CHAPTER - 7
CONTEMPORARY NPPs AND ITS FUTURE

The future of anything is uncertain and unpredictable and the same thing can be said about NPPs. It is very difficult to say at present whether NPPs will continue to exist in the long-run. If it exists, whether it will bear the same form or style or there may be some changes or whether they may be written or produced for a duration of 30 to 60 mts as they stand today? What are the expected possibilities? These questions stand before us as major one due to recent changes supposed to take place in organizational set-up shaped in the form of Prasar Bharati, the Broadcasting Corporation of India, planned to run on commercial basis and earn revenues for its independent functioning. In other words, whether due to shift from Govt. control over the medium, there would be some changes in the policies and planning of programmes under the Prasar Bharati. Even if we take it for granted that NPPs would continue to exist in the new set-up, but it is likely that there may be some changes in their style and the drive may be different than that of the present one.

In this chapter, these aspects would be critically examined and aimed at finding out new possibilities for the survival. For this a few opinions from AIR officials have already been sought for which also express doubt about the future of radio plays including NPPs. In this context, it would be better to have a clear vision about the broadcasting industry as existed at present in our country and the changes that are taking place in the organizational set-up alongwith the attitudes to programming and its contents. Because the future of AIR is closely related to the future of NPPs. Its future moves towards plans, programming and objectives will determine the fate and future of both. Any change in them or motives of commercialization of the present industry will change its course in future too.

In fact, Broadcasting is a fast-paced and dynamic industry that is continually changing. Careers in broadcasting can be exciting, unique and rewarding. The
programme personnels or the production department of a radio station makes certain that all programme contents and commercials are timely produced and lined up for timely broadcast. The operation department supervises the smooth operation of the radio station. The on-air personalities deliver the contents to the listeners and are the face of the radio station. These departments along with other departments like Administration, Accounts are responsible for smooth functioning of a radio station. Since radio production is a team work, and various persons from different departments are engaged, a co-operation from all corners is very essential.

There has been a major change in the radio set-up and organization recently with the coming of Prasar Bharati, the Broadcasting Corporation of India. The concept of full governmental support to this industry has been modified and reduced to make the industry into a self-financing organization to grow on its own feet in the coming days. This results in changing of its earlier motive of a non-profit making industry to a great extent and inspires to run in the line of corporate business set-up which is very essential for an autonomous institution.

The works of already existing Marketing Division of All India Radio have been revitalised with a prime objective of commercial revenue earnings for this autonomous institution. The marketing department / division is responsible for generating direct revenue for the radio station by selling air time or slots to advertisers. The department consists of several persons who perform different functions ranging from a Sales Head / Manager (a Assistant Station Director in case of AIR, Guwahati) who supervises the functioning of the entire department to make certain the revenue targets are met. The officials of the department approach advertisers and prospective advertisers to sell the air time or for sponsorship of programmes and negotiate the terms and the payment details as per rate of AIR advertisements with these advertisers.

Thus, radio advertising or commercial broadcasting has come to play a great role to achieve its basic objectives. Unlike FM radio or other private radio channels, the traditional government controlled radio under Prasar Bharati does not aim
only at revenue generation, though it has become essential for its survival and existence to compete with other media. Therefore, besides this prime objective, the traditional radio has some other secondary objectives to be achieved as a responsible organization towards nation building and economic development. In case of traditional radio, generally the advertisers are the Government Departments giving publicity of their plans and schemes or messages for the benefits of the common people including rural inhabitants who are informed and encouraged to come forward for improving their standard of living, life styles, health conditions and environment; and to that extent, the traditional radio bears social responsibility as opposed to FM radio advertising where majority of advertisers are private parties, business concern and even individuals.

The Supreme Court Judgement

In the case of the Union of India vs the Cricket Association of Bengal, the Supreme Court in its judgement on February 9, 1995 held that the airwaves are a public property and a monopoly over broadcasting whether by the Government or anybody else (public monopoly could be an exception) is inconsistent with the free speech right of the citizens and directed the government to take immediate steps to establish an independent autonomous public authority, representatives of all sections and interests of society to control and regulate the use of airwaves.

Regarding private broadcasting, the Apex Court in its judgement observed:

"The question of whether to permit private broadcasting or not is a matter of policy for the Parliament to decide. If it decides to permit it, it is Parliament to decide, subject to what conditions and restrictions should it be permitted private broadcasting, even if allowed, should not be left to market forces, in the interest of ensuring that a wide variety of voices enjoy access to it..."

".... the electronic media are the most powerful media, both because of their audio-visual impact, and their widest reach covering the section of the society where the print media do not reach. The right to use airwaves and the context of the programmes, therefore, needs regulation for balancing it and as well as to prevent
monopoly of information and views relayed which is a potential danger flowing from the concentration of the right to broadcast / telecast in the hands either of a central agency or of a few private affluent broadcasters."

It was expected that the government would bring in legislation for setting up a broadcast authority with enabling provisions to license and regulate private radio stations. But the government chose to use the administrative powers vested with it and worked out a scheme to make way for the setting up of radio stations by private parties. It identified 40 towns and cities for setting up 108 channels. Some cities would have as many as 11 private channels while places like Agra, Cuttack, Trivandrum, Nagpur etc. would have only one. The allotment of licenses to operate channels was made on the basis of highest bids from the eligible applicants. Only companies registered in India under the Companies Act, 1956 were eligible to apply. The scheme includes some clauses for disqualifying religious bodies, political bodies and advertising agencies from getting the license. There are also clauses to prevent the same company getting more than one license at the same town or city. The Government might identify more places and channels for opening up private radio stations. It is worthwhile to note that some of those who got the licenses surrendered them because of financial non-viability.

Organizing a private radio station involves setting up of a studio, transmitter and generation of software. This would require a substantial investment, entrepreneurship and manpower and this will depend on the hours of broadcast and types of programming. The station has to depend on advertisement revenue for its day-to-day expenditure, profits and provision for depreciation etc.

Experience of running private radio stations elsewhere in the world reveals that they have to be compact organizations with minimum staff, avoiding the expense of large paraphernalia of divisions and departments with huge staff manning them. The management could ill-afford all this. The station has to be managed with a small contingent of multi-skilled staff numbering 10 or 15 persons or even less.
The software has to be drawn from pre-recorded cassettes / CD’s and the like. To hook the listeners in a competitive environment, they may have to organise interactive programmes, chat-shows, prize schemes etc. The situation would be different if a corporate body gets licenses to operate a number of radio stations at many centres. These could be “functional” type of organizations. In community radio stations, the organization could be distinctively different depending on the informational resources.

The government has granted licenses to IGNOU to operate educational channels known as Gyan Vani. These radio stations are managed by a three member team headed by a station manager. The proliferation of radio channels throws up a lot of challenges as well as opportunities. The presence of a number of private stations would encourage a healthy competition among them and in such a situation, the listening public eventually would be the beneficiaries.

Thus, it can be said that this verdict has opened the floodgates of petitions from voluntary and social organizations as well as educational institutions for allowing them to operate radio channels for “public or community’s interests”. This has further led the government to make legal provisions for accommodating private operators alongwith NGOs, Voluntary organizations, educational institutions to be allowed to apply for, receive and operate FM radio channels. Today, in our country, there are more than a hundred private FM channels in addition to about 40 community FM radio stations including those in the educational institutions.¹ Thus the setting up and expansion of FM radio stations are the result of the economic liberalization process subsequently supported and inspired by the landmark judgement of the Supreme Court of India in 1995.

History of Indian radio is the history of radio broadcast that started in India with the setting up of a private radio service in Chennai in the year 1924. In that same year, British government gave lincense to the Indian Broadcasting Company to launch radio stations in Mumbai and Kolkata. Later on the company became

¹. IDOL study Material, MCJ (Final), Media Manaement, P. 51.
bankrupt, the government took possession of the transmitters and began its operations as the Indian State Broadcasting Corporation. In the year 1936, it was renamed All India Radio (AIR) and the Department of Communications managed it entirely. After independence, All India Radio was converted into a separate Department. AIR has five regional headquarters - in New Delhi for the North Zone; in Kolkata for the East zone; in Guwahati for the North-East zone; in Mumbai for West zone; and in Chennai for the South zone.

In the year 1957, All India Radio was renamed Akashvani, which is controlled by the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting. During the period of independence only a mere 6 radio stations existed throughout the country. But during the late 1990s, the network of All India Radio extended to almost 146 AM stations. Moreover the integrated North-East service focused on reaching to the population in northeast India. All India Radio offers programmes in English, Hindi and numerous regional and local languages. In the year 1967, Commercial Radio services started in India. The initiative was taken by Vividh Bharati and Commercial Service, from the headquarters in Mumbai. Vividh Bharati accumulated revenues from widespread sponsorships and advertisements. During the mid-1990s, broadcasting was carried on from 31AM and FM stations.

By 1994, there were around 85 FM stations and 73 short wave stations that linked the whole nation. The broadcasting technology in India is basically indigenous and reaches far and wide to various listeners like farmers who require various updated informations on agriculture. Between 1970 and 1994, the amount of radio receivers increased manifold, almost five times. From the initial 14 million, the number increased to a staggering 65 millions. The broadcast services from foreign countries are provided by the External Services Division of All India Radio. Almost 70 hours of news, entertainment programmes were broadcasted in 1994 in various languages with the help of 32 shortwave transmitters. After Independence, Indian radio was regarded as a vital medium of networking and communication, mainly because of the lack of any other mediums. All the major national affairs and social events were transmitted through radio. Indian radio played a significant role in social integration.
of the entire nation. All India Radio mainly focused on development of a national consciousness as well as over all national integration. Programming was organised and created keeping in mind the solitary purpose of national political integration. This supported in prevailing over the imperative crisis of political instability, which was created after the independence. Thus, political enhancement and progressive nation building efforts were aided by the transmission of planned broadcasts.

All India Radio also provided assistance in enhancing the economic condition of the country. Indian radio was particularly designed and programmed to provide support to the procedure of social improvement, which was a vital pre-requisite of economic enhancement. The leading development beliefs of the time analysed the problems and hindrances in development as the primary ones in the developing nations. The function of broadcasting paved a way for the surge of modern concepts. Later, with the modernisation of the country, television was introduced and broadcasting achieved new status. But by then, radio had become a veteran medium in India. Diverse programmes including entertainment and melodious songs were also transmitted nationwide. Akashvani or All India Radio still stands as one of the biggest radio networks around the globe.

Re-shaping of Radio Industry

Radio has made a comeback in the lifestyles of Indians. Radio has the reputation of being the oldest and the cheapest medium of entertainment in India. The radio industry has been completely reshaped by the various private players that entered the sector after the government allowed foreign investment into the segment and opened the licenses to the private players.

For more than 4 decades, the Government of India did not permit private radio stations to broadcast in India. Then history changed its course. In 1993, the Government allowed private FM operators to ‘buy’ blocks (chunks) on All India Radio, prepare programming content, book commercials from advertisers and broadcast the whole lot. Within 4 years (1997-98), the FM radio advertising and sponsorship business grew to Rs. 93 crores with Times of India’s Times FM &
Mid-Day Group’s *Radio* Mid-Day becoming the main players.

Then, in June, 1998 the Government, through its electronic media regulatory body *Prasar Bharati*, decided not to renew contracts of Private FM operators. Not surprisingly, the advertising revenue fell by 50% within a year. This time, the Government gave the green light to privatize *radio* in India. July 6, 1999 was the historic day when the Government announced that 150 new FM channels would be licensed across 40 cities. And in 2000, the Government auctioned licenses for private FM channels to bolster the revenue. And the focus on metros was evident in the bidding. Expecting to collect Rs. 800 million from auctioning 108 licenses, the Government had to actually face mass withdrawal of bidders because of the huge license fee. A handful of serious bidders chose to remain.

In response to the Government’s offer, many companies bid for the licenses to operate in key markets. But the going was not so easy. Many gave up, unable to sell out the high license fee. For instance, the bidding price for the Mumbai license was reportedly to the tune of Rs. 9.75 crore. Others dropped out saying the business was not viable. So, in effect, the competition shrank, players consolidated and the Government extended its deadline. Today, there are roughly 10 players who will operate approximately in 37 cities across the country.

The government collected close to Rs. 4.6 billion as license fee for the privately run FM *radio* channels in 40 cities. New Media Broadcasting, a Zee Group company, which focused mainly on the smaller towns, won the largest number of bids.

The first round of bidding for 76 channels in 26 cities, garnered close to Rs. 3.5 billion. The government got the highest bid Rs. 97.5 million from each of 10 broadcast companies for stations in Mumbai. Interestingly the bids for Hyderabad and Nagpur came next, each for Rs. 77.2 million and Rs. 74 million respectively, while the bids for Delhi were Rs. 71.2 million each.
Radio is expected to follow the growth of the Television industry which grew rapidly following the entry of private player. Currently, FM coverage in India is restricted to just 17% of the country, compared to 89% of All India Radio (AIR). Incidentally, Music Broadcasting became the first firm in India to commence private FM broadcast from Bangalore.

**Future of Radio Industry**

FM radio can play its part in building a stronger business future for India, providing free-to-air local broadcasts of music and entertainment, helpful information - traffic advisories, community announcements and public service messages provide a real value-added service. But at current levels of advertising support, each radio station is reeling under the brutal financial impact of high costs. With more players in the fray, the FM radio industry would grow and also enhance the government’s yield from licensing radio naturally.

The New India deserves an active private FM radio sector. It can provide a level playing field with benefits for listeners, for advertisers, employment & career options and spearhead the government objective of growing the FM radio business in India.

With the government ready to reduce the license fees, it will help in attracting new players like Reliance which had earlier backed out only due to the entry fees. Also government allowing foreign players to enter the Indian market, it will help the industry grow. Virgin group has already started exploring the Indian market for suitable partners. Various radio stations are coming up, for example, Radio Mirchi thus helping them expand.

Another important development taking place in the industry is Radio City. Radio City is a FM radio station in India. It broadcasts on 91.1 (earlier 91.0 in most cities) megahertz from Mumbai (where it was started in 2004), Bengaluru (started first in 2001), Lucknow and New Delhi (since 2003). It plays Hindi songs, English and regional songs. It was launched in Hyderabad in March, 2006, in Chennai on July 7, 2006 and in Vishakhapatnam in October 2007. Radio City recently forayed
into New Media in May, 2008, with the launch of a new mega music portal—Planet Radiocity.com that offers music related news, videos, songs and other music related features.

The future looks bright as the reach of radio is expected to raise post the increase in the number and quality of players in the industry. It is on the basis of these key drivers of growth, it is being predicted that radio's share in the total advertising pie will see an increase in the medium term.

**Bridging the Gap**

Due to the public-broadcaster nature of AIR and its socio-economic rather than a commercial focus, its ad-revenues are expected to grow at a moderate pace. Since the private FM channels need to survive in a commercial and competitive environment, they have focused on mass entertainment to gather listeners. Hence, it is expected that the private FM channels will drive the future growth of the sector.

**Indian FM Radio Story and the Changing Future**

Today’s grandfathers are to be remembered tuning into their giant radio sets to listen to the hourly news bulletins of Akashvani or the BBC World Service. Those were the days when Indians used a bit they had to stay well informed. It was not difficult to see a person on the street clutching a small radio set and listening to music as he walked by, much as almost everyone speaking on mobile phones today. Like in other countries around the world, Indians too rely on a combination of radio, television, movies, and music, besides devices like Internet-powered smartphones and portable music players for entertainment.¹

For years, Akashvani, the official broadcaster of India, dominated radio services in India. People across the country were exposed to ageless voices of presenters like Ameen Sayani and a mix of news, film songs, and comedy shows

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¹ Rabe T. Iyer, Business Head, 92.7 BIG FM.
they grew to love. This scenario changed when the government experimented with private FM broadcasts in the early 90s.

Partly from the time television arrived on the scene in a big way in the mid-seventies and much more so with the expansion of electronic media in the commercial sector, the public broadcasters in India feel more and more compelled to be defensive about what they stand for, to be apologetic. The commercialization of the media market was accompanied by strident attacks on the state-run broadcaster. Some popular arguments for attack being, ‘it is not the job of the government to run electronic media’, or ‘Why should public pay for programming that they don’t watch’. While some of the arguments may sound true, it is important to examine what lead to this popular perception.

**Not the Job of the Government to run Broadcasting**

This wisdom dawned on the third world intellectuals after President Reagan popularised deregulation in the overall economy and more specifically in the media industries in United States of America. The mid-80s and 90s saw a spate of regulatory fiat which opened up the markets for private sector media players all over the world. The argument was that the private sector is more responsive and will cater to the needs of the market with greater efficiency, while ensuring diversity.

The advent of private broadcasters was greeted with great excitement and anticipation. But soon, the private enterprises’ business priorities made it clear to the consumer/ audience that diversity and innovation are not a priority to the private operators. Unlike the state-run broadcasting, neither did private enterprise privilege the cultural and national goals.

The reality of private sector’s actual performance in the marketplace is unfolding before us every day much to the chagrin of parents, teachers and civil society in general. The private sector not only failed to cater to the needs of the people, it chases success formulas, without diversity and without much creativity. It is frenetic, market driven and is changing the cultural landscape of the country into a quagmire of immorality, corruption and violence. With this experience of
what the private sector broadcasting is capable of, there is little doubt that a large section of the population is looking for an alternative. Broadcasting being technology intensive and capital intensive, it is well understood that it is either the deep pockets of big business or the state that can set up broadcasting enterprises.

The Indian state built up a formidable terrestrial broadcasting network over the last 62 years after Independence. The network continues to be the most watched in terms of sheer reach to all nooks and corners of the country and cutting across all classes of audience. The miniscule ratings that the satellite channels boast of are no competition to the extraordinary access Prasar Bharati has to its audience. It also serves the interests of a vast rural, poor audience who do not have disposable income and who are not valued as consumers by the commercial media. This in itself is an important contribution.

But the impact of rapid and successful expansion of commercial media industry on Prasar Bharati has been adverse over the years, not so much in loss of commercial revenue but in loss of policy direction. The public broadcaster began to convince itself that to fight this market, it is necessary to lose its essence and to mimic the competition. The successful public broadcasters across the globe have cautiously avoided this and strengthened their programming strategies instead to provide a high quality alternative to the commercial product. It is for Prasar Bharati to rediscover its former clarity of vision and provide healthy entertainment and information to the audience. More than ever, it is necessary for the state to strengthen its broadcast set up to provide a credible alternative to the commercial broadcasting.

The answer to the statement that it is not the job of the government to run electronic media is, it is the job of the government to protect the public from the onslaught of commercial media by providing alternate cultural products. India is known to be a very different kind of market. It is well known that subscription channels like the BBC and Discovery are doing well in India. There is a fairly good chunk of audience that is willing to support good programming. Only the larger publicly funded systems (BBC of UK and PBS/NPR of USA) will have the wherewithal to take on
the commercial channels. The public broadcaster must revive its faith in its audience and address their cultural needs.

**Why should Public Pay for Programming that They don’t Watch?**

The implication of such a statement is: Commercial broadcasting is providing what the public wants and therefore gets ratings and advertisements. Advertising supported media is free. Expensive media products are generated and delivered to the audience free of cost. This is a myth that has been actively promoted by the media industry and the advertisers. The issue really is what is being watched and in which context and who is paying for what. Advertising-driven content has many peculiarities to it. Firstly, it assumes much about what the viewer/listener wants and by repeatedly promoting some products and ideas, normalises them. For instance, the newly launched FM stations do not have access to much of high quality music that AIR has. However, by repeatedly playing what is available and presentation couched in bantering conversation with the listener is insidiously making the listening experience ‘interesting’. It is this poor quality product attractively packaged that makes money quickly and moves on to something new, which is the primary characteristic of commercial media business, some kind of hit and run strategy.

The other is, if any charge is associated with the experience of media products, the scenario will be different, as is evident from Rupert Murdoch’s media empire grappling with the idea of charging for its products. Respected establishments like the BBC (domestic and online, not the world service) are providing very high quality product free and without the support of advertising. News Corporation is hesitating to charge as it may lose a large segment of its current ‘patrons’. This more or less leads us to the point that the news and entertainment consumer will not pay for what he is supposed to be wanting from his media house if it is to be paid for. Crime, sensationalism and disaster news and mindless entertainment that is advertiser-supported and free to the consumer, will have far lesser chance when the consumer begins to play the role of a ‘rational being’ in the economy and spends only on products he perceives as Value-for-Money. This already operates in the film industry.
Films that don’t make the cut fail at the box office. The film-goer will not spend his hard-earned money on a poorly made film. However, he may well see it when it is shown on television ‘free’. This does not give us the liberty to claim that that’s what the audience really wants. Much poor quality programming gets by because it’s there, and it’s free.

There is a need to make the audience aware of the enormous material and cultural cost of advertising to the consumer. By perpetuating the myth that advertiser supported programming is free, we are not just helping to cover up the hidden social and cultural costs of advertising, we are also getting the audience to accept a much poorer standard of programming... (we cannot be too demanding about what we don’t even pay for, can we? Even if we are, who’s listening?).

Delivering his acceptance speech at the International Press Institute Award 2007, the eminent editor-in-chief of Outlook group of publications, Mr Vinod Mehta said, “...content is a mix of what the reader wants and what he does not want. The trick is to marry the two and make money.” More importantly, he concluded, “really great journalism must do more than merely give people what they want. There has to be room for the unexpected, for stories the public has no idea it wants until it sees them...” Ideally, this would be a fitting motto for good public broadcasting too. A good broadcaster also leads audience tastes, doesn’t always follow them.

Common belief about public broadcasting is that it guzzles public money. When public money is invested, it also carries the onus of providing programming that is of use. But in the case of AIR and Doordarshan, the licensing revenues and advertising revenues that they earn are not always available for improving programming. Historically, there has been an obsession with technological expansion at the cost of programming, added to this, the new mantra of all public enterprises, self-sufficiency.

No public broadcasting enterprise can be expected to survive merely as a profit centre. Expenditure on public broadcasting is an investment in the future of a community. Leaving the cultural landscape entirely to the private enterprise is to
abdicate the responsibility of the state in protecting the cultural diversity and integrity of the nation (just as the state is also responsible for the unity and integrity of the country).

Looking to the Future

There is a world-wide debate today to reclaim the cultural space usurped by commercial interests much to the degradation of social life. While there are some reservations on how effective state-run broadcasting can be in doing this, it is an opportune time to ride the public sentiment and regain the lost ground. A public broadcaster’s identity is closely tied to the kind of programmes it can deliver and the value-for money it can create in public perception. For this, the public broadcaster needs firstly to be proud of its achievements; while boasting of a proud legacy, it also needs to get young and speak to a 21st century nation of young people. Be present on the net - on Facebook, Twitter and other sites to create a buzz on important issues that the broadcasters are focusing on. Interestingly, All India Radio is already on facebook... but wait a minute... it’s not our Akashvani... it is an Australian music band!

Possibilities

Considering the recent changes in radio technology and programming patterns in the industry due to commercialization and consumerism, it is high time to search for new possibilities for survival of contemporary NPPs or cheek for new alternatives in its place either in the present form or in a form with some modifications to suit people’s interests and time to be devoted to listening to NPPs. There was a time and age where families gathered around to listen to their radio plays – NPPs or series the way they do TV series today.

A we know, radio (or audio) drama is a curious medium. NPPs are also a part of radio drama. It contains morals and messages, creates suspense, gives informations, highlights problems, provides solutions, enriches our cultures, maintains traditions and also makes search for new techniques for storytelling to listeners to entertain and educate them. But with the emerging changes and
scheduling pattern of NPPs and other radio plays, we, most of the times, express doubt that a day would come when the popular and traditional dramatic slots in the radio programme schedule would be completely taken over by other programmes including commercials. As in the contemporary present scheduling of programmes, the usual slots for dramatic presentation, the time allotted is normally 30 minutes to 60 minutes. The case of NPPs is almost the same. This indicates that radio drama takes usually a more time compared to other radio programmes and there is little scope or no scope at all to include commercial in between presentation of such a radio play when aired for listeners to entertain them. According to the BBC, 90- minute drama are problematic because few people have the time listen them all. Long drama slots now tend to be scheduled for holidays when people are likely to have the time. The people get little time or no time at all to listen to this traditional medium plays. They readily accept the most modern and easily accessible medium for entertainment, and this is one of the reasons that the audience itself becoming limited. Radio play now-a-days attracts the smallest audience of station’s drama output. And that its budget is also becoming limited. The programers generally go for fund-diversion method i.e. they usually divert funds towards producing those programmes which earn something at least in commercial term instead of going for production of plays which only provides entertainment. They even prefer to resort to the cost-cutting plans which means that money has to be saved across its output, and radio drama is no exception. Cutting budget across radio drama could well result in a dip in quality. Most listeners would prefer, we think, less done better than a full schedule of below-par plays.

Along with the fall in quality, the quality of NPPs and other radio plays, both at national and regional levels, has gradually been decreasing in terms of numbers day-by-day. The result is more repeats of such plays. The radio drama fans in India and beyond are concerned not only about the loss of this beloved time slot, but of the implications of the move for the future radio drama and NPPs (at least as a terrestrial radio broadcast).
Radio drama like NPP needs to think the unthinkable and begin to look to at the recording itself as a visual experience, treating it as an event and working to create a genuine sense of occasion around it that will, in turn, translate into the broadcast experience.

For the medium to survive and grow, we must find ways to encourage experimentation; to platform the work of young people and resist the temptation to over-produce it. Let’s keep the mistakes, the flaws, the misjudgements. It is only by doing so that we’ll create space for the moments of rule breaking genius, humour and fear that make for truly great radio drama.

New Style : Future Drive

NPPs and other radio drama still remain popular in much of the world, though most material is now available through internet download rather than heard over terrestrial or satellite radio. What radio drama needs right now is a total rebirth from the ground up. It needs rediscovering at the local level by passionate creative writers who want to reshape an artform so old it has almost completely disappeared. And yet it can become completely new again in the right hands.

The first step for the novice radio dramatist is to undertake considerable research. One just need to find out what has already been done for inspiration and so he or she does not waste time completely reinventing the wheel. This process will open his or her mind to the exciting and limitless creative possibilities of radio drama. It is not just TV or films without pictures. The pictures in radio drama are so much better than anything possible on a visual screen, because they happen wholly in the listener’s imagination.

It is a good and positive sign that attempts have been made by a few public broadcasters for re-discovering radio drama. Accordingly, sometimes the traditional radio stations make arrangements for drama workshops, hold seminars and discussions for revamping this artform to keep alive even in future. Recently in an workshop arranged at RTI of AIR, Vazhuthacaud, G.M. Shirahalli, SD, AIR /
Doordarshan, Bangalore explained this important aspect in the following words:

“We are looking at the possibilities of revamping the genre of radio drama. It is an art form that is unique to radio and needs an exclusive production style. Almost any other item broadcast on radio can be borrowed from another medium; for instance, a speech or songs or even the voice-over of a movie. But radio drama has to be planned and produced exclusively for this broadcast medium.”

In the same workshop, K.A. Muraleedharan, Station Director, AIR, Thiruvananthapuram also said: “If the public service broadcasting organization, which AIR is, stops producing radio dramas, the genre will die out in due course since none of the private broadcasters take interest in it.”

However, in spite of all such efforts, there is a huge amount of fear and uncertainty about its future. The amount of time dedicated to an NPP or radio drama is now a big question due to constant threat from approach to commercial revenue. Radio drama remains the same, but many listeners feel resources have been out back and diverted into more popular stories, though drama is the heart of the programme schedule and entertain them most.

Moreover, due to recent change in the technology and broadcasting system, new techniques and processes of recording and producing a radio play have been emerging. One of such important emergence in the technique is discussed as follows:

Podcasting-Recording and Producing a Radio Play

Podcasts are now commonplace, with almost anybody being able to produce one themselves if they wish. However, with a little thought and a little extra effort, it’s possible to take this new medium to a whole new level and produce one’s own radio play.

Thanks to the advent of digital audio and the power of modern PCs (personal computer) it is now well within the capabilities of virtually anyone to produce and

2. The New Indian Express, Saturday, Nov. 23, 2013
publish their own radio play using the same technologies as used in Podcasting. Podcasting is a mainstream phenomenon, largely thanks to the ubiquitous iPod. Virtually anybody can produce their own podcast with a cheap microphone and a personal computer. With today’s technology, attention has been shifting away from movies, television and radio to computers. Nearly every entertainment and business process is able to take place on a computer, and people are looking to the Internet to find media and useful information. One example of the move away from other media to the web is the development of Webcasts. Essentially, webcasts are broadcasts of recorded or live presentations via the Internet. Since their introduction, webcasts have begun to compete with television and radio broadcasts of news, events and business events, and they present an easy and effective way to transmit recordings to a huge number of people at once.

The technology behind Webcasts is relatively simple. An audio or visual system picks up the audio or video one wants to stream and transfers it to a host’s computer. Then it is encoded using special software and delivered to a server called a content delivery network (CDN). The CDN is used to bring the content to the Internet. When the content is delivered, it can either be viewed live or recorded, so that people can watch it after it happened. When people view or listen to the webcast, a media program or their computer will decode and convert the webcast from the CDN to stream.

Thus, it is found that many innovative and technological changes have been emerging in radio industry day by day resulting major deviations in the mode and process of technique of production of radio plays including NPPs. The listeners are also developing new tastes and habits and instead of listening to a radio play or NPP of long duration as is generally found in case of an NPP, they like to listen to a radio play, particularly an NPP of short duration. Because most of the listeners remain busy now-a-days with their routine works and they do not have enough time to be devoted to listening to any radio play, though it might be very interesting and informative. The public policy shifted from purely entertaining the listeners through variety of different radio programmes to commercial revenue earnings has also
reduced its scope to a great extent. Therefore, a doubt is expressed regarding the existence of an NPP, and if it exists, it will, perhaps, lose its present form, characters and style. The result is evident. The most of the regional AIR stations including AIR Guwahati are found to be reluctant to relay the NPPs b’cast through AIR, Delhi on scheduled date and time. They do not even get the NPPs translated into their own regional languages and make provision for broadcast as per their schedule. They are, in fact, growing the habit to convert this slot allotted to NPPs to some other programmes which are commercially viable and profitable.

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