
Seven Decades of Radio Listening in Nepal

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Abstract

This article tells the story of the coming of Radio to Nepal, and the creation of a radio audience, first through listening to overspill broadcasts from neighbouring countries, on sets which required the express permission of the King to possess until Radio Nepal finally began broadcasting in 1950. It focuses on the social aspects of broadcasting, and on the problems of audience research, and argues for the use of listeners' memoirs to supplement more quantitative methods.

Background

In Nepal, the first Radio station *Radio Nepal* was established in 1950. However, even before that time Nepali people had already been experiencing the taste of listening to the radio from the stations of neighbouring countries. It is hard to say when Nepalis first started listening to the Radio. But we can guess that Nepalis have been listening to the radio for more than 75 years. Nepal's neighbour, India, had already started broadcasting by 1923, so Nepalis working there certainly listened to Indian broadcasts. According to Madan Mani Dixit, one of the listeners contributing to the study this article is drawn from, his youngest uncle Dev Mani Dixit had imported a radio from England in 1929 and he attended the gathering when the radio was turned on for the first time. He further guesses that it might have been the seventh radio in Kathmandu, the capital city of Nepal, at that time. So we can give an educated guess that the radio had already been introduced into the Rana's¹ palaces and perhaps a few villages on the border with India².

After the establishment of radio stations in India, the radio became popular in elite circles in Nepal too. However, without the ruler's assent, nobody was allowed to have a radio set. We cannot guess the number of radio sets at any particular time during the initial days of radio listening. When the British forces were doing badly

against the Japanese during the Second World War, the rulers in Nepal seized the radio sets from the people. Rana rulers had been supporting the British and providing soldiers to fight for them, so they did not want the people to listen to news of battles being lost. The seized radio sets were stored in Singhdurbar, and it is said that they numbered about 400 and were returned to their owners later. In July 1946, the then Prime Minister Padma Shamser Rana declared that people could have personal radios. He also arranged to broadcast native radio, *Nepal Broadcasting* from Bijuli Adda in January 1948. But this could not last long. Padma Shamser Rana resigned from the post of the prime minister and a few months later, this transmission was also halted. This was not to last for long and in August 1948 it was revived again. Mohan Shamser, then Prime Minister, made arrangements to bring two transmitters in order to improve transmission.

In 1950, the Nepali Congress Party was fighting against the Rana autocracy and freedom fighters had also begun to run radio transmissions called *Prajatantra Nepal Radio* from Biratnagar, an eastern city in Nepal. This programme was used to broadcast their activities as well as other information which encouraged the general people to support their movement against the Rana rulers. When Nepali Congress' campaign succeeded, the new government shifted the radio programme to Kathmandu (Koirala 2005). Later on it was renamed *Nepal Radio* and it ultimately became *Radio Nepal*.

From that time radio broadcasting caught on in a big way. Until 1995 *Radio Nepal* was the only radio station to broadcast in Nepal. Then frequency modulation (FM) radio technology entered Nepal. In recent years, the private sector has become actively involved in FM broadcasting. There are now a total of 56 licensed FM stations, with more than 45 actually in operation. Because of the variety and growth of broadcasting stations in recent years, the number of sets in Nepal has increased. This followed the growth of listeners as well. The radio has become an intimate friend of many Nepalis.

After February 1st, 2005, the broadcasting scenario in Nepal drastically changed³. From then on FM radio stations have been permitted to broadcast only entertainment programmes. Before that, they used to broadcast news, talk shows and current affairs programmes, which had been very popular. FM stations and journalists are currently agitating against the present government over the issue of the freedom of the press.

In this paper, I will talk about some common research practices concerned with radio generally, and some Nepal-specific issues. I will then also briefly discuss the memoirs of radio listeners collected as part of a larger research project on radio in Nepal as ways to understand more about radio listening practices in Nepal.

Audience Research Practices

Radio audience and listening patterns can be researched in a number of ways. There may be differences in methods, objectives, importance and coverage of audience research. It is natural that every broadcaster wants to produce popular and effective programmes. Thus they need information about the number of listeners, their attitudes, tastes etc. On the other hand, advertisers also need to know the listening habits of people. They are interested in such information as peak listening hours, estimates of the total listeners, the popularity of particular programmes, listeners' demography etc. from market surveys. On the basis of this information, they decide which media or channel or programme is fit for advertising their product.

Listener surveys are a traditional and widely used method to know the listening patterns of a community. In this technique, information is generally gathered with the help of a questionnaire. Telephone interviews and diary keeping are also practiced. In diary keeping, diaries are distributed to the respondents who are asked to log their daily listening over a set period. In recent years, electronic devices have been developed instead. When connected to the radio set, these devices track information like frequency of broadcasts, time and duration of listening etc (Hendy 2000, 122). These methods are purely quantitative.

Besides these methods, some qualitative approaches like in-depth interviews, analysis of personal memoirs, focus group discussion, study of radio-related content in literature and other published materials, etc. are also being used in the field of audience research. According to Shaun Moores (1993, 115-6), such studies help to understand and analyze the interrelationship between broadcasting and daily social life⁴.

The traditional concept of listener studies presumes that listeners are passive in nature. There is another perspective which takes listeners as possible consumers of commercial products. Both these concepts treat the listener as a blank sheet of paper on which the media can write anything it wishes. This is what the 'effects' model in media research believes. This model is considered to be an insufficient account of the communication between media and the public, as it does not consider the audience and individuals with their own feelings, ideas and attitudes. As a reaction against this, a new model- 'uses and gratifications' - originated in the 1970s emphasizing the audience as an active agent. In this model, a researcher does not ask how the media affects the audience, but how the audience is using the media (McCullagh 2002, 153-5). In short, this suggests that audiences have particular needs and they actively turn to the media to use different contents for their satisfaction.

But both of these models to some extent do not consider the correlation between the audience and their social background, how they produce meanings from the media message and their exact relation with the media text. Studies done under these concepts are mostly objective and deal with numbers. A study in the subjective and qualitative aspects of media consumption is not attempted. How radio listening affects the individual is not addressed by these quantitative researches. In these models, a researcher's role is central and audience is treated merely as an object. Why people listen, in what circumstances, for how long and why? These questions have remained an amazingly underdeveloped area in academic researches too.

During the late 1980s, a new concept was further developed which focused on the domestic context of broadcasting. This is known as 'reception analysis'. In this concept, a researcher is curious about what the listeners take from the media. This new model assumes that it is the audience who ultimately produce the meaning from the media content. On the whole, this concept has adopted the social and cultural perspectives (Ang 1990, 157-161). So from this discussion, we can say that for the study of listening patterns, we need the exact perspectives from audience side.

In the Nepali context, we find no research on radio listening in its initial days. Later on, a few research practices about listening patterns have occurred. Listener surveys made the first move in 1969 (Taylor and Hamal 1969). At the time surveys were carried out either for a particular programme or for the entire programme of *Radio Nepal*. Large scale surveys in Nepal were carried out in 1974, 1989 and 1997, and which estimated the number of radio sets in Nepal to be 115,000, 1,127,000 and 1,722,000 respectively. This shows the gradual increase of radio ownership. According to the 1974 survey, a set cost Nepali Rs. 200 to 1300 (the lower amount is nearly equivalent to the salary of a primary teacher at that time). All of these surveys showed the dominant role of adult males in radio listening activities such as tuning the radio, choosing the frequency and the station etc. Listeners were found to share information and views in their circles of kinship and friendship. Listeners were fond of folk songs. Programmes of songs from Indian movies were ranked second in popularity in the 1974 survey. This was later on displaced by songs from Nepali movies and Nepali Modern songs. The news was also a highly popular programme. Other common popular programmes were *Chautari*, *Rodhi* and *Drama* (Parajulee 2004).

Besides such surveys, one can find a small number of audience research reports. Though the radio has become an intimate friend of many Nepalis, the study of radio listening is still an untouched field in Nepali social science. Furthermore, we can hardly find anything about listening to the radio in books and in literature. The reports from surveys are highly saturated by numbers, tables and figures. Counts

of audiences according to age, gender, environment, geographical location and social class are the major findings of these researches. In surveys, information is gathered with the help of questionnaires. These questionnaires are limited by the questions that they ask and audiences try to answer what they think the researcher is trying to find. Generally questionnaires are so designed that the researcher does not come across any difficulties. Possible answers of the respondent have already been presumed. To some extent, these quantitative data from surveys are significant for programme producers and advertisers. But these do not help us to understand the social and cultural background of listeners. There is no chance of getting qualitative information regarding listeners. An audience-oriented history of radio listening in this context is very necessary and memoirs provide much insight.

Encounters with the Radio Set

The memoirs of people in Nepal assist us in assuming that most Nepali people encountered the radio as the first form of modern communication technology. A few people from the older generation were familiar with the gramophone prior to encountering the radio. Kamal Dixit has described the arrival of a radio set in his family in 1938/39. This is a threshold of radio history in the memoirs we collected. I have already mentioned that common people were not allowed to listen to the radio at that time. In his memoir, Satya Mohan Joshi takes us to 1941/42 when he listened to the radio at a neighbour's house from behind closed doors. Both of these events took place in Kathmandu Valley. This restriction gradually declined over time and radio ownership spread over the country, though in small numbers.

In 1951, *Radio Nepal* was established and people could enjoy local news and local music in their own language. This attracted people and accelerated the growth of radio set ownership. After few years, portable transistors were seen in the markets. The memoirs reveal that people from Gurkha regiments in the British and Indian army were the main agents who introduced the radio into rural communities in Nepal. They used to bring a transistor while returning home on holiday from their service. However, people working in non-military services in India also used to bring home radios on visits home. They would carry the transistor in markets, fairs and while roaming around too. It was a subject of prestige to carry a radio. When they returned, they would either leave them with their family or sell them to local business personnel or service holders.

There were a few other media which helped the radio sets spread. In the Panchayat⁵ era, radio sets were distributed from the government side. Community Listening Centers were formed where people used to listen to the radio in groups. *Radio Nepal* used to broadcast a programme of distance learning. Some schools in rural communities also got radios under this programme. Another organization

which conducted educational programmes called *Radio Teachers Training Programme* also distributed radios at low prices to the teachers after training them. Most of the memoir-writers have beautifully described the first arrival of a radio set in their own, their neighbour's home or locality. The times they travelled a long distance just to have a glance of the chattering box is still glued in some of their memories. They were very curious about this new object. Some believed that tiny human beings were inside the radio.

A radio set was a high-status symbol and if one bought a radio it was a significant moment. Jitendra Saha from eastern Terai writes how the radio first arrived in his home:

...one day, in 1980/81, the father of my friend scolded me for playing with his radio and I returned home crying. After this event, my mother bought a radio selling her ornaments. Actually she asked one of our neighbours to go to Farbishganj (market place situated in India) to buy the radio. He brought a National Panasonic radio which drew everyone's attention in my family and neighbourhood as well. All the neighbours gathered to see the radio. That evening we invited the neighbours to the feast to celebrate the arrival of the radio.

People in their childhood would play with structures resembling radios made up of mud, stone, wood, etc. They would also try to imitate different voices coming from radio. Adults usually could be seen walking around with a radio hanging on their shoulders. In the late 1980s, this trend declined. However after the arrival of FM radios, interestingly, people again started to carry small radios with them.

Radio: A Luxury

Radio was not easily available until the 1960s. It had to be imported from foreign markets. It was so expensive that people with low incomes could not afford it. I already mentioned that Kamal Dixit got a chance to listen to it in Kathmandu in late 1930s. But there were many families who could not afford it even in 1990. The radio was still regarded as a luxury good. That is why there was a provision to pay taxes on radios. This was practiced till mid 1980s.

In 1946/47, Satya Mohan Joshi had paid Rs. 350 for a five banded 'Bush' radio. A local agent imported it for him from England. At that time Joshi was working as a government officer and his monthly salary was just Rs 70. Kedar Sharma's grandfather bought a radio for Rs 600 in 1967/68. Jhalak Subedi used to teach at a school in a rural area in 1980/81. At the time the radio cost around Rs 500 and Jhalak Subedi's desire to own a radio remained unfulfilled. He further explains why he could not manage the purchase:

Initially my salary was Rs 220 per month and reached Rs 250 later. I had a strong desire for a watch rather than a radio and I bought a watch from my first Dashain allowance.⁶ There were only two of us running the whole school. The headmaster Krishna Gurung used to go to Pokhara once a month. Then I would be alone. I was 18 years old and totally immature. Once I closed the school at 2 pm thinking that it was already 3.15 pm. The next day, people from the school management committee and the headmaster scolded me. So I preferred buying a watch to a radio.

This shows that even civil service post-holders found it difficult to afford a radio. Electric sources were not available outside Kathmandu. Consequently batteries were needed which were costly. In the initial days, lead acid batteries were in use which had to be imported from the Indian market. These batteries were big in size and risky to transport. If tipped over, the acid inside would damage other goods. Smaller dry cells appeared later for transistors but they were still costly and had to be replaced again and again. People would listen to only selected programmes in order to extend the cell's life and they would also keep the expired cells in the sun so that they could be re-used.

I have already mentioned that radio gave status to its owner. Krishna Dharabasi has written that it was common practice in his neighbourhood to take photographs with a radio hanging from the shoulder of one's body. It was a matter of great delight to do so. Even a stranger in a rural community would get more attention if he had a radio. People would offer the visitor large snacks just because they would get a chance to see and listen to the radio. Basanta Thapa takes us back to 1966/67 attending a picnic of an unknown family in Dharan. He was invited because he had a radio. This clearly indicates the craze for the radio and the common people's limited access to it. There is also a great deal of information which tells us the taxation system for owning a radio. Some village Panchayast would charge a tax for a radio set even during the 1980s. Again, this is because it was categorized as a luxury item.

Radio and Politics

During the Rana regime, ordinary people were hardly ever able to listen to the radio as only the nearest and the dearest to the Ranas had access to it. Those who wanted would listen in secret. The then despotic rulers wanted to keep the people away from the media. Although it was permitted to have radios later, radios were seized as the English were losing battles during the Second World War. Luckily, as mentioned before, people were later returned the radios as the war turned favourably for the British and their allies. Even Kamal Dixit, an elite member of society, reveals that the radio he used to listen to was seized during that period.

In addition to this, Ramesh Bikal revealed that he had listened to the *Prajatantra Radio* in Kathmandu in 1950/51 broadcast from Biratnagar. Radio news had become contextual during the general election in 1958/59. The radio provoked people's interest and it was used to find out about the results of the election.

Listening to radios was almost banned during the Rana rule. During the Panchayat system, the radio was used according to the state's interests. Preference was given to those programmes that could strengthen the monarchy, the Panchayat system and the central government. With the intention of popularizing the Panchayat state, appropriate news and the musical programmes were equally broadcasted. Pratyoush Onta elsewhere talks about the role of *Radio Nepal* in promoting the Panchayat system during its first five years (Onta 2005b). The most influential Panchayat documents and broadcasts about the Panchayat system and the then King Mahendra were collected in the form of a book and published on the occasion of the King's birthday every year. In this context, Onta argues that *Radio Nepal* had become the most powerful weapon to establish the King's autocratic Panchayat system (Ibid). The attempts of *Radio Nepal* to promote the Panchayat system as an ideal system can be traced in memoirs. In order to make the Panchayat system synonymous with all around development, songs like 'Panchai Ho Yo Des Banaideu' (Panchas, build the country!) were delivered through the radio. Around 1963/64, the East-West Highway was being constructed. In the name of encouraging the establishment of the highway as a major source of development, a programme entitled *Purba-Paschim Rajmarga* (East-West Highway) was run discussing its multifaceted activities.

It has already been mentioned that some villages were provided with a radio each under the concept of Community Listening Center in order to take the Panchayat system and its policies to every ear. Those radios were so adjusted that they could receive only the *Radio Nepal's* transmission and could not be traded elsewhere. The first phrase used to be 'His Majesty the King ...' and then the news followed. Social and political matters were shadowed by the speech of the prime minister, ministers and other Panchas. Political Parties were banned. The Congress and the Communist parties were not even mentioned on the radio. Their leaders and cadres were termed 'anti-national' elements (Whelpton 2005, 170).

It is clear that people lost their faith in *Radio Nepal's* news during the Students' Movement of 1979 and People's Movement of 1990. In those days, the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) had won the people's faith. Besides the BBC, some memoir-writers even claimed that they used to listen to the *All India Radio* too. Such radio news enhanced the trend of viewing the Panchayat political system critically. During 1990 *Radio Nepal* denounced democratic activists terming them anti-national elements, traitors etc. The same concept was imprinted in the mind of teenagers like Bina Sharma, Devraj Humagain and Dewan Rai due to their radio

listening habits. But the involvement of the elders and clean-imaged neighbours in the movement shattered their long-standing belief in *Radio Nepal* and the truth of its transmissions.

Even after the restoration of democracy, the spirit of radio transmission was molded by the vested interests of party politics. The changes in government brought changes even in the tone of the news. Programmes like *Ghatana ra Bichar*, *Parikerama*, *Parivesh* etc. were especially affected by politics and the productions of the programmes were filled with accusations.

Radio and 'Nepaliness'

The role of the radio in promoting the Panchayat philosophy has already been discussed. Nepali language, Daura-Suruwal-Topi, Hindu religion etc. were considered the symbols of 'Nepaliness' in the Panchayat philosophy. The radio was used to establish such assumptions. Similarly, in their seminal study, Scannell and Cardiff examined the role of the BBC in the process of nation-building by articulating a particular sense of Britishness (Scannell and Cardiff 1991). Only the Nepali language was used for broadcasting through *Radio Nepal*. Undoubtedly it contributed a lot to the enhancement of the Nepali language. Memoir-writers have also equally talked about *Radio Nepal's* negligence of other languages. News in Hindi and Newar languages and the *Jeevan Dabu* programme about Newar culture begun in 1951 was stopped by the Panchayat regime. During the Panchayat period, a monocultural policy of one language, one religion, one costume, etc. was adopted, which negatively impacted on different languages and ethnic groups. Satya Mohan Joshi has expressed his disappointment of that time. He seemed happy that the Newar language along with others got a free play in the radios after the restoration of democracy in 1990.

A programme in Radio Nepal entitled *Fulbari* broadcast in the different languages spoken in Nepal. Sharad KC is a native of Banke district which is thickly populated by the Tharu community. To his dismay, he could not listen to the songs in the language of his Tharu neighbours. They used to dance with joy even when Tharu songs of Dang were played on the programme. Despite their craze towards *Radio Nepal*, their language, culture, and heritage were discarded very shockingly which shattered their spirit. According to Jitendra Saha, the natives of Rangeli, a village from Morang district, used to be pleased if Rangeli was pronounced in *Radio Nepal*. The above mentioned statements reveal that *Radio Nepal* was Kathmandu centered.

Anil Bhattarai writes that the attempt to spread 'hill nationalism' and prepare an anti-Indian mindset in the public was practised through *Radio Nepal*. He used to listen to a programme named *Bideshma Basne Nepaliharuka Lagi Karyakram* which

taught him that India is the country of cheaters and cunning people. He recalls that it would address the job seekers in India from mountainous regions and appeal them to struggle in their own land.

People were dissatisfied with the onesided highlights of Hindu religion, Nepali language and *Daura Suruwal* and *Dhaka Topi*. The democratic system hasn't been able to root out the spirit of Nepaliness sprouted in the Panchayat system. Raghu Mainali argues that *Radio Nepal* which spoke against the Bhutan government's decision to make the 'Jonkha' language compulsory among Bhutanese, is hypocritical as it is stuck with the Nepali language and *Daura Suruwal Dhaka Topi*.

Radio: A Source of Knowledge

Radio remained an important medium of information and knowledge until the 1980s. Radio was the primary and only source of information at the beginning. This was later challenged by the newspaper first and the television later. Eventually, radio has been able to restore its popularity with the introduction of FM. Nowadays radio is not merely been an empty vessel to kill time, but a part of life itself. The memoir-writers reveal that they had experienced very difficult moments without a radio.

Formally different programmes were run on *Radio Nepal* to impart knowledge. Among them, programmes like *Chhatra Karyakram*, *Proudh Siksha Karyakram*, *Shaikshik Karyakram*, *Shikshakharuka Lagi Karyakram*, *School Prasaran Karyakram* etc. were noteworthy. These programmes had direct links with education. Furthermore, some educational programmes like *Bigyan Prabidhi* (science and technology) and others were broadcast through *Radio Nepal's* transmission. Many memoir-writers acknowledge their deep impact on them.

Radio imparted much more informal knowledge than the formal. In most of the writings, we can trace out its contribution in identifying one with the different corners of the world from a single room. It equally empowered his/her vocabulary too. In this regard, Kedar Sharma was proud to have learnt strange names like 'Indira Gandhi', 'Lebnan', 'Vietnam', 'Luna 17', 'Apollo 11', etc. through the programmes. Apart from this, it familiarized the listeners with their locale and the name of the foreign countries, Kings or head of the states. The information collected from the radio programmes energized them in participating in activities like quiz contests, oratory contests, debate competitions etc in their school. In addition to enriching the Nepali vocabulary, Kamal Mani Dixit and Shyamal credit the radio for their improvement in English too.

The radio was both an effective and the quickest medium to familiarize one with national and international happenings. Not only Gunaraj Luintel from Bhojpur

and Tirtha Shrestha from Pokhara, but also Dharendra Premarshi from Sarlahi and Biplab Pratik and Govinda Bartaaman from Kathmandu came to know about the death of then King Mahendra at the same time. The sombre music and news transmitted during the 13 days' mourning period still echo in their ears. Apart from this, the news of the deaths of then Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi and her son Sanjay Gandhi came to Nepal in no time through the radio.

Undoubtedly, radio had helped in widening the listener's imaginative power. Via the radio, the horizon of imagination is broadened as it gives nothing more than the sound unlike visual-based media like television. The radio plays a vital role in nurturing the imagination. Radio constructs an ingenious world through programmes like sports, news, dramas etc. In this way radio has been activating the listeners (Douglas 1999, 355).

The writings we have discussed have established radio as a mine of information and equally, as a base for the construction of an imaginative world. In this regard, Babita Basnet writes:

... radio has prepared a foundation to imagine things like motor vehicles, electric lamps etc. For me who was brought up in an extremely remote and underdeveloped village, urban facilities such as motors, electricity, cinema, were limited to only the imagination. I had copied the images of shimmering electric lamps, sounds of the motor-horn, speedily driven bikes, telephone conversation etc. in my mind's eye through radio dramas. Otherwise there was no ground to dream of such facts in such a remote area.

In this way radio had empowered Basnet's imagination who was brought up in a distant district- Khotang. The long standing effects of the information went on appearing gradually. With the news of demise of Indira Gandhi, tears welled up in rural Nepali girl Babita Basnet's eyes. Neither was Gandhi her relative nor had Basnet ever seen her. Even then, it was only the radio that established her one sided intimacy with Gandhi. Therefore, Gandhi's death had pricked her heart badly. This indicates how the radio narrowed the world.

In addition to news, other programmes also had greatly enriched people's access to knowledge and information. *Bal Karyakram* and *Sahitya Sansar* transmitted through *Radio Nepal* stimulated the listeners' literary mind. The memoir-writer's curiosity and uncontrollable thirst for such programmes can be seen in their writings. Some of them have directly (visiting studios) or indirectly (sending letters) participated in programmes. Some other programmes were also broadcast with literary capsules. The radio was even found to be a time keeping device. People used to reset the time on their watches with the radio programmes.

Radio in Music

Most of the memoir-writers preferred musical programmes to the news and other programmes in their early days. Not only from *Radio Nepal*, a large number of listeners enjoyed songs of Indian movies to the fullest through stations outside Nepal namely *All India Radio*, Radio Ceylon and *Akaswani Kharsang*. A programme of requested songs from Indian movies in *Radio Ceylon* named *Binaka Geetmala* was very popular among Nepalese listeners too. This programme and its host Amin Sayani were highly remembered in the memoirs. During the 1980s, Indian movie songs were dominant. *Radio Nepal* also played a large number of Indian songs so its transmission was enjoyed even in the bordering Indian states. Gradually, the domination of Indian songs lost its grip on Nepali listeners who were later captured by Nepali songs.

Nepali music actually became successful with the establishment of *Radio Nepal*. *Radio Nepal* conserved and promoted Nepali folk songs. Therefore, songs from the east of Nepal had free play in the west of Nepal and vice versa. The memoir-writers were highly impressed by Nepali songs. They used to listen and sing along with the song on the radio. Some even made a big collection of the songs played by the radio. Such collections were sung among the peer group to pass time. Among the memoir-writers, Dharendra is still involved in this field. He agrees that radio had a large hand in drawing him to this field. But some listeners have also critically commented on the words of songs. They are sorry to find those women and other communities dehumanized and belittled in songs. Example of songs they found offensive are 'Laibari lai, Laibari lai, Gaunka Thiti Sabailai' (yay, yay, girls of the village for all), 'Ramra Ramra Taruniko Poi Mareko Jati' (it had better the death of beautiful young woman's husband) etc.

Radio: An Intimate Friend

As the source of entertainment, radio has been a true companion for many. This research shows that people used to listen to it for peace and comfort as well as entertainment. It has also helped in strengthening familial bonds because of the trend of collective listening during the leisure periods.

The radio would bring changes in one's daily life. Unique programmes used to echo on *Radio Nepal* on every Saturday, the weekly holiday. Among the rest, radio drama especially used to draw much attention. In this regard, Binaya Kasajoo remembers:

On Saturday, it was almost like a regular task for the students, teachers and others to be gathered at Ridi River for bathing and washing. They would not miss the drama at any cost. Either they would go there after listening to the

drama or return home hurriedly before its broadcasting time. Some used to take the transistor radio with them and enjoy listening and bathing/washing simultaneously at the bank. It is somewhat a means to show off.

That day would make listeners like Deepa Gautam extraordinarily active. Her sister's playmates, soon after the morning meal, used to be assembled at her home and talk about the previous week's drama while waiting for that day's drama impatiently. Shashikala Manandhar would hurriedly prepare the evening meal on Fridays before her favorite programme *Rasrang* started.

I have already noted that the practice of carrying the radio for companionship was mainly found in the case of men. Babita Basnet recalls her uncle's rebuke 'daughters must not be roaming with the radio' when she was found doing so. Many memoir-writers have talked only about the listening practices of their male elders. Some have also guessed that women could not listen due to endless household works. But some certainly could have had access to it, while working or afterwards. Because clearly men who were also busily involved in manual labour, were listening while they worked, killing two birds with one stone.

The radio had been a close friend for Shyamal during the referendum in 1979 when he had been campaigning for a multiparty democracy system while underground. The same was the experience of Bhagirath Yogi when he was detained for four months during Satyagraha in 1985⁷. In many cases, the radio not only provided good companionship, but also a means of social intimacy. Collective listening brought the friends and the family members together. This lubricated the social relationship too as it gives subjects to talk about among themselves (Mendelsohn 1964, 245). The discussions between the radio listeners and the exchange of ideas have also been experienced by the memoir-writers. Nowadays in the context of Nepal, a large number of listener clubs are springing up. They are issue-specific and are found to be running collective listening to programmes, with discussions on the content broadcast and may also involve enrolling in social welfare activities (Adhikari 2004).

Though the radio is considered as a one way communication medium, there are still grounds to argue that it is two way. Some memoir-writers participated in the radio programmes through letters with comments, queries or creative writing such as short stories, poems, comedies etc. Though it was hardly noticeable in the initial days of radio, the newer generation has been found active in this practice today.

Conclusion

The media plays a significant role in fashion, food habits, vision and other behaviour. Every person, institution and social culture is influenced to some

degree by the visible and invisible power of the media. In the past, the radio was the most influential media in Nepal. Its effect on the listeners' daily life is complex and long lasting.

In these days, people are in the process of being active listeners. The practice of two way communication is being nurtured. Similarly, the tendency of critically filtering the contents of broadcasts is rising. As in uses and gratification theory, people accept what pleases them and avoid the programmes deemed unworthy. Even a programme from a single media can have different impacts on the listeners from the same community. However, widely used survey methodologies of listeners are unable to map out such differences. Therefore the type of study and research methodology illustrated in this paper is helpful in learning about radio listening tendencies in different social contexts.

This research on the radio listening experience of some Nepalis has unfolded different layers of social life. Obviously, the 64 memoirs on which this research is based cannot represent the Nepali experience fully, but they do give a taste of some of the experiences. These memoirs dig out political, economical, social and musical aspects of radio listening. The environment was not favourable during the Rana regime. Only after the introduction of democracy (1951 and 1990) or the establishment of *Radio Nepal* did radio listening fervour rise. But during the Panchayat system, it was mostly a tool of the system. In a true sense, it also became an instrument to popularize Nepaliness.

The attentive listeners had already encountered the depth of Panchayat nationalism so they had looked for alternatives like *BBC*, *All India Radio* or others. *Radio Nepal's* contribution is certainly praiseworthy in promoting Nepali music. Nevertheless, it is not untouched by the accusation of broadcasting songs with the ingredients that discriminate on the grounds of sex or ethnicity. The facts derived from the past listener survey like collective listening practices, male domination of the radio, peak listening habits during morning and the evening etc. are also visible in this study. In their memoirs, the writers have presented their listening experiences freely as a listener – which would not have been possible if a survey had been used. Surveys can not give full details of listening patterns in the past and over time. This is because the respondents may not understand survey questions correctly. Similarly, the questionnaire may not give importance to things and experiences the respondents remember. That is why radio listening experience can be traced in fuller ways by such memoirs.

I do not claim that all the memoirs are perfect and fully correct from every angle. Stated memories may be exaggerated, distorted, and even made up. However, it is clear that qualitative analysis should be carried out side by side with surveys⁸.

Notes

¹ The Ranas are an elite caste group that held power in Nepal until 1950.

² This and the following paragraph are based on Onta (2005b).

³ In February 1, 2005 King Gyanendra sacked the then government and formed a new one under his direct chairmanship.

⁴ Moores has studied the initial days of radio and its effect on then domestic life in England. For this, he interviewed the people who had been alive in the 1920s and 1930s.

⁵ The autocratic Panchayat political system existed in Nepal from 1961 to 1990.

⁶ Dashain is one of the festivals in Nepal and at that time people working in the civil service receive a bonus equivalent to one month's salary.

⁷ A Gandhian concept, associated with peaceful civil disobedience.

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