

HMTV 'ANDHRA PRADESH - DASHA DISHA': TELEVISION JOURNALISM WITH PEOPLE'S PARTICIPATION AND ITS IMPACT ON TELANGANA MOVEMENT

Pasunuru Sreedhar Babu
Research Scholar,
Department of Mass Communication,
Telangana University, Nizamabad.
sreedhee@hotmail.com

Dr. Chandra Shekhar Ghanta
Department of Mass Communication,
Telangana University, Nizamabad.
ghantacs@gmail.com

Abstract

When the Telangana separate statehood movement was in the peak stage in 2009, a live interactive debate programme 'Andhra Pradesh Dasha Disha' was broadcasted by HMTV news channel. On 9th December of the same year then Union Home Minister P. Chidambaram announced the central government's decision to create a separate state of Telangana State. It led to the vertical split in the state congress party, and scores of MLAs and MPs resigned vowing that the division was not acceptable to them. Tension prevailed as the students from various universities in Andhra and Rayalaseema took to the streets and attacked the Congress. With the 'altered' situation in the state, the Centre back-tracked on its decision and called for a wide range of political consultations. On hearing this, students in Telangana went on a rampage. About 17 pro-Telangana students launched fast unto death before the Osmania University Arts College building. In those dark and uncertain times, HMTV called for a live debate with politicians, intellectuals and students with the tagline 'do not raise your voice, improve your argument.' Starting on 20 December 2009, it conducted debates in 22 districts of Andhra Pradesh apart from the opening session in Hyderabad. The study assays the impact of these marathon debates on Telugu society and how journalism with people's participation will help resolve the social issues amicably.

Keywords: *Dasha Disha, statehood movement, political consultations, Telangana, TV live debate,*

Introduction

When the majority of print and electronic media was under control of Andhra people, HMTV, a 24-hour Telugu news channel, was floated by an investor from Telangana in 2009 with the renowned senior journalist K. Ramachandra Murthy as its Chief Editor and Managing Director. When all the major media companies, be it print or electronic, are run by the investors from Andhra region, the emergence of HMTV was perceived as a neutral player which would give equal importance to the Telangana voice. The channel went on air officially on 12 February 2009 after a few weeks of trial run. The timing was as crucial as the movement for separate statehood for Telangana gathered momentum and forcing for a collective political will.

The year 2009 is a key turning point in the separate statehood movement. Separate statehood movement witnessed violent and non-violent movements witnessed in combined Andhra Pradesh. Very minimum media houses try to resolve the issues. The situation took a violent turn with the central government announcing two major decisions in two weeks gap. On 9th December the centre issued a statement saying that the process of the formation of Telangana as a separate state was started. It took a complete u-turn on this due to the subsequent violent

reactions in the Andhra region. The centre's backtracking resulted in more severe agitations all over Telangana. Political parties split across the party lines and students in the region went on a rampage and some groups launched fast-unto-death on the campuses.

In such turbulent times, the HMTV editorial board came up with the idea of creating a live platform for the agitators, students, intellectuals and not least the politicians from both the regions to voice their views on division of state and continuing as a combined state. The core purpose of the programme was to make the people understand the arguments from both sides rather than being rhetoric and resorting to violent acts. Thus, the historical television live marathon debate show called '*Andhra Pradesh Dasha Disha*' began in Jubilee Hall of Hyderabad on 20 December 2020. Its tagline was: 'Do not raise your voice, improve your argument.'

First step towards the discussions

The main objective of the *Dasha Disha* is to create some awareness in the people on various aspects of the statehood movement as well as the United Andhra Pradesh. It is just like a platform to share different ideas and opinions of people. The first '*Dasha Disha*' live show with the participation of major political leaders from all parties, intellectuals from different areas and social groups and student leaders started at around 6 p.m. and ran beyond 11 in the night. More than 50 people spoke during the live show with temperatures going high in between. People for and against the division of the state were given time almost equally and the show proved to be a big hit in terms of critical acclaim and TRP numbers. It helped viewers all over the state to understand the tussle better and to form their own opinions.

On the people's demand, *Dasha Disha* was organised in 22 districts and made thousands of people speak on television live shows. It was a clear case of participatory journalism or democratic journalism, where reporting, analyzing and dissemination of news happened by the citizens of the state.

Its impact was huge as it gave people an opportunity to give their voice and give thought to arguments coming from the opposite sections. It is not that everyone from Telangana wanted a separate state and all from coastal Andhra were advocating the status quo, there were voices in Telangana against the division and likewise, some people from Andhra argued against the idea of continuing as a combined state.

In Telangana, JACs were formed after *Dasha Disha* went on air. Later came the Sri Krishna commission, which was formed by the centre to have wide consultations on the Telangana issue. HMTV handed over its abridged versions of the transcriptions of *Dasha Disha* to the committee.

The article argues that *Dasha Disha* was an excellent example of participatory journalism which helped the people not to be just emotional by falling trap to the political agendas but to be rational by understanding the reasons behind the crisis. In the process, the unique programme provided the much-needed ground report to Sri Krishna Committee and helped the central government to take a wise decision in line with the aspirations of the majority of people.

Literature Review:

Regional distinctiveness cannot often be traced to caste, cultural, or linguistic factors, it is clear that a history of division goes far to create sub-regional feelings within a broad cultural region. As Telangana is seen as a broad cultural entity, the approach of Duncan B. Forrester in his book 'Sub-regionalism in India: The Case of Telangana' explains the historical and cultural roots of the Telangana movement and how the cultural vividness captivated the new technology called television broadcast journalism. Duncan mentions that Telangana has a separate political history of some two centuries. Dasha Disha helped the people from Andhra Pradesh to understand this regional distinctiveness which could influence their arguments.

The development of television in India since the early 1990s, and its implications for Indian society more widely. Until 1991, India possessed only a single state-owned television channel, but since then there has been a rapid expansion in independent satellite channels which came as a complete break from the statist control of the past. This change has been categorically explained in 'Television in India - Satellites, politics and cultural change' compiled by Nalini Mehta (Published in 2008 by Routledge, 2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN)

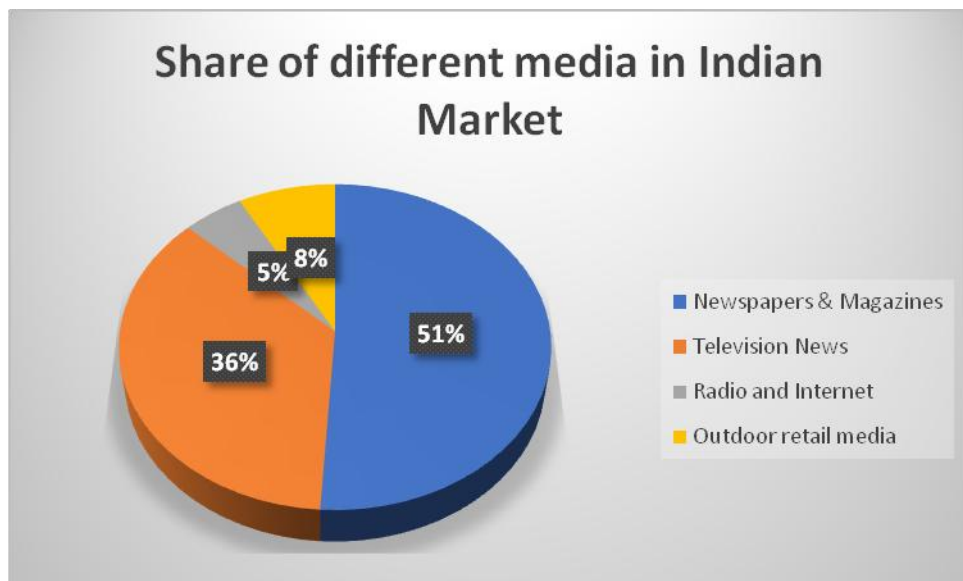


Figure 1 Share of different media in Indian Market

Television news captured 36% of the market share in less than a decade.

Source: AdEx Report 2007

As Nalini rightly mentioned, 'misinterpretations and misunderstandings happened in Indian political history, particularly with Telangana region. The expansion of Television media has been providing answers to these past trends.

Table 1 Language-wise breakdown of news channels in India 2010

Language-wise breakdown of news channels in India (2010)	
Hindi	28
English	9
Tamil	10
Telugu	9
Malayalam	6
Kannada	6
Bengali	5
Marathi	4
Punjabi	3
Oriya	3
Assamese	1
Urdu	1
Gujarati	1
Bhojpuri	1
Information not available	7
Global languages; minor languages	6
National languages (English; Hindi*)	37
Regional languages	50

Source: Government of India, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting (2010).

Note: These are all the channels that have been granted permission to uplink from India, and may not necessarily be ‘active channels’, that is, those that are actually on air.

*Several channels in the Hindi category broadcast in Hindi dialects, and hence can also be classified under regional languages.

The historical trajectory of the growth of television news and critical analysis of the role of private television news in framing the nature of public discourse in contemporary India are discussed elaborately in 'Media Discourse in Contemporary India - A Study of Television News' by Sudeshna Devi.

Methodology

Given the above studies, we decided to study the impact of Television Journalism on the Telangana movement. We decided to find out the following:

- The core idea of the Dasha Disha programme and its reach in technical terms
- Level of participation of people and influences
- Result of participatory journalism
- Did Dasha Disha change the Dasha (future) and Disha (direction) of the state?
- Impact of Television as a mass medium in dealing the social issues.

For this, qualitative research is done by going through the feed and literature available on Dasha Disha. HMTV has released CDs and a book about thousand pages with abridged speeches of the participants. The book was edited by eminent journalists like K Ramachandra Murthy, Kalluri Bhaskaram and Jayadhir Tirumala Rao. The book explained how the programme was conceived and conducted. TAM (Television Audience Measurement) reports on Dasha Disha were collected to get data insights to establish the popularity of the programme in those times. Spoke with the then Chief Editor of HMTV, K. Ramachandra Murthy to understand his experiences in running the show.

Conclusion

Nobel laureate Amartya Sen, in the preface to his much-acclaimed collection of essays, *The Argumentative Indian* (2005: xiii) says, ‘Discussion and argumentation are critically important for democracy and public reasoning...’ Sen’s emphasis on argumentation and discussion as critical for democracy is part of a long and illustrious tradition of political thought. Dasha Disha did the same and threw the light on public reasoning.

An unbiased journalistic approach and balanced participation of experts helped its credibility among the common audience. Dasha Disha had religiously followed the rule of opening the debate with an intellectual supporting the cause of Telangana when the show is organized in the Andhra region and vice versa i.e. opening remarks by an intellectual who wants the state to be united.

Table 2 Week: 51' 2009 (13th Dec to 19th Dec 2009)

Channel	*HYDERABAD	AP .1 TO 1 MN.	APREST 1 MN.+	TOTAL MARKET
Zee 24 Ghantalu	40	22	58	35
ABN Andhra Jyothi	12	35	40	27
ETV2 Telugu News	104	91	82	95
Gemini News	2	19	7	10
HM TV	34	25	30	29
I News	37	41	66	43
Mahaa TV	10	23	27	18
NTV News	100	69	128	91
Sakshi TV	65	87	77	76
Studio N	17	33	39	28
TV5 Telugu News	145	62	135	108
TV9 Telugu News	259	223	284	248
GRAND TOTAL	824	732	973	809

Table 3 Week: 52' 2009 (20th Dec to 26th Dec 2009)

Channel	*HYDERABAD	AP .1 TO 1 MN.	APREST 1 MN.+	TOTAL MARKET
Zee 24 Ghantalu	60	27	44	43
ABN Andhra Jyothi	30	47	50	40
ETV2 Telugu News	139	78	98	106
Gemini News	3	11	7	7
HM TV	61	26	31	41
I News	54	51	69	55
Mahaa TV	21	23	20	22
NTV News	136	66	112	102
Sakshi TV	112	98	65	98
Studio N	20	29	32	26
TV5 Telugu News	166	67	143	120
TV9 Telugu News	308	234	254	267
GRAND TOTAL	1110	757	925	927

Source: TAM Reports 2009

Compared to print, television journalism will reach more people irrespective of literacy rate and in turn involve more people in the political space. The above charts clearly show that the news channel viewership had gone up after the December 9 announcement. Total GRPs in week 51 were 824 and crossed 1,110 in the subsequent week.

HMTV viewership also doubled in the week of the Dasha Disha telecast. It had gone up from 34 GRPS in week 51 to 61 GRPs in week 52 in Hyderabad. Overall, in the state, its ratings climbed from 29 to 41 in a week.

Prof. G. Haragopal, in his research document, 'Telangana People's Movement: The Unfolding Political Culture' said that, 'Dasha Disha, an exercise, if not an experiment, is fairly effective. Members of one region listen to the arguments of the other region with some interruptions from passionate and impatient supporters. This programme is popular and people in the entire state watched this live telecast lasting for six to ten hours. This viewership behaviour fairly compares itself with day and night cricket matches.

The expansion of television journalism means the expansion of political space for the people in democratic societies. The study recognizes that interactive, people-centric, objective journalism will impact society. 'Dasha Disha' helped people to understand and appreciate all viewpoints on the complex and delicate problem. The convenor of the show and then Chief Editor of HMTV, K. Ramachandra Murthy rightly mentioned in the inaugural edition of 'The Hans India', an English newspaper launched by the group in a later stage, 'The light generated during the heated arguments had remarkably reduced the un-democratic, uncivil and undesirable trends in public discourse.

Address for correspondence**Dr. Chandra Shekhar Ghanta**

Department of Mass Communications,
Telangana University, Nizamabad 503322
Telangana State
Email. ghantacs@gmail.com

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