UNIT 4 MASS MEDIA POLICIES

Structure

4.0 OBJECTIVES

By the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- identify the communication needs of the people,

- explain the working of the communication system in India,

- define communication policy and underline its importance in giving direction to the process of development and change,

- discuss India's attempts to formulate a mass media policy, given the recommendations of various Committees and Commissions appointed by the government to streamline the functioning of the mass media in the country,

- evaluate the performance of the mass media in the light of media policies and priorities of a developing nation, and

- discuss the future trends in mass media policy.

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This is the last unit of Block 1. Earlier we had discussed the historical and cultural aspects of Indian society including its communication underpinnings. We also presented the theme of Sadharanikaran and its impact on the communication ethos of Indian society, tracing it down to modern mass media and its utility in the country. Further, questions of access to mass media, its availability and the right to seek information, were discussed in detail.

In this unit we shall trace the evolution and growth of the mass media in India with reference to specific policy directions and the recommendations of various Committees and Commissions appointed by the government. We shall also enquire into various communication obstacles faced by the masses due to the present mode of functioning of the mass media.

In the next block of this course we shall discuss various aspects of development and its relation with the society. We shall consider the concept of development in Unit 1, development communication in Unit-2, development support communication in agriculture in Unit-3, and development support communication in population, health education and environment in Unit-4.

4.2 COMMUNICATION SYSTEM

A considerable part of our communication activities take place through the media. Communication technology has equipped us to overcome constraints of distance and time. It enables us to interact with each other without being in 'face to face' situations. In addition, mediated communication exposes us to varied experiences and makes us aware of new people, things and events.

In contemporary society, there are communication systems such as the postal and telecommunication agencies, radio and television, news wire services and newspapers, archives and libraries, information and extension services and other organized networks.

The Mass Media are a very important component of society. Their use in a developing country like India is considered most crucial in the challenge to mobilize people for development activities. Therefore, there must be a communication policy, and more specifically a mass media policy in each country. The policy should give direction to the programmes which are channeled through various mass media networks.


Activity 1

In order to streamline the operations of cable television, the government proposes to regulate cable TV. These regulations will require cable operators to monitor their programme content and also ensure ISI quality of their equipment. Would you classify this proposal under mass media policy? Why?

Can you specify at least two other decisions with regard to cable TV policy?

4.3 COMMUNICATION PROBLEMS

In the above activity, check if you have pointed out the government provision which makes it obligate to telecast one Doordarshan channel on cable TV; and the decision concerning permission to carry advertisements on hitherto taboo subjects of tobacco and liquor products. Both these decisions have a bearing on cable TV policy. In this section, we shall consider the problems related to the installation and maintenance of communication technology and those that come up when one conducts research on any topic in communication. We shall see how the resolution of such problems policy formulation.

You have studied about the concept of 'noise' in the communication process. You are aware that it creates problems of miscommunication or even lack of communication. To minimise the effects of such problems in our social transactions, society has equipped itself with useful tools. In order to communicate better, people have made use of timely inventions.

The first major invention which helped to cope with communication related problems was language, in both its oral and written forms. Then came special tools and materials for recording messages about material objects, and for transferring these messages from one person to another. Besides, there were ways to convey messages through signals, to communicate across distances. The second major invention was the printing press. Finally, in a surge of recent inventions, powerful acoustic, optical and electronic communication instruments have been developed within a very short period. We have experienced this extraordinary revolution in communication only for a limited period now. This is the reason why the problems of modern communication are still new and challenging. A communication and mass media policy would have to explore the nature and extent of these problems.
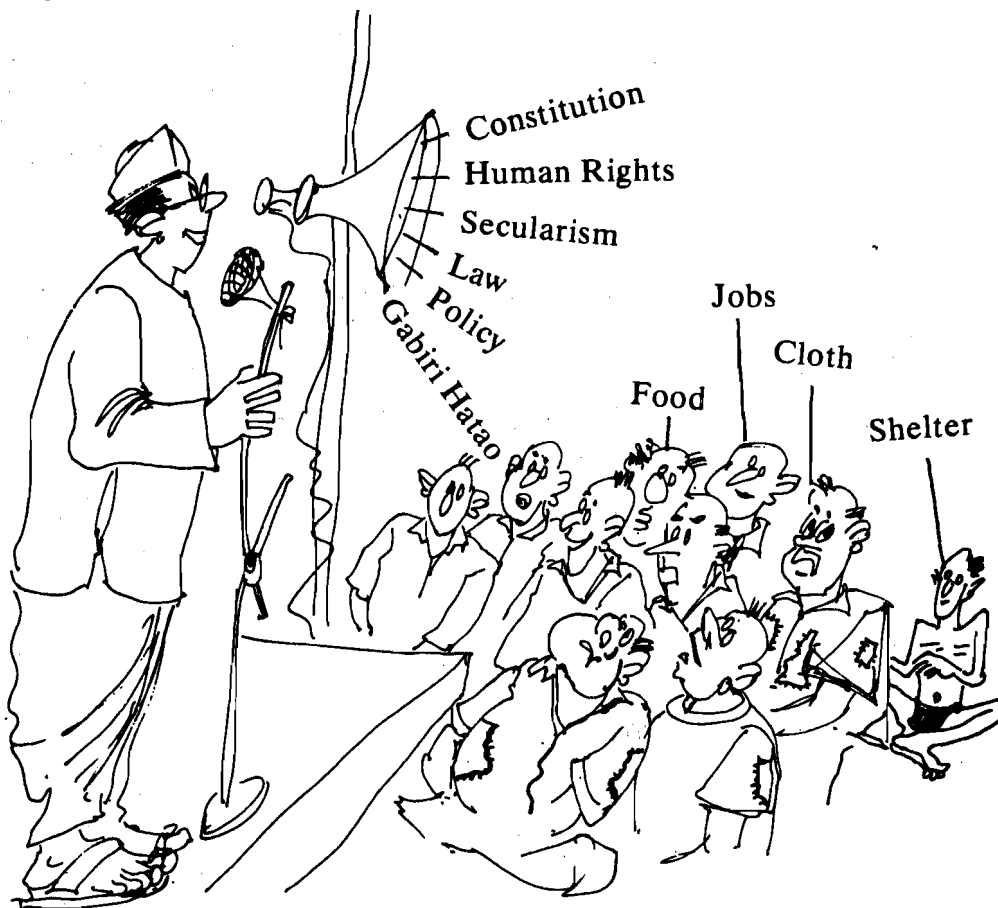
4.3.1 Technology-oriented Problems

The mass media systems may fail to perform their functions when unplanned use of such technology creates problems. For instance communication resources can be

concentrated in a few centres alone. The mass media may be misused by the owners to exercise their power, or the media content may be manipulated to give as a result' of the communicators biases. Guided by past experience, all these problems will have to be foreseen and reasonable solutions formulated for a viable communication policy. If the policy itself becomes outdated in the face of technological developments, it will have to be suitably changed. A mass media policy should contain directions for our media personnel to make correct use of the media technology. From the installation of equipment to its maintenance and from media ownership to its mode of operation, every decision that is taken should be part of the policy.

4.3.2   Problems of Research

Traditionally, communications research in India has shown a remarkable orientation towards social problems. Studies on propaganda techniques, attitude change, effects of mass media, personal influence, diffusion of innovations, communication and development, flow of information, media uses and gratifications, organizational and management structure of the media, and the economics of communication have been motivated by practical problems faced in society. These studies focus on the need to understand the role of communication in those problems and the desire to apply the knowledge gained from research to solve them.

In spite of a great deal of empirical research, no systematic knowledge about the nature, frequency, and origin of communication problems in India is available. However, the situation is beginning to change now. Dissatisfaction is being expressed at the conventional way of using communication resources, the defining of functions and jurisdictions of the media systems, and the regulation of communication. Demands are being made for improving existing regulations, resource allocation principles, institutional arrangements, and defining the rights and responsibilities of professional communicators, commercial communication organizations, and the bureaucracies. These factors are forcing communications researchers, practitioners, and policy makers to take a fresh look at the nature of communication problems and their relationship with other social problems. A communication policy must give importance to these issues. The policy, in effect, is built on the body of knowledge developed by research.

Check Your Progress 1

Note :   i)   Answer the following questions in one or two sentences each.

ii)   Compare your answers with the ones given at the end of this unit.

1)   What do you understand from the phrase 'mediated communication'?

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2)   List the organized communication networks in a society

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3)   Broadly what do you mean by the communication needs of a society?

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4.4   DEFINING COMMUNICATION POLICY

A policy is a set of principles, rules and guidelines to help in the tackling of problems which may be faced by a society in any particular field. A social policy would facilitate the framing and implementation of action programmes to solve social problems. In the same way, a communication policy is formulated in response to the challenges of new communication technologies.

We can define communication policy as action-oriented principles, outlining objectives and means of achieving objectives, focusing on what needs to be done and what is to be avoided in dealing with current and anticipated communication problems in society. The policies are formulated as authoritative guidelines, by legitimate bodies, for developing, maintaining, utilizing, regulating, and changing the mass media systems. General social principles and norms about communication that are incorporated in political ideologies, cultural values, legal doctrines, the fundamental rights, and our collective critical social consciousness about problems are rich sources from which policies are derived. Specific organizational strategies, operational rules, regulations, and tactics are in themselves not policies. They are operational measures for applying and implementing policies.

Policy making is a complex, dynamic process involving different kinds of inputs: scientific knowledge from theoretical and empirical research; social wisdom expressed by philosophers, scholars, and leaders engaged in different areas of social activities; and valid opinions expressed by the public. It is obvious that to be effective, the policy making process needs to dealt with a large volume of information from different sources, mostly processed and integrated for immediate use. This is possible only when the society has a well organized communication system.

4.4.1 Role of Communication Policy

Given the centrality of communication in modern society, one should rightly expect that communication policy would have a distinct and independent role to play. It would be based on society's goals and expectations about the structures, functions, needs, and resources of communication. It would take into account the problems that crop up when using communication in varied activities. This concept of communication policy is represented in Chart-I. The essential point here is that communication policy should be based on an understanding of the totality of communication problems. Such a policy should aim at achieving society's goals and expectations regarding the applications of communication.

Proposal   **Policy**   **Implementation**
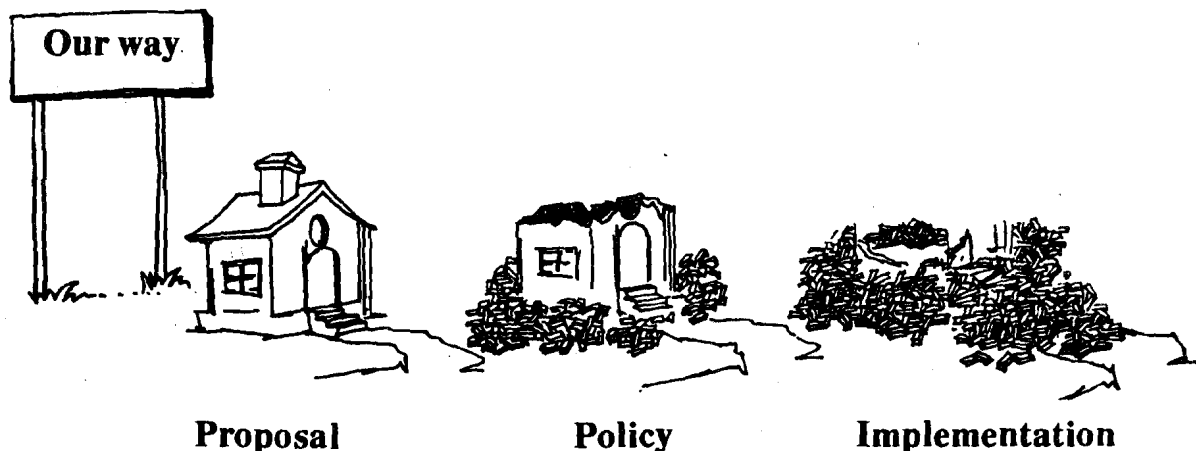
Chart 4.1: Shaping Communication Policy

Communication Problems*	Sectoral Social Policies*	Communication Policy*
Structural:	Agricultural Policy	Formulated on the
Languages	Industrial Policy	basis of analysis of
Region	Science and Technology	the totality of communication
Political Economy	Policy	problems and communication
Regulations	Export & Import Policy	goals of society.
Cultural Norms	Environment Policy	
Technology	Population and Health Policy	

Functional:		
Information	Education Policy	Takes account of the
Education	Cultural Policy	sectoral policies in
Entertainment	Tourism Policy	utilizing
Motivation		communication
Persuasion		in those sectors.
Needs:		
Recognition		A pre-requisite in
Expression		providing information
Influence		bases for society's
		overall policy
		making on all problems.
*Concerned with the process and product of communication.	*Addresses some communication problems, but in an unco-ordinated, fragmented manner. These sectoral policies have implications for communication policy.	*Should have a distinct and independent existence of its own, but it will have inter-sectoral implications.

4.4.2 Objectives of Communication Policy

The priorities according to which the developed and developing countries formulate their policies differ; sometimes even contradict each other. The technologically advanced countries like the United States and Japan, are concerned with mobilizing world markets for their communication goods and services. On the other hand, the developing countries, like India, which are at the receiving end of the technology and information transfer, are concerned with building and expanding their communication systems with indigenous and appropriate technology. The manifest objective of the communication policy of developed countries is to safeguard the free and open flow of information the world over and to ensure the public's access to varied points of view.

While the developing nations seek to safeguard their societies from economic, cultural and communication invasion by the developed nations, one major objective of their communication policy is to eliminate the vestiges of colonial dependency. The governments of developing countries demand balanced trade as well as news flow with the developed countries. A major thrust area of the communication policy of developing countries is the implementation of viable alternatives to the one-way flow of information into their societies. The communication networks of developing countries are devoted to affirming and preserving the diverse cultural identities, and reinforcing the ideology of national integration.

Some developing countries can apparently afford to import complex communication systems which they hope will modernize their infrastructure in a short period. Such countries serve as lucrative markets for the exporters of communication technology. Most of the developing countries however, are busy waging a constant battle against poverty, malnutrition, illiteracy, and indebtedness. Thus, communication development receives scarce priority in their national objectives. The chance to build a strong communication network depends on the availability of foreign aid. Under the circumstances, communication policy debates centre around the acceptance or rejection of financial and other assistance from developed countries.

The main issues are not just the mobilizing of financial resources, transfer of technology, and development of the human resources for communication. There are more fundamental issues concerned with the basic role of communication in society, such as:

● the role of government,

● the mode of financing communication services,

● basic access to communication-independent of the economic ability to pay for essential services,

- protection of the rights of the poor and disadvantaged,
- regulation of commercialism in communication, and
- harnessing of cultural resources through mediated communication on the mass media networks.

Research will have to examine these questions in the context of the great potential of modern communication technology. The results of such research certainly have a bearing on policy formulation.

Check Your Progress 2

Note :   i)   Answer in one or two sentences.

ii)   Compare your answers with those given at the end of this unit.

1)   Define communication policy.

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2)   Are communication policies the same the world over?

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3)   Name any two countries which are the largest exporters of communication technology.

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4)   Generally, what is the direction of information flow between countries?

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5)   Name three sources which may be utilised while framing a communication policy.

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Activity 2

The desire to improve the rate of literacy in our country has certain implications for media policy. Take, for instance, budget allocation; funds will have to be earmarked to prepare special books for the new literates. This is a policy issue.

Now, you are required to identify at least two other policy considerations that would make the total literacy campaign successful.

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4.5 MASS MEDIA POLICY FORMULATION

In the above activity, you may have identified areas such as the selection and presentation of content in the primers, maintenance of low price levels to boost access to low income groups, solutions to hitches in the rights of translation, publication and copyright etc., as probable policy matters. Quite right. Having an explicit policy helps to realise the true potential of the media. But how is a mass media policy formulated? We shall study the question now.

The mass media can be tools of cultural enrichment; national cohesion and advancement; and understanding and peace among peoples, through a "truer and more perfect knowledge of each other's lives". Or they can become the "new opiate of the masses", the debasers of standards and the instruments of cultural domination. Either way, the result depends on the applications of the media. The applications depend on policy deliberations based on research findings.

Communication policies are inherent in every society, though they may frequently be latent and disjointed, rather than clearly articulated and harmonized. The need is to concretize national communication policies and this aspect is receiving greater attention, of late.

The media policy makers in India have to first bridge the gap between ground realities and ideal situations. Certain paradoxes exist in the field of communication which need to be considered by policy makers, planners and researchers. Some of these realities are elucidated here.

- Whereas there is an urgent demand to realise the right to "equal access to information there is a widening of the information gap between the richer and the poorer sections of society and an increasing urban orientation of the mass media.

- There is misappropriation of the mass media for commercial and political purposes, when the need of the hour is to apply the media to the task of propagating culture, education, information and leisure time entertainment.

- There is predominant use of the media to impose foreign values instead of giving due importance to reflecting the values and norms that are inherent in a particular society.

- The communications generally create a rapport with the audience by taking into consideration the feedback received from them. But in India (by and large) the communicators do not desire to find out the reactions of the audience to their programmes. This mentality hampers the qualitative growth and improvement of the programmes over a period.

- The increase in the number of channels of information is not matched by any corresponding increase in the standard of programming.

- While communication satellites and such other new technologies remove the barriers to information and education across national boundaries all over the world, the same technologies pave the way for phenomena such as 'new communication colonialism' and 'cultural imperialism'. This is expectedly a by-product of the current one-way flow of information.

In achieving the compromises between these opposites, communication policies borrow from cultural policies. At the same time, communication policies are related to national policies for science and technology and to policies for social, economic and educational development and planning.

4.6 COMMISSIONS AND COMMITTEES ON THE MEDIA

Let us now examine the regulations that have been implemented by the government when enunciating with its policy for individual media like press, radio, TV and film.

One of the first steps undertaken immediately after India gained independence was the setting up of a Press Law Enquiry Committee in 1947 to review the existing press laws. The outcome was the passing of the Press (Objectionable Matters) Act amending Article 19 (2) by adding various restrictions. The press agitated, but to' no avail. The government constituted the First Press Commission, under the Chairmanship of Justice G.S. Rajadhyaksha, on September 23, 1952. The Commission presented its report in 1954. Among other recommendations it advised the formation of a Press Council; a code of Ethics; the appointment of a Press Registrar and A State Trading Corporation; minimum basic wages for working journalists; and the operation of price-page schedule.

Another major committee to promote the growth of small newspapers, called the Enquiry Committee on Small Newspapers, was appointed under the Chairmanship of P.R. Diwakar, who submitted the report to Parliament on March 9,1956.

4.6.1 Necessity of Expert Committees

There is an oft-repeated charge that the government, for reasons best known to itself, is not interested in framing a communication policy. Though policies have been announced in other sectors like agriculture, industry, education, health and even tourism, the same has not been done in the case of the mass media. This position can be summarised in what Mrs. Indira Gandhi said on returning to power in 1980, "it was necessary to keep control over AIR and TV, to correct the imbalance created by the 'free press'.

Let us now examine the recommendations of some of the Committees appointed by the Central Government to advise it on the form, structure, ownership and content of broadcasting in India.

4.6.2 Chanda Committee

During Mrs. Indira Gandhi's tenure as the Union Minister for Information and Broadcasting, the A.K. Chanda Committee was appointed in 1964 which submitted its report in 1966, which was tabled in Parliament only in 1970. It recommended the liberation of Radio and TV from rigid government control by converting them into separate corporations. It took another six years to separate 'Doordarshan' from 'Akashwani' to create Akashwani and Doordarshan in 1976, though both function under the same administrative and financial procedures with common engineering and programme staff cadres.

4.6.3 Kuldip Nayar Committee

On the constitutional and legal fronts, the 1975-77 emergency and the Janata Party rule during 1977-79, heralded a fresh look at the media issues like the restructuring of the national news agencies and the granting of autonomy to the broadcasting media. The four national news agencies—PTI and UNI (English) and Hindustan Samachar and Samachar Bharati (Hindi) were merged on February 1, 1976, and one news agency "Samachar" was formed. After the Emergency, the Kuldip Nayar Committee was appointed in March 1977. It recommended the dissolution of Samachar and

suggested the creation of two news agencies—**Varta** in Hindi and other Indian languages and **Sandesh** in English, plus an international news agency **News India**. But the Kuldip Nayar Committee report was rejected.
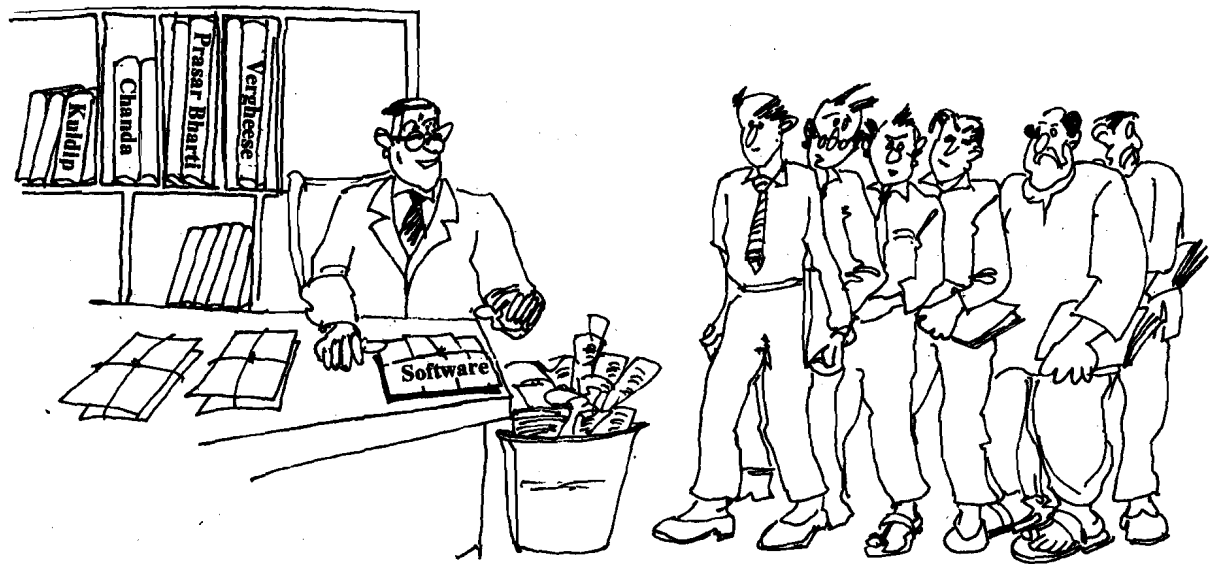
4.6.4 Verghese Committee

Meanwhile, the Janata government appointed a Working Group on Autonomy for Akashwani and Doordarshan in August 1977 headed by B.G. Verghese, which submitted its recommendations on February 24,1978. But the main suggestion of the Verghese Committee, the formation of the **Akash Bharati** or the National Broadcasting Trust for both AIR and Doordarshan, did not find favour even with the Janata rulers. Explaining the background to this bold recommendation, B.G. Verghese later said: "the reason why the people want an independent corporation is because the executive, abetted by a captive Parliament, shamelessly misused broadcasting during the Emergency, that is what has to be prevented for all time. Democracy is not something based on the pillar of only one institution, such as Parliament or the Judiciary, however important it may be. It is a tapestry woven out of many institutions of which a free, responsible and creative broadcasting system is one of the most significant".

The Verghese Committee Report was tabled in both houses of Parliament and finally, L.K. Advani, the then Minister for Information and Broadcasting, introduced a bill on May 16,1979. The Bill proposed the setting up of an Autonomous Corporation known as Prasar Bharati for both AIR and TV. But it substantially altered the basic structure of the proposed Corporation as suggested by the Verghese Committee and rejected the provision of constitutional safeguards. But on the untimely dissolution of the Lok Sabha, the bill died a natural death.

4.6.5 Working Group on Software

For the Congress government, back in power by 1979, autonomy for AIR and Doordarshan "was not considered necessary to enable these mass media to discharge their basic objectives of serving the people." The government appointed, in 1982, a Working Group with Dr. P.C. Joshi as Chairman "to prepare a software plan" for Doordarshan. The working group, in its report submitted in 1984, emphasized the lack of functional freedom. It suggested reorganisation of the Information and Broadcasting Ministry on the Railway Board pattern insisted that it should be similarly manned only by people with professional experience.

4.6.6 Other Committees

The media foundation of the Non-aligned (NAMEDIA) undertook, in 1986, a national feedback project on Doordarshan and held six seminars in different metropolitan cities.

On the basis of consensus that emerged at the various centres, it advocated that "a Television Authority of India as a public trust, set by and under the benign scrutiny of Parliament and governed by experienced professionals and broad-minded persons of national stature with acclaimed scientific, technical, cultural, artistic and aesthetic backgrounds, was thought to be ideal". The issue of autonomy was also considered by the Sarkaria Commission (1987). From the different opinions gathered from various state governments and the intelligentsia in all parts of the country, the commission established that there was too much of political interference in the working of the electronic media.

4.6.7 Prasar Bharati

After it assumed power in 1989, the National Front government came out first with a Cabinet Paper and then introduced the Prasar Bharati Bill in December 1989. According to P. Upendra, the Minister for Information and Broadcasting, the Bill borrowed from the Prasar Bharati Bill of 1979 and took into account the changed circumstances and the present ethos. Many, however, felt that the bill was put before the nation in a hurry. A national debate was initiated, in many cases with the active encouragement of the government to arrive at a consensus on the framework and the modalities of media autonomy. The Bill, after incorporating some amendments, was unanimously passed in both Houses of Parliament. But following a change of government in October 1990, the lack of political good will to translate the concept into a working proposition was apparent. While there was no official pronouncement, the interim government headed by Chandrasekhar continued to maintain the status quo. The dissolution of the Lok Sabha in April 1991 signed the death warrant of the Prasar Bharati Bill, which then had needed only the Presidential assent for becoming Law. The death of Rajiv Gandhi and the advent of Congress rule in June 1991, under P.V. Narasimha Rao, put an end to any hopes about the issue. Meanwhile, the question of broadcasting autonomy has become irrelevant as other sources of information and entertainment viz., STAR TV, CNN and BBC have burst into view in the wake of the Gulf War. The invasion from the skies has begun.

Today, the rapid expansion of television in India in terms of availability (7 channels) and sheer expansion (545 TV stations) speaks of unqualified success by any standards. TV has often reached a high degree of professional excellence in its news coverage. The 32-hour continuous election telecast in May-June 1991 involving on-the-spot reporting from the counting booths even in the remote corners of the country and the swift shuttling between the national network and the local centres was a refreshingly dramatic experience for the viewers. But barring occasional and isolated instances, it has steadily developed an urban bias and an elitist approach, popularising, in the process, an alien life style and culture far removed from the realities of Indian life.

Check Your Progress 3

Note : i) Fill in the blanks choosing the correct alternative from the ones given in the brackets.

  ii) Compare your answers with those given at the end of this unit.

1) The Press Law Enquiry Committee was constituted in

  ....(1948, 1946,1947).

2) The Working Group on Software for Doordarshan was headed by

  .... (Justice Sarkaria, P.C. Joshi, G.S. Rajadhyaksha).

3) The Kuldip Nayar Committee recommended the creation of an international news agency to be called .... (Samachar, Sandesh, News India).

4) The Verghese Committee recommended the setting up of an autonomous trust, for AIR and Doordarshan to be called... (Registrar, Akash Bharati, National Book Trust).

5) The first Press Commission recommended the formation of .... (a Press Council, a Code of Ethics, both these alternatives).

4.7 POLICY VERSUS PRACTICE AND PERFORMANCE

The. Doordarshan has always suffered from the dichotomy between policy pronouncements (which emphasize the use of the mass media for social progress) and the continuous drift and departure from them in actual practice. In a developing and democratic country like India, access to television and the social benefit accruing from it, is a crucial test of the social relevance of such an expensive medium. The **reaison d'etre** of the Doordarshan in India, according to official statements, is to create a sense of participation in our efforts to usher in a new social order. As early as February 1973, a seminar on software objectives sponsored by the government recommended that, "Television must be used in the development process as an instrument of social change and national cohesion by unhesitatingly upholding progressive values and involving the community in a free dialogue. Indian TV has to shun an elitist approach and consumer value system and evolve a truly national model".

Officially the task assigned to the electronic media is three-fold. First, " the AIR and Doordarshan should inform people about happenings in India and the world, objectively, fairly and without any bias, as adequately and quickly as possible" Second , "the electronic media should get across to the people the policies and programmes that the government has framed for accelerating the process of socio-economic transformation". And finally, the broadcast media should pursue "an open policy and a policy that does not shirk issues and the responsibilities connected to these issues in order to develop an informed and participative citizenry; so that people know and think for themselves what is good for them and for the country". There can be no serious difference of opinion on these objectives. The reach of the electronic media together with the high percentage of the illiterate population make the broadcast media the most appropriate vehicles of national communication.

Mrs. Indira Gandhi, who played a leading role in the growth of TV in India, saw its role primarily as a promoter of development and education in a backward country. She repeatedly affirmed the national importance of utilising TV not just for the idle entertainment of the elite but for the uplift of the poor, especially in the inaccessible rural areas. But in effect and in actual practice, the purchase of a TV set is seen as wholesale investment in entertainment which obviates the bother and expense of going to an auditorium or a stadium. Even a cursory examination of its programmes during any week makes it clear that the order in which Doordarshan fulfils the three functions of the medium is: entertainment first, information second and education third. This is true even after the introduction of the five Metro channels.

Even a casual viewer cannot but notice that the Doordarshan does not practice what it preaches and evidently such guidelines are honoured more in the breach than in the observance. The official media, despite occasional airs of openness, are generally identified as the propaganda wing of the party in power. These media do not present a balanced and non-partisan view of the events and happenings, which an average citizen so badly requires in order to arrive at an informed judgement. India may demand free and balanced flow of information at the international level. But at home, the distinction between the ruling party and the government, between the party interest and the national interest often gets blurred. In addition to the lack of objectivity and frankness, the news on Doordarshan also suffers from an overdose of elite and urban values.

4.7.1 Commercialism Vs. Social Good

From inception, broadcasting in India has been looked upon as a public service for the promotion of social objectives. The concept of advertisements for the promotion of consumer goods was also considered incompatible with the prevailing philosophy of the "socialistic pattern of society". What causes alarm today is the proliferation in the mass media of these very advertisements for consumer goods.

In a developing country like India, radio and TV should be viewed as a national resource for the uplift of the masses. It is only through a strong media network that

the right kind of information and education can be imparted to the people. But the media in our country, like elsewhere in the world, have buckled under the pressure of commercial interests. As a result, besides discrimination of information or the 'haves' from the 'have-nots', there is erosion of regional and cultural identities and ethics. Mindless entertainment with little or no educative value defeats the very purpose of building up a strong media network. For one, it is definitely not in the interest of the people to provide them with unproductive media fare. For another, it is nothing but unjustifiable use of invaluable resources.

The question that inevitably arises is whether we should use TV for promoting a humane social order or to create synthetic needs.

Under the existing system Doordarshan has become a tool for the promotion of crass consumerism. It is a strange paradox that this public investment, which facilitated the rapid expansion of the TV network in a poor country, is now being exploited by the big businesses for building their own corporate images. While it is conceded that ad revenue makes a network viable and independent, the same advertising also dictates the nature, form and content of the media software. Every noble intention to arouse social consciousness through the media gets traded for unhealthy programming. Here is an example.

Advertisers would always prefer to sponsor those programmes which create the proper mood in the viewers to buy their products. Their choice, invariably, falls on entertainment programmes. On rare occasions when serious programmes on topics like environment preservation, public hygiene or any significant social issues like land reforms or minimum wages are telecast, no sponsor is usually available. This is in stark contrast to the situation when advertisers lined up to spend a total of Rs. 35 crore on the serial 'Mahabharat' alone. To play the role of communicator-cum-educator in developing countries, broadcasting media have to provide software that would enrich the lives of the people. A communication policy would have to specify some guidelines to our communicators regarding balanced programming. Here, 'balanced' would mean the right mix of entertainment, information and education.

4.7.2 The Performance of the Indian Press

The press in a democratic country plays a vital role in creating, moulding, and reflecting public opinion. It is a fundamental institution of our society.

Though the press in India is free, it suffers from many ills. It has yet to identify its true post-independence role so as to ensure against haphazard growth and directionless expansion.

There are a few in-built handicaps such as vast geographical area, illiteracy, poverty, multiplicity of languages, and absence of adequate communication facilities. Some other bottlenecks exist, like :

- the linking of ownership of newspapers with other industrial or commercial enterprises,
- limited newspaper ownership with closely held 'share interest',
- urban-oriented expansion of newspapers leaving the vast country side population untouched,
- inadequate and expensive newsprint, and
- the lack of local advertisement support.

Eminent journalists have pointed out several drawbacks which stand in the way of making the press in India an independent and impartial instrument of communication of news and views. Some of these drawbacks are :

- the present system of accreditation of journalists,
- the government's allocation of newsprint,
- fixation of advertisement rates,
- favours to journalists in the form of perquisites such as subsidized housing, medical facilities. etc.,
- heavy dependence of the press on official releases.

4.7.3 Second Press Commission

For a comprehensive and an in-depth examination of the state of the Indian press and the steps that need to be taken for its development on sound and healthy lines, the Government of India appointed the second Press Commission on 18 May, 1978, headed by Justice K.M. Mathew.

The appointment of the Second Press Commission had become necessary as the Indian Press had undergone several changes, had taken new strides, and acquired an added significance with an ever-expanding readership.

One of the recommendations of the Second Press Commission was to include both positive and negative aspects of an event in development reports. This implied that these reports should investigate the reasons for success as well as failure at different places and under different conditions—of various development programmes affecting the lives of the common people. But most of our newspapers merely carry official handouts giving statistics of mandays of employment provided, persons made literate or area brought under irrigation.

The reporting of non-official initiatives in rural development, education reform, struggle against superstitious beliefs, evil practices like dowry and Sati or other areas of social campaign, is even less extensive than indepth reporting of the implementation of official development programmes. The Commission says : "our newspapers usually become aware of such non-official activities only after they have been honoured by a Jamnalal Bajaj Foundation award or Magsaysay award!"

Another long standing criticism of the press is that it carries too much bad news at the expense of the good. To gain maximum readership, the press emphasizes the exceptional rather than the representative; the sensational rather than the significant. Many activities of the utmost social consequence are not considered reportable incidents. But, as Indira Gandhi never tired of pointing out, "the meek may one day inherit the earth, but never the headlines". This brings us inevitably to the question of social responsibility. Certainly, the press has travelled a long way from the arrogant attitude of the newspaper owners who said, " A newspaper is a private enterprise owing nothing whatsoever to the public, which grants it no franchise. After all, responsible journalism is journalism with a conscience". Nikhil Chakravartty, an eminent journalist, feels that, "Even if you don't like someone or disagree with him ideologically, you must be fair." A journalist is confronted with ethical decisions almost daily. Should a news source go unnamed? Should a "leak" possibly affecting national security be used? Does the public interest override individual privacy? Should a rape victim's identity be disclosed? Should communities be identified in a communal clash or gory details of violence reported? General professional codes call for truth, accuracy, impartiality and fair play. Unlike most countries where a free press exists, there is no universally accepted code of conduct in enforcement in India. Even the professional bodies have not been unanimous in developing any. Nor has any serious effort been made by the press to find out what the society thinks of it let alone identify the possible areas of disagreement.

The Indian press had always been known for its sanity over sensitive issues like communal disturbances. But on the threshold of the nineties, it appeared that a large section of the press lost its sense of balance and fairness while reporting such highly explosive issues and events. Barring a few glorious exceptions, most of the newspapers betrayed a distinct and dangerous slant in reporting the Ram Janmabhoomi-Babri Masjid controversy.

For all this, the absence of a code of professional conduct in our country is more or less made up for by the adherence of the press to the social responsibility theory. And the performance of the press can be evaluated on the basis of this single criterion. Such accountability to the public serves as a self regulatory mechanism in place of an explicit policy.

4.8   THE FUTURE ROLE OF POLICY

What is the role of the government in making the mass media truly effective vehicles of culture, creativity and expression ? Whatever the nature of media ownership—whether government, public corporation, or private enterprise—it is the government which is ultimately responsible for ensuring the use of broadcasting frequencies in the public interest.

Programme content is based on the objectives of the medium, These objectives form the basis for media policies. In our country, the Ministry of information and Broadcasting monitors the content of the print and electronic media to ensure that all the mass media serve their noble purpose; to be tolls in the process of development and change, The improvement and expansion of the media network is directly linked to this goal.

From time to time various Committees and commission have been set up for the purpose of evaluating the working of the communication network. Attempts have been made to formulate a mass media policy based on their recommendations, Whether or not these suggestions will be incorporated to the working of the media system depends on the authorities. In response to some of the policy considerations the government may decide to make resources available through direct budgets, or grants or provided fiscal advantages to quality productions, or offer preferential customs duties when importing hardware or software, etc. Alternatively, the media policy itself may be the outcome of such decisions and regulations.

Public participation in the formulation of national mass media policies may be achieved by setting up Mass Media Policy Council, with representatives from among media professionals and others concerned with the role of communication in society.

To implement policy initiatives, institutions may be started or existing ones improved for training and research in the media of film, radio and television broadcasting, printing and book production, etc.

It is of utmost importance to chalk out a detailed communication policy to guide the growth of the communication networks. Piecemeal initiatives only harm the functioning of the media system. A comprehensive policy would help bring about more effective and purposeful communication.

Check Your Progress 4

Note :   i)   Answer the following questions in two sentences each.

ii)   Compare your answers with those given at the end of this unit.

1)   What was the significant recommendation of the A.K. Chanda Committee?

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2)   What kinds of self regulation can be subscribed to by the media?

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3)   What was the recommendation of the second press Commission regarding reportage of development events?

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4.9   LET US SUM UP

In this unit, you were exposed to the significance of mass media policies. There have been frequent calls for enunciating an explicit media policy for the country. Critics have pointed out that it was impossible to give direction to the practices in the media in the absence of a declared policy. Those scholars who do not share this view claim that for a country of India's diversity it is not possible to declare a uniform national media policy. Some others argue that policy directions are available for each mass medium through guidelines, codes of conduct, and even laws enunciated in the Constitution, the Indian Penal Code, etc., policy directives from important media bodies say for instance the Press Council of India, form a major part of the national media policy.

In this unit we have defined communication policy as a set of princplies to tackle action-oriented problems effectively.

India's efforts to give proper direction and fillip to the growth and effective functioning of the mass media was also explained. To summarise here, the Chanda Committee recommended freeing of the broadcast media from government control and the separation of Doordarshan from AIR. The Verghese Committee suggested the setting up of Akash Bharati, an autonomous corporation, to oversee the functioning of both AIR and Doordarshan. The Working Group on Software for Doordarshan recommended reorganizing the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting after the pattern of the Ministry of Railways.

The first Press Commission recommended the formulation of a code of ethics and also of a Press Council, among other suggestions, to regulate the print media. The second Press Commission strongly recommended the inclusion of an element of balance in reporting development related and other events . The performances of Doordarshan and the Press have also been outlined. A brief perspective into the future role of mass media Policy was given so that you would be able to analyse the parameters that need to be kept in mind while formulating any mass media policy for the nation.

4.10   FURTHER READING

Bhattacharjee, Arun (1972) *Indian Press : Profession to Industry,* Vikas Publications, Delhi.

Chatterjee, P.C. (1987) *Broadcasting in India,* Sage Publications, New Delhi.

Report of the National Broadcasting Trust Akash Bharati (Vol. 1 & 2), B.G. Verghese, 1978.

4.11   CHECK YOUR PROGRESS: MODEL ANSWERS

Check Your Progress 1

1) Mediated communication is the use of the media by an individual or organisation to send a message to an audience.

2) Telephone, telegraph and mail services, microwave telecommunication networks, satellite links, cables, newspapers and periodicals: books libraries and archives; radio and television services, cinema, documentation services; even interpersonal communication by folk media.

3) Communication needs of society are the sum of individual communication needs: to be informed, educated and entertained, to share experiences, to influence others decisions, etc.

Check Your Progress 2

1) A communication policy is a set of action oriented principles, which outline objective and means of achieving them and focus on dos and don'ts when dealing with current and anticipated communication problems.

2) No; they depend on the degree of development of the country and its political system.

3) Japan and USA.

4) Information flows from countries of the north to those of the south, from countries of the West to those of the East.

5) Fundamental rights as enshrined in the constitution; collective critical social consciousness about problems; cultural values.

Check Your Progress 3

1) 1947

2) Dr. P.C. Joshi

3) News India

4) Akash Bharati

5) A Press Council and a Code of Ethics

Check Your Progress 4

1) The A.K. Chanda Committee in its report of 1966, recommended the libersation of the broadcasting media from rigid government control. It further suggested the separation of AIR and Doordarshan into independent corporations.

2) The media can subscribe to a code of ethics, i.e. maintain standards of practice, establish councils to investigate complaints about media content, or appoint an ombudsman to oversee the fairness of media coverage, and have a self regulatory system to set acceptable standards in advertising practices.

3) The Mathew Commission, as the second Press Commission is known, recommended the incorporation of both positive and negative aspects about any development related event in press reports.