Plenary Session

The morning began with a short welcome address by Prof Sanjay Kumar, Director CSDS, who set the context and intent of the seminar.

Dr N Bhaskara Rao, Founder Chairman, CMS delivered the keynote address, reminiscing about the complete absence of quantification of media and media services in the yesteryears, with the sole exception of Audit Bureau of Circulation. He emphasized the difference between control and ownership and how they still tend to be blurred in India, as also the complete opacity about the media companies’ reportage about their ownership patterns, including in their Annual Reports. He noted observed the various conflicts of interest between honest reportage and the interests of the conglomerates owning the media channels and reminded the audience about the adage of ‘Jute and Sugar press’ and their vernacular connotation of ‘Jhooth’ (meaning lies in Hindi) and ‘sugar coating’ implying subservience, a comment that is recorded in the annals of Parliamentary proceedings. He observed pithily that the real story was about nexus, which is why they (the media themselves) never allow facts and trends to brought out and reported in dispassionate and independent ways.
Dr Rao spoke at length about the setting up of the Fact Finding Committee of Newspaper Economics in 1974, in response to the constant demands for subsidy by the newspaper (then the only private press) industry under the chairmanship of Dr Bhabatosh Dutta, an economist of renown. The major newspapers did not cooperate with the Committee by supplying the requested data for over six months, forcing Prof Dutta to resign. [The report of the FFCNE was based on the information supplied voluntarily by a few newspaper organisations]. The Second Press Commission was set up in 1978 under the chairmanship of Justice Matthew in which they complied indicators like - circulation, readership and content, mentioning cross ownership only briefly. Post liberalization in 1991, all support services for media industry which quantify the data like readership surveys, audience measurement etc. were opened to multinationals and they have come to dominate the sector completely. Conflict interest do not allow for the numbers to be reported dispassionately.
Dr Rao reiterated that Regulation is a facilitator for democracy and media, who regulate each other, where transparency is the key to a healthy relationship between the two. He brought out that there are six levels of regulation that are needed in a democracy which are: self-regulation, industry specific (as a group/peer), civil society, professional or functional bodies, academic spaces and the State. Each of these are vital and important and need to be nurtured and developed. A more co-regulatory framework is required involving all these six key stakeholders.

He once again reiterated the criticality of transparency and bemoaned the lack of it citing the non-publication of Paranjoy Guha Thakurta’s massive report [36,000 words] on Paid News by the Press Council, ostensibly due to conflict of interest. He concluded with the observation that though RTI is a boon, conflict of interests cannot be addressed only at a macro level, linkages have to be made at various levels, towards the functioning of a healthy democracy.

Mr. Sunil Kumar Singhal- Advisor, TRAI,

The second keynote was delivered by Mr. Sunil Kumar Singhal- Advisor, TRAI, who spoke about the consultation papers authored by TRAI and referred to the reports and recommendations released from time to time, and the one on cross-media ownership brought out in 2014. He mentioned that TRAI, has tried to differentiate between the issue of ownership and control, with ownership being just one part of control, and other aspects also need to be recognized when talking about control. While examining international practices TRAI has also tried to devise a uniform definition of control, to facilitate consistency for comparison. TRAI has also reflected on issues of political, religious and govt ownership in media. The focus of the recommendations of 2014 was on safeguarding plurality and diversity of ideas in Indian media. Plurality and diversity is required at the level of ownership too and media should not be controlled by one entity or a handful of entities.
Mr Singhal continued that TRAI is cautious that the understanding on control and ownership in media should not be based on perception or case studies but should be based on scientific enquiry, and decision be based on data and not perceptions. Hence, it started identifying relevant markets and measurement of market shares. They also examined the idea of Relevant product and geographical market, since the country is linguistically diverse. For 2014 recommendations the focus was on news and current affairs, considering the TV and print segments under that. He said, cross media scenario is dynamic and requires to be reviewed every three years, you can’t be static about it. Understanding Relevant Geographical market was a challenge- media is more linguistically divided.

To measure the market shares- the challenge was in identifying sources of revenue, as also volume of consumption and reach. He said, in the print sector, there is no transparent method of measuring the number of hours of newspaper reading per person and is merely focused on reach, while for TV, the current metrics focus on reach and volume. The formula being used by them to calculate market share of a channel was the GRP of the channel divided by the total GRP of all channels in the relevant market. Market share of an entity was the total of the market shares
of all channels controlled by it. Some channels are a mix of news and entertainment channels and their market share was considered as that for news and recommended the use of the Hirchmann-Herfindahl Index (HHI) as a measurement of concentration for the media segment in a relevant market.

On cross-media ownership, he observed that France has a different approach to ownership, individual entity cannot own more than certain percent of the media. Vertical integration of broadcasters and distribution platform operators i.e. cable/hits/DTH operators in India can restrict horizontal competition. Reciprocal regulation does not exist between DTH and cable operators- i.e. - DTH cannot own more than 20% in a cable operation, but there is no equivalent restriction on cable owner towards owning more than 20% in DTH services, thus one company cannot dominate in both- DTH and cable.

Responding to queries, Mr Singhal reiterated that TRAI has given its recommendation and discussions on the matter have started within the responsible ministry. Though the recommendations have not been implemented, they have not been rejected either. He agree that procedures are taking so much time, that the relevance of the recommendations could get obsolete with the rapid change in technology and its performance quotient.

Prof. Sanjay Kumar, Director, CSDS

Prof Sanjay brought out the issues of trust deficit in the media, about plummeting trust on private television and national newspapers while the trust in Doordarshan, the public broadcaster, and regional newspapers growing. Discussing the exit poll conducted and results aired by Dainik Jagaran, he said it was the epitome of arrogance by a news media, in complete defiance of the Election Commission directives for the polling states.

He also discussed issues of regulation, including self-regulation and the need for defining clear and actionable penal actions in the age of news being clearly slanted to favour certain interests, or even planted. He, however cautioned against a single regulatory mechanism and authority, as that would get too authoritative. He favoured a multi-layed regulation mechanism as it was more
conducive to transparency. He elucidated the point with the example of the institution’s researchers being harassed in the electoral states in conducting post poll surveys.

Session 2: Contemporary Cross-Media Scenario

This session was chaired by Ms. PN Vasanti, who described this section as the core of the seminar where internal research on the subject was presented. The works are in various stages of publication. The Chair noted that there is a conflicting point of view between academia, industry and the concerned ministry whether media ownership concentration is an issue or not. And it is data that holds the key. Nonavailability of data was actually the biggest challenge and that she was delighted to welcome the participants of the session with their data driven work. She thanked TRAI for raising ownership issues but cautioned the harm caused by the regulatory ad hocism and policies trying to ‘catch up’ up on dynamic technologies in this sector. The Chair
also opined that this discussion including representatives from the regulators, industry, broadcasters and the academia was a good beginning.
Dr. Anuradha Bhattacharjee

Anuradha presented a numbers driven study of the dominance of 12 major news media companies in India in the verticals of newspapers, magazines, television and radio as content providers, MSO and DTH as carriage media and telephony, as the basis of the ongoing concentration (dominance of a few companies) facilitated by convergence. She drew upon data till 2011 and international studies for methodology and theoretical background, and also historical reports of the First and Second Press Commission reports to set the context for her study of the Indian media. According to her the major news providers could be classified as:

a) Single content media groups viz. ABP Group (newspaper), Dainik Bhaskar Group (newspaper), NDTV Group (television), Indian Express Group (newspaper) and The Hindu group (newspaper) who were strong in only one news product which is indicated in the parenthesis and had limited interests in non-media operations.

b) Multiple content media groups viz. Jagaran group (newspaper and radio), Hindustan Times Group (newspaper and radio), BCCL Group (newspaper, magazine, radio, television), India Today Group (magazines, radio, television) and Network 18 +
Eenadu (Television and films) just prior to their mergers with Aditya Birla Group and Reliance Industries respectively. These groups have strong presence in multiple content media sectors and also several non-media linkages, being a part of industrial conglomerates.

c) Zee Group has a strong presence in presence in content and carriage industries (television, MSO, DTH, MSO) besides being a fractional part of a major national conglomerate. Recently its top brass has developed clear political interests demonstrated by Mr Subhash Chandra becoming a sitting member of Parliament.

d) News media companies with significant marketshares in Content, carriage and telephony industries are i) Reliance Industries (radio, films, DTH, wireless telephones) and ii) Sun Network (television, films, DTH, MSO, wireless telephones). These companies have dominating marketshares in several of these sectors and are benefitting substantially from the convergence technology available within the group. Both these companies have substantial non-media interests in a variety of industries and have indirect and direct political interests respectively as well.

Drawing on a recent theory by Noam (2010), Anuradha concluded that operating in a free market, in the absence of any regulations otherwise, the Indian media industry is poised to get highly concentrated in a few hands in the near future.

Devi Leena Bose

Devi Leena Bose presented a part of the study which was supported by the Inclusive Media UNDP Fellowship 2015. The study looks at how state government, central government departments and politicians are directly or indirectly are entering the community radio station sector which does not violate the policy in letter but is against the spirit of the original intent.

She presented evidence on how CR is getting appropriated by the government and politicians. She gave example of how BJP in 2016 Kerala assembly elections instructed to exploit platforms like CR. Further in the case of Vanya Radio which is located in Bhabhara and is owned by Vanya Prakashan, is a society registered by the state’s Ministry of Tribal Affairs. The study also
found few stations were owned by either educational institutions or societies, which were a part of central ministries and departments.

The study questions, if All India Radio already has Local Radio Stations and can open more, the point to discuss is: could community radio licence holders then be state agencies?

Talking about politicians being interested in CR, she said in Baramati, Maharashtra, Vasundhara Krishi Vahini is owned by the Vidya Pratishtan’s Institute of Technology. Sharad Pawar, head of the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) was the President of the Board of trustees of the Vidya Pratishtan. Other trustees included his relatives. The study highlighted how there is a gaping loophole in the CR guidelines on political ownership. It mentions that political parties and their affiliates cannot own a station, but there is no mention of individual politicians.

The study observes that the spectrum is the key to this scenario. There is need for transparent spectrum allocation along with a strengthened screening committee. There is a need to make the entire licensing procedure completely transparent. This may entail a decentralised and digitised licensing process. In addition, there is a need to totally reduce the role of the government, once the various ministries and agencies and an independent and autonomous body shall be responsible for the final decision on CR licences.

**Anushi Agrawal**

Anushi dwelled on the difficulties in locating ownership data on media companies and the historical legacy issues. In 1973, in the case of The Stateman v. Fact Finding Committee on Newspaper Economics, where the newspaper declined to share its internal financial details with the committee citing that the company’s accounts are not a matter of public interest was upheld by the The High Court of Calcutta. The Honourable Court had ruled that the Committee could proceed with the fact finding but petitioners are not bound to answer the questionnaire issued by the committee. Though this case has not been cited as a precedence, but the Honourable Supreme Court has not struck it down to date either. With this background, it often becomes a dark hole and opaque regarding data, after reaching a point.
She spoke about the existing sources of data for media companies and their limitations. For example, Industry reports often give estimate figures and are not consistent or annual reports of TRAI give the sector-wise data and not company specific information. She highlighted how it is difficult to give exact figures for media companies and specifically, to get break-up of their different operations. For example, it is difficult to ascertain how much BCCL earns from its different media operations- newspapers, TV, website, films etc. Moreover, for the business conglomerates which have business interest other than media, there is no way to segregate their income from media and non-media activities. She also spoke of limitations of company database of Registrar of Companies, there are times we get blank documents when companies have not filed all the data required or the data is not consistent for all the years and the website is not user-friendly. Hence overall, the currently available data sources have limited use for a focused economic and financial study of media industry.

Anushi further spoke about some of the existing data sources that can be better utilized like Indian companies registered with foreign stock exchanges- they have different disclosure norms and might help in getting additional information about Indian media companies. Also, every listed company comes out with the analyst every quarter which could be a good source for information. She said, the important question is - how to analyze media sector in absence of the medium-specific data or clear break-up of the operations in terms of cost and revenue.

She elaborated how it is difficult to get data about unlisted companies, partnership firms and proprietorship firms. The network of media companies through their subsidiaries and joint-ventures is usually full of such firms. She also spoke of mandatory disclosure for trusts and non-profit organizations about their funding model and details of their trustees and their other interests. She concluded by reinforcing the need for better disclosure norms and need for uniformity in submission of data towards better studies in the media sector, including comparison with other sectors or other similar companies internationally.

Mr Paranjoy Guha Thakurta lauded Anuradha’s research and encouraged her to continue seeking the data on the ownership of subsidiaries, associates and sub-subsidiaries of media
companies using forensic accounting methods. He discussed cross holding between subsidiaries and between media companies. He mentioned that there are hundreds and hundreds of companies that are intertwined in any one major media company and the sector needs diligent study, even though it is painstaking and slow to unravel. He observed that the penalty for not providing the data to RoC on time is very minimal and hence, the compliance with disclosure norms is also low.

**Mr. Shambhu Ghatak**, a participant, observed that companies operate as per returns to scale and media industry is no exception. He emphasised that these industry are trying to maximise returns after heavy investment in capital and develop products and go into markets so that their marginal cost lowered and they could dodge the competition in the market. According to him this is one of the reason for the cross media ownership and not a competitive situation for new entrants or small players.

**Session 3: Regulatory Needs for Managing Cross- Media Ownership**

This session was chaired by **Mr. Paranjoy Guha Thakurta** and its focus was to discuss the needs for restrictions on cross-media ownership and to what extent. Crossmedia restrictions have existed all over the world- Australia, Canada, US in the philosophy that there needs to be diversity and plurality. The matter has become more complex with the rapid change in technology and the prevalence of Internet.

He continued that several bodies have discussed the issue of cross-media ownership and its implications. ASCI had carried out a study and made recommendations, which the Ministry of I &B withheld for a very long time. It recommended on issues of ownership and control, whether to deal with coporate entities or conglomerates on the issue and lastly the need to bring in the Competion Commission of India. The Parliamentary committee on information and technology too came out with a set of recommendations, TRAI was set up and each of then have recommended a need for restrictions on cross-media ownership, on a vertical, horizontal or with change in technology, even diagonal consolidation where a content provider and a content carrier are owned by the same conglomerate and the lines getting further blurred by the proliferation of
Internet and all content becoming easily available on that medium and thus its regulation
becoming a matter serious concern. A number of issues came up and the cases are pending
before several appropriate authorities including TDSAT etc.

The Chair also discussed that the recommendations by TRAI had met with stiff opposition from
several quarters including several major media companies who have argued that India is a
developing country and market, due to which restrictions are not warranted. His personal opinion
however was that there was a huge difference between what was said and what was implemented
and the political class in their position was similar to that of the big media conglomerates. The
nexus between the political class, across party lines and the big media companies is quite close.

Mr. Avnindra Mohan, President(Legal & Regulatory), Zee Entertainment Enterprises Ltd

Mr Mohan began by critiquing the seminar concept note and the recommendations by TRAI
(2014). He pointed out that ‘doctored video’ mentioned in the seminar concept note was a
matter that was subjudice and the forensic report received from CFSL in the matter does not
show any evidence of tampering in the footage. (Ed note: the seminar concept note did not
mention Zee by name).

He emphasized that State and direct and indirect political ownership of media is quite
disturbing and distorting the market by creating monopolies, especially television distribution
channels segment citing the examples of the Tamil Nadu, AP and Punjab governments. He
discussed the power held by the distribution channels over the broadcast channels and potential
misuse there of by citing the example of the dispute between Fastway cable (owned indirectly by
the ruling Badal family of Punjab) and Times Now, a broadcaster, when the broadcaster aired
some reports detrimental to the ruling Akali Dal and the channel being blacked out in Punjab till
a compromise was reached between the two. He pointed out that TRAI recommendations in this
behalf are pending with MIB for many years and urged that the Govt should take immediate
decision on these recommendations as otherwise the ARASU, AP fiber net etc would become a
precedent for other State Govts to set up similar distribution platforms to further their political
interest and create monopolies resulting in potential abuse of their dominance.
He insisted that it was a matter of survival for the broadcasters to own distribution platforms in the face of such strong special interests. He also mentioned that TRAI had frozen the rates as prevalent in 26.12.2003, at which the Broadcasters have to provide their channels to cable distributors and other content distribution platforms. While the cost of creating the content & acquisition of movies etc has gone up manifold, the TRAI had not allowed for an upward revision of rates except two marginal inflation related hike of 4% & 7%.

He emphasized that TRAI has adopted the ‘arguments of convenience’ with respect to pricing by advancing the justification that average revenue per user (ARPU) in this sector had to be kept low keeping local conditions in mind whereas on ownership and other such matters TRAI tended to cite and adopt International models, which were not congruent to Indian conditions. He cited the following particularly:

1. TRAI recommended that a media group/ broadcaster can only have 30 odd channels and cannot hold more than one distribution platform on the premise that vertical integration will hamper healthy competition. The concerns for plurality and diversity raised by TRAI are misplaced as out of about 800 permitted channels available in India, more than 50% are news and current affairs channels. In addition, the public service broadcaster DD has more than 30 channels and most of which are required to be carried by all distribution platforms compulsorily. Besides Prasar Bharti has its own DTH platform- DD Direct which is “free to air” and carries about 104 channels.

2. There is no possibility of discrimination by a Broadcasting entity to a distribution platform vis-à-vis its vertically integrated platform as TRAI Regulations mandate “must provide” regime whereby a Broadcaster is obliged to provide on request, its TV channels to a distribution platform on non-discriminatory terms and conditions including price.

3. He insisted that in such a regulated regime a broadcaster needs to become economically viable and for that any kind of ownership restriction would be unwarranted, uncalled for and counterproductive. He also pointed out that ownership restrictions in US etc are mainly on analog terrestrial TV stations and radios which hold spectrum. These restrictions have also been gradually relaxed with the advent of digitalization. He brought out that whereas in other countries broadcasters and content creators are different thereby warranting restrictions on TV stations because of limited terrestrial spectrum,
however in India the entire terrestrial spectrum is held by state owned Prasar Bharti and in the private sector, Broadcaster and content creator are virtually the same and they hardly use any spectrum except for uplinking therby obviating need for any restriction.

4. He also touched upon the recent announcement of Finance Minister abolishing the institution of Foreign investment promotion board (FIPB) and the allowance of 49% foreign direct investment (FDI) in the newspaper, news broadcast segment and radio sectors. He pointed out that in almost all jurisdictions there are FDI restrictions on news and current affairs segment because of associated sensitivities and if at all some restrictions are warranted, it should be on FDI in this segment. He was asked if the Argument of Convenience was applicable to the government, can we apply the same to your FDI argument? He retorted back by pointing out that while opening up a sector for FDI, we must seek reciprocity and Indian entities should also be permitted to invest in other countries in the said sector, which is not the case because of prevalent restrictions in those countries. There cannot be a one way traffic.

Responding to questions from participants, Mr Mohan admitted that promoters of Zee network have multiple non-media interests being a part of the industrial conglomerate Essel group, of which ZEEL is only a small part. It has the largest packaging company in India and an important company in the sector internationally. They also have an amusement park and are also involved in infrastructure, much bigger than the media business. All the companies are professionally managed independent companies and operate on armslength basis e.g, the advertisement rates of Zee channels is the same for sister/ group companies as it is for other advertisers. He did not wish to discuss the case of the content being biased towards the infrastructure or amusement park companies in the absence of a concrete factual case, which has not come to light as yet.

Referring to pricing of the channels, he said that TRAI has been creating an illusion by the announcement about the removal of caps on ala carte channels pricing since subscription of channels mostly takes place on a bouquet level and not on channel by channel - ala carte level. Ala-carte is normally used for “top –up” i.e for selective channels which may not be available in a particular subscribed package/bouquet.

He insisted that ‘doctored video’ means manipulated, tempered and changed and not ‘extended’ or enhanced which was a focused approach to enhance the experience of the audience.
He touched upon the issue of social media and internet and questioned whether the government had been successful in tracking news on Internet Whatsapp etc, whether regulating content on Internet platforms such as whatsapp etc possible and also desirable and also if cultural hegemony happens only at national level by an Indian company when 49% FDI has been allowed in the newspaper, radio and broadcast sectors. FDI always comes with the aim of earning profits and with a rider of participation in the management. He wondered which hegemony was a bigger evil. And questioned the idea of a passive audience when they held the power with the television remote control in their hands and thus the power to switch off a channel.

Mr. Siddharth Narain, Fellow, CSDS

Siddharth mentioned that the earliest attempt to regulate the Internet was the Convergence Bill of 2002. Though it gradually disappeared, it was an umbrella legislation – a single statutory framework for licensing. The Broadcasting Bill, 2006, designed to make one umbrella legislation for the broadcasting with a Broadcasting Authority, was not enacted.

He brought out that earlier the debates were around- spam, hate speech etc. But since last year (2016) the debate has shifted to – free basics, zero rating platforms. So the debate now is whether specific Acts are needed for Internet, broadcast etc or an umbrella policy to encompass technologies related to Convergence.

Particularly giving the examples of the confluence of news/ opinions on Whatsapp, like The Election Commission and UP Cyber Police looking at the issue of advocating for votes online, he said any kind of campaigning on Whatsapp (an internet product) should also be regulated. He emphasized the point by citing another example of an order by the DM of Kupwara in Kashmir that all whatsapp groups should be registered in an attempt in trying to fix responsibility of the material being circulated, whereas Whattsapp groups can be formed and dissolved in a matter of minutes. The fallout has been that Kashmir News Services – a news organization has submitted an application for mandatory registration, while there is no clear cut definition of ‘news on whatsapp group’
He further cited the bans on Internet in Gujarat, which was struck down by the Gujarat High Court citing that the IT Act which has a provision to block defamatory sites and did not need Section 144 of CrPC, since the blocking of Internet affected broadband services and all the businesses and activities dependent on them, which were not remotely linked to the material which prompted the ban. He noted that between 2013-16, India has witnessed more than 55 internet bans.

He also highlighted how inter-media movement of content makes its problematic to trace its origin since the Internet has no geographical boundaries. Inflamatory material could have originated from outside the country, which then creates a clash between national and international jurisdiction. He also spoke about implication of monopoly by groups like Facebook and Google on Whatsapp and Youtube respectively. He also spoke about the issue of privacy online and highlighted how Facebook now wants access to all the contacts on phone through whatsapp.

Responding to questions, he said Whatsapp has elements of public and private and it was very challenging to control content but increasingly there has been effort to control circulation- hence internet bans. Even though the police had filed FIRs against a few Whatsapp moderators, the Delhi HC had opined that group moderators could not be held responsible. Regarding Fake news- eg GPS chip in Rs.2000 note, the Law enforcement agencies and civil society organizations had increasingly intervened by posting messages and information to correct the perception.

**Session 4: Implications of Cross-media Ownership for Indian Democracy**

Prof Ronal deSouza from CSDS, who chaired the session, reflected that policy thinking is probably behind the process in an age when media is completely technology driven. Democratic process is about making information more accessible.
Ms PN Vasanti, DG, Centre for Media Studies

She compared democracy to a forest, with media as the elephant - the biggest and most influential animal. Just as the health of a forest depends on the diversity of living beings and also maintaining the fine balance of this ecosystem, our democracy also thrives on diversity of viewpoints and respecting the democratic traditions. Media, like the elephant also needs to follow few rules and be accountable to maintain this ecosystem.

Clearly, plurality of broadcasters is an important component of the freedom of speech and expression. While this is important for healthy competition, she questioned the number of channels and getting ‘more of the same content’ across all. For example there are 20 news channels in Andhra Pradesh, do we actually think they are there for strengthening the democracy? Owning channels is more for influence or leverage – political or corporate!

Also, number of players is not expanding the range of issues covered. CMS Media Lab trends over the last decade have shown how news channels concentrate on news from major metros and issues like environment, agriculture and health is less than 1% in prime time.

She also questioned why we focus only on news as most people consuming media are for entertainment. Less than 10% of television viewers in our country watch TV for news – most just watch serials, reality shows, movies, songs, sports, etc

She questioned the content and values promoted on these media. Speaking about the deplorable state of content in media she elaborated how media promotes a fixed idea of beauty and talent which does not necessarily adhere to the Indian realities at all times. Is media selling a particular perception of talent and beauty through its subtle messaging? And that brings us back to the question, how is media strengthening democracy and its values.

Dr Vipul Mudgal, Director, Inclusive Media for Change, CSDS

Dr Vipul Mudgal initially set the context for seminar, welcoming the thoughts expressed by Dr. Bhaskar Rao and was of the opinion that his memoirs and those of some other scholars on the early days of Indian media ought to be compiled for the benefit of the younger generations of
scholars. He also spoke about the long standing interest of CSDS in media research, and how CSDS and IM4Change has done some rudimentary work in the field. He expressed satisfaction that one of the studies published in EPW had been cited by Prof Amartya Sen and Jean Dreze in their work on Indian democracy. The CSDS report on the television coverage of 2014 elections had also been well received and published in a journal.

Reflecting on the idea of self-regulation, Dr Vipul Mudgal said that it will work only when we have strong mandatory regulations in place, defining the limits of all activities and linked to defined penal recourse. He said the word ‘Regulation’ had come to be used in a negative context these days. He further elaborated about importance of plurality and diversity in media.

Commenting on the dearth of data on media companies, observed in earlier sessions, he said that it was even more difficult to get data about companies which are registered in offshore. However, he mentioned that there were a breed of financial experts who know how to navigate between this web of companies.

He continued that politicization of media is a matter of the past as the new trend is Mediatization of politics. It is now the trend that if a person wants to change anything they no longer go to the streets to build a mass movement, they just have to go to a TV studio and with a broadcast and social media activity, a movement begins. These days media constructs news and not deconstructs it. We do not go to the reality, the reality is brought to us. We are consuming second-hand politics. In this game- what the new medium has given is reality can be digitally enhanced. New disciplines have emerged- spin doctors or Impression managers. It is easy to digitally distort reality. And when you have a monopoly this happens seamlessly, meaning is loaded so skillfully that the audience doesn’ t know the difference between truth and fable.

Further he questioned, that in such a scenario do we actually have a safe space for plurality and diversity. He observed, Indian media is getting highly concentrated in a few hands and the above are just manifestations at the tip of the iceberg, with plenty more connotations beneath the surface that could affect the democracy and society in India.
Prof. Peter R. deSouza, Professor, CSDS

Prof deSouza summed up the day’s deliberation by discussing the efficiency logic and democratic participatory logic of cross media ownership and concentration. He said that we must acknowledge that newer technologies have led to democratization of knowledge, but also created cross media ownership and concentration as a by-product which then creates a system of control and manipulation of knowledge, and therefore a tendency towards tyranny, which is a major concern. He clarified that by tyranny he meant control of knowledge.

For the former process he cited examples from his early days in teaching, when access to information for students was limited, which has now been solved by technology. For the latter, he illustrated citing the control of carrier channels and the examples where information could be controlled by a few people who exercised control over the carrier channels e.g. Punjab and Andhra. According to him, such control of the information sector by a few people can be a danger for the democratization of knowledge and democratic processes.

He also said that we need to debunk the present belief that the media in India is plural. It is evidently clear that people invest in news channels for acquiring power and we need to study the nexus between politicians, corporate houses and media to know and understand how does acquisition of media converts into acquisition of political power. If media is only an instrument by which a citizen encounters reality but if media becomes the manipulator of reality then what are the interests behind this manipulation. Ownership is too easy an answer, we need to look at the larger picture, may be its about your ideological framework and how it guides your values and perception. We as researchers need to deconstruct the ideological framework and its implications.

Referring to the observations made by Ms P N Vasanti about the poor state of content in Indian media, Prof deSouza said that the values that are emerging from content contribute to inferiorization. He elaborated how that is also the critique of colonization where the idea was to inferiorize and dominate. Hence, it is worth deliberating if media is doing the same in subtle ways. He further said that the policy community usually gets its thinking from the west. But where is the counter thinking. While studying media trend, we need to ask the meta question and not the consequential thinking.