



IMPACT RESEARCH

# Piyar ka Passport: Using Radio Drama to Foster Dialogue about Social Issues in Pakistan



The cast and production team of *Piyar ka Passport*

**BBC World Service Trust pilot radio drama to raise awareness and stimulate dialogue on human rights and social and gender issues in Pakistan, in partnership with the BBC Urdu Service and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) through the British High Commission in Islamabad**

**This report outlines key findings from research conducted after the Trust's pilot radio drama was broadcast. 'Piyar ka Passport' (Passport to Love) was broadcast on the BBC Urdu Service and FM partner stations in Pakistan in March 2006.**

The questions explored in this report include:

- » What are listeners' expectations of radio and radio drama?
- » Did 'Piyar ka Passport' provide an engaging story and address contemporary social issues in an interesting and authentic way?
- » Do listeners perceive the drama to have an 'agenda'?
- » Did the drama succeed in challenging listeners' thinking about a range of social issues?

## Overview

The radio drama was part of a larger pilot project exploring the use of radio drama as a vehicle for incorporating discussion, raising awareness and stimulating dialogue around a range of human rights and social and gender issues affecting the lives of people in Pakistan.

The project produced and broadcast the following outputs:

- » *Piyar ka Passport*: Twelve 15 minute episodes of an Urdu language drama broadcast over two weeks in March 2006.
- » A live radio phone-in programme on the BBC Urdu Service with additional phone-in programmes on partner FM stations in Pakistan.
- » A live radio debate with an audience, held simultaneously in both Lahore and London.
- » Two websites - in Urdu and English respectively - providing background information on the project, audio versions of all the outputs, detail about the drama and characters and a forum for online discussion.

## Project design

The key objectives of the pilot radio drama were:

- » To depict social issues related to marriage and family life in Pakistan.
- » To stimulate dialogue around social issues related to marriage and family life in Pakistan.

- » To encourage listeners to share their views, particularly via phone-in programmes, participating in the live debate and contributing to the project website.

## Methodology

This report draws on a programme of quantitative and qualitative research activities conducted after the broadcast of *Piyar ka Passport*:

- » A quantitative survey of 362 radio listeners (May-June 2006).
- » Four key informant focus groups (March 2006).
- » Eight radio listeners' focus groups (March 2006).

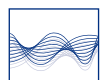
## Survey of radio listeners

The survey sampling methodology was based on a random sample design, carried out in four regions: Faisalabad (30%), Jaranwala (20%), Multan (27%) and Lodhran (23%). All respondents were aged 17 years or older and were screened on whether they had listened to *Piyar ka Passport*. The 162 research participants who reported they had listened to *Piyar ka Passport* constitute the basis of the quantitative analysis reported here.

## Piyar ka Passport listener profile

- » 19% of the sample was aged 17-20 years old, 43% 21-30 year olds, 28% 31-40 year olds, 9% 41-50 year olds, and 2% over 50 years old.
- » 94% had a radio in their own household, with 82% listening to it daily.

<sup>1</sup>Formative quantitative and qualitative research was also conducted prior to the broadcast of *Piyar ka Passport*.



Set in a fictional community in Northern Pakistan, the pilot radio drama tells the story of two branches of a family, one based in Pakistan and the other in the UK. Ahmed, who moved away from Pakistan to the UK, has thought of returning, whilst his brother Niaz wonders if he has suffered by staying in Pakistan. The younger members of the two families are meanwhile caught between the liberal and conservative influences of their different worlds. When a family wedding in Pakistan reunites the two branches, the brothers arrange to seal family ties by arranging a marriage between their respective children. However, what at first appears to be a simple and harmonious proposal leads to conflict and unexpected consequences. A number of dramatic events follow, among them a painful secret from the past and a land deal that has gone sour.

The three generations of the family are not good at listening to the needs of one another, nor are the men and women of the respective families. The audience has the opportunity to follow the characters express contrasting views on the unfolding events.

### Focus groups

Four key informant focus groups were conducted among both practitioners and experts on gender and social issues in Lahore and Islamabad<sup>2</sup>.

Eight focus groups were conducted with radio listeners in Faisalabad, Multan and surrounding rural regions. The sample split for the radio listener groups was as follows:

- » All groups were single sex: four male groups, four female groups.
- » ½ urban respondents, ½ rural respondents.
- » All aged between 15-44 years old.
- » All males were BBC Urdu Service listeners.
- » All female urban respondents were BBC Urdu Service listeners; all female rural respondents were radio listeners in general.

The gender recruitment for these groups was based on previous research undertaken on listening habits.

### Key findings

The findings highlighted here draw upon both the quantitative and qualitative research outlined above.

### Radio drama and listeners' expectations

Generally, radio listening is peripheral, and used for light entertainment (music and chat) and information (news) during other activities. Most (71%) of the listeners to the pilot radio drama report listening to radio 1-3 hours a day.

Focus group respondents report listening to the radio more frequently during the day than in the evening. Rural focus group respondents reported listening to the radio more than those in urban areas.

FM radio is an increasingly popular medium with listeners in Pakistan; this is evidenced by the 90% of *Piyar ka Passport* listeners surveyed who had reported listening to the drama on FM. The focus groups uncovered that FM radio is regarded as a new source of information, an alternative to AM output and regarded positively for recreation. FM is also regarded as more versatile, since it is available on mobile phones. The more customised 'music and chat' output of FM stations was broadly regarded as appealing to younger people, whereas AM stations, comprised of relatively more 'conservative' news and religious based programming, appeal to older and more rural audiences.

Music and talk were regarded as rather 'light hearted', while radio drama in general was viewed as positively adding something more substantial to radio outputs, albeit with a degree of nostalgia due to the strength of Urdu radio drama before the advent of television.

Most felt radio drama had the potential to have an impact. There was disagreement, however, on whether this could be accomplished in the absence of supporting outputs and activities.

### Engagement and authenticity

A majority of listeners to the pilot radio drama surveyed felt *Piyar ka Passport* was 'quite/very entertaining' (62%) 'quite/very informative' (59%) and 'quite/very original' (65%). *Piyar ka Passport* was praised in focus groups for its balanced depiction of issues faced by characters, particularly in looking at issues from both male and female perspectives.

The characters represented a range of social classes and were praised for their acting<sup>3</sup>. This served as an important vehicle for listener engagement. The three characters remembered most in the survey were:

- » **Patwari** (36%): Married, projecting a deceptively wealthy image, but actually a corrupt character that exploits his position as land registrar for personal gain, and is thought to be violent towards his wife.
- » **Daadi** (32%): A candid and loud grandmother figure who oversees the household and is seen as trustworthy and even handed in her decisions.
- » **Jeera** (22%): A heroin addict in his mid thirties and excluded to a large extent because of his reliance on the drug.

It was suggested that there should be more emphasis on widening the range of regional accents in future broadcasts, particularly in the absence of visual imagery.

Most of the listeners to *Piyar ka Passport* heard between one and three episodes (62%); 34% had heard between four and six episodes and only 4% had listened to seven or more. In focus groups, not all had been able to listen to every episode and thus experienced a degree of difficulty in following the plot. The level of character recall and engagement within the quantitative findings is particularly noteworthy in light of irregular listening to the drama. Some felt the need to make the drama more accessible to those who were not able to follow the detail over many episodes, and to limit the degree of complexity of subjects covered within a single storyline.

Respondents engaged with characters and their stories. Criticisms tended to be about how characters handled particular issues in their lives, an indication of the strength of the story, script and acting in creating an authentic portrayal of contemporary life in Pakistan.

Many called for a more balanced tone to increase the element of entertainment or 'lighter relief' within each episode. While the drama enjoyed praise for the range of issues it portrayed, there was some concern that it should not be seen to focus too heavily on negative aspects of society in Pakistan<sup>4</sup>.

Most *Piyar ka Passport* listeners surveyed said they would like to know what happens in potential future episodes of the drama (53%), to the extent that most would also either watch or consider watching a TV series of the drama (71%), and suggesting a range of issues for it to cover.

### 'Agenda' to the drama

Of those *Piyar ka Passport* listeners that did perceive the pilot radio drama to have an agenda, most saw it as promoting broader themes rather than specific issues – in particular, the importance of trusting people (32%), 'love and humanity' (17%) and various issues around marriage were identified.

**'[Piyar ka Passport] revolves around many different topics such as love, betrayal and greed whereas only love stories are generally highlighted in most dramas...'**

**Female, Faisalabad**

Focus group respondents clearly understood that gender and family issues were the focus of the pilot radio drama: forced marriage; how much power rests in young people's hands; rape; the acceptance of victims of sexual abuse; and women's rights.

**'[The pilot radio drama] convey[s] in the end that women too have their own self respect.'**

**Female, Multan**

Although focus group respondents believed forced marriage had been used often in drama already as a commonly used plot, they saw two major issues in the pilot radio drama - rape and migration to the UK - in which *Piyar ka Passport* was regarded as breaking new ground. Some, however, thought these issues were more important than others.

**'The story of Safia is that she, along with her parents, is living abroad. She gets raped there and comes back to Pakistan. Their plans for her marriage do not succeed due to that unfortunate incident. Her relatives here do not accept her and even the boy refuses to own her. He should have owned her because one has to accept both the good & bad aspects of one's beloved. She was innocent and not responsible for what happened...'**

**Female, Faisalabad**

Women lauded the inclusion of the rape storyline in the pilot radio drama more than men. This was regarded by many as a first for such a taboo subject like rape within radio drama in Pakistan.

The second major theme identified from the pilot radio drama was migration to and living in the UK.

Some interpreted the portrayal of the differences between society in the UK and Pakistan as a negative comment on Pakistani immigration to the UK; others took away valuable insights about the differences between the two societies as well as the lives of those living in the Britain. The pilot radio drama was seen to have effectively portrayed contemporary life in the two countries, rather than being idealistic or 'escapist' in its depiction.

### Initiating discussion about social issues

**'In [Piyar ka Passport] we were given both negative and positive arguments and could compare them easily.'**

**Male, Multan**

Evidence about how the pilot radio drama initiated discussion is derived from the following sources:

- » Levels of discussion and debate regarding specific topics in all of the 12 focus groups.
- » Listeners' reactions to the additional discussion outputs supporting the pilot radio drama.

Radio listeners in the focus groups discussed the pilot radio drama's issues vigorously, particularly the rape story. Many felt that issues not covered before in the genre of radio drama should be extended within future episodes. Others commented directly on what happened in the pilot radio drama and commented on how differently the characters should have handled the situation.

**'There is no concept of rape in our culture. It happens here, but less frequently compared to the liberal west.'**

**Male, Faisalabad**

**'Take the case of rape as it is shown in the drama; when the other family comes to know about it, they should have tolerated it open-mindedly. They should have accepted this reality but they taunted and teased her instead.'**

**Female, Faisalabad**

As mentioned above, the pilot radio drama was supplemented by three principal fora for dialogue in the project broadcasts:

1. Live phone-ins.
2. 10-day "Have your Say" web discussion, which followed the drama.
3. Two debate programmes on March 19th and 20th, following the conclusion of the drama.

Over 70% of callers in a phone-in show to one broadcaster complained that they saw hypocrisy in the attitude of one character's mother towards her son's intended bride. This high level of involvement in a storyline, leading on to debate and discussion, is precisely what the project aimed to achieve.

### Project and research learnings

#### Integrated and complimentary outputs

Radio drama can be effective in depicting complex social issues. Discussion fora, linked to the drama output, serve to facilitate discussion, and have the potential for a catalytic role. The preliminary research suggests that self-contained episodes and clear issues that are raised and resolved within an episode serve to better focus discussion.

<sup>2</sup>The key informants participating in the focus groups were NGO representatives, human rights activists, Government officials, representatives of women's education and family planning organisations.

<sup>3</sup>There was a range of social classes represented by characters in the drama and in participants in the research.

<sup>4</sup>This theme first emerged in the qualitative formative research, which showed a mixture of positive and negative feelings by participants within Pakistan itself, but a perception of more intense negativity towards their country from people outside; specifically, that women were repressed in their ideas and actions, and terrorism, corruption, illiteracy, fundamentalism and repression were rife.



### Characters

- » The research confirms the importance of realistic acting and portrayal in the drama to maximise resonance with listeners.
- » A diverse combination of positive and negative characters positions a drama with a strong identity, though there is a balance to be struck between sustaining one's audience but avoiding the perception of painting an overtly negative picture of a country.

### Production values

- » A range of accents facilitates a broad appeal for a drama, preventing it from appearing too provincial and potentially alienating some audiences in the process.
- » Listeners recognise the benefits of resolving issues and conflicts within a single episode, and also the value of continuing stories over a series of episodes. Both approaches have implications for listeners' comprehension and recall of content.
- » A mixture of heavy and light themes balances information with entertainment, two key characteristics of radio listening that appeal to listeners for different but not contradictory reasons.
- » There is also the potential for radio drama to act as the centre piece of an integrated information dissemination strategy using a variety of media platforms.

### Social content

- » Radio drama clearly has the potential to draw attention to issues within contemporary society, and cover sensitive, even taboo topics to its listeners and succeed in engaging rather than alienating them.
- » As a genre, radio drama has the potential to confront controversial issues, once they are contextualised within themes or topics that resonate strongly with the host culture.
- » Radio drama also has the potential to be inclusive of a range of different perspectives - young, old, male, female etc.
- » Topics that address issues of national identity are susceptible to the criticism of promoting a negative picture of a particular society. It is imperative, therefore, that dramas in which these issues are explored are constructive, yet critical when appropriate.

**'We will be waiting for [the drama's] next episodes. We can listen to the drama during our household work, doing embroidery etc. There should be more dramas like this on the radio.'**

**Female, Faisalabad**

### About the BBC World Service Trust

**The BBC World Service Trust is the independent, international charity set up by the BBC, which uses media to advance development. Through its Media Development and Development Communications Groups, the Trust works around the world to:**

- » Raise awareness of development issues among mass audiences and opinion-formers.
- » Influence attitudes, awareness and behaviour amongst poorer communities through a wide range of educational programming on poverty-related topics.
- » Build capacity in the media sector in developing and transitional countries.

This work is underpinned by formative, monitoring and impact research, which is managed by the Trust's *Research and Learning Group*. Research professionals based in London and ten project offices in the field staff the Group. The *Research Dissemination Series* aims to contribute to the fields

of media development and development communications research through summaries of the *Research and Learning Group's* work. As such, the target audience of the series includes research practitioners, technical advisors and project managers who commission and use such research.

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### Contact & Feedback

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