

Lecture- 38



Archives – Preserving India’s History and Culture

Prasar Bharati's National Archives, India's oldest and biggest audio-visual Archives, has an exclusive collection of rare recordings of historical value – interviews, documentaries, features, music, radio plays, etc. It is a treasure trove of not only the memorable performances of the great artistes, who have contributed to India's rich cultural, music and dance heritage but also a collection of rare media assets related to important events like Independence Day celebrations, Republic Day Parades, address to the nation by Prime Ministers, Presidents etc. as well as other important broadcasts since the advent of broadcasting in our country. These rare assets are in the form of sound recordings and audio visual footage in all genres like music, dance, drama, interviews, short films, documentaries, feature films etc.

Archival activities started in the form of Transcription Service of Radio recordings on 3 April 1954, with transcription of speeches of all dignitaries, especially the presidents and prime ministers of India. Though informal archiving had been there in the country before 1954, setting up of transcription service converted it into an organized activity. Doordarshan Archives was established in 2004 with an objective to digitize and preserve the valuable audio-visual footages. Initially the archival setups in AIR and Doordarshan grew separately under their respective verticals. In 2018, these separate setups were combined and brought under a common umbrella as a new vertical ‘Prasar Bharati Archives’.

Radio Autobiographies are one of the unique collections in the Archives of Prasar Bharati, wherein audio autobiography of eminent personalities who have made invaluable contributions in different fields of nation-building is recorded. Besides being anecdotal about the lives and works of the personalities, these Radio Autobiographies also chronicle the contemporary history of India narrated through the life's journey of these eminent personalities.

In his Radio Autobiography recorded by All India Radio in 1986, India's then leading Industrialist and former Chairman of Tata Group Jehangir Ratanji Dadabhoi Tata recalls his memories of the Emergency era, his conversations with Indira Gandhi and Sanjay Gandhi on the excesses during the Emergency. Recollecting one of his interactions with Indira Gandhi in the beginning of Emergency, JRD Tata said, “When she declared Emergency, I went to see her. I

said, Indira ji, why did you have to put all these people in jail including old people like Morarji Desai. She said, because they were plotting against me. I can't have people against me from within.”

In an interaction with All India Radio in January 1986, Sahitya Akademi Award winner and renowned poet Amrita Pritam said that in popular culture, people count Hinduism as one of the religions along with Islam, Christianity, etc. But in reality, Hinduism is not a religion. Everyone born in Hindustan is a Hindu.

This treasure trove is being digitized and made available on Prasar Bharati Archives YouTube channel[60][61] in public interest for academic purposes. Apart from the content mentioned above, audio of around 50 original Constituent Assembly Speeches from 1946–1949 have been uploaded on this YouTube channel.

Priceless recordings of the likes of maestros Ustad Bismillah Khan, MS Subbulakshmi, Begum Akhtar, M Balamuralikrishna and the epic Ramcharitmanas, among others are part of Prasar Bharati archives and are available on the counter at Akashwani Bhawan on Parliament Street in Delhi.

Prasar Bharati Archives has contributed significantly to PradhanMantri Sangrahalaya, inaugurated by PM Modi on 14 April 2022, providing about 206 hours of audio and 53 hours of video content. This includes Address to Constituent Assembly (Tryst with Destiny), Broadcast to the Nation on 1st Independence Day, Oath-taking ceremony, Inauguration of Atomic Energy Establishment and Opening of the 1st Atomic Reactor, Declaration of Emergency, Address to the UN General Assembly, Non-Aligned Conference, Inauguration of Delhi Metro and much more.

From among the rare audio-video content of historical, political and cultural significance available in Prasar Bharati Archives, we have created decade-wise YouTube playlists of such content starting from 1930s till 2000s.

TV and Radio shows produced by Doordarshan and All India Radio respectively got multiple awards at the ABU – UNESCO Peace Media Awards 2021 at Kuala Lumpur in Malaysia.[65] Doordarshan's programme 'DEAFinitely Leading the Way' won an award under 'Living Well with Super Diversity' category, while All India Radio's programme 'Living on the edge – The coastal lives' won another award in the category of 'Ethical & Sustainable Relationship with Nature'.

Channel Manager at Prasar Bharati Sports Abhishek Dubey and Senior Content Manager Pravin Sinha received Panchjanya-Organiser Media Awards 2022 for Sports.[66]

Ashok Shrivastav from DD News got the Panchjanya-Organiser Media Awards 2022 for Social Media.

Divya Bharadwaj got the Panchjanya-Organiser Media Awards 2022 for Environment for the DD National show Rag Rag mein Ganga.

Ashwini Mishra from DD News got the Panchjanya-Organiser Media Awards 2022 for Arts and Culture.

Umesh Chaturvedi of All India Radio News was awarded with the prestigious Devrishi Narad journalism award.

Controversies

In 2010, as many as 24 candidates out of the 30 selected for the posts of journalists in Doordarshan News were alleged to have been appointed on the basis of political considerations. For example, one of the successful candidates was closely related to a former Congress Minister of State for Information and Broadcasting, another successful candidate was the daughter of a sitting Congress Union minister, and a third was a close relative of Union Commerce Minister Anand Sharma.

The number of applicants called for interview was increased from 25 to 35 to accommodate the daughter of a Congress politician, who held the 33rd rank, and would have otherwise been eliminated at the cut-off stage. Another successful candidate, Anika Kalra Kalha, was not even called for an audition and reporting skills test, and the remark in the relevant columns read “Did not qualify for this stage”. Similarly, the weightage given to interviews was arbitrarily increased two days before they were held.

In 2014, over allegations of DD editing out portions of interview of the then BJP's PM candidate Narendra Modi, then Prasar Bharati CEO Jawhar Sircar had admitted that some parts of the interview "were apparently edited" and pointed a finger at then I&B Minister Manish Tewari for failing to grant the "operational autonomy" that the public broadcaster had been seeking for years.

In August 2017, then Tripura CM Manik Sarkar alleged that Doordarshan and All India Radio had refused to broadcast his Independence Day speech unless he reworked it.

In September 2017, following instructions from the ministry of information and broadcasting, Doordarshan had put on hold prime time slots auctioned to Ekta Kapoor's Balaji Telefilms and Saaibaba Telefilms.

Fake offer/appointment letters for jobs at Prasar Bharati's DD Kisan channel were given by scamsters on fake letter heads of DD Kisan.

In September 2017, following a complaint of alleged abuse of dominance with regard to infrastructural facilities for FM radio broadcasting, Competition Commission ordered a fresh investigation against Prasar Bharati.

In March 2018, then Prasar Bharati Chairman Dr. A Surya Prakash said that the I&B Ministry had been refusing funds to Prasar Bharati since December 2017 and that the funds for the month of January and February were drawn from the broadcaster's contingency funds to pay its employees' salaries.

In early 2019, Union Information and Broadcasting Ministry floated a draft Bill ‘Prasar Bharati (Broadcasting Corporation of India) Amendment Bill, 2019’, which would have given Ministry the power to appoint Director Generals of Doordarshan and All India Radio directly,[80] instead of the then practice of recruitment of DGs through Prasar Bharati Board. The Bill sought to remove the provision to establish a recruitment board ‘Prasar Bharati Recruitment Board’ (PBRB). According to the explanatory note of the draft Bill, “As per Section 9 of the Prasar Bharati Act, officers and employees of the public broadcaster were to be appointed in ‘consultation’ with the Recruitment Board, which was to be established as per Section 10 of the Act. However, the Prasar Bharati Recruitment Board (PBRB) could not be established due to one or another reason” and the ministry has now decided “not to establish PBRB” and remove the relevant section of the Act which empowered Prasar Bharati to set up recruitment boards.” Soon after, the notification seeking public feedback on the draft Bill was removed from the Ministry’s website, and another notice was issued which said that “the matter has been kept in abeyance till further orders”.

In April 2019, then Congress President Rahul Gandhi's office did not respond to Prasar Bharati CEO's request for Gandhi's interview by DD News. Earlier that month, Congress had submitted a memorandum to the Election Commission with allegations of bias in the political coverage by the public broadcaster.

In October 2019, Prasar Bharati suspended a Chennai Doordarshan Kendra official citing "disciplinary proceedings". According to media reports, Doordarshan Kendra assistant director R Vasumathi had allegedly blocked the telecast of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's speech at IIT Madras.

In March 2020, Prasar Bharati CEO Shashi Shekhar Vempati turned down BBC invite for an awards function, alleging that the BBC did “one-sided” reporting on Delhi violence in February 2020. In his letter to BBC Director General, Vempati said, “I must respectfully decline the invitation in view of the recent coverage of the BBC of certain incidents of violence in Delhi.”

In February 2021, Twitter blocked the account of Prasar Bharati CEO Shashi Shekhar Vempati for using a hashtag which was deemed inappropriate by the government. BJP MP Meenakshi Lekhi, who chairs the Parliamentary Committee on Data Protection Bill, condemned blocking of Prasar Bharati CEO's account, saying that Twitter has "victimized the person who told you to take the right step". The account was restored later in the day.

In October 2021, a few media reports alleged that Prasar Bharati is shutting down transmission[85] from DD Kalaburagi and DD Silchar. Taking note of these reports, Prasar Bharati clarified that broadcast reform steps to phase out obsolete analog terrestrial TV transmitters was being misrepresented. That these DD Centres will continue to generate program content for broadcasting on the satellite channels of Doordarshan dedicated to their respective States, apart from maintaining their presence on digital media via YouTube and on social media. For instance, program content generated by DD Silchar and DD Kalaburagi shall now be broadcast on DD Assam and DD Chandana respectively.

In an investigative article published on May 24, 2022, NewsLaundry alleged that Prasar Bharati CEO Shashi Shekhar Vempati has immense power in Prasar Bharati. NewsLaundry went on to elaborate upon how Vempati has acquired such powers. They quote from I&B Minister Anurag Thakur's speech in the Parliament, "Vempati was acting as chairman of the board in accordance with section 8 of the Prasar Bharati Broadcasting Corporation of India Act 1990 as the tenure of the previous chairman Dr A Suryaprakash had ended in February 2020."

NewsLaundry quotes an anonymous Prasar Bharati official to allege that Vempati has direct connection with PM Modi. According to NewsLaundry, a senior Prasar Bharati official said that Vempati has the advantage of being in direct contact with PM Modi which is qualification enough to move forward in one's career today. NewsLaundry also mentions that Vempati received the "Dataquest Pathbreaker award" from Dataquest magazine for his "outstanding role" in Modi's campaign.

NewsLaundry further alleges that Vempati doesn't leave any chance to please the government, "That's why he did not attend the BBC programme when questions were raised against the

government after the Delhi riots. That was in March 2020. Vempati had declined an invitation to the BBC Indian Sportswoman of the Year Awards Night, citing the corporation's "one-sided version" of the communal violence in Delhi the previous week." Adding to this allegation of pleasing the government, Newslandry further highlights that when Modi inaugurated the Kashi Vishwanath corridor in Varanasi, Vempati boasted about the "extensive preparations" made by DD for the visit, and that "about 146 TV channels in India carried Doordarshan's live coverage of the day".