

THE CHANNEL THAT NO ONE WATCHES

An Evaluation of Gyan Darshan

by

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The road to a better future for education in India encounters the challenge of bridging a massive and growing gap between the demand and supply of education. Education is the third Reithian ideal of public broadcasting, and hence the responsibility of state-funded television for the purpose of distance education in India is of no mean relevance. This responsibility was undertaken with the launch of the Gyan Darshan bouquet of channels in the year 2000. The channels were intended exclusively for programming for distance education, supported by funding from the Ministry of Human Resource Development (HRD), with the Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) as the nodal agency for coordination and implementation. The rationale for evaluating the performance of these channels stems from two interlinked aspects: first, the investment of public money in this endeavour and secondly, the need to investigate whether the reach of these channels, in terms of both numbers and quality, justifies the amount of investment being made.

The success of television in buttressing distance education is exemplified by the performance of the Open University in Britain that used BBC airtime for the purpose. An understanding of the factors that led to the success of the Open University in this endeavour would enable an evaluation of Gyan Darshan in a comparative frame. Examples of attempts to use television for distance education in developing countries would similarly be useful. Brazil, for instance, started a massive distance education programme after a state decree in 1970 requiring all television stations in the country to set aside five hours a week for free educational broadcasting. The research demonstrates through these examples that television can be and has been effectively used for the purpose of education; a useful jumping board from which to critically analyse whether this is happening in the case of Gyan Darshan.