

GLOBALISATION VS LOCALISATION: PRESERVING CULTURAL IDENTITIES AND SUSTAINING DEVELOPMENT IN SOUTHERN INDIA

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Abstract

The core argument of this paper is that local, regional and national media in India, though state funded and controlled by the government, are thriving and thereby promote and sustain ethnic cultures among remote, hill audiences in Southern India. The paper argues that although the remote audiences have exposure to and strongly engage themselves with the global television channels through satellite cable television network, they also regularly consult local channels such as radio for locally relevant, development messages and information. These conclusions have been reached from an in depth qualitative audience ethnographic study of three indigenous communities living in the Nilgiri Hills in Tamil Nadu, Southern India.

Abstrak

Persoalan utama kertas kerja ini adalah media tempatan, wilayah dan nasional di India walaupun ditaja dan dikawal oleh kerajaan tetap berkembang pesat, dan telah berjaya mempromosi dan mengekalkan budaya etnik di kalangan masyarakat terpencil, khalayak pergunungan di Selatan India. Walaupun masyarakat terpencil ini mempunyai pendedahan dan mengikat hubungan sesama sendiri dengan televisyen global melalui rangkaian kabel satelit, mereka juga secara kerap mengadakan rundingan dengan saluran tempatan seperti radio bagi mendapat informasi dan berita pembangunan yang relevan dengan masyarakat tempatan. Hasil kajian ini diperolehi melalui kajian etnografik khalayak secara mendalam, temubual mendalam, kumpulan fokus dan pemerhatian turut serta terhadap tiga komuniti asli yang tinggal di Nilgiri Hills di Tamil Nadu, Selatan India. Kertas kerja ini juga menunjukkan bagaimana saluran tempatan seperti radio mempromosi, menggalak dan mengekalkan budaya tempatan dengan memperkasakan khalayak melalui program pembangunan dan budaya setempat. Ia juga menunjukkan bahawa khalayak tempatan bukanlah pendengar yang pasif tetapi aktif melibatkan diri dengan media radio melalui program-program pertanian, berita, hiburan serta budaya.

Keywords: national media, cultural identities, remote audiences, global television, ethnography

Globalisation Vs Localisation: Preserving cultural identities and Sustaining Development in Southern India

The public service broadcaster also needs to take into account the media needs of the minority audience, whether they be ethnic, religious or linguistic. Such a broadcaster needs to concern itself with developing taste, promoting understanding, spread literacy and development, create informed debate and empower the disadvantaged: major issues that a commercial broadcaster rarely addresses (MIB, 2000, p.9).

Introduction

The rapidly increasing number of foreign satellite television channels, with mainly western programs, as well as the subsequent mushrooming of cable television networks have led to the demands to allow private broadcasting from within India. The Indian Telegraph Act (1885), did not prohibit cable television networks from operating in India, hence CNN began broadcasting in 1990 with coverage of the Gulf War. Cable television networks gradually expanded, challenging the dominance of Doordarshan, the Indian national television broadcaster. The Government of India (GOI) decided to end the broadcasting monopoly of All India Radio and Doordarshan on 9th February 1995. This historic decision was made after the Supreme Court of India, in a landmark decision, said that there was no right to broadcast implied in Article 19 (1) (a), Freedom of Speech and Expression of the Indian Constitution. In order to safeguard national security, the Supreme Court suggested regulation and licensing as a remedy. The Supreme Court also recommended an autonomous broadcasting authority, independent of the Government, to control all aspects of the electronic media.

Realizing this, the Government of India sought to regulate satellite television by enacting a new Broadcasting Bill (1997). According to this Act, all the private television stations are required to uplink from India and not from overseas. Furthermore, they need to apply for a license from the Broadcasting Council based in New Delhi. However, public service broadcasters (PSBs) and news channels like BBC and CNN are exempted from this procedure, so long as they remain a free service to the audience (Cherian, 1996a, 1996b). These legislative changes created a very competitive mediascape, forcing Doordarshan to broadcast mainly film-based entertainment programs in order to attract viewers and maintain the highest possible audience share. Monteiro (1998, p. 162) argues that:

With the growth of cable television and multinational satellite networks in the recent period, Doordarshan has intensified its strategy of going commercial. The change in programming, with more time for feature films and entertainment serials ... all these are being seen as inevitable if Doordarshan is to survive the competition from its new challengers.

Until 1997, the electronic media in India was under the direct control of the Government. After a lengthy historic and political struggle for media autonomy (Reeves, 1994; Thomas, 1990), the Prasar Bharati Act, which provides autonomous status to Government owned radio and television services, was enacted in 1990. Some amendments were made in July 1997 and implemented on September 15th, 1997 ("Prasar Bharati Act Effective from Sept.15," 1997). This act aims to support the remote and tribal audiences, who could be better served by radio. The recent 'Report of the Review Committee on the working of Prasar Bharati'(MIB, 2000), instituted by the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting (MIB), discussed the implications of the Prasar Bharati as a public service broadcaster, stating:

The problem is [that] commercial broadcasting always compete[s] for the audiences of such programmes. On the other hand, PSB intends to account for the needs of audiences and their requirements. The programmes on PSB should be appealing to the audiences, need-oriented and also achieve audience share (MIB, 2000, p.8).

The review committee of the Prasar Bharati Act, also emphasise the importance of bringing changes to people's lives through the use of programs. The report says, 'the objective of [the] Prasar Bharati is to broadcast meaningful high quality programs, spreading knowledge and education, fostering social change and in catalysing development'(p. 12). The report also suggested that radio and television in India, should have an autonomous status, functioning without any interference from the Government. But how can the Prasar Bharati be an autonomous corporation when it has to depend on Government funding? When radio and television were under the control of the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting (MIB), their expenses were met by the Government. Now, under the Prasar Bharati, it should be made to generate its own revenue to meet all its expenses. 'In the early 1980's although radio and television enjoyed a monopoly, a reduction in the budgetary

support and pressure to raise more revenues to fund rapid expansion forced the pace of commercialisation in India' (MIB, 2000, p. 11). The committee also suggests that to increase the revenue the Prasar Bharati need not produce 'mindless' programming but should produce programs that inform, educate and entertain its audiences. As it was difficult to administer and implement, the license fee was abolished in 1985. This option was not acceptable politically. The review committee also recommend against funding through advertisements and sponsorships 'as this model may not correct market deficiencies' (MIB, 2000, p. 24). Until the Prasar Bharati can generate its own revenue, it is going to be dependent on the Government of the day for its funding, which may force radio and television services to function like a Government mouthpiece, for which it has been subject to previous criticisms for many years. In terms of programming, public service broadcasters (PSBs), have had to compete with private broadcasters. Kiran Karnik, CEO of Discovery channel India, said 'PSBs must compete with private broadcasters in producing quality programmes and addressing audiences that have not been reached' (AMIC, 1999, p. 1). Leonard (1993) defining public service broadcasting as:

Public Service Broadcasting is programming transmitted in the interests of the public. It might be educational, or cultural or informational programming. It is programming that provides some sort of service to the public to help people in their daily lives (p. 31).

Similarly Raboy (1999, p.19) argues that public service broadcasting thrives to empower individuals, social groups and reach audiences most effectively. However, PSBs are facing increasing competition from commercial broadcasting in India. Addressing the issue of challenges to public service broadcasting in the Asia Pacific region, the seminar titled 'Media Proliferation: How can Broadcasters Best Serve Public Interest', held in New Delhi, articulated that public service broadcasters need to create 'new audiences' and produce 'quality programming'. This will help PSBs to be more responsible and competitive so that they can manage the issue of competition from other commercial channels (AMIC, 1999). This is important because commercial broadcasting in India has made a dramatic impression on audiences, bringing a great variety of programs into rural and urban homes, which have entertainment value and commercial interest (Rahim, 1994; Rajagopal, 1993).

The proliferation of satellite and cable television channels in India fulfilled the entertainment needs of the audiences, but left a huge gap in development programming (MIB, 2000). In order to

sustain audiences and gain commercial revenue, Doordarshan, the national public television service, broadcast film-based entertainment programs, and remains largely an urban phenomenon rather than rural (Jayaprakash & Shoemsmith, 1999; Joseph, 1996; Karnard, 1989). Rowland and Tracey (1990, p.21) While reviewing PSBs worldwide argue that 'in their efforts to survive, many public broadcasters seem all willing to abandon their public service commitments'. Many authors, researchers, and activists in India and overseas believe that radio, with its cheap cost, easy access, reach and portability, can be more effective than other forms of media communication (Joseph, 1996; Powell III, 1999). Joseph(1996) argues that:

With growing commercialization, privatization and globalization, television has increasingly become identified with entertainment, with programmes designed primarily to cater to the tastes of the urban middle and upper classes. The dilution of educational content of television naturally reinforces the existing disparities in conventional educational facilities which, in turn, hinder human development by accentuating inequalities in information levels and thereby help perpetuate exploitative processes (Joseph, 1996, p.64).

In order to attract audiences, the Indian television service, Doordarshan, recently decided to broadcast mainly film-based entertainment programs. The television audiences, however, choose these programs to watch and the medium is mostly preferred for its entertainment value. The studio-based developmental programs, including agricultural programs on DD are unpopular and often ignored. Hence, scholars and media experts believe radio could better serve as a developmental tool than television. Moreover, its low cost and accessibility enhances audience participation (Hassan & Zakariah, 1993; Varghese, 1995). These characteristics help radio to be more intimate than any other medium of mass communication. However, it is also important to consider that rural audiences need entertainment and that film songs, drama and short stories, along with 'service' programs. When it comes to audience preference of programs, (Mody, 1991) argues that even though audiences have asked for programs to solve their problems in agriculture and health, entertainment is still their primary interest area.

Meanwhile, rural and indigenous audiences in South India, also consider the cultural programs, village profile, folk songs, tribal songs and devotional songs as useful and interesting programs. In the recent past, AIR realized the importance of field-based programs

and radio personnel began respect the rural audience views, irrespective of their socio-economic, political and educational background. In other words, radio, thanks to the decentralization policy, is becoming more accessible for audience participation than television:

The fact that there has been no attempt to promote local or community television through the provision of simple programme generating and playback facilities on a local transmitter—which could be done at a reasonable cost—suggests that there is little remaining interest in using television as a catalyst for education, social progress, or participatory democracy, or even in increasing access to it among the poor, especially in rural areas (Joseph, 1996, p.65).

Considering these factors, this paper critically analyses how indigenous audiences of Nilgiri hill areas in South India use Ooty Radio Station (ORS), a low power regional radio station of AIR, for public service and commercial programs. AIR is the only national public service broadcaster in India. In this context, a public service broadcaster like ORS, located near the tribal settlements to empower tribal audiences, can produce programs which are locally relevant, and also encouraging audience participation in both field-based and studio-based programs. Scannell (1989, p.142) argues that, 'it is important to acknowledge the ways in which radio and television have given voice to the voiceless and faces to the faceless, creating new communicative entitlements for excluded social groups.' In contrast, commercial channels such as regional satellite television telecast programs, which are largely irrelevant to the tribal audience life styles and their everyday problems. However, PSB increasingly encounter competition from the commercial channels through its purely entertainment programs. Leonard (1993, p.124), reviewing the arrival of STAR TV in Asia, argued that 'it was widely believed that STAR would fail, because it is free-to-air and relies on advertising for its revenue. But it hasn't failed yet; in fact it seems to be going from strength to strength'.

India planned the introduction of state sponsored local radio in the 1980s. The first ever local community radio service was introduced in Nagercoil, Tamil Nadu, South India in 1993. Although Nagercoil is well documented as a success story (Anjaneyalu, 1989; Jayaprakash, 1993), the programming policy was changed in the 1990s, the station then operated largely as a relay mechanism for programs originating from the major regional radio stations of AIR. It has been argued elsewhere (Jayaprakash, 2000), that the concept of local or community radio in India has been defeated. However, by

contrast, ORS, although in policy term remains a regional radio service, actually serves its tribal audiences distinctively like a community radio. Considering its location and the people it serves, ORS is probably one of the most effective community based radio stations in Tamil Nadu, South India. It serves a very specific and in some senses, limited minority audiences. The tribal audiences are very obviously secluded from the mainstream population, the majority of them being illiterate, or below high school education standard. Agriculture is the main profession of many of the audience, very few work as public servants.

Recent shifts in the indigenous mediascape

Critically reviewing the growing popularity of television and cable TV images in the Nilgiris, a journalist from this region, wrote:

I believe that television demeans and trivialises everything and everyone connected with it. I feel that the TV is going to be the cause for the downfall of civilization- in short, it is the advent of the Dark Ages. This Dark Age has been brought about, not by suppression of knowledge and information, but its dazzling assault on our senses. The result is nothing short of a catastrophe. For all practical purposes, everything in Indian society has become a branch of entertainment-business, news, politics, religion, sports, culture, you name it. Why? Because people can no longer make sense of their own world; they are fed with an overwhelming volume of "information". This mysterious "information" and the sheer complexity of it, it is bombarded everyday into the minds of eager and yielding recipients. The "information" encourages all those along their pursuit in front of their idiot boxes. But do they find a coherent image? The answer is resounding "No" (Ullash Kumar, 1998, p.7).

Toda settlements are located in the highest altitude areas in the hills of Nilgiris, their settlements are scattered and often located in the most remote regions where cable television operators cannot reach. Cable service providers do not think of the Toda settlement audiences as viable business propositions. On the other hand, the Kotas live as communities, in regions of comparatively lower altitude, compared to the Todas. In the Kota settlements, there can be more than 50 houses with power, giving them access to cable television.

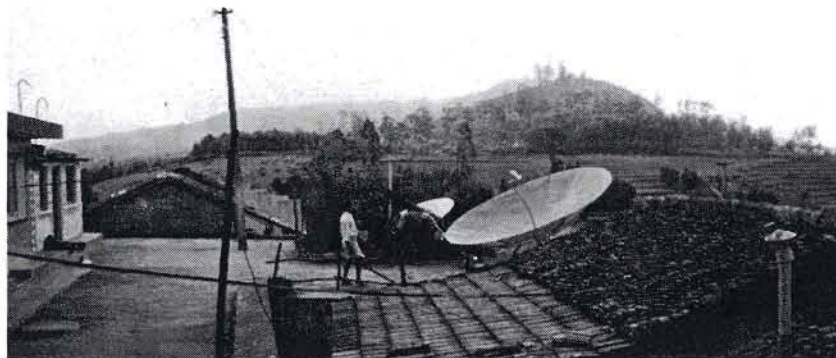
Figure: 13



An overview of Kota settlement

Although the tribal audiences have access to cable television, radio is still considered an important medium for information, entertainment and development. When the Kotas first obtained a satellite television dish for twenty thousand rupees for their settlement in Tiruchikadi (a Kota settlement), there was a temptation to ignore radio.

Figure: 14



Satellite dish at Tiruchikadi Village

However, audiences realized that they could not simply sit in front of the television set for long periods. Tribal audiences felt that exposure to television would affect their children's education and their everyday work. Considering this, elders from one of the Kota villages (Kundha Kothagiri), did not permit cable television in their

village. This scenario is clearly understood from the critique of Ullashkumar (1998, p.7), 'I hold television responsible for the current deplorable state of affairs in society. The lack of thinking, the lack of will to act, the death of civilization; all because of television-it has become a role model for all'.

Increasingly, tribal audiences hesitate to visit their neighbors' houses to watch television because they do not want to disturb them. In short, the introduction of television has disrupted the rhythm of normal tribal life. On the other hand, non-television households, as well as those who own a radio at home, listen to radio programs regularly. Audiences who listened to radio regularly, before subscribing to cable television, tended to ignore radio programs after the arrival of cable television at home.

Jegannathan, a 30-year-old Kota man from Tiruchikadi village, notes:

When we had a cable connection at home we placed our radio set in the corner of the house and the radio set gathered dust. Now after few months we have started listening to radio again

The locally relevant cultural programs brought the audiences back to radio listening. Tribal audiences attach considerable importance to locally produced cultural programs which are relevant to their lifestyles, because their culture has never been presented in mass media like this before. As a social worker, from the Toda community, Pothali kuttan, points out:

If there are radio programs relevant to the hill audiences, people are ready to switch off their televisions and tune into radio programs.

He had observed this trend when he visited a number of the Toda settlements. My observation of radio-listening behavior also confirmed this pattern of media use. Later in my fieldwork, a 30-year-old man compared agricultural programs on radio and television saying:

Agricultural programs shown on TV are irrelevant to this place and climate. They don't give information about carrot and potato, which we are largely cultivating here.

It is also interesting to observe that in the context of media use in developing countries, that villagers generally do not hesitate to visit their neighbors to watch television. This pattern of television

viewing is prevalent in the tribal settlements of the Nilgiris, where the trend is transforming the patterns of media use. A 15-year-old male high school student from Sholur Kokkal, Subramanyam, said: I don't use television much because when I go to my neighbor's house to watch television sometimes they have guests. If I go there it will be disturbing to them. So I hesitate to visit my neighbor's house to watch television.

Parents are also cautious about their children's everyday media use because they feel strongly that exposure to television could affect their children's education, as well as their everyday work. Particularly agricultural -related work, hence their economical development. Tirumurugan, a 35-year-old Kota man, suggests:

Television viewing would affect our children's education and our everyday work.

He felt that the entertainment value of cable television would tempt them to watch television for many hours, as many of them would get completely carried away by its film-based entertainment programs. However, we cannot deny the impact that the arrival of television in the home has had on radio. After the arrival of a television set in the home, listening to radio drama is reduced. Also, listening to the radio has decreased in the evening and at night. Jegennathan said:

We used to listen to radio news in the evening especially BBC Tamil news. However, for the past eight months [since they got cable television] we have stopped listening to radio at night. Nowadays we watch Sun TV [regional private satellite television] news at 8 p.m.

Audiences of this region are entertained with many other regional satellite television channels, such as Raj TV, Vijay TV, Udaya TV, Gemini TV and Asianet. Apart from satellite television, the Nilgiris town has access to two CCTV networks, Nilgiri television network and Ooty Television network (Ullash Kumar, 1998). Elderly people listen to the radio regularly, whereas children and teenagers are looking for entertainment through cable television, visiting their neighbor's houses to watch television. Furthermore, some economically well-off families feel that television provides them with informative and entertaining programs, so feel they do not need the radio for news. It is also useful to mention here that AIR newscasts often ignore development news or rural news. Shah (1988, p.428) argues that 'AIR newscasts contain relatively little content that can be called development news'. Shah further insists that ' more

thorough and more frequent reporting of a wider range of development issues is likely to improve the quality of AIR development news' (p.429).

My interaction with the literate tribal audiences reveals that they rely more on regional Tamil language newspapers, such as the '*Daily Thanthi*', '*Dinamalar*', *Dinakaran*, and so on for local news. Newspaper reach is almost negligible in remote settlements but a few settlements located near the main road, arrange through bus drivers, to hand over the newspapers to a person who is waiting alongside the road. Since the Toda live in a higher altitude of the Nilgiri hills, it is very hard for them to get newspapers. When the Toda men visit Ooty once a week, they get newspapers, take them back to their settlements, and pass the papers onto other members of their family and friends. Generally women do not have any choice which newspapers are purchased; the Toda men choose the newspapers, whilst the children rarely read the newspapers. When asked about her newspaper reading habits, Kokila said, I read *Dinamalar* [Tamil Daily] newspaper, my father brings newspaper.

As far as newspaper reading is concerned some Toda children from the town settlements which are located near the town, read 'Young World' a supplement from *The Hindu* (English) newspaper. Children read Tamil newspapers, such as '*Thina thanthi*' (morning Tamil daily), and '*Malai Malar* (evening Tamil daily), occasionally, when their fathers or elder brothers bring them to their settlements. However, due to the high illiteracy rate amongst tribal audiences, newspaper readership is negligible. When comparing radio to other mass media like newspapers and magazines, Pothalikuttan said, '*radio is like headlines*' because it provides news and information briefly whereas print medium investigates and informs through detailed information. He also mentioned that for remote audiences, newspapers are not easily accessed. He also said, 'we cannot buy newspapers everyday. In some remote settlements you cannot even see people reading newspapers'. He feels that radio is the only source of information and that Todas really love radio-listening. This observation was confirmed by a 30-year-old Toda man, who said:

TV means mainly drama and cinema and we can watch games such as football, cricket ... Radio we can listen through our ears. The news bulletins are same in radio and TV. News, it is sufficient if we could hear from our ears. Not necessary to see [on TV]. When we are busy with our activities, we will not be having free time until the evening, radio means we can keep it next to us and listen to news and we can go...

The audiences mostly prefer radio-listening, because they feel it is easier to listen to radio than to watch television. The basic characteristics of radio, such as intimacy and portability, encourage them to use radio as a 'family medium'.

Since many television serials and dramas are scheduled after 7pm, it is generally considered the television viewing time, especially for audiences in the Kota settlements who have cable television. In order to attract audiences, ORS could concentrate programs between 4 pm and 7 pm in the evening and also introduce morning broadcasts as well. However, we should not forget the fact that if there is no television set in a household all the members of the family listen to radio. In rural areas, very few people can afford to buy television sets so radio still plays a major role by informing about current affairs and entertaining its listeners through film songs, dramas and various other programs. Some audiences say that they know at what time AIR broadcasts certain radio programs and listen to them. Women audiences also select their favorite programs and film songs at appropriate listening times. Tribal audiences also listen to overseas radio, such as Singapore, Malaysia etc in the morning hours. These stations broadcast new Tamil songs in their Tamil language broadcast. Sri Lanka radio is very popular amongst the audiences. Unlike AIR, Sri Lanka broadcasts Tamil film songs throughout the day, and some housewives tune into Sri Lanka radio all the time.

On ORS, apart from news, local cultural programs are very popular amongst the hill radio audiences. Since the hill audiences like to listen to locally relevant cultural programs, ORS broadcasts many local programs. Thus local audiences feel Ooty radio station is useful and important to them. Local programs are popular, one young educated youth said, 'we don't miss local programs from radio'. During my fieldwork, I could see that radio listeners have an awareness of local issues and political news.

Ooty radio personnel give importance to audience participation and are not very particular about 'elite' participation. Men and women, rich and poor, literate and illiterate are all given the opportunity to participate in various cultural and folk programs. Meanwhile, after listening to a certain number of good programs, audiences themselves approach AIR Ooty and express their intention to be involved and present locally relevant cultural programs. In this category, *Malai Aruvi* is one of the most popular programs amongst the audiences. Agricultural families still expect a lot of information from radio, listening and participating in the agricultural program, *Thottamum Thozhilum*.

I observed the Kotas who have recently gained access to satellite television and saw how this recent exposure has altered the

ways in which they use radio. I explore how, in this new media environment for tribal audiences, ORS can serve as a channel for public service broadcasting. In this paper, I have mainly considered agricultural programs, news, current affairs, cultural and locally produced programs that deal with the tribal audiences' lives as public service programs. ORS is mainly concerned with local issues and the everyday lives of tribal audiences of this region, apart from a few sponsored commercials and relay programs from the regional and national radio stations. It is important to have PSB because the informational and educational needs of the audiences may not be met by commercial broadcasting. This paper also traces the programs people listen to in 'service' and commercial programs. Another important issue arising from the shift in the indigenous mediascape is that in India 'the proliferation of channels has fuelled many wants and fulfilled some needs, but has left gaps. A PSB should fill these gaps' (MIB, 2000, p.8).

The Audience Research Unit (ARU) of AIR and media researchers in India, have not looked at the recent introduction of satellite television channels amongst tribal audiences, or their impact on radio listening. It is important to see how radio could be used as a Public Service Broadcaster, as the newly set up autonomous corporation, Prasar Bharati, strongly believes radio has enormous potential to serve the rural and remote audiences. Considering this strong hope for radio, my research found that ORS has many limitations as a public service broadcaster, serving the remote tribal audiences of the Toda and Kota. I argue that the recent introduction of cable and satellite television in Kota, as well as few other tribal settlements, has altered the way the Kotas use radio in their everyday life. I will also show that ORS is unpopular amongst the Kotas in spite of its programming that largely concentrates on tribal people, their culture and lifestyle. On the other hand, many regional radio stations and their public service programs, particularly agricultural programs, although they are irrelevant, are tuned into by the tribal audiences of this region because of the various reasons that are dealt with here. It is highly important for this low power radio (ORS) to know the pulse of these tribal audiences because none of the other radio stations have access to these people who are located in the remote areas and are often secluded from the mainstream media and population.

The Todas live in the regions of highest altitude in the hills of Nilgiris, their settlements scattered, often located in remote regions. There are only three to five houses in a settlement, most of the do not have a power supply. Hence, cable television operators cannot reach these Toda settlements and do not think it is viable for them to extend their business to these areas. On the other hand, the Kotas live as communities, in regions of comparatively lower altitude than

the Todas. In the Kota settlements there can be more than fifty houses with a power supply, and so they have access to cable television. A Kota man from the Tiruchikadi village very happily said, 'we get eighteen channels including Star Movies, Star Plus, Star Sports and so on'. However, in Kota settlements, audiences still feel that radio is important, as the majority of households do not have television sets. For example, Sivan, a 20-year-old man from the Kollimalai village argues:

Even if television is here, radio is still important. For those who do not have television at home, radio is the 'main use'.

Remote audiences from the Nilgiri hill areas expressed a need for both radio and television. Sholur Kokkal is a village with 64 houses where only 15 houses have television sets and cable connections, so the Kotas remain convinced that radio is important for their *Kokkal* (village) especially in accessing the news and maintaining links with the outside community. Kota children are exposed to more satellite and cable television in their settlements than any other tribal communities selected for this study. The Toda and Kannikaran communities have very remote or negligible access to satellite television. The Todas have little exposure to television in their 'town' settlements and cable television exposure is almost negligible. During my fieldwork, I found only two rich families who had access to cable television. There were houses located far away from the other Toda *munds* (villages). There were no signs of the Todas visiting these houses to watch satellite television programs. In town settlements audiences have access to Doordarshan (DD), and the mythological serials such as '*Jai Anuman*', and '*Sri Krishna*' are very popular. Ratheesh Singh, a 12-year-old Toda boy listens to ORS for 'malai aruvi' and film songs. Though they listen to radio everyday in his house he said 'they mainly watch television', rather than listening to radio. During this interview, Ratheesh Singh was listening to Tamil film songs on ORS. I asked him, 'but now you are listening to radio?' He replied, 'we listen to ORS in the evening between 5.30 and 6 pm for Tamil film songs'.

Traditionally, AIR broadcasts devotional songs when they start their broadcasts each day. It was a very bold move on the part of the then Assistant Station Director (ASD) of ORS to schedule Tamil film songs right at the start of the broadcasts. This innovative step made the listeners tune into ORS in the evening because Tamil film songs are largely used as background music by radio listeners. Generally, settlements who have access to DD still listen to radio for two reasons. Firstly, they listen to ORS for its locally produced

tribal programs, such as *malai aruvi* and *yengal giramam*. Secondly, they listen to film songs as background music. Badagas, the migrant population, who live in the lower altitude of the Nilgiri hills, have good access to cable television because most of the families own Tea estates and are richer than the Todas and Kotas. Since the Kota settlements comprise fifty to sixty houses and have electricity in their settlements, they have access to cable television as well. The Todas are largely dependent on radio in most of the settlements. Pothees Kuttan, a 35-year-old Toda man, when asked about this poor access to cable television in Toda settlements said, 'we have small number of houses in Toda settlements so no cable television'. However, Toda children who have relatives live near Ooty town have cable access and Toda children occasionally visit them and watch cable television. However, the point here is that very few Toda children get access to cable television from their relative's houses, which are located close to Ooty town. The fieldwork confirms the view that the Toda children get some remote access to cable television, most significantly watching films and film-based entertainment shows, on television.

It is not possible for the Toda children and other age groups to visit other settlements who have television because the distance between one settlement and another is not easily covered due to the poor roads and long distances. They need to walk two or three miles to reach another settlement that has a television. While access to DD programs was somehow possible for the remote settlements, cable television access is very difficult. Satheesh Kumar, a 12-year-old school student (Toda boy) from the Narikuzhi mund, does not have a radio or television at home. He observed that no one had cable television in their settlement, so he cannot watch Sun TV, Raj TV and so on. Mohan Raj, an 11-year-old Toda boy from this mund also said it is 'impossible' for them to watch these regional satellite television channels. Alex kuttan, an 11-year-old (sixth standard) Toda boy from the Kaadi mund expressed that it is impossible to watch television (DD) programs. Many Toda children who do not have radio at home and live in settlements that have television sets are unable to listen to radio programs but watch DD programs in their neighbors' houses. For example, Thosthali kuttan, an 11-year-old Toda boy, from the Nathanari mund and an 11-year-old girl, Simya from Koil mund, do not have a radio at home, but go to their neighbor's house to watch television. Awasthi, an 11-year-old Kota girl from the Tiruchikadi village, during a focus group discussion at the tribal school said, 'we don't listen to radio, we watch sun TV, Raj TV, Vijay TV'. She said she watches 'films and film songs'. She does not get to listen to radio, because she does not have a radio at home. They have owned a television set for the past two years, so have access to the regional satellite television station's news and

entertainment programs which has made them ignore the radio in their households. Another important reason is that Awasthi and her parents use a tape recorder to listen to devotional and film songs, which make them ignore the radio. Vasuki, a 14-year-old Kota girl, also mentioned that she does not have a radio at home, watches Sun TV news at 8 pm and watches films on Saturday. While she watches mythological serials like 'Sri Krishna' on DD, she does not watch any other children's program on television. Vasuki said:

I don't watch any children's programs on television.
On Saturday night I watch 'saami nadagam'
[mythological serial such as Ramayana and
Mahabharat] on DD'.

Many tribal children I spoke to through interviews and focus group discussions told me that they watch films, dramas, mythological serials and occasionally news. It is also important to remember that there are eighty houses in Tiruchikadi, a Kota settlement, where only fifteen houses have television sets able to receive cable television. Sun TV is the most popular cable channel people like it for its wide coverage of world news and interesting talk shows during the weekend. Sun TV also telecasts regional news with colorful graphics and staff correspondents throughout the country. However, most cable TV households watch news on Sun TV in the evening and usually listen to morning news on radio. Few cable television households also listen to radio. So we cannot rule out that cable television households completely ignore radio. Cable television households who continuously watch Sun TV news ignore Doordarshan's news. Some women also said they still listen to film songs from radio. However, a cable television subscriber said:

Cable TV frequently broadcast films which contains sexual themes and obscene scenes. We cannot sit and watch those films as a family. Meanwhile, Doordarshan chooses good films and we won't be embarrassed when we sit and watch.

Some audiences say that they know what time AIR broadcasts certain radio programs, so can listen to news on time. Women audiences also select their favorite programs and film songs at appropriate times. However, in rural areas very few people can afford to buy television sets, hence radio still plays a major role by informing them current affairs and entertaining the listeners with film songs, dramas and various other programs. However, after 7pm it is generally considered a television viewing time and audiences sit down to watch television programs.

Figure: 15



Kota audiences watching cable television

We cannot say that in rural areas those who do not have television set, always watch television in their neighbors' houses. Audiences still hesitate to go to neighboring houses to watch television.

Although the Kotas visit their neighbor's houses to watch television, they hesitate to go to often, tuning their radio sets in the morning to listen to devotional songs, news, film songs and agricultural programs. Tirumurugan felt Kota audiences from the Tiruchikadi village do not ignore radio because Kota women love to listen to film songs and devotional songs while they perform their household work. Men listen to agricultural programs and news, though they watch television in the evening for entertainment because they feel both radio and satellite television news are different. Radio is comparatively very fast in reporting sports news and also has credibility amongst tribal audiences as it reports news objectively. Since the ORS reception quality is not good, Kota men tune to other regional radio stations such as Coimbatore, Tiruchirappalli and Chennai in the morning hours, feeling that these agricultural programs are irrelevant to the local conditions of the Nilgiris. Murugesan from this village mentioned that Kota audiences increasingly tune into the radio to listen to film songs, drama and other entertainment programs and are not inclined to listen to 'service' programs such as agricultural programs. From the focus group discussion and interviews that I had with tribal children it was clear that children in the cable television households largely ignore radio. One of the other reasons is that cable television

households do not maintain their radio sets that they used before the arrival of television in their homes. When it comes to repairing a radio set, they need to take their sets to Ooty town to repair them, which involves at least half a day of their time and a minimum of 100 rupees.

Maintenance of Radio

While radio is actively used, one thing that I had not anticipated as a significant factor in media use was the maintenance of a radio set, which according to the hill audiences is very important. During my visits to many households in the remote settlements, I observed radio sets that were not in use. They struggle to maintain a radio for a long time. Revethi, a 21-year-old married Kannikaran woman from Piravilai settlement said:

I had a radio earlier but it is under repair for five months so I go to my neighbor's house to listen to radio.

In contrast, the scenario in Kota settlements in the Nilgiris is different. A 22-year-old Kota woman Devi, who is a housewife from Tiruchikadi, gets to watch television in the absence of radio. She said:

We had radio set before now it is under repair. I go to my neighbor's house at 12 noon to watch Sun TV. Before that I'll make sure that I finish my entire household work and cooking. My husband comes at 1 pm from work for lunch. When sun TV shows news, at that time I come home, serve him food (lunch) and go back again to watch sun TV. Then again in the evening I cook at 4.30. My husband comes back at 5 pm. Again he will go to work, I go again to watch Sun TV. My husband does not watch television.

However, there are instances where people replace their old radio sets with new ones. A 34-year-old agricultural laborer who lives in Thalapatheri mund, a Toda settlement which is located seventeen kilometers from Ooty town, had a brand new transistor radio. He paid 480 Rupees (approximately twenty dollars) to replace his 'very old' radio, which he had used for more than twenty-five years. Another illiterate Toda man expressing the same view said: We've been listening to radio for the past 20 years or so, when it is old we buy a new radio set.

On the other hand, cable television provides them with entertainment and informative programs in Tamil, which tribal audiences, particularly children with cable television access at home, watch and are satisfied with. Mohankumar, aged, 18 argued, that while the Kota settlements have better access to cable television but only a limited number of households have televisions at home. He added that only 15 out of the 80 households in the Tiruchikadi village have access to cable television. He also argued that people still tune into the radio for news in the morning, because it has frequent news bulletins and provides up to date information on sports and politics, both national and regional. He said that cable television is mainly watched for its entertainment programs, like films and serials. Muthulakshmi, a 35-year-old Kota woman, said radio is still in use amongst cable television households. She herself having a cable television at home still tunes in on Wednesday nights and Saturday mornings for radio drama. Audiences also appreciate the program format and programming of AIR. Sivan, aged, 28, argued that technologies such as cable television and tape recorders cannot replace radio because radio always comes up with new program formats and sometimes the visual media adopt these formats in their programs. While explaining about tape recorders and radio, he said, 'with the tape recorder we always know what the songs are going to be, but on radio it will be always be unexpected songs'. Sankaran, aged, 30, said that though radio listening had been reduced, it was still important to have radio to listen to news and devotional songs in the morning.

Although Kota audiences from Tiruchikadi settlement are talking about the low popularity of radio after the arrival of cable television, Kollimalai, in another Kota village which does not have cable television, in spite of the availability of a power supply in this village, says radio is still popular. Audiences from Kollimalai watch DD (national television), but radio remains very much in use. When I looked into the data of these two villages separately the difference was very obvious on radio use. At Tiruchikadi, radio is mostly used in the morning, mainly for news and devotional songs, but at Kollimalai, Kota audiences listen to all kind of programs, such as agricultural programs, women's program news, local programs and so on in the morning, afternoon and at night by tuning various radio stations.

The Kannikaran tribal community is one of the most remote communities in the Kanyakumari district where many have not seen cable television programs. They rely on radio for both entertainment and information. However, Kannikaran men complained that agricultural programs from the local radio station at Nagercoil are irrelevant to the hill locations where they cultivate tapioca, pepper, bananas and so on. While Sun TV is popular in the Kota

settlements, it is not widely known in Kannikaran hamlets. A 35-year-old Kannikaran woman, Sri Devi from Koovaikadu Malai, has not heard about Sun TV at all. Moreover, the community television provided in this village for public service broadcasts has been used for watching entertainment programs. At the time of this research, the television set was under repair due to the poor maintenance by panchayat officials. This does not allow the audiences of this settlement to watch DD programs as well.

Conclusion

For many years (until 1997), AIR has functioned as a propaganda arm of the ruling party's political movements, as far as news is concerned. Developmental news reporting is comparatively scarce and generally rural people's views have been ignored. On the contrary, AIR news formats predominantly use the official version of the facts rather than ordinary people's views. For the past fifty years, AIR's news and current affairs programming have been viewed in many quarters as propaganda for the ruling political parties interests. This has included development news and communication in many respects. According to the Director-General of AIR news services division:

...[D]evelopment news has to concern itself with all that happens to the whole people and their welfare in the broadest sense of the word. It cannot be only about government plans and official speeches or statistics about projects. A particular person, a family, a village or a particular community should be the stuff of development news (Bhaumik, 1996, p.9).

This system of programming 'alienates instructions from the target groups', and the purpose of development communication has failed miserably in India. Apart from the failure of development programming at the production stage, there were some serious problems at the reception stage. Community radio sets provided in the villages by the governments were mostly guarded by the rich elites in the villages thereby preventing common peoples from accessing this media (Singh, 1996; Yadava, 1996).

The recent autonomous status has helped AIR radio to be more flexible in terms of program format, presentation, audience participation, and production of programs. ORS serves its tribal audiences distinctively like a community radio in India. The findings revealed that the locally relevant cultural programs brought tribal audiences back to radio listening. Although cable television

households ignore radio, it is still popular amongst the remote audiences.

The introduction of commercial media and its increasing availability amongst tribal audiences raises major questions about cultural preservation and continuity. The availability of western programs essentially urban in its orientation may be viewed as potentially problematic. To date tribal audiences appear to have adopted a cautious attitude, although the young, especially male interest towards sports such as cricket seems to be rapidly changing. Further change is inevitable as the reach of different media continues to penetrate the more remote communities in South India.

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