

EVOLUTION AND ROLE OF THE RADIO IN THE ASIA PACIFIC REGION

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(English Version)

Though radio transmission was established a few years before the twentieth century, it was only after the First World War that real progress was made in the Western world. The BBC was set up in the UK in 1922 and private radio operators made their initial forays in America and a few advanced countries. Some Asian Pacific countries started their own experiments the same decade and India, Australia, Korea and Japan are among those that took an active interest. By the 1930s, China, Turkey, Thailand and a few others also started radio transmission but the real leap forward in this region actually took place when colonial countries ramped up their services in these colonised countries when they were severely threatened by Japan during the Second World War.

Soon after this war, the European powers left this zone and the new independent or rejuvenated nations set up their own public radio corporations, as this was the best method of mass communication. The CRI of China, RRI of Indonesia, the RTM of Malaysia and the KBS of Korea are good examples, while countries like India and Iran started rapid expansion to bind their nations stronger. Thus, the first major role that radio played in the new nations was to bring their people together in one conscious emotional bonding, especially where cultural or ethnic complexities existed.

The 'national language' or standard pronunciations or spelling were reinforced and a pride in the history and heritage of the people was underlined, rather successfully. There may be exceptions, but in general, it is a fact that the radio reached the official or common narrative to distant corners of the liberated colonies or in the post-War nations, as nothing before ever could. Songs and radio plays as well as news and informed discussions sewed common identities through a novel unique medium. Differences that exist in every society, possibly because of limited interaction and lesser consciousness of other social groups and contesting identities, were tackled by the national radio services with dexterity as they stressed on commonness and on harmonious relations. Radio plays and history based programmes instilled 'patriotism' and a pride in the past through freshly-strengthened cultic heroes. Its stirring appeals helped rally national unity during wars and other

crises. This was hardly the case in the West, where the radio may not have been called upon to play in forging national consciousness to such a degree.

Radio played a critical role in the Asia Pacific region not only in strengthening national identities, but it performed a unique function in national development, especially in spreading consciousness of health, hygiene, pre and post-natal care mass education. It helped form new social habits, like queuing up, and in orthodox societies, it did wonders in gender sensitisation and women's welfare. Whether it be in the eradication of polio and malaria or in the control of cholera and other water-borne diseases, the nation states in this region now possessed the most powerful tool of mass communication in their radio services, that none had ever before.

As rural societies moved into the modern world it was the radio that became their constant companions, as they usually spoke to them in their own tongues. Agriculture and its modernisation was a prime challenge to all less developed and developing nations, and most of those in this Asia Pacific area fell into this group. Before the television arrived properly in the 1980s, it was the radio that single-handedly brought messages on exact agronomic practices that were essential for every crop during each season. Besides, it helped in the development of agro-based industries and in fostering SMEs, small and medium enterprises.

But what radio services are we talking about? While Short Wave could rule in splendour till about the 1970s, traversing huge distances with national and international messaging, it was the Medium Wave that really succeeded more effectively in connecting the new nations, from the 1970s till the last decade of the 20th century. Besides, satellite links that arrived some four decades ago, helped connect radio services in distant corners. It meant that radio programmes could be heard even if the originating and relay stations were not directly connected through terrestrial connections. Lastly, the transistor brought in portability and affordability in receiver sets, giving radio a quantum leap in the 1960s and this democratisation made the radio the most powerful medium.

FM services showed a dramatic rise in the present century and even a decade before and many nations have shut down SW and are giving lesser priority to MW. While several countries welcomed the arrival of private enterprise FM in urban areas, this also meant the fragmentation of unified command structures of national radios. Public broadcasters have played a heroic role in the new and developing nations of Asia and the Pacific for several decades but as nations 'mature', citizens often clamour for more variety and this is now the new challenge among older radio services in this vast swathe of the globe.