Waves of Influence: A Posthumanist Perspective on All India Radio's Cultural Impact in Kerala

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Abstract

This article explores the profound cultural impact of All India Radio (AIR) in Kerala through a posthumanist perspective, analyzing how the medium has shaped and been constructed by socio-cultural dynamics neglecting human centric agency. By inquiring AIR's role in Kerala's social environment, this paper aims to manifest how a technological, social, and ecological element participates in the formation of regional identity and cultural practices. This paper argues that AIR's influence in Kerala can be understood through complex relationships involving human actors, technological advancements, and environmental factors, reflecting a posthumanist perspective that surpasses traditional anthropocentric analyses.

Keywords: AIR – All India Radio, Posthumanism, Cultural impact, Network society, Radio Technology, Media Influence, Non-Human Agency, Cultural Transformation, Broadcast Media

Introduction

All India Radio, commonly known as Akashvani, has been instrumental in shaping India's cultural, social, and political landscape. In Kerala, a state renowned for its rich cultural heritage and linguistic diversity, its impact has been equally significant. As a state-run broadcaster, AIR has been instrumental in disseminating government policies, promoting national unity, and preserving cultural heritage. However, its influence extends beyond the mere transmission of information. From a posthumanist perspective, AIR is seen as an active participant in the formation of subjectivities—identities, beliefs, and cultural norms shaped by the interaction between human listeners and the non-human agency of radio technology. After

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Language in India www.languageinindia.com ISSN 1930-2940 **Vol. 24:8 August 2024**
Suja. S., B.Sc., M.A., M.Phil., Ph.D. Scholar   59
Waves of Influence: A Posthumanist Perspective on All India Radio's Cultural Impact in Kerala

Indian independence, Malayalam broadcasting by AIR has influenced various aspects of cultural and social life in Kerala. This article applies a posthumanist perspective to understand how AIR, as a technological medium, has co-created cultural subjectivities in Kerala.

Posthumanism challenges the traditional human-centered view of subjectivity by acknowledging the role of non-human actors, such as technology, in shaping human experiences. This article applies a posthumanist framework to analyze the cultural impact of AIR, focusing on how radio broadcasts have co-created identities and influenced societal change in Kerala. Rather than adhering to a single theorist's perspective, the theoretical foundations for this research study primarily align with the ideas of Donna Haraway and Katherine Hayles, both of whom are prominent figures in posthumanist thought.

AIR's Role in Promoting Malayalam Language and Culture

AIR has played a crucial role in promoting Malayalam, the regional language of Kerala, through its broadcasts. When All India Radio Kerala stations started broadcasting, Standardized Malayalam was not been popular among common peoples. By providing a platform for Malayalam-language via news, drama, and literature, AIR has helped to standardize and popularize the language across different parts of the state, regardless of being literates, illiterates, villagers, metro polities. From a posthumanist perspective, the radio technology itself has acted as a mediator in the promotion of Malayalam. The broadcast waves reached even the most remote areas of Kerala, creating a shared linguistic experience among diverse populations.

Spanish sociologist and communication scholar Manuel Castells defines how these technologies reshape social, economic, and political structures. According to Castells, *"The network society is a society whose social structure is made up of networks powered by microelectronics-based information and communication technologies. Networks are increasingly becoming the dominant form of organization in every sector of society. The network society is characterized by a new technological paradigm based on information and knowledge, and a new mode of social organization and communication that transcends geographical and temporal*

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Language in India www.languageinindia.com **ISSN 1930-2940 Vol. 24:8 August 2024**
Suja. S., B.Sc., M.A., M.Phil., Ph.D. Scholar   60
Waves of Influence: A Posthumanist Perspective on All India Radio's Cultural Impact in Kerala

limitations" (Castells 3:2004). This interaction between the technology as in here broadcasting and the listeners helped to shape a collective identity centered around the Malayalam language.

AIR's radio literary programs and in Malayalam have significantly contributed to the preservation and popularization of regional literature. Mozhiyazhaku, Sahithya Vedi, Sahithya Sahakarika, Sargasabha, Kathayum Kathapathrangalum, Kavyanjali, Vayanakalari, Radio drama, etc. Mozhiyazhaku is a programme based on defining the beauty of language. Sahithya Vedi includes readings from literary works, interviews with authors, and discussions on various aspects of literature, fostering a deep engagement with Malayalam literary traditions. Sahitya Sahakarika focuses on literary collaborations and group discussions among writers and literary critics. It often features panel discussions on specific literary themes or trends, offering listeners a broader perspective on Malayalam literature. SargaSabha focuses on creative writing and the process of literary creation. It includes interviews with writers, discussions on literary techniques, and readings of new literary works, offering listeners an insight into the creative process. Kathayum Kathapathrangalum highlights short stories and their characters, presenting readings from well-known Malayalam writers. It is often followed by discussions that delve into the nuances of the stories, exploring themes, character development, and the socio-cultural context of the narratives. Kavyanjali is the recitation of Poems with the introduction of poets. Vayanakkalari is a program that encourages reading and literary appreciation among listeners. It includes book readings, author interviews, and discussions on the importance of literature in daily life.

Radio dramas, which are visual form of drama have played a crucial role in the popularization of Malayalam literature, storytelling, and performing arts. In a posthumanist context, Malayalam radio dramas can be seen as transcending traditional boundaries between the human and the non-human. The disembodied voices, reliance on technology, and networked dissemination challenge the notion of a singular, embodied human experience. The dramas often explore themes of identity, technology, and the human condition, resonating with posthumanist ideas of fluidity, hybridity, and the entanglement of humans with their technological environments. Haraway's cyborg theory emphasizes the fluidity of identity in a world where technology and biology are increasingly intertwined. It suggests that boundaries between the

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Language in India www.languageinindia.com ISSN 1930-2940 Vol. 24:8 August 2024
Suja. S., B.Sc., M.A., M.Phil., Ph.D. Scholar   61
Waves of Influence: A Posthumanist Perspective on All India Radio's Cultural Impact in Kerala

human and the non-human are not fixed but permeable, allowing for new forms of being that challenge traditional humanist perspectives.

Impact on Local Music and Arts

AIR has been instrumental in promoting Kerala's traditional music and performing arts, such as Kathakalisangeetham, pulluvanpaattu, kalampaattu, kolkkalipaattu, parayavaadyam, puthanpaana. etc. By broadcasting performances and providing a platform for local artists, AIR has played a role in preserving and disseminating these art forms. The interaction between AIR's technology and Kerala's traditional arts created new subjectivities for both artists and audiences. For artists, performing for a radio audience involved adapting their art to fit the medium, which sometimes led to innovations in presentation. For listeners, the broadcasts made traditional arts more accessible, shaping their cultural experiences and identities.

Akashavani acts as a post-human conduit that enables local music and arts to transcend traditional boundaries of space and time. N. Katherine Hayles defines this as "In the information age, the concept of disembodiment emerges, where information becomes separable from its physical carriers. This shift allows information to circulate independently of the material world, leading to a new way of understanding the relationship between the mind and its technological extensions" (1999). By broadcasting local traditions on a national platform, Akashavani integrates human creativity with technology, allowing local cultural expressions to evolve in new ways as they interact with a broader audience. This can be seen as a form of cultural hybridization, where local traditions are both preserved and transformed through their mediation by technology.

Political Influence and Social Change

During significant political events, such as the Emergency period, Assassination of Mahatma Gandhi, Rajiv Gandhi, and various regional movements such as Kerala's Language Movement, Silent Valley Movement. AIR played a role in shaping public perceptions. The state-controlled nature of AIR during these times meant that broadcasts were often aligned with government perspectives. At the same time AIR's centralized and bureaucratic control over content

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Language in India www.languageinindia.com **ISSN 1930-2940 Vol. 24:8 August 2024**
Suja. S., B.Sc., M.A., M.Phil., Ph.D. Scholar   62
Waves of Influence: A Posthumanist Perspective on All India Radio's Cultural Impact in Kerala

production can be seen as limiting the diversity of voices and perspectives, including those of marginalized human and non-human entities. Posthumanism advocates for a more decentralized, networked approach that allows for a multiplicity of voices and acknowledges the agency of non-human actors, something AIR's structure might inhibit. Broadcasting of programs like "Mann Ki Baat," a monthly radio program by India's Prime Minister can be seen as a tool that extends the reach of the state into the private lives of citizens, using technology to shape public opinion and behavior. While the program is framed as a dialogue with the public, it also represents a form of soft power that subtly influences and monitors public sentiment, aligning with broader concerns about how technology is used for governance and surveillance in the posthuman era.

The technology of radio during politically charged times acted as a tool for shaping subjectivities in Kerala. McLuhan's influential concept of "the medium is the message" underscores how media technologies shape and mediate communication processes, which emphasizes that the nature of media technologies themselves has a profound impact on how information is perceived and processed. The content broadcasted was controlled and curated to reflect the state's narrative, influencing how listeners perceived political realities. The radio technology thus played a role in creating a mediated version of political events, shaping public opinion and consciousness.

AIR's coverage of National - regional political movements, such as the language agitation for Malayalam, reflects its role in shaping political subjectivities. The way these movements were reported influenced how listeners understood and engaged with political issues, illustrating the posthumanist idea that technology mediates and shapes political consciousness. The post-human perspective acknowledges that technology mediates human experiences and interactions, including political experiences. Information technologies transform how political information is accessed, shared, and perceived. The mediation of political consciousness through technology involves the filtering and framing of information. Algorithms used by social media platforms can influence the visibility of political content and shape users' perceptions by prioritizing certain narratives or viewpoints. This technological mediation impacts political

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Language in India www.languageinindia.com **ISSN 1930-2940 Vol. 24:8 August 2024**
Suja. S., B.Sc., M.A., M.Phil., Ph.D. Scholar   63
Waves of Influence: A Posthumanist Perspective on All India Radio's Cultural Impact in Kerala

consciousness by determining which issues are highlighted and how they are discussed, thereby influencing public opinion and political behavior.

Live Broadcasting

Akashvani (All India Radio) has played a significant role in live broadcasting in India, acting as a crucial medium for disseminating information, culture, and entertainment to the masses. Live broadcasting on Akashvani has historically been a powerful tool in connecting people across vast and diverse regions of the country, often transcending linguistic, cultural, and geographical boundaries. Live broadcasting of events such as the Sabarimala pilgrimage can be significant for cultural and religious reasons, but it also comes with several potential negative aspects, particularly when viewed through social, ethical, and cultural lenses. There is a risk that live broadcasts may misrepresent or oversimplify complex rituals, leading to a loss of cultural depth. Live broadcasts of parliamentary sessions, election results, and political speeches have kept the public informed and engaged in the democratic process. Akashvani's role in disseminating political information has been essential in shaping public opinion and ensuring transparency in governance.

Educational Impact and Rural Development

AIR has been involved in broadcasting educational programs aimed at rural audiences in Kerala, focusing on topics such as agriculture, health, and social welfare. Krushidarshan, Vayalum Veedum, Karshikarengam, Doctorodu Chodikk aam are some of such programs. These programs have played a role in rural development by providing valuable information and resources. The educational content broadcast by AIR acted as a mediator in the rural development process. By bringing new knowledge and practices into rural areas, the radio technology influenced the subjectivities of listeners, shaping their understanding of modern practices and social issues. AIR's agricultural extension programs have helped rural farmers in Kerala by providing information on modern farming techniques and practices. The technology of radio made this knowledge accessible, influencing how farmers approached their work and integrated new methods into their practices. This interaction between technology and rural audiences highlights the role of AIR in shaping developmental subjectivities.

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Language in India www.languageinindia.com ISSN 1930-2940 Vol. 24:8 August 2024
Suja. S., B.Sc., M.A., M.Phil., Ph.D. Scholar   64
Waves of Influence: A Posthumanist Perspective on All India Radio's Cultural Impact in Kerala

Conclusion

All India Radio has had a profound cultural impact in Kerala, shaping subjectivities through its role in promoting language, preserving traditional arts, influencing political perceptions, and supporting rural development. From a posthumanist perspective, AIR is seen as an active participant in the creation of cultural identities, blending technological mediation with human experience.

By examining these interactions, we gain insights into how AIR, as a non-human actor, has contributed to the formation of cultural and political subjectivities in Kerala. This perspective challenges traditional, human-centered views of media influence, offering a more nuanced understanding of the role of technology in shaping human identity and experience.

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Language in India www.languageinindia.com ISSN 1930-2940 Vol. 24:8 August 2024
Suja. S., B.Sc., M.A., M.Phil., Ph.D. Scholar   65
Waves of Influence: A Posthumanist Perspective on All India Radio's Cultural Impact in Kerala