UNIT 8: NEWS-BASED AND OTHER INFORMATIVE PROGRAMMES

UNIT STRUCTURE

8.1 Learning Objectives
8.2 Introduction
8.3 Different types of TV news
8.4 Panel Discussions, interviews, documentaries and current affairs programmes in TV
8.5 Let us Sum up
8.6 Answers to check your progress
8.7 Further reading
8.8 Possible Questions

8.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit you will be able to:

- categorize different types of television news
- describe what is a panel discussion
- explain the concept of interview
- discuss about documentary and current affairs programme.

8.2 INTRODUCTION

In the previous unit we have introduced you to the basics of television news, its characteristics and the different elements that go into the making of a Television news bulletin.

In this unit you will learn about different types of news and current affairs programmes including interviews and panel discussions, etc that form the bulk of content in a television news channel. Most major news bulletins on TV hold panel discussions on the important news item/s of the day. Interview can either be conducted as part of news item or as a separate programme.

All these will be discussed in the following sections.

8.3 DIFFERENT TYPES OF TV NEWS

We have discussed in previous units that newsworthiness attributes to an event on the basis of a relatively stable set of news values. Individual news items differ in **categories** and genres. The categorisation of items into **foreign and home news** applies the criterion of location of the event. Foreign news is any event that is happening abroad while home news involves something going on in the broadcasting country. Similarly news can also differ in terms of content, like sports news, political news, business news, etc.

News on television can also be categorised in terms of its presentation mode. There could be **verbal news or read news** (read by news reader, no visuals present apart from studio setting), **audiovisual news** (read by Voice Over and dynamic elements of visual mode are in operation) and **combined news** (either news reader plus still picture, or Voice Over and map, scheme, diagram covering whole screen).

Also, when the composition and participation of institutionalised and accessed voices are taken into account, four sub-genres of news are recorded: **flash news** (very short, usually read by one voice, no commentary present), **extended news** (one institutional and one assessed voice, usually news reader or news reporter and witness), **commented or personified news** (either reporter comments on issue from the location), and **reportage news** (very dynamic, investigative camera and reporter on location).

The second genre**, report**, if compared to that of news, is in its length more extensive and also broader in coverage of the event. Usually after news reader's abstract of main information, the reporter reports from the scene, then a third party is interviewed or talks, and reporter provides further insight. The report is always **audiovisual**. The third identified genre is **feature**, regularly **audio-visual**, and found in four modifications: **critical, portrait, occasional and reflective**. It carries elements of feature as a genre in film and press journalism. In its content, specific event, important personal matters or issues are analysed, assessed and generalised. Different from news or report, it reconstructs and interprets some known significant event.

Graber (1994) offers another labelling of news items by four main categories combining **duration and content criteria**. The first genre of **high drama story** focuses on conflicts and accident of larger scale (for instance terrorist bombing, floods, and large accidents, etc.). **Routine stories** with deficiency of obvious high drama elements cover issues of politics and diplomacy, social and legal matters, economic and political stories, and symbolic activities. They sometimes cover conflict or accidents but their impacts lack the scale of that of high drama stories and are usually without dramatic consequences. **Feature essays** are considerably longer with content usually dedicated to social and cultural issues/events. The last in **Graber**'s (1994) genre is the **story snippet** of usually less than 21 seconds in length. It provides very short account of event with either routine story content or high drama story character.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q.1. What are the three basic genres of news items? What is the difference between them?

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Q.2. What are the different kinds of news according to the differences in participation of verbal and visual modes?

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ACTIVITY- 8.1

1. Discuss the proportion of foreign and home news items in individual news bulletins of any news channel.

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2. Watch a news bulletin on Television and observe the following. How does a news bulletin keep the watcher hooked? What stories are kept in reserve and hinted at to ensure that viewers do not desert the show during the commercial break?

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8.4 PANEL DISCUSSION, INTERVIEW, DOCUMENTARY AND CURRENT AFFAIRS PROGRAMME

Panel Discussion

In 'panel discussion' a group of specialists discusses and debates an issue/ event from different angles and perspectives. Panel discussion is made if an issue is too complex for one person to handle. It also provides the audience different viewpoints.

Panel discussions, however, differ from team presentations. The purpose is different. In a team presentation, the group presents agreed-upon views while in a panel discussion, the purpose is to present different points of views. Also in a team presentation, usually speakers stand as they speak; in panel discussion, usually speakers sit the whole time.

Technically, a panel discussion consists of questions and answers only, and a symposium consists of a series of prepared speeches, followed by

questions and answers. The compeer must introduce the subject, conduct questions, monitor time; as a whole conduct the programme. The compeer must see that all panel members get equal opportunity to put forth his/her view. He/she must ensure that no panel member dominate the show. The compeer must not show his/her personal bias in relation to the subject of discussion. At the end the compeer should summarize the discussion and thank the panel members.

One of the advantages of panel discussion is that it offers multiple perspectives and view points to one issue. The issue at hand is looked at and scrutinized by all the members present in the panel. It is very often a rule in panel discussions to include people from conflicting schools of thought so as to offer different viewpoints/arguments. It is then left to the audience to accept or reject the conflicting viewpoints/arguments. Panel discussions are increasingly being held by news channels on socio-political issues. For example, during the recent debate on the Indo-US Nuclear Deal, most news channels aired panel discussions where political leaders from various parties and experts from various related fields were given the opportunity to voice their opinion and to convince the viewers on their respective standpoints. By principle, the compeer or the anchor of the show does not take sides with any party but summarizes the different viewpoints for the benefit of the audience.

Television Interview

The word ‘interview’ comes from the French and means, roughly, ‘ to see one another.’ Interviews fill a great many hours of every broadcast day. Some are brief, such as 10-second news broadcast actuality or sound bite. Others are longer and make up the substance of hour-long talk programmes. Interviewing eye-witnesses at the scene of a fire, an airplane crash or similar event for news broadcast is only one aspect of news-gathering by reporters; on the other hand, conducting interviews and discussions with guests is the chief activity of hosts of talk and interview shows. This section is devoted to practices and techniques appropriate to television talk shows.

Some interviews are essentially question and answer sessions, often with controversial guests. Many are single-subject interviews on topics such as health care or illegal migration. Other interviews are essentially conversations that may involve bringing out interesting or amusing anecdotes from famous guests. Each type demands a special technique determined by purpose.

Every interview must have at least one clearly defined objective, and it is important to determine that purpose before beginning. Some interviews – especially those with outstanding storytellers-are meant to entertain and require a light hearted approach. When you interview a gifted teller of anecdotes be prepared to let the guest narrate humorous or otherwise entertaining narrative with little interruption.

Establishing the purpose of an interview before starting it is one of the most important decisions you can make as a talk show host. When you interview a writer who has a book to promote your aim should be to explore in an engaging way the most interesting, amusing, controversial, or noteworthy parts of the book. You may also provide your viewer with enough information about the book so that he/she may buy it and at the same time keep the interview from becoming a puff piece for the author. Interview on serious social problems should be geared to providing useful information on critical issues and should be approached with a serious, but not somber attitude.

Interviews for News and Current Affairs can be classified into:

1) Interview for a Story: These are interviews that are included in news stories. The entire interview is not used here but only those portions that are related to the story. It is mainly used to elicit sound bites for a news story. The face of the interviewer is usually kept out of the frame.

2) Interview as a Story: Usually much longer than the sound bite, here the focus is on the interviewee. Hence the treatment is different. Usually it follows an 'introduction, question-answer, conclusion' pattern. The interviewer also appears on the frame.

Conducting interview on television is not an easy job. It requires through preparation. You need to keep the following in mind before conducting an interview on television.

Research:

There is a need for in-depth research for interviews. That's what makes the interviewer confident and focused and the interview interesting.

Focus:

Research however has to be carefully utilized. Be sure of what you want from your interview before you start. Tailor your questions to that end.

Open Ended Questions:

To get a good quote the question should be so phrased to get a complete answer. A question that gets just a "Yes" or "No" answer is to be avoided. Sometimes it helps to add a why, how or what to your question to get such a quote. Some interviewers even go to the extent of briefing an interviewee about what they are looking for. That is not always desirable because the spontaneity in the interview is lost.

Example:

Closed Question**:** Are you against your party leader's new economic policy?
Answer: Yes.
Open Ended Question: Why are you against your leader's new economic policy?
Although in most cases Open Ended Questions helps to get a good quote, with a reluctant interviewee only closed questions work better.

Leading questions

A leading question will gain an obvious answer. They could be used to corner an interviewee who is avoiding giving a direct answer. For example, "Don't you think this is too trivial an issue to have an internal squabble in the party?"

Hypothetical questions

A hypothetical question can be used to explore an organization or a person's thoughts or ability in an unforeseen situation. For example, "How prepared is your government in case an earthquake occurs again?"

Probing questions

A probing question will help tease information and thoughts from the interviewee. This helps when doing an investigative story. For example, "What do you mean by helping the family of the kids when you are actually forcing them to work for such a meager salary?"

Prompting question

A prompting question is a sympathetic one which will help the interviewee formulate an answer which is close to the questioner's requirements. For example, "Tell me a bit about it, how you got here, how long it took and what you thought of the transport system?"

Using the right question format at the right time will obtain more information and make the interviewee relaxed. It leads to constructive interchange and gives the person asking the questions more control over the situation. In short, for conducting a fruitful interview:

1. Formulate right type of questions
2. Always consider what the object of the interview is.
3. Choose the right question format.
4. If the answers are not developing properly, change the format.
5. If the interviewee is nervous or anxious use prompting questions.

Current Affairs Programme:

Current affairs programming is defined as: A programme which contains explanation and analysis of current events and ideas, including material dealing with political or industrial controversy or with public policy. Also included are investigative programmes with contemporary significance.

A current affairs programme could be one of the following:

1) *News* - The stories are of short duration and could range from as little as thirty seconds to two and a half minutes on an average. A news program has different styles of reporting news which would also be mentioned later in the lesson.

2) *News magazine* - These are programs whose aim is to take it beyond where the news left. Such programs not only report but also analyze the events.

3) *Debates* - Debates are also used to discuss a current event. Generally, the major events are debated by important people. NDTV has a programme titled 'Big Fight', whose content is nothing but debate.

4) *Talk Show*: It could be defined as 'a broadcast show with a format arranged around interviews conducted by a host. The interviewees may be celebrities, or members of the viewing or listening audience.' NBC's *Tonight Show, We the People, Oprah Winfrey's Show* etc are familiar examples of television talk shows.

The television talk show is, on the face of it, a rather strange institution. We pay people to talk for us. Like the soap opera, the talk show is an invention of twentieth century broadcasting. It takes a very old form of communication, conversation, and transforms it into a low cost but highly popular form of information and entertainment through the institutions, practices and technologies of television.

Documentaries:

Documentary film is a broad category of visual expression that is based on the attempt, in one fashion or another, to "document" reality. Although "documentary film" originally referred to movies shot on film stock, it has subsequently expanded to include video and digital productions that can be either direct-to-video or made for a television series.

The word "documentary" was first applied to films of this nature in a review of Robert Flaherty's film Moana (1926), published in the New York Sun on 8 February 1926 and written by "The Moviegoer," a pen name for documentarian John Grierson. Grierson's definition of documentary as "creative treatment of actuality" has gained some acceptance, though it presents philosophical questions about documentaries containing stagings and reenactments.

The television documentary is an adaptable form of nonfiction programming that has served various functions throughout the medium's history: as a symbol of prestige for advertisers and networks, a focal point for national attention on complex issues, a record of the human experience and the natural world, and an instrument of artistic and social expression. Unlike other programming on television, documentaries have typically been

sustained for reasons other than high ratings and ad sales. Consequently, the health of the documentary form serves as an indicator of a network's commitment to news and as a barometer of social, political, and economic dynamics.

A documentary is defined as a nonfiction report that devotes its full time slot to one thesis or subject, usually under the guidance of a single producer. Part of the fascination with documentaries lies in their unique blend of writing, visual images, sound tracks, and the individual styles of their producers. In addition to their particular contribution to the television medium, however, documentaries are notable because they have intertwined with wrenching moments in history. These characteristics have inspired some to describe documentaries as among the finest moments on television and as a voice of reason, while others have criticized them as inflammatory.

TV documentaries, as explained by A. William Bluem in the classic, Documentary in American Television, evolved from the late 1920s and 1930s works of photojournalists and film documentarists, like Roy Stryker, John Grierson, and Pare Lorentz. Bluem writes, "they wished that viewers might share the adventure and despair of other men's lives, and commiserate with the downtrodden and underprivileged." The rise of radio in World War II advanced the documentary idea, especially the distinguished works of CBS writer Norman Corwin and the reporting of Edward R. Murrow. In 1946, Murrow created the CBS documentary unit, which linked documentary journalism with the idea that broadcasters owed the public a news service in exchange for lucrative station licenses.

Prasar Bharati-supported Public Service Broadcasting Trust (PSBT) is involved with the promotion of documentary and reality films. PSBT's films are already being telecast on Doordarshan every week and at numerous national and international forums. NDTV recently became the first privately-owned channel to screen films made by the PSBT. They telecast documentary films each month on NDTV's flagship channel NDTV 24x7 as part of the NDTV series 'Documentary 24x7'.

Documentary films provide an ideal platform for the exploration of myriad issues and a scope for enhancing the viewership of powerful and insightful

content. The effort of PSBT has gone a long way in creating and encouraging a public culture of documentary appreciation and engagement.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q.3. Describe the format of a television panel discussion

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Q.4. Define documentary film.

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ACTIVITY - 8.2

1. Prepare a detailed proposal for making a television documentary on women empowerment.

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2. Conduct a television interview of a prominent personality of your town or city and prepare a report on it.

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8.5 LET US SUM UP

- Television news can be of the following types: foreign and home news, verbal news or read news, audiovisual news, combined news, flash news, extended news, commented or personified news, routine stories, reportage news, feature essays, story snippet
- A television news bulletin or newscast is a regularly scheduled television program that reports current events.
- Interviews for News and Current Affairs can be classified into: Interviews for Stories and Face to face interviews
- Current affairs programming is defined as a programme which contains explanation and analysis of current events and ideas, including material dealing with political or industrial controversy or with public policy.
- A current affairs programme could be one of the following: News magazine , Debates, Talk Show, Face to Face interviews
- Documentary film is a broad category of visual expression that is based on the attempt, in one fashion or another, to "document" reality.

8.6 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Ans. to Q No.1 : The three basic genres of news items are:

- News
- Report
- Feature

The difference between news and report is that compared to news, report is more extensive in terms of its length and also broader in coverage of the event. Usually after news reader's abstract of main information, the reporter reports from the scene, then a third party is interviewed or talks, and reporter provides further insight. The report is always audiovisual. The feature is found in four modifications — critical, portrait, occasional and reflective. It carries elements of feature as a genre in film and press journalism. In its content, specific event, important personal matters or issues are analysed, assessed

and generalised. Different from news or report, it reconstructs and interprets some known significant event.

Ans. to Q No.2 : According to the differences in participation of verbal and visual modes news can be represented in three ways –

- **Verbal news or read news** – It is read by news reader. No visuals present apart from studio setting.
- **Audiovisual news** – Mostly read by Voice Over, and dynamic elements of visual mode are in operation
- **Combined news** – Several elements like news reader plus still picture, or Voice Over and map, scheme, diagram covering whole screen.

Ans. to Q No.3 : The format of a panel discussion is as follows:

In panel discussions, usually speakers sit the whole time. Each speaker prepares separately, the other speakers hear one another. Technically, a panel discussion consists of questions and answers only, and a symposium consists of a series of prepared speeches, followed by questions and answers. The compeer must monitor time and manage questions. It is his/her responsibility to conduct the show. The compeer must not be a biased person; he is neither in nor against the topic. At the end the compeer should summarize the discussion and thank the panel members.

Ans. to Q No.4 : A documentary is defined as a nonfiction report that devotes its full time slot to one thesis or subject, usually under the guidance of a single producer. Part of the fascination with documentaries lies in their unique blend of writing, visual images, sound tracks, and the individual styles of their producers. In addition to their particular contribution to the television medium, however, documentaries are notable because they have intertwined with wrenching moments in history.

8.7 FURTHER READING

1. Hyde, Stuart W. (1998) Television and Radio Announcing. Kanishka Publishers
2. Kundra, Shipra (2005) Basic Audio-Visual Media. Anmol Publications Pvt. Ltd.
3. Luthra, H.R. (1986) Indian Broadcasting. New Delhi : Publications Division.
4. Ninan, Sevanti (1995) Through the Magic Window : television and change in India. Penguin Books.

8.8 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Q.1. What are the different types of television news?

Q.2. Write short notes on:

a. Television Documentary

b. Television Interview

c. Boom in television news industry

d. Talk Show