

# Podcasting and the Revival of Oral Storytelling in Indian Media

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**Abstract:** *This research explores how podcasting has become a modern revival of India's centuries-old oral storytelling tradition. With the digital transformation of media consumption, podcasts have emerged as a bridge between heritage and technology — reshaping how Indians listen, narrate, and share stories. Through an examination of the history of oral traditions, the evolution of digital audio, and current trends in the Indian podcast ecosystem, this study aims to understand podcasting's cultural, linguistic, and creative implications. It also identifies research gaps and proposes a methodological framework for deeper academic investigation*

**Keywords:** Podcasting, Oral Storytelling, Indian Media, Digital Narratives and Cultural Revival

## I. INTRODUCTION

Storytelling has been an inseparable part of Indian culture since ancient times. Long before writing systems emerged, oral traditions served as the primary means of preserving collective memory, cultural values, and community wisdom. Performative traditions such as kathakalakshepam in Tamil Nadu, pandavani in Chhattisgarh, harikatha in Andhra Pradesh, and qissagoi in North India showcased the emotional power of the spoken word. These performances were much more than entertainment; they represented shared identity, spirituality, and social learning. In the age of globalization shrinkage in time and space of the world became possible. In this digital technology has played an important role. In the developing countries like India is also enjoying this technology for their expansion and growth.(Rai, 2017)

Over time, storytelling adapted to technological advancements. The rise of the printing press, cinema, and broadcast media gradually shifted narratives from oral to visual and written modes. Yet, the emotional resonance of the human voice remained impactful. The introduction of All India Radio (AIR) in 1936 and Vividh Bharati in 1957 rekindled some aspects of oral storytelling, though centralized programming limited creative diversity. With the emergence of podcasting in the 21st century, sound-based storytelling became democratized, allowing diverse voices and narratives to flourish freely.

## II. HISTORICAL CONTEXT: FROM ORAL NARRATIVES TO DIGITAL VOICES

India's oral storytelling heritage stretches back thousands of years. Epics such as the Mahabharata, Ramayana, and the Jataka Tales were transmitted through recitation long before they were ever written. Regional folk traditions such as baul sangeet of Bengal, burrakatha from Andhra Pradesh, and kavad yatra of Rajasthan showcased storytelling practices that blended dialogue, singing, and dramatic performance. These formats fostered strong community engagement and allowed values, history, and imagination to pass across generations.

The advent of print culture during colonial times gradually displaced oral forms. However, the introduction of radio in 1936 renewed sonic storytelling, with shows like Hawa Mahal, Bal Varta, and Binaca Geetmala shaping early auditory imagination. Despite this revival, radio's centralized control restricted narrative experimentation. The digital revolution of the 2010s shifted this landscape dramatically as on-demand audio platforms empowered listeners to choose their content, marking the return of oral storytelling in a decentralized form.



### **III. PODCASTING AS THE NEW ORAL SPACE**

Podcasts reintroduce the emotional intimacy of oral storytelling through voice-driven narratives. Popular Indian podcasts such as Kahaniyaan, The Musafir Stories, and Indian Noir demonstrate how storytellers can build atmosphere through tone, pacing, and expressive delivery. These narrative podcasts echo traditional oral experiences, guiding listeners into imagined worlds using sound alone. In doing so, podcasts revive the cultural practice of listening with attention and emotional involvement.

Unlike radio, which is bound by schedules and institutional control, podcasts empower individuals to create, share, and circulate stories without centralized gatekeeping. A basic microphone and internet access are enough to reach global audiences. This participatory and democratized structure closely mirrors traditional oral spaces where storytelling belonged to everyone. Thus, podcasting has become a modern-day public square, enabling new dialogues, community building, and cultural exchange.

### **IV. LINGUISTIC AND CULTURAL DIVERSITY IN INDIAN PODCASTS**

India's vast linguistic diversity significantly shapes its podcasting ecosystem. While English and Hindi serve urban and pan-Indian audiences, regional languages such as Tamil, Telugu, Marathi, Bengali, and Malayalam have gained remarkable traction on audio platforms. Apps like Kuku FM, Pocket FM, and Suno India produce thousands of hours of content across 20 or more Indian languages, including local dialects that are rarely represented in mainstream media.

This regional podcast surge also supports cultural preservation by documenting oral history, folk tales, and local wisdom for digital archives. For instance, Assamese folklore retellings, Kannada Panchatantra adaptations, and Marathi devotional storytelling reflect an effort to digitize cultural memory. By allowing creators from small towns and rural regions to distribute content widely, podcasts uphold India's linguistic plurality and expand cultural participation across socio-economic boundaries.

### **V. GENDER, VOICE, AND AGENCY**

Podcasting provides a powerful medium for women to reclaim narrative spaces historically dominated by male voices. Shows such as Agla Station Adulthood, The Sanskari Girl Podcast, and Maed in India allow women to discuss identity, relationships, work, public life, and personal experience openly. The absence of visual scrutiny in audio formats offers women a sense of expressive safety, enabling honest, vulnerable, and confident storytelling.

This shift promotes feminist expression, diversity of perspective, and new models of media participation. Women podcasters challenge social stereotypes and shape new cultural understandings by centering their voices. As listeners engage, they practice forms of empathetic listening that transform how women's voices are culturally received. Thus, podcasting fosters a more inclusive communication environment where gendered experiences become legitimate sources of knowledge and creativity.

### **VI. ECONOMIC AND TECHNOLOGICAL DIMENSIONS**

India's podcast industry operates where creativity intersects commercial innovation. Major international platforms such as Spotify, Amazon Music, and Apple Podcasts have invested heavily in Indian content ecosystems. Meanwhile, homegrown studios like IVM Podcasts, Suno India, and Bound Podcasts support independent creators by providing production resources, editorial mentorship, and distribution networks. The growth of AI-powered recommendation systems has also enhanced podcast visibility and listener engagement.

However, monetization remains uneven. While brand partnerships, advertisements, and subscription models are emerging, many creators struggle to sustain consistent revenue. Fiction-based storytelling apps like Pocket FM and Kuku FM have experimented with microtransactions and paid series, offering new economic models. As podcasts begin merging with educational technology, journalism, entertainment industries, and mental health services, the medium continues to expand as an integral part of India's digital economy. Despite rapid growth, scholarly research on Indian podcasting is still developing. One major gap is the absence of long-term listener engagement studies that track how habits evolve over time. Additionally, most industry research focuses on urban audiences, overlooking the increasing role of rural and semi-urban listeners. Regional linguistic podcast dynamics also remain underexamined, limiting



understanding of cultural diversity within audio storytelling trends. Further research is also needed to explore gender, caste, class, and digital identity politics in podcast participation. Moreover, platform algorithms and recommendation systems shape content visibility, yet academic attention to these technological dynamics remains limited. Addressing these gaps requires interdisciplinary approaches combining media theory, cultural anthropology, digital ethnography, and communication research frameworks.

### VII. SUGGESTED METHODOLOGY

This research recommends a mixed-methods approach that integrates qualitative and quantitative analysis. Qualitative interviews with podcasters, producers, and listeners would help uncover creative motivations, narrative techniques, and listener relationships. Ethnographic observation of podcast communities can further illuminate how audio storytelling shapes shared cultural experiences.

Quantitative tools such as audience analytics, platform usage statistics, and market studies would help determine demographic trends and content performance patterns. Content analysis of selected podcasts across genres would provide insight into narrative structure, language choices, sound design strategies, and cultural themes. Combining these methods ensures both interpretive depth and empirical clarity.

### VIII. CONCLUSION

Podcasting is a cultural renaissance that reinvigorates India's oral storytelling heritage through digital innovation. By merging the expressive power of the human voice with the accessibility of mobile technology, podcasts revive listening as a shared cultural practice. They offer intimate spaces for reflection, community bonding, and emotional connection — especially in an era increasingly dominated by screens and visual overload.

As India continues to expand technologically and culturally, podcasting sustains linguistic diversity, empowers marginalized voices, and preserves cultural memory. It reshapes storytelling as an evolving, participatory tradition that connects the past with the present. In essence, podcasting represents the sound of India rediscovering itself — one story at a time.

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