



(Above) Franklin D Roosevelt during his first 'Fireside Chat'.

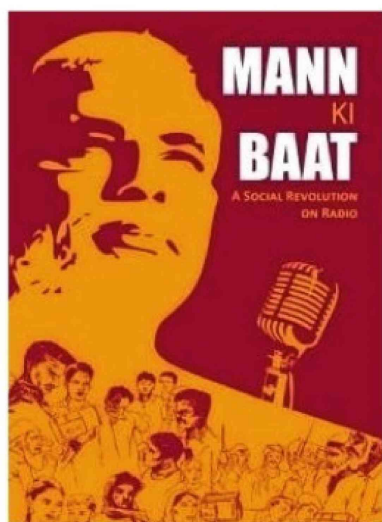
THERE is something about radio. Perhaps no other medium has dispatched history so definitively and eloquently to so many people worldwide since its invention.

The tragic ring of El Maracanazo, Brazil's 1950 World Cup final defeat to Uruguay, must still haunt older Brazilians who were part of a shell-shocked nation glued to the radio that day. Or when Jawaharlal Nehru came on Air India Radio (AIR) on January 30, 1948, to deliver his speech — "The light has gone out of our lives" — to announce the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi.

From Nazi propaganda by Joseph Goebbels ("the German revolution would have been impossible without the airplane and the radio," he said) to Franklin Roosevelt's Fireside Chats while leading his country out of the Great Depression, the medium has been used for both evil and good with great effect. Subhas Chandra Bose, for instance, started galvanising the nation against British occupation on Azad Hind Radio from 1942.

RADIO has been a potent tool in Mexican nationalism of the '30s, and is the medium on which more than 20 countries of sub-Saharan Africa overwhelmingly depend for news.

So, standing about four months from three years of Narendra Modi's *Mann Ki Baat*, one can guess why one of the finest performers in the visual format chose to be the bodiless voice on Akashvani from Vijaya Dashami, 2014. The sheer power of AIR, its sway over 92 per cent of India's area and 99.19 per cent of its people, little groups listening to the PM sitting around at tea stalls or porches can be more earthy and effective than a pyrrhic televised speech.



Narendra Modi in the middle of one of his 'Mann ki Baat' transmissions. (Below-left) A new eponymous book comes packed with trivia and perspective on the PM's popular radio show.

Modi's radio nationalism

A newly released eponymous book, put together by Bluekraft digital foundation, comes packed with trivia and perspective on the PM's popular radio show, tracing the journey of the first 23 episodes event by event with occasional glimpses of a much larger design.

Modi has not tried to hide his disappointment with and mistrust of mainstream media. While with social media he cut out journalists and started reaching the message directly to the people, with radio, he becomes his own messenger for even those who do not have a cell phone or a TV set.

Early chapters touch on how the name came by. When his commu-

nication team was coming up with 'PM Ke Saath Ru-Ba-Ru' and 'Vaarta Modi Ji Ke Saath', the PM asked them to keep it light.

"*Kuchh halki phulki mann ki baatein karoonga*," he apparently said, and they got their name.

And Modi has cleverly kept it that way. The Modi of radio is far from the aggressive political campaigner of rallies and TV telecasts. Neither is he the statesmanlike communicator on social media.

You hold a radio close to the ear. You sometimes hear it huddled with your own small group

of acquaintances or family. In that way, it is a lot more intimate mass medium.

The PM, perhaps mindful of that, has chosen for radio issues that resonate in the household like cleanliness, examinations and career, drug addiction, girl child, farmers, Siachen soldiers, handloom, festivals, yoga or gas subsidy. The topics are almost out of a modern Sangh *pracharak's* 'vyakti nirman' kit, made to shape an individual's relationship with family and society.

But in all this lie seeds of Modi and

the RSS idea of nationalism. The radio show gently plants ideas of a stronger, more cohesive nationhood.

What *Mann Ki Baat* also set in motion was a massive feedback and suggestion mechanism in the background. Much of it was being handled by the government's citizen participation initiative, MyGov. "Every month, the *Mann Ki Baat* open forum is launched on MyGov, about 10 days before the scheduled broadcast," the book says. "While screening the comments, the content team looks at the uniqueness of the idea, any thought or suggestion, a personal anecdote which can help narrate a larger goal and... motivate them to do something similar in their lives."

The book talks about the joint *Mann Ki Baat* session PM had with President Barack Obama in January 2015, or the decision to start Post Box 111 every Sunday on radio with spillover, important suggestions.

So far, *Mann Ki Baat* has been this paternal voice on the nation's airwaves. It has been largely apolitical. But the PM has created a formidable platform. How he uses it in the future and whether he innovates and keeps it relevant are to be seen.

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