

Media

Introduction

The ethnic Indian media in foreign countries, which includes the English language media, reflects the diversity of regions and languages of India. Indians are a social and communicative people with a highly developed political awareness. Those who leave India's shores carry memories of a lively and vibrant democracy, a free and vocal indigenous press and a culture that accommodates a wide variety of opinions. Indians abroad therefore take to the media as naturally as their compatriots back home. Indians would be surprised and delighted to see the extent of identification and sympathy for India's concerns on a wide variety of issues in the ethnic media of Indian communities around the world, in which even the advertisement sections are devoted to ethnic Indian products and services.

Background

- 32.2. The ethnic Indian media evolved out of the need of the Indian Diaspora to remain in touch with its roots. Living in an alien and often unfriendly environment, the Diaspora recreated the familiar symbols of its past by initially keeping its traditions alive. Later, imports of Indian songs and films added to the locally available cultural menu. Initial forays to create their own channels of communication focused on acquiring slots in local radio channels for their ethnic programmes. Gradually their own print media evolved, albeit with a limited circulation and focus.
- 32.3. In the next phase there was a proliferation of ethnically owned radio and TV channels as well as their own print media, especially in countries which permitted freedom of expression. In such countries, coverage of political and international issues tended to gain in importance, as did the focus on current affairs and news about India. In others, the focus remained inevitably on entertainment and community issues while political coverage was limited. The ethnic media fulfilled the important function of providing a forum for networking within the community to satisfy its special requirements, including such features as matrimonial advertisements. Ethnic radio, TV channels and films even managed to attract mainstream audiences in some countries, particularly in the Arab and African world and later even in the West (*Bhangra* and *Indi-Pop*, *East is East*, *Mississippi Masala*, *Salaam Bombay*, *Lagaan* etc.).

- 32.4. Today, with technological advances and the advent of the Internet, access to information on India has been greatly facilitated. No mention of the ethnic media would be complete without a reference to the vast proliferation of websites catering to the needs of ethnic Indian communities in many countries. They provide easily accessible and regularly updated information on news about India, cheap airfares and flight schedules to India, tourist information, domestic flight and railway schedules, domestic employment opportunities, stock market news in India, exchange rates, special bank facilities for NRIs, fixed deposit rates available across banks in India, STD Codes in India, educational sites including top colleges in India, classifieds for residential properties, addresses of Indian Missions and NRI Associations, FEMA / Passport application forms, immigration rules, suggested traditional baby names, recipes for Indian food, Diaspora and NRI news - the list could go on. Clearly, they cater to the multi-faceted needs of the Diaspora and its desire to keep in touch with developments and facilities in India.
- 32.5. An important recent development has been the availability of Indian channels such as *ZEE TV* and *Star TV* via satellite in practically all the countries of the world. *ZEE TV* in the US is playing a significant role in transmitting Indian news in English, Hindi, Gujarati and Punjabi. There is also evidence to show that these channels enjoy significant popularity with other non-Indian communities, and hence act as a very important medium of communication with them.
- 32.6. In the following paragraphs, the Committee has described the feedback received from some countries around the world. It has not been possible to cover every country in this survey.

The Ethnic Media in Different Parts of the World

- 32.7. The ethnic media is very active in the Gulf region. The mainstream, English language print media report on developments in India. The entertainment requirements of the Indian community in the region are met by radio and TV programmes. *Radio Asia* and *HUM* are broadcast all over the Gulf, and are the most popular radio services. They are run by Indians and cater to the diverse Indian community in the Hindi, Urdu and Malayalam languages, with plans to expand into other Indian languages. There are also 3 AM stations broadcasting in Malayalam. There are no ethnic Indian TV channels telecasting from UAE. However *Doordarshan* programmes will now be beamed over E-vision of Abu Dhabi's cable network, a subsidiary of the state-owned Emirates Telecommunications Corporation. AIR has a correspondent in Dubai and has announced the launch of satellite transmissions to target the Gulf audience. Channel 33 in Dubai is very popular with expatriates. In Oman the 2 prominent dailies the *Oman Daily Observer* and the *Times of Oman*, are edited and managed, though not owned, by Indians, and devote substantial space to Indian news, as do the state run TV and radio networks. In Saudi Arabia, members of the Indian community publish 2 dailies Urdu News and Malayalam News. Popular Indian channels like the ZEE TV, Sony TV, MTV India etc. are available through dish antennas in many Gulf countries.
- 32.8. In Singapore the Tamil daily *Tamil Murasu* and the TV channel *Vasantham* are targeted at the Indian community. In Hong Kong, the *Bharat Ratna* (BR) International monthly was started 37

years ago by Hong Kong business tycoon Bob Harilela. *The Indian* is also published from Hong Kong. In Malaysia, there are two prominent Tamil dailies, *Tamil Nasion* and *Malaysia Nanban*. *Astro* and *Mega* channels transmit Indian programmes. In the Philippines, the Sindhi community publishes a monthly English magazine *Samachar*. Zee TV, Sony and STAR TV can be seen through satellite or cable throughout this region. Many NRIs and PIOs work in these organisations.

- 32.9. The South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) has 3 TV channels for the Indian community. Every Sunday, a two-hour programme titled *Impressions* which includes Indian vernacular serials, a local community programme and an India report - *Eastern Mosaic* - is broadcast for the South African Indian community. SABC's *Radio Lotus* also targets the Indian community. It gives equal time for the major local Indian languages - Tamil, Gujarati, Hindi, Urdu and Telegu. Apart from SABC TV, every Sunday the independent *M Ne* pay channel hosts *East Net* for its Indian subscribers and also offers Indian channels like ZEE TV, Sony and B4U. The Independent Broadcasting Authority has licensed several private radio stations such as *Marble Ray*, *East Coast Radio* and *Radio Hindvani*. Of these, *East Coast Radio* is the most popular and has the largest listenership.
- 32.10. The ethnic FM radio stations 'East 106' and 'Sound Asia' in Kenya cater to the Asian community. In Mauritius, radio/TV channels are state owned but devote a significant portion of coverage to Indian matters: culture and programmes in Hindi as well as other ethnic languages. In Tanzania, *Dar Es Salaam* Television (DTV), Cable Entertainment Network (CEN) and Cable Television Network (CTN) are owned by people of Indian origin.
- 32.11. In Israel, the Marathi quarterly *Maiboli* has been published by Israelis of Indian origin since 1987. In Spain - *Aaina*, *Muskan*, *Sitara* and *Hindi Valencia Samachar* are published by the Indian community. In Suriname, PIOs own the *RAPAR*, *Trishul* and *Rasonic* Broadcasting Networks, *Radio Radika* and TV and *Radio Sangeetmala*. Indian films are very popular in Trinidad & Tobago where there are 4 radio stations that broadcast Hindi songs. In Fiji, the ethnic Indian community has very little role in the media. Two ethnic Indians have minority shares in the *Fiji Sun* and a radio station is partially owned by an ethnic Indian businessman. The publication *Shantidoot* in Hindi is issued from Fiji. A number of TV channels in Guyana are owned by Indo-Guyanese.
- 32.12. In Australia, the following publications are edited or owned by members of the Indian community: *The Indian Down Under*, *The Indian Post*, *The India Voice*, *Hindi Samachar Patrika*, *Indian Link*, *Bharath Times*, *Bhartiye Samachar* and the *Indian Observer*. There are several other radio programmes in the vernacular Indian languages in Australia. In New Zealand, *Bharat Darshan*, *Newsletter* and *Indian Newslink* comprise the Indian ethnic media.
- 32.13. Due to the greater feedback and information available on the Net, as well as the longer traditions of freedom of expression in the print media in countries like the US, Canada and the UK, considerable, though not exhaustive, information is available regarding the ethnic media in these countries. The following sections of this chapter outline the salient features of the ethnic media in these three countries.

Indian Media in the UK

- 32.14. The Indian media has a strong presence in the UK, both in the print and increasingly in the electronic media segments. The Indian community runs a number of ethnic TV channels, radio stations, newspapers and magazines. These tend to focus primarily on news and events related to the Indian subcontinent and help the community to remain in touch with India. Several India-based media organisations are also represented in the UK. In addition to wire services like PTI and IANS, most major Indian dailies including *The Times of India*, *Hindustan Times*, *The Hindu* etc. have full time correspondents. A number of national and regional publications also engage stringers. Together these constitute the Indian Journalists Association of the UK. The *Asian Age* is the only Indian daily to have a London edition. Magazines like *India Today*, *Cine Blitz* and *Movie Mag* also have special UK editions and maintain full-time representation in London. It is understood that *Outlook* may also launch a UK edition.
- 32.15. Indian ethnic publications cater to different sections of the community. The widest circulation ethnic publications are in Gujarati and Punjabi, as these communities constitute the two largest Indian linguistic groups in the UK. They provide their readers with a mix of community news, information about religious and cultural events and reporting on important developments in Gujarat and Punjab respectively. *Gujarat Samachar*, with a circulation of 40,000, and *Garavi Gujarati* with a circulation of 42,000, are the leading publications serving the Gujarati community, while *Des Pardes* is the widest circulating Punjabi weekly in UK, followed by the *Punjab Mail* and *Punjab Times*. *Amar Deep* is a Hindi weekly with a circulation of 40,000.
- 32.16. *Sunrise Radio*, the oldest Indian radio programme, caters to the Indian (and Pakistani) communities. The newest entrant in the news segment is *Punjab Radio*. Among other ethnic Indian radio channels are *Sabras Radio*, *Radio XL* and *Supa AM*. BBC radio also provides several hours of programming in Indian languages. Indian TV channels - *Zee TV*, *Sony Entertainment Television*, *B4U*, *Star TV* – are highly popular. Among home-grown TV companies, the market leader is London-based *Reminiscent Television (RTV)*, which offers 6 channels including *Lashkara* in Punjabi, *Gurjari* in Gujarati, *CEE* in Tamil, *Bangla* in Bengali and *Anjuman* in Urdu, and *Channel East* that provides community-based programming. In addition, Birmingham and Leicester have their own local Indian channels - *MATV* (which has now become part of RTV) and *APNA TV*. There are 3 Punjabi weeklies in the Birmingham area catering to the predominantly Punjabi community - “*The Punjab Times*”, “*Des Pardes*” and “*Awaz-e-Qaum*” and a Punjabi TV Channel “*Lashkara*”.
- 32.17. The decreasing level of awareness of Indian languages amongst the younger generation means that the vernacular publications are largely limited to the older generation. The youth tend to rely primarily on English-language publications. The *Eastern Eye* and *India Weekly* are the prominent English weeklies. *Asian Voice* is owned by the Gujarat Samachar group. The India Abroad weekly has a London Bureau. The younger generation has also launched its own publications - including the weekly *Asia Xpress* and *BritAsian* and monthly magazine *Snoo*. Coverage

of India in these publications is relatively limited and largely focused on Bollywood and the latest music groups.

- 32.18. The wide range of publications, combined with the growing availability of radio and TV programming, provide the Indian community in UK with the latest information on India, which plays an important role in sustaining their ties with India. Many of these organisations have close links with their Indian counterparts. Most sections of the ethnic media maintain a cordial relationship with the Indian missions in the UK.

Indian Media in the US

- 32.19. Indians today are regarded as a highly qualified and educated community in many countries of settlement, but especially in the US. Their second advantage in the world of media, besides their natural intelligence, is their command of the English language. The quality of reporting and news coverage is high, as is their coverage of Indian issues. Indian Americans have therefore been relatively ahead of their other Asian counterparts in the US media. Several journalists of Indian origin have made it into mainstream journalism. The South Asian Association of Journalists (SAJA), established in March 1994, is a professional group whose goal is “to foster ties among South Asian journalists in North America and improve standards of journalistic coverage of South Asia and South Asian America”. It now has a membership of over 800 journalists of South Asian origin in New York and other cities in North America. It is not a political advocacy group and is nonpartisan. It would be extremely useful for the central nodal agency in India dealing with Diaspora affairs to maintain regular contact with a lobby of committed professionals who are developing the quality, excellence and mainstream credibility of journalists of Indian/ South Asian origin in the US, more so since in many countries Indian publications are not really influential opinion-makers and are not read by the mainstream public.
- 32.20. The list of ethnic publications in the US also runs into several pages, which is true of other parts of the world. *India Abroad*, an international newsweekly started in 1970 for the South Asian expatriate community, is the largest selling Indian newspaper published outside India. The *India Abroad News Service*, started in 1987, covers all the continents and serves 62 newspapers in four languages - English, Hindi, Arabic and Gujarati.
- 32.21. There are other countless Indian papers in all major US cities with a significant concentration of the Indian community. The Committee expresses its inability to chronicle all of them. It has therefore given here only an illustrative list. In California, the weeklies *India Post* and *India West* are popular, while *SiliconIndia* and *Siliconeer* cater to Indian IT professionals in Silicon Valley. Some of the weekly Indian newspapers published from Houston in the English language are - *Voice of Asia*, *India Herald*, *Indo-American News*, and *Indu*. In the vernacular there is *Malayalam Weekly*. From Washington, some of the publications are *India Post*, *India West*, *India Journal*, *Himalayan News*, *India Focus magazine* and *India Currents Magazine*. Other publications are *India*

Times, India Monitor, Asia Observer, India Tribune besides a number of other ethnic magazines. Though there are a number of local broadcast programmes, the most popular Indian TV channels are Indian satellite channels like ZEE TV, Sony Entertainment, B4U, Zee World etc. Local TV channels like *Darshan TV* and *Namaste* are also popular and focus on news and entertainment. Journals also focus on issues affecting the Indian community. The ethnic media based in Chicago includes the *India Tribune, India Abroad, Indian Reporter and World News, India Post, Indo-American News, NRI Times, Sandesh International, Gujarat Samachar, Gujarat Mitra, Malayalee Sabdam, Punjab Timez, Awaaz* (in Hindi) and *Business Times*. TV channels in Chicago are *Chitrahara Broadcasting, Sabtahiki* in Hindi, *Super Broadcasting Corp., Ektara TV, Sikh TV, Sohna Punjab*. Amongst radio programmes, there is *Jhankar, Geet Gurjari, Rang Tarang, Raunak Mela, Voice of Asian Minorities, etc.*

CANADA

- 32.22. It is the Canadian government's policy to support ethnic TV channels. This is one of the reasons for the large number of ethnic TV and radio channels in Canada such as the *Asian TV network, A.K. Video Madhuban, Gaunda Punjab, Eye on Asia, TV Asia, Indradhanush* etc. The ethnic media in Canada is prolific and keeps the community fully up to date with news events on India. The interested and educated component of the Indian community has access to instant news and information through the Internet. The Indian community is centred around two main areas i.e. Greater Toronto Area in Ontario province and Vancouver – Surrey in British Columbia. Toronto has the highest concentration of PIOs and consequently also of ethnic publications focusing on entertainment, social and religious events and news of interest to community. These include publications in the vernaculars and in English, such as *Hamdard, Sukhanwar, Punjab Di Mahak, Sikh Press, Pardesi Punjab, Gujarat Vartman, Nawa Zamana/Punjabi Jodha, Multicultural Gazette, Bharti / Asia Times, Sada Punjab, Sanjh Savera, "Ajit" News Paper, KALA, Desi News, Sikh News & Views, Nagara Punjabi, Namastey Canada, Pragati, Ashiana, India Abroad, Asian Roots, The Indo - Canadian Voice, The Toronto Tribune, India Journal, India Post, New Canada* etc. The "Link" weekly, the "Indo Canadian Times", the *Canada Darpan* in Gurumukhi, the *Char di Kala* (a mouthpiece of separatists), are some of the papers published from Vancouver. Ms. Sushma who runs the above-mentioned TV programme *Indradhanush* also runs a 24-hour radio programme.
- 32.23. In Canada some publications are also run by Khalistani elements. There are several ethnic radio programmes such as *Punjabi Lehran* run by Satinder Pal Singh Sidhu, *Gaunda Punjab* by Joginder Bassi, *Geetmala* by Darshan Sahota and *Radio India* by Neeti Prakash Ray. A new radio programme *Hot Like Pepper* started a year ago. There is a 24-hour *Asian Television Network* run by Shan Chandrasekhar. His telecast includes major local community events and 8 hours of programmes from Doordarshan, news, entertainment and movies. Other prominent weekend TV broadcasts include *Eye on Asia* by Darshan Sahota and *Asia Net TV* by Neeti Prakash Ray in Hindi, English and Punjabi.

Prospects

- 32.24. The ethnic media abroad can become a very important vehicle for communication between the Indian public and the Diaspora. It is already helping in sensitising the latter to India's achievements and concerns. Frequently the mainstream media in many countries does not do justice to various Indian points of view on international and Indian events, even though local politicians in areas where there is a significant Indian community, may monitor their content. The ethnic media keeps contact with the free and vibrant press of India, which meets the highest world standards. This enriches their perspectives and acquaints their readers with a different point of view on major international developments. It also equips them to face the often one-sided local commentary on Indian affairs. Lack of effective communication, especially with the ethnic Indian press abroad, was in the past one of the reasons for misguided elements in some countries to support subversive movements in India.
- 32.25. Some current drawbacks need to be highlighted. One is financial. The numerous Indian ethnic publications/TV and radio stations survive on advertisement support from community sponsors rather than subscriptions. The proliferation of media to cater to different sections of the community prevents consolidation and achievement of optimum mass, which affects quality.
- 32.26. Another serious drawback is that ethnic publications carry little clout in the mainstream media and political circles. Barring a few, these publications are seldom taken seriously by younger PIOs and also the decision makers in the host country. Their role in their host countries and in strengthening relations between India and the Diaspora may therefore diminish unless steps are taken to improve quality and make them relevant to their needs. For example, one idea projected to us is that given the talent available in the highly educated Indian community in many countries including the US, some of the ethnic papers were to pool their resources, they could emerge as viable rivals to even the "mainstream" US dailies!
- 32.27. Initiatives to enhance interaction and improve the quality of the ethnic media are sure to be welcomed by PIOs as they feel that this is a medium for enlightening second-generation PIOs about India.
- 32.28. Side by side with measures to improve the quality and reach of the ethnic media, efforts should also be made in India to initiate greater interaction with mainstream Indian media personalities, many of whom are well disposed towards the land of their forefathers. A very important section of the Diaspora has been extremely successful in mainstream foreign media. People like Riz Khan, Fareed Zakaria, Shashi Tharoor, Pankaj Mishra etc. need no introduction. A number of persons from the Indian community occupy important positions in the mainstream western media including the CNN, BBC, NYT, The Daily Telegraph, Financial Times, etc. Several Indians have attained prominence in literature and films. Their presence in these organisations, which is bound to grow, contributes to a better understanding of India and a more balanced projection of issues of concern to India.

Recommendations

32.29. In the light of the foregoing discussion, the Committee makes the following recommendations:

- (i) It is important to create a comprehensive data bank of ethnic media, their coverage and their circulation in the central organisation dealing with the Indian Diaspora.
- (ii) A facilitation mechanism for interaction with the Indian ethnic media should be set up in the future organisational set up that the Committee is recommending in this Report and in the External Publicity Division of the Ministry of External Affairs - to facilitate dissemination of information, exchange of views, holding of the annual convention (see below) and cultivating Editors/ journalists of the Indian media abroad. PTI, UNI and other Indian news agencies should also consider linking up with major ethnic publications worldwide.
- (iii) Conferences in India of regional PIO Editors and owners of media channels to meet Indian think tanks and prominent Indian Editors and journalists could be organised. Each conference could have a topical theme of special interest to India and its Diaspora.
- (iv) Associations like SAJA and the UK Association of Indian Journalists could be invited to specialised conferences as they are the most organised lobbies of journalists of Indian origin abroad and have links with the mainstream media.
- (v) Provision of training to technical personnel in India could be considered.
- (vi) There is scope for greater involvement of Indian Missions in establishing these linkages, which has been welcomed by the local community wherever this has been attempted.

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