



## creativeresistance

from Design & People

[Home](#) | [Design & People](#)

.....

Sethu Das / April 13, 2010

### "Good Morning! This Was All India Radio!"

Most of us grew up listening to the radio at a time when subjects had to pay the state for the cautiously-edited news broadcasts under the **radio receiver license system of 1928**. Design & People Co-founder Sethu Das wonders why India wants to keep radio a state property while it tries to open up television so much.



**Kishori Lal Sharma** was considered an intelligent man by the people of Garoh, a small village in Himachal Pradesh. Because he was capable of telling the villagers about the drought situation, 'predict' weather and give an abstract of world events — all through the information he gathers from the radio he bought in the 60s from an Indian soldier who returned from Congo.

The battery-operated one foot-long radio of Kishori Lal Sharma was the first in the village and he was very much proud of the device that could produce melodious voices. Devinder Singh Rana, a government school teacher in the nearby village was one of the hundreds who used to gather at Kishori Lal's house to listen to the talking device. Some villagers thought there's someone sitting inside the magical instrument to sing songs while realists around perceived that such a small instrument could not accommodate human beings. The first radio had already created enough confusion and curiosity among the villagers of Garoh.

Owning a radio was once a status symbol. Devinder Singh Rana too wanted to own a radio set which would sooner connect him to the rest of the world. "I purchased my first radio in 1979 as I wanted to listen to weather forecasts and news on the latest happenings of the world. I bought the second radio in 1986. All India Radio (AIR) and BBC were the only channels available in those years. You can see everything on a television, but I still prefer my radio as I could carry it anywhere," says Rana.

"Yes, I am happy with the service I get from the All India Radio and I still have faith in it. But it is only when we listen to the BBC and Voice of America, we get to know the difference in the quality of broadcasting. The channels we get are much clearer than what we get from AIR and get only the one version of the story which the government wants us to listen. The same news is reported in different ways. Chinese radio is very clear while our own radio is not clear to us," says Rana, who bought his first single-channel radio in 1979 with his one month's salary.

The radio played an important role in shaping up our minds and connecting us to the rest of the

world. Most of us grew up listening to the radio and at a time when subjects had to pay the state for the cautiously-edited news broadcasts under the radio receiver license system of 1928. Sam Pitroda, former Chairman of National Knowledge Commission and the man behind the connectivity in India feels that the seeds his team planted in the 80s — the economic liberalisation and the abolition of the License Raj gave us a 'connected nation' and gave India the visibility in the modern world. "Information will bring about openness, accessibility, connectivity, networking, democratisation, decentralisation and as a result — ultimately the social transformation," says a confident Pitroda.



Devinder Singh Rana with his Philips Minor 2-Band Main Receiver he bought for Rupees six hundred. (Photo: Sethu Das)

Today India's cities and villages are truly connected within and with the outside world. The nation which had only 2,75,000 radio sets after its independence has more than 132 million listeners today. Soon radio is migrating from analogue to digital terrestrial broadcasting to wipe out analogue broadcasting in India by 2015. What about the idiot box? In 1962 India had only 58 licensed television sets and today it has more than 112 million television sets. Thanks to the Unesco and Ford Foundation for their first educational telecasts and to Philips for leaving behind television equipments in an exhibition ground in New Delhi because of which the television came to India accidentally.

While India owned the first radio broadcast of Indian Broadcasting Company Limited of 1923, the Azad Hind Radio service started by Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose in 1942 was owned by the Indians. Azad Hind Radio was founded with the intention of motivating Indians to fight for its independence and countering British propaganda channels. Bose's radio aired news in eight languages from Germany in the beginning shifted its base to Singapore and later to Rangoon. In one of his regular broadcasts in 1943, Netaji referred AIR as 'Anti-Indian Radio' and BBC as 'Bluff and Bluster Corporation' — channels once specialised in forcing people to listen what the governments wanted them to listen.

Many exile governments functioning from different parts of the world use radio effectively because it is still one and the only medium for them to communicate with their own people living under military regimes. Karma Yeshe, Editor-in-Chief of Voice of Tibet radio, an independent radio station founded with the aim of providing Tibetans inside Tibet unbiased news from exile feels that the most challenging task for his radio is to surpass China's 'jamming' of signals. He feels that China uses stronger and powerful jamming transmitters for clear broadcasts and for the purpose of jamming other news channels targeting Asian region at large. "China continues to violate international telecommunication laws and block frequencies of other channels. But Voice of Tibet uses different strategies to overcome the jamming of our radio signals. We change our frequencies quite often to overcome jamming, but in this process we lose our audience too. We broadcast our programmes on three or more frequencies simultaneously and advise our listeners to tune into these frequencies," discloses Karma while speaking to Design & People.

The entertainment-centric Indian radio channels leave more questions to be answered instead of providing us with answers to some of our long-term concerns. Is the only revolution that goes in the country is in the field of information and communication? How independent is our national radio and how effective are our national programmes? Why All India Radio fails to reach our radio sets while Chinese channels violently penetrate our air waves with the government propaganda in crystal clear sound? How long our national radios will feed its listeners with Hindustani music while keeping them ignorant about the national issues? Why do our policy makers and politicians appear in front of the television cameras 24x7 while not a single person speaks to the nation through the radio? Why India wants to keep the radio a state property while tries to open up television so much to foreign religious groups and news agencies?

The reason is very simple — the mindset of an ordinary radio 'listener' and the mindset of a television 'viewer'. Somewhere out in the back of our mind we fear that the millions of our radio listeners — mostly the ordinary masses will one day rise up or even revolt against the state if we ever open up information to them, while the 'viewers' of the idiot box will always be comfortable lying down on their sofas watching breaking news repeatedly with popcorn in one hand and the remote control in the other.

"During our war with China in 1962 and with the war with Pakistan we depended on our radios. The radio helped the entire village to know the war situation," remembers Devinder Singh of the Garoh village who continues to use his radio. May be the time has come for our national radio to review its policies and methods of broadcasting to ensure that we are capable of communicating with our masses in a possible war scenario and during national calamities. If not, our national radio will once again truly become an Anti-Indian Radio.

[Share](#)

.....

Sethu Das is the Co-founder of Design & People. He can be reached at: [sethu.das@designandpeople.org](mailto:sethu.das@designandpeople.org)

The 'Open Design Policy' of Design & People grants users the freedom to copy, share, study, distribute, display, transform or even make derivative works based on Design & People artworks — both visual and written — for any non-commercial or academic purpose by giving appropriate credit to the author of the work. We advise the user who creates a subsequent work based on the original artwork make no attempt to remove it from the Public Domain. By choosing to contribute to the evolution of this work of art, the user agrees to give others the very same rights.

.....



Design & People **E:** [support@designandpeople.org](mailto:support@designandpeople.org) **W:** [www.designandpeople.org](http://www.designandpeople.org)

