

A Critique of Prasar Bharati

Kanchan Vasudev

Deputy Director, ICSSR, New Delhi

Abstracts: Radio and Television are the two-effective medium of mass communication and assumes an enormous importance in the society. Doordarshan and AIR are two completely separate wings under the corporate umbrella of the Prasar Bharati. In this paper an attempt will be made to find out whether the independent status for Television and Doordarshan as important media agencies. The need of some sort of autonomy was always felt. As a result Prasar Bharati came into existence. To examine whether the bill is indeed a "charter of freedom for giving voice to the people of India", an investigative approach has been adopted.

Keywords: Television, Doordarshan, Prasar Bharti, The Nitesh Sengupta Committee, Sam Pitroda Committee.

Introduction

The media put our environment in perspective by giving its many aspects various meaning and explanations. They help establish our agendas by giving us things to think and talk about; they help us become socialised into our communities and political system and to participate in change when necessary; and they help us cope with or escape from life's realities in a wide variety of ways. In short, the greater our need to belong, to understand, and to cope with, the greater our reliance on the mass media and hence the media must have some pervasive influence on our thoughts, beliefs, values, and even our behaviour.

Every mass medium of communication has its unique identity. By virtue of that uniqueness it creates space for itself in the society. The audience that it attracts is also attributed to its uniqueness.

Since independence, the most influential mass mediums, All India Radio and Doordarshan were working as media units under the Ministry of Information & Broadcast (I&B) and hence always treated as a government mouthpiece. Hence the need of some sort of autonomy was always felt. As a result, Prasar Bharati came into existence.

Aim

In this brief paper an attempt will be made to find out whether the independent status for these important media agencies are real or illusory. In order to examine whether the bill is indeed a "charter of freedom for giving voice to the people of India", an investigative approach has been adopted.

Mediums of Mass Communication

Radio and Television are the two effective medium of mass communication and assumes an enormous importance in the society. Doordarshan and AIR are two completely separate wings under the corporate umbrella of the Prasar Bharati.

All India Radio

Radio broadcasting in India started on 31st July, 1924, when the Madras Presidency Radio Club went on the air for the first time. However, their pioneering effort came to an end in 1927 owing to financial crisis. The move towards a regular broadcasting service was made in the same year by the Indian Broadcasting Company, a commercial undertaking, which chose for its operations the two premier cities of Bombay and Calcutta. In March, 1930 the Indian Broadcasting Company had to go into liquidation. A month later, the then Government of India took over the control of the Company's affairs and the Indian State Broadcasting Service was born. However, due to non-viability proposition, after operating the service for about 18 months, the Government decided to close it down. At this juncture, public opinion began to assert itself and the Government gave up the contemplated closure. And thus, in May, 1932, Indian Broadcasting received its permanent lease of life. The next four years were marked by some significant developments and, in June, 1936, Indian State Broadcasting was given its present name, All India Radio.

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Radio as a mass medium of communication has a significant reach. Radio played a significant part in transforming the public opinion and behaviour of an entire nation and significantly affects the lives of the people to willingly contribute to the state and the society. It has created for itself an image of being an important source of education and development. Radio network as an instantaneous news medium unifies a diversified nation in to one. It is also found that using radio successfully in reaching "hard-to-reach" rural audiences quickly and quite inexpensively. Advertising on the radio with catchy jingles and phrases is a tried and tested means of communication. Radio lost its popularity with the boom of television. But till day, radio remains one of the favorite means of electronic communication. Moreover, it is an interactive means of communication with all the dial-in programs which give the listeners an opportunity to feature on radio.

Payal Kamat (2012) mentions "AIR is considered by media authorities and researchers to have proved its worth and utility both as an informational channel and a development and cultural activist. It has provided healthy entertainment through its various light and humorous programmes.

Malhan (1993) says that extensive research and other field surveys have already given great credit to radio as a credible promoter of a suitable climate for development and progress as also for having advanced form educational and cultural renaissance.

The large number of under privileged people in rural areas still sticks to radio. (Gupta 1995)

Rao (1992) found villagers' exposure to radio was significantly high with as many as 50 per cent having access to the radio and getting the benefit of exposure to broadcasts as far as reach and utilization of the media and villagers' exposure to other informational channels was concerned.

It was also found that agriculture or rural programmes were high on the priority of listeners. The local radio stations are very effective in reaching the people and ensuring their participation.

Audience researches conducted all around the country have shown that many radio programmes have fairly high percentage of listeners. The feedback and suggestions on popular as well as special programmes such as Yuvvani, film songs, rural based programmes, farmer's programmes, expert's talks and question answer format programmes are treated as overwhelming.

Many were attracted to radio and there was a time when "Chhaya Geet" on Vividh Bharati and "Binaca Geet Mala" were listened to religiously by one and all. Radio commercials have been very popular.

Doordarshan

Television in India took faltering steps in 1959. This delayed entry was due to the misconception prevalent in the fifties that television is a luxury which only the more advanced and affluent countries in the world can afford. But there was also realisation of the immense potential of television as an instrument of rapid socio-economic transformation. And so with the help of UNESCO, in September 1959 India joined the small Asian community of TV nations. The year 1982 witnessed the introduction of a regular satellite link between Delhi and different transmitters, the introduction of Colour T.V. and the process of the National Programmes and Doordarshan switching to colour transmission. The major impetus for these developments was the Asian Games held in Delhi in 1982. After 1982, there was rapid expansion owing to the setting up of Low Power Transmitters (LPT) throughout the country. The number of transmitters grew form 46 to 553 in just one decade. Doordarshan launched its International Channel with effect from 14th March, 1995. Today Doordarshan has emerged as one of the largest broadcasting networks of the world.

Acharya, R.N. (1987) Television appeals both the auditory and visual senses, and hence is an important communication device as it beholds the attention of the audience. Television is a popular and powerful medium that both imitates and influences culture. For many people, television is a primary source of information and entertainment. It is a window into a different world an opportunity to view people, place, and things that we may not have experienced first-hand. In an increasingly global society, television shapes society's perception of the world.

According to Gupta and Agarwal the television has evolved for itself an image of being essentially an entertainment medium and even as an extended arm of the film industry.

Manik Saikia (2015) has said that television is one of the greatest inventions of the scientific world has contributed immensely to the development of mankind. It has brought people of different countries and regions closer to each other, enabling them to learn about the culture and traditions flourishing in different parts of the world. It is perhaps the most powerful means of mass communication for education and entertainment.

Indian Television Dot Com (2015) states that the Television has come to the forefront only in the past 21 years and more so in the past 13. There were initially two ignition points: the first in the eighties when colour TV was introduced

by state-owned broadcaster Doordarshan (DD) timed with the 1982 Asian Games which India hosted. It then proceeded to install transmitters nationwide rapidly for terrestrial broadcasting. In this period no private enterprise was allowed to set up TV stations or to transmit TV signals. The second spark came in the early nineties with the broadcast of satellite TV by foreign programmers like CNN followed by Star TV and a little later by domestic channels.

For many people, it is impossible to imagine a life without their television sets, be it the daily news, or even the soap operas. Television has become an advertising hub where advertisers are ready to spend huge amounts for an ad of few seconds, especially for programmes with high viewership. The Indian television industry is one of the largest in the world in terms of viewership. Thousands of programmes are telecast every day in a variety of languages through the medium of television in India. An overwhelming majority of households own a television set these days and its penetration is slowly increasing in rural areas as well.

Indian television viewers were looking for entertainment options, apart from what state-owned broadcaster DD was offering. That came their way with the import and manufacture of video cassette recorders permitted domestically. There was a veritable boom in video cassette recorder sales during this period. Enterprising individuals in apartment blocks placed a video in their homes or their garages and started offering a cable TV service to people who opted for it. The fare available was Hindi and English movies and pirated western comedies, music and game shows. At this stage, cable TV, which was restricted to the major metros and towns and the upper crust of society, now is a mass connect.

Apart from news and other informative programme, from serial Hum log, Ramayana, Mahabharat, Chanakya to now Saas-Bahu Soap Operas, television has turned to be the most effective tool of entertainment. Reality shows have been order of the day attracting and wooing the audiences of all ages. With the advent of shows like Antakshri and Sa Re Ga Ma Pa, the music reality shows, Indian television industry saw a new wave generated in the genre of Reality Television shows back in early 1990s and since then there has been all kinds of reality shows and perspectives like MTV Bakra, Nach Baliye, Kaun Banega Carorepati, Jhalk Dikhlaaja, Big Boss, Swayamvar. The TV serials like Ramayana, Mahabharat, Hum Log, Buniyaad, Saas Bhi Kabhi Bahoo Thi, Tarak Mehta Ka Ulta Chasma, etc., kept families glued to it. The TV sets are the must for a household.

Need for Prasar Bharati

Since independence, the most influential mass mediums, All India Radio and Doordarshan were working as media units under the Ministry of Information & Broadcaste (I&B).

AIR and Doordarshan, despite their excellent track record in the realm of public service broadcasting, find themselves vulnerable to criticism when it comes to news and news based programmes, including current affairs. Since it was controlled by the State, it has always suffered from the label of being biased and mouthpiece of the Government. And hence always suffered from a credibility crisis. Thus the need of autonomy of these mass medium of communication was always voiced from different quarters.

Secondly an absolute need was felt for a public broadcaster in a developing country like India where there are millions of people below the poverty line, and where millions are still illiterate. Private channels would not touch with a barge pole many of the developmental issues. The public broadcaster has to take them up. The net result of the formation of the Prasar Bharati will have two important dimensions; (i) It will enhance the credibility score of the political rulers at the centre, and (ii) it will satisfy, though for a short spell of time, the malcontents in different parts of the country.

Mehta (1989) pointed out that, the Bill has to be in harmony with the basic approach of the broadcasting policy as laid down by the Supreme Court, which stated in a recent judgement that "air ways or frequencies for transmission of electronic communication are public property and should not be the monopoly of the government or anybody else. It should offer a plurality and diversity of news and views". Also, the policy has to take cognizance of the rapid changes in electronic media technology.

Enactment of Prasar Bharati (Broadcasting Corporation of India)

For over three decades beginning with Chanda Committee Report in 1966 and continuing through the reports of the Verghese Committee in 1978 and the Joshi Committee in 1985 - expert committees set up by the government made a case for organizational restructuring of broadcasting, so as to give it greater autonomy. It was mainly based on the Prasar Bharati Bill, 1978 introduced by the Janata Party in Parliament.

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As a result, the Prasar Bharati Act (1990) was formed by the government. It was kept idle for seven years. In July 1997, it was activated after being notified and came into force on September 22, 1997 almost after 50 years of independence.

The major objectives of the Prasar Bharati Corporation as laid out in the Prasar Bharati Act, 1990 are as follows:

- To uphold the unity and integrity of the country and the values enshrined in the Constitution;
- To promote national integration;
- To safeguard citizens' rights to be informed on all matters of public interest by presenting a fair and balanced flow of information;
- To pay special attention to the fields of education and spread of literacy, agriculture, rural development, environment, health & family welfare and science & technology;
- To create awareness about women's issues and take special steps to protect the interests of children, aged and other vulnerable sections of the society;
- To provide adequate coverage to diverse cultures, sports and games and youth affairs;
- To promote social justice, safeguarding the rights of working classes, minorities and tribal communities.
- To promote research and expand broadcasting faculties & development in broadcast technology.

A Critical Appraisal

The Prasar Bharati (Broadcasting Corporation of India) Bill which was introduced in the Lok Sabha on December 29, 1989 is in a sense not entirely a new measure. As the minister for information and broadcasting pointed out while introducing this bill, it was mainly based on the Prasar Bharati Bill, 1978 introduced by the Janata Party in parliament. The earlier bill had been based on the report of the Verghese Committee.

The Prasar Bharati Bill has time and again triggered a lively debate on provisions such as cross media holdings, the extent of foreign equity allowed, up linking facilities and the cosmopolitan and powers of the Broadcasting Authority of India. It is argued that the Bill is not in harmony with the basic approach of the broadcasting policy as laid down by the Supreme Court, which stated in a judgement that "air ways or frequencies for transmission of electronic communication are public property and should not be the monopoly of the government or anybody else. It should offer a plurality and diversity of news and views". Also, the policy has to take cognizance of the rapid changes in electronic media technology.

According to the statement of objects and reasons, the intention of the bill is "that the proposed corporation should function as a genuinely autonomous body-innovative, dynamic and flexible-with a high degree of credibility". Though it is true that a corporation could be more independent than a government department, however, an organisation does not necessarily gain independence by becoming a corporation.

Administrative Control

The bill envisages the appointment of four full-time governors in the board: chairman, executive governor, governor (finance) and governor (personnel) and six part-time members who will be people of eminence from various fields like culture, art, communication and social development. The director generals of the media organisations will report to the executive governor who will be the chief executive of the corporation. The Prasar Bharati Bill provides that the board of governors will be appointed by the president of India on the recommendation of a three-member committee. It would be wrong to assume that the union cabinet would have no say in this matter. Under the Constitution of India, the president of India has to act, in the exercise of his functions, in accordance with the advice given by his council of ministers. Since a statute operates in conformity to the Constitution, we have to read the relevant portion of the bill with the aforementioned provision of the Constitution. This means that the recommendations of the three-member committee would have to be ratified by the union council of ministers before the president could act on the basis of such recommendations. Thus *the* real choice lies not with the three-member committee, but with the union council of ministers. Perhaps the three-member committee would only serve to create a 'pseudo-impression of autonomy.

Once Manish Tewari, the then Minister of I&B had also no qualms in admitting that the government has an extremely intimate relationship with the public broadcaster. While addressing the inaugural session of a meeting of the expert committee on April 5, 1990 he said: "Two-thirds of the I & B ministry's budget - Rs. 18.85 billion out of Rs. 28 billion - goes to Prasar Bharati. I am the recruiting authority, the disciplinary authority, the sanctioning

authority. Yet, I am supposed to have arm's length. I am not God". The candidness with which he states the truth is laudable. The truth about the proximity of the government to the public broadcaster though, is far from it.

Financial Control

While these powers of appointment or removal, of issuing directives of persuasion or rule-making and of sanction do provide a wide scope for government control over the public corporations, a very important aspect of government control is financial control.

An analysis of the financial memorandum attached to the bill, and the speech made by the minister for information and broadcasting while introducing the bill in the Lok Sabha (1989) suggested that the government intends to reduce the dependence on government funds and plans to make the commercial advertisements the main source of the corporation's income. However, due to the fear of getting the Prasar Bharati in the clutches of multinationals, the government continued to extend financial assistance and the then Minister of I&B stated that "We are not in favour of AIR and TV getting into the clutches of multinationals".

Owing to some administrative discrepancies, the Ministry of I&B had decided to hold back all grants to the broadcaster leaving it in a lurch. According to a report in *Economic Times*, the I & B ministry, which has administrative responsibility for the autonomous Prasar Bharati, had told the broadcaster that it will not release new funds for the fiscal year 2012-13 as audited accounts have not been submitted since fiscal 2009-10.

It was thus once suggested by Sambudda Mitra Mustafi, a fellow at Swaniti Initiative in a write-up for Gateway House: Indian Council on Global Relations that if it is a question of funding, "The government should look at options like the license fee model of funding, where if each of India's 150 million TV households paid 10 cents (Rs. 5) a month, it would generate \$168 million (Rs. 840 crore) in revenue annually. This is eminently do-able. Last year, *BBC News* and *BBC Parliament* put together had an operating expenditure of only \$105 million (Rs. 525 crore). In 1996, *Al Jazeera* started with an initial grant of \$137 million (Rs. 685 crore)." There is no reason, why Prasar Bharati cannot come up with a similar model of revenue generation thus denting some of the government's smugness for funding the public broadcaster. For this to happen though, the public broadcaster and the expert committee will have to rise to the occasion.

A committee, tasked with reviewing the institutional framework of Prasar Bharati, including its relationship with the government, had once rightly acknowledged that it needs state funding and will therefore have to broadcast the government's "messages and accomplishments of public interest".

It is true that after the Prasar Bharati started functioning there are some superficial changes in the television and radio programmes, But one cannot ignore the stark reality that the agenda is determined by those who will control the funds.

Views of the CEO, Prasar Bharti

Jawhar Sircar (2014) the then CEO, Prasar Bharati, stated that even as this Act was passed by Parliament in 1990 its spirit of autonomy was vitiated by two sections, 32 and 33, which took away with the left hand what the right gave. They ensured that all its major decisions like manpower, recruitment, service conditions, salaries and critical issues would be decided only by the Ministry of Information & Broadcasting (I&B). Though Prasar Bharati boards were constituted by several governments from time to time, none took the initiative to operationalise the Act's mandate for a "Parliament committee" of 22 MPs to oversee its functions, nor the "broadcasting council" to receive and consider complaints against the broadcaster. The "non-lapsable fund" the Act provided was also not created, which meant that it would be 'business as usual' and the ministry would continue to control funds and functioning.

The most glaring example of control is in the news divisions of AIR and DD where over 200 top posts are manned by officials appointed, posted and punishable by the ministry, over whom Prasar Bharati has no supervisory role except to provide services, support and funds, and then take the blame. All attempts to convince the I&B ministry that this was counter to autonomy failed, and instances like the recent controversy over editing out sections of a Narendra Modi interview are bound to happen when there is a 'shadow' over the news heads, even if direct interference by any regime may not be visible.

He further stated that nothing could be more absurd than Prasar Bharati being given a showcause notice by the ministry for upscaling four sleepy TV stations in the Hindi belt of UP, Bihar, Rajasthan and MP, where most of the viewers reside, from transmitting for just 3-4 hours a day to beaming 24x7. Similarly, India lost the race for vice presidency in the world's largest broadcasting union because of myopic babudom and in the last five months, the

Pitroda committee report on which a hundred experts toiled, could not even be discussed because it recommends nothing short of total autonomy.

Somi Das (2013) in *The Newslandry* reported that according to an *Indian Express* report, two circulars were issued on behalf of Prasar Bharati CEO Jawhar Sircar which laid down clear "operating procedure/ guidelines" for the new team. The circulars stated that each and every detail from what was going on-air to who was being invited on a panel should go through the scrutiny of Director General (News)/Additional Director General (News). Both the circulars were also marked to the Personal Secretary to Information & Broadcasting Minister Manish Tewari. These two circulars could be seen as an example of government interference.

Corrective Measures

Dynamic Changes had taken place at a swift pace on the media front since the passing of the Prasar Bharati Act in 1990 and its implementation in 1997. A complete rethinking of the role, organisation and functions of Prasar Bharati became necessary in a multi-channel scenario, mostly driven by market forces, Prasar Bharati needed the requisite degree of flexibility and financial powers to hold its own. There has been a constant debate concerning the quality and purpose of Indian Broadcasting. Some basic questions required to be addressed to be able to evolve a vibrant and versatile model of a national broadcasting system, including a reinvigorated Prasar Bharati, in a vastly changed and fast-changing scenario. Growing concerns about the autonomy of the Prasar Bharati, Government of India, showing its self-determination, came up with corrective measures to reassure its commitment for providing an unbiased mass communication mediums to the people from all nook and corner of the country.

The Nitesh Sengupta Committee

The Nitesh Sengupta Committee was set up by the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting vide a notification dated 28th December, 1995 under the Chairmanship of Dr. N.K. Sengupta to review the provisions of Prasar Bharati (Broadcasting Corporation of India) Act, 1990 and to make recommendations regarding the restructuring of Prasar Bharati. Besides Dr. Sengupta, the other Members were Brig. M.R. Narayanan and Shri Ved Leekha.

The Sengupta Committee in its recommendations suggested the setting up of an independent Radio and Television Authority of India, as strongly enjoined by the Supreme Court, to license private channels, domestic and foreign, to impose appropriate terms and conditions on these licensees in accordance with the Broadcasting and Advertising Codes and also to receive and adjudicate on complaints of violation of these Codes, received from the public or representative bodies or consumers' forums. These 'complaints' functions of the Authority will also cover the channels run by Prasar Bharati. This Authority will also serve as the regulatory mechanism for private radio and television stations/ channels. The proposed Radio and Television Authority to be created by a new Act should consist of a full-time President with a sound background of the electronic media and ten members appointed by the President of India from amongst the public-academia, consumer activists, social scientists/researchers, etc.

Sam Pitroda Committee

An expert committee was set up for Prasar Bharati (PB) under Sam Pitroda in January 2013. There were 11 expert groups in the expert committee. Each group would make recommendations within a time period of six weeks. The committee had to focus on the "sustaining, strengthening and amplification of Prasar Bharati's role as a public broadcaster, with a special reference to its relationship with Government, in the emerging context". The group of advisors included people such as actor Farooq Sheikh, film producer Pritish Nandy, entrepreneur and social philanthropist Ronnie Screwvala, business leader Tarun Das, director & screenwriter Shyam Benegal, actor Sharmila Tagore, actor & director Nandita Das, lyricist Javed Akhtar and management professional R. Gopalakrishnan. And this motley crew of talent does hold out some hope that they might manage to bring us a better and newer Prasar Bharati.

On this issue of review of Prasar Bharati, Seventi Ninan and Rao said that while there are bureaucratic impediments and there are work culture-related problems and said that both these issues needs to be addressed. Ninan also said, "Either you can overhaul an ailing body or you can let it run the way it is running. I see value in it. The exercise (review) in itself is useful but am not sure about the result. I am part of it because I would like to make some contribution from my experience gained from recent research in the field, it really doesn't bother me even if there is no direct, immediate outcome".

Making a strong case for granting total autonomy to Prasar Bharati, the government-appointed expert committee (2014) has recommended amendments to the Prasar Bharati Act, 1990 to give "effective freedom to the public broadcaster with administrative and financial powers." It calls for reorganisation of the Prasar Bharati Board to make

it a professionally managed body effective in guiding the organisation. The committee also strongly batted for the use of social media by Prasar Bharati "which can be implemented immediately" and defining a social media strategy for the organisation. It has called for setting up of a 'Prasar Bharati connect' as a third arm of the public service broadcaster independent of the Doordarshan and All India Radio and mandate it to manage the various social media initiatives of the organisation.

Headed by Sam Pitroda, the committee has also said that a funding mechanism should be developed for Prasar Bharati to address the need for autonomy with financial accountability. While submitting the report Mr. Pitroda told reporters "Enough discussions on these recommendations have taken place and I hope we start implementing some of them if not all of them. We cannot wait for too long to start implementation".

Another of the expert committee's major recommendations is monetising Prasar Bharati's assets, including vast tracts of land across the country where the shortwave radio transmitters that are no longer used were set up.

Conclusion and Suggestions

The year 1997 was a 'land mark year' which saw far reaching measures to free the broadcast media from the shackles of Government control 50 years after independence. It was a good instance of a government voluntarily bringing legislation to free the media from its control which set in motion a chain of events in the country bringing in revolutionary changes in the field.

Doordarshan and All India Radio are a part of Prasar Bharti and one has to understand the background and the current status of an organisation like Prasar Bharti. This organization is about 18 years old and there are several legacy issues. The problems persist but the idea is not to be deterred by problems and try to move ahead regardless.

It is now felt that that between 1990, when the Prasar Bharati Act was passed, and 1997, when it was notified and to the present scenario, the broadcasting climate in the country had completely changed. Satellite television, FM radios came in, and the need for a non-government autonomous news broadcaster is relatively considered less relevant. However, many quarters still feel that the AIR and DD covers the remotest parts of the country and need of its autonomy is very important.

How much is the earning of revenue is important to a public broadcaster is a fundamental question which has to be answered. The kind of programming must be such that should address the concerns and the interest and the aspirations of common citizens. It could be in terms of social articulation or in cultural expositions. Particularly to take care of those who don't have media options. Still in this country there are people who don't have media options. So it is the bound duty of Prasar Bharti to take care of them in particular. Prasar Bharati is a sort of a bridge and if there are some inadequacies without being overtly negative, in a very constructive kind of it can suggest things. People would like DD to have far superior, far more relevant regional programmes. Their language, dresses, culture, achievements and the sheer history of that particular place must come alive in the capsule form. Much more of Bharat than India on DD is expected which means covering the villages, the small towns and that can be very interesting and valuable.

There is a challenge in the cable and satellite homes but there is opportunity as well. There is no reason for a public broadcaster to either shy away or to mimic the private broadcasters, they have their own role. A public broadcaster will continue to be relevant all the time and need just to look at private broadcasters as competitors so as to always ready for course correction for better and at the same time informative and quality programmes.

We have the period from 1997 to 2014 to see what has been achieved. DD and AIR have become autonomous but not fully. Prasar Bharati is meant to be an autonomous corporation. But it is dependent on government for funds and manpower. Of the total budget of Rs. 4,010 crore for FY2014-15, government has provided Rs. 1,950 crore, about 50 per cent of the expenditure. The manpower is from the central government's information service. No corporation can be autonomous if it lives on borrowed money and borrowed staff. Prasar Bharati should have its own recruitment board. And it should increase its revenue earnings so that it does not depend any more on government for funds. I think in the next 10 years, Prasar Bharati should move towards complete autonomy in terms of finances and manpower.

Some course correction has been done and some more is called for. There also is the need for greater conceptual clarity at all levels, not only in Prasar Bharti even in the Government about the role programmes and revenue earning that Doordarshan or AIR must engage in.

While granting autonomy to the media agencies the government should remember that there is no point in having a corporation and treating it as an administrative department subordinate to the secretariat. For that a Constitution

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(Amendment) Bill is needed. Prasar Bharati Bill should be replaced by a Constitution (Amendment) Bill which would provide for the incorporation of some new articles covering the status and the role of the Prasar Bharati.

Whatever be the future structure of AIR & Doordarshan, social responsibility and public service idealism should continue to be their hallmark. A developing country can ill-afford to give up this obligation, the strong dictates of financial self-reliance notwithstanding.

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