PUBLIC SERVICE BROADCASTING: INDIAN SCENARIO

Rajina Chhetri
Student (Session: 2009-11)
Department of Mass Communication
University of North Bengal
Siliguri, West Bengal, India
Website: http://www.nbu.ac.in
Email: razina_thapa@yahoo.co.in

Abstract: Article 19 (1) (a) of Indian constitution has guaranteed freedom of speech and expression as fundamental rights of individuals. Broadcasting is the most important mass communication channel through which the right to freedom of speech and expression which is to receive and impart information and dissemination of ideas freely can be sustained. Public Service Broadcasting (PSB) is to meet community needs which exist beyond traditional geographic and institutional boundaries. Today, Prasar Bharati through All India Radio (AIR) and Doordarshan (DD) networks provide maximum coverage of the population and are one of the largest terrestrial networks in the world. Prasar Bharati aims to provide most efficient media content of the highest quality that will empower and enlighten the citizens of India and its audiences outside the country through original and relevant programmes which inform, educate and entertain people. So, as the competition is going serious with the existence of private channels and with the move into digital age, public broadcasting is in the forefront of using new technology to provide better service and programmes to an even wider and more diverse community. This is a small study which tries to gauge the public service broadcasting scenario in India.

Introduction
Public service broadcasting is the broadcasting made, financed and controlled by the public, for the public. It is neither commercial nor state-owned; it is free from political interference and pressure from commercial forces. Through public service broadcasting, citizens are informed, educated and also entertained. Public service broadcasting can serve as a keystone of democracy when it is guaranteed with pluralism, programming diversity, editorial independence, appropriate funding, accountability and transparency. Public broadcasting
includes radio, television and other electronic media. Public broadcasting may be nationally or locally operated, depending on the country and the station.

**Origin of Public Service Broadcasting**

Public service broadcasting is based on the principles of universality of service, diversity of programming, provision for minority audiences including the disadvantaged, sustaining an informed electorate and cultural and educational enrichment. The concept was conceived and fostered within an overarching ideal of cultural and intellectual enlightenment of society. The roots of public service broadcasting are generally traced to documents prepared in support of the establishment of the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) by Royal Charter on January 1, 1927. This corporation grew out of recommendations of the Crawford Committee appointed by the British postmaster general in August 1925. These recommendations included the creation of a public corporation, which would serve as a trustee for the national interest in broadcasting. It was expected that as public trustee, the corporation would emphasise serious, educational and cultural programming that would elevate the level of intellectual and artistic tastes of the audience.

Broadcasting in India was started in 1927 by the Indian Broadcasting Company (IBC). The broadcasting service has been growing at fast speed since 1936 when the name of All India Radio (AIR) was adopted and the national television service of India, Doordarshan (DD) was started on September 1959, since then it is climbing the steps of success.

**Public Service Broadcasting Day**

November 12, is observed as the Public service broadcasting Day in India to commemorate Mahatma Gandhi’s visit to All India Radio (AIR) studio. On November 12, 1947, Gandhi spoke on radio to the refugees from Pakistan, stationed at the camp at Kurukshetra. It was Gandhi’s first and last visit to the studio of AIR. He was a communicator par excellence. He had always emphasised on the service and advocacy aspect of media, two important pillars of public service broadcasting.

**The Social Responsibility of Public Service Broadcasting**

The responsibility of public service broadcasting is to act responsibly. Their responsibilities are diverse and composite; they are frequently challenged and always challenging. Their mission may not always be popular with the masses, but decades of social experience
show the social worth and importance of keeping faith with that mission. Public service broadcasting is about many things for many people because it’s about serving a public comprised of many publics and a cultural life created by many cultures. Their principles and practices have been rightly defined as the “social responsibility” approach to broadcasting and electronic media. Their approach to broadcasting has always been defined as a service to the public. That is the soul of legal obligations and the heart of practical operations.

Public service broadcasting has the responsibility to provide services to a public comprised of many individuals with linguistic cultures, languages, wide ranging differences and broad similarities. Of all the identities that are important for defining one’s self in modern society, the most important for political democratic process is one’s identity as a citizen. Good citizenship is the decisive requirement for a society at peace with itself and with each other. The ability to effectively exercise one’s identity as a good citizen depends on the quality and variety of information that is necessary to make informed decisions about social policy, political scenario and civic life. Public service broadcasting is obligated to act responsibly in all news and current affairs programming as an essential service to the public in the duties and privileges entailed in the exercise of citizenship. It is a social responsibility.

**Importance of Public Service Broadcasting In India**

Prasar Bharati is India's public broadcaster. It is an autonomous corporation of the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India comprises the Doordarshan television network and All India Radio. Prasar Bharati was established in India on November 23, 1997 following a demand that the government owned broadcasters in India should be given autonomy like those in many other countries. The Parliament of India passed an Act to grant this autonomy in 1990, but it was not enacted until September 15, 1997. Public service broadcasting is a major means in bringing social change in people and nations through mass media. It is formed to meet every community needs which exist beyond traditional, geographical and institutional boundaries. It is been dominated by the commercial broadcasting due to its high viewership and its programme content, the importance of public service broadcasting cannot be diluted in India. Unlike private commercial broadcasting, public service broadcasting is concerned about a broader set of consumers and a much larger mandate. It meets the complete media needs of all, including those of a villager sitting in the remotest hamlet of the country who has very few media options. It caters to people who are
either watching television or listening to radio, on a community set, in a remote part of the country. In India, where there is variety of customs, religions and languages, it becomes crucial for such a service to take into account the media needs of the minority audience, whether they are ethnic, religious, or linguistic. The public service broadcaster is concerned with developing taste, promote understanding, spread literacy and development, create informed debate and empower the disadvantaged - major issues that a commercial broadcaster rarely does. Over the years, the Directorate of Audio Visual Publicity (DAVP) has played a key role in spreading public service messages in line with the policies of the government with view to promote informed social transformation. Programs like ‘Krishi Darshan’, ‘Grameen Bharat’, and ‘Jaago Grahak Jaago’ have informed and educated farmers, villagers, and common citizens of the latest technologies and innovations available to them in their profession or rights and opportunities they possess as citizens of the country. These programs have informed, educated, motivated, and even entertained that vast segment of our society to which this information is vital.

Media is the most powerful tool in impacting, influencing, informing and educating people in our country. People in villages, towns and even cities are still overwhelmed by superstitions and resist improvements and change. High illiteracy rate and poverty still plaguing our nation, the importance of public service broadcasting in our country remains immense. DAVP's Jaago Grahak Jaago in which fictionalized cases were used to educate audiences of their rights as consumers is a typical example of competing and ensuring viewership of such programs that are imperative to educate our audiences and bring about the social and economic transformation that our country strives to achieve. The significance of public service broadcasting in India remains immense and it maintains its position as the most powerful tool for informing, educating, and empowering the people.

To Inform, Educate & Entertain

The goal of public service broadcasting is to make needed information available at the doorsteps of everyone. It should be wide ranging in its appeal, reliable, entertaining, instructive and informative serving only to one master i.e. the public. It strives to engage all communities through thought provoking broadcast programmes and outreach projects. It channelizes the information and ideas that improve communities socially, culturally and economically. The goal of public service broadcasting is to meet community’s needs which exist beyond traditional, geographic and institutional boundaries. Public service broadcasting
through All India Radio and Doordarshan networks provides maximum coverage of the population and one of the largest terrestrial network in the world.

In a country like India where illiteracy rate is high, this medium has a great potentiality to inform, to educate and entertain people. The immense social responsibility of public service broadcasting is consonant with the potentiality of the network as it reaches vast masses of the people through the country. Over the years, Doordarshan and All India Radio true to its role as a public broadcaster have been engaged in miscellaneous activities. With the move into digital age public service broadcasting is in the forefront of using new technology to provide better service and programmes to an even wider and more diverse community.

**Prasar Bharti of India**

The Indian constitution has guaranteed freedom of speech and expression as fundamental rights of the individuals. Article 19(1) (a) of the Indian constitution states that, “all the citizens shall have the rights to freedom of speech and expression”. Broadcasting is the most important mass communication channel through which the right to freedom of speech and expression can be sustained. In a developing country like India, where illiteracy level is high, people living below poverty line and having problem in gaining access to information, the role of broadcasting is critical to the building of democracy, developing economy, social value system and culture. The main functions of the Prasar Bharti are:

1) Upholding the unity and integrity of the country and values enshrined in the constitution
2) Promoting national integration.
3) Safeguarding citizen’s right to be informed matters of public interest and presenting a fair and balanced flow of information.
4) Paying special attention to the fields of education and spread of literacy, agriculture, rural development, environment, health and family welfare, science and technology.
5) Creating awareness about women’s issues.
6) Providing adequate broadcast coverage to diverse cultures, sports and youth affairs.
7) Promoting social justice, safeguarding the rights of working class, minorities of tribal communities.
8) Expanding broadcasting facilities and promoting research and development in broadcast technology.

Prasar Bharati will aim to provide, in the most efficient manner possible, media content of the highest quality that will empower and enlighten the citizens of India and audiences outside
the country through authentic and relevant programmes that inform, educate and entertain ensuring a sizeable audience and reach.

**Funding of Public Service Broadcasting**

In recognized democracies, the freedom of public service broadcasting organisations from governmental interference is reasonably secure, both in law and conventional practice. The main threat today to the ability of public service broadcasting organisations is to fulfil their mandates stem from the financial restraints that are increasingly being placed on them. In these times of seriousness, and with prevailing views relating to government downsizing, many public service broadcasting organisations are being called upon to maintain previous levels of service while at the same time the level of public financial support for them is decreasing. Usually, public service broadcasting organisations have been largely funded through public allocations, either from general government resources, or through the collection of a broadcasting fee. Both main forms of public funding have their advantages and disadvantages. A general charge on users, or broadcasting fee, is relatively insulated from government interference or manipulation and provides consistent levels of funding over time. It does involve collection costs, although these may be minimised by using existing payment systems, such as electricity suppliers, to collect the fee. More seriously, it has often proved difficult for political reasons to introduce a broadcasting fee for the first time in countries where one has not traditionally been collected. In addition, the fee may exert some pressure on broadcasting organisations to maintain high audience levels as a way of justifying fee collection, which can undermine commitment to public service goals.

As an alternative to full government funding, many public service broadcasting organisations now look to commercial activities, mainly advertisements, but at the moment, advertisements are largely restricted to public television services, in part because production costs are far higher for television than for radio. Commercial advertising on the public airwaves carries a number of risks. There are so many broadcast hours in the day and the better if more time is dedicated to quality programming. It becomes more serious if commercial imperative will result in public service broadcasting organisations that simply imitate the private sector and base their programming choices on popularity rather than quality. This can only lower the quality and diversity of public service broadcasting, undermining the whole motivation for it in the first place. At the same time, financial imperatives and declining public resources in many countries mean that public service broadcasting organisations cannot maintain levels
and quality of programming unless they are allowed to supplement their income with outside revenue. A balance can be found by allowing a limited amount of commercial advertising while ensuring that most of the resources come from public sources of funding.

It can be viewed that extensive public funding should remain the rule for public service broadcasting. If public service broadcasting organisations are forced to compete in the commercial marketplace, they will simply come to be like the private broadcasters with whom they are competing, thereby deserting their mandate.

**Different from Commercial Broadcasting**

Public service broadcasting differs from commercial broadcasting for purely or political reasons because of its specific responsibility, its agenda is different. Its objective is public service. It provides the whole society with information, culture, education and entertainment; it enhances social, political and cultural citizenship and promotes social unity. Firstly, pure commercial broadcasting does not meet the full needs of informing, educating, and entertaining the vast sections of population in any nation, especially those living in remote corners of towns and villages in many countries. Television rate points and saleability of programs play a major role in deciding the content of shows in commercial broadcasting channels. Similarly, the private FM radio stations target the up market and more urban radio listeners. The private channel delivers to an audience and is not a vehicle for delivering new ideas, information and education to its viewers and listeners. Hence, for citizens of the country who need to be informed and educated about aspects like opportunities in various vocations, improvements in technologies, or availability and growth in various sectors, these channels have little to offer. Content on these channels may have found high entertaining value amongst the mass audiences that today reaches small towns and even villages, but this content simply does not provide the kind of specialized education and information people in this stratum of society require. Secondly, even if commercial broadcasting channels do offer some content that is of significance and relevance to the people in the far and remote corners of India, the low purchasing power of these citizens make this content inaccessible to them. For instance, doordarshan produced a program for Star News which titled ‘Mera Gaon Mera Desh’- a show that depicted the advancements in technology in the agricultural sector which is being adopted by farmers spread across the country. The program also showcased success stories of people in hamlets and villages who turned parched areas of land, or innovated and invented technologies that enabled better output and hence better income for each of them.
The program struck a chord with those farmers and villagers who possessed the purchasing power to access cable network, but for the poor in the remotest of remote corners of our villages, the program and the content, even though of immense relevance and importance remained inaccessible.

Thus, with pure commercial broadcasting channels, the information and education required by this vast segment of population in our country remains unfulfilled. It is public service broadcasting that fills this emptiness by ensuring that every citizen stays informed, educated, and connected with the latest happenings and events taking place in the country or opportunities that may be useful to him or her in the course of life.

**Swot Analysis of Public Service Broadcasting in India**

**i. Strength**
Prasar Bharati in India has a strong network of transmitters and production facilities to fulfil the needs of the public by broadcasting varieties of programme relating to socio-economic values, culture, ethnicity, language, etc. Prasar Bharti has the largest global network of All India Radio (AIR) and Doordarshan (DD). AIR and Doordarshan covers about 99 % and 90 % percent of population of India respectively.

**ii. Weaknesses**
Many more innovative formats are yet to be created and utilised and audience of Prasar Bharati said that the educational programmes are not so effective and interesting due to lack in techniques. Audience feedbacks are not being paid attention by the experts. Programmes are not so interesting and attractive to catch attention of its audiences.

**iii. Opportunities**
As world is becoming more tough due to competition and availability of seats in educational institutions are decreasing, learners are bound to adapt electronic media for their learning, Prasar Bharati provides excellent opportunity to produce programmes of dedicated to education.

**iv. Threat**
As media scenario is varying day by day and huge numbers of private channels are growing with new techniques, Prasar Bharati should always remain focussed to their mission. They should be very innovative and concentrate on large-scale quality programme venture.
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