

ALL INDIA RADIO:

This discussion will be continued in our issue of August 22

by LIONEL FIELDEN

BROADCASTING, because it is one-third political and two-thirds entertainment, has always posed problems of control: and because it must appeal, more or less inoffensively, to all shades of opinion and taste, it has also the problem of being unable to please all the people all the time. These are the platitudes of broadcasting, and they are the lasting foundations of its difficulties. What sort of control is best? What kind of programmes are most pleasing, instructive, helpful, entertaining? There is, at the moment, no very certain answer. Authoritarian governments naturally cling to a tight state control and censorship: in the West, the parastatal monopoly, such as the B.B.C., is tending to give way to the richer prizes of commercial radio. These are the alternatives. But the really astonishing thing to me is that broadcasting and television, with their astronomically huge armies of listeners and viewers, have had so remarkably small an effect: they have largely become mere background noises and pictures to which scant attention is paid. I sometimes wonder whether it matters a twopenny damn what they do.

I say this with a certain disappointment, because when I came to India in 1935 to start All India Radio, I had a glittering vision of what broadcasting might achieve in the Indian subcontinent. I thought that suddenly wise voices—Indian voices, of course—might speak to the millions of illiterates, and a new unity and purpose might be forged. I did not—alas—know my India. And I shall now try to tell you why India, in my experience, has problems of broadcasting which are unique in the world.

It is true that Russia and China have somewhat similar problems—vast territories, language differences, diversity of customs—but in totalitarian states differences are ironed out and some sort of unity is imposed. India, however, is not totalitarian yet, and its unity is precarious. It is really a federation of widely-differing peoples, fused into unreal centralisation by the British Raj. And that is the first great problem of Indian broadcasting. How easy, in comparison, is broadcasting in England or France or even America, where there is at least a common language and more or less common habits and customs. To get Indian broadcasting into perspective, you have to compare it to a (now impossible) single broadcasting organisation for all Europe, with all the difficulties and dissensions that that would involve. How would you do it? I shall return to this argument presently.

India's second problem is, of course, poverty. Until you get very cheap locally-made radio sets for the villagers—or, to put it in another way, until you get villagers with enough money to buy sets—broadcasting in India will be appealing only to a minority of the vast population. And this is a failure. It is a failure because broadcasting is not doing its proper job, and because, in default of 20 million listeners (at least), it is dependent on and controlled by the state.

And that is the third problem of Indian

broadcasting—state control. It seems to me that All India Radio is well organised and efficient, but unimaginative and dull. This is the penalty of control by civil servants, who are doubtless worthy and careful, but are sure to discourage originality and initiative. I think that with all my mistakes—and I made millions of mistakes—All India Radio was much more lively in my day than it is now.

Now let me return to the comparison between Indian broadcasting and a (quite impossible) broadcasting organisation for all Europe. I believe that this comparison is valid. If I had to do with such a thing, what should I do first? Why, obviously, abolish state control. You could not have Paris or London or Rome or Bonn dictating policy and programmes to all Europe. Equally, I have come to believe that, in a subcontinent like India, you should not have Delhi dictating policy and programmes to Madras and Calcutta.

Suppose—though I fear it is unlikely—you get rid of state control in India, what then? How about commercial radio? It is not a thing that I personally like, and yet... I am not quite sure. In the days when All India Radio had no money at all, I was offered a quite staggering sum to put just one line into the village programmes: "A cake of X soap costs one anna." I wondered if it would do any harm. I thought how much we could do with the money. Today, living in Italy, I see the Italian radio living on commercial programmes with great success and very little offence.

But if not that, and if not state control, there remains only the semi-independent corporation, such as is the B.B.C. But in India you could not have one only—there would have to be at least five—let us say Telugu and Tamil, Gujarati, Bengali, Urdu—or perhaps even more: but no great harm in that. How about a sort of federation of semi-independent corporations, perhaps under the loose control of Delhi? Thus you might provide better for local languages and customs and traditions, and avoid centralisation, which I think is perhaps one of the failings of All India Radio, and perhaps in part my fault, or, may I say, the fault of the British Raj, which wanted everything tightly controlled from Delhi.

There you have the alternatives. State control? Personally, I would say no. Commercial radio? I am not sure: cogent arguments can be advanced against it, yet it works quite well in many countries, and might solve the financial problems of Indian broadcasting. Semi-independent corporations? Perhaps the best—if you can get a sufficiency of distinguished and disinterested people to form Boards of Governors.

I think—although after all these years I am in no position to give advice to anyone—that All India Radio has three things which need doing. First, cheap sets available to the masses. Second, a more lively approach to programme-making, which means employing original and perhaps "dangerous" people. Third, a fact-finding mission to go and look at broadcasting in Russia and China and America and Europe: I am sure there is much to be learned.

Broadcasting expands continually. This vision must come to all the world. These things are inevitable. Because I played a small part in the foundation of AIR, I have a paternal and

fraternal interest in Indian radio. Backed by a potential of 200 million listeners, and by the great philosophies and traditions of India, it should be a great world force. As yet, it is not. With all my heart I wish that it may become so.

by M. R. MASANI

I AM not a regular listener, but I have often heard the news and sometimes commentaries, talks and discussions. I have not broadcast much in recent years but, when I was still a Congressman, I was frequently invited to broadcast. There are advantages in belonging to the ruling party! Though contact has not been very extensive recently and my view is predominantly from within, I am keenly interested in the possibilities of radio and television and have attempted to keep touch with developments here and in other countries.

I should like to pose a problem at the very start. When I broadcast some talks for school from the Bombay station in the early 1940s, the Programme Assistant—the foremost Programme Officer in those days—who looked after school broadcasting was my friend Soph. Natarajan, a graduate of Cambridge University and certainly a well educated and well read person who could discuss my scripts with me on equal terms and could suggest many improvements in them. My more recent visits to AIR studios have not brought me into contact with persons of this kind even at much higher levels than the Programme Assistant. Why? Could it be that there is something wrong with the personnel policies of AIR?

In those days, in the 1940s, the Bombay station had Mr. Z. A. Bokhari as Station Director and Mr. B. S. Mardhekar, well-known Marathi poet and writer, as Assistant Director. Mrs. Masani was Programme Executive, Mr. Chandradan Mehta, the noted Gujarati writer, was a Programme Assistant, Mr. Walter Kaufmann, a well-known composer and musician, looked after Western music. Aubrey Meen, who became famous later as an expatriate Indian novelist, was producing a daily feature, "Sound News", besides producing features for school broadcasting. It must have been stimulating to work in such a lively group. Why does not an AIR station attract such a group any more?

As a consultant in personnel management, this aspect of AIR interests me greatly. I have no doubt that the dullness of programmes, the absence of creative effort and activity, the lack of imagination displayed in a hundred small ways all reflect a failure to recruit the right kind of people to AIR. Unless the Minister for Information and Broadcasting takes very drastic steps to reverse this trend and to screen and reject unsuitable elements that have come into the organisation, the right kind of people will not be able to find a place in it. I would also like to ask whether AIR has adequate training for its staff. It was one thing in the early days for new recruits to learn their work through personal contact with their senior officers, who worked as pioneers of a new adventure. Surely this cannot work in the large

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ds. At last he took courage and said: "Sir, I am sure you are making a mistake. I am not..."

But Ghosh Saheb cut him short with a hearty laugh and said: "Isn't that funny? I am making a mistake and you are going to correct me! Now listen. If you are to succeed in work, you must dress well. Our bodies are fashioned by God. But, unless the tailor leaves his mark upon God's handiwork, we are helpless. If you wear a dhoti eight yards long and a kurta less like a sack, all you can do is to lean upon a thick cushion & pull at a hookah. You cannot do much more than that. I have seen in Western countries. If they have progressed so much, the main reason is that people there know how to dress. In prehistoric times, the sole purpose of clothing was to cover one's nudity. But civilised man has gone much beyond that stage. Today, the science of dressing aims at making us active."

When Ghosh Saheb returned home with Ahibhushan, his car carried the weight of two big suitcases packed with clothing, hosiery, footwear, stationery and toilet requisites. There were a couple of friends with him in the car, and so there was no conversation between uncle and nephew.

As soon as he reached home, Ghosh Saheb went to his office and remained there into the late hours of the night. Ahibhushan made several attempts to see him but did not get a chance. He was in the hands of the butler, the boy and the secretary. They had been deputed to look after his efforts.

Next morning it was the same story. He saw his uncle only for a few minutes at the breakfast table. Ghosh Saheb said: "Your train leaves at 7.30 this evening. Majumdar has gone to reserve your berth. I shall return from office at 6.30. Pack up your things and be ready. The servants will help you."

With these words, he got up and, before Ahibhushan could put in a word, rushed off.

It was 6.25 in the evening. The packages were ready. Mr. Ghosh was fretting over his nephew's journey. When everything was arranged, he said: "I have sent a telegram to your employers. Someone will meet you at the station. Work diligently and carefully. It is a responsible job—you will be entrusted with a good deal of cash."

Ahibhushan bent down to touch Ghosh Saheb's feet. The uncle patted him on the shoulder and said "None of that!" Then, as he

saw the young man's moist eyes, he said: "Oh no! Don't be sentimental, my boy. A new game has begun for you today—the game of life. You must not be weak on a day like this. You are a man—born for work. Just go on working. So that's that. Don't waste any more time. Where is Majumdar?"

"I am ready, Sir."

"See that all the packages are carefully loaded. Don't forget anything."

"Yes, sir."

"I have a visitor and so shall not be able to come to the station. Look after yourself. I'll inform your mother tomorrow."

Ahibhushan was by this time in a complete daze. He appeared to be altogether overwhelmed and said: "You will inform my mother? But why should you take so much trouble, Sir? I'll write to her as soon as I reach there."

"No, no, it is for me to write."

"But her address..."

"You think I have forgotten the address? Well, you have a right to think what you like. No, my boy, I have forgotten nothing! For many years, I was gasping for breath, choked with work. Could not keep in touch with you people. Believe me, I am ashamed of myself."

Ahibhushan was shocked, mystified, completely nonplussed. How could Mr. Ghosh, the great business boss, utter such words? After a while, he picked up courage and said: "I cannot understand your words, Sir. I am sure there is some big mistake somewhere, otherwise all that you have done, without even asking me who I am..."

"Ah, there you go again! How you talk, Ahibhushan! Almost a carbon copy of our Majumdar here! You know, I have travelled in many countries, I have seen many men. To understand a man's worth, it is enough to look into his eyes. But let that be. Hurry up, or you will miss your train! Here, keep this cash with you! You will need it for the journey. I'll send you some more in a few days. Write as soon as you reach there. Good-bye..."

THREE days later, Ghosh Saheb was engaged in the daily ritual of going through the dak. Suddenly, catching sight of a postcard, he ejaculated: "What!"

The clerk, who was placing the papers before him for his signature, was alarmed by his tone. "What's the matter, Sir?" he asked, anxiously.

Ghosh Saheb ignored him and shouted: "Majumdar! Where is Majumdar?"

When Majumdar arrived, the postcard was passed on to him. This is what he read:

Dear Binoy,

I could not send Shriman to Calcutta on the 23rd. Then, for some reason, the almanac did not of depart on an auspicious moment decided to ure. Now, I have de- the evening train. Shriman knows very little of Calcutta. The roads are unfamiliar to him. See that your men meet him at Howrah Station.

I need not add that there is no one but you to help your unfortunate sister. Fix up something for my child. When I see him settled, I shall have the strength to die in peace.

Yours,
Didi

Ghosh Saheb stretched himself and put his entire weight on the back of the chair. His head rested upon his hands, and he stared at the ceiling with a vacant look. There were deep lines under his tired eyes. Alas, even a man of action has to rest some time!

But, a moment later, Ghosh Saheb straightened up again. With terrific speed, the red pencil began to level down the heap of papers on the table. When he had almost waded through all the letters, he came upon this one, which he silently handed over to Majumdar:

Respected Sir,

I sent you a telegram as soon as I reached here. I hope you received it. I joined duty yester-

day, and from today my training has begun. All that has happened during the last four days is like a dream. After passing my B.A., I spent an entire year, looking for an ordinary job. I shuttled forth from office to office. Nowhere did I receive even a word of encouragement. Then, someone advised me to see you. I stood before you in fear and trembling. The height of my expectations was that I might secure a clerical post, carrying a salary of thirty rupees a month, in one of your numerous offices. But, without uttering a word, I secured a job of four hundred! Such is Destiny.

I do not know what you saw in me at that auspicious moment. Nor is it necessary for me to know. Give me your blessings, so that I may prove worthy of your generosity and confidence.

Yours,
Ahibhushan

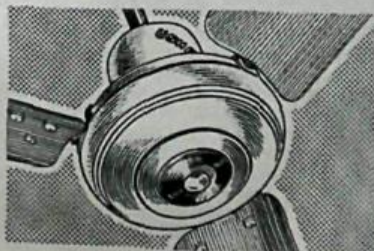
(Translated by V. S. Naravane)

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CORRECTION

The caption for the photograph published with the "Madras Film Letter" in the "Weekly" of August 1 (P. 45) read: "M. Rajan as Abhimanyu and Kanachana as Subhadra in Rajalakshmi Productions' 'Veera Abhimanyu'." "Subhadra" in the above caption should have read "Uttara". The error is regretted.