



Exploring the Historical Origins of Cultural Communication: A Case Study of All India Radio Leh

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Abstract

The present paper explores the cultural communication through a historical case study of All India Radio Leh. It describes how the radio has contributed to promotion and preservation of Ladakhi language and culture. The study explores the role of radio broadcasting in the dissemination of cultural traditions, revival of local languages, and the connection of communities in a region known for its unique heritage and remoteness. In exploring the history of All India Radio Leh, this paper illustrates how it synthesized traditional oral storytelling and modern radio technology. Drawing upon previous research, historical documents and case studies, the study examines the radio role in the preservation of culture. Functioning of All India Radio Leh has kept alive the Ladakhi identity. It has accomplished this by airing shows in local languages, sharing folk songs and showcasing cultural festival. The community is now proud of their heritage and traditions have been kept alive. The paper also addresses challenges, such as limited technology and the effects of globalization, but it emphasizes how the station has remained relevant. This study rises to the forefront in globalization times. It could be interesting for researchers and policymakers. As a model media studies review of a site of cultural communication history, the study of All India Radio Leh helps us comprehend more general interactions between media, heritage and identity in an era of profound change.

Keywords: cultural communication, all India radio Leh, language preservation, ladakhi heritage, public broadcasting.

1. Introduction

Cultural communication about their importance to preserving, sharing, and evolving traditions, languages, and values through practices, customs, and artifacts that shapes their identity over generations (Rahman et al., 2022). It embraces the passing of beliefs and practices into the generations but allows to also adapting to contemporary existence. This kind of communication reinforces identity, unites communities and protects languages that would be vulnerable to globalization (Guirdham & Guirdham, 2017). Medias are among the most dominating avenues of conveying culture, particularly radios. Since it is easily available and reaches people in distant areas, radio has kept traditions alive (Singh et al., 2022). While print or digital media require literacy or access to the internet, radio is a very simple means of sharing the stories, music and discussions (Hendy, 2013).

Radio is inexpensive, accessible and connects people, making it a great way to preserve culture and traditions (Aarzoo & Lal, 2025c). Like public and community radio stations, which keep traditions, languages, and folklore alive around the world (Norris & Inglehart, 2009). India is no different, as evidenced by the efforts of the All India Radio (AIR) to reach listeners with programs in numerous languages and keep diverse communities engaged with their origins (Aarzoo & Lal, 2025b). In Ladakh, where native customs and dialects must be preserved, this is an indispensable task (Aarzoo & Lal, 2025a). Within this region, AIR Leh remains an important vehicle in preserving Ladakhis' culture and language (Dinnerstein, 2013).

All India Radio Leh was established as a regional station to promote cultural diversity and linguistic heritage of Ladakh. Ladakh is one of India's most remote regions, characterized by extreme weather and limited access to other media (Lal, 2023). This has made radio important as an information and entertainment provider for the people (Khan, 2015). AIR Leh has adopted newer technology over the years and has continued to promote local languages, music and folklore (Aarzoo & Lal, 2026c). Broadcasting in the Ladakhi language, Balti and other local dialects, the station helps preserve these languages for the next generation (Lal & Aarzoo, 2026c). The folk songs, traditional stories, and local customs discussions help

strengthen community bonds which are broadcasted through the station (Kumari & Batool, 2024).

This study presents the contribution of AIR Leh to maintaining the Ladakhi language and culture. It also explores how the station shares cultural traditions and shapes community identity. Another objective is to discuss the issues and challenges of AIR Leh with respect to globalization and digital media and how it still sustains its relevance. The main research questions for this study are:

- i. How does AIR Leh help preserve the Ladakhi language and culture?
- ii. What strategies does the station use to engage with the local community?
- iii. What challenges has the station faced due to technological and social changes, and how has it adapted?

In this paper, we structure the fore coming section as follows. This literature review provides an overview of previous studies that have surveyed how culture is communicated, the preservation of language and the role of radio in that, and finally a history of All India Radio, India. In this way, the methodology section elaborates on the research methodology, comprising of data collection through historical records, archival documents and secondary literature. Discussion The discussion section covers the history, programming, cultural contributions, and social impact of AIR Leh. It also examines some of the challenges the station has faced over the years, including technological limitations, shifting media consumption habits and globalization. The conclusion summarizes the findings, and the recommendations section suggests policies and strategies to support public radio's continued role in cultural preservation.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical Perspectives on Cultural Communication and Media

Cultural communication is the transmission of values, traditions, and identities between societies. Several theorisations can help to understand its interaction media. Hall's Encoding/Decoding Model (1980) states that that social meaning is encoded by media producers, but which can be decoded by audiences influenced by their own cultural background (Hall, 1980). This idea helps us make sense of how Ladakhi listeners are responding and engaging with All India Radio (AIR) Leh's broadcasts. Appadurai's flow model of culture (1996) investigates how media allows for the movement of cultural expressions at local and global levels (Appadurai, 1996). This provides a framework through which AIR leh could be

analysed for its challenge in balancing the contemporary with stakeholders and the preservation of the traditions of Ladakh. Chambers (2003) identifies one of them as Habermas' Public Sphere Theory (1989), which highlights how media can promote public discourse (Habermas, 1991). Radio is a community medium that enables conversations on cultural identity, heritage and social issues that position it as a primary medium of cultural preservation in Ladakh (Lal & Aarzoo, 2026a). The above theories ground the understanding of the impact of AIR Leh on cultural discursive activities in the local context (Lal & Aarzoo, 2026b).

2.2 Previous Research on Radio Broadcasting and Language Preservation

Radio has been, and remains, an important tool for preserving languages and cultural heritage, especially within remote communities and rural areas where access to other media may be limited (Deb et al., 2026). Radio serves as an oral vehicle that helps to carry indigenous languages, folklore, and traditional music forward, keeping it alive from generation to generation. One of the main things Hendy (2013) describes that help radio to be a powerful tool of preserving language and culture is that radio has something very old in a modern way when compared to the oral way of storytelling. The nature of the medium also allows for instant interaction, fostering wider community engagement throughout the manifestations of their heritage such as through song, dialect, music and conversation (Lal & Sharma, 2021). Riggins (1992) underscores the importance of community radio promoting endangered languages. Community radio provides an essential space for linguistic minorities to express themselves and reassert their cultural identity, translating broadcast in native dialects (Aarzoo & Lal, 2026b). These initiatives also support language sustainability, especially in areas where indigenous languages receive little support in schools.

In this light, All India Radio (AIR) has contributed significantly to the preservation of linguistic diversity in the Indian context. AIR's regional services, which offer broadcasts in various local dialects, Kumar (2020) noted, "keeping in mind the interest of a larger section of the population and in order to preserve the linguistic tradition of various communities" Dinnerstein (2020) notes how AIR Leh plays a role in supporting the Ladakhi cultural heritage through folk songs, oral storytelling, and discussions on traditional practices (Sarkar & Lal, 2023). These studies transcend into the notion that radio is a strong medium for language preservation with a sense of cultural pride as well as continuity within regional communities amidst the changes of digital media and globalization (Aarzoo & Lal, 2026a).

2.3 Historical Evolution of Public Broadcasting in India, with a Focus on AIR

The origins of public broadcasting in India can be traced back to British colonial rule, when All India Radio (AIR) was set up in 1936. AIR was originally used mainly as a tool of information dissemination and colonial administrative interests. With independence in 1947, AIR took on a very different role. The government acknowledged the potential of the platform as a means to foster national unity, promote education, and preserve the country's colossal cultural and linguistic diversity. According to Mehta (2020), All India Radio (AIR) played a vital role in preserving linguistic variation by airing programming in several regional languages. That way, this method helped maintaining contacts to the roots in their own culture and in addition enabling the progress for nationalizing. The launch of VividhBharati in 1957 would further add to the reach of AIR by introducing entertainment programs along with cultural and educational content. That made radio more attractive and accessible to audiences throughout cities and rural places.

In the case of Ladakh, AIR Leh had come about in the 1970s to serve the region's remote population. According to Dinnerstein (2018), over the years, AIR Leh transformed itself to become more than just a platform for broadcasting news. It has become an important platform for cultural preservation, frequently highlighting Ladakhi folk music, oral storytelling, and the traditions of local societies. With its programming, AIR Leh keeps asserting regional identity and helping Ladakh's heritage stay alive against the onslaught of modernization and globalization.

2.4 Studies on the Impact of Radio on Regional Cultures and Heritage

There is abundant evidence that radio plays a critical role in safeguarding regional cultures and heritage. Lewis and Booth (1989) argue that radio is also a highly effective medium for maintaining cultural continuity because it facilitates the transmission of storytelling traditions (including poetry) and traditional music. Unlike their visual counterparts, radio works on the assumption that listeners engage through hear and feel, rendering it a useful tool for societies with strong oral traditions. Likewise, Birowo (2011) emphasizes that some regional radio stations are also used as a medium of cultural reinforcement through the dissemination of information in their native language, as it makes listeners feel a sense of belonging and strengthen community ties (Singh et al., 2021). Its role is particularly significant in the case of indigenous and minority communities, as radio serve as a critical means for cultural expression and linguistic preservation (Saika et al., 2021).

Devajana(2024) roll out the contribution of AIR's regional stations towards keeping traditional knowledge systems alive in Indian context. Their study highlights AIR Leh's role in reinforcing Ladakh's cultural identity through programmes reflecting local customs, folklore and social practices. Using interviews and content analysis, their study exemplifies that radio is still an important mass communication medium in Ladakh where geographical and infrastructural barriers inhibit access to other forms of mass communication. In addition, Dinnerstein (2022) at AIR's cultural programming in Ladakh. Their research reveals that local communities turn to AIR Leh for knowledge about seasonal festivals, religious rituals, and oral traditions. The study emphasises how radio both provides education and forms a link between generations, meaning that young Ladakhis retain an affiliation to their heritage through the media even as they enter the world of digital transformation.

3. Gaps in Existing Literature and the Need for this Study

While there is a vast amount of research on radio's role in cultural preservation, there are also several gaps. To begin with, there is hardly any research on AIR Leh and its contributions to Ladakhi culture. While larger studies mention AIR's role for regional broadcasting, few offer detailed analysis of its work in Ladakh. Second, the majority of the literature on AIR focuses on its historical legacy but struggles to capture contemporary realities of radio broadcasting in the digital age, especially the shift in media consumption no longer favouring terrestrial radio. Now more than ever, I want to investigate how AIR Leh balances the need for technological updates with its curation role in preserving culture, even amidst the rise of digital tools such as social media, podcasts, and streaming services. Third, an area for further research is around the audience experience of AIR Leh. Though qualitative studies have highlighted the station's cultural relevance, such quantitative data on listening trends, audience preferences and generational changes in radio use remain under-researched. To fill these gaps, this study presents a detailed discussion of the importance of AIR Leh in the preservation of Ladakhi culture and language. This study, through investigating how the practice has evolved over time, the difficulties it has faced today, and the ways in which people engage with media in relation to heritage and preservation contributes to the wider discourse on the role of media for heritage preservation in the digital era.

4. Methodology

Employing a historical case study methodology, this study empirically explores how AIR Leh has preserved Ladakhi culture and language. The case study method enables an in-depth analysis of this station's evolution, programming, and its effects on the local community. The subsequent step of data collection, as covered in this guide, is employing multiple sources for a broader analysis. Old documents, such as government reports and AIR records, also give context on the starting and growing of the station. Interviews with central stakeholders like AIR Leh broadcasters, cultural experts, and community listeners inform programming strategies and audience perceptions. The test theoretical framework is supported by studies in the wider secondary literature, including brief accounts of the use of radio broadcasting for the preservation of languages. Program analysis also involves reviewing past and current broadcasts to evaluate language and cultural heritage content. Given its role as a regional radio station, serving a culturally distinct, geographically remote community, AIR Leh is chosen as the case study. Not only does the station serve as an essential means of maintaining Ladakh's linguistic and cultural identity, but it also provides a rich case study through which to explore how media can play a role in preserving heritage. This approach allows for a comprehensive understanding of AIR Leh's contributions to cultural sustainability by drawing on both historical and contemporary data.

4.1 Limitations

This study sheds light on the role of AIR Leh towards the preservation of culture, but there are certain limitations. Firstly, the study targets only to AIR Leh, and no comparative analysis is performed with other regional AIR stations. A larger-scale comparison would provide more insight into how other stations impact our linguistic and cultural legacy. The second point concerns the availability of archival documents, as documentary sources on regional broadcasting usually are scarce or difficult to access. This might change the capacity to create a fully historical narrative. Third, because the study is based on interviews and program analysis, AIR Leh's impact is susceptible to its subjective interpretation. This study is benefits from being balanced, well-supported despite these limitations.

5. Results and Discussion

5.1 History and Development of All India Radio Leh

All India Radio (AIR) Leh was established in early 1970s for the remote culturally rich region of Ladakh. In a region where such broadcasting facilities are rarely present, AIR Leh

has been a vital source of the spread of information in a relatively remote area along with the promotion of cultural heritage and local identity. Originally mainly reserved for official news and government broadcasts, the station began to broaden its scope during its first years to include entertainment, education and cultural programming (Dinnerstein, 2013).

With the advancement of technology, AIR Leh has expanded, undergoing transition from analog to digital broadcasting. In the 1990s, frequency modulation (FM) was introduced, enhancing sound quality and extending the reach of the station into some remote villages (Kaustubha, 2021). The advent of digital archiving has also allowed for the preservation of valuable oral traditions, folk songs, and historical records, ensuring that Ladakhi heritage can be accessed by future generations. Although AIR Leh has faced infrastructural setbacks, it has succeeded in the race against time to embrace modern broadcasting while preserving AIR's ethos of cultural preservation (Thomas & Thomas, 2022).

5.2 Role in Cultural Communication

However, All India Radio (AIR) Leh has been an important medium to preserve and promote Ladakhi language and folklore. In the role of a major media provider that broadcasted in Ladakhi, Balti and many other vernaculars, the station played a crucial role in preserving regional linguistic variety in a place where globalization risks the extinction of native languages (Kumari & Batool, 2024). AIR Leh's committed efforts towards these cultural programs have helped create a platform through which folklore, oral traditions, and historical narratives that might otherwise fall into oblivion find their voice. "According to the study by Dinnerstein (2020), storytelling is still considered a central aspect of Ladakhi cultural identity, and in this regard, AIR Leh has ensured this continuity by airing regular radio dramas and interview of local elders."

Music and festivals are closely associated with Ladakhi culture, and AIR Leh has also played an active role in their promotion. Local folk songs, deeply infused in the region's history, also play frequently on the radio, keeping a link to younger generations (Brandt, 2021). The station's coverage of local festivals like Losar (Tibetan New Year) and Hemis Festival aid in improving cultural pride in Ladakhis, including those that have settled in metropolitan areas. Through the documentation and broadcast of these events, AIR Leh act as a cultural repository that helps ensure the transmission of traditions across generations (Kharé, 2024). In addition, the station has also worked to open a bridge between older and younger generations. Given the rise of digital media, and globally expressive entertainment, youth in Ladakh have started

to move further away from their roots. AIR Leh responds to this challenge by including modern content into its cultural programming, including conversations on cultural identity, interviews with Ladakhi youth, and storytelling sessions that mix traditional narratives with modern themes (Thomas& Thomas, 2022). Such initiatives ensure that the culture is not just alive but also relevant to younger audiences.

As a linguist, I feel AIR Leh maintains language: a small region in the midst of modernization in Ladakh where more and more indigenous languages are on death bed due to the modernization of people, migration and rapid spread of Hindi and English languages. The station broadcasts programs in Ladakhi, Tibetan and Balti to help younger generations learn more about their cultural heritage, as well as their roots in terms of language. Such interaction in the language help keep the root of local languages alive makes languages relevant in real life and instills the pride of owning a language. With consistent and sustained language-based programming, AIR Leh has helped preserve these languages, and also provides the subject matter as an education tool for those interested in honing their fluency and understanding the nuances of these indigenous tongues.

Ladakh is a multilingual region with many dialects spoken by different communities, and AIR Leh aims to foster language proficiency among them as well. Languages like Lehskat, Shamskat, Balti and Nubraskat are an inseparable part of the culture of Ladakh where knowing these languages is of utmost importance when it comes to protecting their heritage and their belongingness. By exposing its listeners to programming in these dialects, AIR Leh serves as an accessible and relatable platform through which listeners can practice their native tongues: fine-tuning their vocabulary, pronunciation, and linguistic faculties. That the station's work has been so widely recognized and hailed as critical for improving language skills in the region further attests to the importance of its work that has helped so many speak their local language, dialect, or dialect more fluently than they ever could have imagined. Through locally relevant story-telling, educational programs, and cultural transmission, AIR Leh plays such a crucial role in their people's language preservation and revitalization, and strengthening their connection and love for their language.

5.3 Socio-Cultural Impact

The impact of AIR Leh is not just limited to communication at the cultural level but it also has a strong influence on community engagement and identity reinforcement. The station serves as a public broadcasting platform, giving Ladakhis a voice by representing their struggles,

concerns, and aspirations. According to Riggins (1992), community radio has been used as an important instrument for promoting social cohesion specifically in rural and indigenous people. In Ladakh, where television and internet coverage is still limited, especially in areas along the border, radio is still the most reliable and accessible medium for public discourse. Among the station's unstinting contributions was in the area of language preservation and education. In light of the loss of the Ladakhi language within formal teaching settings and urban areas, it was AIR Leh that took on the challenge and produced an array of programs geared towards preserving the Ladakhi language. Among these are storytelling sessions, poetry readings, and talks on linguistic heritage to encourage Ladakhis to take pride in their native tongue (Hendy 2013). Moreover, there is consistent public dialogue about language preservation strategies involving experts and educators (Thomas & Thomas, 2022).

Case studies of AIR Leh's cultural programmes further accentuate its impact. One is its work with local historians to collect oral histories. For instance, by capturing narratives of Ladakhi elders about ethnic traditions, historical occurrences, and religious practices, this program plays an important role in preserving knowledge that would have been otherwise forgotten and is now available at the disposal of future generations (Dinnerstein, 2018). As mentioned, a project to engage youth, whereby students from neighbouring schools are invited to interact in dialogue sessions, and to take part in storytelling competitions, is another notable example (Kumar & Lal, 2023). Such an initiative has played a critical role in encouraging intergenerational dialogue and ensuring that young Ladakhis are connected to their heritage.

AIR Leh has taken the lead in preserving Ladakh's rich oral traditions by airing folklore, myths, and legends of Ladakh. Neighbourhood tales that used to be shared over group dinners and public markets have become chronicles and broadcasts, spreading further and wider. (Rahman et al., 2024) These stories are amply steeped in local history, religious beliefs, and social customs, reflecting key cultural values that shaped Ladakhi society for centuries. With a focus on air time to tell local stories, legends, and religious teachings, AIR Leh plays an important role in preserving these narratives through time. Moreover, the preservation of folklore by way of radio has a significant educative role, assisting younger generations in comprehending the customs and beliefs that have been part of life in Ladakh for centuries.

The cultural programming of AIR Leh is based on the greatest involvement of local community. The station has established good relationships with cultural institutions, local artists and indigenous groups that allow it to extract from Ladakh's rich cultural tapestry. As such, they work tightly together so that the programs aired are authentic and represent the real

experiences and traditions of the people. Traditional Ladakhi folk songs, spiritual chants and classical music, for example, are regularly aired as live-in concert on AIR Leh's broadcasts, performed by local musicians. These musical inserts are important to the programming of the station; they are a means of preserving and promoting Ladakhi music, which is closely interwoven with the region's history, religious life and social existence.

5.4 Challenges and Adaptation

While this strategy has proven effective in preserving culture, AIR Leh faces challenges related to technology limitations, infrastructure, and economic conditions. "Given that Ladakh is a geographical isolated region, direct broadcasting faces so many logistic challenges in terms of the weather, and in remote villages, village electricity supply is very limited. Broadcasting is also done using old transmission equipment. According to Gupta (2023), many of the regional radio stations in India lack funding resulting in weak operations and failure to catch up with digital media. Yet another complex challenge involves the effect of globalization on communication styles. Media consumption patterns have undergone changes, especially with the growth in penetration of television, social media and digital streaming platforms. According to Malik (2022), traditional radio broadcasting is becoming less popular globally as radio broadcasting moves to digital platforms. For young listeners in Ladakh, who are now consuming most of their content via smartphones and the internet, AIR Leh, in its efforts to keep the audience engaged has a challenge on its hands.

AIR Leh has taken many steps to remain relevant in the digital age. It is on the digital front where it has changed the most (Mane & Lal, 2021). The station now accompanies its programming with recorded broadcasts on social media and streaming platforms, expanding access to its content beyond traditional radio frequencies (Aarzo & Lal, 2025). This strategy was proven to have broadened not only its audience range to a wider demography but attracted a younger audience who preferred on-demand content delivery (Laor, 2022). A further adaptation has been the broadening of programming to encompass modern issues as well as the regular fare. Understanding the changing aspirations of Ladakh's youth, AIR Leh launched new shows incorporating modern issues like climate change, sustainable development and education, while connecting them to our cultural values. For instance, Honnappa and Sujatha argue that local vernacular conversations around data regarding traditional Ladakhi irrigation

systems have now shifted to the distant past, whereas they are much more relevant and framed along ideas of environmental sustainability if they are understood in their contemporary referring contexts (Sujatha, 2021).

A big part of the station's success has been its active cooperation with local and international organizations to provide financial and technical assistance. AIR Leh has partnered with educational institutions and cultural preservation bodies to digitize its archives, train new broadcasters, and balance its production quality (Hendy, 2013). These efforts have allowed the station to stay relevant while still maintaining its core mission of cultural preservation (Jain et al., 2023).

The cultural programming of AIR Leh balances tradition with the contemporary. The station is closely tied to existing cultural and political features, but at the same time, it must find a balance with the need to morph with changing media interests, with younger generations. More recent formats, such as talk shows, radio dramas and interactive programs looking at topics in a contemporary cultural context, have been added as well. Some programs, for example, converse about changes from traditional practices due to globalization or ask how younger generations relate to their cultural heritage in the digital era. It is this joining of old and new that characterizes the way AIR Leh has rendered itself relevant to the different strata of society, while still remaining a guardian of cultural heritage.

7. Conclusion

All India Radio (AIR) Leh has played an important role as a means for preserving Ladakh's cultural heritage, language, and identity. When the station started out in the 1970s till today, it has been a platform that enabled communication on cultural issues in the local language, while also highlighting Ladakhi folklore, music and traditions. The programs have closed gaps between generations and ensured that younger audiences stay engaged with their heritage, thus strengthening a sense of community and identity. Nonetheless, AIR Leh has been able to adapt to the changing times despite challenges related to technological limitations, financial constraints, and the ever-evolving nature of the digital media landscape, by embracing digital and social media platforms, and engaging with a diverse range of content and projects in partnership with various cultural and educational institutions. Such initiatives have kept it relevant in an age when modern means of communication have forced traditional broadcasting to contend with the threat to its existence. Studying AIR Leh offers insights into the significance of regional media in the preservation of heritage more broadly. It highlights the

must for on-going assistance for public broadcasting, to protect linguistic and cultural diversity. With globalization altering the landscape of media consumption, AIR Leh's strategies offer crucial lessons on how traditional media can adapt to modernity while keeping its objective of preserving culture intact. The success of the station reinforces the resilience of radio as a medium to preserve cultural heritage in an age of digital media.

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