

MAKING WAVES: COMMUNITY RADIO AND THE INDIAN SCENARIO

Ravi Shankar,

Head, Department of Mass Communication and Journalism,
Government Post Graduate College, Ambala Cantt, India.

ABSTRACT

Community radio, as distinct from public service broadcasting, serves to bring small communities together, focuses on common man's day-to-day concerns and helps in realizing local aspirations. In this sense it aims to contribute to the lives of the local community, through the content that is created by the people and for the people of the community. Community radio reflects the interests and needs of the community it serves. According to Everett Rogers "Development communication refers to the uses to which communication are put in order to further development." It can thus be said to be an approach to communication which provides communities with information they can use in bettering their lives. Development communication has two primary roles, i.e. Transforming role, as it steps social change in the direction of the hygiene taste of today's generation in this competitive market and a socializing role by seeking to maintain some of the established values of the society. Media plays an important role in development communication through circulation of knowledge, providing forum for discussion of issues, teach ideas, skills for a better life and create a base of consensus for stability of the state. In a developing nation like India, mass media such as Community Radio has a great role to play. It has definitely left an impression on the Indian society over the years. The present paper aims at discussing the role it can play in developing the nation as well as it will try to throw some light on the development and growth of Community Radio.

Keywords: Community Radio, Media, Communication, Development, Community communications, Community media

"When radio fosters the participation of citizens and defends their interests; when it reflects the tastes of the majority; when it truly informs; when it helps resolve the thousand and one

problems of daily life; when all ideas are debated in its programs and all opinions are respected; when cultural diversity is stimulated over commercial homogeneity; when women are main players in communication and not simply a pretty voice; when no type of dictatorship is tolerated; when everyone's words fly without discrimination or censorship; that is community radio."

José Ignacio Lopez Vigil (Author of Rebel Radio)

INTRODUCTION: Use of communication media which include two way communications has been called 'community communications' or 'community media'. In the past, similar terms have been used to identify programming especially designed for particular community groups, such as ethnic or minority groups, groups with special needs or interests. Other than this deliberate orientation, little in the production procedure was changed. Topics were chosen in the same way, by professional communicators, and targeted towards the apparent needs and interests of the audience. But community communications should mean more than programming designed for special or selected groups. They are intended to be based on more than assumed audience needs and interests. Community media are adaptations of media for use by the community, for whatever purposes the community decides. They are media to which members of the community has access, for information, education, entertainment, when they want access. They are media in which the community participates, as planners, producers, performers. They are the means of expression & the community, rather than for the community. Community communications describe an exchange of views and news, not a transmission

from one source to another.

We know it well that Communication has always been used for more than just passing on information. It is often used as a tool to facilitate the participation of people in developmental activities. Such form of communication is known as development communication. Everett Rogers rightly uttered that, "Development communication refers to the uses to which communication are put in order to further development." It can thus be said to be an approach to communication which provides communities with information they can use in bettering their lives. Development communication has two primary roles, i.e. Transforming role, as it

steps social change in the direction of the hygiene taste of today's generation in this competitive market and a Socializing role by seeking to maintain some of the established values of the society.

Media plays an important role in development communication through circulation of knowledge, providing forum for discussion of issues, teach ideas, skills for a better life and create a base of consensus for stability of the state. From the early stages of the introduction of the media in India various attempts were made to exploit their potential for development purposes. The history of development communication in India can be traced to 1940's when radio broadcast was done in different languages to promote development communication through various programmes, like—Programs for Rural Audience, Educational Programs and Family Welfare Programs.

WHAT IS COMMUNITY RADIO? Community radio, as distinct from public service broadcasting, serves to bring small communities together, focuses on common man's day-to-day concerns and helps in realizing local aspirations. In this sense it aims to contribute to the lives of the local community, through the content that is created by the people and for the people of the community. Community radio reflects the interests and needs of the community it serves.

It challenges the traditional division between the broadcasters on one side and the listeners on the other. Non-profit organisation and communities stand to benefit from this inexpensive yet effective means of communication. It is said that Community Radio is a radio service which offers a third model of radio broadcasting in addition to commercial and public broadcasting. Community stations serve geographic communities and communities of interest. They broadcast content that is popular and relevant to a local, specific audience but is often overlooked by commercial or mass-media broadcasters.

A WORLDWIDE PHENOMENA: José Ignacio Lopez Vigil once rightly remarked, "When radio fosters the participation of citizens and defends their interests; when it reflects the tastes of the majority; when it truly informs; when it helps resolve the thousand and one problems of daily life; when all ideas are debated in its programs and all opinions are respected; when cultural diversity is stimulated over commercial homogeneity; when women

are main players in communication and not simply a pretty voice; when no type of dictatorship is tolerated; when everyone's words fly without discrimination or censorship; that is community radio."

Meanwhile, **Louie Tabing** has defined a community radio station as "one that is operated in the community, for the community, about the community and by the community."

Tabing further says, "the community can be territorial or geographical – a township, village, district or island and can also be a group of people with common interests, who are not necessarily living in one defined territory."

Another authority on Community Radio, **Carlos A Arnaldo** distinguishes Community Radio as a social process in which members of a community federate design and produce programmes, and air them.

Some other interesting observations coming from different corners of the world and thus giving the concept an international flavour are worth mentioning here:

"Waves for Freedom" Report on the Sixth World Conference of Community Radio Broadcasters Dakar, Senegal, January 23-39, 1995 mentions, "Community radio, rural radio, cooperative radio, participatory radio, free radio, alternative, popular, educational radio. If the radio stations, networks and production groups that make up the World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters refer to themselves by a variety of names, then their practices and profiles are even more varied. Some are musical, some militant and some mix music and militancy. They are located in isolated rural villages and in the heart of the largest cities in the world. Their signals may reach only a kilometre, cover a whole country or be carried via shortwave to other parts of the world."

Bruce Girard in A Passion for Radio: Radio waves and community. 1992 states, "Its most distinguishing characteristic is its commitment to community participation at all levels. While listeners of commercial radio are able to participate in the programming in limited ways – via open line telephone shows or by requesting a favourite song, for example – community radio listeners are the producers, managers, directors, evaluators and even the owners of the stations."

“What is Community Radio? A resource guide” AMARC Africa and Panos Southern Africa. 1998 says, “Even though community radio should encourage access and participation by communities, it also has to address issues such as who is in control, whether it is democratically managed, and whether there is a mechanism whereby it is accountable to those it serves. Community radio is not about doing something for the community but about the community doing something for itself...”

THE INDIAN SCENARIO: In India the campaign to legitimise community radio began in the mid-1990s, soon after the Supreme Court of India ruled in its judgment of February 1995 that "airwaves are public property." This inspired groups across the country; however, only educational (campus) radio stations were originally permitted (under a number of conditions). Anna FM was India's first campus "community" radio station. Launched on 1 February 2004, it is run by the Education and Multimedia Research Centre (EMRC); all programmes are produced by Media Science students at Anna University.

LANDMARKS IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF COMMUNITY RADIO IN INDIA:

- 1. Supreme court judgment on airwaves, 9 Feb 1995:** The Supreme Court delivered this historic judgment in Ministry of Information and Broadcasting Vs Cricket Association of Bengal, which involved the rights of a cricket association to give telecast rights to an agency of its choice. The Court ruled that, "Airwaves constitute public property and must be utilised for advancing public good."
- 2. Bangalore declaration, September 1996:** Policy planners, media professionals and CSOs gather in Bangalore in September 1996 to study how community radio could be relevant in India. A 'Bangalore Declaration' is signed, which formed the basis of advocacy for community radio since then.

- 3. Commercial FM licensing phase-1, May 2000:** 108 FM frequencies were licensed in 40 cities. Only 21 commercial FM stations are currently on air, in 12 cities.

- 4. Pastapur declaration / initiative, July 17-20, 2000:** A UNESCO sponsored workshop from July 17-20, 2000 in Hyderabad and Pastapur (Andhra Pradesh) brings out the 'Pastapur Initiative on Community Radio', urging the government to create a three-tier structure of broadcasting in India - state-owned public radio, private commercial radio and a non-profit community radio.

- 5. Deccan Development Society (DDS), machnoor village Zaheerabad, Medak dist. (Andhra pradesh) applies for radio license, August19, 2000**

- 6. MYRADA applies for 'Namma Dhvani' community radio license to be set up at budhikote, karnataka, June 2001**

- 7. First private commercial FM station (Radio City) goes on air, Bangalore, July 3, 2001**

- 8. Consultations by IGNOU, New Delhi, August 8-9, 2001:** While the consultation focused on the idea of Gyan Vani, it reiterated the importance of community radio and mooted that up to 40 per cent of broadcast time could be reserved for community programming. It also articulated the need for a cooperative model.

- 9. India's first village fm broadcast, Oravakal (Andhra Pradesh), March 2002.**

- 10. Campus/community radio, December 2002:** Ministry of Information & Broadcasting releases 'Community Radio Guidelines' in December 2002, which restricts community radio licenses to 'well-established' educational institutions. News and current affairs programmes and advertisements are banned. Transmitter power up to 50 watts is permitted, with an antenna height of 30 metres.

11. FIRST COMMUNITY RADIO STATION IN INDIA STARTS

BROADCASTING. Sangham Radio 90.4 MHz was inaugurated at 11am on 15 October 2008, (International Day of Rural Women) by Justice PB Sawant, who had delivered the historic Supreme Court ‘Airwaves judgment’ on 9 Feb 1995. The Wireless Operating License was issued to Deccan Development Society on 8 October 2008. Sangham Radio is run by ‘General’ Narsamma and Algole Narsamma with the help of 12 rural reporters. The station broadcasts for about one and a half hours in the morning (7am onwards), with a repeat in the evening. The station is located in the DDS ‘Green School’ campus in Pastapur village, Zaheerabad Mandal, Medak District, Andhra Pradesh, some 105 kilometres from Hyderabad.

12. RADIO BUNDELKHAND 90.4 OF SOCIETY FOR DEVELOPMENT ALTERNATIVES (DA) LAUNCHED IN ORCHHA, MADHYA PRADESH – 23

OCTOBER 2008. DA, a Delhi based NGO, received its Wireless Operating License on 31 July 2008, began test transmissions on 15 August and launched its station on 23 October. The CR station is located in the NGO’s Taragram campus, Orchha, Bundelkhand (Tikamgarh District, Madhyapradesh), some 12 kilometres from Jhansi. The station was inaugurated by a community worker, Prabha Delhi on 23 October 2008 at 11.35am. The station broadcasts on 90.4 MHz, from 10am to 12 noon, with a repeat from 4pm to 6pm.

13. ‘NAMMA DHWANI’, BUDIKOTE VILLAGE, KOLAR DISTRICT, KARNATAKA RECEIVES WIRELESS OPERATING LICENSE (WOL) – 16

DECEMBER 2008. MYRADA receives WOL on 16 December 2008 for its community radio station, “Namma Dhvani”, in Budikote Village, Kolar District, Karnataka. Namma Dhvani has a long history of cable radio, loudspeaker narrowcast and school radio. Since 2003-4, Namma Dhvani has made 90 minutes of programmes on a daily basis, and has an extensive database of programmes.

14. MVSS COMMUNITY RADIO LAUNCHED IN MHASWAD (SATARA), MAHARASHTRA – 26 JANUARY 2009.

Regular transmission from the Mannvikas Samajik Sanstha Community Radio station began from 26 January 2009.

Experimental transmission from its Community Radio Station at Mhaswad, Distt Satara, Maharashtra operating at 90.4 MHz FM started with effect from 16.12.2008.

15. DHAN FOUNDATION SIGNS GOPA FOR ‘KALANJIAM COMMUNITY RADIO’, NAGAPATTINAM, TAMIL NADU – 5 FEBRUARY 2009. DHAN Foundation, Madurai, signs Grant Of Permission Agreement (GOPA) to establish, maintain and operate a Community Radio Station at Nagapattinam, Tamilnadu. The Community Radio Station is expected to be operational within three months as per the agreement. DHAN Foundation, Madurai is a Non Governmental Organization. The Kalanjiam Community Radio Station will be established at Village-Vizhunthamavadi, Block-Keelaiyur, Distt-Nagapattinam, Tamilnadu.

16. ‘PARD VAANOLI’ COMMUNITY RADIO STATION LAUNCHED IN MADURAI – 8 SEPTEMBER 2009. ‘PARD Vanoli’, the community radio station licensed to PARD Madurai was officially inaugurated on 08.09.2009.

ROLE PLAYED BY COMMUNITY RADIO IN INDIA: As it has been mentioned earlier as well, Community radio reflects the interests and needs of the community it serves. It is an approach to communication which provides communities with information they can use in bettering their lives. Development communication has two primary roles, i.e. Transforming role, as it steps social change in the direction of the hygiene taste of today’s generation in this competitive market and a socializing role by seeking to maintain some of the established values of the society. Media plays an important role in development communication through circulation of knowledge, providing forum for discussion of issues, teach ideas, skills for a better life and create a base of consensus for stability of the state. In a developing nation like India, mass media such as Community Radio has a great role to play. Table 1.2 throws light on what Community Radio has been doing and what it can do in future in a country like that of ours.

ROLE PLAYED BY COMMUNITY RADIO IN INDIA



- ❖ A social enquiry tool
- ❖ A means for cultural expression and entertainment, for collecting, preserving and enhancing oral and musical heritage.
- ❖ A tool for gathering information on social issues that is essential for defining, planning and implementing local development.
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Figure 1.1

CONCLUSION: It has come to be known as the 'narrow casting' as opposed to 'broadcasting'. The introduction of the community radio is a milestone not only in reaching out to the remotest area but also persuading the citizen to share in the vision and excitement of development. With the avowed objective of developing itself as community broadcasting, the local radio strives to demolish the division between the broadcaster and the audience and serve as a link between the citizen and the extension agencies. In course of time, these community radio stations would act as a catalytic agent in galvanising the local community into action for their own development.

In India, this concept can be effectively harnessed keeping in view the variety in region, background, culture, language, education and economic status. Community radio stations can be used to project and reflect the needs, desires, problems, joys and sorrows of a society clearly defined within a limited area. For example, the need to construct a new road, remove stagnant water, put down gang warfare or whatever problem is being faced by the people in a specific area, could be dealt with in a meaningful way, Fruitful negotiations could be held by the affected people with area development workers, local authorities and voluntary

agencies. Similar background of the people facilitates problem solving, and imparting instructions on various development related issues.

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