

Participatory Approaches to Message Design

'Jeevan Saurabh', a Pioneering Radio Serial in India for Adolescents

The article investigates the experience of All India Radio, the Indian national radio network, with 'Jeevan Saurabh' ('Fragrance of Life'), a 13 episode radio series, which addressed various problems faced by adolescents, especially issues relating to teenage sexuality, intergenerational conflicts, career choices, and personality development. First broadcast on All India Radio in 1988, 'Jeevan Saurabh' broke new ground in terms of (1) addressing hitherto sensitive, 'taboo' issues i.e. teenage sexuality, and (2) employing a participatory message design strategy. The programme used the actual 'voices' of the target audience (the Indian youth), their parents, and experts to establish pressing adolescent problems and explore possible solutions.

In the article, the authors describe the process through which 'Jeevan Saurabh' was conceived, produced, and implemented in India, emphasizing its participatory approach to message design. They analyze the intense listeners' feedback to the series, highlighting the high levels of audience involvement with the radio series.

USHA BHASIN
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I think I'm neither a child nor an adult. What do I do and say?

—Vijaylakshmi, a 13 year-old girl, expressing her dilemma in 'Jeevan Saurabh'.

My parents don't believe in me now. A few years ago, they loved me dearly. Why?

—Avinash, a 16 year-old boy, expressing his feelings in 'Jeevan Saurabh'.

In recent years, several mass communication scholars have advocated a participatory approach to message design and research (Mody, 1991; Melkote, 1991; Servaes et al., 1996). Involving the target audience in identifying, formulating, and creating mass media messages have consistently yielded more relevant, realistic, and effective media programmes (Singhal and Rogers, 1989; Cambridge, 1992; Food and Agriculture Organization, 1987; Risopatron and Spain, 1980; Piotrow et al., 1997). However, the process of creating participatory mass media programmes is time-consuming, often more expensive (at

least initially), and fraught with challenges, a reason why such programmes are not the broadcasting norm in most developing countries, but are rather the exception.

This paper investigates the experience of All India Radio, the Indian national radio network, with 'Jeevan Saurabh' ('Fragrance of Life'), a 13-episode radio series broadcast in 1988, which used a participatory message design process to address various adolescents' problems such as sexuality, intergenerational conflicts, career choices, and personality development. The participatory message design process of 'Jeevan Saurabh', including its conception, production, implementation, and evaluation is described. We analyze the listeners' feedback, highlighting the intense audience involvement in the content of the radio series. 'Jeevan Saurabh', first broadcast on All Radio in 1988, broke new grounds in terms of (1) addressing sensitive, 'taboo' issues i.e. teenage sexuality, and (2) its participatory message format which used the actual 'voices' of the target audience (the Indian youth) to establish their problems and seek possible solutions through expert advice.

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Bridging the Practitioner-Researcher Gap

This paper represents a collaborative effort between a media practitioner (Bhasin) and scholar-researcher

(Singhal). Bhasin has served as a writer, producer, director, and manager for All India Radio (AIR) for over 20 years and Singhal has been studying the effects of mass media programme in India for over 14 years. 'Jeevan Saurabh' was Bhasin's 'baby', she worked on the radio services full-time and alone.

The sections in the present article on the creative and participatory production process of 'Jeevan Saurabh' draw primarily upon Bhasin's experience, and hence written from her vantage point. The analysis of listeners' reactions to 'Jeevan Saurabh' was primarily conducted by Singhal.

The present article also draws upon the following data sources: (1) the scripts of the 13 episodes and their audiotape² recordings, (2) letters written by 6,000 registered youth listeners of 'Jeevan Saurabh' who represented a captive audience for the radio series, (3) other listeners' letters received by All India Radio in response to 'Jeevan Saurabh' including those written by parents, teachers, and others, and (4) the press coverage received by 'Jeevan Saurabh' in the local and national media in India.

Research Questions

We organized our inquiry on 'Jeevan Saurabh' around several research questions.

1. *What were the various^{steps} in the participatory message-design process employed to produce 'Jeevan Saurabh'?*
2. *What was the nature of listeners' feedback to the broadcast of 'Jeevan Saurabh'?*

What did the listeners say about the production attributes of 'Jeevan Saurabh', its mix of entertainment appeals and educational content, its relevance to youth topics, its handling of 'taboo' issues, and its degree of realism?

3. *Who listened to 'Jeevan Saurabh'? Did it spur interpersonal communication between listeners?*
4. *What role did the narrator of 'Jeevan Saurabh' play in enhancing audience involvement in the radio serial?*
5. *How did 'Jeevan Saurabh' impact the lives of its highly-involved listeners?*
6. *What were some limitations of 'Jeevan Saurabh'?*

A Participatory Message Design Process

The idea for the programme was floated in 1987 by the then Director General of All India Radio, Amrit Rao Shinde. Shinde was concerned about the rise of youth unrest in urban and rural India, reflected in the lack of discipline among youth, and their lack of respect for parents, elders, and established social norms. After some deliberations, a producer, Usha Bhasin was selected by Shinde in late 1987 to work full-time on 'Jeevan Saurabh'. She was given complete freedom to create a programme dealing with problems faced by the youth.

Bhasin began her full-time work on programme in May, 1988. In order to learn more about pressing youth issues, she visited various institutions that dealt with youth topics, for instance, Saheli ('Friend'), a non-governmental organization in south Delhi which provides

counseling services for youth; the departments of psychology and psychiatry at the All India Institute of Medical Sciences; the department of social sciences at the University of Delhi; the Indian Council of Social Science Research, and high schools in Delhi, especially those which had youth counselors. While these visits were useful, Bhasin felt that she was not making much headway in formulating the content for the programme. The information she gathered on youth issues from these sources was diffused and quite ambiguous. Even a scouring of the available research literature did not yield a handy list of youth problems.

So Bhasin turned to her target audience, perhaps the youth themselves could shed light on what ailed them. In Delhi, Bhasin visited with youth on college campuses, in high schools, in their homes, in counseling clinics, and in drug de-addiction centres, recording their impressions, grievances, and angst. She also spoke with youth who were involved with All India Radio's Yuva Vani ('Youth Voice') channel, a youth programming service. 'Breaking-in' with the youth was difficult. Most of them, understandably, were hesitant to share their innermost feelings. Some were shy; others afraid. Several questioned her motive. Bhasin was eventually able to gain their trust. When the proverbial ice was broken, the irritations, anger, and loneliness of the youth came through stridently. Many said 'we have no where to go for advice'; many blamed their parents for not understanding their stress, feelings, and daily pressures. Some even met with Bhasin, in private, to vent their feelings.

Of special concern to the youth were the physiological changes that their bodies underwent. For instance, adolescent girls said they were often perplexed, rather baffled, by the onset of menstruation, the development of breasts, and the sudden changes in their parents' behaviour regarding how they should 'properly' conduct themselves now that they had come of age. Adolescent boys said they were often embarrassed by their cracking voices and their sudden spurt in height. Many felt guilty about the involuntary release of semen while sleeping (referred to as 'nightfall'). 'This is not right, something is wrong with me', many felt. Some adolescent boys were proud of the complements they received for their many physique and sprouting of facial hair; others said they were 'picked on' for the lack thereof. It was clear to Bhasin that most adolescents, both male and female, were uncomfortable about these physiological, relational, and interactional changes. They did not comprehend that these changes were a natural and universal phenomenon. No one, including their parents, had told them otherwise.

Bhasin wondered how the parents felt about these youth problems. Could they be so completely unaware about the pressures that their adolescent children wrestled with on a daily basis? To find this out, she turned to several parents, including the parents of several previously-interviewed youth, who openly held a grudge against their mothers and fathers. The parents seemed quite satisfied with how they performed their role and responsibility vis-a-vis their children; many felt they had appropriately prepared them for the physiological changes associated

with adolescence. Several parents, however, seemed dissatisfied with the behaviour of their adolescent child, reflected in such remarks as 'they don't study enough', 'they don't help in household work', 'they become angry when questioned', and others. Clearly, a big divide existed between the parents' and adolescents' perceptions of each others' roles and responsibilities.

Bhasin listened to an estimated 60 to 70 hours of interviews with adolescents and parents, recorded on about 125 audiotapes with about 200 respondents. Several key adolescent issues that deserved attention bubbled-up from these recordings. If the recorded interviews did not cover an issue in a comprehensive or a balanced manner, she returned to the field to overcome this gap. For instance, if the youth interviewees mostly hailed from an urban area, she sought out rural youth. Once the critical issues confronting the Indian adolescents/youth were identified, she organized the 13 episodes of 'Jeevan

Saurabh' around them (Table 1). For each issue, subject matter specialists—physiologists, psychiatrists, psychologists, school and medical counselors, gynecologists, personality development experts, and career advisors—were selected. Care was taken to ensure that each specialist dealt with real-life youth issues in their day-to-day professional lives. Each subject matter specialist was then invited to All India Radio, where Bhasin discussed with them the nuances associated with each youth topic. Problems of the youth and their parents were analyzed by the subject matter specialists for the delivery of an expert opinion. An assessment was made by the subject matter specialist about how prevalent the identified problem was in Indian society, and then scientific explanations were provided to help the listeners seek solutions to them. The key was to identify common adolescent problems so that the experts' opinions could benefit a large number of youth listeners. The expert

Table 1
Adolescent Problems Addresses in the Content of 'Jeevan Saurabh'

Episode #	Content Description
Episode #1	An introduction to adolescents' problems in their own voices including a discussion of teenage sexuality, gender bias, career choices, and others.
Episodes #2 and #3	The changing adolescent body and the accompanying psychological changes, including the addressing of such teenage sexuality issues as puberty, masturbation, menstrual periods, the reproductive process, homosexuality, commercial sex, sexually-transmitted diseases, and others.
Episodes #4 and #5	The changing relationships between the adolescents and their parents, including a discussion of the growing degree of parental interference and control and the youths' tendency to question and rebel.
Episode #6	The consequences of growing tensions between adolescents' and their families, including a discussion of a loss of self-confidence among youth, the adoption of errant ways, and, in some cases, suicide.
Episode #7	The growing physical attraction for the opposite sex and issues related to girlfriends/boyfriends, including social norms, peer pressure, and parents' conservation and differential treatment of boys and girls in this respect.
Episode #8	The consequences of unplanned teenage pregnancy, including a discussion of who is to blame, the need for right knowledge about the reproductive process among the youth, and the role of parents and adolescents in preventing such socially taboo events.
Episode #9 and 10	Youth and career choices, including a discussion of youths' lack of direction, parents' expectations (for instance, many parents wanted their unfulfilled dreams and ambitions realized in the career of their children), and social norms of what constitutes a worthwhile career i.e. becoming a doctor or engineer.
Episode 11	Girls and career choices, including a discussion of marriage versus career and the differential treatment of boys and girls in this respect.
Episode #12 and 13	The need of focus on the personality development of adolescent and practical ways for doing so, including a discussion of how to build self-confidence, keep youth away from alcohol and drug abuse, involvement in drama, music, and sports, etc.

opinions were recorded on tape and served as a raw material for the final production of 'Jeevan Saurabh'.

In editing the interviewees, Bhasin was careful not to take sides but to adopt the role of facilitator. So the narrative approach was 'Here is what adolescents say. Here is what the parents say. And this is what the experts' opinions are on these differing points-of-view'.

She devised her own pre-test by playing the first draft episode to a group of students in four schools in Delhi, which attracted students from various socio-economic segments. She gave the listeners a sheet of paper, asking them to record their impressions. Bhasin felt the non-verbal expressions of the listeners were telling. They became very serious when they heard parent voices. The representative reactions on paper included, 'I was in a similar situation. It's a real problem'; 'Oh! I never thought anybody will tell us about these issues', 'Thank god somebody thinks about us and our problems'.

The first episode of 'Jeevan Saurabh' went on the air in early October, 1988 on Yuva Vani, the youth channel of All India Radio. It was broadcast for three months with one episode being broadcast every Friday evening, which was then repeated again on Sunday morning. Press reviews began to come after the first few weeks and they were very positive: Wrote a media critic, 'the programme made one think about one's own school and college days when ignorance about the "facts of life"—because the subject was then treated as a shameful secret—caused much anguish and needless worry' (*The Sunday Statesman*, 1988, p. 3). Another said: 'Programmes like "Jeevan Saurabh" exemplify the pioneering role that radio can play' in development.

Listeners' Feedback

Letters from listeners of 'Jeevan Saurabh' began to pour into AIR within the first few weeks of the radio serial's broadcast. A special effort was made to create a captive audience for the programme. Pre-programme publicity on the Yuva Vani (the youth channel) encouraged youth from ages 14 to 21 to register themselves as regular listeners. Listener registration forms were available at All India Radio and were sent to high school administrators and counselors in the Delhi area for distribution among students. Six thousand youth registered. They listened to the programme regularly and wrote their reactions, including their responses to questions posed in the programme. This was a passionately-involved audience base. Even though the programme lasted for three months, its relationship with its listeners lasted for over a year. The programme's relationship with its audiences began with the pre-programme publicity and the listener pre-registration process, was maintained through the duration of the programme, and then extended beyond through parallel interaction programmes, quiz contests to test the knowledge gain of listeners on youth issues, and the ensuing award ceremony. In this sense, 'Jeevan Saurabh' was not just a radio serial operating in isolation, it built and sustained a campaign atmosphere.

Bhasin wanted to solidify the involvement of listeners

further. To do so, she encouraged listeners to submit their 'pressing' questions, instead of just replying to the questions posed in the programme. She also increased the frequency of a parallel interaction programme which accompanied the broadcasts from once a month to twice a month. In this programme, listeners' letters were read and their various queries addressed. Several queries dealt with the physical manifestations of adolescence, for example, Jai Prakash Gupta from Mongolpuri asked the question: 'I have "nightfall" at least once a month. I have neither masturbated nor have any relationship with a girl. Why does it still happen? Why?' These interactional programmes helped boost listeners' participation and involvement with the radio serial even further.

Listeners' letters ranged from topics such as 'I'm in love with my cousin', to 'I'm depressed because my girlfriend's family does not allow her to see me', to 'My parents don't understand me', to 'Why have I suddenly begun to grow body hair'. Many letter-writers urged that their anonymity be preserved. There were short letters and long ones: From a few sentences written by one listener, to four letters written by another listener, each of which was between eight to 12 single-spaced pages.

What were some of the common themes in these listeners' letters to the programme? Several letters commented on the various aspects of the programme itself i.e. its high production quality, its entertaining and educational nature, its service to the youth in society, its bold treatment of taboo topics, and the real-life nature of the youth problems addressed.

High production quality

Several letters praised the various production attributes of 'Jeevan Saurabh'. 'AIR needs to be commended for this excellent, issue-based production', wrote Santosh Nethani from village Pali in Garhwal, U.P. Several commented on the fine narration: 'Kudos to the producer Usha Bhasin for conceptualizing the series and for the excellent linking narration', said Neel Batra, a media critic (1988, p. 13). Several listeners commented on the engaging format of 'Jeevan Saurabh'. 'The interviews sounded natural and frank'; 'The programme's format is simple and direct' (*The Sunday Statesman*, 1988, p. 3). Santosh Nethani from Garhwal, U.P., said: 'Hearings the differing points of view of youth, their parents, psychologists, and physiologists—especially their open and clear discussion of various taboo issues—kept the interest alive in listening to the programme until the end.' Several listeners commented on the excellent choice of experts. All in all, listeners were greatly impressed by 'Jeevan Saurabh's' high production quality.

Entertaining and educational

Many listeners commented on the entertainment, educational, and social value of 'Jeevan Saurabh'. Santosh Nethani from Garhwal, U.P. wrote: 'Jeevan Saurabh' is interesting, educational, and entertaining.' For many, the educational information helped clear their doubts: 'I got

a lot of useful information from the programme. A lot of misconceptions I had were cleared by the programme', wrote Palvinder, a grade 12 student from New Delhi. Several listeners highlighted the specific educational lessons they learned, for instance, Meenu Sharma from Mandi Pilakhua, U.P. wrote: 'I learned a great deal about the girlfriend-boyfriend issue. I realize how important it is for male-female friendships to have certain limits. Boys and girls should know and practice these limits'.

In sum, 'Jeevan Saurabh' was perceived as interesting, educational, and especially tailor-made to address youth problems.

Service to youth

Many listeners commended the useful role the programme was playing in serving the youth: 'Jeevan Saurabh' is the first programme that dealt with adolescent problems of students. We have lots of problems but have no solutions for them. We are afraid to ask our parents for their advice. Even if we ask them, they may not have the right answers. Our friends also have the same problems as us. So whom should we ask for solutions?', wrote Gurinder, a grade 12 student from New Delhi. Another registered listener echoed this theme: 'If one wants to understand the psychology of adolescents, it can be only be done by listening to Jeevan Saurabh'. A media critic said: 'It will certainly play a pivotal role in helping the society deal with some of its problems, especially the youth'.

Bold treatment of taboo issues

Many letters commented on the bold themes addressed. Said Lakshman Jha from Sangam Vihar, New Delhi: 'Even in my wildest of dreams I had never thought that such issues could be discussed so openly. By your programme you have lessened the burden of my heart and mind.' A media critic commented: 'One was impressed in particular with the way the awkward themes of sex characteristics, urges, menstrual problems, wet dreams, masturbation, homosexuality, and other surreptitious and fumbling experiments in contacts with the opposite sex were dealt with' (*The Sunday Statesman*, 1988, p. 3).

Real-life nature

Several listeners emphasized how close 'Jeevan Saurabh' was to real-life and how it reflected their day-to-day problems: 'I like all 13 episodes of Jeevan Saurabh because each programme dealt with problems that we youth experience on a daily basis', said Harpal Singh, from Sonipat, Haryana. Several listeners pointed to the commonality of the youth problems addressed in the radio serial: 'When you answer letters and address other people's problems, you help answer many of my own questions', said Gandharv Kumar from Aligarh, U.P.

An Active Audience

Though designed primarily for the youth, 'Jeevan Saurabh' had a wide audience appeal, as reflected in the following letters: 'I am 60 years old but I am very much in favour of

broadcasting such programmes', wrote Virendra Kumar from Meerut, U.P. Virendra Kumar from Baroda, Gujarat wrote: 'This programme answered the questions and suggested solutions to the problem of all age groups. This programme gives direction to both the youth and their parents'. Another listener wrote to say: 'Everybody in my family listens to this programme.'

Several letters indicated how 'Jeevan Saurabh' had stimulated interpersonal communication in families and other listener groups. Suresh Chandra from West Sagarpur, New Delhi wrote: 'I listen to this programme with my mother, father, and brothers and sisters. We then get a chance to discuss these youth issues'. Pavan Jangda from Old Fardabad, Haryana, said: 'This programme has cleared several of my doubts about delicate youth issues. I have tried to bring in most of my friends among your regular listeners'. Another listener wrote: 'I and my brothers and sisters listen to your programme very carefully and we talk about it'.

In essence, the programme had a wide audience appeal; it attracted not just youthful listeners but also their friends, brothers, sisters, parents, grandparents, teachers, and counselors. The broadcasts spurred listeners to talk with others, extending the range and influence of its messages.

Role of the Narrator

The listeners felt comfortable with Bhasin as narrator and took a liking for her. For some listeners', the relationship with Bhasin was symptomatic of parasocial interaction, defined as the seemingly face-to-face interpersonal relationship that media consumers often develop with media personalities (Horton & Wohl, 1958). There was evidence of several listeners' perceiving their relationship with Bhasin as being an interpersonal one, much like an ongoing relationship with a friend. As Tilak Ram from Rambag, Muzzafarnagar wrote: 'I listen to your programme very intently and wait impatiently to hear you on the next episode'. In their letters, many listeners addressed Bhasin as Usha 'didi' (elder sister). They were interested in knowing how what her personal opinion was on the youth topics, an indicator of involvement with the media personality. Many felt that Bhasin was compassionate and personal, a person with whom they could share their inner feelings and secrets. For instance, Anil Kumar Bhatia wrote: 'First time in my life I am telling anyone my Ram Kahani (life's story)'. Another listener asked: 'Please tell me Usha didi what I should do? Where should I go? Do you have a solution to my intimate problem?' A media critic, who got hooked to 'Jeevan Saurabh', commented on Bhasin's relationship with her listeners: 'Usha Bhasin's voice comes over well; friendly and striking, the right elder sister note, evoking trust as one who could bridge the gap between the younger and the older generation'

Impact on Listeners

It is difficult to comment on the aggregate impact of 'Jeevan Saurabh' on its audiences given our primary data-

source were the letter-writers to the radio programme. The letter-writers represent a highly-involved audience group and hence one cannot generalize from them to programme's regular audience. However, letters represent an important and prized data-source as they help us understand, in the listeners' own words, how they know what they hear, and with what psycho-social consequences. The very act of writing is a communicative act, and an indicator of self-direction and motivation (Law and Singhal, 1997). Several rich qualitative manifestations of 'Jeevan Saurabh's audience impacts were apparent in the narratives of its letter-writers: 'This programme, dedicated to the problems of adolescents, will help them much more than their regular school does', wrote Tilak Ram from Muzzafarnagar, U.P., a school teacher. Several listeners said the radio programme helped them tremendously in coping with their daily lives: 'I have heard all the episodes of 'Jeevan Saurabh' so far. The information received has helped me get over my misgivings for my parents. Now I can relate to them better', wrote Narayana Chand from Faridabad. A parent wrote: 'After listening to 'Jeevan Saurabh', I have realized that parents should not police their children but treat them as friends. It is the parents' duty that they should openly talk to their adolescents about their problems'.

So 'Jeevan Saurabh' seemed to have positively impacted the lives of certain youth listeners, their friends, parents, and family members. Clearly, different listeners derived different meanings out of the radio programme, and certain listeners seemed to have been influenced more than others. Some listeners provided evidence that radio programme may have helped increase parent-child discord and contributed to family conflict. One youth listener said: 'After listening to 'Jeevan Saurabh' I realized how domineering and unreasonable my parents are.' Another listener said: 'If we do any wrong, our parents punish us. Who can punish them for what they do to us?'

Limitations of the Radio Serial

Like all mass media programmes, 'Jeevan Saurabh' was not free from limitations. However, AIR learned from these limitations in making subsequent decisions. Several letters pointed to the radio serial's limitations: 'This series is not just for youth, it should be heard by parents also. It should not just be restricted to the youth channel', said Batra, a media critic (1988, p. 13). This limitation was overcome later when 'Jeevan Saurabh' was rebroadcast in 1989 on the main Delhi channel of All India Radio, and then in the Hindi-speaking area of India, covering some 30 radio stations with an audience of several million people. Another critic said: 'Programme like this need to be given much wider publicity'. In its rebroadcasts, a great deal of pre-programme publicity was undertaken by Bhasin. Another listener wrote to say: 'The only limitation of this radio series is that it will take long to get over. I wish this programme had at least two episodes per week'. Broadcasting only one episode of 'Jeevan Saurabh' a week was a conscious decision taken by AIR in order to allow time for listeners' feedback and queries to be addressed in a

'non-rushed' manner.

The more substantive limitations of 'Jeevan Saurabh' were pointed out by letters such as 'Many youth do not realize the importance of such radio programmes. They think this is mere propaganda and smells of family planning. They do not understand why listening to such programme is important. For such youth, what advice do you have?', said Santosh Nethani of Garhwal, U.P. Another listener's letter demonstrated the complexity of youth problems, and that it may take more than a radio programme to find a solution: 'Your programme has given my life a new turn. I am a student, and like all students, I have problems and no solutions. I have an interest in theater, I take part in drama performances, and I love music. But my parents do not like this. How can I please their interests and mine? Please advise me what is wrong with me', wrote Sanjya Shama, Rajpur Road, Delhi. Another listener pointed to the problems that could arise from insufficient treatment given to certain pressing youth issues: 'Each episode of 'Jeevan Saurabh' is highly educational. However, sometimes I feel that the knowledge given is much less than is required. Half knowledge can be harmful'. Another listener wrote: 'You discussed the issue of unplanned pregnancy, but did not discuss the main reason for why unplanned pregnancies occur. The girls of today, although they know better, engage in sex without thinking about the consequences. This is the main reason for unplanned pregnancies, not that simpleton girls are victims of men's lust. It would have been nice if you had focused on this issue'.

So while 'Jeevan Saurabh' had its admirers, there were several listeners who felt that the radio programme was not doing enough, or could do more.

Conclusions

'Jeevan Saurabh' utilized a participatory approach to message design involving the youth in identifying their problems, in presenting them on the air, in enhancing their comprehension of these problems, and in evaluation the message impact. Various themes emerged in the letters received from the listeners. Viewers commented on the entertaining and educational nature of the radio serial, its high production quality, its service to the youth in society, its bold treatment of taboo topics, and the real-life nature of the youth problems that were addressed. Other letters reflected the group listening situation of 'Jeevan Saurabh', the high degree of involvement of the listeners with the narrator (Bhasin), and the impacts of the programme in the listeners' lives. Several letters pointed to some of the limitations of 'Jeevan Saurabh'.

One of the biggest contributions of 'Jeevan Saurabh' was that its experience served as a knowledge base in the launch of several other socially-relevant radio serials on All India Radio in the late 1980s and 1990s. In essence, the wishes to its many listeners, exemplified in such statements as 'I wish that it would never end' and 'Please continue to develop and broadcast programme like "Jeevan Saurabh" in the future' were not in vain. The lessons learned from this programme inspired the use of participatory approaches

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So while 'Jeevan Saurabh' had its admirers, there were several listeners who felt that the radio programme was not doing enough, or could do more.

Conclusions

'Jeevan Saurabh' utilized a participatory approach to message design involving the youth in identifying their problems, in presenting them on the air, in enhancing their comprehension of these problems, and in evaluation of the message impact. Various themes emerged in the letters received from the listeners. Viewers commented on the entertaining and educational nature of the radio serial, its high production quality, its service to the youth in society, its bold treatment of taboo topics, and the real-life nature of the youth problems that were addressed. Other letters reflected the group listening situation of 'Jeevan Saurabh', the high degree of involvement of the listeners with the narrator (Bhasin), and the impacts of the programme in the listeners' lives. Several letters pointed to some of the limitations of 'Jeevan Saurabh'.

One of the biggest contributions of 'Jeevan Saurabh' was that its experience served as a knowledge base in the launch of several other socially-relevant radio serials on All India Radio in the late 1980s and 1990s. In essence, the wishes to its many listeners, exemplified in such statements as 'I wish that it would never end' and 'Please continue to develop and broadcast programme like "Jeevan Saurabh" in the future' were not in vain. The lessons learned from this programme inspired the use of participatory approaches

to message design in other ensuring radio series⁴ at All India Radio, including 'Jeevan Saurabh II', broadcast in 1990 (dealing with issues of marital incompatibility, family conflicts, women empowerment, and others) 'Dehleez' ('Threshold'), broadcast in 1993-94, a 52 episode dramatic radio series dealing with issues of population socialization of Indian teenagers, and 'Tinka Tinka Sukh' ('Happiness Lies in Small Things'), broadcast in 1996-97, a 104 episode radio series dealing with issues of gender equality, women's empowerment, small family size, and family harmony. These radio serials were highly popular among radio listeners in India: For instance, 'Tinka Tinka Sukh' was listened to by an estimated 35 to 40 million people in the Hindi-speaking belt of India. Research evaluations have shown that these programmes are effective in both entertaining and educating their audience members (Sood, Singhal, and Law, 1997).

The experience of All India Radio with 'Jeevan Saurabh' presents several useful lessons for media practitioners and researchers. Audience involvement and participation in the message design process can give programme an air of authenticity, relevance, and meaning that is not possible with expertly-scripted, in-house, studio-based productions. Participatory approaches to message design promote listener identification with issues, while inculcating a feeling of 'inclusion' among the listeners. When the topic is taboo, and the viewpoints of certain audience members for that topic are intense, 'pent-up', and muted, as was the case with youth issues in 'Jeevan Saurabh', participatory message design strategies can be especially effective.

From the perspective of research 'Jeevan Saurabh' pointed to the importance of investigating listeners' letters that were written in response to the radio programme. Listeners of 'Jeevan Saurabh' were actively recruited to listen to the programme, and those who listened were encouraged to provide feedback. Letters, as unbiased research journals, provided rich details of the meanings that listeners ascribed to the radio programme, and documented, in the listeners' own words, the impact it had on their cognitive, affective, and behavioural patterns. Letters, in general, are also informally written and the writers are typically unaware of grand research motives, which helps to reduce response biases (Law and Singhal, 1997). While focusing solely on letters as a data source may be problematic given they represent the opinions of highly-involved listeners and are thus not generalizable to the regular audience, letters nevertheless represent a rich, insightful data source, which can be collected/elicited at a fraction of the cost of conducting a field survey of the regular listeners.

As mass media systems continue to expand in developing countries, the choice of what programming strategies are employed will often determine how effective media messages are in realizing their goals. Participatory approaches to message design represent a way to effectively involve audience members in their own welfare.

Notes

- 1 An earlier version of this paper was presented to the 2nd International Conference on Entertainment-Education and Social Change, Athens, Ohio, U.S.A, May 7 to 10, 1997. We thank our respective organizations—All India Radio and Ohio University—for their support of our work. The views expressed in this paper are of the authors and not of the organizations they represent.
- 2 In 1990-91, All India Radio licensed a private media company, INRECO, to release the audiotape recordings of 'Jeevan Saurabh' for an even wider distribution across India. This helped recover the production costs of 'Jeevan Saurabh'.
- 3 These other radio serials were created under the auspices of the Central Educational Broadcasting Unit (CEBU) All India Radio, under the direction of author Usha Bhasin.

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