

VABILO

Oddelek za azijske študije vljudno vabi na gostujoče predavanje nekdanjega indijskega ministra **Jawharja Sircarja** z naslovom:

»The Role of Media in the Integration of India«

Datum in kraj: **27. 2. 2017 ob 16.00 v Modri sobi**
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Povzetek predavanja

A new view of the special role played by the public broadcaster in multi ethnic India will be presented, as neither academia nor the establishment in India has ever given due emphasis to it. The author has been able to fish out some materials and references from the libraries and records of the All India Radio and the public service television, Doordarshan, when he worked in these organisations.

The argument is that while the newly liberated nation states in post-colonial Asia Pacific did make positive interventions to foster unity among its people and to 'mainstream' ethnic minorities. India was confronted with the challenging task of holding together and administering millions who spoke in 22 different languages and some 600 dialects; that belonged to six different religions and also had their own cultural practices, that often looked down on those of others.

In India, the nation state was mainly concerned with guarding the frontiers, quelling a few hotspots of trouble and in the task of economic upliftment, leaving it with little time, energy, fund or even intention to fuse a common cultural ethos in its widely diversified linguistic and ethnic groups. Without a link language other than the colonial English language legacy, Hindi was declared as only the 'official language' for a certain amount of communication. Any attempt to expand its role was met with overt and covert resistance, and even violent protests.

In this scenario, it is interesting to note how colloquial Hindi that was mixed with a lot of Urdu was the one that gained immense popularity, without any state intervention. This was mainly because it was used in Hindi films: in their 'dialogues', lyrics and songs that usually accompanied their irresistible dances. This form of popular entertainment also used certain phrases or expressions that were picked up

from the grassroots, which shocked purists but was lapped up by the masses of almost all regions. It was this autonomy that 'converted' many from other linguistic groups who had misgivings about Hindi as a link language, because this Hindi was easier to understand and more free.

The presentation also explains in brief how Bollywood, as the Hindi film industry was labelled, started and how it developed, moving ahead of competition from rival languages and cultures. While the largest layers of the pyramid enjoyed the sheer entertainment that was offered by Hindi films, with a lot of spice, dances, songs, fight-scenes, high drama and its pandering to the lowest denominators, the established that was led by the better-educated classes derided it as kitsch.

This presentation then focuses on the role of Hindi film songs a binder and explains that they were played by the state radio only after it overcame its initial resistance to popular films and music. In 1957, full ten years after India's Independence, the state radio finally lifted its ban on broadcasting popular film songs. This one single decision did more for unifying diverse and often adversarial cultures, through an idiom that was found very attractive and even mesmerising by the masses.

This latter derogatory attitude is quite evident among the policymakers of the Indian ministry of Information and broadcasting that decided the programmes of All India Radio and reflected in the myopic mindset of the top echelons of the state broadcaster. It is surprising, therefore, to see how the same radio succumbed to mass demands and took an active part in promoting popular film music, both in the regional languages and (more so) in Hindi.

The rapid expansion of the radio network was considered essential by the central government in India and was funded totally by it to spread 'news' and its messages about agriculture, weather, literacy, primary education, basic health, coastal fisheries, animal husbandry and even gender sensitivity. This opportunity was also fully utilised by the copyright holders of film songs and even the radio service, first for increased audience reach and (after 1967) for revenues.

It is contended, with some statistics, that while the original films and their songs reached a rather small audience through theatrical releases, the number of those who were enchanted by the song component was considerably higher, thanks to the gramophone. This reach was redoubled several times over by the radio network that took the songs, mainly in Hindi, to the farthest corners of India.

The radio also gained from advances in technology like the crystal diode that enabled the number of radio listeners to increase very rapidly as prices fell and portability took the radio to every traveller, shepherd, soldier on the borders. The radio was forever playing these songs that were on quite loud at every village tea stall and street corner shop all over India: whether one liked the service or not. This embedded this in the permanent hard disk of the memory of most Indians and most would cherish it as an inseparable part of their life.

Then, the introduction of cheap cassettes, often pirated and copied, led to a quantum jump and the mass level cassette players invariably came with a radio and a recorder as the popular '3 in 1' sets. Further, the wars with Pakistan in 1962, 1965 and

in 1971 also contributed to the phenomenal increase in the number of radio listeners, which in turn, helped the radio promote, in addition to its mandatory messages, a popular film culture with Bollywood obviously as the biggest gainer.

The radio also popularised sports through its professional games commentary services and the cumulative effect was in moulding a distinct mass level cultural commonality that was beyond the capacity of any government. From 1975, the state played an active role in increasing the reach of the new television services, which were an adjunct to its All India Radio. Once colour TV arrived along with a defining event, the Asiad Sports 'mini olympics', the same 'unificatory process', however haphazard it be, was ramped up over state television, DD.

DD was manned primarily by programmers from the radio service who carried on the same winning formula. By then, two generations had already been born in Independent India that were fed on a staple diet of Hindi-language entertainment.

The crowning glory was however reached when all of India, even those who barely understood Hindi, was intensely gripped by TV versions of the two epics of India. When they were telecast on Sunday mornings, over three years, the entire nation was glued before the television at home or in localities; all other activities were halted and the roads and rail traffic was hardly visible as if a curfew like situation was clear.

The presentation then touches upon the relations and politics of the private print media and the radio-television that were owned by the state till 1997. Some other historical developments in the media sector are also discussed, such as the entry of private capital in radio and TV and the rise of its power over print media.

During this stage, it is noticed that the discourse in the Indian media had actually moved to real everyday concerns of the people that were fairly common across the country rather than focus on regional pride or 'local struggles against central hegemony'. As the media in all its verticals revelled in exercising its new found power through 'public trials and lynching', very few observed how the media had effectively catalysed the process of integrating India, however unintentionally it may have been.

The binding role that media played in India, through Hindi-language films and their idiom of songs that had been reinforced for over 4 or more decades by the radio and the television was, indeed, effective. So much so that even non Hindi speakers had become fairly familiar with the lingua franca and were participants in what they now viewed as 'our cultural tastes'.

In the second decade of the new millennium, what now needs to be reviewed more is whether certain new attempts to homogenise India may, if allowed free say, actually harm the plural nature of Indian society and culture.

Curriculum Vitae

Jawhar Sircar

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I. Education:

Masters in Ancient Indian History and Culture, Calcutta University

Second Masters in Sociology (with Social Anthropology).

BA (Hons) in Political Science, from Presidency College, Calcutta

‘Developmental Strategies’ at the Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex, 1992-1993.

Queens’ College, Cambridge University in 2008.

II. International Talks

- **Unity & Diversity, Tradition & Modernity: Mass Media Cul in India**
May, 2016: University of Sydney, Sydney, Australia
- **Interpreting 5 Millennia of Indian Culture**
Feb 2016, Special Address to Foreign Diplomats, Brasilia, Brazil
- **Indian Civilization: What Exactly Does It Stand For?**
Feb 2016, Indian Cultural Centre, Sao Paulo, Brazil
- **Can Creative Industries Fend for Themselves? Indian Film & TV**
Nov 2015, Basque University & Asiatic Research Institute, Bilbao, Spain
- **How TV and Radio Brought A Nation Together**
Oct. 2015, Tagore Centre, Berlin, Germany
- **Public Broadcaster: Serving Audiences & Empowering Societies**
Oct 2015, Asia-Pacific Broadcasting Union, Istanbul, Turkey
- **Future- Proofing Broadcasting in a Fragmented Media World**
 - Oct. 2014, Lead Speaker at ABU General Assembly, Macau, China
- **Future of Journalism - Role of Intl. Broadcasters (Lead Speaker)**
June 2014, Deutsche Welle’s Global Media Forum, Bonn, Germany
- **Elections 2014 and the Indian Media**
June 2014, University of Heidelberg, Germany
- **The Pre-Election Media Scenario in India**
Mar. 2014: Victoria University, Wellington, New Zealand
- **Indian Media & Its Role in a Dynamic Democracy**
March 2014: University of Auckland, New Zealand

- **Media Revolution in India in the Twenty-first Century**
Oct-Nov 2012: Australia-India Institute, Melbourne, Australia
- III. On Soft Power : Talks and Writings**
- **Lecture on Soft Power: IFS Probationers Briefing**
Foreign Service Institute, New Delhi
 - **Can India Become a Major Soft Power?**
LBS National Academy of Administration, Mussorie
 - **Culture As An International Strategy: Using India's Soft Power**
Foreign Service Institute(FSI), New Delhi
 - **What Exactly Is Soft Power?: Is It Real ?**
May 2012, Calcutta University, Kolkata
 - **Soft Diplomacy Vs Soft Power: Subtle Difference**
Feb 2012, Senior Foreign Diplomats Training, FSI, New Delhi
- IV. Publications:**
- **The Hegemonic Gene: Bureaucracy and Mindless Dominance**
2016, Indian National Conf. of Anthropologists, Bhubaneswa
 - **Krishna's Long Journey: From Sacred Texts to Popular Arts**
2016, by Victoria Memorial (Under Print)
 - **Vividh Bharati's Role in Unifying The Nation**
2014, RamaKrishna Mission Institute of Culture, Kolkata
 - **Media Revolution in India: Myth & Reality**
2014, by Australia Indian Institute, Melbourne (Under Print)
 - **The Construction of Hindu Identity in Medieval Western Bengal**
2005, by Institute of Development Studies, Kolkata
 - **From The Aniconic To The Iconic: The Folk Gods Transform**
2004, Journal of the Indian Anthropological Society
 - **Parliamentary Elections in West Bengal, 1952-1999**
1999, Department, Saraswati Press, Kolkata
 - **Rural Small Enterprises, Employment and Indian Policies**
1993, Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex
- V. Recent Talks and Writings: Some Selections**
- **Other Side of Durga: Bengal Zamindar & Cul of Agriculture**
Oct 2016, Victoria Memorial, Kolkata
 - **How Culture, Religion and Commerce Went Hand in Hand**
Aug 2016, VC Invitation Lecture, Vishwa Bharati, Shantiniketan
 - **Are Our Museums Inclusive?**

- Sept 2016 Brij Mohan Vyas Memorial Lecture, Allahabad Museum
- **Indian Culture & Civilisation: Some Uncomfortable Questions**
Sept 2016 History Dept. Conference, BHU, Varanasi
- **Why Can't We Have Better Museums: Operating Problems**
Jul, 2016 , National Gallery of Modern Art, Bangalore
- **Culture as a Battlefield 'Gender' Vs Beleaguered 'Nation State**
Jul 2016 Keynote , Womens' Study, University of Jadavpur, Kolkata
- **Urban Subaltern Culture in Kolkata in 19th & 20th Centuries**
Sept 2015, Nitish Ranjan Ray Memorial Lecture, Kolkata
- **Sustaining: Cultural Heritage In Contemporary India**
Aug 2015, Inaugural Speech, Apeejay Literary Festival, Kolkata
- **Who are the New Maharajas: Arts Patronage in India**
Jun 2015, Inaugural Speech at Times Lit Fest, Mumbai
- **Literature and Culture: Linkages & Issues**
Mar 2015;- Keynote Address, University of Hyderabad
- **Narrating Our Past: Connecting People with Museums**
Mar 2015, CSMVS (Prince of Wales Museum), Mumbai
- **Why Do We Waste Museum Collections and Opportunities**
Feb 2015, Annual Autumn Lecture, Victoria Memorial, Kolkata
- **Have We Retro-Fitted Indian History? (Inaugural Address)**
Feb '15, 18th Natl Seminar Centre for Archeological Studies , Kolkata
- **Musical Traditions of Asian Countries & Analytical Views**
Jan '15,(Keynote) Annual Conf, Dept. of Music, University of Delhi
- **Lecture on Soft Power: IFS Probationers Briefing**
Foreign Service Institute, New Delhi
- **Can India Become a Major Soft Power?**
LBS National Academy of Administration, Mussorie
- **Culture As An International Strategy: Using India's Soft Power**
Foreign Service Institute (FSI), New Delhi
 - **What Exactly Is Soft Power?: Is It Real ?**
 - May 2012, Calcutta University, Kolkata
 - **Soft Diplomacy Vs Soft Power: Subtle Difference**
Feb 2012, Senior Foreign Diplomats Training, FSI, New Delhi

VII. Career

(A) 41 years in public service:

- 17 yrs+ in Commerce, Industry & Finance Deptts.
- More than 14 yrs+ in Education, Culture & Media.

(B) 2012-2016: CEO of India's Public Service Broadcaster

- Prasar Bharati, the world's largest broadcasting network.
- Looks after 419 Radio Stations and 67 TV Production Centres.
- Manpower-30,000 permanent + 20,000 persons on contract.

(C) 2008-2012 : Secretary, Ministry of Culture, India

- Was India's Longest-serving Culture Secretary under the direct supervision of Hon'ble Prime Minister.
- Initiated long-pending reforms like:
 - Modernization of Museums, Archives, Libraries.
 - Policy reforms for better cultural administration
 - Took up mammoth worldwide celebrations of culture
 - Forged meaningful cultural partnerships both in India & abroad.
 - British Museum Silver Medal 2011 for Contribution to Culture
- Had two short stints as Secretary, Ministry of Information & Broadcasting, Govt. of India.

(D) 2006-2008: Additional Secretary & Development Commissioner, Micro Small Medium Enterprises – Govt. of India

- Converted small industries (SSI's) a more vibrant MSME.
- Pioneer of 'Cluster Development' of Indian MSMEs
- Special programmes like Skill Development & Tool Room
- This became National Skill Development programme.

(E) 2003 -2006: Pr. Secretary, Higher Education, West Bengal

- Helped Modernise educational sector in a conservative State.
- Opened up to Private Education after strict quality check.