



# Radio as a Tool to Preserve Indigenous Culture with Special Reference to Arunachal Pradesh

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## Abstract

Arunachal Pradesh is a multi-ethnic tribal state located in the northeastern part of India. Majority of the population in the state lives in rural areas where many people are yet to avail communication opportunities offered by digital technologies in today's society. The availability of newspapers in remote areas of the state is still a distant dream while the villagers, who are mostly engaged in agricultural activities hardly read newspapers. Television viewing even if available may be interrupted due to long hours of power cuts in villages. In such a situation, radio becomes their primary source of information and entertainment because of its reach and accessibility. Radio dominates other media in meeting people's information needs in rural areas of the state. Moreover, the villagers can easily connect with the radio programmes of the All India Radio Itanagar, which are based on their culture, traditions and information needs, that too in their own dialects. As such radio broadcasting in general and All India Radio Itanagar in particular must have been contributing to preservation of culture and traditions in Arunachal Pradesh. This paper seeks to explore the role of radio especially the All India Radio Itanagar in the preservation of the indigenous culture in Arunachal Pradesh.

**Keywords:** *media, radio, culture, preservation, Arunachal Pradesh.*

## Introduction

Situated in northeast India, Arunachal Pradesh is a multi-ethnic tribal state with 26 major tribes and 110 sub-tribes with distinctive characteristics in language, dress and customs. Majority of the population lives in rural areas and many are yet to avail communication opportunities offered by digital technologies in today's society. The availability of newspapers in remote areas of the state is still a distant dream while the villagers, who are mostly engaged in agricultural activities hardly read newspapers. Television viewing even if available may be

interrupted due to long hours of power cuts in villages. In such a situation, radio becomes their primary source of information and entertainment because of its reach and accessibility. Radio dominates other media in meeting people's information needs in rural areas of the state.

Besides addressing various social issues of urban areas, the All India Radio Itanagar also serves the rural and illiterate population keeping in mind their special needs and interest. The villagers can easily connect with the radio programmes of the All India Radio Itanagar, which are based on their culture, traditions and information needs that too in their own dialects. While the participation of local artists in various dialect programmes enables them to express their own voices, the radio station's recording of various dialect programmes like folk songs, community songs, drama, music etc. help the communities to document their culture, which have been in existence mostly in oral forms since time immemorial.

Research studies show that mass media play a key role in bringing out socio-cultural change and cultural preservation in society while radio is always considered as the best medium for change. Thus, radio broadcasting in general and AIR Itanagar in particular must have been contributing to preservation of indigenous culture and traditions in Arunachal Pradesh. Hence, the study of the role of radio in preservation of indigenous culture and traditions in Arunachal Pradesh has significance. This paper seeks to explore the role of radio especially the All India Radio Itanagar in the preservation of culture in Arunachal Pradesh.

### **Radio and Cultural Preservation**

According to Mari Ogbemudia James (2015), the world has not only become a global village, but a global bedroom and the mass media is responsible for the dissemination of developmental information in many ways and this goes a long way in elevating cultures and cultural identity. Radio plays a significant role in society especially for those people living in far-flung and remote rural areas. The All India Radio, comprising 420 stations located across the country, presently broadcasts programmes in 23 languages and 179 dialects catering to vast spectrum of socio-economically and culturally diverse population. As it covers nearly 92 percent of the country's geographical area thereby reaching 99.19 percent of the total population, almost every citizen gets benefits in day-to-day life from various programmes being broadcast by it ([allindiaradio.gov.in](http://allindiaradio.gov.in)).

Patil (2010) in his study cited Vinod Pavara (2003: 2166) that radio is an inexpensive medium, and more suitable for illiterate people, peasant communities and societies characterized by oral and folk traditions. It allows the people to listen to its programmes without disturbing their household chores and other activities. Pati (2004) in his study '*Media and tribal development*' underscored the importance of broadcasting medium and said the medium has the potentials to influence people, which need to be emphasized further. In his article *Radio Broadcasting in North East India*, Bala Lakhendra (2014) explained that awareness about HIV/AIDS, voter education, gender issues, peace building, environmental problems etc. were the main burning issues in the north east India. He underscored that while realizing the mass appeal of the radio service, the government decided to

expand its reach by setting up more radio stations in different places and sought to use radio as prime medium for social, educational and cultural prosperity.

Bala Lakhendra (2014) underlined that as the North East India is very rich in its cultures, radio can be an important tool for the promotion and protection of local and national cultures against the dominance of multinational western cultures. According to him, radio is legally defined as a distinct broadcasting sector for the purpose of social benefits, social objectives and social gain as part of people's awareness and development. It certainly acts as a vehicle for the communities for their development as mass media can help create awareness faster than anything else. In fact, it has a great impact on people's everyday life and culture because it can make or break the belief of the people.

### Radio in Arunachal Pradesh

While radio broadcasting first began in India in August 1921 with the Times of India's broadcasting of a special music programme, the northeast region entered the broadcasting map of India in the post independence era when the Shillong-Guwahati Station of All India Radio started its broadcast on July 1, 1948. And the first All India Radio station in Arunachal Pradesh (*formerly North East Frontier Agency, NEFA*) was established in Pasighat on March 6, 1966. Before it the AIR Guwahati and AIR Dibrugarh stations transmitted news bulletins for Arunachal Pradesh namely *Arunachal Baturi* in Assamese language.

With the emergence of All India Radio Pasighat, readers' choice of getting news and information has changed. Like other medium of mass communication, radio also serves for the cause of rural development and growth in Arunachal Pradesh (*Panchanan Doley, Programme Executive, AIR Itanagar, personal interview, October 24, 2018*).

Presently, Arunachal Pradesh has five radio stations, one each at Itanagar, Pasighat, Tawang, Tezu and Ziro. It has one FM station. The AIR Itanagar station is located at C-Sector Itanagar and broadcasts in 675 KHz, 4990 KHz, 6150 KHz and 103.1 MHz frequencies. AIR Itanagar has been serving for the cause of rural community in Arunachal society by broadcasting a variety of dialect programmes besides Hindi and English languages (*P. Doley, October 24, 2018*).

After independence, television entered the region and computer came in the 19th century (Lakhendra, 2014). Gradually, the concept of New Media come to the fore and spread out among the people of this region. The growth of the electronic media was slow in northeast region as compared to many other states while All India Radio and Doordarshan were the sole operators in the North East Region. It is only in the recent past that the private radio and television stations have increased the popularity in this region. While AIR Itanagar allows members of the communities to gain access to information, education and entertainment, the people can participate and express their own voices. Thus, the influence of All India Radio cannot be ignored in these remote areas of the state.

## All India Radio and Indigenous Cultural Preservation

Being a young state, Arunachal Pradesh witnessed a slow growth of journalism along with other developmental activities. The late Lummer Dai, a social reformer and novelist, introduced the first weekly newspaper of the state, *Echo of Arunachal* earlier in 1988. Like other medium of mass communication, radio also serves for the cause of rural development and growth in Arunachal Pradesh (*P. Doley, October 24, 2018*).

Similarly, Sakda (1984) in his study also stated that radio has its impact in all aspects of life. By using the diffusion of latest ideas, it prepares listeners for reception of innovations. According to him radio helps villagers directly with recommendation and special educational programmes to undertake new strategies at agricultural methods.

Recognizing its contributions towards social upliftment and cultural preservation, the government has gradually set up four more All India Radio stations in Arunachal Pradesh. With the set up of five radio stations in the state at Itanagar, Pasighat, Tawang, Tezu and Ziro, the information about various social, political, economic and other activities reach to the masses to a great extend. These AIR stations have been making continuous efforts to produce programmes of archival value based on folklores and mythology of local tribal communities. They act as a tool for different ethnic communities to document their oral culture in the form of audio recordings. The dialect news bulletins being broadcast from AIR Itanagar further encourage the youngsters to learn their mother tongue.

As the mass media now a days mostly focused on westernization, the status of the indigenous culture and tradition in Arunachal Pradesh is a cause of concern in present society. In the backdrop of all such factors, All India Radio is the only medium, which mostly broadcast programmes in local dialects along with English and Hindi languages, paving the path to document and preserve ethnic cultures of the state.

Radio, the first electronic media to reach in Arunachal Pradesh, still attract common people because of its simplicity and variety in programmes. Being the cheapest medium of information, communication and education, radio can address various issues and challenges faced by the rural people. The radio programmes of 13 hours 22 minutes being broadcast from AIR Itanagar in a day mostly consist of local dialect programmes besides other in English and Hindi. Similarly, many other state level programmes from the primary radio station, All India Radio Itanagar, are transmitted via all other four local radio stations at Ziro, Tezu, Pasighat and Tawang. All the AIR stations in Arunachal Pradesh broadcast folk and tribal music, spoken words (talk, interviews, discussion, etc.) besides special audience programmes, light music, current affairs and news-based programmes (*Doley, personal interview, October 10, 2018*).

AIR Itanagar broadcast news summary in 11 dialects and 16 dialect programmes during the 13-hour broadcasting service in a day. The morning transmission spends 4 hours 18 minutes consisting of 7 dialect and other national programmes. Afternoon broadcasting contributes 2 hours and 2 minutes while the evening transmission covers 7 hours 2 minutes, consisting of 9 dialect programmes along with other government and

national based programmes. Some of the programmes that have been a part and parcel of people's life in Arunachal Pradesh are-

**News summary in 11 dialects** - *Tagin, Apatani, Galo, Miju Mishmi, Khamti, Wangcho, Idu, Tangsa, Nocte, Adi and Nyishi*, **Dialect programmes** in 16 dialects including *Tutsa, Monpa, Sajolang (Miji), Hrusso (Aka)*, **Singpho songs, Miju-Mishi folk song, Apatani folk song, Nyishi song, Discussion of health issues, Sponsored Programmes, Children Programme, Health tips** by different doctors or specialists, **Talk shows, Informative programme on farming and other news-based programmes.**

The happenings of the state quickly reach to the people through radio. When the English news items are translated into a dialect it would become easier to understand for the community while on the other hand such practices also encourage youngsters to learn their own mother tongue, thus directly or indirectly preserving the cultures of the state. In this age of new media technologies, many of our folk songs, folklore are disappearing. Today's youngsters never heard folk stories or folklores told by their grandmas, hence AIR Itanagar has archived many recorded spools and CD cassettes of such folk songs and folklores and broadcast it from time to time (*Rajiv Rai, newsreader in AIR Itanagar, personal interview, October 26, 2018*).

Though there are less listeners of AIR programmes especially in urban Itanagar but villagers listen to AIR Itanagar every day for dialects news and to get information about farming and other health issues. As most of the villagers could not understand English and Hindi Bulletins they tune to radio for local or regional news. Thus, directly or indirectly AIR services has been credited for playing a vital role in preservation of ethnic cultures of the state.

Radio being a cheap medium of communication can cater to the needs of the audience in the field of education, entertainment and so on. Schulma (2016) in an article entitled 'A Closer Look At The Future Of Radio' states that radio is still as strong as ever for disseminating information as well as cultural preservation of a state. In the age of satellite television channels and news portal on the internet, AIR Itanagar continues to enjoy great popularity in Arunachal Pradesh.

## Conclusion

From the above discussion, it can be concluded that many rural areas in Arunachal Pradesh are yet to avail communication opportunities offered by digital technologies prevalent in today's modern society. In the absence of accessibility to newspapers and television owing to various factors, radio dominates other mass media as the primary source of information to fulfill their communication needs. Being a cheap mass medium, radio can cater to the needs of the audience in various fields by providing entertainment, information and education besides spreading awareness on various development programmes. The villagers in Arunachal Pradesh can easily connect with the radio programmes of the All India Radio Itanagar, which are mostly based on their culture, traditions and information, needs that too in their own dialects. As AIR Itanagar archived all its recordings like

folk songs, folklores etc. it is definitely contributing to the preservation of culture of Arunachal Pradesh. As such AIR Itanagar plays a significant role in preserving culture in the state.

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