



Transparency Review

Journal of Transparency Studies

THE BEST OF AJIT JI

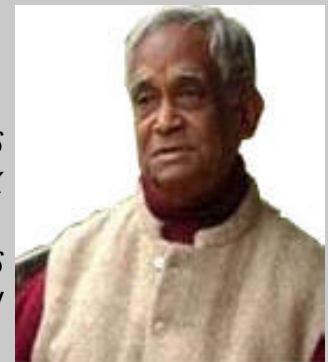
Ajit Bhattacharjea, *doyen of Editors for years, is 86 years now and is seriously ill since last month. He has been actively editing this Transparency Review from the very outset, March 2006. In fact, he helped to shape it. For, transparency has been his vision and mission. That is how he volunteered to edit Transparency Review. It has been his baby. He made sure it offers a platform for the underdog on the social justice plank.*

His interest in offering an outlet for dissent on recent reforms and his concern for the poor and good governance issues has been all through. His support for grass roots movements which deepen democracy truly, as in the case of MKSS headed by Aruna Roy, is too evident.

His devotion to the Transparency Review was all through, unconcerned of doctor's advise in the last few months. He never missed to bring out any issue of Transparency Review. Even now he wants to carry through the task. We wish him recovery first. We hope he would complete profiling "Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathana in Rajasthan" which he had taken up as a part of tracing origins of the movement for transparency in governance and public offices.

Each time I met him, atleast once a fortnight, he has been reminding me to put down my own engagement of 40 years (since 1970) with media

scene in the country - twists and turns including. As a mark of respect to Ajit da, I intend to take on his suggestion seriously now.



Get well first Ajit. All of us at CMS look forward to see you amidst us soon with your cute smile. All his editorials reflect certain concern for basic issues which CMS fully shared. Some of his editorials in Transparency Review will be reproduced starting with this issue.

On this occasion two pertinent "think pieces" are specially published in this issue. One on "The dilemmas of development and democracy in India" was by Mani Shankar Aiyar at the national lecture on "Analyzing and Envisioning India" and the other was on "Capitalism, Regulate, Rework, Transform" of Prof. K S Jacob first published in The Hindu on 22.1.2011.

As the one who started media research in the country, including viewership studies, I was the one to point out the perils of "TRP" approach more than a decade ago. I&B Ministry took this long to realize the magnitude of the calamity and appointed a committee. Their recommendations, submitted last month, are given here along with two of our earlier writings on the topic.

-NBR

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TRANSPARENCY STUDIES

The Right to Information Act 2005 represents a historic breakthrough in recognising the citizen's democratic rights to monitor measures affecting the public good. Following adoption of the Act by the Parliament of India, the CMS has set up a Transparency Studies wing to document, examine and publicise the interrelation between governance and society in all its aspects. It facilitates dissemination of relevant material, confers with experts and field workers and networks with the media to promote implementation and awareness.

The functions of Transparency Studies include:

- Publishing and distribution by electronic mail of Transparency Review, a journal designed to publicise news, articles and documentation concerning developments in Right to Information and the overall interface between governance and society. Priority is given to right to education, especially of children; right to work; right to justice and associated human and social rights, especially at the grassroots.
- Operating Transparency Features to disseminate articles and information on the above.
- Linking with civil society groups to further common objectives like exposing corruption, monitoring elections, improving civic services.
- Arranging discussions on emerging issues and problems between specialists and mediapersons.



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Historic Judgment On RTI

Published in February 2010

When the first issue of Transparency Weekly appeared nearly four years ago, the heading on the cover was “The Journey Begins.” Implemented six months earlier, the Right to Information Act had made a limited impact but was encountering serious bureaucratic hurdles. We described its mission as “nothing less than to transform the culture of secrecy inherited and maintained from colonial times to the culture of administrative transparency required in a truly democratic society.”

The long distance travelled since then is recognised by the recent landmark judgment of the Delhi High Court describing Right to Information as “the most significant event in the life of Indian democracy.” As reported in this issue, the judgment declares that even the Chief Justice of India is accountable to RTI. It spells out the all-inclusive range of the Act in

unmistakable terms: “Wielders of power condition that they account for their stewardship to the people who authorize them to exercise such powers.” The judgment will go down in history.

In our section on Right to Work we note basic differences between the authors of NREGA and C.P. Joshi, Minister for Rural Development. aroused by his move to dovetail plans for his Bhilwara constituency. The diversion of NREGA for constructing panchayat at buildings has sparked the dispute

A regular Media Review section has been started in response to the widespread concern aroused by articles on Paid News, Vice-President Hamid Ansari’s lucid, wide-ranging address sets the tone. Critics maintain that in view its role as the Fourth Estate, a mechanism should be devised to extend RTI to media as well.

Mortal Threat To Media

Published in December 2009

The practice of newspapers accepting money to portray advertisements as news is not new. Major dailies and journals have yielded to the temptation of publishing ‘advertorials’ by failing to mark clearly that a column or supplement has been paid for. This may help the advertiser to promote his case by borrowing the cloak of credibility, but does grave damages to the credibility of the media.

When the practice is taken to the extent of charging huge sums to promote the prospects of particular election candidates, the injury becomes life-threatening. It strikes at the vitals of the democratic process that the media is sworn to uphold; it suggests that its life-blood of credibility is up for sale. Fortunately, the main news inputs of the papers we read every morning seem untainted, but the death of credible news looms unless effective protective measures are devised urgently.

This issue recalls the memory of Prabhash Joshi, doyen of Hindi journalists. Before his untimely death,

he was engaged in campaigning to arouse awareness of the mounting danger to the media. He circulated examples of tainted coverage and the rate cards put out by leading Hindi newspapers for publishing favourable handouts and pictures of particular candidates. He took his complaint to the Chairman of the Press Council.

P. Sainath’s exhaustive investigation in The Hindu of promotional coverage in Maharashtra favouring the candidature of the Chief Minister shows how deep the disease goes. Veteran journalist Inder Malhotra places the threat in perspective. A wide-ranging survey of the business interests influencing media control and priorities is provided by N. Bhaskar Rao, Chairman of the Centre for Media Studies.

Our previous issue focussed on the Bhilwara achievement. It has been blighted, to some extent, by an unexpected reversal of policy. The text of Aruna Roy’s protest letter to the Chief Secretary of the Rajasthan Government appears within.

The Bhilwara Achievement

Published in October 2009

Given the unhappy record of so many official programmes designed to alleviate poverty, it is easy to be cynical about the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA), the ambitious effort to provide the minimal employment required to keep workless millions from the verge of starvation. The cynicism flows from accounts of the bulk of anti-poverty funds being diverted into the pockets of politicians, officials, contractors and others in the easily perforated pipeline between the authorizing authorities and the luckless intended beneficiaries. The underlying flaw is the absence of a reliable official audit agency. They have become part of the problem.

But can we do nothing in the face of the shameful figures collected by international agencies showing that more people in India are hungry than in the rest of the world? The bulk of them subsist in villages; their condition accentuated by periodic drought and

flood. NREGA is a carefully targeted move to allay their plight that has registered some successes. By limiting relief to those willing to undertake manual labour, the Act has combined it with self-respect and constructive work for the community.

What those concerned can do to plug and expose corruption was demonstrated by a massive exercise in social audit in the Rajasthan district of Bhilwara. Much dirt was exposed but that, as the Right of Information Act has already established, is an essential step in cleaning the system. In view of its increasing significance this issue focuses on NREGA including two articles on the Bhilwara achievement published by The Hindu. We also carry the speeches of the President and Vice-President of India at the convention to celebrate four years of Right to Information. Unlike previous years, however, attendance was limited. A CMS survey on the occasion appears.

Hamara Paisa: Hamara Hisab

Published in April 2010

At a *jan sunwai* (public hearing) organized by the Mazdoor Kisan Mazdoor Shakti Sammelan in 1996, in a crowded triangular patch in front of the old Chang Gate in Beawar, a well-built woman strode up to the microphone, lifted the multi-hued *ohrni* covering her face, to demand access to the local panchayat accounts. Nourti Bai's self-confident air and strong, clear voice articulated the demands for the information required to establish complaints that workers' dues were being diverted and the works shoddily constructed. The 500-strong gathering responded with the slogan *Hamara Paisa : Hamara Hisab*. To me, Nourti Bai became a symbol of the momentum gained by the then incipient right to information movement in Rajasthan by linking transparency to livelihood.

More *jan sunwais* exposing the corruption involved in public works made the momentum unstoppable. Right to information was transformed from an academic pursuit into a grassroots campaign. After nine years, Parliament responded with the Right to Information Act of 2004 containing specific provisions requiring government offices at all levels not only to

provide access to files but erect boards publicising their functions. The National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) passed soon after underscored the overlap of the two historic pieces of social legislation.

The need for both to operate in tandem became obvious as crores began to be poured into panchayats to implement the NREGA pledge of offering 100 days of work a year to those willing to work on manual labour projects at the minimum wages rate. The requirement of manual work on digging or clearing on muster rolls, shoddy material and poor designing of projects diverted the money into the hands of sarpanches, junior officials and politicians. A high degree of corruption was revealed by non-official social audit groups.

Reports of the money poured by candidates into the recent panchayat elections in Rajasthan showed that control of them, and the funds they have access to, is attracting black money. Since they are not under the supervision of the Election Commission, candidates are free to transport and bribe voters and conduct their campaigns without fear of inquiry.

Boleros and Scorpios were seen plying on village paths to entice voters...

Wider open access to details of NREGA projects was demanded by activists to counter the threat. Kalu Ram, Sarpanch of Vijayapura panchayat in Rajasthan, showed the way by painting details of work sites on the outside walls of his office and near the sites themselves. The names of and payment to workers, of material used and its suppliers, are listed. On December 31 last year, the State Government issued an order requiring such boards to be put up by every panchayat. Last month, I visited villages around Vijayapura.

Nira-ki-Bassi lies on a slope of a low spur of the Aravalli range, the road winding up to it. The habitations are on different levels. Beyond stretches an arid, semi-desert landscape relieved only by the green of isolated trees and bushes on the red soil. On the approach to the village, a recently whitewashed wall of a shrine catches our eye. On it are painted details of the works being started this year under the National Right to Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA).

The village road soon peters out. A lone woman, holding a lunch pail, trudges along a stony path towards a blue patch of water, a yellow board beside it. The scarce rainwater from last year's patchy monsoon has formed a small reservoir scooped out by NREGA labour. A yellow board displays the details of the project.

A little further, women are working on low-lying land beside an anicut, another plan to preserve water. Each woman is required to dig and clear a pit of designated length, width and depth each day to earn the Rs 100 received under NREGA. Still wearing their multi-hued *ohrnis*, they labour for at least six to eight hours under the sun, bringing their lunch pails with them. One woman serves drinking water.

Yet they did not look weary and spoke readily. The youngest, a child beside her, was articulate. It was hard work, but it helped to meet their rising livelihood expenses. The previous year, they had been able to do the full 100 days of work guaranteed by NREGA and received Rs 10,000. I asked why only women seemed to be working. She smiled but did not reply. But the confidence in her voice indicated the difference that NREGA was making in social and marital relations.

Kalu Ram is no longer Sarpanch of Vijayapura. He has handed over charge to the newly-elected Sarpanch, his wife, Rukma Devi. She was rewarded at the recent elections by the villagers for the work he has done in the face of caste opposition. Both are Dalits, belonging to the weaver caste. When I called on her in her village house, she was shy but determined to continue her husband's work.

Though modest in appearance, Kalu Ram is not shy, showing visitors the brightly painted walls of the panchayat office with pride. One section quotes the section of the Right to Information Act requiring government offices to display their functions. Others list full, updated details of NREGA works with names of workers, the amounts they were paid, source and cost of materials used and dates. Other works done by the panchayat are also listed. Audit teams have no need to peer into the dusty registers and account books in other panchayat offices.

We accompany him to Narainji-ka-Bidda, another village under Vijayapura panchayat. The low hills surrounding the village are contour-banded to preserve rainwater, preventing it from cascading into the valley. Further, women toil on the valley floor, each digging a measured pit while others place the cleared earth in metal basins and carry them up a slope to be emptied into the makings of an embankment. A matelays down the measurements and calculates the volume of work. They will be checked when the project is complete.

Vijayapura is unusual. I saw no NREGA boards in other panchayats despite the State Government's order. Opposition to transparency and audit is strong. I was present at a large-scale social audit campaign in Bhilwara district earlier where many sarpanches were found to be involved placing fake names on muster rolls and fudging accounts. But little action has been taken. The authorities seem unwilling to antagonise them with elections to the State Assembly approaching.

Yet the future is not dark. In the panchayat elections, Nourti Bai emerged again as one of the few successful Independent candidates, as was Rukma Devi. They contested powerful local interests. Nourti's performance in Beawar made right to information come alive; Kalu Ram has done the same for NREGA.

The Dilemma Of Development And Democracy In India

Shri Mani Shankar Aiyar

India is prospering; Indians are not. **The Sun may be shining on India but it is not on Indians.** This is the central issue of development and democracy in India.

Democracy is very demanding if, the benefits of growth are disproportionately siphoned off, there arises a challenge to both democracy and development. That is becoming evident in our country.

These achievements in democracy make us complacent. But will it survive the coming Most Dangerous Decades?

My answer is, “Yes, but only if democracy is married to meaningful development for the people at large.”

Hence the imperative of Inclusive Development which, in my view, can be secured only through Inclusive Governance – a point well-understood by Rajiv Gandhi but inadequately comprehended or promoted since then. This is my central thesis in the remarks I am making before this distinguished audience, and I am grateful to the Centre for Media Studies (CMS) for affording me the opportunity to do so.

Between 2009 and 2010 India’s relative ranking on the Human Development Index remains as it was last year. Basically, India’s disgraceful showing at position 134 last year, which ranking was exactly same in 1994, remains unchanged. The latest UN Human Development report, calculated HDI annual average growth rates in three categories: 1980-2010 (long-term); 1990-2010 (medium term) and 2000-2010 (short term).

The basic paradox revealed is that while our GDP has been growing, we have not succeeded in translating accelerated growth into inclusive development.

Worse, it would appear that as GDP/per capita growth rates rise, there is a levelling off, rather than a commensurate rise, in the growth rates of HDI values.

We are assured on high authority that there is nothing unprecedented or alarming about growth

leading to inequality. In his contribution to the *festschrift* in honour of Dr. Montek Singh Ahluwalia, who had then just been conferred an honorary doctorate by Oxford University (which makes me proud of being a Cambridge man myself!) the Prime Minister’s Chief Economic Adviser, Prof. Suresh Tendulkar, has invoked Simon Kuznets’ famous U-shape argument to contend that while widening inequalities of income and wealth are an inevitable concomitant of the growth process, this does not amount to the sacrifice of equity because growth benefits everyone even if the higher the growth rate the wider the disparity.

At the same time, Dr. Tendulkar has done his bit to ask for rise in National Poverty Line to 37% under that line.

The National Commission for Enterprises in the Unorganised Sector has in its August 2007 Report on Conditions of Work and Promotion of Livelihoods in the Unorganised Sector identified the following categories of “poor”, each of which requires an individually tailored strategy for poverty alleviation and eventual eradication: extremely poor; poor; marginally poor; and vulnerable. While the number of “extremely poor” and “poor” has decreased during the first decade of post-1991 economic reforms, in 2004-05 they still comprised 237 million people; meanwhile the number of poor and vulnerable together numbered 836 million, or 77% of the population. Notwithstanding the rise in Middle and High Income persons to a significant 253 million, those crying out for help constitute three to four times the number who have succeeded in standing on their own feet.

National Poverty Line divides the entire population into two comfortable categories – the BPL (Below Poverty Line, about Rs.10 per day) and the Above Poverty Line (APL). This is “comfortable” for two reasons. First, poverty alleviation can then be reduced to the entirely feasible proposition of shifting some top-of-the-line BPL over the line into the APL category and calling it “poverty alleviation”. Second, because it eliminates the tiresome distinction between the marginal survivor and the obscenely rich: all are APL

and all, therefore, beneficiaries, in some aggregated manner, of the growth process.

Our experience of serving up their Entitlements of primary education, and health facilities, the public distribution system and rural infrastructure is that the district and sub-district level bureaucracy and technocracy has been the single biggest failure of governance at the grassroots. Sporadic access to Entitlements in the absence of Empowerment to secure Entitlements is principally what has rendered outcomes so hopelessly out of alignment with outlays.

Thus participative development – that is, grassroots development through grassroots democracy - is our imperative need. The path to such development was charted through the 73rd and 74th amendments to the Constitution, which resulted in the present Part IX ('The Panchayats') and Part IXA ('The Municipalities'). In which we have the key to Inclusive Growth through Inclusive Governance.

Unfortunately, the planning and implementation of anti-poverty and grassroots development programmes in India remains self-defeatingly centralized, devolution lacking in political will.

Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi rewrote the three Rs of learning – Reading, 'Riting and 'Rithmetic – into the three Rs of democratic local self-government: **Representation** fostering **Responsibility** and **Responsibility** leading to **Responsiveness**: **R-R-R** to realise **E-E-E**!

The key lies in scientific Activity Mapping based on the principle of subsidiarity – which holds that anything that can be done at the lower level should be done at that level and at no higher level – such that consensually structured Activity Maps detail the **Functions** to be devolved respectively to the village, intermediate and district levels, and thus provide the basis on which the devolution of **Finances** is to be patterned, matched by a parallel devolution of **Functionaries** to each level of self-governance, in rural as much as in urban localities. Three Fs – **Functions**, **Finances** and **Functionaries** - to provide the framework for the three **Rs** to lead us down the three-fold **E-E-E** path! Simple, no?

The Central Government has also been woefully slow in using its immense financial clout to push for effective Panchayat Raj.

There lies the fundamental explanation for India's shameful showing on the UN's Human Development Index contrasted with her spectacular showing on GDP. The imperative of Inclusive Growth has been grasped, but the imperative of Inclusive Governance has been barely comprehended.

Much of the dichotomy between growth and equity arises through the privileging of accelerated growth over inclusive growth. None of this can be rectified at the grassroots- without Inclusive Governance.

It is a dangerous delusion to imagine that prosperity for a sliver of our population – even if that sliver runs to millions in absolute numbers – can blind us to the reality of many hundreds of millions more living in dreadful, poverty. We need Shining Indians more than Shining India. And we can get them by listening to Mahatma Gandhi responding on the eve of our Independence:

"I shall work for an India in which the poorest shall feel that it is their country, in whose making they have an effective voice".

In consequence the politics of our poverty is reflected in the poverty of our politics.

It is not as if outlays on poverty alleviation and meeting social sector needs are decreasing in India, Central budgetary outlays on such programmes have risen by a factor of fifteen over the last fifteen years.

Why are higher outlays impacting so relatively little on all that makes life more bearable for the a poor? Political attention so muted in comparison to the hurrahs we hear over GDP growth rates?

The problem lies in the answer to the second question – the muted attention given to issues of poverty alleviation relative to the race to economic super-power status - even as the solution lies in the answer to the first question – why outcomes are non-commensurate with outlays.

Governance in a time of rapid growth does indeed privilege growth over equity. The contemporary view is that the promotion of prosperity for some, should be encouraged if we are to redistribute prosperity rather than redistribute poverty.

In the absence of Inclusive Governance, that is, the intended beneficiaries of poverty alleviation programmes, are left abjectly dependent on a

bureaucratic delivery mechanism. Not only is responsive bureaucratic administration almost a contradiction in terms, the Indian experience of the last six decades would appear to confirm that bureaucratic delivery mechanisms absorb a disproportionately high share of the earmarked expenditure: up to 85 paise in the rupee, said Rajiv Gandhi.

Worse, precisely because over a hundred schemes are delivered to the same set of beneficiaries through mutually insulated administrative silos, convergence of schemes at the delivery point becomes virtually impossible, thus depriving beneficiaries of the multiplier effect.

In Nehruvian India, Constitutional governance and Parliamentary democracy, and fairly far-reaching land reforms, led to political and social **Empowerment** of a rising middle class. That middle class quickly secured privileged access to their **Entitlements**, particularly in the two key human development areas of education and health.

The combination of **Empowerment** and **Entitlements** has given India's middle class **Enrichment** on a scale undreamt of a generation or

two ago. This is what has made India a fast- high-rising star on the international economy. The sheer size of our middle class make us, in absolute numbers, a huge market and a mouth-watering investment destination.

But because the numbers of our desperately poor are much, the challenge is to convert accelerated growth into inclusive growth. The path favoured by Government after Government in India has been to exponentially increase spending on anti-poverty programmes such that a critical mass of expenditure will somehow be reached the straw for the poor clutch at to rise out of their misery. The intention is sound but commentators rue the fact that implementation has been hopeless.

What then is the systemic solution? I suggest that it lies in replicating for the poor the same pattern that has brought such impressive, growing and assured prosperity to our burgeoning middle classes: **Empowerment** leading to **Entitlements** and the two together to **Enrichment: E-E-E**.

Summary of Shri Aiyar's CMS National Lecture on "Analysing and Envisioning India" at Teen Murti Auditorium, New Delhi on 24 Nov 2010

Capitalism: Regulate, Rework, Transform

K. S. Jacob

Economies should combine the efficiency of capitalism with socialistic ideals of equity and justice

The liberalisation of the country's economy resulted in tremendous progress, sustained growth and increased wealth. Yet, the incredible indices of development mask inequity and the human cost of progress. For millions of Indians, hunger is routine, malnutrition rife, employment insecure, social security non-existent, health care expensive and livelihoods are under threat.

Capitalism's ability to improve economies is not in doubt. It has always argued that what is good for large corporations is good for national economies. Gross domestic product figures inflated by phenomenal successes of the rich are often very impressive. However, they conceal the poverty and suffering at the bottom of the economic pyramid.

Nevertheless, there is a perception among capitalists that the system is fair and allows for growth of all sections. The fact that those who do not have capital (finance, land ownership, education, health, etc.) have little chance of economic progress is never acknowledged.

Greed and excesses

Inequity in the capitalistic system is a given. Hence, controlling the excesses of capitalism, while allowing for economic progress, is a serious consideration before mature democracies and governments. However, others argue that such controls are only possible in theory and do not work in practice. Capitalism, driven as much by individual greed and

aspiration as by individual capital, will always strive to break free of controls. The rich, who control capital, contend that minimal controls are required for free markets to flourish. They support minimal taxation policies, reject increased levies to meet public expenditure and oppose enhanced duties for social justice initiatives. Nevertheless, these viewpoints actually cover libertarian beliefs that governments have no right to tax people because taxation is nothing but stealing personal property obtained by merit, history and inheritance.

Capitalists also control governments, even hold them hostage. The funding of elections by private capital mandates moderation in the election rhetoric of politicians, during their tenure in government. Consequently, most governments take up right-of-centre positions, which do not allow for taxation policies required for social justice in our grossly iniquitous world.

Nevertheless, the recent collapse of many international banks, the massive bailouts required by many reputed pillars of finance for survival and the global economic recession exposed the limitations of the capitalist system. They documented the excesses of unregulated capitalism and laid bare the greed and intellectual dishonesty undergirding the system. Surely, a more honest conceptualisation of the conflicts of interest and biases among the rich and powerful players who have benefited from the system is needed; the focus on the wealth created should also highlight the resultant gross inequity.

Models of control

China's economic success has shattered many a capitalistic myth. It has emphasised the phenomenal success of direct governmental controls on the market. It has also underscored America's amnesia about its own industrial policies used to protect national interests. The U.S. government controls on steel and railroads in the 19th century and on the agriculture and defence industries in the 20th century supported sections of the American market and economy from external competition, thus cementing their success.

The collapse of the Irish economy, lauded as the perfect example of free market success, also refutes many free market myths. Its abysmally low rates of

corporate tax attracted international corporations to relocate their headquarters to Ireland. The country gained a few thousand clerical jobs in exchange for its charity towards the rich. Ireland also subscribed to other free market folklore and allowed for unregulated speculation and trade in its financial sector. Its recent financial collapse and bailout have left all its citizens paying for the greed and errors of its rich bankers.

Free market arguments are always used by rich and developed nations to prise open poor economies to their advantage. The conditionalities imposed by their banks (read the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank) in exchange for credit have crippled many a developing economy by removing trade barriers and reducing subsidies, which are required to protect local and fledgling markets against international competition. The obvious double standards on protectionism by rich nations are never mentioned.

Regulated capitalism

Economic structures should combine the efficiency of capitalism with socialistic ideals of equity and justice. The key question now is: "Who should regulate capitalism?" The answer is: national governments. Governments in poor countries as representatives of the population, the majority of which subsists on \$1 a day, owe it to their people to provide social justice. Although some regulation exists and programmes for social justice have been rolled out in India (the National Rural Health Mission, the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme, etc.), they are employed to mitigate the effects of structural violence and as a vote-winning strategy rather than as a commitment to uplift the poor. The national health budget was reduced to 0.9 per cent of the GDP in the 1990s. Although the United Progressive Alliance was voted to power on its promise of raising it back to 2-3 per cent, this has yet to materialise. The ruling class (read politicians, administrators and their corporate partners) seems to employ social justice projects to soften democratic opposition to its capitalistic ideas of development. These schemes seem to be measures to prevent open revolt by the poor, rather than solutions to produce an egalitarian society. However,

gross underfunding of such schemes ensures the success of capitalistic ventures, thus increasing privatisation and running down the public sector.

Massive corruption, exposed in the 2G spectrum and Commonwealth Games scams, is also maintained by a convenient nexus among politicians, corporations, civil servants, the judiciary, the police and the rich in civil society, who disagree with the strategy for social change or are impatient to increase their personal wealth. The administration refuses to clean up the system, as it would expose the extent of the rot within. Opposition to the Right to Information Act also stems from a similar nexus.

The lack of significant differences among various political groupings over financial and economic policies reflects the insensitivity of the ruling class to the needs of the majority. It mandates that the people, with their electoral power, should regularly ensure changes in governments, which over-promise and under-deliver. Although the lack of credible alternatives limits impact, it remains the only check on the ruling class and governments.

Individual or collective aspiration

The vision for civilised societies, enshrined in many national constitutions, has to be the fulfilling of the collective aspiration of the vast majority. While free trade policies are good on the average for rich and developed nations, individuals with limited capital within these cultures also suffer when they lose their jobs to Bangalore or to Shanghai. Specific protections are good for emerging markets, as they benefit the vast majority in the region and allow time to improve efficiency and competitiveness.

The focus on the collective aspiration of the majority of India's population, of moving out of poverty, is a just cause. National policies and programmes should

cater for the needs of the majority rather than adding millions to the coffers of the wealthy. The magnitude of subsidies for the corporate sector and the scale of corruption in business dealings also suggest that the amount of monies actually available for social justice programmes exceed all expectations and require only political and administrative will for implementation.

China has reworked capitalism on its own terms. It has showed the way in using direct government control to protect its economy, create wealth and improve its indices of health and human development. It leads India on these indices, arguing that investing in social justice projects for the majority will provide the demographic dividend needed for economic prosperity.

There is need to transform capitalism, redesign and root it in the Indian context. Capitalistic beliefs often result in a lack of understanding, and disregard for the lot of the average citizen. The wealthy have hijacked public spaces, shared resources, economic rights and political processes and have skewed the national debate. Democratic systems demand solutions, which are sensitive to the aspirations of the majority. Economic growth will have to translate into basic needs for all. History will judge whether our very own IMFwallahs are instruments of the rich or use their intellect, positions and power to bring equity for the majority, the poor. The government will need to fulfil the Directive Principles enshrined in the Constitution, and its commitment to the human rights of the majority of the population. The interdependent nature of our modern world argues for a fair deal for all. Universal development will result in a stabler and more secure world.

(Professor K.S. Jacob is on the faculty of the Christian Medical College, Vellore.)

Courtesy: The Hindu (22 Jan 2011)



Delete RTI Rules To Strengthen-Activists

The National Advisory Council, headed by UPA chairperson Sonia Gandhi, has strongly objected to some of the RTI rules proposed by the Government. It has recommended their deletion maintaining they are either “legally wrong” or may encourage “blackmail” and “murder” of information seekers.

Rejecting the proposed rules that one application shall relate “only to one subject and shall be limited to 250 words...” the NAC feels it was not part of the RTI Act and it is legally wrong for rules to go beyond the Act. It said limiting one RTI to a single subject will make it open to arbitrariness and misuse as it is difficult to define. “Also, limiting the number of words is bad in Law, unrealistic and will militate against rural applicants,” it has pointed out.

The council has also objected to another proposed rule which allowed abatement of proceedings before the Information Commission on the death of the appellant, saying such a rule could encourage “murder” of RTI activists.

The NAC is against “allowing withdrawal” of an appeal during the course of hearing at the Information Commission as it could become a source of “harassment/blackmail”. These views of NAC have been conveyed to the Department of Personnel and

Training, which had invited public comments on the proposed rules, and was accessed through an RTI application filed by Subhash Chandra Agrawal.

The suggestions for changes in the rules were formulated in a meeting of the NAC working group on Transparency, Accountability and Governance on December 13.

The council is going to hold a meeting on Friday where proposed RTI rules will be discussed in detail to firm up the views further, a senior NAC member told The Pioneer.

On the proposal of appointing Chief Executive Officer and Registrar General for Central Information Commission, the NAC has recommended that Information Commissioner should have “freedom to select its staff from among Government servants or from open market and also freedom to allocate work and responsibility.

The council has said missing documents should not be a criteria while rejecting an appeal or application by the Information Commissions and has recommended that information should be sent in such a way that proof or receipt remains with the PIOs. It has also recommended charging extra postal charges only when the amount is above ‘50.

Courtesy: Pioneer News Service

NAC SUGGESTIONS ON RTI REJECTED

NAC Vs DOPT

Proposed RTI Rules: Information to be sought on subject within 250 words

NAC: Delete the provision, as it will harm interest of poor and less educated people

DoPT: As applicant doesn't require to give explanation, 250 word limit justified. Only educated file lengthy applications.

Proposed RTI Rules: Actual amount spent by public authority to supply information should be taken from applicant.

NAC: Delete the section

DoPT: Accepted NAC suggestion but wants up to Rs.50 for postal expenses.

Proposed RTI Rules: Information Commission shouldn't admit appeal unless it is satisfied that the appellant had availed all remedies available.

NAC: Commission can misuse provision and should be removed

DoPT: Provision is a reminder to applicants that they shouldn't directly appeal to Commission.

Courtesy: The Hindustan Times (27 Jan 2011)

Plan Panel To Launch Website For Feedback On Policies

Seema Sindhu

Here is your chance to contribute to the 12th Five Year Plan. The Planning Commission of India is going to launch a website this week, www.12thplan.gov.in, where anybody can write his views about the Government policies, schemes and challenges. The site would have a facebook feature also to link it with the social networking site and engage in the youth.

In its efforts to “reform” itself, the Planning Commission has decided not to restrict its consultations to internal and inter-ministerial discussions and reach out to other stakeholders like civil societies, NGOs and States.

The Plan panel has asked civil society groups to hold 15 consultations across India on various social issues and submit a report, which would be utilised in the drafting of the new plan.

In addition, it is trying to break the “disconnect” with States while drafting the approach paper. It has

already written to the States seeking their views on the 12 challenges it has identified for the 12th plan.

The commission has identified 12 challenges going forward: enhancing capacity for growth; enhancing skills and faster generation of employment; managing the environment; markets for efficiency and inclusion; decentralisation, empowerment and information; technology and innovation; securing the energy future for India; accelerated development of transport infrastructure; rural transformation and sustained growth of agriculture; managing urbanisation; improved access to quality education; better preventive and curative healthcare.

The objective is to look beyond planning and monitoring. More than restructuring, it is a reform, as the Commission calls it now — Systems Reforms Commission.

Courtesy: The Pioneer (21 Jan 2011)

Bring PPP Projects Under RTI:CIC

Nidhi Sharma

The Central Information Commission (CIC, the final appellate authority for the Right to Information (RTI) Act, has asked the Planning Commission to include disclosure norms in all future public-private-partnership (PPP) projects undertaken by the Centre and the state governments.

Chief Information Commissioner Satyananda Mishra has written to Planning Commission deputy-chairman Montek Singh Ahluwalia to incorporate disclosure norms, so that any project which has the participation of private firms and concessionaires come under the purview of the transparency legislation. A full Commission meeting on December 28, after a detailed discussion, viewed that private

companies undertaking government projects should be brought under the RTI Act. All information commissioners agreed that a specific disclosure clause should be included in the model concessionaire agreement (MCA) between the government and the private party.

Speaking to ET, Mishra confirmed the request sent to the Planning Commission. He said: “This request is arising out of a number of RTI applications filed in state government departments and at the central ministries for disclosing details of a project undertaken by a private consortium or a concessionaire. This is a matter on which the law is a little hazy.” As per the provisions under Chapter I of the RTI Act, the Act is

WHITHER AP INFORMATION COMMISSION?

Information Commission of Andhra Pradesh is without Commissioners since September 16, 2010 when the three Commissioners who completed five years retired. More than 800 appeals received since have piled up at the commission while over 6000 appeals were pending earlier. The Chief Information Commissioner, who was a Secretary to the then CM, took charge hardly a couple of months earlier, has been sitting alone awaiting full function of the Commission.

It is generally believed that the delay in appointment is because the positions are looked up on more as “political appointees” of the Chief Minister. More than 70 aspirants are said to be lobbying with the powers to get appointed into the three positions of Commissioners – unless the Government decides to increase the number of Commissioners.

applicable on any “public authority” which is “established constituted, owned, controlled, or substantially financed by funds provided directly, or indirectly by the central government, or the Union Territory administration, or by the state government”.

The clause “substantially financed” has also been interpreted as any firm which is financed 51% by the government. The move becomes significant with the government planning to take up most of the high-investment infrastructure projects on PPP mode.

Mishra said: “There is a grey area here because there are instances where land is given to private schools and hospitals on very nominal rates. There is a road project given to a private firm on build-operate-transfer (toll) basis, from say Delhi to Chandigarh. People are seeking details under the RTI Act on how the private company or institution is using that land,

whether the school is giving free education to the poor, or if the toll collected is used completely for maintenance purpose.” Since there is no specific disclosure clause in any PPP project, the RTI applicant’s struggle to get information under the transparency law becomes very difficult. “We are increasingly getting these cases as appeals in CIC. We want this included in the agreement so that there is uniformity all over India.”

This view had also emerged in September, 2010, at the two-day national convention on the completion of five years of the implementation of the RTI Act. RTI activists had pointed out that clarity in the law was needed. The view was also supported by Gajendra Haldea, advisor (infrastructure) to Planning Commission deputy chairman.

Courtesy: Economic Times (10 Jan 2011)

Political Biggies, RTI Hog Limelight In HC This Year

Amit Anand Choudhary & Prabhati Nayak Mishra

Efforts to expand the ambit of the RTI law in various public institutions culminated into a path-breaking judgement in 2010 by the Delhi High Court which held that the CJI’s office was amenable under the transparency law to provide information on judges’ assets.

The high court’s verdict, in the very first fortnight of the year, ordering disclosure of the apex court judges’ assets came as a blow to erstwhile Chief Justice of India K G Balakrishnan, who wanted to keep the CJI’s office out of the purview of the Right to Information Act, 2005 on the grounds of judicial independence and autonomy.

Stung by the high court’s verdict for disclosure of its judges’ assets, the apex court went on to have it

challenged before itself and is currently adjudicating it, sitting in the judgement over its own cause.

Observing that judicial independence is not a judge’s personal privilege but a responsibility cast upon him, the high court had dismissed the Supreme Court’s appeal against its September 2009 ruling which had sought to bring CJI’s office within the purview of the RTI Act.

The high court held the stock exchanges, Industrial Finance Corporation of India Ltd (IFCI), National Agricultural Cooperative Federation of India Ltd (NAFED) as public authorities, bound to disclose various information under the the transparency law.

*Courtesy: Political & Business Daily
(30 Dec 2010)*

Cong Advocates RTI On Corporate Sector

Jal Khambata

The Congress has floated the idea of bringing the corporate sector under the Right to Information Act (RTI) for total transparency.

An editorial in the latest issue of the party’s mouthpiece Congress Sandesh circulated at its plenary here on Sunday says that the RTI has empowered every citizen to have an access in the corridors of the governments and now it should be turn of the corporate sector:

“There is growing demand that a similar mechanism for the corporate corridors should be created so that the concept of total transparency could be achieved.... When a country progresses, the fruit of its growth must reach to the most weaker sections of the society,” says the editorial.

Courtesy: Free Press Journal (20 Dec 2010)

Pending Cases At CIC Double Up

Nivedita Khandekar

The number of pending cases at the Central Information Commission (CIC) has been increasing over the years with more than 13,000 cases pending till September this year compared to 7,000 in 2009.

Of these, around 300 cases are pending for more than a year. What's more, most of the cases are pending due to the retirement of former chief information commissioner Wajahat Habibullah.

In reply to a query filed under Right to Information (RTI) by chartered accountant Rakesh Gupta, the

CIC has said it has 13,668 cases pending till September. There are 7,495 cases that are pending for three months; 4,970 for three to six months; 904 cases for more than six months and 299 for more than a year.

The number has only increased over the years. In March, the Hindustan Times had reported that there were 7,068 cases pending during January to December 2009. Incidentally, the transparency watchdog's own website has not updated these figures.

Courtesy: The Hindustan Times (18 Dec 2010)

RTI Cases Via Video Conferencing

Studio facility available at offices of DCs and ZP CEOs

The Karnataka Information Commission (KIC) in Bangalore will now conduct video conferences every Saturday to address the Right To Information (RTI) cases from the district headquarters. Hitherto, petitioners and information officers from the State personally appeared before the Commission in Bangalore for hearings.

The facility was formally inaugurated by Chief Secretary S V Ranganath on Wednesday.

KIC Chief Commissioner H N Krishna told reporters that the State Information Commissioners will hear cases pending in districts via video conferences from Bangalore by making use of the studio facility available at the deputy commissioners' offices and the offices of the chief executive officers in the zilla panchayats.

Courtesy: Deccan Herald (23 Dec 2010)

Activists Demand SMS Alert For RTI

Viju B

RTI activists across Maharashtra have appealed to state chief information commissioner (CIC) Vilas Patil to implement the SMS service system to keep RTI applicants informed about dates of hearings so that they do not miss the dates owing to postal delays.

The SMS service has already been approved by the Bombay High Court (HC) for the benefit of litigants, especially those residing in villages.

Ten to 15 per cent of applicants miss the first and second appeal dates due to postal and bureaucratic delay. By the time they are intimated about a hearing, it's often too late, said RTI activist Vihar Durve.

Courtesy: The Times of India (28 Dec 2010)

Tripura Introduces Online RTI Filings

Tripura today become the first Indian State to introduce online filing of Right to Information (RTI) complaints. Chief Minister Manik Sarkar launched the service of the Tripura Information Commission (TIC) here.

Courtesy: The Sentinel (1 Jan 2011)



Broadcasting Social Change

PN Vasanti

With greater focus on social issues, media firms can not only quicken reforms, but also become more competitive

One of the most visible and positive growth stories in the first decade of the 21st century was that of the media. In fact, this story is usually referred to as the “Indian Media Boom” in most scholarly papers and other journalistic references.

The growth narrative of the media in this period is mostly about sheer numbers—both in terms of players (channels, publications, producers and genres) and audience (viewers and readers). For example, the number of television channels grew from less than 50 a couple of decades ago to 612 in November; during the same period, the number of homes with television went from 30 million to more than 130 million.

While this has been the impressive story of the decade, what is less talked about is the capacity for change—both economic and social. To some extent, the economic potential is taken care of in the business plans of media houses. The social potential, however, remains dormant.

By social potential, I mean the media’s inherent ability to influence change on basic yet critical issues that drive the 21st century experience such as population growth, poverty, mega-urbanization, globalization, terrorism, global warming, loss of biodiversity, water shortages, agricultural productivity, education, health systems and social justice.

One might ask why the media should care about its social function—it is a business after all, and profitability isn’t always thought of in conjunction with welfare. But it is precisely for this reason that the media needs to be conscious of its social potential. Let me explain why.

Take the example of television news channels. As a powerful visual medium, television is popular with

advertisers, who use it to engage customers with core messages or service propositions about products and services, and to advise them on how to respond—for example, contact or visit a shop, and make a booking or a purchase. However, the same principles of engagement have been applied only in a limited way to influence social norms or justice issues that prevail in our society.

Clearly, television has had visible impact in the way markets and consumers behave. But can we say the same about its impact on social behaviour, particularly deep-rooted attitudes that can be addressed by an influential television media?

The power of the news media to set a nation’s agenda and to focus popular attention on key public issues is immense and well documented. However, very few news channels and programmes have been able to use this influence purposefully. Some of the proactive news channels have tried, and cases such as the murder of Jessica Lall and other crime issues have turned into fruitful media campaigns. A few channels have also had limited success in pursuing issues of farmers’ suicides, bureaucratic and political corruption, and terrorism. However, such initiatives have been sporadic; no systematic strategy has guided media investigations into these issues.

Similarly, environmental issues and climate change have been given prime-time bulletin space as well as special programmes and panel discussions. However, coverage on them has been neither coherent nor consistent.

Recent examples have proved that whenever the news media has strategically planned and committed to a cause, it has made change possible. For the particular media companies, this has also translated into better positions vis-à-vis the competition. The

recent NDTV campaign on the tiger is one example—it was strategically used not only to generate commitment from the viewers, but also to create the goodwill that will surely reflect on NDTV’s balance sheet.

Similarly, consistent enquiries into any prevalent social or environmental issue have been able to make a difference. A Centre for Media Studies initiative with Telugu channels in Andhra Pradesh over last two years has yielded positive results in convincing the channels to produce lucid programmes on the girl child.

The follow-up annual awards by The United Nations Children’s Fund in Hyderabad have partly motivated this shift to a new gender perspective on large issues. For those who have made this shift and used creative ways to address such issues, like Telugu news channel HMTV, this strategy has provided both audience support and a way of standing out from the competition.

Given market compulsions and the competitive environment today, every news channel is concerned about survival. While most of them are becoming more professional and corporatized, few are sensitive

to their corporate social responsibilities as business entities.

Even fewer are concerned whether the balance between public interest and commercial imperatives is being strategically reviewed, properly managed and publicly disclosed. This leads to the media industry’s current low trust ratings, sitting uncomfortably alongside its growing power and influence.



As agents of social change, the news media has an opportunity to address this growing discomfort and cynicism. New technologies have done more than change how news is produced and delivered—they have thrown the very nature and values of news into question. This new scrutiny means the coverage of issues regarding social

development and social justice have to be probed and perhaps rethought. The major realignment of mainstream news priorities required for this has yet to occur.

In this new decade, we should hope for more innovation and experimentation that can unleash the media’s potential to address pressing issues in our society.

Courtesy: Mint (21 Jan 2011)

Recommendations Of The “TRP Committee” Of Ministry Of Information & Broadcasting

“The Committee has taken serious view of the small sample size used by the two rating agencies in India. Further people meters are installed in select urban households leaving out rural households. The committee also found other lacunae in the current TRP measurement systems. The committee is also convinced that the changes in the content, viewership and delivery platforms need to be more effectively measured. This can be remedied

by increasing the sample size and having a more scientific approach towards research.

1. Sample Size

The Committee strongly recommends an increase in sample size in terms of number of sample households, coverage of rural areas (which is practically missing today!) and addressing the need

to cover multiple delivery platforms. The sample size should be increased by almost 4 times from the current 8000 approx. (TAM) to 30,000 households over a period of 5 years for television households of INR 129 million in India, as of 2009. An added cost of approximately INR 660 crore is required to install the 22, 000 additional people meters. To support the funds required for such high numbers of additional peoplemeters, the committee suggests that BARC should involve the industry to pay an agreed upon annual fee depending on their size and the number of channels they beam. It is suggested that this expansion in the TRP measurement system should be carried out over a period of 5 years.

2. Transparency & Reliability

The rating agencies should make the process more transparent. The research methodology should be disclosed and be subjected to financial and process audits. BARC should disclose on its website relevant information pertaining to the research process. The Committee believes that transparency of methodology and data can be achieved by putting it in the public domain and making it available to statisticians and researchers for review. The methodology should be clearly elaborated on the website of BARC and the ratings should be made available after an appropriate time lag of report generation and seek their suggestions for better research processes and evaluation.

3. Tampering & Manipulation

It is absolutely essential to ensure that there is no tampering or manipulation at the time of data generation and collection and the Committee is convinced that an increase in sample size could act as a deterrent to any fraudulent manipulation. This concern partly arises from reports that certain

‘agencies’ have been gifting separate TV sets for viewing to residents of people-meter homes and manipulating the people meter based TV sets in favour of specific channels who have appointed the agency. By raising the number of people meter homes to 30,000, such practices would become more difficult.

4. Viewership across diverse platforms

There is a pressing need for making the rating systems compatible with the emerging technologies and capable of capturing data over different platforms including cable, terrestrial, DTH, IPTV and others. A regular updation in samples shall be requires to reflect the developments taking place in viewership on a variety of delivery platforms.

TRAI has also opined that new technologies such as portable people meters and Return Path Data should be used to used by rating agencies to ensure that the emerging technologies / delivery platforms being made available for television viewing are also measured. The rating systems should keep pace with the emerging new technologies to cover viewers through different platforms.

5. Frequency of TRP Announcement

The Committee recommends that all rating agencies follow the practice of releasing the ratings on a weekly basis, particularly for the NEWS channels. It is upto the discretion of BARC to reduce the periodicity further to a fortnight.

6. Shareholding pattern of rating agencies

To avoid conflict of interest there should not be any crossholding between rating agencies, broadcasters, advertisers and advertising agencies.”

*From the committee report,
submitted on Nov 25, 2010*

ADARSH: INFO COMMISSIONER TIWARI SUSPENDED

Governor K Sankaranarayanan on Thursday suspended controversial former bureaucrat Ramanand Tiwari as the State Information Commissioner for Greater Mumbai. Tiwari’s name had surfaced as an alleged beneficiary in the Adarsh housing society scam. The order will come into force with immediate effect. “The Governor has suspended Tiwari using powers under Section 17.2 of the RTI Act,” a Raj Bhavan spokesperson said.

[From CMS Files-2001]

Is It A “TRP TRAP” Or Hijacking Of Indian Television?

Dr. N. Bhaskara Rao

CNBC revelations on possible “rating fudge” is significant since priorities of television in India are set by Television Rating Points (TRPs). “Stunned”, “shocked” and “damaging” are some of the reactions of TV channels. Certain hype on TRPs has been all across and as if they are sacrosanct. That is why the expose acquires the proportion of a “scam”. But it is a wonder that despite a “TRP Trap” television in India has been under for some years, the intricacies were not brought out for public attention much earlier. Considering the consequences, the revelation should be viewed as a wake-up call in the industry.

This is not the first time that allegations of “manipulation of TRPs” has been made. This time, however, vulnerability of the system being followed has been substantiated such a way that larger public attention is ensured. TRPs were being taken for granted as “universal yardstick” by media buyers, broadcasters, media, media users and by development planners at highest level in the country. Advertising agencies and advertisers have been doing their campaign planning and apportioning television spend amounting to some Rs.4000 crores primarily based on such weekly “ratings”. And, newspapers were busy hyping the “rating claims” by channels and content producers.

And yet there is hardly any analysis in the media what these TRPs are all about as to at whose instance they are being compiled, with what kind of methodology and with what reliability, and as to their very relevance in the context of changing media scene and unique viewing situation in the homes.

That these ratings are only projections and for only a select few cities and based on a small sample of “representative” TV households was not convincingly explained. The pattern of selecting television channels, viewing programmes, timings, etc are measured with the help of a “people meter” installed in those selected few TV households. The general impression often given is that these ratings are

national and represent total “TV owning households” in the country is not fully correct. At best one could dare to say that they are indicative of viewership in metro and major cities. Neither of the two rating services cover rural India. In fact, they cover only half of urban India. Starting with four metros about five years ago, the ratings today cover 29 cities with some states/ languages being covered by only one city.

The “peoples meter” being used was developed for relatively homogenized societies and cultures such as Canada, USA or South Africa and infact, these meters were initially imported from these countries, mostly used ones. The buttons on such a meter in each sampled TV households are expected to be pushed by each viewer as per his or her viewership. That is each viewer in the household is expected to be an “active” one to push on and off of the button each time something on TV is being watched.

The sample size of TV households covered with “people meter” started with 400 has now gone to 3454 in the case of TAM and 4405 in the case of INTAM. The sample size in the case of some cities is around 120 and in the case of Mumbai it has been maximum – today it is around 600. In these sampled panel households every member is expected to maintain strict confidentiality and factual in doing “on and off” of the button of the meter without any inducement, or any pressure and each member is expected to use only the assigned button on the meter for her or him and do so each time of viewing during a 24 hours period and every day as long as the house is a member of the panel. Each such sampled household is expected to represent several thousands of TV households or cable & satellite TV households.

Any aberration in doing off and on of the button, or any passivity in the process of any one member in the household will vitiate the projected ratings one way or other. If a few households in the “panel” of sample could be induced with incentive as is being done, the outcome is nothing but a manipulated one.

The actual representative weightage of a household in a particular socio-economic category is another issue.

Spread of television to nook and corner of the country and of regional language channels, has changed the scope and extent of viewing. And yet rating service is not extended to rural and small towns, despite 60 percent of TV sets being there. Also, since nearly 60 per cent of television sets are old black and white ones, reliability of accuracy of sensing device of people meter is doubtful in capturing the viewership. Then, ofcourse of the fact that spread of channels is not uniform across in different regions of the country. All this brings out inadequacy of rating methodology presently being followed. As a result channels having more viewership in rural or among certain sections are disadvantaged in the ratings. That is ratings based on urban viewership are deciding the programmes and programme schedules of TV channels, including of Doordarshan. Certain phenomena of TV being used as a decoration like a “wallpaper” in some households where “on and off” is not always related to actual viewing, or extent of viewing, is yet another issue.

The contents of peoples meter are projected by desegregating the figures into several socio-economic-demographic classifications converted into a matrix of some 64 cells is another contentious issues in terms of accuracy levels. That is how, competing channels, often end up using these ratings to their own advantage picking up from out of these several variables. This is further complicated from the fact that there are two rating services in the market sometimes widely differing from each other although both use similar methodology and cater to same interests.

Both these services, TAM and INTAM, each charging anywhere between Rs.5 Lakh to Rs. 50 Lakh as annual subscription (depending on the turnover of the subscriber), are driven by the interests of advertising. Since advertising is primarily based on perpetuating and pampering consumerism, rating service too caters to such interests. That is preferences and priorities of TV channels and their programmes, their time schedules and formats, commercial tariff, etc are all moderated by and based on these ratings. The two agencies are now engaged to merge rating service and perpetuate tyranny of ratings on Indian television. It is unfortunate that, not realizing all this, Doordarshan got into this trap and

lost its direction and priorities when it supported TRPs despite this author’s efforts otherwise a few years ago.

Such ratings do serve in giving a “logic” for media planners to justify their large dispensations total of which works out to some Rs.8000 cores yearly. Hence the need for certain transparency in methodology and some independent monitoring and validation procedures. Routine replacement of a 10 per cent of sample over a year is too little to ensure reliability of rating or to cope with passivity and casualties in sampled TV households week after week.

Since ratings are now “guaranteed” weeks before to lure advertising, obviously implies that these ratings are a matter of survival for advertising agencies, content producers and to channels themselves. The kind of competition between them is such that it will intensify and lure them further. Obviously, organizations like Indian Broadcasting Foundation (IBF) should take initiative to bring in some discipline. Self discipline any day is far better. The task of validation of ratings should not be left to users alone. In my opinion no one having interest, directly or indirectly, in advertising or media business, be entrusted with such a task. They should however be associated with the exercise.

The architecture of “peoples meter” and its practicality, once the scope is extended beyond cities, is yet another issue that needs to be looked into. So that we have state of art technology involving imaging and intelligent processing which allows direct measurement of actual eye contact and reduces tampering chances.

Despite week after week these meter based ratings are being pronounced how much do we know about the “impact” of television on any section of the country?. For example, on children?. On a rough estimate the money involved between the two agencies, bringing out TAM and INTAM, is not less than Rs 100 crores yearly. Recalling my own experience of bringing out the first ever National Readership Survey (NRS) report and the fourth one, I know what kind of resistance and pressures one face in revealing facts not palatable to subscribers who are under constant threat from each other. What an effort for scratching the surface or shall we say for hijacking the priorities of television and its very character?

Courtesy: The Asian Age (21 Sept 2001)

Television Viewership Measurement:Dilemma And Challenges

PN Vasanti

It is no surprise that CMS meet on TV Viewership ratings has generated so much interest among so many different people. For it was the first time that a open forum had brought together rating agencies on one platform and also because the meet considered the concerns of general public rather than confining to the business interests of advertisers and TV channels. No one disagreed at the meet that rating of TV viewership should be preferably by an independent agencies and that the process should be transparent and that since it is bound to have a say on the scope and schedules of contents of channels, the perspective of larger public cannot be ignored. That is how CMS initiative was appreciated and the meet felt that further initiatives are required by an independent group to examine issues to do with standards, regulation and technology of ratings. Because it felt that in the context of fast evolving technologies at the viewer end and emerge of a second rating agency, it is high time that a range of issues involved are further deliberated by those who have been seriously involved in shaping national policies as well as by those who are actually using the ratings.

It is astonishing that despite ratings have become the benchmark for the priorities and pre-occupation of TV in India, no basic research of any significance to validate or even assess and appraise the methodology, outcome and the role of ratings has been there. Perhaps because only a fraction of about two percent of revenues of TV, as spent in some countries whose viewership “market” is much smaller than

India’s, is being spent on research. This perhaps also explains why despite realization, even channels and advertisers, of limitations of “TRPs”, they are contended with a service which hardly covers a quarter of population and even viewers and reflect any qualitative dimensions involved in viewing. It was also felt that the practice is without coming under any independent scrutiny at a time when every other such practice is being brought under a regulator and assuring transparency in the process.

It is heartening to see that both the old player (TAM) and the new player (aMap) shared their outlook and approach at this CMS Meet. aMap presentation included an overview of global scenario. It is obvious that the competition between the two is already causing a relook and revamp of the sample size and even the methodology. One issue which could not be deliberated at this meet however was to do with the “use of TRPs” by channels sometimes denting the credibility of very rating. The other issue not discussed was about conflict of interest aspect of rating agencies.

In this monograph on the proceedings of day long CMS Meet we tried to present the discussion in verbatim to most extent. This publication is expected to help take the debate forward and also, in the process, sensitize more people about pros and cons of viewership rating operations and their implications to the kind of television channels and programme options we should have in the country. Your suggestions in this regard are welcome.

Preface to the publication on the deliberations of first ever such meet on Viewership ratings on March 7, 2007 at India International Centre, New Delhi with participation of stakeholders

Naming-Shaming: As With Radia Tapes!

Dr. N. Bhaskara Rao

Notwithstanding what two or more individual journalists did or did not, for sure the Fourth Estate in India suffered a blow in credibility as never before and much more. That judiciary and politics too are going through such a crisis in credibility is no way to look at the situation. The Nirra Radia tapes irrespective of their veracity, remind a larger malice afflicting the media. Only recently we had the debate on “paid news”, before that it was about “private treaties”. Those two debates have indicated that the crisis is not a overnight development nor in isolation. In the case of private treaties the media house which took to it was questioned at the very outset but soon was adapted by other media houses including the ones who questioned it initially. In the case of paid news, most concerned groups have condemned and questioned the practice but could not come up with specific correctives; On the contrary, there were deliberate efforts to sideline the core issues. Now we are in the midst of another issue, surfaced with tapes of Nirra Radia conversations, a corporate PR lobbyist, involving well known journalists of iconic stature. While media operators mostly remained spectators to this expose, journalists appear divided and, once again, side tracking the core issue as if it is to do with a couple of individual.

The malice, evident in the three issues, is deeper for more than a decade and has been eroding very vitals of the Fourth Estate. A decade ago (2001) CMS had indicated this emerging phenomena as “Paradigm shift in media operations”. A write up of that trend no daily newspaper was willing to take initially. But once the Frontline published, EPW followed by reprinting the article. But those connected with the media sector remained silent as if they were unaware or unconcerned of what was brought out in that analysis.

That analysis had explained how new functionaries (“new gate-keepers”) have becomes proactively influencing the very priorities of news media. It indicated arrival of corporate public relations (PR) as a key function in determining news. How, Market Research (MR) and Media Planning (MP), and PR have become key players to the extent of dictating the very structure and source of news was brought out. As a part of that study, CMS also showed, how

changes overnight in FDI limits (allowing 100 percent in PR, MR, MP and advertising), without a debate in and outside the Parliament, was changing not just the course and direction but the very scope and strategies of news media establishments. The study also exposed TRP as “a TRP trap” and “hijacking of Indian television”. To take forward that debate CMS held a national seminar (Hyderabad 2006), “Should there be a Laxman Rekha for media?”, with Justice G N Ray of Press Council of India, Rajdeep Sardesai, M.J. Akbar, among other senior editors, and owners like Ramoji Rao. In between these, CMS gave presentations on these trends at professional meets of journalists. Interestingly, in one of those meets in New Delhi the then Minister for I&B pretended (?) his innocence about 100 percent FDI into PR, MR, MP and advertising. When it was that decision of the Govt. which facilitated the shifts in media operations and prompted private treaties, paid news and unleashed of corporate PRs. In between, CMS also brought out more than once during the decade, based on its tracking and analysis of news media, how news priorities are changing because of all that. “A hand book on Poll Surveys in media” publication (2009) of CMS even described the process of quid pro quo in media coverage of politics on behalf of one or other corporate or political interest. On the “press day” meet (November 16) a few weeks ago at the Press Council, I have described the phenomena of corporatisation of media and how the “new gate keepers” role is getting consolidated – at the cost of editors and objective reporting. Corporatisation has given a big push to proliferation of media vertically and horizontally in the country. But we should all be aware of the consequences of such growth in the absence of “checks and balances” to moderate that process in every ones interest. Those early signals of CMS over a decade did not receive the kind of attention that private treaties, paid news or Radia tapes have.

This is the first time that such a (lobbying) role of senior journalists was caught on tape and is being exposed for public debate. I was a personal witness more than two decades ago to a senior newsman influencing a political party selecting its candidates

for Rajaya Sabha and Lok Sabha and lobbying for births in the cabinet. Corporates look for drafting journalists who are more credible. One corporate PR leader who now talks of ethics boasted a decade ago how he hosts “evening parties” so often for editors and how he “pushes” stories. Earlier, such practice was limited to “envelope journalism” and then to “sponsored journalism”. We now hear of “quid pro quo journalism”.

What is the function of PR in today's world of 24x7 news media? What guidelines and codes apply to them? Capability as a wheeler – dealer vis-à-vis the media should not be criteria for success. What legal provisions do we have in the country that apply to this function. Justice Ganguly of Supreme Court questioned (Nov 30, 2010) Radia's work being described as a “profession” and went to the extent of observing that it was “not an ostensible profession”, “Profession is something honorable”, the judge said. Is it not? Professional is one who comes under purview of certain norms, standards, transparency and accountability practices from within and outside. Lobbying should be within certain regulatory provisions. In today's world it is better that lobbying is a legal activity.

Niira Radia could be thanked for making the nation realize what is happening and what it all meant to media, politics, bureaucracy, democracy and national policies. Something good should come out of the Radia tapes in every one's interest. What ever was brought out from the Radia tapes should prompt stakeholders for a reappraisal of their role, a rethink of priorities and a review of the very functioning of media in the country. Targeting individuals is sidelining and missing yet another opportunity. Outlook and Open magazines should be complimented for bringing the issue in to public domain. This Radia tapes episode bring out that “Naming – shaming” is perhaps a better way of sensitizing stakeholders for a rethink. But that should be to go into systemic issues.

Some initiatives that need to be taken and pursued

First and foremost journalism schools in the country need repositioning with more appropriate curriculum. Some years ago when IIMC started public relations course sidelining “development communication” course, I pointed out the implications of such a shift. Since most have become schools of public relations more.

RTI Act has good potential for the good of media too. Media should come under the purview of this Act. We are now in the era of transparency.

The Govt. has abdicated its responsibility to implement Wage Broad recommendations under the Working Journalist Act result of which is “contact employment” of journalists. Without correcting such a system, can we restore the role of journalists fully?.

Professional organizations of journalists have to be proactive in their priorities and be concerned of larger issues. Civil society organizations have to be concerned and take on the responsibility with action programmes.

Media audit of news media by civil society groups periodically helps timely initiatives to correct any imbalances and deviations. It was based on such audit of media contents and analysis that CMS was able to come up with its insights at the very outset. Such audit should take place at multiple levels.




News media should disclose their ownership pattern, share holding pattern and balance sheets. “conflict of interest” aspect should be indicated in its concerns and coverage. Editors and heads of news organizations too should disclose on their own. Rajdeep Sardesai should be complimented for coming forward with such an announcement (he has not yet done so). Since he is an editor of a news channel and President of Editors Guild, his initiative should set an example. Also, those engaged in editorial and news programmes, including poll surveys in media, should refrain from accepting Govt. patronage. Example set by Mainstream editor should not be forgotten. In 2000 Nikhil Chakravathy, doyen of editors then, refused to accept Padma Bhushan award.

Redressal mechanism by way of ombudsman or such other, should be simpler and easier for any one to think of complaining and also come up with suggestions. In fact, such “activism” should be encouraged on the part of citizens. Most citizens do not know where to go or how to go about and not sure of what happens if complained. Examples of accountability should be obvious at individual media and in the sector.

Pending a Media Commission to come up with its assessment, an independent regulatory mechanism should come into play such a way that no one takes undue advantage of the media. It is better that TRAI should be repositioned adding broadcasting.

Visit of Head of State: Primetime News Coverage by Channels 2005-2011

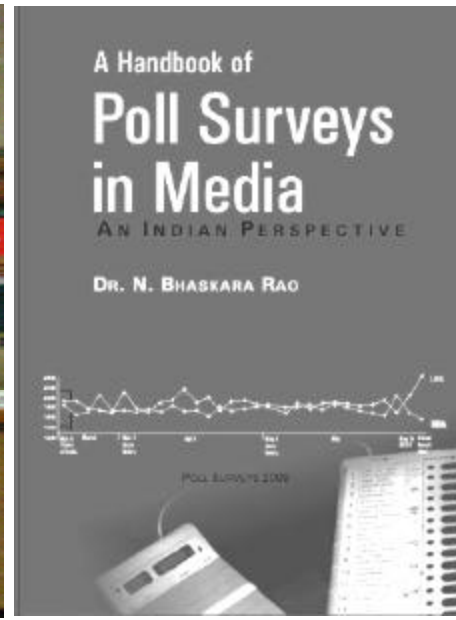
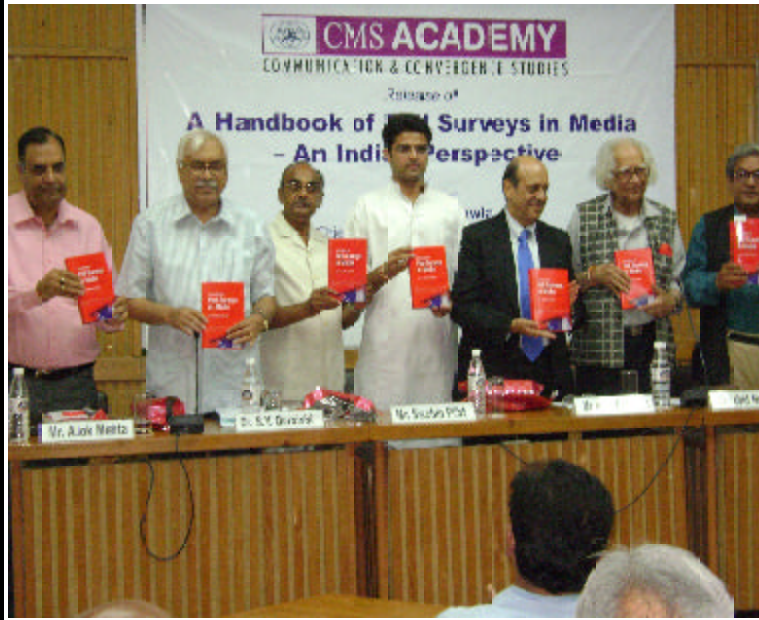
2005	2006	2010	2005	2009	2006	2010
						
7%	6%	14%	3%	2%	4%	8%
Wen Jia Bao	Hu Jintao & Liu Yongqing	Wen Jia Bao	Junichiro Koizumi	Yukio Hatoyama & Miyuki Hatoyama	Jacques Chirac & Bernadette Chirac	Nicolas Sarkozy & Carla Bruni
	Chinese		Japanese		French	

2006	2010	2011	2010	2009	2010	2009
						
55%	95%	0.05%	2%	4%	14%	2%
George Bush & Laura Bush	Barack Obama & Michelle Obama	Susilo Yudhyono & Ani Bambang	Dmitry Medvedev	Vladimir Putin	David Cameron	S Hasina
USA		Indonesia	Russian		UK	Bangladesh

(Percentage of Prime time news bulletins time)

Source: CMS Media Lab

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Dr. N. Bhaskara Rao has been a fountainhead of poll surveys and psephology in India. Backed by an excellent academic background in political science and sociology and a Ph.D. in communication, he belongs to the avant-garde in India, which ventured over three decades ago to apply survey research to the Indian electoral scene in a big way. He initiated poll surveys as a part of market research at ORG as its Chief and refined further at CMS and MDRA.

Dr. Abid Hussain

Former Ambassador to USA, October 16, 2002

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