The broadcasting environment has witnessed profound changes worldwide and media institutions in India, too, have felt the impact. From the days of a single channel till 1991, to more than 800 television channels today, Indian television has come a long way. Television began in India in 1959, based on the West European model of a public broadcasting system, rather than the American-style private commercial networks. Public service broadcasting emphasises on editorial independence, catering to the diverse tastes of the public and reaching everyone through its signals.

For the past two decades, the concept of public service broadcasting has been challenged by the emergence of a new breed of commercially oriented and profit-seeking broadcasters. Faced with intense competition from their commercial rivals, public service broadcasters have had to struggle for their survival and have adopted a variety of strategies and responses. The study explores and examines such concerns in the Indian context.

The objectives of the present study were to examine and analyse the policies and guidelines of the public broadcaster, Doordarshan over the study period and find out changes in them, if any. The study also looked at the evolving programming strategies of Doordarshan over the period 1984-2009.

The study has followed the qualitative research approach. In-depth interviews were conducted with Doordarshan officials as well as those from the Ministry of Information & Broadcasting and Prasar Bharati. To get an independent perspective on the subject, media observers, critics and scholars from India and abroad were also interviewed. Secondary data in the form of Annual Reports, Working Group and
Committee reports, Acts of Parliament, draft bills and press reports also formed crucial part of the research.

The findings of the study reveal that Doordarshan’s financial realities are having a negative impact on its core public service programming. Since assured funds from the State have shrunk over a period of time, DD is forced to earn a sizable portion of its costs through commercial means. This restricts its ability to focus exclusively on public service programmes since such content does not readily find sponsors. Moreover, it was found that areas such as human resources, technology, and systems and procedures need major reforms to contribute towards better performance. Significantly, it came out that the perception of a ‘government channel’ has to be abandoned at the earliest through structural reforms if DD is to become a true public service broadcaster.