

EVERY tuesday

One Week in One Day

4 40 years of Prabhat

5 Gangadhar Gadgil

6 International Music Day

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Wisdom of Words

Aditya Vyas

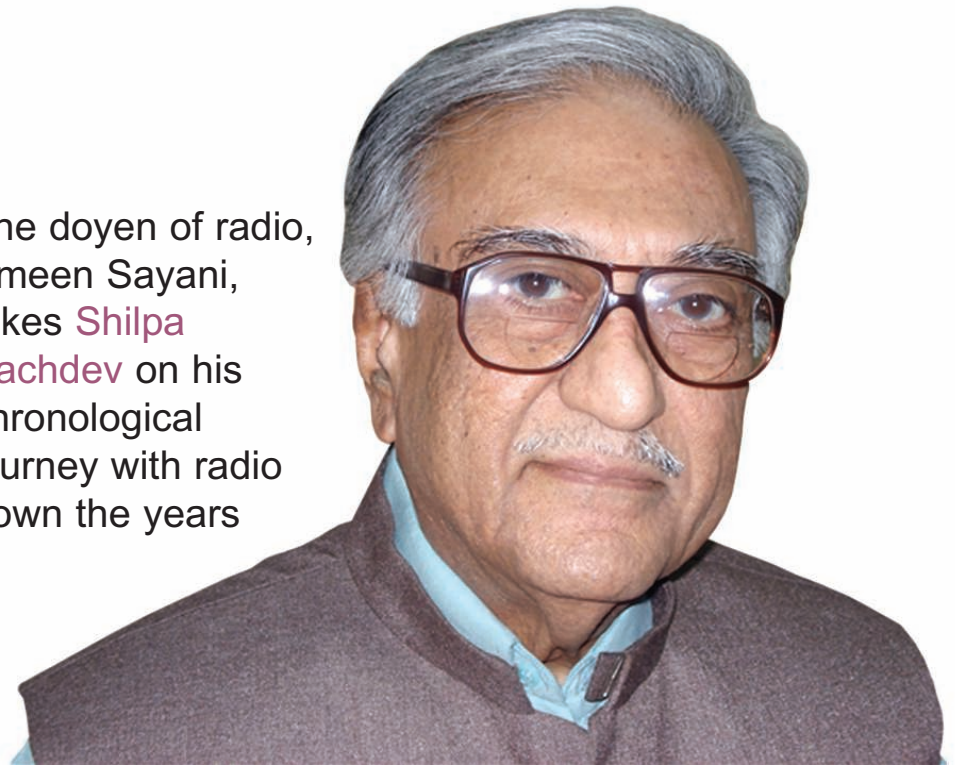
The art of writing has had many heroes in the history of literature. Similarly, it is the case with speaking, many a great orator creating history with their speeches. Writing and speaking are the two forms of communication where words are essentially used for expression as opposed to music or photography. It is then imperative, to inquire a few facets about words and their evolution.

Words originated from sound, we can say our vocal chords were the progenitors of words. The evolution must have begun from humans trying to express their emotions out of the reflexive urge of the human mind to tell, to express, dramatize, and last but not the least, to emote and convey. From there on humans have formed a society and not remained just a herd or a flock who are together for natural reasons. The development of language has been the single most important thing in human history without which knowledge, arts, science could not have been exposed as well as they are now.

From mere syllables then comes the formation of words and sentences. From mere utility words were used for amusement and that became the beginning of poetry. Then amusement turned to entertainment and poetry achieved higher benchmarks, finally humans reached a level of pure reflection, much higher than mere entertainment, and at this point poetry became sublime and words became chaste.

The wisdom of knowing when to use which word has, it seems been eroding over time and the old quality of clear, intelligent, and sensible writing or speaking is now rarely seen. Though there are very good writers and excellent journalists even today and they are bearing the responsibility of manifesting the truth as it is, a few power-hungry newsmongers are spoiling the environment. Modern media are often seen misusing and to some extent abusing words and even the content. The recent incident of a young girl committing suicide due to a distorted news item is a scary symptom of how irresponsible the media has become in terms of principles and ethics. They have lost even the basic dignity that a responsible medium should have.

The doyen of radio, Ameen Sayani, takes Shilpa Sachdev on his chronological journey with radio down the years



Memoirs of a master

The early years

I am not just going to take you 50 years back but precisely 69 years back. When I was a young boy recording for AIR in Mumbai studio, I was an English broadcaster, not Hindi. My brother Hamid - who was my guru and a very great broadcaster - introduced me to radio. He would take me to stations and make me participate in small things, here and there. I was a Gujarati student and an English broadcaster and had-

n't studied Hindi. In those days, AIR was really an 'akashvani' because it had the stature, allure, excellence and authority of something that everybody heard with pleasure and believed in. To assess AIR of those days right up till independence, I would say it was one of the finest broadcasting stations in the world, at par with BBC with all sorts of programmes, features, dramas, news; and all the people who participated in it were top-notch - it was considered a great honour to go to AIR to record.

Why Radio Ceylon

Unfortunately in the early 50's the Minister for

Information and Broadcasting, Dr. BV Keskar took a number of wrong steps that hit AIR very badly. AIR apart from being the treasure house of classical material was also a treasure house of Indian film music, because in those days Indian film music had already stepped into its golden period. If you remember all the great music directors, singers, and lyric writers of those days were all

working together especially from the early 40's right up to the 80's - they were top quality. Now at that time, Dr. Keskar unfortunately banned Indian film music from AIR, so the entire popular listenership turned away. It had a tremendous impact because Indian Hindi film music was the greatest source of home entertainment in India - there was no television. Secondly, it was the greatest medium for the promotion of the Indian national language in its simplest and most beautiful form i.e. in Hindustani. If you remember, Gandhiji was trying hard to get Hindustani adopted as the national language of India, as he knew that Hindi

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Interview

would perhaps become too difficult and not remain the language of the masses. But for various reasons the government adopted Hindi as the national language. At the same time Radio Ceylon, and to some extent Radio Goa, had started playing Hindi film music in a very big way. When the British left India and Ceylon, there was, under Lord Mountbatten, a south-east Asia command which had its own huge short-wave transmitters put up near Colombo. The British, gave these to the Government of Ceylon. On these transmitters, the commercial service of Radio Ceylon started in Hindi, English, Tamil and Sinhalese too, but the all Asia service was in the former three languages. When people realised that their favourite Hindi music was being played on Radio Ceylon, listeners who were fond of film music went there.

In those days, there were no proper announcers in Radio Ceylon. Around the early fifties, an agency for Radio Ceylon for commercial purposes was formed in Bombay - an all India agency and they also started a production wing. As it happened, my brother Hamid was selected as the Programme Director of the programme wing of the agency of Radio Ceylon in India. He got together some excellent Hindi people who were accustomed to Hindi broadcasting, and excellent programmes / sponsored programmes and commercials came into being.

Some of these sponsored programmes went on to become absolute legends. For example there were two programmes for Ovaltine - the *Ovaltine Pbulvari* where new

young singers were asked to sing, and there was *Bonnisans Quiz Kids* where we had a panel of brilliant students who used to answer questions sent in by the audience both in Hindi and English, which was a hit. It was Radio Ceylon's first and extremely popular quiz programme. Hamidbhai used to do it in English and a man called Naqi Rizvi used to do the Hindi version.

The starting years

In those days I was trying very hard to get my brother Hamid to give me some work, but he said, "Look you are an English broadcaster, a Gujarati student and you haven't studied Hindi properly. I already have very good people for Hindi and for English I am doing just two-three programmes, which I am handling, so you won't be able to get much chance there."



I decided to listen to the Hindi programme recordings and try and enter there. So I started listening to these programmes and mainly to one Bal Govind Shrivastava who was the producer and a good writer too and there was the actor Manmohan Krishan, who was one of his main comperes. At this point I focused on improving my Hindi. I knew written Hindustani but my language was full of Gujarati and an English accent.

Finally I was given this half-hour programme - *Geetmala* - it was not a hit parade then, it was a programme where 7-8 songs would have to be re-arranged. I worked very hard on the first script. It was on the commitment that I would have to script it, speak it, produce it and check the mail because there was a small Rs. 100 competition attached. We were expecting about 30-40 letters but the first programme brought in 9000 letters. Suddenly people woke up, ohh Radio Ceylon is so popular and then the letters rose to a peak of 65,000 a week - after which it became a hit parade and went on to become an absolute wildfire success.

Vividh Bharati

There were many other programmes too where Radio Ceylon built up its listenership like *S. Kumar's Filmi Muqadme*. At that time, there was no commercial service on AIR and

Radio Ceylon had taken away a lot of their Hindi popular programme listenership. Of course they still had many good plays and features and were branching into various languages of India, so they couldn't be totally beaten except in the popular listenership. Also AIR had become slightly stiff, sedate and very boring. People were not allowed to have fun, which broadcasting or any medium should be allowed to do. So they had been losing out to Ceylon.

We at Ceylon were told the same and advised 'do anything you wish and have fun', so we let our hair down and went about doing a lot of *dboom-dbaam*. Ceylon became extremely popular. At a very rough estimate, especially the Hindi service of Ceylon, we were reaching not only to the whole of Asia, but all the Arab countries, all of Africa, Pakistan, Nepal - everybody was listening to it. They had three transmitters on short wave but they covered all this area. Now AIR finally realised what had happened. India was losing revenue and listenership, so to counter Radio Ceylon, *Vividh Bharati* came into being, based on Ceylon's programming pattern more or less, but it was a little sedate.

There was a very fine chief producer in-charge, called Pandit Narendra Sharma. Later, people like Lokendra Sharma, Kamleshwar and lots of other people joined who brought it up quite well. But it was only in the late fifties, when *Vividh Bharati* became a commercial service, that listeners started getting interested. There were no sponsored programmes, only commercials on a few stations and film music had also come back so people started regaining interest. They were broadcasting on medium wave transmitters with short range, so wherever there was range, the reception was excellent but outside that it couldn't be heard - so in all those pockets in between, Radio Ceylon was still filling up. It was not until 1970 that sponsored programmes were introduced on *Vividh Bharati* - and I am proud to say mine was the first sponsored programme called '*Saridon ke Saathi*' - a 15-minute programme where filmstars were invited to talk about their illustrious friends. And immediately after that a 15-minute programme started called '*Kobinoor Geet Gunjar*' that was compered by an outstanding broadcaster, Pandit Vinod Sharma. There was one English programme on Vividh Bharati's Hindi service that became a rage - the *Bournvita Quiz Contest* compered by my brother Hamid, which I took over after he passed away. That was my first coming back to English after being in Hindi for so long. These popular programmes ran right up till 1980.

In 1979, Vasant Sathe became the Minister for Information and Broadcasting, a very open minded person. At a seminar on radio and television, I talked about the extremely poor condition of reproduction of material in *Vividh Bharati*. Within a week, things started improving immediately and by 1980s *Vividh Bharati* was booming because reception of Radio Ceylon had deteriorated.

The downturn of radio

But again in 1980 AIR committed a huge

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mistake when they raised the rates by five times. Within two months the business became one-fifth and that's how *Vividh Bharati* again started losing out. Also TV had started, so people went towards the new toy. Radio Ceylon was already suffering from bad reception and *Vividh Bharati* was suffering from bad rating policies. Doordarshan became the 'in' thing.

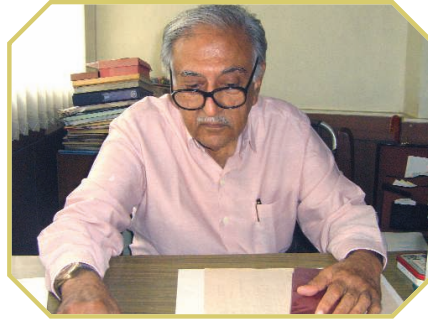
The FM revolution

It was only many years later that the Government decided to privatise radio and then people like *Radio Midday* and *Times FM* started doing very well. They did so well that the Government got a little flustered and chucked them all out and then started with a new process of bidding, thinking that they could make more money. The first two biddings did not work out. The third did and was continued, but in the fourth stage it was explained to the Government that the high revenue that they were charging would not allow these private radio stations to last. So a system of revenue-sharing came into being and then many radio stations started coming up. I think by the end of this year there will be atleast 350 private radio stations going.

New ways

With broadcasting turning into narrow casting, it was a huge change as it was a different kind of broadcasting that evolved. We at AIR grew up on hardbound techniques where we had to have a script and were given proper training. There was nothing

impromptu but when I heard the first *Radio Midday*, I found that they were chatting and that was a breath of fresh air. The idea is very nice, where you can relax and everyone enjoys it. But it also had a disadvantage, an announcer is supposed to be on the beam for 3-4 hours - but how long can a person talk - so it became a little jarring. Also on all stations people were talking in the same style



and playing the same songs again and again, guided by a computer. In this FM mould, the announcer cannot select his favourite songs and play what he likes. He has to stick to what the computer has been fed; basically songs that are top popularity and heavy beat and so all the stations sound the same. Unless there is station identification, you can't differentiate. Some stations started realising this and subsequently realised the importance of old music.

Views of a pro

I feel that lot of changes have happened - some good, some bad - but I feel as long as there are people who care for radio, who love radio, who are dedicated to the medium and who are willing to work for it and create programming that appeals and blends into the camaraderie of the talker and the listener, radio will never be killed by any medium. But they must learn to inject variety into it. There will soon come a time I hope where there will be specialised radio stations.

The problem is everyone wants to make money so everyone is playing popular music. So one has to differentiate and that will attract competition. And only the best will survive. It's just like TV where there are 200 channels but at a time you look at only one. A tremendous waste. I feel there is a lot to be learnt but there may come a time where radio will give TV a stiff fight. Because you must remember that among all the various advantages that radio has, the greatest is that you don't have to be weighed down by the radio, you can listen to it anywhere you like!

More than that, in radio, the listener does half the work. The listener starts to use his imagination, there is such a large involvement in the sound that the listener starts visualising and that's why we senior broadcasters often say that the best radio programme is one that you can see.

Multi-faceted personality

With a talent for painting and writing, Olaf Van Cleef, is the scion of the Van Cleef dynasty and a counsellor for high range jewellery at Cartier.

In spite of living in Paris, his paintings have the taste of India's art tradition. He makes use of watercolours and includes mythological figures, birds, cows, elephants and the stick figure. His specialty is that he uses swarovski crystal and bits of chocolate wrappers, which creates a different effect. For this unique art he spends around twelve hours to stick the bits of chocolate wrappers.



His exhibition is being held in India by Concern India Foundation at Coomaraswamy Hall, Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Vastu Sangrahalaya from September 22 to September 25. The scion of the Tagore dynasty, painter Manob Tagore will present his paintings. He has organised eight one-man exhibitions for Olaf all over, with shows in Calcutta, Singapore, Ahmedabad and Zurich/ Neuchatel (Switzerland).



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