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General Article

Television: No more an Entertainment Box Only!

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Abstract

Television, introduced in India in 1959, has been taking care of both "instruction" and "social education" in the context of educational broadcast in India. Television is still considered as one of the greatest inventions of mankind among thousands of other technological inventions made so far. It has gained popularity among the millions of people and made a central place in a wide spectrum of media including new media. Apart from being a source of entertainment, it has evolved as one of the medium of educational technology. This article tries to give an overview of Television in India with regard to its educational functions and also as an educational equaliser. An attempt has been made to give a picture of educational broadcast in India with special reference to distance education. Few challenges that emerge while using Television as an educational media alongwith few points of policy implications have also been discussed.

Keywords: Television, educational Television, educational media, SWAYAM Prabha

Introduction

The literal meaning of Television is, "vision at a distance." Nevertheless, it is a composite word derived from the Greek *tele* which means, "at a distance", and the Latin verb *video* which means, "I see". "Television" has also been briefly defined as "vision by telegraphy" (Dinsdale, 2000). The history of origin of Television can be traced back to 26 January 1926, when John Logie Baird gave the world's first demonstration of true television before 50 scientists in central London ("BBC-History-John Logie Baird", n.d.). But, Marconi was the first person who developed wireless transmission and without which invention of television could not have been possible. So, what was the reason behind the invention of 'Television'? Was it for entertaining us? or for some other purpose? Therefore, at the first place, it becomes important to understand the vision behind introducing Television to the masses.

> ″When television is good, nothing —not the theatre, not the magazines or newspapers — nothing is better. But when television is bad, nothing is worse. I invite each of you to sit down in front of your own television set when your station goes on the air and stay there, for a day, without a book, without a magazine, without a newspaper, without a profit and loss sheet or a rating book to distract you. Keep your eyes glued to that set until the station signs off. I can assure you that what you will observe is a vast wasteland."-*Newton N. Minow,* Chairman, Federal Communications Commission (FCC)."

Minow in his speech, referred to American commercial television programming as a "vast wasteland" and advocated for 'programming in the public interest', "Television and the Public Interest", popularly known as '*Wasteland Speech*' ("American Rhetoric: Newton Minow-Address to the National Association of Broadcasters (Television and the Public Interest)", n.d.). This landmark speech for the medium of 'Television' was delivered during the convention of the National Association of Broadcasters held on May 9, 1961. It was a time when there were only three networks in the United States. With the advent of large number of private owned television channels, this 'wasteland' increased manifolds. Even after five decades, this speech has its own relevance and consequently, it sets the agenda for all of us to discuss few major issues: Does Television function in the public interest? Does television spoils our children? Has Television made significant contribution so far towards educating the mass?

In India, the prime objective of Television Broadcast was to 'educate' the masses through 'entertainment'. But to our dismay, in due course of time, the 'education' has taken the back seat and the 'entertainment' has tried to overshadow the basic motto of Television in India with one and only objective of generating revenue. However, effort is on towards motivating teachers, students and policy makers to exploit the strength of the television medium for life-long learning.

Educational Media in India

The constitution of India has already guaranteed free and compulsory education for all children as fundamental right irrespective of religion, language, cast and creed. The Right to Education Act, 2010 has been passed in the Indian parliament to this effect. According to this Act, every child in the age group of 6 to 14 years will have a right to free and compulsory education in a nearby school. With this, the role of educational broadcasting on Radio and Television and webcasting on internet has become important in order to reach the unreached. It also intended to cope with pressing educational needs while delivering a high standard of skill-oriented education (Agrawal, 2000). Although, "Democratization of education" is an important issue with regard to the use of educational broadcast but, many researchers claim that limited evidence show that educational broadcasting has really helped in increasing either access or quality of education in India (Agrawal, 2000). Nevertheless, from the very beginning, both "instruction" and "social education" were included in educational broadcast in India.

Television was introduced in India in 1959. Much before Television came into existence in India, Radio was the first electronic medium through which educational broadcasting was also attempted for almost three decades. As Binod Agrawal writes: "The year 1971 marked the beginning of concerted efforts for use of electronic media for improving the quality and reach of education" (Agrawal, 2000). But unfortunately, it was never resolved by the academicians and educational policy makers "whether educational broadcast can be used directly without teacher intervention (Agrawal, 2000)". Despite the fact that some stand-alone educational media (both broadcast and non-broadcast) have been created as private and public initiatives, the use of educational media has not been very impressive so far. We may all agree that such situation ought to happen in the absence of a clear-cut policy or direction.

Television vis-à-vis Idiot Box

Every moment of our life is facilitated by a new invention and the advent of a new technology. Television is still considered as one of the greatest inventions of mankind among thousands of other technological inventions made so far.
The popular connotation of being a distractor to education has been a major hindrance in popularising it as an educational medium. As someone has rightly said that "*if you read too much books you are called good reader but if you watch too much TV you are not called good viewer*" (TV is not an Idiot Box, 2013).

Television in our day to day life

Over the course of time, Television has become an important part of human life. It has been catering to many of the day-to-day needs i.e. for entertainment, political news and for information on consumer goods etc. As Jane Root (Root, 1986)**,** the first woman channel controller of the BBC (British Broadcasting Corporation) describes in 1986: *"television is very effective towards insulating ourselves from other people and their demands. Interestingly, 'it is time for bed' can be easily ignored with the help of a television set"*.

Does Television influence Children?

Television being a broadcaster of various types of information, has been found to influence many of our opinions and choices. But, does Television influences children? As Jane Root writes (Root, 1986): "Claims for the powers of television become particularly exaggerated when the audience is composed of children." Cedric Cullingford (Root, 1986) writes, '*Children can understand the complexity of moral decisions by the age of five…they can talk about the concept of thinking and the meaning of death between five and seven*'. Therefore, TV can be considered to influence anyone's life irrespective of, gender, age, caste, social background etc. But, it is important to note here that is has its own limitations with regard to its access, audience's characteristics and other logistics (Groucho Marx Quotes, 2013).

What is Educational Television?

In the recent year the concept of educational Television has emerged with reference to educational technology. Therefore, it becomes important to understand what is Educational Television? Whether it should be referred to as educational or instructional? Following are some of the meanings of the terminology (Das, 2016):

(i) Programmes under SITE (Satellite Instructional Television Experiment) were classified into two broad categories i.e. (a) Educational Tele Vision (ETV), meant for the school children in the age group of 5-12 years and (b) Instructional Television (ITV) for adult audience, primarily designed for neo-literates and illiterates (SITE, 1981). As far as ETV programmes were concerned, they were meant for making education more interesting, creative, purposive and stimulating as well as for creating awareness in the changing society. Whereas, ITV programmes, primarily meant for adult viewers, were to cover incidents of national importance, improved practices in agriculture, health, hygiene, family planning, nutrition, etc. and some recreation programmes.

(ii) Educational Television is also referred to 'use of television programs in the field of distance education' (Educational Television, n.d.). Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) stands an example of this. It was established in 1985 by a Special Act of Parliament "to advance and disseminate learning and knowledge by diversity of means, including the use of communication technology, to provide opportunities for higher education to a large segment of the population" (IGNOU, 1985). Along with the rapid expansion, it has emerged as an international institution in the field of open and distance learning. It has adopted an integrated strategy for imparting instruction, consisting of printed materials, audio-video tapes, broadcast on radio, educational TV channels, teleconferencing, video conferencing as also the face- to- face counselling (Das, 2009).

Television (TV) to Educational Television (EDTV)

In 1932, State University of IOWA, USA became the first university to use television as an instructional medium. But, the World War II, slowed down the introduction of television in education. In spite of interest of educationists very few educational institutions got involved in using television as an instructional medium till 1948. Understanding the potential of television for educational purpose, "the Federal Communication commission in USA reserved 242 frequencies for educational broadcast on no profit and non-commercial basis in 1952" (Magnuson, 1965).

Various functions of television in delivering education through distance mode in supporting and enhancing teaching include; instructing; explaining, clarifying; motivating and encouraging; imposing study speed (determining rate of study); presenting a reference to large masses; changing behaviour; and presenting unreachable facts and events, have been presented (Hizal, 1983). After a decade of Hizal's highlighting Television's educational potential, in 1993, a ten-day long first IGNOU-ISRO (Indian Space Research Organisation) teleconferencing experiment was done covering 525 participants. This experiment demonstrated that by using one-way live video (interactive television) with two-way audio, all students could view and interact with the teacher, and simultaneously the teacher could also listen to all participating students through phone at remote sites. It became a major landmark in the extensive and continuous use of teleconferencing for distance education. The success of this experiment prompted the university to include teleconferencing as a regular component of IGNOU's student support system (Khan & Panda, n.d.).

The U.K Open University (UKOU), a pioneer in the field of distance education, has already demonstrated the instructional power of television. Parallel to UKOU, IGNOU has been imparting education through the mode of Open and Distance Learning (ODL) by adopting a multiple media approach: transacting the course material through print, audio (Radio) and video (TV) modes.

From Doordarshan to Gyan Darshan: A Journey of Indian Television

Decades back, Indian viewers were exposed to only few Doordarshan's programmes, which most media analysts considered to be dull, non-commercial in nature and directed towards only education and socio-economic development with very few entertainment programmes. With serials like Hum Log (1984), and mythological dramas like Ramayan (1987-88) and

Mahabharat (1988-89) a big change came in the history of Indian Television which attracted very large number of viewers. The scenario changed further with the up-gradation from black & white to colour TVs, delivery of TV programmes via cable network in smaller towns apart from the metros. This resulted in a sudden increase in the purchase of TV sets (http://www.indiantelevision.com/headlines/y2k12/apr/) and later, launching of various other channels.

Doordarshan, a division of Prasar Bharati, is one of the largest broadcasting organisations in the world in terms of studios and transmitters (Door Darshan, n.d.). It is an Indian public service broadcaster which has started replacing its analogue transmitters to digital transmitters. As a result, it allows up to eight channels to be carried from a single transmitter. Doordarshan has been rendering its services at three levels – national, regional and local. The national level emphasises on events and issues of interest to the entire nation and it includes news, current affairs, documentaries on science, art, culture, environment, social issues, serials, music, dance, drama and feature films. The regional level programmes are beamed on DD National at specific time and also on the Regional Language Satellite Channels. These programmes cater to the interests of a particular region with its native language. Local programmes are area-specific and cover local issues featuring local people.

Doordarshan started as an experimental telecast in Delhi on 15 September, 1959. Nevertheless, the regular daily transmissions started in 1965 along with a five-minute news bulletin as a part of All India Radio. In 1972, the television service was extended to Bombay (now Mumbai) and Amritsar. Television service was made available only at seven Indian cities till 1975. On 1 April 1976, Television services were separated from radio. Finally, in 1982, Doordarshan came into existence as a National Broadcaster with Krishi Darshan as the first telecast program. Till 1982, the transmission was mainly in black & white mode. It was the first turning point in the history of Indian Television when Doordarshan introduced coloured TV during the Asian Games held in New Delhi in 1982 and simultaneously started installing transmitters nationwide for terrestrial broadcasting. It is significant to note that, during that period no private enterprise was allowed to set up TV stations or to transmit TV signals. The second turning point came in the early nineties when foreign channels like CNN, Star TV and domestic channels such as, Zee TV and Sun TV started broadcast of satellite signals (http://www.indiantelevision.com/ Indian broadcast/ history/ historyoftele.htm). In this manner, Television reached people of India through various regional, national and international programmes simultaneously.

Gyan Darshan-A New Face of Indian Television

Television has been perceived as an efficient tool for imparting education to primary, secondary and university level students. Educational broadcasting in India is more than 40 years old and UNESCO has played an important role in promoting use of electronic media for education. Though, educational broadcasting has suffered from a built-in contradiction i.e. whether it should be used to enhance classroom education or be used to enrich the knowledge of the learners **(**Agrawal, 2005). With the introduction of open and distance education, the educational broadcasting has gained a greater momentum. The potential of electronic media, particularly television, has been recognised because of distance neutrality and simultaneous reach in covering large areas. The National Policy on Education (1986)

gave due emphasis to educational broadcasting in India. Some major educational television projects undertaken in the country in the last three decades (1960-1990) are, Secondary School Television Project (1961)**,** Delhi Agriculture Television (DATV) Project (Krishi Darshan) (1966), Satellite Instructional Television Experiment (SITE) (1975) (SITE, 1981), Indian National Satellite Project (INSAT) (1982) and UGC-Higher Education Television Project (1984).

Gyan Darshan (GD), a 24-hour educational television channel, was launched on January 26, 2000 in India (Agrawal, 2005). It was considered to be a major milestone in the field of educational broadcasting in the country. It came as a joint venture between the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) and Information and Broadcasting, Prasar Bharati and IGNOU. Gyan Darshan, a fully digital exclusive Educational TV Channel, was a digital bouquet of 4 channels-GD-1 (Prime Channel), GD-2 (Interactive Distance Education Channel), GD-3 (Ekalavya-Technology Education Channel) and GD-4 (Vyas-Higher Education Channel). Nevertheless, due to some financial, administrative and technical reason, it got off-air on June 4, 2014 but, was back on-air on October 4, 2017.

Educational Broadcasts by CIET-NCERT, NIOS & CEC-UGC

Similar to that of IGNOU, the National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS) takes into consideration learning through printed self-instructional material, audio and video programmes, participating in Personal Contact Programme (PCP), and Tutor Marked Assignments (TMA) (NIOS, 2016). Besides IGNOU and NIOS, there are other educational institutions in India at the national level, committed to enhance learning beyond the classroom using various educational technologies. Central Institute of Educational Technology (CIET) national Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) is one of such educational institutes which undertakes activities to widen educational opportunities, promote equity and improve quality of educational processes at school level (CIET, 2016).

Another important player is the Consortium for Educational Communication (CEC). It is one of the Inter University Centres set up by the University Grants Commission (UGC) of India. It has a goal of addressing the needs of Higher Education through the use of powerful medium of Television along with the appropriate use of emerging Information Communication Technology (ICT) ("About CEC Pages - About CEC", 2016). In order to exploit the potential and power of television towards disseminating educational knowledge, UGC started the Countrywide Classroom Programmes in the year 1984. Since 1993, CEC has been working as a nodal agency to coordinate, guide & facilitate production of educational programmes at the National level ("About CEC Pages-About CEC", 2016), by setting up Media Centres at various Universities and spread all over the country.

SWAYAM Prabha

The SWAYAM Prabha is a group of 32 DTH channels devoted to telecasting of high-quality educational programmes on 24X7 basis using the GSAT-15 satellite (SWAYAM PRABHA, n.d,). The contents are provided by NPTEL, IITs, UGC, CEC, IGNOU, NCERT and NIOS. The INFLIBNET (Information and Library Network) Centre maintains the web portal. The DTH Channels covers the following (SWAYAM PRABHA, n.d,): a) Higher Education:

Curriculum-based course (https://www.swayamprabha.gov.in/) contents at post-graduate and under-graduate level covering diverse disciplines such as arts, science, commerce, performing arts, social sciences and humanities, engineering, technology, law, medicine, agriculture, etc. All courses would be certification-ready in their detailed offering through SWAYAM, the platform being developed for offering MOOCs (Massive Open Online) Courses (MOOCs, n.d.) (b) School education (9-12 levels): modules for teacher's training as well as teaching and learning aids for children of India to help them understand the subjects better and also help them in preparing for competitive examinations for admissions to professional degree programmes, (c) Curriculum-based courses that can meet the needs of life-long learners of Indian citizens in India and abroad and d) Assist students (class 11th & 12th) prepare for competitive exams.

Educational Functions of Television

The above discussion on Television shows that it has been considered as a medium of imparting education. Some of the key aspects of Television with regard to its educational functions (Das, 2016) may be highlighted here.

(i) Television and distance education: Television in distance education fulfils the functions such as, supporting and enhancing teaching, instructing, explaining, clarifying, summarising, reinforcement, motivation and encouragement. Use of television has been increasing in developing countries for various reasons and also for distance education. As Saglik and Ozturk (Saglik and Ozturk, 2001) point out,

> "……. In other words, the best technology to provide all individuals equal opportunities is radio-television technology. This is the main reason that television, a more advantageous technological tool than radio with its audio-visual facilities, is being used non-stop and is improving in each project of the Open Education Faculty".

(ii) Television and health education: In India, Television has already been used to educate the masses with regard to HIV/AIDS education in the form of serials, quizzes, advertisements and awareness programmes (Misra, n.d.). It can also be utilized through teleconferencing mode to provide information and counselling to school students to discuss HIV/AIDS issues openly with experts like medical practitioners, social workers and educationists (Das, 2016).

The Spectrum of Research Study on Educational Broadcast in India (1975-2011)

Over a period of 50 years, educational school television broadcasting (1961), countrywide classroom educational television broadcasting (1984), and several other educational television broadcasts have been evaluated by a number of social scientists and other experts in the area of mass communication and educational technology. Some key findings of those studies may be highlighted here (Das, 2016).

a) Evaluation report on Satellite Instructional Television Experiment (SITE**) -** The SITE programme was launched on 1st August, 1975 as a joint venture of NASA, ISRO and AIR with the objectives of (a) exploring the potential of satellite for nation-wide communication through the medium of TV and (b) broadcasting instruction programmes in the field of agriculture, family planning and education etc. A study, confined to those aspects of the

programmes telecast meant for adults, was conducted. The findings revealed that after the introduction of the SITE programme, about three-fourth of the respondents felt that the development programmes shown were useful and conformed to their local conditions (SITE, 1981).

b) Research report on National Viewership Survey on UGC-CEC Vyas Higher Education Channel Telecast through Cable & Satellite & DD DTH - In the year 2010, a research report was prepared based on the national survey which was conducted by the Educational Multimedia Research Centres of CEC -UGC (VYAS, 2010). The survey aimed to ascertain the viewership of educational programmes shown on Vyas- the Higher Education Channel and to know the usefulness of multimedia inputs in the programmes produced for the same. Based on the feedback of the respondents, the results of the study may be summarised as follows (Das, 2016): (i) 56% of them found the programmes are relevant, (ii) As far as format of the programmes are concerned, 'video lectures' have been rated 'Good' by the majority of the students, (iii) With regard to the 'attention span', most prefer the duration of the programme to be of 30 minutes duration and (iv) In the context of preferential reference**,** it was noticed that there is a demand for all types of programmes with a variation in terms of preferences: Enrichment programme (23.4%), Syllabus-based question-answer programmes (19.4%), Syllabus-based lecture programmes **(**16.6%) and utility programmes pertaining to health related issues, career counselling etc. (least preferred).

c) IGNOU EDUSAT, GD (Gyan Darshan) and GV (Gyan Vani) Assessment Study: 2007-08
IGNOU Open and Distance Learning (ODL) Assessment study 2008 IGNOU Study was an end user study to review the effectiveness and sustainability of interactive multimedia learning support system based on teleconferencing utilizing Television, Radio, EDUSAT, Web platforms and Internet facilities (Das, 2016). The key findings of the study based on students 'Feed In' and opinion of other stakeholders were summarized as follows: (Kumar & Rai, 2007).

(i) With regard to IGNOU's slot in Doordarshan, 47 percent students were watching IGNOU slot programmes telecast on Doordarshan Channel I (DD-1) (ii) 93 percent students who watched IGNOU programmes in Doordarshan main channel were comfortable with the language of telecast (iii) 60 percent students who watched IGNOU slot in Doordarshan rated the content quality of programmes telecast as good (iv) More than seven out of ten students said the programmes telecast on IGNOU slot in Doordarshan was useful in learning process and (v) 60 percent students who watched programme telecast on Doordarshan felt it helped them in understanding their programme topics better.

Students who found the IGNOU programmes telecast on Doordarshan were useful, were further probed for the manner in which it helped them in learning process. The responses were as follows (Table.1):

Table 1: How it is useful in learning process

In…	Percentages (%)
Understanding programme content	60
Enhances knowledge of programme	16
Clarification of programme related doubts	10
Doing well in examination	8
Solving programme related problems	6

Response only of those who said it is useful
(**Source**: IGNOU EDUSAT, GD and GV Assessment Study: 2007-08)

Suggestions

A study on the educational aspect of Television and its prospects leads to few suggestions for the policy makers towards an effective use of television for education:

(i) ETRP vs. TRP: It is the era of TRP (Television Rate Points) i.e. the criterion that indicates popularity of a channel or programme (TRP, n.d.). Similar to that of private channels and their programmes a system of ETRP (Educational Television Rating Point) can be introduced which would prove the credibility of a channel (including news and entertainment channels) in terms of its educational functions. (Das, 2016).

(ii) Cross-channel broadcast: Another point of suggestion is that education needs to be a common agenda across the channels, private or public. Every channel should make a policy of dedicating a slot on their channel to broadcast an educational programme (Das, 2016). If the channel cannot produce, a programme of Gyan Darshan/SWAYAM PRABHA channels on a specific time may be relayed by them. Gyan Darshan/SWAYAM PRABHA Channels may reciprocate by carrying an educational programme (at least an enrichment programme on 'Voting Rights' and 'Protection of Environment' etc.) on its channel free of cost with a gesture to an education-friendly channel (who supports the cause of education) as a policy of cross channel broadcast.

(iii) Using Television for self-learning: The discovery of Hole-in-the-Wall in 1999 by Dr. Sugata Mitra, Chief Scientist at NIIT (National Institute of Information Technology) was an eye opener event in the field of learning skills with some minimal (human) guidance (Hole in the Wall, 2015) The experiment implies that many a times, little or no inputs from teachers is required and children learn things on their own with the process of exploration, discovery and peer coaching. This also points out to a broader concept of Minimally Invasive Education. It is defined as "a pedagogic method that uses the learning environment to generate an adequate level of motivation to induce learning in groups of children, with minimal, or no, intervention by a teacher (MIE, 2015)". Taking these concepts as examples, an interactive television may be put up in public places to educate the masses particularly, children.

Conclusion

Television (TV) has truly emerged as an important medium to disseminate information to the students in various academic disciplines. Over the years, it has been able to break the myth of

being only an entertainer. Though it is yet to understand upto what extent the Educational Television (EDTV) would help to demonstrate itself as an 'Educational Equaliser'. But, the reach and potential it has, requires to be understood in order to serve the educational needs of the young audience.

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