

History of All India Radio

All India Radio (AIR), also known as **Akashvani**, is one of the largest broadcasting organizations in the world. It has played a vital role in shaping modern India by disseminating news, culture, and education to the masses since its inception. The history of AIR is deeply intertwined with the evolution of broadcasting in India, starting from its humble beginnings in the colonial era to becoming a key pillar of independent India.

1. The Early Years of Broadcasting in India (1920s - 1936)

Introduction of Radio in India

- Radio broadcasting began in **1923** when the **Radio Club of Bombay** made the first-ever transmission.
- In **1927**, the **Indian Broadcasting Company (IBC)** was established in Bombay (now Mumbai) and Calcutta (now Kolkata). It was a private entity tasked with providing regular radio services.
- Despite initial enthusiasm, the IBC faced financial difficulties and was liquidated in **1930**.

Government Intervention

- The Government of India took over the IBC's assets in **1930** and established **Indian State Broadcasting Service (ISBS)**. This marked the beginning of state-run radio broadcasting in India.
 - The first ISBS station was inaugurated in Delhi in **1936**.
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2. Establishment of All India Radio (1936)

- On **June 8, 1936**, the Indian State Broadcasting Service (ISBS) was renamed **All India Radio (AIR)**, reflecting its national scope.
 - The motto "Akashvani" (meaning "Voice from the Sky") was coined later, inspired by a Sanskrit term used in classical Indian literature.
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3. Expansion During the Colonial Era (1936 - 1947)

Role During World War II

- During World War II (1939-1945), AIR played a significant role in broadcasting wartime news and propaganda.

- The British Government used AIR to boost morale and counteract Axis powers' propaganda.

Technological Advancements

- The 1940s saw improvements in infrastructure, and new transmission centers were established to expand coverage.
- Major stations during this time included Delhi, Bombay, Madras (now Chennai), Lucknow, and Calcutta.

Introduction of News Broadcasts

- Regular news bulletins were introduced in the **1940s** to provide updates on national and international events.

4. Post-Independence Era (1947 - 1976)

Role in Nation-Building

- Post-independence, AIR became a vital tool for nation-building, focusing on education, cultural preservation, and promoting national integration.
- It adopted a policy of broadcasting in multiple Indian languages to cater to India's diverse population.

Key Developments

1. 1950s:

- In 1950, AIR introduced "**Vividh Bharati**," a popular entertainment channel offering music, dramas, and quizzes.
- New stations were established in smaller towns to reach rural populations.

2. 1960s:

- The introduction of **commercial broadcasting** in 1967 marked a major milestone. Advertisements were allowed on Vividh Bharati to generate revenue.
- AIR became a major medium for agricultural and educational programming.

3. Integration with Television:

- While television was introduced in India in 1959, radio remained the dominant mass medium due to its affordability and accessibility.

Akashvani as a Cultural Guardian

- AIR preserved and promoted Indian art, music, and culture through dedicated programs on classical music, folk traditions, and literature.
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5. Emergency Period and Autonomy (1975 - 1977)

- During the **Emergency period (1975-1977)**, AIR was heavily controlled by the government, leading to criticism of its lack of autonomy and its use as a propaganda tool.
 - This period highlighted the need for a separate, independent body to manage public broadcasting.
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6. Modernization and FM Revolution (1980s - 2000s)

Shift to FM Broadcasting

- In the late 1980s, FM (Frequency Modulation) technology was introduced, offering superior sound quality compared to AM (Amplitude Modulation).
- FM stations gained immense popularity for music and entertainment programming.

Technological Advancements

- AIR modernized its infrastructure with digital studios, satellite transmission, and online streaming.
- New regional FM channels were launched to cater to urban and rural audiences.

Major Reforms in 1997

- The **Prasar Bharati Act, 1997**, transformed AIR into an autonomous body under the **Prasar Bharati Corporation**, along with Doordarshan.
 - This move aimed to reduce government interference and enhance professionalism in broadcasting.
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7. Present-Day All India Radio (2000s - Present)

Diverse Services

- AIR now operates over **470 broadcasting centers**, reaching nearly 99% of the Indian population.
- It offers services in **23 languages** and **179 dialects**, reflecting India's linguistic diversity.

Key Programs and Channels

1. News Services Division:

- AIR provides news bulletins in multiple languages, making it one of the most trusted news sources in rural India.

2. Vividh Bharati:

- Continues to be one of the most popular channels for entertainment and music.

3. FM Rainbow and FM Gold:

- Focus on contemporary music, youth-oriented programming, and infotainment.

Digital Transformation

- AIR embraced digital platforms, offering live streaming of its programs through its **NewsOnAir app**.
- It also collaborates with international broadcasters for cross-cultural exchanges.

Global Reach

- The **External Services Division (ESD)** of AIR broadcasts in **15 foreign languages** to foster cultural diplomacy and connect with the Indian diaspora worldwide.

Significance of AIR in Indian Society

1. Promoter of National Unity:

- AIR has played a vital role in connecting diverse regions of India and fostering a sense of unity.

2. Rural Outreach:

- It has been instrumental in providing information on agriculture, health, and education to rural and underserved areas.

3. Cultural Preservation:

- AIR has preserved India's heritage by promoting classical music, folk traditions, and regional arts.

4. Disaster Communication:

- AIR remains a crucial medium for disseminating information during natural disasters and emergencies.

Conclusion

The history of All India Radio is a testament to its enduring significance in India's development journey. From its inception in the colonial era to its transformation into a modern, digital broadcaster, AIR has adapted to changing times while remaining a cornerstone of India's communication landscape. It continues to uphold its motto of **"Bahujan Hitaya, Bahujan Sukhaya"** (For the benefit and happiness of the masses), making it an integral part of Indian life.