

178. A National Channel Devoted for Science Communication (NCSC)–Need of the Day

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Abstract. India is a vast country with a wide diversity of language, traditions and culture. A large number of activities are undertaken for popularisation of science among different sections of the society. Significant amounts are being spent for these programmes. The advances in science and achievements in technologies at the National level are highly commendable. All these can reach the people, if properly pooled, suitably edited and beamed in the electronic media through a National Channel for Science Communication (NCSC), especially devoted for this purpose.

Keywords: Astronomical Events, Electronic Media, Flexitime, National Channel, NCSTC, Print Media, Science Centres, Science Express.

Introduction

Under the NCSTC banner a large number of activities are undertaken throughout the year in different parts of India to popularize science. Besides, there are various organizations, institutions, individuals and groups who have their own programs to take science to the common man. Particularly, schools and colleges organize various activities, including popularization of science on occasions like Annual Day, Foundation Day, Cultural Week, National Science Day, Technology Day, World Environment Day etc.

At the National level, we have National Children Science Congress, Indian Science Congress – a large part of which is aimed at and relevant to the common man. Mention may be made about the programmes of Science Centres under the National Council of Science Museums. Similarly the RVPSP under DST organizes the Science Express in collaboration with Foreign Societies. There are also major events like successful launching of Chandrayan-1; it's continuing sojourn and landing on Moon, future program of experiments to be conducted; participation of team of Indian Scientists in the experiment on Large Hadron Collider, by far the greatest scientific experiment ever conducted in the world.

Whereas in the former events the activities are confined to visitors and participants, only a few columns are covered in print media and a few minutes of TV coverage reaches the other areas and common public. The latter events are mostly covered in the print and electronic media only as NEWS ITEMS.

Very often the curiosity of the children and public is not satisfied in this process. It is true that some interesting events are brought out as articles in some magazines – more often devoted for other purposes. Some are available on internet to which only a lucky and privileged section have access.

Objective

A National Channel of Door Darshan devoted for programmes on Science & Technology appear to be a

pragmatic solution for taking Science and Technology to everyone.

Observation / Discussion

For a moment let us consider some channels presently operating in other countries. NASA channel continuously beams programmes related to Space activities, both current launches and past programmes, trainings, seminars, talks, interviews and so on. Similarly National Geographic, Discovery channels have a lot of science components. These are costly and production of programmes of such quality and depth may be out of reach for us at present.

We should do justice by adding that some of the programmes of the foreign channels like 'Discovery' & 'Animal Planet' etc are now available in Hindi. I would still consider them as supplementary provision.

But considering activities related to SCIENCE COMMUNICATION, currently going on in different parts of our country, these can certainly be beamed in a channel devoted for this purpose. All that one has to do is to co-ordinate and pool them – if not make it mandatory to convey the recordings in e-media - to a central point, edit them by an expert group and beam them in the channel.

In our country we have enough talents to communicate Science in a number of INNOVATIVE WAYS which does not reach many corners of our vast country and its heterogeneous public.

Thanks to NCSTC, already the methods of communication have been standardized and are popular. Similarly, technologies are available for rendering texts in one language to any other Indian language.

Crores of rupees are spent, in our effort to communicate science, for production of software which remains confined to limited regions and becomes only a ritual. On the other hand if the details are beamed in a National Channel more people will be benefited.

I quote below some reports, views and reviews on Science communication published in newsletters and books.

“Why Science Communication

“Science Communication Programmes and Activities have an important role to play for developing a scientifically informed and attitudinally rational society, by way of interpretation of scientific knowledge and scientific concepts to the public through different mass media-Print, Broadcast, Folk, Interactive or Digital, sustained Science Communication efforts play a key role....”

“The Rashtriya Vigyan Evam Prodyogiki Sanchar Parishad established in 1982 undertakes a broad spectrum of activities concerning S&T communication targeted at various segments of our society laying emphasis on...”

“Reaching people using all possible media both traditional and modern and by employing software in their own language.”

The third independent review held in 2001-02 assessed about 25 programmes of the Parishad. (I refer to only a few concerning TV).

- Kudratnama–A popular science TV quiz for school children-27 episodes
- A TV series titled Vigyan Ki Rahein –under Krishi Darshan
- Collection of data from organisations engaged in S&T popularisation in Delhi and Haryana.
- National Children Science Congress, since 1997.
- National Science Day celebration spread over a month.
- Country–wide programmes for Scientific Awareness and safe observation of total Solar Eclipse on

24.10.1995 and 11th August 1999.” Let us take the case of National Children Science Congress. It has become almost a mass movement (students).

But think of the larger mass of students in remote corners, who have neither been able to participate nor have an exposure of the apex level. Think of what would be their joy and benefit if they are shown a glimpse or more of the programme, exhibits, presentations etc.

Take another case of Science Express. It would be relevant to quote the views of Mr. Chander Mohan.

“Science Express is an innovative Science Exhibition mounted on specially designed train. This state of the art exhibition will cover about 17,000 kms over six months and halt at 51 Railway Stations.....The major objective of this unique venture is to nurture curiosity amongst our youth and rekindle their interest in science.”

This programme is being repeated very often, almost every year, in collaboration with foreign institutions. The contents are simply superb, stupendous, awe inspiring, highly educative and valuable. One laments to think of the large of student population and public who are deprived of a closure look, if not physically, at least by other audio–visual media. In fact, one would go further and say that a mass briefing before the express reaches the station would be highly beneficial to the visitor for understanding and appreciating better. A TV channel proscribed for Communicating S&T, I hope will serve the best interest.

Regarding efficacy of Mass Media like Radio, the author has experience in one such event. Way back on October 24, 1995 there was a major Astronomical Event viz; Total Solar Eclipse (TSE) viewed in India. Elaborate arrangements were made in the Pathani Samanta Planetarium (PSP) premises for observing TSE. In addition, PSP collaborated with AIR, Cuttack to arrange for a “running commentary” of the event as it progressed in different locations in India. It was interspersed with scientific information related to the event. This created not only interest about the event as a “Natural Phenomenon” in the minds of the people in the remote corners of Orissa but also helped in dispelling superstitions and blind beliefs about TSE. Just imagine what would have been the effect had it been telecast in TV with running commentary!!

Felt Need of TV Channel

For communicating Sc & Tech the acute need of a TV channel has always been felt. To quote Mr. Subir K.Sen

3 “Science shows & documentaries are another very important communication mode for science. Unfortunately we do not have any TV channels or slots in any channel for transmission of indigenous Science Technology & Industries (STI) matters. Our interested persons or viewers are to satisfy themselves from foreign CD’s and channels such as

Discovery, Animal Planet & BBC. I know of the nice science program in English by Mr. Samir Bagchi and team, serialised in National Network of

Door Darshan..... Cannot we have some arrangements for knowing existence of such items and see them if need be.” Thus our Elite people, Scientists and Technologists, over the years, have always expressed the need of a TV channel of Science, devoted for Science and Science alone.

Inference

The advantages of Television are:

- TV is audio – visual
- TV can reach more people simultaneously.
- It is flexitime.
- Programs can be available and expected in one particular channel.
- NCSC can be an alternative to channels meant for “Entertainment” and ‘News’ about which much can be said.
- Production cost would be minimal as many of the programs to be beamed are / would be available in e-form having been prepared at various locations.

Conclusion

The role of Print Media, Radio or other e-media cannot be underestimated. However the advantages of Television appear to be enormous, considering the mobility and other modern technologies by which the communication can reach every individual.

In India’s perspective, considering its diversity of population, locations, languages, cultural backgrounds, on one hand and technologies available, money being spent for current programmes and economic viability on the other hand, the national channel has immense potential.

Recommendation

Hence we should recommend for setting up A National Channel For Science Communication (NCSC) under the aegis of Door Darshan. It would be relevant to mention that Door Darshan is not a paid channel. Hence NCSC can be made to be freely available through all cable operators.

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