

Enhancing Literacy with Karaoke

PlanetRead, a Mumbai NGO, is using a form of karaoke to increase literacy among India's poor. Called Same-Language Subtitling (SLS), it is the brainchild of Prof Brij Kothari, a literacy expert at the Centre for Educational Innovation at Ahmedabad's Indian Institute of Management. "The idea came to me in 1996 when I was a student," says Kothari. "Some friends and I were watching a Spanish film

with English subtitles. As a student of Spanish, I thought it would have been more useful if the Spanish film had Spanish subtitles. That way, I could have grasped the dialogue better, in the original language." Added Kothari, half in jest, "If only Hindi film songs were subtitled in Hindi, India would become literate!"

Thanks to that idea, Doordarshan now airs SLS-enhanced Hindi programs *Chitrahaar* and *Rangoli*. As with karaoke, the words of the song too appear on the screen to sing along. SLS has, since 2006, been implemented in seven regional languages as well. One study has found that after five years of viewing SLS television shows in Hindi, viewers who could read a Hindi newspaper well increased from 33 to 70%. A similar study showed that 24% of school children with no exposure to SLS became good readers. But among kids whose schooling was supplemented with SLS, that figure increased to 56%.

