

# MAKING A MARK IN THE MEDIA WORLD

By

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Saman Qureshi

Remember the movie Munna Bhai Laage Raho, in which Munna Bhai (Sanjay Dutt) is smitten by the voice of Jahnvi (Vidya Balan) - a radio jockey and is hooked to her programme “Hello Mumbai”. Having grown up listening to Ameen Sayani’s Binaca Geet Mala, and giving talks on Radio, I became fascinated by the possibilities the Radio offered in its new Avatar of FM Radio in communicating and connecting to a wider audience. I was therefore keen to meet a Radio Jockey and learn about the profession. But tied down to my 24/7 schedule of a Public servant with onerous domestic responsibilities I didn’t pursue it and was content in listening to Radio Mirchi 98.3 FM on way to office and back and of course giving an occasional talks on A.I.R.

Then last week I heard from a friend about Sadaf, a young Muslim girl from a conservative background in Bihar who had come all the way to Mumbai to pursue a career as a Radio Jockey. And that information triggered off my old desire to learn and understand this career and the possibilities it opened for girls from conservative and traditional families to earn a living, make an impact in society, get fame and perhaps one day become a celebrity. So I did some research, checked out on the schemes and channels of All India Radio and most importantly was finally able to interview a Radio Jockey who was also a Production Assistant in the Urdu section of All India Radio, and had been on Television and was aspiring to become a news anchor: 22-year-old Saman Qureshi from the Muslim dominated locality of Mumbra in Thane district.

But first let me give a little information on the development of the Radio industry with its wide network of government/ private channels (to me it was an eye opener) operating in India so as to understand why I consider it to be such an exciting career option. The immense reach and popularity of the radio has a lot to do with the advent of FM radio and the opening of Private Radio stations – a beginning of which was made in 1930's in America. In India the first FM broadcast began on 23<sup>rd</sup> July 1977 in Chennai and it was only in the mid-90's that it expanded to other cities. Today AIR has 421 channels across India and FM has 7000 private and 5000 Community channels! But the top ten channels which are most popular and have millions of listeners are generally considered to be Radio Mirchi, 98.3 FM with a nationwide network of private FM radio stations owned by the Entertainment Network India Ltd (ENIL), one of the subsidiaries of The Times Group; Vividh Bharti, Air FM Rainbow, AIR FM Gold, Radio Mid-Day, Red FM 93.5, BIG FM 92.7, Radio City, Radio Indigo and Fever 104 FM. The list is dynamic as the ratings keep changing and much of the popularity is dependent on the charm and skill of the Radio Jockey- he /she should be able to captivate the listeners. The big names in the industry are Naved and Malishka who command a salary of 8 lacs per month!

So what does one require to become a Radio Jockey. Well, first and foremost they need to have a command of the language, a clear and soothing voice, good pronunciation, great interpersonal skills, a fine sense of humor. It helps to have a degree in Media or in Radio Journalism. But most of all experience is required and the All India Radio provides a launching pad to many aspirants as they maintain a large panel for which they conduct auditions every three months. Generally, the selected candidates take a month to be trained. Some however become adept in a week or so. They are paid about Rs 1300 for one session of three hours and on an average a panelist earns about 10,000 per month. As it is a part time pre-occupation it is popular with students and housewives. It is interesting that 90% of the selected candidates are women. Many of the selected candidates after gaining experience move over to private channels. They also get assignments as DJ's and comedians for various events and as voice over in advertisements, documentaries, TV serials and movies.

When I first saw Saman, a slim, fair complexioned girl with delicate features and dark intense eyes in the AIR office I wondered what she was doing there: she had the personality of a TV news anchor. And I soon learnt that was what she was aiming to be- that is what she had always wanted to be. Hence she had done her Bachelors in Media Management (BMM) from Bedekar College Thane. She also did a stint at DNA newspaper as a reporter and also internship with Aaj Tak news channel where she appeared on the Saas Bahu Betiyan programme. She also modelled

for some domestic products. After working for some time as Radio Jockey, to gain experience in the A.I.R Samvadita channel, she decided to learn the work of a Production Assistant.

I was surprised to learn that this jean clad girl lived in Mumbra .A year back, I had been to Mumbra to write about the work being done by the NGO's Sahara and Rehnuma and was quite taken back by the predominance of burqa clad women and men with skullcaps

“ Though my appearance is not like a Muslim , I am very religious .Besides reading the Quran daily and my five times prayers, I also do Tahjud and ...” Saman broke into a smile watching my awed expression. I was truly impressed. Amazing too was her family background. Her father has a fruit business and her mother is a housewife. – No one connected with the Media world or the corridors of power. She has three sisters and her younger sister has got married .There was tremendous pressure on her to get married, from the extended family but she held on. There was also criticism on the choice of career, but fortunately her parents were supportive. Now that she has found some success and appeared in TV shows the criticism has muted.

So we wish Saman all success and hope to see her soon as News anchor on TV shows – an inspiration to girls from less privileged and conservative backgrounds.