

Using Broadcast Stories as Message Carriers: A Case Study with reference To Gyan Vani

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Abstract

The paper discusses the benefits of using broadcast stories as message carriers. The *Gyanvni* program of the Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) is taken up for a case study. The case study was conducted on the dedicated FM radio station of the Madurai Regional Centre of IGNOU started broadcasting programmes from March 15, 2013. It broadcasts on FM channel 105.6 and has a reach of 80 km from Madurai. The broadcast used a short story as part of the lesson. This effectively broke the monotony of a single voice dominating the broadcast space for a considerably long period and sustained listener interest in the story.

In short, the simple folk story, traditionally involving a royal family and a set of subservient courtiers was adeptly transformed into a strong story with an essentially significant social message. The sudden change in tone and tenor of the story grabbed the attention of all listeners because of the complete change of focus that it entailed. It is a bold and imaginative experiment in information dissemination and motivational broadcast journalism.

Key words: IGNOU, radio educational broadcasts, stories as message carriers

Introduction

The Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) has an excellent establishment for regularly broadcasting lectures, classes etc. It is called Gyanavani (meaning “voice of knowledge) and it is available in most cities where the IGNOU has regional study centres.

Gyan Vani is not only for the conventional educational system but also one of the main tools in making the dream of “education for all” come true. Gyan Vani's main intention is to take education to the doorsteps of the people. In addition to giving the purely curriculum oriented programmes, it will also deal with awareness programmes concerned with Women Empowerment, Consumer Rights, Human Rights, the Rights of the Child, Health Education, Science Education, Continuing Education, Extension Education, Vocational Education, Teacher Education, Non-formal Education, Adult Education, Education for the handicapped, etc.

The day-to-day programmes of Gyanavani are contributed by educational institutions, government, non -government and semi-government organizations, UN agencies, various government ministries like agriculture, environment, health, women and child welfare, science & technology, etc, besides national level institutions like the National Council for Educational Research and Technology (NCERT), National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS), various state open universities etc.

Each Gyanavani Station has a range of around 60 km and covers an entire city including the adjoining rural areas. The medium of broadcast is English, Hindi and the concerned regional language.

Gyanavani broadcasts in the FM mode and uses stereophonic transmitters. The stations are operated by professionals. However content and software are provided through the Electronic Media Production Centre of the IGNOU. The centre serves purposes of production, dissemination and transmission of educational material. The facilities available at the media production centre are shared with various educational and training institutions, state open universities, central and state government ministries or departments, non governmental organizations, corporate bodies and other sectors.

In March 2000 the HRD ministry of the Government of India was allotted a frequency for educational broadcasting. The ministry handed over the task to IGNOU which already had some experience telecasting education on Doordarshan's education programme called Gyandarshan. Thus IGNOU started broadcasting in the four cities of Coimbatore, Vishakhapatnam, Lucknow and Indore.

Since then, Gyanavani's Educational FM Radio Network has spread to 37 cities and towns across the country. A proposal to start Gyanavani Stations at 15 more centres is under consideration of the Ministries of HRD and Information & Broadcasting. (Details taken from the Website of Gyanvani, Tamilnadu Agricultural University, Coimbatore.

IGNOU in Madurai

The dedicated FM radio station of the Madurai Regional Centre of IGNOU started broadcasting programmes from March 15, 2013. It broadcasts on FM channel 105.6 and has a reach of 80 kms from Madurai.

S. Mohanan, Regional Director, IGNOU, said that IGNOU also has a 24-hour television channel, 'Gyan Darshan,' and a web resource facility, e-Gyan Kosh. It was also reaching out to defence personnel through Gyan Deep. He pointed out that the Madurai station will broadcast programmes from 6 a.m. to 10 a.m., and 6 p.m. to 10 p.m. every day. (Personal interview with Shri S Mohanan).

Educational broadcasts

The success of educational radio depends upon the quality of content and the "radiogenic" personality of the presenter. There is no single "best" format available in educational radio. But it is of no doubt whatever that radio can be an excellent medium for teaching.

The specific strength of radio, in the matter of presentation, is that it can introduce new concepts and information more effectively. Formats like dialogues, discussions, interviews, quiz, drama etc are used widely. (Radio Broadcasting: A Reader, by Dr K Parameswaran, published by Authourpress, New Delhi).

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Information as Story: A Novel Approach

Recently I have developed the habit of tuning in to Gyanavani during the evening hours when I am free. One of the programmes which attracted me was the adult continuing education programs presented with the help of the Continuing Education Directorate of the Government of Tamilnadu.

Recently I heard a very interesting approach made in the programme. It involved the presentation of a short story called “Arasarude Aasanka” (The Anxieties of a King). The story, in Tamil, was written and presented by an instructor of the Valar kalvi maiyam (continuing education centre) N Lakshmanan. The presentation was frequently interspersed with dramatized conversations between the various characters in the story. This effectively broke the monotony of a single voice dominating the broadcast space for a considerably long period and sustained listener interest in the story.

Details of the Story

The background to the story was that the King and Queen of a country, though enveloped in wealth and luxury, were extremely saddened because of the lack of a male heir to the royal lineage. After a few years of married life, they were blessed with a baby boy. The country erupted in celebrations that lasted for more than a month. The King honored all the rishis and scholars of the country; besides, he announced life long, free education and health care for all the children born on the same day as the royal heir! All the courtiers were awarded lavish bonuses and their families were invited to the most sumptuous feasts that lasted more than a week.

The real reading of the story begins with a scene from the royal court. The narrator says that the court itself was the last word in pomp and luxury. Even the pillars of the hall were decorated with jewels of myriad colours, it seemed! The hall itself was interspersed with servants holding large feather fans, on which were tastefully painted with natural colours, various scenes from the valiant life of the King! ! Outside, on both sides of the magnificent entrance to the hall, stood majestic, caparisoned elephants, swaying to the rhythm of glorious nadaswaram music, being played by the most senior and talented artists of the country! ! !

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The King (arasan) was seated in his royal throne; the queen was seated on a smaller throne, placed beside the King's seat of power. Beside them, on a shining cradle, lay the prince. The faces of both the arasan and the queen were pale and drawn. They were not even conversing with each other. Tension and worry were palpably written on their royal visages.

The problem was that the royal prince had not exhibited any of the land marks of healthy growth like attempting to sit, stand or toddle. He had completed seven months recently. The King had called all his courtiers and they were asked to suggest ways and means out of this quandary.

They, in their turn, suggested seeking the advice of various doctors. Some, who rushed in on hearing the royal writ, were quacks of doubtful reputation; some were clearly hacks, only after money! A few followed the ayurvedic system, while others were votaries of the homeopathic system. There were a few who insisted on the natural way to health. Each contradicted the other, while the King, in his sadness and irritation, contradicted every one!

(It has to be noted here that the conversations between the King and the courtiers, between the King and the physicians, etc were dramatically interspersed, using different voices, within the reading of the story. It seemed like a story telling session, in which the elements of a radio drama were also expertly included).

This continued for quite a few days, with no change in the health condition of the prince. Then, it so happened, that one of the senior courtiers chanced to meet up with a revered old sanyasin who was reputed to have solved various problems of very tricky nature. The courtier invited the sanyasin to the royal court.

He bowed before the King, smiled benevolently at the queen and then bent down to examine the prince. The little prince was lying, turned to one side, breathing very shallowly. He was very pale and there was almost no flesh on the body.

The sanyasin straightened up and looked at their Royal Highnesses with intense eyes which mirrored deep understanding. Then he took out some holy ash from the intricately carved silver box he held in his hand, spread it on his palm and blew over it with great force. The hall seemed to reverberate with the sound of the sage's breath. The ashes flew hither and thither. But a considerable part fell on to a spot near the royal throne.

Lo behold, from the ashes arose a handsome boy of may be four or five years age. The boy smiled engagingly, bowed before the King and started talking in a sweet and attention grabbing voice. He explained all the basic health precautions that the pregnant mother should take; the importance of feeding the new born child with the mother's first milk; the significance of periodically weighing the child and ensuring that all the land marks of growth are achieved within the specific time frame; the stress that should be laid on the child as well as the mother partaking of balanced and healthy meals!

Information Content

The boy's narrative included also the important role played by the ICDS centres, the nutrient supplement (called sathumavu and sathumavu unda in Tamil) being supplied jointly by the Health and Family Welfare and Women and Child development ministries through Anganwadis, early childhood welfare centres, Primary Health Centres, mid day meal centres etc, the card system developed under the ASHA initiative where the mother's and child's health profile is being maintained systematically from the period of pregnancy itself and so on.

Modulation and Dramatization

Another important aspect brought to light by the analysis of the programme is the important role played by the techniques of presentation in making any radio programme a success. The change of tone, as far as radio is concerned, always indicates either a change of mood or that of setting. It is one of the most important tools available for the radio broadcaster at achieving special effects and at highlighting any important part of the presentation. (Personal interview with Smt. N Koma, presenter, Gyanvani, Tamilnadu Agricultural University, Coimbatore).

Another point of importance to note is that dramatization of the content of the programme, mixed with the usual narration, has served to pinpoint the purpose of the programme. Since radio programmes can be consumed only through the aural medium, variety of voices and variation of tones should be integral parts of radio programmes as far as possible. (Personal interview with Shri P Prabhakaran, former Programme Executive in charge of Educational Broadcasts, AIR, Trivandrum).

Conclusion

In short, the simple folk story, traditionally involving a royal family and a set of subservient courtiers was adeptly transformed into a strong story with an essentially significant social message. The sudden change in tone and tenor of the story grabbed the attention of all listeners because of the complete change of focus that it entailed. It is a bold and imaginative experiment in information dissemination and motivational broadcast journalism.

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