CHAPTER 7

A PERSPECTIVE
In India, today, people are not interested in politics. The study conducted by me revealed that out of 200 respondents, only 48 respondents envisaged interest in politics while 152 persons were not at all interested in politics. Out of those interested, 48 respondents, urban respondents (32) envisaged more interest than rural (16). To put the response sexwise, male respondents (39) showed much greater response than female (9). Age-wise analysis showed that "18-25 years" group showed greater interest (31), followed by "25-35 years group (15). The response of "35-45" age group was meager (2). Whereas there was no response from above "45 years" age-group. Education-wise analysis showed that higher the education, more the interest was envisaged. "Above graduation" group showed greater interest (11/27) and "upto graduation" (20/59) and "upto secondary" group (14/47) whereas "illiterate" group showed very little interest (3/67). (1)

The intensive interaction with the communicators and the communicated revealed that they detest politics, politicians and their methods adopted for the political communication. They also firmly believed that whatever measures are taken by the politicians, are for only securing petty ends. They resort to gathering wealth and retaining it. Same is the case with power. These politicians try to remain in power and come back to power. For this, they resort to lies". Politics, even sixty years' before, was considered dirty. The intellectual writer Lord Backon wrote an essay entitled "Art of Political Lying." Lying was considered to be an art. The greater the capacity of lying of a politician, he was considered to be more intellectual. The politician is expert in exploiting others. Particularly, he exploits the under-privileged and makes the rich richer and creates a suitable environment to meet his needs. He tries to prove that whatever is done by him is for the betterment of people. (2)
Today, political communication presented by mass media do not and can not be effective and useful to meet people's requirements. People accept facts provided by these media; but they also consider the facts presented to them distorted, willfully suppressed as the governing authorities desire—effecting a black-out of some portions of facts and politically coloured as their bosses want them to be.(3)

People also feel that facts regarding formulation of policy, facts in regard to vital issues in which they are interested, and matters which affect their daily life are presented by media comparatively very less. The net result that accrues from these circumstances is that feeling of integration, loyalty and a feeling of participation is not generated in them.(4) In democracy, feeling of participation is a "must". Or, democracy's survival will be at stake. Information regarding working of democratic process is in the interest of people as well democracy itself. In democracy, people's taking interest, sustaining interest, imbibing spirit of having more and more information, evaluating information gathered, enable them to be informed and participative respondents.(5)

People do not quite appreciate mass-media's presentations. In spite of this, they continue to read, see or listen and depend on them. The impact of mass media's political communication is rather less so far as sources of information and opinion building aspects are concerned. These are difficult problems and mass media in order to function for democratic processes and serving public needs, require a new perspective, a new angle, new vision and new vistas. Mass media in its new perspective will have to renovate their presentation, in form, content and style to meet ever-changing needs of people.(6) A static and traditional approach can not deliver good. In the new perspective, mass media will have to create a sense of placing nation's interest supreme at heart. Local, regional, national and international issues will have to be presented with harmonising and co-ordinating all these viewpoints.
Role of political communication in India:

Three objectives are set forth for media of mass communication. These objectives to state in brief are as under:

1. Entertainment
2. Information
3. Education and Development (7)

India is a multi-culture, multi-linguistic and multi-dimensional nation. The goal of mass media underscored so far is not satisfactory as it does not meet the needs of such a continental polity and society. Prevalent situation is taken into account, and the fact that the goal of mass media goes beyond this understanding is stressed upon in this thesis. Specifically stating that the goal of mass media is not merely political communication, but enabling people to live a democratic way of life. (8) People must understand what democracy is and to be democratic. For this, citizens will have to be conversant with the basic principles and processes of democracy.

With this concept, the ultimate aim of mass media should be to create a conducive atmosphere in which adult citizens are well-informed and are committed to healthy democracy. Mass media should fulfill this aim by providing full information, make them concerned with the state of affairs at all levels, motivate them for discussions and analysis of factual information presented to them. If this basic aspect is properly presented before people, automatically a suitable atmosphere will be created where people will be active participants in governing the country. (9) They will be able to live a democratic way of life and that is the goal of mass media in democratic political system.

For the fulfillment of this goal, mass media will have to adopt three modes of operation as under: India has comparatively a low literacy rate. For the growth of democracy and understanding by people, inculcating a sense of becoming literate must be given top priority. Therefore, mass media in the first instance will have to
pay much more attention to literacy, functional literacy and social awareness. Secondly, mass media will have to inculcate scientific temperament in people to judge events and information in place of going merely by emotions and sentiments. Then only people will have environmental consciousness and will face natural calamities like floods, drought, earthquakes etc. courageously. People will be able to have a correct concept. Concepts of people may differ but the democratic growth should continue unbeaten.(10)

Thirdly, the mass media will have to work for percolation of useful and relevant information in time. Information imparted after the occasion has passed over, it does not enable people to have correct understanding of the process. Precisely for this reason, information should be imparted throughout the whole process.

People living below poverty line have no free access to mass media. Information should be provided to this unprivileged class in the language they understand.(12) If access is provided, it will be an investment in democracy which will pay rich dividends in much less a period than what is visualised at present.(13)

What is required is not a flow from top. Flow from top has a single or very few channels. But if numerous streams of thoughts flow from bottom, mass media will speed up its goal of being responsible and accountable to people. This will become comparatively very effective as people's various channels (pressure lobbies) compel those who govern the country to accept their views. This process itself will lead to the specific goal of democratic way of life. (14)

**Desired Communication Approach:**

Total innovation of the existing pattern of communication through mass media is required. Mass media have to accept that the envisaged desired communication approach demands fundamental change in the concepts of communication. Mass media will have to work sincerely on the principle of "people's sovereignty" in democracy. Will of communicators, politicians or bureaucrats can
not prevail and should not prevail. (15) Communication system should ensure that ultimately the will of people prevails. For this, everybody including alert citizens should make conscious and dedicated efforts to see that people's will is translated faithfully in its true spirit. (16) It is imperative that democratic principles are observed in the process of governing the affairs of the nation. People's communication and information needs have to be ascertained. The new communication approach should be need-based and public-oriented.

The previous chapters on the perception of the communicators as well as of the adult citizens clearly point out a negative image of mass media in public mind. The new approach should take cognizance of this trend. Even the word "politics" has a different connotation in public mind due to the reasons known to all. Under the circumstances, political communication requires a very sincere and dedicated thrust on the part of mass media policy planners. To put it briefly, there is a need for evolving a suitable approach by mass media that may fulfill cultural, socio-economic and political needs of the people.

Pre-requisites:

Mass media should make vigorous thrust on the following twelve points pre-requisites of fruitful and useful communication approach.

1. Acquainting people with progressive views on burning topics to enable them to modify their static opinions and lead them to form fresher, newer and dynamic approach. (17)

2. Mass media to-day have more of a propagative approach. This should be minimised to the maximum extent. Informative approach should be given large share whether in a news or discussions, features, articles or documentaries.

3. People should have concern over political reforms and their impact on people's life. Mass media should make
people sensitive to political reforms by giving details of these reforms and how they affect their lives.(18)

4. Mass media will have to establish their credibility. People should have faith that whatever mass media communicate is true and useful to them.

5. Information and analysis should be presented in such a way that outmoded and outdated opinions held by people can be eliminated. People's opinions may be moulded to meet their present requirements. If this is done effectively, people will evince interest in new things and work for their welfare as they will understand the hurdles and barriers of their progress.(19)

6. Mass media have no effective people-oriented feedback mechanism. Reactions of people, their acceptance of the contents, their desire to mould them, presentations, criticism are not received by the mass media communicators as they ought to be.

7. Mass media should activise people and generate atmosphere where people start raising their voice.(20)

8. A big gap exists between those who govern and those who are governed. Mass media must provide information regarding duties and rights of elected representatives inside the House and outside the House to enable people to understand. This will make clear whether politicians raise issues pertaining to people or not. This will compel elected representatives to visit their constituencies regularly and remain responsible and accountable to people.

9. Mass media must be wedded to openness. Nothing should be kept secret from people and there should be free flow of information at every stage on every aspect.(21) It may be defence policy or foreign policy, corporate or fiscal policy or any national, regional and local issue. Then, there will be response of citizens and they will respond to all governing affairs. By adopting this approach, mass media can bring about political awareness in people and strengthen the grass-roots of democracy.
10. Mass media should explain and strengthen political processes. They should give considerable presentation to proceedings of judiciary and legislative besides executive. Unless people understand proceedings of these three wings of government, they will never grasp the importance of political processes. Mass media will have to inculcate understanding of political processes in public mind. (22)

11. One major task before mass media is to present "politicians in action". (23) This can be done by giving details of how the politicians behave in the internal affairs of the party, how they behave with opposition parties and how they behave with people. This type of exposure by mass media will enable people to evaluate the politicians' performance as well as their efforts for the reconstruction of society on the normative lines set forth in the constitution.

12. Micro-level activists' groups are working for political consciousness in different states of our country. If mass media project their work, functioning style and objectives, these groups may come closer and unitedly work for the same cause. Besides, individuals interested in the same ideology may get incentive and encouragement to extend their support to the active groups. As a result, political alertness and awareness will be channelised. (24)

Two-way Communication:

In a developing country like India, there should be a two-way political communication between the communicator and the receiver. The two-way flow alone can generate conditions which can lead to healthy democracy. (25) It should be horizontal and vertical. To put it graphically, it will be as follows:
Two-way communication:

Sender (-----------------)  Receiver

Horizontal and Vertical communication:

Sender
\[ \uparrow \]
\[ \| \]
\[ \| \]
\[ \downarrow \]

Receiver (-----------------) Receiver

Participatory approach:

The ultimate aim of political communication is to echo the true concept of democracy i.e. "Democracy is of the people, for the people and by the people." People's involvement and participation is the integral element approach in the process of governing the affairs of the country. Similarly, people's involvement and participation is an unavoidable precondition in political communication. Communicators and receivers should be considered as equal partners in the communication process. (26) Else, it would not yield useful results in building up democratic way of life.

The dictionary meaning of people's participation in the affairs of the nation is "sharing". But this meaning is limited. In this thesis, I have widened the horizons of people's participation and as such the meaning and significance of the term "participation" takes altogether a new connotation: "Exchange of initiatives, reactions and responses from both the ends."
To limit people's participation in governing the affairs of the country by providing structural form in mass political communication does not serve the purpose. The people should be the center in democracy. People-oriented communication is the very basis of democracy. The genuine and true spirit of democracy should be projected in content and presentation. The very concept of considering political communication as structural form damages projection of the spirit of democracy which demands dedication and sincerity for serving interests of the people.

The spirit of serving interests of the masses and keeping them in the center should be imbibed in direct as well as indirect projection by mass media. In direct projection, people should be able to present their viewpoints without assistance of any one. They should be able to project themselves through their voice, writing, music, art, physical presence etc.

In direct projection, only few people who are vocal, expressive and who are well exposed to the governing affairs of the state can participate. In our country, a very large majority of people are not able to project their problems and views. Under the circumstances, task of indirect projection by mass media becomes very difficult. The mass communicators will have to understand needs, aspirations, demands of this vast majority of people. They will have to present analysis of these things in simple intelligible language. "India" means these people and dedication and sincerity of communicators to serve interests of people can alone assist in realising this goal.

If direct projection in general and indirect projection in particular is resorted to by the mass media, then people and communicators both will have a sense of identification in their minds and hearts. Along with this, filters and barriers of communication process will be largely removed. This, in turn, will make political communication much more effective, fruitful and people-oriented. (27)
Four stages:

Instead of the hardware led mass media software policy, the planners should evolve a "need based people-oriented software policy and should try to have multi-media approach. This can be achieved in the following four stages:

1. People-oriented mode of acquiring the facts/information

2. People-oriented mode of processing of the facts/information

3. People-oriented mode of presenting the facts/information and

4. People-oriented feedback mechanism to offer (built-in) corrective measures.

With regard to stage one the mass-media communicators should obtain information of what people speak, listen, see and think. The communicators should make indepth study of people's "Felt needs" i.e. the requirements felt and narrated by the people. This can be done by evolving a mechanism that keeps track of regular assessment of people's changing needs. These "felt needs" should be supplemented by the "perceived needs" by the communicators as these people are not aware of interpreting, analysing and ways to solve them.

Full justice can be accorded to stage two if facts and information are analysed and processed by adopting "public-oriented" mode. Mass media communicators have to put aside their elite, educational, urban and personal bias and keep the target audience i.e. "receivers" in view. For this, they will have to come down to the level and requirement of this large majority of people and process facts and information gathered. Processing should consider socio/ecomonic, language, educational, political and cultural background of people in mind.

In stage three, when facts and information are presented to people, the analysis of the facts should not be an
intellectual exercise. The mass media communicators should make presentation and analysis "utility oriented" and present matters relevant to people's problems. With this approach, communication can be more faithfully "people-oriented".

Communicators should provide facts, process, analysis in the language people understand. The approach of "known to unknown" should be followed. The entry level and take off point of presentation should be according to the level of knowledge, attitude and practice of the receiver. "Unknown" content should be presented in the acceptable fashion.

The communicator should not rest contented merely by presenting the acquired information. He should be concerned for the impact of the conscious communication strategy he has adopted. For his own understanding of the extent of achievement of the objective, he should evaluate the receivers' reactions, responses, filters, barriers and expectation. Accordingly, he should change and improve his communication strategy. An effective feedback mechanism, may it be in form of receivers' letters, impact-survey, continuous exposure and interaction with the receivers etc. maximises the chances of success of communication.

My association with people at the places they reside commenced a decade before when I started working as a researcher during the course of fulfillment of work assigned to me at Development Educational Communication Unit at ISRO. This enabled me to communicate with people. That also acquainted with their responses and reactions, their problems and requirements. Particularly the inevitable need of people's participation in political communication was felt by me. Consciously and semi-consciously my thought processes began to work on this need. This thinking left traces on my mind and went on leaving rather concrete and visible marks in my approach and thinking level. A decade after I am inclined to formulate assumptions on these lines that
the people oriented approach must be adopted as the sole motive by mass-communicators. The result was this thesis which tests this assumption.

As a student of political science and a citizen keen to maintain values of democracy, I was always worried that public's say in governing affairs of the state must have a "final say" in political communication. The combination of education in politics and consciousness of alert citizen wedded to democracy, were instrumental in imparting this subject, a positive shape in this thesis.

More responsible projection of contents and presentation in a lucid intelligible style must be adopted by mass media at all levels and particularly at a top-level. This is imperative because people at large should understand the details of the issues/subjects projected and be able to evince more interest in them. They also should be able to offer their views. This conviction made me lay thrust on participatory approach.

The methods for public-oriented approach already presented in this thesis, became all the more relevant with the recent trends, particularly during last months, after the formation of National Front Government.

The President, Mr. R. Venkatraman's address to a joint session of Parliament in Council Hall was telecast live for the first time in Indian democracy on February 20, 1990. This was the first major step towards acquainting people with the affairs inside the House. This need has been already stressed in the thesis.

The other steps mentioned in the thesis of conferring autonomy to AIR and Doordarshan, providing free flow of information and not withholding vital information from people as well as from Parliament also advocating openness of governance and its functions in full public views— all seem to be taking shape in proper perspective.

The President said that "the Government believed in openness and would function in full public view. For
this purpose, the Official Secrets Act would suitably be removed from the statue book..." He also declared "The new government's intention to an alternative model of governance and development based on socialist ideals of economic equality and social justice and federalism and decentralisation institutional accountability and human rights". (29) This declaration, if followed in spirit, would lead to healthy growth of democracy, the need which is emphasised in my thesis.

Among many other policy statements, two may be mentioned, as they are of great relevance to the thesis. They clearly state conferring autonomy to AIR and Doordarshan and not withholding any information of vital importance to public. This has been the main thrust in my thesis and I hope that the recent trends would continue and people will be politically more conscious and aware.

"The Prime Minister would be brought under the purview of the Lok Pal, a legislation for the setting up of which would be introduced in the current session of the Parliament to tackle corruption. The government would also confer autonomy to AIR and Doordarshan.

While the Constitution would be amended for meeting the citizen's right to information, the amendments to Commission of Enquiry Act, which permitted withholding of vital information from people and Parliament would be removed from the statue book." (30)

(The Times of India, - December 21, 1989)

The Union Minister for Information and Broadcasting, Mr. P. Upendra, while introducing the historic Prasar Bharati (Broadcasting Corporation of India) Bill in the Lok Sabha on December 29, 1989 said that "till the Corporation comes into existence, the five-member Board with sufficient authority will ensure that programming is objective, impartial and of the highest quality."

Outlining the composition of the Board of Governors, the Union Minister said "the Corporation will have a Board
of Governors - four full time governors and two part
time governors who will be people of eminence in various
fields of relevance to media...... to truely ensure
autonomy, the government would have virtually no say in
the appointment of chairman and governors. They will be
appointed by the President on the recommendations of a
Committee consisting of the Chairman of the Council of
States, the Chairman of the Press Council and a nominee
of the President. The expiry of the term will involve
the same procedure required for removal of the Chairman
and the members of the committee.(31)

(The Times of India, December 30, 1989)

Regarding autonomy, certain views which require to be
considered are presented in the print medium either in
editorials or in statements of the people who know
implications of autonomy.

Interview with Mr. B.G. Verghese:

"Akash Bharati", the 1978 Verghese Commission report
proposing autonomy for the National Radio and Television
Network has, of late, resurfaced like an unquiet ghost.
The new government of National Front had made one of the
first promises to the nation on conferring autonomy on
these two media this month.

Accountability to people

"Our suggestions have to be in a specific frame of
reference," said Mr. B.G. Verghese. "Autonomy, yes, but
from whom? And for what?"

Mr. Verghese explained that the factor of accountability
came as a parallel with autonomy. "If people feel they
are being misrepresented through distortions, biases or
malice, they should be permitted to appeal for review to
an independent complaints commission constituted
explicitly for this purpose which will make its findings
public. The government must have some reserve powers,
which can be enforced if they feel a broadcast is anti-
national or a threat to peace and security. But if this
censorship is exercised, the broadcasters must get the
statement from the Center in writing. They must also inform the public that these restraints are being imposed. Similarly with programmes the government insists be put on the air." (32)

"Smriti Vohra," Media Autonomy: Conversation with B.G. Verghese".

(The Times of India, January 13, 1989).

All encompassing Action Plan:

A time-bound action plan, approved by the cabinet, envisaged land reforms, a long term fiscal policy, new support price for agriculture, special programmes for urban poor, amendment of the official secrets Act to ensure the citizens right to information, special measures for minorities, setting up a cabinet sub-committee to consider recommendations of the Mandal Commission for backward classes, setting up of special courts for expeditious disposal of cases relating to caste, communal riots and atrocities, an employment guarantee scheme etc. Information in regard to these issues were given in full details with analysis intelligible to people by news, interviews, features etc. by AIR and TV for the first time. Even print medium gave considerable space to these issues. The pattern of providing people with information in a way they understand began to emerge. One of the vital thrusts to make information public-oriented started taking place and this trend, as it seems, will continue. Once a desirable thing is done, even if the other government comes, it can not go back upon it. It will, therefore, not be incorrect to say "change-actions" for better political communication will yet be bettered.

(A summary from a news item titled "Fair Deal for ryots, jobless", The Times of India, January 2, 1990).

In the editorial of 'The Times of India', January 8, 1990 entitled "Electronic Autonomy", many points incorporated in the thesis are spelt out as under:
(1) A Turning point in the History of Radio and Television:

To judge by the deliberations of a national colloquium on autonomy for Doordarshan and AIR organised by this newspaper in the capital last Friday, the political class as a whole now appears to favour greater independence for the two electronic media.

(2) Stage set at the level of resolve:

The stage is, therefore, set at least at the level of resolve, to examine the issue in a relatively dispassionate spirit. All the same, as the speeches at the colloquium made it clear, consensus on the resolve does not and can not prelude differences on the nature and scope of the autonomy that is sought to be conferred on radio and television.

(3) Key questions:

In this regard, the questions pertain to the structures and manning of the new outfit and its functioning. Fears have been expressed that bureaucrats and political appointees will continue to hold sway in the governing bodies, giving short shrift to professionals both within and outside the organisation.

A good deal of fine tuning - especially on such matters as the accountability of the new outfit to Parliament and the public at large - is not only possible but also very much in order. In the end, however, what will matter is the excellence of the programmes. Indeed there is no earthly reason why the government can not take steps right away to encourage more creativity on TV and radio.

Freening AIR and DD:

A national consensus on the future of Doordarshan and AIR now exists at least at the level of first principles. The next step will necessarily be complicated: Framing a charter for the autonomous bodies, determining their structure, ensuring their
mechanisms, accountability, setting up financing mechanisms, providing for a continuous flow of trained manpower and so on. On all these issues, experiences abroad can, and do provide, useful pointers though, clearly, any attempt to draw extensively on them will be counterproductive. The BBC is often cited as an example worthy of emulation. But the present controversy in Britain on Mrs Thatcher's efforts to allow "market forces" to ravage the media scene in that country surely cannot be ignored as we move towards autonomy for our electronic media. (34)

(Excerpt from the editorial ‘Freeing AIR & DD’, The Times of India. January 13, 1990)

viable Policy to end unleashing

Forces of anarchy:

The editorial in 'The Times of India.' (January 13, 1990) further analyses: 'These very issues have been examined already from every conceivable angle, notably by the Chanda Committee in 1966, the Varghese Committee in 1978 and by the working group of software for Doordarshan in 1985. Other organisations, such as Namedia and the Space Applications Center in Ahmedabad, have offered incisive insights. These various reports, taken together, must now be distilled to enable the government to enunciate a viable policy for Doordarshan and AIR. It would be a sad day if Doordarshan were to escape political pressures only to fall a victim of "market forces." Similarly, it would be a calamity if television after riding itself of its propagandist image, were to move to the other extreme of sensationalism. These and other pertinent issues need to be discussed threadbare. Otherwise, in its wholly legitimate eagerness to keep the word it has given to the electorate, the National Front government might well end up unleashing forces of anarchy in the all-too-sensitive fields of information and communication.
Bureaucratic way of governing affairs:

The Programme Staff Association of All India Radio and Doordarshan opines regarding the Autonomy to both these institutions..."The framework proposed in the Bill envisages all powers in the hands of administrators, financial wizards and so-called personnel management experts", Mr. Batra said" In fact, the draft of the Bill itself was entrusted perhaps to these very persons who have *consciously imposed shackles* on DD and AIR."

(emphasis added)

In other words, says the Association, the present ministerial set-up of two additional secretaries and a joint secretary is transplanted to the board, thus denying autonomy to the director-general, the professional head of the media. The purpose of these three full-time governors is all too apparent; it is an attempt to provide berths for these bureaucrats in the ministry who would be displaced with the birth of the corporation. As Mr. Batra put it, "the bureaucrat is now going to be a governor instead of a public servant." (35)


I have tried to evaluate the mass media performance from participatory perspective, assuming adult citizens as equal partners in the process of political communication. When I read the book of "Development and Social Justice: Micro Action by Weaker Sections" Written by Prof. Anil Bhatt, I was all the more convinced that my participatory approach was, indeed, pre-requisite for the development.

"This approach does not directly and explicitly challenge the existing political system and its political, economic and administrative institutions. It is concerned with participation and its various components: who participates, how far, the types and levels of participation, mechanisms and process of participation. (36)(Anil Bhatt, Development and Social Justice, Micro Action by Weaker Sections, p.24)
Mahendra Chaudhary of the Rajasthan Kisan Sangathan also argued that "People should be involved in these struggles dealing with their own local and immediate issues. This would bring about awareness and consciousness. Once the poor and the deprived are thus aroused others would join leading to a macro-movement. But one must start with the small, the local and from the bottom. (37)

(Anil Bhatt, Development and Social Justice, Micro action by Weaker Sections, p.25).

The participatory approach advocated by this thesis to understand the role of mass media as "information carriers", "opinion builders" and "change - agents for awareness and consciousness" in political communication has been very well reflected in the recent trends. I am sure with the detailed analytical perspective presented by me will lead people to believe in a true healthy democratic role and mass-media will play a more positive role in realising this objective by removing all the filters and barriers.
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A Perspective

Communication for the people, of the people, and by the people.