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Pod Pooja

Imagine I am an Indian immigrant in some corner of the world with my roots in a lesser-known Indian language and culture such as Tulu or Dogri. But I'm a global worker bee. I've lived in San Francisco and Sydney. I've made decent bucks. Now, somewhere within me, I feel I'm losing touch with my roots.

I don't miss India as much (not with so many globetrotting Indians around) as I miss my linguistic, regional and subregional roots. I long to hear songs in my language and news of my people beyond what the ethnic news channels, now broadcasting abroad in Hindi and Indlish, can provide.

Enter podcasting. With a personal computer and nifty software like audacity or garageband, anyone can now produce audio or video programs that can be accessed anywhere anytime by a device such as an iPod.

That includes podcasts by my kith and kin, by my buddies in college, and by my special interest friends hooked to cricket, Bollywood, and the stock market. I can sample the latest recording of a school band, watch my niece's arangetram, and hear my friends in Bangalore bash ideas for improving the city's infrastructure while gardening here.

The remarkable thing about podcasting it democratizes the media. With a few simple tools, anyone can be a broadcaster, a TV anchor, a singer or an entertainer -- with access to a worldwide market. A talented artist could easily put his or her work online, set up downloads for payments, and make a living bypassing the entire formal system.

Podcasting is also language- and constituency friendly. You can crank up a podcast about any subject for which you think there is a market or interest out there. Sindhis and Parsis need not look for some entrepreneur, much less

the government, to put them on air. Do you think you have a unique perspective on cricket and movies that could have a listenership – in Konkani? Podcast is for you.

Today, even cable television and constantly updating websites seem passé in the face of personalized blogs and podcasts. The Iyers of Tambaram, the Mehtas of Mulund, and the Agarwals in SouthEx can package their own news and views pertaining to clan and community, colony and country. It's like your own home movie, except that your cousin or nephew in some Podunk American town can hear it while driving to the mall.

To get an idea of what podcasts are doing, check out www.podbazaar.com. Here, a bunch of Bay Area desis crank out home made programs on investing in India, desi dilemmas, and even music shows. There are podcasts in Marathi, Gujarati, Urdu, Tamil and Malayalam.

It's still raw, but in the few weeks it has been around, podbazaar has been humming with action -- a podpourri in many Indian languages. What a change from the time when telephone calls to India cost \$ 3-a-minute and Indian newspapers arrived here a week later.

Forget America, just imagine podcast's potential in India. Sure there won't be one in Garhwali or Santhali anytime soon. But how long before some entrepreneur finds that Awadhi and Maithili dialects are spoken by 20 million people each? Surely not as long as it took Bollywood to discover the 24-million strong Bhojpuri market?

Those who think all this is elite, hi-tech chatter need only to hark back to the cell phone revolution. As with mobiles, it won't be long before \$ 300 iPods drop to \$ 30 apiece. Then every Scotty and Subbu will be beaming. Small wonder podcast has been selected as the word of the year by the Oxford American Dictionary. The best is yet to come.
