RADIO AS A MASS MEDIUM: ISSUE OF STATE CONTROL

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ABSTRACT

Radio – the true medium of the masses has been effectively and satisfactorily serving the country since inception till date. Despite quite a few notable changes it is yet to be fully successful in shedding its tag as that of an indirect spokesperson of the Union Government even now. But, the major contribution of this medium in making possible the green revolution and many other welfare schemes of the government must be duly acknowledged which make the masses expect something more from it than it is actually providing us at present. This author begins with the hypothesis that this medium which is far more closer to the masses at grassroots level than anything else, has not been given the due share of its autonomy and freedom to act in the better interests of the people. This is amply reflected in government policy and also implementation of various acts keeping news and current affairs programmes out of reach of the medium except All India Radio. On the other hand news and current affairs have never been a problem with newspapers and Television channels in the private sector. This paper would like to argue that the government is apprehensive of the medium of radio as being capable of inculcating adequate sense among the people at grassroots level and thereby cause revolutions or major upheavals in the society in the near or distant future. Thus, the Ministry of Information & Broadcasting (MIB) of is till date hesitant to de-control broadcast of news and current affairs to radio stations in the non-government sector. Further, there seems to be a certain design by the powers-that-be to undermine this medium’s significance and thereby wean away its popularity. The India Census 2011 registers a disturbing trend of sharply declining listening habit of radio compared to that of 2001 Census.

Keywords: Participatory Communication, Media Policy, Meaningful Messages, Public Service Broadcasting, Radio Audience

INTRODUCTION: RADIO - A MEDIUM OF THE MASSES

The purpose of broadcasting media is not merely to disseminate plain information or entertain superficially. These are tools, weapons for social development. Hence this medium must be used for public welfare, creative and interactive public tools.

For the majority of the world population, particularly by those belonging to disadvantaged groups, radio and television remain the most accessible and widespread means of information
and communication. Radio continues to be the most widely accessible communication medium. UNESCO is committed to promote Public Service Broadcasting (PSB) and empower citizens with knowledge to participate actively in decision-making process. (Khan, 2005).

Further, the Extension, Education and Communication Service of Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) summarizes the most important functions of rural radio as – a tool for democratization, a platform for the expression of ideas and opinions, an alternative media to the imperfections of public and commercial media, a conflict management tool, an agent of social change, a channel for the diffusion of information on rural issues, a tool that can be used for training and the transfer and exchange of knowledge and technologies, a channel for interactive communication, dialogue and debate on the major issues of rural development, a medium to collect local information on social issues which is essential for defining, planning and implementing local development efforts, a tool for cultural expression and entertainment, and a means of collecting, preserving and promoting the oral and musical heritage of rural communities, a tool for social investigation.

These statements reaffirm the immensely-potential scope of radio as the perfect medium for mass communication. Specially for nations like that of India where major portion of world’s illiterate and underprivileged people reside.

Further, in case of the Green Revolution and several other developmental programmes in the first few decades of our Independence, no one can ignore the enormous contribution that radio (All India Radio - AIR) made for making them successful.

BIAS TOWARDS RADIO:

During the initial days of our Independence, the authorities had the notion that the population which comprised a majority of illiterates, it would be a better idea to utilize the mass media – mainly radio - for guiding the masses towards developmental goals. This is why the electronic media of the country – both radio and television remained under strict control of the government for many decades.

It was only around the 1990s that both these media were liberalized in varying degrees for service to the masses.

However, at this point a major policy discrimination is reflected in the government’s acts and regulations. This includes –
- While Television channels in the private sector are allowed to broadcast news and current affairs programmes without any hitch right from their establishment, the same is not true for the radio sector.
- At a time when there is hardly any restriction on setting up of TV channels – both exclusively for news or for entertainment –a similar treatment is not given to radio for reasons best known to the government.

The 1991 liberalization of our economy saw the advent of TV channels – both cable and satellite and at present direct-to-home TV in a never-before way. Today we have about 800 TV channels of which more than 50 are exclusive news channels.
As against this, the total number of radio stations across the country is less than 400 including private FM channels.

However, the demands from communities and like-minded people received a major boost in February, 1995 when the Supreme Court of India ruled that "airwaves constitute public property and must be utilized for advancing public good." The judgment further decreed that broadcasting media as a whole should promote freedom of expression and speech and, therefore, should be able to enjoy freedom from Government monopoly and control subject to regulation by a public body. (Noronha, 2009).

Following this ruling the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting (MIB) of Government of India very cleverly took up a policy of allowing FM radio centres to be set up in the private sector and till recently about 350 such centres were targeted to be set up under this scheme.

But the trick here is that in the name of opening up the airwaves for public participation the MIB only allowed private sector to start FM radio centres. That too with a condition that they would not be allowed to air news and current affairs programmes except maybe relaying news bulletins of AIR from time to time.

Similarly, following persistent demands from development-oriented organizations and activists the MIB had finally opened up the sector for Community Radio Stations (CRS) to reputed NGOs, educational institutions, agricultural universities etc. It has resulted in a total of 152 operational CRS by August, 2013 out of which 89 are with educational institutions, 52 with NGOs, 11 with Krishi Vigyan Kendras (KVKs). This despite almost a decade of opening up the field for CR stations.

Kumar (2013) opines that the provision for allowing private FM players to air some amount of news and current affairs programmes from AIR presents us with a ridiculous syllogism – no news was good news on private FM. But now it can use AIR new which many will argue, is no news or only good news. So no news or only the good news is to be the news on private FM. Much like a little knowledge, in the matter of news, half a loaf can be worse than no bread.

He reiterates that to deny the masses on an easily accessible medium such as radio, a broad spectrum of information to enable them to make considered choices is to take away from the sanctity and right of that exercise of franchise. If anything, the government should have, from the outset, made news and current affairs a compulsory component of programming on FM channels so that they did not deteriorate into a regime of trivia talk and film songs administered ad nauseam.

Kumar (2013) further adds that there floats a pop psychological rationale for keeping independent news out of bounds for the FM licence. That is, unlike television or print, radio has a grassroots reach that includes sensitive, vulnerable, least common-denominator minds which can be swayed this way and that by anything they hear on it, particularly on religious and caste issues.

Besides, with the CRs also, the same condition of not allowing broadcasting of news and current affairs is attached which makes its functioning hardly practical in the true sense of the term.
Thus, it seems that the spirit of the 1995 Supreme Court ruling is lost in oblivion. This leads to the belief that this maybe a calculated strategy of the Union Government for preventing benefits of news and information percolating down to the masses at grassroots level as far as possible.

In any medium, but particularly in the case of audio-visual tools, the best message is the one that has been conceived and delivered by the target group itself. If the project’s stakeholders are able to recognize their fellow citizens, neighbours, or friends in a programme they hear on the radio, you will have found a way to grab their attention

**STEADY EROSION OF RADIO AUDIENCES:**

The moot question here is what is the justification of this glowing discrimination between the two media.

All these negative developments are gradually and steadily leading to a major erosion of listenership of this highly-effective medium for development. Along with the declining popularity of this medium - an important potential for disseminating information for development purposes – it is also registering a rapid downfall in the overall analysis. This is what is being reflected in the latest trends of ownership and audiences of this medium of the masses.

The India Census 2011 has reflected an important and alarming development. That is, the percentage of households owning at least one radio receiver set all over the nation has gone down from an impressive 35.1% in 2001 to 19.9% in 2011 Census. This is quite a steep fall just within a matter of one single decade. This is in light of the intense competition among various media for cornering more and more percentage of the audience base. The drop is more alarming at 20% for urban areas from 44.5% to 25.3 while in rural areas it is about 15% from 31.5 (2001) to 17.3 (2011). *(India Census, 2011 – Table No I)*

As the table here reflects adequately, this negative growth is more in rural areas of the country than in urban areas.

**First of all**, AIR has not yet been able to shed its long-lasting image as simply being a government spokesperson as a whole for all its programmes. Initially it was established with the objective of developing it as a PSB modelled under the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC). But, down the decades of its existence till now, this organization has lost its true glory either way. It has failed to prove its worth as a PSB and continuing to function only as an information-dissemination agency of the union government.

This is a sheer wastage of opportunities as AIR has a reach and coverage of more than 99% of the population and also geographical areas of the country.

**Secondly**, the MIB as discussed above, has never allowed any competition to grow for AIR and even development of a proper PSB system independent of AIR.

**There is yet another negative development for this particular medium.** The recent CNN-IBN- *The Hindu* Election Tracker Survey, conducted by the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies (CSDS), Delhi found that only 12% of Indian voters actually accessed radio for
news whereas the same for TV stands at a high of 42 %. (The Hindu, 2013). This study was conducted with 20,000 respondents across 267 constituencies in 18 states of the country.

Table IV : Media Exposure

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>HOW REGULARLY DO YOU DO THE FOLLOWING FOR NEWS?</th>
<th>DAILY</th>
<th>SOMETIMES</th>
<th>BARELY</th>
<th>NEVER</th>
<th>NO OPINION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Watch TV</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Read newspaper</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listen to the radio</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use the internet</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: The Hindu, July 29, 2013, page 3

In the Indian context, there has been numerous calls for democratizing the information-dissemination system. It is expected to encourage an optimum level of participation of the target audiences in the programme-making process and thereby determine their own development agenda. However, things have not proved successful in that sense yet. In this regard, the situation in the African continent and also in case of our neighbour Nepal are highly encouraging.

IV : THE RADIO RENAISSANCE:

Mary Myers (2008) observes that - overall, radio is enjoying a renaissance and numbers of small local stations have exploded over the last twenty years, due to democratization and market liberalization and also to more affordable technologies. Radio seems to have proved itself as a developmental tool, particularly with the rise of community and local radios.

This had facilitated a far more participatory and horizontal type of communication than was possible with the older, centralized broadcasting model of the 1960s and 70s. There seems also to have been a re-discovery of radio in the context of new Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), a realisation that technology has made radio into a more two-way medium. And that it can help bridge the digital divide by providing a powerful tool for information dissemination and access, especially for hard-to-reach rural audiences.

Further, Bonin et al (1998) observes that - community radio represents the democratisation of communications. Since the advent of Africa’s democratisation process in the 1990s many communication activists now see it as the basis for popular participation by majority of the people. Eugénie Aw (1995) said that in speaking about democratization in Africa, a specific challenge arises: How can it become possible for populations, in all their diversity, to determine their future and the type of development they wish for themselves? How can radio participate in creating a democratic culture that enables the population to take responsibility for political, economic and national management? Radio, the new tree of speech, is capable of rekindling the key tradition of oral expression in which speech ‘builds the village’.

CR signifies a two-way process, which entails the exchange of views from various sources and is the adaptation of media for use by communities. In an ideal world CR allows members of a community to gain access to information, education and entertainment. In its purest sense, it is the media in which the communities participate as planners, producers and
performs and it is the means of expression of the community, rather than for the community.

This is because current media emphasis has been on the use of mass communications, with messages flowing from the capital cities to the periphery, where feedback from communities have been limited.

CR should encourage access and participation by communities. At the same time it also has to address issues such as who is in control, whether it is democratically managed and whether there is a mechanism whereby it is accountable to those it serves.

CR has the potential of playing an important role in the growth of a country, especially one as large as India. This can be done by catering to local tastes and providing a platform for dissemination of news and views that resonate within a small community.

It is considered to be at a nascent stage in India but the government is working towards providing a fresh impetus to this movement. The government will be providing one billion rupees in the XII Plan for propelling CR forward. During the Plan period, it is proposed to set up 500 new CRs. Out of the amount, Rs 900 million has been proposed for providing financial support, Rs 100 million is being proposed for training, capacity building and awareness activities of CR.

The Government is also planning steps to make these stations financially viable. The Department of Telecom of Government of India is considering spectrum waiver for CRs. Government is also planning to take steps to make the CRs financially more viable. The MIB has taken the initiative to promote streamlining and simplification of CR empanelment through DAVP thereby ensuring that the empanelled stations received a fair share of Government advertisement.

On the other hand mobile radio is trying to fill the gap of CRs in small towns. It is driven by the facts that rural population has access to mobile phones and there are currently no existent FM stations or CRs which can take up regional issues.

The radio channel is meant for the users for self expression and gives them the ability to be heard. They have held discussions on issues like water conservation, utilization of MNREGA funds and HIV/AIDS. People also utilize this platform for showcasing talent and sharing. (FICCI, 2013)

V: RADIO – AN INTEGRAL PART OF A MARKETING PLAN:

Though radio has been one of the oldest media in India, its true expansion only took place in 2001 when the government deregulated it and allowed frequencies to be owned by private players. With the advent of over 40 players in the medium and its availability in 86 of the largest cities in the country, there was a huge focus from the networks to showcase radio’s attractiveness to the advertiser and equally an interest from the advertisers to test this medium as part of their advertising mix. With the recent round of auctioning, it is expected to have expanded to 227 cities by 2013 year end or early 2014.
It is the only medium which is local, live and interactive, thus advertisers can actually create geographically-localized and segmented communication stimuli for their customers, use radio to reach out to specific pockets of audiences and actually get real time responses to their communication. Advertisers can use radio to have a two-way communication with their consumers and measure response to their brands while in the case of traditional media it is usually a one way and more passive communication. (FICCI, 2013)

With the advent of Phase 3 where FM will become available across nearly 300 more cities, its reach will only go up exponentially. As advertisers look beyond the metros and mini metros for growth, the availability of FM in Tier -2 and 3 towns will provide a cost effective choice to them to reach out to potential consumers in these cities. More importantly, it will become available as a local medium to advertise on for thousands of retailers in these cities who today have practically no cost effective way of advertising and reaching out to buyers. Phase 3 is expected to change the nature of communication in smaller towns as well as give a powerful tool to local businesses to expand and grow. (FICCI, 2013)

VI : YOUTH CONTINUE TO BE THE PRIMARY LISTENERS OF RADIO:

Indian Readership Survey (IRS) is one of the largest readership surveys conducted in the country. It also captures listenership for radio. According to IRS 2012 Q3 findings, the listenership of radio increased from 155 million to 159 million from Q1 2012 to Q3 2012 registering a growth of 6.1 % compared to 6.4 percent growth of Television during the same period.

Significantly, majority of radio listenership comes from the age group of 20-40 years. As a result stations continue to focus on youth by developing youth-centric programming. (FICCI, 2013)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>% Listenership</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Below 20 years</td>
<td>27 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 – 40 years</td>
<td>48 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Above 40 years</td>
<td>26 %</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source : FICCI, 2013

The recent announcement by the Finance Minister of India in the 2013 budget on the rollout of 839 stations across 294 cities is an encouraging development for the radio industry.

VII : RADIO FOR PARTICIPATORY COMMUNICATION:

On the other hand the discourse about participatory communication in UNESCO language about self-management, access and participation from the 1977 Belgrade, Yugoslavia meeting defines it thus ---

- Access refers to the use of media for public service. It may be defined in terms of the opportunities available to the public to choose varied and relevant programmes and to have a means of feedback to transmit its reactions and demands to production organizations,

- Participation implies a higher level of public involvement in communication systems. It includes the involvement of the public in the production process and also in management and planning of communication system. (Singh, 2004) But the functioning of the Indian
broadcasting sector – particularly radio reflects something that is not even remotely
correct to the said principles.
- Social Communication experts Daniel Learner and Willbur Schramm recognized radio as
‘magic multipliers’ of development which can be a powerful developmental tool for these
factors – speed and ease of dissemination of information for development, a capital tool
for changing social behaviour, can be of help in developing feeling of nationalism and
help faster public awareness. (Singh, 2004)

A few other reasons in favour of this medium are – ability to disseminate information among
illiterates, being cost effective compared to TV, cinema, quickest and fastest, the most
powerful local medium, can be operational even in areas without electricity supply. (Singh,
2004)

Despite this medium’s one shortcoming that it is an oral medium a quote from Marshal
McLuhan summarizes its utility, “Had radio not been there, Hitler wouldn’t have been what
he was”. (Singh, 2004)

Radio has to shoulder the responsibility of providing a platform for limited expression to
citizens of the third world. In such programmes, government interference must be reduced to
the minimum. At the same time the right to answer accusations or allegations and doubts
must also be protected.

A considerable body of academic research, and the real experience of numerous NGOs,
confirm that the present scenario for radio in this country shows a clear bias in favour of the
privileged. Despite all the solemn declarations about information societies and
communication revolution, most people have neither the tools nor the skills to participate in
social communication, nor are they encouraged to participate in the process of broadcasting.
For instance, in 2001 the state responded to the Supreme Court Ruling of 1995, by auctioning
airwaves, reflecting a clear preference to urban consumerism. As a token, one frequency in
each city where FM channels have been auctioned was given to Indira Gandhi National Open
University (IGNOU) for educational broadcast. The right to ownership for communities and
civil societies was conveniently ignored. Again in 2003, in the name of community radio,
educational institutions have been granted right to ownership of airwaves, ignoring requests
from the NGO sector and local self-help groups who have long been asking for radio licence.
(Mukhopadhyay, 2004)

Pavarala (2004) also expresses similar concerns. It is a fact that university campuses are
privileged communities with more than adequate access to media resources. Thus, it is
completely unrealistic to expect campus community radio stations managed by young
students to avoid fun and entertainment in their radio station. So, there is no apparent fit
between form and content in this new policy (Community Radio policy guidelines by MIB),
even as marginalized rural communities continue to be denied the right to produce, own and
operate real community radio.

Pavarala further speaks about one major barrier in ushering in a vibrant community radio
sector in India. That is, it appears to be the perception that CR poses a threat to the power
structure although it is couched in a lot of other words like sovereignty and security. The
basic fear is what happens to the power structure.
Venniyoor (2004) also raises the same question whether an educational institution can actually address a community.

VIII : RIGID GOVERNMENT CONTROL REGIME:

The extent to which there is non-elite participation into communication policy making may be a barometer for the level of democracy in a society. (McChesney, 1998)

Table No I:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>No of radio stations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>USA</td>
<td>14,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>1000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>2000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greece</td>
<td>1300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>1000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>850</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russia</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UK</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Zealand</td>
<td>170</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sri Lanka</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>About 500</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source : Mukhopadhyay, 2004

This above table reflects the rigid control regime of the MIB for not opening up the radio sector for public participation in the proper sense. Otherwise, how can a country despite being within the top five position in the world from land area and population in the world have just about 400 radio stations of which about 250 are under AIR while the rest with private FM operators. This despite the 1995 Supreme Court ruling.

Table II : Exposure to Mass Media during the 1991-2001 decade

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Background Characteristics</th>
<th>Reads a newspaper or magazine at least once a week</th>
<th>Watches television at least once a week</th>
<th>Listens to the radio at least once a week</th>
<th>Visits the cinema / theatre at least once a month</th>
<th>Not regularly exposed to any media</th>
<th>Number of woman</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AGE GROUP</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15-19</td>
<td>11.6</td>
<td>21.9</td>
<td>36.1</td>
<td>9.8</td>
<td>52.1</td>
<td>320</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20-24</td>
<td>16.0</td>
<td>25.1</td>
<td>39.8</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>49.2</td>
<td>611</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-29</td>
<td>19.0</td>
<td>30.3</td>
<td>42.2</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>45.6</td>
<td>673</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-34</td>
<td>17.2</td>
<td>27.9</td>
<td>42.9</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>45.7</td>
<td>657</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35-39</td>
<td>16.9</td>
<td>32.0</td>
<td>38.0</td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>49.6</td>
<td>475</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40-44</td>
<td>18.0</td>
<td>34.5</td>
<td>44.8</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>42.7</td>
<td>361</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45-49</td>
<td>13.6</td>
<td>29.5</td>
<td>39.7</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>48.3</td>
<td>343</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source : India Census 2001

As against this, the USA has about 14,000 stations along with countries with far smaller geographical areas having thousands and hundreds of radio stations.
IX : ABSENCE OF PROPER POLICY GUIDELINES:

Further, it is an irony that there is no proper broadcasting guideline to guide us in our policy decisions till date.
The severe complexity of broadcasting is that we don’t really have a well-defined broadcast act to go by. We either go by the Telegraph Act of 1885 and many subsequent amendments to that act. (Venniyoor, 2004)

Broadcasting in India is not governed by a single law. It is governed by a whole lot of acts, policies, guidelines, codes, regulations, rights and judgments. And that makes things very complex. (Venniyoor, 2004)

Katarey (2004) pointed out to an aspect that the state in many countries explicitly stated that it had the responsibility of broadcasting within its area. And the intrinsic property of broadcasting as a centralized transmitter of information for a mass made it politically and socially important, increasing the interest of the state in this medium and making it susceptible to ruling class propaganda.

The scholar further observed that as broadcasting was centralized, it could also be used effectively for several cultural and educational tasks whose form and content simultaneously complemented the broad ideological positions of the state and the ruling class. Hence the possibility of perpetuating the status quo through the use of radio, television and film was immense and evidence suggests that governments and political parties never failed to shrug such possibilities off.

He further says (2004) that while AIR remained in the realm of public broadcasting service, it substitutes public interest by representing wider political and ideological interests of the ruling class, serving to improve the image of the state and the institutions under the state’s direct and indirect control, so as to influence the long term behaviour of the electorate.

Agarwal and Raghaviah (2006) opine that political leaders of independent India recognized the value of information and its uses for accelerating the process of development and for democratizing an ancient country. And the Constitution recognized the value of independent, impartial and innovative public broadcasting to meet the aspirations and expectations of its citizens. At the same time it was also felt that in the newly-independent nation that lacked maturity in democratic values, the public broadcasting system could not survive without the full support and control of the government. In retrospect, many observers feel that colonial hangover and fear of the unknown did not allow bringing about change in the broadcasting policy, or for that matter, regulate the free flow of information within the country. It took half a century for radio before it could be done – that too without full freedom to broadcast news.

However, the Government of India appointed Chanda Committee in 1964 to evaluate the functioning of AIR found that – It is not possible in the Indian context for a creative medium like broadcasting to flourish under a regimen of departmental rules and regulations. It is only by an institutional change that AIR can be liberated from the present rigid financial and administrative procedures of government.
In the same paper these two experts concluded that historical analysis of public broadcasting in India shows distinct use of radio towards political ends since its inception in colonial times. It was to serve political masters attain political power and control the subjects.

They also opine (2006) that during the economic liberalization era radio appears to be largely losing its listeners to Television. Also, the medium lost its direction because of the reason that while FM radio acts as entertainment channel, AM radio continues to be the information and news channel.

If broadcasting had been taken seriously in India in 1924, subsequent events in India might have been very different. Johan Charles Walsham Reith (Cited in Luthra, 1986, 4, also cited in Changing Media AMIC, Banerjee Muppidi, p 48)

Roy (2009) says that though radio has been in existence in the country for more than 75 years, erroneous polices, tight regulations till recently, complete state control, an undefined financial model and lack of vision had kept this easily-diffusible technology from becoming an effective medium for communication in the country till now. In this country, radio requires licensing as there were only a limited spectrum on which it can operate and was historically state-owned and tightly-regulated medium given its reach and power as an effective medium of mass communication. Until 1999, when the first phase of FM radio licensing was brought about, radio remained a government enterprise and liberalization of the medium was nowhere in the agenda of the government.

Roy added that the attempt by MIB under the second phase of radio licensing had been to make policies conducive to the growth of radio in smaller towns where there are lesser media options available compared to metro cities.

Gandhi (2008) says that radio remains a very relevant medium for India and its being a medium of spoken words uses conventional, simple and direct language. He criticizes the situation that because the zeal and enthusiasm have been weakened by the absence of a long term communication policy on the basis of which extension of the network could be properly planned. Such a policy, taking into account the priorities and the available resources, would have provided the guidelines for development appropriate for the country’s needs. In the absence of such policy, the expansion has been hesitant, short-sighted and out of step with listeners’ demands and requirements.

Gandhi continues his discussions saying that a policy plan for development must decide on whether the rural or urban community must take precedence. Till now, the urban listener has received far more attention although in the cities people have access to other media. Further, broadcasting can only help in development if radio and TV are accessible to the people

X : CONCLUSION:

From the discussions above, it becomes amply clear that successive union governments at any given point of time have been strongly pursuing a one-point agenda of not letting the control of radio to slip from their hands. At least not in the news and current affairs sphere as it possesses the potential of making the people at grassroots level aware of real issues on the ground. While formally the radio sector has been opened up for private participation, a very clever trick has been used for hoodwinking the people. That is, the private FM radio stations
and also the Community Radio stations are not allowed to air independent news and current affairs programmes which is a gross violation of our Constitutional right to freedom of information and expression. These developments actually throw open more questions than answering. Primarily, what is the problem in opening up of the radio sector for private participation including independent news and current affairs whereas there is no such problem at all with Television at the same time for the same issue. In addition to violation of our Constitutional rights it also reflects a strong bias of the government towards the urban population whereas even today 70% of the country’s total population live in rural areas for whom radio remains the best medium for dissemination of information which in turn has the potential to empower them in the long run.

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