

Biased vision

It goes without saying that the very purpose of establishing a regional/local Doordarshan centre is to ensure better programming for a particular region. The items telecast should have special relevance and meaning for the local people. Instead, if all that the centre does is provide better reception of items in a language not properly understood by the people or which have very little bearing on the local situation, it belies viewer's expectations. Disenchantment with the situation will slowly but surely creep in with time. This is exactly what is happening in most of the non-Hindi speaking regions with regard to Doordarshan telecasts.

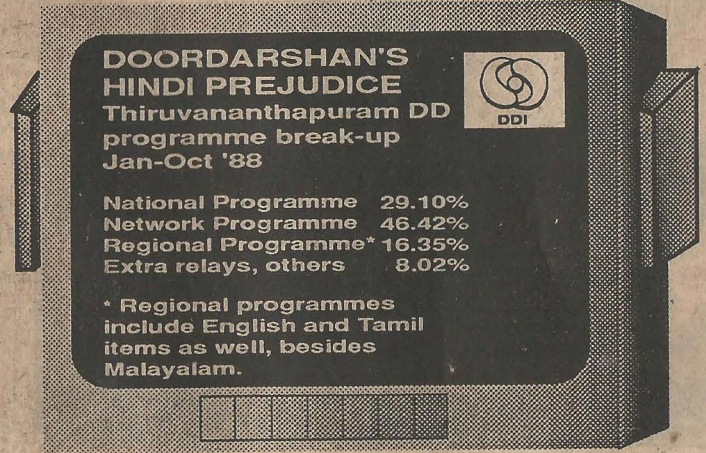
Imagine for a while, the reaction of people in the Hindi belt to programmes in a South Indian language, say Tamil. More so if they are telecast in the same proportion as those in Hindi now telecast to non-Hindi areas! The same type of response can ordinarily be expected from non-Hindi areas, when viewers are forced to watch Hindi items for long hours every day. There should, at least, be a reasonable, balanced, representation for regional/local interests and aspirations in Doordarshan programme plans.

Television in India began on September 15, 1959 with an experimental centre at New Delhi. This situation lasted till April 1, 1976 when a separate Directorate was organised for the exclusive management of Doordarshan. During the IX Asian Games at New Delhi in 1982, low power transmitters were put into service in 41 centres all over India. These LPTs, as they were called, functioned

without even elementary facilities for programme production. When the Asiad was over, they continued to relay programmes, all produced in Hindi, from Delhi. This lopsided set up of having TV centres without production facilities still continues in several places. In Kerala, such centres are located at Pathanamthitta, Palakkad, Kannur among others. From their establishment till date, they have not telecast a single item produced in Malayalam! This is true of many centres in non-Hindi areas elsewhere in the country too.

From August 15, 1982 a national programme scheme for compulsory relay by all centres came into existence. This programme, of 90 minutes duration daily, was introduced with the laudable purpose of promoting national integration. The expectation was that due representation would be given to all recognised regional languages in it. Till date, it is not clear what part of it the regional language component has comprised during the last nine years.

Meanwhile, a category of items designated as the network programme was also introduced. Its relay by all centres is also compulsory! The result is a phenomenal increase in the already dominant position of Hindi in the compulsory relays to



non-Hindi areas! It is not understood why two names are used for these compulsory relays when the objective is the same.

The morning and midday transmissions of Doordarshan are mostly devoted to items for women and children. They are all in Hindi too! It is not understood of what use they are to women and children in non-Hindi areas. It is a total waste of time so far as these innocents are concerned. The other items telecast at midday and in the afternoon are amateurish presentations dished out by some universities by the grace of

the University Grants Commission!

Let me now come to one specific example to illustrate the situation in a typical non-Hindi area. Take the case of the Doordarshan centre at Thiruvananthapuram. The foundation for this station was laid on June 2, 1981. On November 19 of same year, it started telecast on a low power one kilowatt transmitter. It took almost another three years (January 1, 1985) to acquire even interim programme production facilities! The transmitter strength was raised to 10 kws on April 14, 1985 and a permanent colour studio was commissioned on March 18, 1987. At present, according to available facts, the centre is fully equipped to undertake production and telecast of local programmes in Malayalam. What is patently lacking here is the will, the interest and a sense of purpose to do something worthwhile and effective, with the involvement of local talent and resources.

The total programme break-up of Doordarshan, Thiruvananthapuram for January-October 1988 is as follows, it serves to illustrate the case:

- 1) National Programme: 52,713.15 minutes ie 29.1 per cent
- 2) Network Programme: 83,803.37 minutes ie 46.42 per cent
- 3) Regional Programme: 29,509.18 minutes ie 16.35 per cent
- 4) Extrarelays and others: 14,482.47 minutes ie 8.02 per cent

From the above, it is clear that the regional programme component was only 16.35 per cent of the total output. This included English and Tamil items as well. The Malayalam component even at a liberal estimate would be only 15 per cent.

Do the ebullient Malayalam professors and the so called committed organisations clamouring for a rightful place and preeminence for Malayalam in Kerala know about this ridiculous fact in the set up of the most important mass media that is television? Or are they feigning

ignorance? Or are they just not concerned?

The feeling is on the increase in non-Hindi regions, that Hindi is dominating far in excess of and out of proportion to its relevance in the total telecast time of local Doordarshan centres. There is a vital financial aspect also at stake for the non-Hindi people, especially artists and technicians.

For the production of a television drama, for example, of 30 minutes duration, a minimum amount of Rs one to two lakh is spent. The minimum number of people involved is about 50, this includes artists, technicians and others. When such an item is produced in the regional area, that amount is spent locally and the people in the area benefit. It also gives birth to a sense of satisfaction not only for those involved, but to the entire people of the region. When a programme of 30 minutes duration is relayed in Hindi from Delhi, the entire amount of one to two lakh is lost to the local people! If we take the total time devoted to network programme relays, about of 46 per cent daily, we can imagine the loss incurred by local people in terms of money! Even regional language films are treated as extremely poor relations.

Now let me make a few suggestions to redeem this awful situation. Regional/local centres should produce for telecast their own items for the entire time now monopolised by network relays in Hindi. To supplement local programmes, if needed, atleast 25 per cent of items may be commissioned from outside producers. This will increase the sense of involvement of local artists and technicians. Telecast of sponsored serials in regional languages should be shifted from the present 7pm to 9pm, Hindi centres may continue with the present pattern with serials in Hindi. This will act an incentive to advertisers to patronise regional language serials in the same way as those in Hindi. Good items in regional languages may be telecast more frequently than at present on the National Programme, with subtitles in Hindi/English. This will be a more meaningful step for better inter lingual/cultural understanding.

The dominance of Hindi, to the extent of about 85 per cent of prime time of regional centres, is counterproductive and needs drastic correction. The matter demands urgent attention of all those deeply interested in national well-being and balanced growth of all languages of India.

Let me end with the words of television pioneer, E.B. White, which he said in 1938 after seeing for himself the projected images on his experimental electronic box: "We shall stand or fall by television, of that I am sure. I believe television is going to be the best of the modern world, and that in this new opportunity to see beyond the range of our vision, we shall discover either a new and unbearable disturbance to the general peace or a saving radiance in the sky".

Our Times



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