control and family welfare;
- e) To stimulate greater agricultural production by providing essential information and knowledge;
- f) To promote and help in preservation of environmental and ecological balance;

- g) To highlight the need for social welfare measures including welfare of women, children and the less privileged;
- h) To promote interest in games and sports; and
- i) To stimulate appreciation of the country's artistic and cultural heritage.

The justification for investing resources into the television infrastructure in India has always been the role it can play for development and educational purposes. However, most of the resources were diverted to develop Doordarshan's entertainment programming (Singhal & Rogers, 1989; Kumar, 1998).

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### **DD National**

As on 31st March 2005, Doordarshan has 1314 transmitters (1188 for DD 1 + 121 for DD 2 + 5 others) with 56 studio centres and 23 satellite channels (which includes Gyandarshan). The flagship of Doordarshan - DD 1 (National) operates through a network of 1188 transmitters of varying power, covering 77.5% of the land area and 89.6% population of India.

The primary channel of Doordarshan (Doordarshan-I) has 3 major components of programme contents - information, education and entertainment. The information component consist of News and Current Affairs. The education component is drawn from the contributions from IGNOU, UGC, CIET, SIET and other Sponsored programmes like TURNING POINT (Science magazine) and Tera Quiz (a programmes on environment). Public Service Broadcasts also form a part of educational programmes which deal with programmes on women's issues and programmes produced by Public Service Broadcasting Trust. The live interactive show "Hum Hazir Hain" presents persons of eminence before the audience as a part of public service broadcast.

Question Hour in Parliament is telecast live on the National channel. Specific window is earmarked for programme in regional languages between 2.30 PM and 8.00 PM on all week days for Public Utility programmes and entertainment programmes in the regional languages and dialects. The entertainment programmes mainly consists of mid-day daily soaps between 12.00 to 2.00 pm and again between 9.00 pm to 11.00 pm. This includes feature films on Friday and Saturday and regional Award winning films on Sunday.

Doordarshan DD-1 (The National Channel) carried nearly 168 hours of programming every week and a substantial part of that is reserved for national programming (60%). The rest 40 % is divided up equally for regional programming and post-midnight satellite programming.

DD 1 - TRANSMISSION PATTERN				
		<u>Hrs.</u>	<u>Mts.</u>	
Total Weekly Duration		168	00	
Window for Regional Programming	20%	33	12	Terrestrial
National	60%	100	53	Terrestrial
Post Midnight	20%	33	55	Satellite

The components of national terrestrial transmission are as given below:-

	<u>Hrs.</u>	<u>Mts.</u>	
In-house	27	28	News, CA, Music, Dance Hello DD etc.
Commissioned	8	38	News and CA, Kashir, NE PSBT/Regional Films
Acquired	16	05	Gyan Darshan
Sponsored	48	42	Soaps/ Serials Weekly Films
Note: As per Fixed Point Chart, (31.03.2005)			

Doordarshan has a three tier programme service - National, Regional and Local. The emphasis in the national programmes is focused on events and issues of interest to the entire nation. The regional programmes are beamed on DD Channel from the state capital Kendras at specific times and also on the 11 Regional Language Satellite Channels (RLSCs) and relayed by all transmitters in the respective States. These RLSCs telecast programmes of interest to the state level in the language of that particular region. The Kendras at local stations originate programmes in the local languages & dialects, and the programmes are area specific.

Source : DD website at [www.ddindia.gov.in](http://www.ddindia.gov.in)

As per the National Readership Survey 2005, there were 108 million TV equipped households in India out of which only 61 million households were Cable Households (as of March 2005).

The other channels are commercial, privately owned, cable-based and profit-oriented. They are also smaller in operations and resources compared to Doordarshan. However, while they seem to have a greater variety of programmes, some of these private channels have also been accused of airing badly produced, poor quality programmes like Doordarshan.

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Doordarshan Today (As of July 2005)	
Channels	27
Studio Centres	59
Transmitters	1,402
Weekly programme output (Hours)	1,485
Channels	
National	DD-1 National, DD-News, DD-Sports and DD-Bharati
RLSCs	Malayalam, Tamil, Oriya, Bengali, Telugu, Kannada, Marathi, Gujarati, Kashmiri, Assamese and Punjabi
State Networks	Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Himachal Pradesh and Jharkhand, Chatisgarh, Haryana
International	DD-India
Educational	DD-Gyandarshan
Parliaments	DD-Lok Sabha and DD-Rajya Sabha
Terrestrial Coverage	
DD-1	Population Covered 90.4%
DD-2	Population Covered 44.7%

Doordarshan operates 27 Channels – 5 All India Channels, 11 Regional Language Satellite Channels, 8 Hindi Belt Kendras, 1 International Channel and 2

Parliament Channels (DD-Lok Sabha & DD-Rajya Sabha). Except for the Hindi Belt Kendras (DD-14 to DD-17 and DD-19 to DD-22), all other DD Channels broadcast round-the-clock.

*Source : DD website at [www.ddindia.gov.in](http://www.ddindia.gov.in)*

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### **Satellite Television**

NDTV, ZEE TV, STAR TV, Sony TV, Sahara One, Sun TV (Tamil), Udaya TV(Kannada), Gemini TV(Telugu), JJ TV (Tamil), JAIN TV (Hindi, Telugu, Kannada and Tamil), Asianet (Malayalam and Telugu), Raj TV (Tamil), Eenadu TV (Telugu) are some of the most notable names in the private television scene in India today. The broadcast situation changed significantly with the availability of private satellite channels in India. While Doordarshan's monopoly was first broken by satellite channels from outside the country, it was not long before private satellite channels in Indian languages were started by local entrepreneurs (Muppidi, 1998). Though up linking facilities were denied to private broadcasters in India, there was a proliferation of language channels in most of the non-Hindi speaking (especially South Indian) states of India (Muppidi, 1998).

This greater availability of non-Hindi local channels catering to regional audiences filled a long standing gap that Doordarshan with its virtual monopoly and predominantly Hindi programming had long neglected (Muppidi, 1998). It was evident also in the popularity of these channels among the regional viewers in these languages (Kumar, 1998). This meant that Doordarshan now faced new competition not only from international television channels in Hindi and English but also from regional private channels in regional (especially South Indian) languages (Muppidi, 1998).

The viewership for private channels has been increasing every year and studies have documented that viewers prefer programmes that are in their local languages and deal with issues relevant to their local contexts. In a vast multilingual and multi cultural country like India, smaller channels with local operations seem to be doing the job much better and benefiting in terms of viewership compared to the big elephant on the block, Doordarshan (Muppidi, 1998; Sarma, 2004).

### **State Control, Regulation and Autonomy in Programming**

A former Deputy Director of Doordarshan and presently the President of the International Association of Women in Radio and Television, Ms. Jai Chandiram says that:

“The question of censorship has been agitating filmmakers for a very long time and the opinion is divided given the social and cultural diversity in India. The tendency for censorship is usually related to sensitivities of the political parties in power and depiction of ‘sex’ in film – the music video scenes get away with bikini clothing and suggestive body movements more easily than the feature films. The feature films continue to show ‘rape’ but find it hard to show ‘love’ scenes. Language is also ‘censored’ particularly if it is sensitive to the minorities and the dialogues instigate civilians to rebel. It is common knowledge that the censor board changes with the changes of political parties in power. Very often, the demand for more qualified people in the composition and representation in the Censor Board is ignored as ‘influence’ is easier through general representatives of the ‘janta’<sup>2</sup>. Of deeper concern is the censoring of views expressed by Khoosboo (film actress) and Sania (Mirza), the new tennis icon, by religious and community leaders<sup>3</sup>. The restrictions and fatwas curtail the freedom of expression and media’s role is clouded as it often conducts “trial by media” in situations affecting the lives of people. This has been seen in the case of Gudiya, who had to choose a husband, in the presence of village panchayat and religious leaders in the media glare. Gudiya had been married a second time as her first husband was missing in action across the border. A mother of a fourteen month baby, she is asked to choose between her husbands. The social & religious pressure is so much that she chooses her first husband even though her heart is with her second husband (personal communication).

She also feels that what is required now is more debate. Also, she feels that there needs to be more of the watchdog role and participation by a wide representation of civil society to shape the media to serve the community.

Monopoly control over communication media has always led to the charge of authoritarianism and imposing state ideology on the masses (muppidi, 1998).

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<sup>2</sup> Slang for common people

<sup>3</sup> Both these celebrities have been dealing with conservative groups challenging their expressed views on women’s freedom.

Several studies have also documented the criticisms of censorship and control by authorities that seek to control a medium (Shields and Muppidi, 1996). The Indian television system has been no exception. The Indian government, at various times, has been accused of using the radio and television networks as propaganda wings of the ruling party (Singhal & Rogers, 1989; Shield & Muppidi, 1996; Muppidi, 1998). Being run as a bureaucratic arm of the information and broadcasting ministry did not help lessen any doubts either (Rajgopal, 1993).

The debate, before 1991, was to free Doordarshan from government control and to grant it an autonomous status. With the advent of satellite television however, this element of total control also seemed lost, as the availability of other television channels to the viewers diluted the monopoly of the Indian government, in dictating what was good for the viewers (Muppidi, 1998). In addition, the popularity of the regional language, satellite/ cable channels raised the question of whether there was a felt need for these programs, which gap was filled by these channels (Das, 1996).

As Singhal & Rogers (1989) suggest, the government contended that Indian television (Read Doordarshan) can contribute towards development. It can combat illiteracy, narrow the gap between the rich and the poor, and facilitate national integration. To this end, the government retained monopoly control over Doordarshan under the assumption that it can be used to fulfill the twin objectives of development and national integration. However, it also served as a technology to extend state power over society (Rajgopal, 1993) and has provoked critics to label Doordarshan as a propaganda apparatus of the ruling party (Singhal & Rogers, 1989; Pendakur, 1990).

While discussing the issue of state control-vs- autonomy of Doordarshan, Mitra (1993) writes that,

This unresolved matter suggests that there is an assumption that television can play a major role in India today. Clearly, the party in power recognizes this: that is, the role of television in impacting upon various aspects of Indian life, from images of the nation to images of religion, and the forging of a preferred national ideology. However, this also represents the conditions that determine the production of the various television texts. An analysis of television needs to constantly recognize this fundamental aspect of Indian television: its state ownership which implicates the state of television in India today (p.24).

Towards this end, there are three significant committee reports that need mentioning. The Chanda Committee on Broadcasting and Information Media, was the first to look into the functioning of *All India Radio (AIR)* and *Doordarshan* (then they were still one corporation). In its report in April 1966, the committee is quoted as saying that, “it is not possible in the Indian context for a creative medium like broadcasting to flourish under a regime of departmental rules and regulations’ and therefore recommended an institutional change, so that *AIR* can be liberated” (Kumar, 1981; p.70)”. It also recommended the separation of *AIR* and *Doordarshan*. While the recommendation for autonomy was rejected by the government, from April 1, 1976, television was separated from *AIR* and constituted into a new body called *Doordarshan* (Kumar, 1981; p.70).

In February 1978, The Verghese Committee report suggested the setting up of an autonomous National Broadcast Trust (NBT) to administer *Doordarshan*. Termed ‘*Akash Bharati*’, it was supposed to function as an independent and autonomous public service. However, even this report was delayed or not acted upon by the central government in New Delhi.

Inspite of the Supreme Court’s ruling in early 1995 that rejected the Government’s monopoly of the airwaves, and called for an independent public body to be set up to regulate their use (*India Today*, March 15<sup>th</sup>, 1995; p.98), private satellite television channels are even today subject to a lot of restrictions and legal barriers before they can broadcast their programs inside the country. The Supreme Court ruling however was subject to the availability of broadcast frequencies and to Article 19(2) of the Indian Constitution which lays out “that any such action should not affect the sovereignty and security of the country, disrupt public order, or cross the limits of decency” (*India Today*, March 15<sup>th</sup>, 1995; p.98). It is however still unclear what actions are subject to this condition or constitutes a violation.

The Cable Television Networks (Regulation) Bill, 1993 gives “the central government blanket power to prohibit the operation of any cable television network, in any such areas as it may specify. No criteria or grounds are specified. It is left to the government’s subjective satisfaction if it thinks it necessary or expedient so to do in the public interest (Clause 20). No appeal is provided for either” (Noorani, 1993; p.2635).

Clause 19 of the same bill gives the power to the state governments, “acting through an officer of the center of a particular rank to ban “any particular

programme” from being transmitted if it is likely to cause ill will between groups or “disturb the public tranquility”. No appeal is allowed for (Noorani, 1993; p.2635).

The Prasar Bharati bill suggesting autonomy for *Doordarshan* was also delayed for political reasons and Doordarshan remained under direct government control till the late 1990’s (Muppidi, 1998). This bill was passed in the Indian Parliament to provide the establishment of an independent broadcasting authority for India, to be known as Prasar Bharati. Autonomy to Doordarshan came eventually when the Prasar Bharati Corporation came into existence on 23<sup>rd</sup> of November 1997.

The primary duty of the Corporation, as per the Prasar Bharati Act 1990, was to organize and conduct public broadcasting services to inform, educate and entertain the public and to ensure a balanced development of broadcasting and radio. The Broadcasting Bill 1997 provides for the Broadcasting Authority to facilitate and regulate broadcasting services in India. However, Doordarshan and All India Radio still can be said to be under the control of the government, even if indirectly.

As Mr. Pavan Manvi, a past producer for Doordarshan and presently the Chief Producer of Eenadu TV,<sup>4</sup> says:

“They (Producers in Doordarshan) have very broad guidelines. They cannot criticize the government, since they are a part of it. Although Prasar Bharati is an autonomous body, Doordarshan still thinks it is a part of the govt. The staff has been indoctrinated with this view. Otherwise the producer has a lot of freedom. Unfortunately it (Doordarshan) does not have good producers to use that freedom. Presently most of the staff is very mediocre, and a lot of them are very corrupt. They want to be in the good books of the ruling party. It does not matter which party is in the govt. They change their colours very quickly. On paper Doordarshan producers have lot of freedom but in practice they function like government employees!! No wonder they are not able to compete with private channels!!” (Personal interview)

### **Social development –vs. - Commercial Objectives in Programming:**

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<sup>4</sup> ETV is one of the largest private Indian satellite television networks and programs in a number of languages and in a number of popular channels.

“In my opinion no country having a less than 7% economic growth and over a 1000 million population can afford to commercialize its broadcasting network entirely”

Santosh Pandey  
Senior Producer, ETV Hindi Channels

India is Asia’s largest television market behind China, and its growing middle class serves as a potentially good market for entertainment programs (Melkote, Sanjay & Ahmed, 1998). The main source of revenue for all the television channels are from advertisements and sponsorship of programs and slots (See Table 1).

Table 1

Commercial Revenue By Network and Major Kendras in India (1995-1996 to 2002-2003)								
(Rs. in Million )								
Networks/Kendras	1995-96	1996-98	1997-98	1998-99	1999-00	2000-01	2001-02	2002-03
<b>Networks</b>								
National Network	1879.7	2835.5	2638.8	2115.5	3175	2591	3305.5	2699.6
Metro Network	795.4	1027.4	937.9	735.1	461.8	872.9	823.2	227.7
DD Sports	-	-	-	-	896.8	719.9	698.3	923.4
DD India	-	-	5.4	4.7	14.7	12.1	14.9	6.8
<b>Kendras</b>								
Delhi	241.8	180.4	49.3	58.1	81.1	67.2	95.2	122.3
Lucknow	41.1	35.3	28	31	41.4	32	41	32.6
Jaipur	5.2	9.3	9.2	12.1	17	19.3	32.2	33.6
Jalandhar	26.6	24.6	25	50.2	43	47.3	70.4	86.3
Mumbai	184.3	261.7	144.9	142.5	147.6	143.4	181.9	180.3
Ahmedabad	40.1	31.4	19	27.8	28.9	38	40.8	55.5
Bhopal	8.9	8.9	9.7	18.1	14.8	17	24.7	22.9
Chennai	404.5	428.3	276.4	147	185.2	72	75.1	101.9
Hyderabad	183	241.3	181	146.2	194.4	128.7	90.8	122.5
Bangalore	189.6	262.8	219.7	137.3	167.6	84.3	136.2	136.2
Thiruvananthapuram	144.1	167.1	166	153.1	201.7	162.4	148.1	131
Calcutta	140.9	177.5	155.8	168	258.4	299.2	277.4	217.9

Bhubaneswar	8.5	23.7	20.5	20.1	18.3	27.3	31.9	37.8
Guwahati	4.8	9	7.6	9.8	10.7	15.8	21.7	46.7
Patna	1.5	3	6.4	12	8.6	18.4	22	11.7

Source : Doordarshan India 2003, Prasar Bharati, Broadcasting Corporation of India & Past Issues.

Doordarshan's revenue from advertising has been steadily increasing from 1,879 million rupees in 1995-96 to over 2,699 million rupees in 2002-03. For a public service network that is a substantial source of revenue and one that is only likely to be encouraged.

In the present situation, with many international, national, regional and local program producers and providers in English, Hindi and several other Indian languages, there seems to be a substantial growth in the culture of consumerism, encouraged by advertisers and corporate sponsorship of select television programs (Muppidi, 1998). Doordarshan today seems as commercialized as the other private channels. In order to compete with private channels and retain audiences, Doordarshan is continuing to abandon slots scheduled for social development programs and replacing them with commercial programming. As Skinner, Melkote and Muppidi (1998) point out, "Doordarshan may be in the process of abandoning its historic role as a development support communication vehicle in favor of entertainment to urban and mostly middle class audiences' (p.4).

Jai Chandiram says that while the television media in India has grown phenomenally both at the national and regional level and delivery and access is available through variety of means including DTH, the channels do not always provide the variety that would be an outcome of this growth.

"Often the emphasis in news channels is now on scandals, crime reporting and celebrity watching which ends-up as 'trivia' and is questionable as news or entertainment. When the battle is for audience ratings, the lack of serious public discourse on development does not find a place in programming. It must be added that the news media play a commendable role in informing and moving people to action when there are disaster and natural calamities as was seen during the tsunami and earthquakes. Perhaps, many channels need to look at objectivity, impartiality and include a variety of perspectives with more vigour" (personal communication)

Singhal and Rogers (1989) also point out that given the fundamental inadequacies, investment in television infrastructure is not economically viable for the country. On a more broader level, the manner in which television has developed in the Indian context, has led to pointers that emphasize the haphazard nature of broadcast development in the country and overall to the lack of a coherent and well thought out telecommunications policy itself (Chatterji, 1987; Singhal & Rogers, 1989; Rajagopal, 1993).

Pendakur (1990) and Rajagopal (1993) also allege that, as a state institution, television is oriented towards its reproduction and expansion as ends in themselves. While Rajagopal (1993) asserts that, "the state may turn to entertainment culture as follower rather than initiator, on the heels of a growing entrepreneur's market" (p.92), Pendakur (1993) alleges that this represents a new form of collaboration between the growing corporate sector and the hegemonic state and represents a coalescence of various interests of power in Indian society.

The commercialization of Doordarshan has led to accusations from most critics, of propagating consumerist values and also to the allegation that its original development-educational goals are being increasingly overshadowed by entertainment content (Singhal & Rogers, 1989; Pendakur, 1990; Rajagopal, 1993). Jai Chandiram however feels that, there is a creative and humorous culturally rooted appeal focusing on the girl child and other minorities, in the new advertisements. Perhaps, this trend will now get reflected in the "tired family soaps" (personal communication).

As I point out in an earlier study, "it is very important that Doordarshan not abandon its public service model because there is a real need for such a network of programs in the Indian situation. A majority of Indians lack important and basic resources. Poverty is rampant and illiteracy is high in various parts of the country. Television in most Third World countries was introduced to aid in social development. India is no exception. It will be a good idea if Doordarshan devotes at least one channel for development programs" (Muppidi, 1998).

The model that will eventually evolve for Doordarshan should be a complex fusion of the market model which will generate the required commercial revenue and thereby fund the public service model that will continue its social development objectives. The revenue generated by the Prasar Bharati Board from fees collected through licensing and up linking facilities offered to the other private Indian channels can also be utilized to fund socially relevant programs.

The statutory power of the Prasar Bharati Board can also be used to stipulate, regulate and monitor that a minimum amount of social development programming is carried on the private channels (Muppidi, 1998).

### **Plurality and Culture in Programming**

...ideas, cultures, and histories cannot seriously be understood or studied without their force, or more precisely their configurations of power, also being studied.

(Said, E., 1978; p.5).

Any discussion of plurality cannot be conducted without examining issues dealing with culture. In a multilingual country such as India, issues dealing with language lie at the core of a culture:

A connection between language and nation has often been assumed in which national differences and state-formation have arisen 'naturally' out of pre-existing linguistic differences. In cases of considerable linguistic complexity, where major language groups occupy compact geographical areas, multilingual arrangements have been devised sometimes which accommodate linguistic diversities in federal and local units, occasionally also but less commonly within the agencies of a central state as well. However, there is little either natural or inevitable about these solutions, which have generally arisen out of political domination or political conflict and have involved conscious choice by political elites to favor one language or several among other more or less numerous possibilities. In modern India, deliberate choice and selection of official languages through political struggle have been very much in evidence throughout the British and post-independence periods (Brass, 1992; p.60).

Doordarshan is a case in point. It follows a three tier policy wherein the national channel is aired in Hindi and English from the national capital Delhi and each state capital has a regional center to broadcast television programs in the dominant language of the state. While this tri-lingual, two-tier system seems well planned on paper, in reality the regional language programming is allowed only at particular non-prime time slots. The prime time slots are filled with national programming which is only in Hindi and English.

While the policy of foisting Hindi programs on a predominantly non-Hindi speaking population in South India escapes any logic, it was cleverly disguised

as part of the national integration policy of the Indian government. All national programming was in Hindi and it was considered the language of common communication through out the country (See Muppidi, 1998 for a more detailed discussion). While it is not clear how the general population views this notion of national integration and national identity, it was justified on patriotic grounds where the acceptance of national programming in Hindi was equated with assimilation into a common Indian identity.

It would be a great mistake, however, to presume that the process of identity formation is somehow either 'natural' or uniformly successful or that the results are invariably permanent. On the contrary, it is better to think of social and political identities in the Indian subcontinent as being in a perpetual state of flux, of political categories as being still under construction, with their boundaries fluid. It is not to be assumed that India is a country divided into clearly demarcated caste, communal and linguistic groups in perpetual conflict with each other. Nor is to be assumed that, when they do arise, such conflicts are necessarily intractable and bound to lead to secessionism or the ultimate disintegration of the Indian state. Such conditions rather tend to arise under conditions which can be specified and which are affected especially by three sets of forces: competition among persons from different cultural categories for the same economic opportunities; designation by the authorities of certain groups as disadvantaged and entitled to political recognition and the reservation of some economic opportunities specifically for them; and exploitation and manipulation of such differences by political leaders (Brass, 1992; p. 92).

Rajagopal (1993) argues that the 'national identity' propagated by Doordarshan is a blatantly 'Hinduized' national identity, thereby threatening minorities, especially Muslims. On the other hand, other scholars have accused *Doordarshan* of promoting a strong Hindi language national identity over television through its programming (Mitra, 1993; Singhal & Rogers, 1989) points out in his critique of the Indian television serial *Mahabharat*,

By binding Hindi and north India as the central locus of practices, *Mahabharat* and other north Indian Hindi serials are able to marginalize the possibility of non-Hindi serials coming out of this center. Indeed the unity of Hindi and north Indian discourse leads to the marginalization of the discourses that are grouped around other languages (such as Assamese from the eastern state of Assam). By constantly reproducing the

hegemony of the north Indian Hindi belt, National Network on Doordarshan has been able to largely ignore the practices that are related to other languages and other parts of India. The occasional film in a regional language, and perhaps some region-specific programs, are mostly what come out of Delhi's National Network. In the end it is a north Indian hegemony that is being perpetuated, which is in total alignment with what is circulated in the *Mahabharat* tale (p.130).

Critiquing the role of Doordarshan as an agent for national integration, Singhal and Rogers (1989) point out that:

National integration is fostered by television coverage of events like the annual Republic Day parade, Independence Day celebrations and major national festivals, along with programs of classical music and dance from different regions, know-your-India travelogues, and biographies of great Indian leaders. But satellite television programs, on the national network are broadcast only in Hindi and English. The latter is understood by only 3 percent of the nation's population, and the former by about 40 percent. In a nation of many languages, television broadcasting in just two languages, critics argue, alienates a large section of the population (p. 73).

Also leveled are allegations that the inherently centralizing nature of a satellite-based national television system is homogenizing regional cultures and also destroying local languages and cultural norms (Singhal & Rogers, 1989). While Mody (1979) believes that helping to create a sense of political oneness among India's disparate ethnic and linguistic groups is a utopian goal for Indian television, Bhatia and Karnik (1985) believe that, 'the solution to this dilemma is the decentralization of television, both politically and culturally' (as quoted in Singhal & Rogers, 1989; p.74).

As far as entertainment goes, Jai Chandiram feels that "the tendency to follow popular successful formulas in programming as has been seen in the "K" serials and adoptions such as 'Jassi Jaisi Koi Nahin' get a huge following with the majority of program focus on the family. The view that these family soaps have opened up the public discussions on sexual issues such as marital rape, extra marital relationship etc., the dominant treatment of the soaps is restricted to appeal to the middle class and the closure is often limited to socially accepted traditional values" (Personal Interview).

On the national scene, Doordarshan has outlasted its competitors, mainly ZEE TV and STAR TV when the language of telecast has been Hindi or English. But that has not been the same when it has competed against other national language, especially south Indian, channels. Here the audiences are increasingly attracted to channels that provide local programming in the local and cultural contexts of the audiences. Simply put, there is more time for programming, more popular programming suited to specific cultures on the small screen today than ever before. For e.g.: any news bulletin on Eenadu TV does carry national news but also has an increased focus on the news from the local state capital and various regions of the state of Andhra Pradesh. There are video clippings of the events and more coverage for state news than national news. This was not the case for Doordarshan. Since this has the added advantage of providing programming in the Telugu language, it will definitely have an edge in appealing to local audiences when compared to Doordarshan (Muppidi, 1998).

On private channels, the programming is not interrupted or relegated to the back seat by national programming at any time as was the case with Doordarshan. Most of the audiences also identify with the programs on local channels because they are made with or about the people from different parts of the state. Hence, there is more identification with each program in terms of language, locale, script, dialect and cultural connotation (Muppidi, 1998).

Doordarshan has never been able to achieve that spontaneity with its national programming. Any video program that uses one cultural setting to appeal to diverse cultural groups will always lack that spontaneous appeal. Doordarshan's response to this competition has been mostly reactive rather than proactive. It has launched regional language satellite channels in most of the official state languages, available through cable, to cater to language audiences that have migrated to the private cable channels. However, this has not been accompanied by a corresponding investment in strengthening the resources intended to make good programs for these channels. Thereby, these regional channels have not achieved much success. As for the rest of the non-cable, captive language audiences, the most Doordarshan has done is to subtitle its Hindi and English programs originating in Delhi, in the regional languages. In a multicultural country that has a low literacy rate, this action also raises questions of validity of such actions. Is the target audience – the elite and upper middle classes in urban India or the audiences in rural India?

The availability of so many media choices, in the present television situation in India, will definitely sustain a plurality of representations. This may either

contribute to furthering the divide between the different identity groups in India or on the contrary it might stimulate a plural, all arching notion of national identity which will encompass and help these various 'imagined communities' find representation within that new definition.

Is television so powerful that it can be the sole cause of important changes? Crediting audiences with the power to decide what channels and programs they prefer to watch, as this study does, questions the power of the media itself to dictate a certain objective. In such a scenario, the media are but one means of representation for the audiences. 'Imagined communities' are dependent on representation for their identity and media play an important part in such a process (Anderson, 1983). However, one should be wary about drawing hasty conclusions about a relationship between the media and the production and distribution of such representations (Das, 1998).

## **Conclusion**

Santosh Pandey reiterates the case for Public Service broadcasting in India:

"The increasing competition in the Indian television market makes it further imperative to have a public broadcaster. The commercial broadcasters have got nothing to do with the general upliftment of society and social engineering. With almost 500 million illiterate people in the population, I don't think India can afford not to have a public broadcaster. Satellite channels continue to depend on cable for distribution in India. This restricts them to remain confined to urban India which is hardly 21% of the country. The rest 79% is the real India below par on all indicators of growth and development. They need to be supported on all information related fronts: health, education and employment. No commercial channel is going to be bothered about these things. In a nut shell, India at the moment can not afford to use television as a luxury and therefore a public broadcaster is a must.

There is no active conspiracy in Doordarshan to exclude specific sections of the population from its programming policy. However, it is more through passive ignorance and inaction that exclusion has come about. The policy makers in Doordarshan and the government information and broadcasting ministry are to blame for the present state of affairs. While broadcast policy till the 1990's had a more overt, political agenda (See Shields and Muppidi, 1998 for a more detailed

discussion) of late the focus has been more reactive regulation than proactive direction.

In recent years, all the broadcasting regulations that have been passed in Parliament have to do more with the structure and regulation of existing players and innovative technology. They do not reveal any thinking towards a futuristic communication policy guided by a pro active vision of programming. On the other hand, some of these regulations even blatantly try to give Doordarshan a competitive advantage<sup>5</sup>. Such support only reinforces the organization's reluctant laziness to pull up its socks and react positively to the competition.

Considering the track record of individual producers in Doordarshan, it is a safe guess to predict that they will continue to be obsessed with staying within the meaning of the words than to think of creative ways of programming. Through its bureaucratic functioning, Doordarshan has thus achieved a passive mode of programming based more on meeting immediate governmental objectives. At the same time, the private players are also under their own pressures and not just of advertising.

As Jai Chandiram says "its hard to comment on the regional media news as this media is also guided by the strong connections in ownership by political parties and content is guided by these affiliations and the bias is evident when there are controversial issues" (personal communication).

When Doordarshan was the only channel available to viewers, most of the programming came from Delhi and some from Bombay. Audiences watched whatever programming was available on television because they had no option. Today, in the new environment, that situation has changed. With the availability of alternate programming and other competition to Doordarshan, television programming has been pluralized. Correspondingly, local television audiences have more choices where none existed before. Hence, the orientation of the viewers also seems to have changed. Earlier all content and images either originated or were approved in Delhi and available through Doordarshan.

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<sup>5</sup> The recent stipulation by Prasar Bharati that all telecast of the India and Pakistan Cricket series (that was awarded to a private channel through competitive bidding), be provided to Doordarshan free for telecast is a case in point. This was subsequently challenged in the courts and was struck down.

Today, they flow from various sources within the country and even across the world. In this changed orientation Delhi is as far away from the audience's mind (and probably choice) as is Singapore or New York. That by itself has positive implications for the future of media pluralism.

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