

IMPACT OF MEDIA ON SOCIETY'S VALUES : SOME FACTS, SOME MYTHS - Abstract

There is no doubt that among the different forms of public communication available in the last half century, "media" has far outstripped its rivals like education, literature, visual and performing arts. As the topic is rather contentious and prone to value judgements, Jawhar Sircar focuses only on Indian media and on Indian societal values, giving palpable evidence as examples to prove facts and to debunk certain myths.

As head of one of the top international media organizations, he goes by the internationally accepted definition of media that covers television, print journalism, films and radio. To strengthen his arguments, he gives statistical information of the real economic impact of each sector within 'media', as a prelude to his discussion on their societal impact. He points out that while 'cinema', especially popular films, has attracted countless investigations and research, television and print media have less cerebral analyses to substantiate or rebut stereotypes, while academic work on the impact of radio in India is woefully poor.

To begin with, Sircar analyzes the impact of television news on viewers and refers to the latest reliable statistics of the Broadcast Audience Research to indicate that actual viewership of English TV news is so negligible that one may as well stop fretting or lauding cacophonous extremes. as they simply do not matter.

Where TV entertainment is concerned, there is cause to sit up and take note, as the 'magic unrealism' of popular soap operas have indeed impacted societal behaviour in India, as elsewhere and the speaker offers examples and viewership data in his argument.

Sircar then brings in facts revealed by the latest but lesser known field study in the most backward regions of India to reveal the hunger for infotainment channels like Discovery and National Geographic in these neo- or non-literate societies, giving insights into their interesting but strong aspirations. He also refers to the impact of DD's old serials like Mahabharata and Ramayan in poly-packing values and in awakening Hindu pride, and also to other serials that laced social messaging through entertainment, thereby captivating an entire generation of Indians through the State owned television. Sircar then cites the proven impact of popular films on society in India, and reiterates that some of these have been studied so threadbare that all one needs is to pick on some fascinating empirical studies on how films have prompted visible attitudinal changes.

He ends with the impact of radio in crafting a new "Indian nation" through the lyrics and melodies of the Hindi film industry over Vividh Bharati, to effectively supersede other regional counter-pulls, with some assistance from patriotism aroused during the three intervening wars and other events celebrations of Republic and Independence Days - that acted as Binders'.

Jawhar Sircar has headed the world's largest and extremely problematic broadcasting network, Prasar Bharati, for five years, administering almost 500 Radio and TV stations of Akashvani and Doordarshan.

He has received several media awards for taking up reforms in the old, orthodox public broadcaster despite stiff opposition. Sircar holds the unique distinction of being a rare non-journalist and non-broadcaster to be voted unanimously as Vice President of the ABU, a 70-nation international forum of broadcasters.

Before this assignment, he was India's longest serving Culture Secretary where his outstanding contribution was acknowledged in glowing terms by both the PM and the President of India. He has also received international recognition for his efforts and the Duke of Gloucester conferred on him the Silver Medal of the British Museum.

In his private life, Jawhar Sircar is known for his research and writings on history, culture and religion. His regular pieces in the Anandabazar Patrika on religious festivals of India are widely read and appreciated. In the recent past, he has been invited to address over a dozen foreign universities and institutes on issues relating to the Media and on aspects of Indian Civilization.

Late Professor Tapan Raychaudhuri of Oxford commended "his exceptional analytical power and depth of knowledge in diverse fields", while Chicago University has called him "an outstanding historical and interpretive anthropologist whose brilliant career in administration stood in the way of his scholarly work".

He has resigned as CEO of Prasar Bharati in November to renew his academic ties.

Sircar has an inimitably humorous style of making light his talks on serious subjects, through presentations of colourful slides and his frequent jibes. He takes care to avoid professorial jargon and reaches his audience through simple direct communication and plebeian examples.

Published on the occasion of the Second National Trust of Bengal Lecture delivered by Sri Jawhar Sircar, former CEO, Prasar Bharati, on 14 December 2016 at Rotary Sadan, Kolkata organized by the National Trust of Bengal In association with the Society for Preservation, Calcutta.