Radio as a medium is very content specific. As it is an all in all audio medium radio programmes cannot afford to compromise on the content part of it. Thus radio programmes are always enriched with information & entertainment.

Like any other media house, radio channels, whether public or private is a profit making venture. Thus catering to the needs of the targeted audience is primarily important along with adhering to the business policy of the house.

In India we categories radio channels into two forms, All India Radio under Prasar Bharati and the private FM Channels. Needless to say that both the categories have their niche programmes catering to their niche group of audience.

In order to understand the differences and further analyse the same we first need to figure out the concept of the two, i.e., All India Radio and private FM Channels.

The broadcasting scenario has changed in India with the arrival of private FMs and the promise to revolutionize the entire broadcasting market in the Asian content.

**Revolution in radio broadcasts**

Since broadcasting has been opened up to private broadcasters about 16 years ago in May’2000, the private FMs have thrived. Times FM or Radio Mirchi and many other FMs like 93.1 and others have ushered in an entertainment revolution. The monopoly of All India Radio has been broken. But AIR has also come up with some FM stations. Also some community radio stations and college FM stations like JU Radio, MOP FM and Loyola FMs have come up in big numbers. All these promise to bring out a broadcasting revolution in the country.

India experimented with FM broadcasts in the mid nineties in five places including the four metros of Chennai, Mumbai, Kolkata and Delhi, plus the tourist destination of Goa. These were followed by stations in Bangalore, Hyderabad, Jaipur and Lucknow. The channels in these cities pay license fee and initially news was not permitted in FMs but it must have been added later as these channels inform locally the news and the weather broadcast as well as the traffic situation. The earlier players include the Times of India, Hindustan Times, Mid –Day and BBC, but new players have emerged in the FM scenario.

FM Radio stations in Bangalore include Big FM, Radio Indigo, Radio Mirchi and Fever FM. Chennai stations include Hello FM (106.4), Suryan FM Big FM, Radio City FM, Radio Mirchi
FM and Radio-1 FM. These have been started receiving advertisements and have changed the advertising scenario. Traditionally radio accounts for 7-8% of advertiser expenditures around the world. In India it is less than 2% at present.

The privatization of broadcasting is a good thing which has to be welcomed by all and it provides alternative to the already available government operated AIR. The privatization has given room for multiple voices in broadcasting and this provides solution to the monopoly and monotony of the public service broadcaster. It provides scope for filling up a number of things like reaching to the needs of the listeners and catering to their needs as effectively as possible.

**AIR – the public broadcaster**

AIR officially known as Akashvani has pioneered broadcasting right from the British days. The person responsible for the name of All India Radio is none other than Lionel Fieldon who was responsible for starting broadcasting in India. AIR today is the division of Prasar Bharathi an autonomous corporation of Ministry of Information and Broadcasting Government of India. The AIR used to be part of the government until recently when it was decided to give autonomy to free it from government control. The Doordarshan is the TV wing of Prasar Bharathi which was also owned by the Ministry but again to free it from government control, it was made autonomous.

Being one of the largest networks in the world, AIR’s headquarters is located at Akash Vani Bhawan New Delhi. It has many different services each catering to different region and languages of India. The well-known Vividh Bharathi program broadcasts commercial oriented film songs and dramas and this Vividh Bharathi had celebrated its golden jubilee on 3rd October 2007. This offers film, music, comedy shows and dramas etc to all the listeners. The Vividh Bharathi service operates on different MW band frequencies for every one of the city. All these stations broadcast live programmes in languages of the region like Bangla, English and Hindi.

There is an External Services Division of AIR which broadcasts in 27 languages to countries outside of India by both high powered short wave and medium wave. In addition to this, there is the General Overseas Service which broadcasts in English for 8 and quarter hours every day.

There is a Yuva Vani service meant to cater to youth of the country with encouraging participation in the programs. It is broadcast at 1017 kHz which corresponds to 294.9 meter. Many popular broadcasters like Roshan Abbas, VJ Gaurav Kapoor Emcee Kshitij Sharma and DJ Pratham have all been associated with AIR’s Yuva vani. There is also the news on the phone service which is operated by AIR since 1998. At New Delhi is in operation in Chennai, Mumbai,
Hyderabad, Indore Patna and Bangalore. The English and Hindi hourly news bulletins can be heard live on http://www.newsonair.com.

There is also news on the MP3 format which can be directly played from the site. Text of the English and Hindi bulletins can be read from http://www.Newsonair.com/BulletinsInd.html.

The AIR news bulletins are available in 9 regional languages.

Truly, AIR is the India’s public service broadcaster serving all sections of the society and the commercial broadcasters serve the business interests of the persons or owners concerned. There is a need for both commercial broadcasters as well as public service broadcasters doing their duty to serve the vast country like India which has more than 1 billion population at the present time.

**Commercial broadcasters**

Although commercial interests may dominate the private broadcasters, it is still an alternative available in news and information in the sense that private broadcasters can fill in with different perspectives when the public broadcaster is compelled to give one-sided view. Also, there is no harm in perspectives provided by private broadcasters as these will go along with the perspective provided by the government run or funded public service broadcaster.

In sum, broadcasting has been a fruitful activity enriching the citizens of India and perform the basic functions of providing education, information and entertainment to all across the country. The news services of these broadcasters keep the nation and those who live in far off and far flung areas informed. Thus, a good service has been provided by the broadcasters to the citizens. On important days and festivals, these broadcasters provide round the clock service keeping the nation tuned to these. Thus, there is an all round service performed by these broadcasters.

Now let us compare the programming format of the two types of radio broadcasters in our country.

Radio as a 24 hour infotainment media has immense scope for news and entertainment based programmes. For All India Radio, we can say that it is far more than the private FM Channels as All India Radio has more than 10 channels, catering to various strata of audience at various point of time. Moreover the reach of All India radio is wider than any other channel. The geographical reach of the private FM channels are restricted by the TRAI.

Keeping these factors in mind, both the radio stations have planned their programmes as follows.
**News:** One of the major components of All India Radio programming is the news. It, in fact has the largest listenership as well. All India Radio caters news in English, Hindi as well the regional language. It runs a parallel department along with the programming department. The news division of All India Radio is also a major employer under Prasar Bharati. Apart from the local news broadcasting, AIR also broadcasts Hindi and English news from New Delhi Station. In order to cope up with the tough competition in the market, All India Radio has also introduced live feeds and transmission from various news source. Moreover the news analysis of All India Radio is very popular and considered to be more unbiased and objective in comparison to the other media.

On the other hand the private FM channels does not have any news hour or slot. As per the Broadcasting Legislation no private FM channels can broadcast news. They knit to cater news in between the talk shows and musical shows. This could be due to the reason that the TRAI Authority recommends: FM Radio broadcasters may be permitted to broadcast news taking content from AIR, Doordarshan (DD), authorized TV news channels, United News of India (UNI), Press Trust of India (PTI) and any other authorized news agency without any substantive change in the content. No other source of news is permitted at present. Thus we can say that in respect of broadcasting news All India Radio certainly has an edge over the private FM channels.

**Drama:** There was a time when All India Radio’s weekly drama, especially the ones produced from Kolkata stations was immensely popular. Drama artists were no less than celebrities. Listeners used to go mad over the voice modulations of the drama artists. Stalwarts like Shambhu Mitra, Tripti Mitra, Utpal Dutta and the likes used to be the drama artist with producers like Birendra Krishna Bhadra and Jagannath Basu. A Saturday afternoon programme, Radio drama was a medium of family entertainment. But over the time in midst of glitz and glamour of the television media Radio drama soon started losing its foot hold. But a time tested format can never go out of trend and perhaps that is why Radio Mirchi came up with their version of Radio Drama as Sunday Suspense. A programme worth listening includes all actors from this generation. Not only a popular audio slot but these categories of programmes are also an honest attempt to revive the lost literature and introducing today’s generation to the golden mines of writing that our language and culture has inherited over centuries. Both All India Radio and the private FM Channels are now successfully running this format of radio production. And beneficially both urban and rural audiences are catered here. Imbibed with music, special effects and professional editing Radio plays are indeed a treat to the listener and hugely popular across generations.

**Documentary:** Radio documentary is a very successful format of BBC Radio and VOA. If you see a film in a movie hall, it is generally a feature film, which is story based and not real. But there are also documentary films which are based on real people and issues. A lot of programmes
you see on television are educational and public service documentaries. Radio also has this format. Unlike documentary films, radio documentaries have only sound – i.e. the human voice, music and sound effects.

So a radio documentary is a programme based on real sounds and real people and their views and experiences. Radio documentaries are based on facts presented in an attractive manner or dramatically. Radio documentaries are radio’s own creative format.

The producer of a documentary needs to be very creative to use human voice, script, music and sound effects very effectively. Radio documentaries are also called radio features.

All India Radio does not have any documentary format as such neither the private FM channels of this part of the nation. If taken seriously, this format could be worth trying.

**Phone in Programmes:** One of the most popular formats of Radio programming both in All India Radio and private FM channels is the Phone in programmes. The phone in programmes are mainly the request show but over the time it has spread to various verticals. One example is the recent economic surgical strike by the prime Minister. Here a phone in programme with an economic expert would be a very popular format and at the same time a resourceful programme for the listeners as well. Programmes like Agony Aunt, Interaction on any social issue and the likes are types of phone in programmes thoroughly appreciated by the listeners. But above all comes the music request programmes, where the listener can directly call up the Radio Jockey and request and dedicate a particular track to someone of their choice. This format was a huge hit and till now no other format can even think of competing with it. The main reason behind this popularity is nothing but emotions. Everyone loves to hear their voice in the radio and just because of this people keep calling during live phone in programmes. Apart from that, the live phone in programmes gives update of live incidents such as traffic situations, weather updates and the likes. In this regard I would like to mention ‘Dil Se’ programme by the celebrity Radio Jockey Jimmy Tangree. Earlier, there was a concept of writing letters for the programmes not only in Radio but in television as well. With the changing time and improved technology the programmes are becoming more and more technology enabled leading towards better interaction and more interesting formats.

**Interview:** Interviews are very commonly used in the radio programming. The major reason behind it is that interview helps to build credibility of the programmes. Interviews are used in news as well as in entertainment formats as well. The interview can be taken of a celebrity, a politician, an educationist or a common man. Vox populi on any major issue is always a popular format. This format of radio programming is a common concept for both All India Radio and the private FM channels. Though the format is common, the mode or style of using it in the programmes may vary as per the niche style of the particular programme. Interviews can be live in the studio, recorded or done over the phone. For example during and after the Union budget, an interview with economists, finance experts and with the common people is very common in
all the radio stations. Sometimes this is done as a ‘one-off programme’ or other times it can be knitted with a regular format of phone-in morning or evening slots.

Getting on the streets and taking mass feedback is also very popular. Even the interviewees get much exited and interested in this kind of formats.

Factors for differences in programmes of All India Radio and Private FM Channels:

Target audience: Keeping a track of the people for whom we are catering our programmes is very important for any media house. So radio is no exception. There is a basic difference between the target audience of All India Radio and the private FM channels and so the nature of programmed are different. The target audience of All India Radio is somewhat serious in temperament and would prefer conventional stuff rather than something jazzy and trendy. Whereas the people the private FMs cater to are the much younger lot with a trendy lifestyle. For them radio is the medium-on-the-go. So they need something fast and grooving. As far as the reach is concerned All India Radio penetrates to every nook and corner of the nation. As a result All India Radio has the responsibility to cater to each group as an individual unit.

Private FMs on the other hand has a smaller area to cater to; mainly the urban and the semi urban region. All FM Channels, be it the private FMs or All India Radio’s FM Rainbow and Gold, always caters to the local audience. Yet there is a considerable difference in the presentation style and choice of words and treatment with language. The advantage of All India Radio is that they have separate channels for catering to the various section of audience. Hence the differences in formats of both the stations are so visible and pronounced.

House policy: Like any other media houses, radio stations also have their set house policy. Such as All India Radio will follow the guide lines provided by the Prasar Bharati and Private FMs their own house policy. A simple example will make things clear. Every morning if we tune into the Private FM Channels we will find that they provide an astrological guideline of the day as per the star signs. But All India Radio will never do as this is against the guidelines they follow. All India Radio represents itself to be more logical and guided by reasoning.

Code of Conduct: As per the Broadcasting Legislation of India every permission holder shall follow the AIR Programme and Advertising Code as amended from time to time. In the event of the government announcing the setting up of a Broadcast Regulatory Authority, by whatever name it is called, and the content regulations are modified, the permission holder shall be obliged to conform to the revised guidelines.

Advertisers & Sponsors: As Any other business, Radio medium is also a profit making venture. Many a times in order to fit in the advertisement and the sponsors, the programme format is customized. This is done more in the Private FM channels compared to All India Radio as the layer of hierarchy is less stringent here.
At the end, we can conclude that the ultimate aim of all Radio stations, be it All India Radio or the private FM channels are to provide information and entertainment to its listeners. And all of them, needlessly to say, are doing it quite well. In the entire process, we the listeners are benefitted the most as we enjoy the best of both the worlds – All India Radio and the Private FM Channels.