

Expanding media market and shrinking public space

Poornananda Dasegowdanakoplu
Mangalore University
India

The growth of media in the last one and a half decades has been unprecedented. This has implications for democracy and public discourse. By providing accounts of the contemporary world and images the media play a pivotal role in shaping social consciousness. Therefore, the issue of their control has become the focus of academic and political concern.

The media are important in a situation where most of the citizens never meet their fellow citizens and the media serve as a kind of proxy (Herman & McChesney, 1997). They provide a link to the larger society and in varying degrees a sense of connectedness and solidarity. They not only provide information and entertainment and but also play a central role in working of democracies. They create what Habermas (1991) calls as '**public sphere**' enabling discussion and debate on issues vital to the community. The public sphere is part of that space which is beyond the influence of systems such as economy, religion and the state.

Public sphere includes all the places and forums where issues of importance to a political community are discussed and debated and where information is presented that is essential to citizens' participation in community life. Habermas' work relies on a description of a historical moment during the 17th and 18th centuries when coffee houses, societies and salons became the centre of debate, and extends this to an ideal of participation in the public sphere for today.

He defines the public sphere as follows:

By "public sphere" we mean first of all a domain of our social life in which such a thing as public opinion can be formed. Access to the public sphere is open to all citizens. A portion of the public sphere is constituted in every conversation in which private persons come together to form a public. When the public is large, this kind of communication requires certain means of dissemination and influence; today newspapers and periodicals, radio and television are the media of the public sphere. We

speak of a political public sphere when the public discussions concern objects connected with the practice of the state (Habermas, 1991, p. 398).

His concept is important because any society that claims to be democratic has to have informed public making political choices. The public has to know what is going on and the options that they should weigh debate and act upon. If they are wrongly or inadequately informed the political choices they may make may not be in the best interest of democracy.

Public sphere works effectively when it is institutionally independent of the state and society's dominant economic forces. Developing and maintaining such autonomy is necessary to make democratic communication possible. A public sphere works well when there is a wide range of media, each partially or wholly independent of the state and commercial control. The crucial factor is that there are no restrictions on the range of political viewpoints and that resources are allocated in such a way that powerful economic and political actors cannot drown out the ideas of media representing the less powerful segments of society. Though there are many other instruments of public sphere, the media are the preeminent vehicles of communication through which the public participates in the political process. How effectively they participate determines how effectively a democracy works. If their performance is poor, people will be ignorant, isolated and depoliticized (Rheingold, 1993). As a result an elite minority will easily capture and maintain control over decision-making.

Although both government control and private media systems threaten the public sphere the private media corporations that have emerged in the recent years pose a greater threat. They not only work towards meeting their profit objective but also influence the way their audience look at the world. The **agenda setting** hypothesis (Cohen, 1963; McCombs & Shaw, 1972; Iyengar & Kinder, 1987) argues that ideas and images that mass media disseminate largely determine what citizens think about and the importance they give to the issues. Those problems that receive prominent attention on the national news become the problems the audience regards as the nation's most important.

A few corporations that dominate media market build up a dominant discourse and expand the '**spiral of silence**' (Noell-Neumann, 1984) on issues critical to the people. Because of people's fear of isolation or separation from those around them, they tend to keep their attitudes to themselves when they think they are in minority. The media controlled by the dominant economic forces tend to present one side of an issue to the exclusion of others which encourages those people to keep quiet without registering their opposing viewpoint. If various viewpoints about an issue are ignored, marginalised, or trivialized by media reports, then people will be reluctant to talk about them. As the time passes, those viewpoints will cease to be heard in public and therefore cannot have impact upon political decision-making (Herman & Chomsky, 1988). Instead of moving people to speak up the corporate media silence them.

Expanding media corporations

Before the 1990s, media systems in many countries were largely composed of domestically owned radio, television and newspaper industries. A global commercial media market began emerging in the 1990s. Foreign satellite channels arrived in India in 1991 when the Gulf War began. The programme of privatisation and deregulation termed as economic 'reforms' that began in that year facilitated the entry of foreign media (Ambirajan, 2002). Foreign investment is now allowed in radio, film and print media*. Media ownership and control have changed drastically.

Radical improvements in communication technology have made global media empires feasible and lucrative in a manner unthinkable in the past. As one of the world's largest and fastest growing industries, mass communications shares the characteristics of the other fields of enterprise to which it often has important economic links.

Concentration and globalization are universal features of today's industrial world. In the oil, automotive, soap, tobacco and drug industries, a smaller number of companies wield ever-greater market power. Propelled by growing capital requirements and by the incessant demands of capital markets for larger profits companies in every field or enterprise buy out, merge and consolidate. They cut deals with competitors,

* Although 26 per cent cap was placed on equity, the foreign firms found ways to circumvent such norms

seek to preempt or crowd out upstart rival, exploit new technologies, identify and co-opt new ideas and fresh talent. With corporate profits increasingly dominating decisions concentration of ownership endangers plurality, diversity, risk taking and dissent (McChensney, 1999)

In 1982, Ben Bagdikian wrote *The Media Monopoly*, an examination of the growing concentration of media ownership. He had calculated that 50 corporations controlled half or more of the media business. By the time he published his 2000 edition, the number had fallen below ten. There are now only six media corporations that account for more than half of the media business--AOL Time-Warner, News Corporation, Disney, Bertelsmann, Viacom, Vivendi Universal. These six largest media firms are major producers of information, entertainment and media software and have global distribution network[†]. The media industry had never witnessed such vertical integration before. There is now a phenomenon of the single owner paying money to the writer of the novel in the form of book advance and royalties, and then paying the screenwriter to write the feature film which is produced at the owner's studio. The owner's magazine does features about actors, producers, directors and other celebrities to promote the movie, while his television network that has the late night talk show on which these folks appear as guests. He owns the theatres in which the movie is shown, the cable networks on which the rerun is provided, the pay-per-view services where people watch it in hotels and the video rental stores where others go to rent it. This has created the possibility of an incredible multi-media, multi-national hype of a product which left on its own might very well have gone nowhere. A few such media firms dominate what we read in books, see in feature films, read in magazine articles and so forth.

This trend towards media concentration is linked to the spread of neo-liberal economics, technological developments and the emergence of global and regional agreements on multi-lateral trade. In fact it mirrors the pattern of global economics in which 225 of the richest people have a combined wealth equal to the annual income of the world's 2.5 billion poorest people (Hackett & Carrol, 2004).

Commercialization of media into a single global market is part of the agenda of WTO, the IMF, and the World Bank (Bandhu, 2001). For the growth of global capitalist

[†] Except for Bertelsmann which has started its operation in India recently the other companies dominate the Indian television market.

economy a global commercial media market becomes crucial. The emergence of such a highly concentrated media system in the hands of huge private concerns violates in a fundamental manner any notion of a free press in a democratic country. Democratic interests of the many are undermined by the private selfish interests of the powerful few. The problem of having wealthy private owners dominate the media in a society means that they will be controlled by those who benefit by existing inequality and the preservation of the status quo (McChesney, 2001).

Sponsored Silence

Privately owned media depend on advertising revenue and must therefore compete for advertisers' attention and serve advertiser interest to prosper (Herman & McChesney, 1997). In fact the prime objective of media is to deliver affluent audiences to advertisers. Advertisers decide what people see or read. Audience service is a means, not an end. Everything works within a framework of private cost and benefit calculations. They exclude materials that the audience might want to watch but which might stir up controversy objectionable to advertisers. Advertisers don't support media that regularly criticize their products or discuss corporate wrongdoing. This results in a preference for entertainment over controversy, serious political debate, and discussions and documentaries that dig deeply, inform, and challenge conventional opinion (Postman, 1985). There is more entertainment but little useful information. A survey conducted in the US during the Gulf War showed the more television news coverage of the war people watched the less they knew about the war and the more they supported the government policy (Postman, 2000).

Advertisers would rather support media that put audiences in a passive, non-critical state of mind-making them easier to sell things. Proctor and Gamble, one of the big advertisers in the world, prohibits programming 'which could in any way further the concept of business as cold, ruthless, and lacking all sentiment or spiritual motivation' (Bagdikian, 1992). Journalism, advertising and public relations are merging. By providing slick press releases, paid-for "experts," ostensibly neutral-sounding but bogus citizens groups, and canned news events, crafty public relations agents have been able to shape the news to suit the interests of their corporate clientele. PR is welcomed by

media owners, as it provides, in effect, a subsidy for them by providing them with filler at no cost. Surveys show that PR accounts for anywhere from 40 to 70 percent of what appears as news. Ben Bagdikian (2000) refers to this as 'dig here, not there' phenomenon. Stories about crime, fashion shows, beauty contests, celebrities and royal families become legitimate news. These stories never antagonize people in power and they are the kind of stories that please corporations (Bansal, 2003). Some newspapers have crossed the line between editorial and advertising. The company that runs India's largest circulated English language daily *The Times of India* and financial daily *The Economic Times* has changed the rules of the media game (Dalal, 2003). At the *Times*, public relations professionals do not smile at editors and wait for their publicity material to get printed. They negotiate rates with the group's online company, *Medianet*, and buy column centimeters of editorial space for photographs, interviews and stories in the different editions of the paper.

The owner and advertiser domination poses a threat to public sphere. The very logic of private media market control and behaviour is antithetical to the cultivation and nurture of public sphere. Media outputs are commodified and are designed to serve market ends, not citizenship needs. Media, instead of encouraging political involvement, tend to strip politics of meaning and promote a broad depoliticization. They promote consumer values and undermine citizenship responsibilities. As media reach expanded there should have been a corresponding growth of political awareness leading to collective action and assertion of democratic rights. But that has not happened. Bandhu (2001) has argued that social movements have weakened in the era of information revolution in India.

Those who defend commercial media argue that the market gives people what they want. Whether the market for mass communication is exactly comparable to the market for toothpaste, chocolates or other consumer products in which the manufacturers either make what the public will buy or perish is a big question. The consumption of ideas and images are different from the consumption of goods. The ideas and images that mass media disseminate shape collective life, form social values and determine the course of history. The information that individual absorbs becomes part of the culture that everyone shares in ways that have different consequences than

choices in toothpaste or soft drinks. The fact is that the most important transaction in the media marketplace does not involve media companies selling content to audiences, but rather media companies selling audiences to sponsors. Market forces could conceivably cripple the media performance of watchdog function. Profit-oriented pressures could lead media entities to abandon expensive, investigative journalism and replace it with cheaper and routine beat reporting.

An analysis of the cover stories of the two widely read Indian English magazines showed that their contents were significantly similar (Dasegowdanakoplu, 2004). The two magazines *India Today* and *Outlook* perceived as competitors in the English magazine market (Narayan, 2001) had most of the cover stories in the year 2003 on Fashion, lifestyle, affairs of political parties and celebrities. There was hardly any difference between the magazines in terms of the subjects they chose for their cover stories. With similar subjects repeatedly becoming the focus of cover stories homogeneity of content was very much evident. The year 2003 witnessed the highest number of farmers' suicides, large-scale migration of people from rural areas to cities in southern states because of the severe drought for the third consecutive year, scarcity of drinking water and labour crisis. But none of these grave issues appeared on the cover pages of either magazine. The cover stories were usually on non-serious issues. Cricket, crime and sex got repeated attention of the magazines. These are the types of stories that the corporate world wants the media to put out so that they promote consumerism (Baker, 2002).

The media have lost their diversity and their ability to present different points of view. Instead, there is homogeneity of news and a regurgitation of the same news stories on every channel and headline. Media conglomerates encourage popular tastes to become more uniform. Gerbner et al. (1982) call it mainstreaming. They have argued that television blurs traditional social distinctions, blends otherwise divergent groups into the mainstream and bends the mainstream in the direction of the medium's interests in profit, populist politics and power. A multiplicity of TV channels is not an expansion of viewers' choice; it is expansion of advertisers' space (Deshpande, 1997). The values, beliefs and practices of a few people are imposed on the audiences everywhere as if they are universal.

Rupert Murdoch of the News Corporation has tried to persuade the people that satellite television is a force for democracy, bypassing totalitarian governments and beaming messages direct to the people. But the reality is that satellite business is a costly business and to make profit accommodations have to be made with national governments, totalitarian or not (Bogart, 1994). In 1994 Rupert Murdoch's News Corporation discontinued carrying the BBC World Service television channel in Asia because the Chinese leadership let it be known that doing so would undermine Murdoch's chance at the lucrative Chinese market.

There was a vision of benign 'global village' (McLuhan, 1967) in the 1960s where new technologies would allow an unlimited number of people to broadcast their own messages. This has not happened. Access to the hardware and marketing the product demands vast resources. Freedom once again loses out to finance. Forces resisting market domination are too few and too weak. Within the developing countries including India citizens' resistance to domination of media market can hardly be seen except for the sporadic protests by some social activists and fundamentalist groups. Since media activism is still in its infancy it is difficult say for sure what course it will take.

Shrinking 'market place of ideas'

The present media system is not the result of free markets or natural law; it is the consequence of a number of important state policies and manipulation of the market by giant corporations (McChesney, 2001). Media corporations have greatly benefited from subsidies, and favourable regulations. The largest media firms are all built on top of the profits generated by government gifts of monopoly rights to broadcasting spectrum or monopoly cable franchises.

Media industries are barely competitive in the economic sense of the term. These major media conglomerates are often more cooperative than competitive, with an increasing number of strategic alliances and joint ventures. Given the small number of media players, there is very little competition in the media industry and the major media companies use a variety of strategies to try to reduce the limited competition that does exist. Inter-corporate investments and interlocking of directorships between the media companies have been common. The giants do compete ferociously, but they do so under the oligopolistic markets, meaning they have far greater control over their

fate than those in truly competitive markets. It means that it is extremely difficult, if not impossible, for newcomers to enter these markets as viable players.

Such a concentration of media power into so few hands is disastrous for the free marketplace of ideas, the bedrock upon which informed self-government rests. The concept of free market of ideas presupposes that every type of idea will get into the market. If free access is denied to any idea then the competition of ideas becomes limited. The key to making markets work in the consumers' interest is that they are open to newcomers, but the present conglomerate dominated markets are not even remotely competitive in the traditional sense of the term (Baker, 2002).

The constitutional provisions with regard to free speech protect an idea when it comes into the market but have been indifferent in creating opportunities for its expression. There is a romantic notion of freedom of speech that the market place is freely accessible (Government of India, 1982). The constitutional issue generally is whether the expression already uttered should be given protection, not creation of an environment in which citizens can freely express themselves. Thus the constitutional imperative of free expression becomes the very instrument of repression of competitive ideas. There should not only be protection of expression after publication but also for its emergence by publication. But the media system dominated by a few firms hinders emergence of newer voices of expression. An established newspaper with large circulation has a stable volume of advertising revenue. Starting a new newspaper requires huge investment. One should have the ability to absorb losses for a period one or two years. Those who cannot mobilize huge capital cannot enter the market because newspaper is a product that is sold at a price far below the cost of production.

price cuts set up new entry barriers by making it unattractive for new players, makes newspapers vulnerable to pressure by advertisers, threaten the survival of smaller newspapers and in the long run affect the media's diversity and plurality. Moreover, newspapers can acquire a dominant position through price cuts and then abuse that dominance to dictate terms to politicians and influence policy-making (Mohan, 2001).

But, more importantly, the price war will result in concentration of more power in the hands of only those newspaper owners who have the financial strength to

withstand the effects of a prolonged price-cutting strategy. This will block arrival of new newspapers and marginalise other newspapers forcing some of the weaker newspapers to close down. For a healthy and vibrant democracy, it is not only important to have a free press—free from both governmental and management intervention—it is also essential to have as many different views on any subject as possible. Inevitably, a price war of the kind being witnessed in India can result in a loss of diversity and pluralism. Many small newspapers representing different voices are closing down in the wake of big newspapers cutting prices and launching district editions full of local news (Ninan & Malaviya, 2004). The district editions with localised advertising have become money spinners for the publishers (Sinha, 2002)

In the year following independence Indian newspaper owners tried to project their newspapers as public service institutions. They were careful about keeping the economics in the background. But for the new generation of media owners profit-making has become the main objective. They see newspapers as just another fast-moving consumer good. Values and principles have taken the back seat. Their aggressive marketing strategies have adversely affected media values and content. The strong moral and creative impulses that fire journalism are subordinated to the demands of the quarterly earnings statement.

Everyone has equal opportunity to put forward his opinions only when a truly free market exists. Newcomers should have an opportunity to start new publication with fair chance of achieving success. Fixing a minimum price at which newspapers of a particular size could be sold was suggested as an effective measure to bring about an atmosphere of fair competition by the First Press Commission and the Second Press Commission. But these suggestions have come into conflict with the constitutional guarantee of freedom of speech and expression[†].

Over the years revenue from circulation has been decreasing while the revenue from advertising has been increasing. The newspapers that are dependent on

[†] The First Press Commission of India had suggested fixing of newspaper price based on the number of pages of a newspaper published as one of the measures to ensure that there was multiplicity of voices in the media market. But in the *Sakal Newspapers* case the Supreme Court of India struck down the Newspaper (Price and Page) Act 1956 declaring it unconstitutional as it violated Article 19 (1) (a) that guarantees freedom of speech and expression to all citizens. The Second Press Commission recommended a re-examination of the case in view of the monopolistic growth of the press.

advertising revenue may have no obligation to be responsive to readers' needs and interests.

The alternatives

Since corporate control of the media is the biggest hurdle to the democratization of communication it is important to look for alternatives that provide space for all. Media democratization expands the range of voices accessed through the media, builds an egalitarian and participatory public sphere, promotes the values and practices of sustainable democracy outside the media, and/or within the media, and offsets the political and economic inequalities found elsewhere in the social system. Autonomous and non-profit entities can provide alternatives to market-driven or exclusively governmentally dominated media systems. There is a burgeoning global grassroots resistance of individuals, groups and organizations who perceive their interests ignored, damaged and threatened by the commercialization of the media and communication. The non-commercial media have the potential of transforming the status of the masses from being consumers to participants and producers (Parthasarthy, 1997). There are communication technologies which can help democratize media in a manner unimaginable some decades ago.

Community radio has emerged as an alternative medium that is developing into a tool of participatory communication. Since it is cost-efficient, it can be used for disseminating information among the marginalized, especially in developing countries. Its language and content can be made most suited to local needs. It is also relevant to local practices, traditions and culture.

After the initial investment is made, sustainability of the project is feasible, and community participation can be depended on. In terms of outreach and geographic coverage too, radio has a strong advantage. The convergence between radio and Internet is providing new strengths to community and has enormously increased networking opportunities.

Non-profit and development organisations have been lobbying in India to get affordable permission to broadcast information that could help the "information poor" get an understanding of issues critical to their lives. Even before the government has

given official sanction to electronic community media, an increasing number of communities in India are exploring whatever avenues are open to them to get their voices and messages heard. Communities are taking communication and information matters into their own hands and exercising greater control over their access and services.

The Deccan Development Society (DDS), a grassroots organisation working in about 75 villages with women's village level associations in Medak District of Andhra Pradesh runs a Community FM Radio Facility, controlled and operated by women themselves. The women control content and the form. This five-year old FM Radio has produced nearly five hundred hours of programmes. Because of governmental restrictions the radio facility concentrates on narrowcasting. The programmes are regularly produced and disseminated among the DDS communities through audio cassettes.

On March 28th, 2003 The community of Budikote, a village about 100 km from Bangalore, the capital of Karnataka state in India, had the first cable audio station, managed by its own members. The community was assisted by two NGOs—VOICES and MYRADA—with support from UNESCO. The station "our voice" is perhaps one of the country's first cable audio initiatives. The process began in collaboration with the local cable operator which enabled 200 of the 650 households in the village to listen to the programme on their TV sets (Voices, 2004). Those households which do not own television sets receive the cable channel on modified radio sets, which are being sold to them at subsidized rates. Cable audio station, managed by members of the local community is perhaps one of stations of its' kind in the world. Reaching out to the entire village community, the project aims at including the excluded. Programmes are made in three languages and cablecast for one hour in the morning and another hour in the afternoon.

Non-profit community radios have been functioning successfully in the neighbouring countries of Nepal and Sri Lanka. Nepal's Radio Sagarmatha, run by a body of environmental journalists, has attracted attention globally for its unique style of operation and promoting a news-based and green message. Restrictions by Indian

government on broadcasting are delaying setting up of full-fledged community radio stations.

It is harder to democratize television because production and distribution costs are very high. But, proliferation of cable channels seems to hold forth new democratic possibilities. Many cable networks in Indian cities and towns provide programmes on local events and issues. Television cooperatives in Honduras that have installed cable systems and transmit programs on community activities appear to be a possible way of democratizing television.

The fall in the price of video equipment has enabled amateur and semi-professionals to venture into video production. Their productions are distributed through cable systems and to organizations and groups for use in meetings, and public and private showings. There are thousands of nongovernmental organizations, colleges and schools which seek alternative video programmes. An alternative video movement has sprung into existence to meet this demand. The Deccan Development Society has shown that given an opportunity, women can bring a new vision to the concept of media. Transcending their barriers of non-literacy, the DDS group of women have produced successful videos[§] to raise dialogues within their associations and inform the outside world of the accomplishments of their fellow women.

Environmental NGOs have been using video to mobilize peoples' support for their cause. The Centre for Science and environment, a Delhi-based NGO, works as a distribution outlet for independently produced video films on environmental and developmental issues.

That the mainstream media are annoyed at the very idea of alternative media is evident in their reaction to a suggestion made by The Press Council of India** (PCI) in 1998. The Council identified private ownership of newspapers as one of the factors impeding press freedom and advocated a system of cooperative ownership as an alternative ownership structure (Mahalingam, 1998). The Indian Newspaper Society (INS), the forum of newspaper proprietors and publishers, condemned PCIs

[§] The Sangham Shot, a film for which women contributed more than 75 percent of visuals and sounds has been making waves across the world. Their compelling statements on why they should have media of their own raise questions on media policies. Their films on agriculture and livelihood have become popular. See <http://www.ddsindia.org> for details.

** The Press Council of India was set up with the objective of preserving the freedom of the press and maintaining and improving the standards of newspapers and news agencies.

suggestion and also complained to the Vienna-based International Press Institute (IPI) which advised the Press Council to refrain from "interfering in matters that should be determined by the market" (Mahalingam, 1998, p. 83) The Council's argument was that the constitution of India permitted cooperatives as it did individual proprietorships, partnership firms, trusts, companies and corporations. The Council suggested that *Jan Morcha* which is run by a cooperative in Faizabad for the last four decades could be a model. The paper has always fearlessly fought against the anti-people policies of the government and the vested interests. The paper has shown that cooperative ownership can shield newspapers from proprietarily pressures.

Although India has shining examples of well-run cooperatives there has not been a single nationally circulated newspaper or magazine brought out through cooperative effort. The only magazine brought out by an NGO with nationwide circulation is *Down to Earth*. The NGO, Centre for Science and Environment (CSE), has exposed corporate violation of environmental norms and has campaigned for sustainable and eco-friendly development. The mainstream media are silent on corporations causing long term environmental hazards as they are dependent on advertising revenue from the same corporations^{††}. *Down to Earth*, with an independent editorial policy, has created public space in a media scene dominated by commercial interests.

Because of the **Internet's** ability to cheaply and quickly distribute vast amounts of information, in addition to its ability to facilitate communication, it has been described as the "new technology of democracy," (Carey, 1995, p. 373) capable of reinvigorating the depressed public sphere. Around the world democratic forces and insurgent groups have been able to bypass the media systems controlled by corporations and governments and communicate among themselves through the Internet. The Internet is providing a mechanism for individuals and groups marginalized by the commercial media system to communicate and share information quickly, in large quantity and on global basis. The Internet may serve as public space where the marginalized groups can practice their discourse before engaging in debate

^{††} When the CSE revealed in 2003 that soft drinks of Coke and Pepsi companies sold in India contained pesticide residues far above permissible levels many mainstream newspapers played down the report and gave massive coverage to the companies' defence of the drinks in question (Rajan, 2003). The top executive of the two companies were on the front pages claiming that their products were of world-class. Even when the Joint Parliamentary Committee confirmed after several months of investigation that the drinks did contain pesticide residues the big newspapers barely covered it. The companies continue to sell soft drinks and the media carry their advertisements with greater frequency.

with dominant groups (Hunter, 1998). Internet petitions and symbolic web protests expand the range of political participation options open to citizens.

Since the Internet was originally established as a cooperative, non-hierarchical, communications system, it was designed to facilitate the sharing of information both between individuals and among groups of individuals. This capability, plus the fact that the underlying digital technology supports the whole gamut of multi-media communications, has made the Internet the first general purpose, interactive medium available to the average person. As such, it seems natural that it has a propensity to foster activity in the public sphere.

Although the Internet has the potential to provide a qualitative and egalitarian type of journalism, politics, media and culture colonization of cyberspace by state and economic interests is limiting the extension and autonomy of online discourse (McChesney, 1999). The largest computer, telecom and media firms are doing everything in their considerable powers to see the Internet brought within their empires. Thus interception and surveillance possibilities are many as it is an open system. Governments around the world are removing all privacy protection from Internet users (Ingram, 2001; Evans, 2001). Once seen as censorship-proof, the Net is facing several restrictions. And, a majority of the people in the world still can't afford the technology needed to access the Internet. In India there are only around 11 million Internet users for a population of more than a one billion. These limitations have to be understood while advocating the concept of cyber democracy.

Conclusion

There is a need to democratise media policy-making, and take it from the hands of the self-interested media corporations. Establishing a well-funded viable and healthy non-profit and non-commercial media sector, independent of big business and government is crucial to make freedom of speech and expression meaningful. It is also important to maintain a strong and vibrant non-commercial public broadcasting service that provides a full range of programming to the entire population. Newer ownership

and public interest regulations are needed for media firms that are granted broadcast or cable licences. Policies that promote the creation of small commercial media are needed. These reforms would go a long way toward democratising the media systems and ease the corporate grip over our economic, political, social and cultural spheres. They are important in creating more egalitarian, democratic and humane world. This cannot be achieved overnight. It has to develop into a movement in which the Third Sector should show keener interest and involvement.

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