Making Waves: Community Radio and the Indian Scenario

RAVI SHANKAR
Associate Professor & Head
Department of Mass Communication and Journalism
Government P.G. College for Girls, Cheeka, Kaithal (Haryana) India

ABSTRACT

As per the latest figures released by Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, India has 394 Community radio stations serving Farmer, Tribal, Coastal communities, ethnic minorities and special interests as in the year 2022. 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.

Key Words : 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 and 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 listeneners 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.

Offering a third model of radio broadcasting — in addition to commercial and public broadcasting — community radio is local people producing and broadcasting their own programmes, who also participate in operating the station. Usually a short-range, not-for-profit radio station or channel, it caters to the information needs of people of a particular locality, a geographical community, or communities of interest, in languages and formats appropriate for local context. Community radio stations are operated, owned and influenced by the communities they serve. It is a medium that enables individuals, groups and communities narrate their own stories, share experiences and become content creators — contents popular and relevant to a local, specific audience but of little value to commercial or mass-media broadcasters. It is a community space for people to meet and collaborate.

In India, the advent of community radio can be traced back to the mid-1990s. It followed the February 1995 Supreme Court judgment that said "airwaves are public property". In 1996, VOICES, a development communications NGO based out of Bangalore, organized a gathering of community radio stakeholders. A declaration calling for the establishment of a third tier of broadcasting, *i.e.* community broadcasting, was signed. Calls were also made for grant of licences to NGOs and other non-profit groups to run community radio stations. At this time, UNESCO provided a portable production and transmission 'briefcase radio station' kit to VOICES to do experimental broadcasting and get hands-on experience in setting up an independently-run community radio station. In early 2003, the Government of India released the first set of community radio guidelines, but restricted eligibility to educational institutions only.

It was finally on 16 November 2006 that the government implemented new Community Radio Guidelines, which permitted NGOs, educational institutions and agricultural institutions to own and operate community radio stations. The first community-based radio station licensed to an NGO was launched on 15 October 2008 by Deccan Development Society, in Pastapur village, Medak district, Andhra Pradesh. Government guidelines require community radio stations to produce at least 50 per cent of their programmes locally, and, to the maximum extent possible, in the local language or dialect. The stress is on developmental programming.

Currently, India has 394 Community radio stations serving Farmer, Tribal, Coastal communities, ethnic minorities and special interests. In its blog titled 'Community Radio — Aiding India's Rural Development', the Confederation of Indian Industries (CII) says, "Community radios help connect the disenfranchised, airing their challenges and concerns. Often, we tend to view rural development merely from the prism of economic growth. It should rightfully also include social,

spiritual and moral enhancement too. Its role includes poverty eradication, illiteracy eradication and employment. Community radio is the common link which binds all these development factors over a common communication channel."

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.
- ❖ 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 processes.
- ❖ A channel for interactive communication, dialogue and debate on a wide range of development issues.
- ❖ A means for training and transfer of knowledge and technologies (e.g. radio listening groups and print media).
- ❖ An information channel on crucial topics for rural livelihoods.
- ❖ An agent of social change
- ❖ A tool for conflict management and resolution
- ❖ An alternative mass medium to overcome the shortcomings of state and commercial broadcasters
- ❖ A channel for expressing ideas and opinions
- ❖ A tool of democratization processes
- ❖ A channel for interactive communication, dialogue and debate on a wide range of development issues.
- ❖ An information channel on crucial topics for rural livelihoods.
- ❖ An alternative mass medium to overcome the shortcomings of state and commercial broadcasters
- ❖ A channel for expressing ideas and opinions
- ❖ A tool of democratization

Fig. 1 :

Conclusion:

It has come to be known as the 'narrow casting' as opposed to 'broadcasting'. The introduction of the community radio has proved to be 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.

REFERENCES

1. Malik Kanchan K. (2007). Community Radio : Concept and Worldwide Practice, Vidura, Journal of the Press Institute of India, Vol.44, Issue.1, 4-7.

2. Payel Sen Choudhury, Media in Development Communication: Commentary Global Media Journal – Indian Edition/ISSN 2249-5835 Winter Issue / December 2011 Vol. 2/No.2,);

3. Sajan Venniyoor, The Journey so far ;

4. K.R. Balan; 2003; Applied Public Relations and Communication; New Delhi; Sultan Chand & Sons;

5. Subir Ghosh; 2004; Mass Communication; Kolkata; Sahitya Sangsad;

6. Johnson, N. and Rajadurai, K., Impact Of Community Radio Programs In Rural Development, International Journal Of Scientific & Technology Research Volume 9, Issue 01, January 2020

7. http://man.comunica.org/

8. http://www.communityradioindia.org

9. http://radiokotagiri.keystone-foundation.org/

10. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Community_radio

11. https://www.mib.gov.in/broadcasting/list-251-operational-community-radio-stations-india

12. https://www.comminit.com/content/voices

13. https://gramvaani.org/

14. https://www.ciiblog.in/community/community-radio-aiding-indias-rural-development/

15. https://www.thehindu.com/news/cities/Hyderabad/community-radio-gives-boost-to-rural-development/article28497112.ece

16. https://www.dhan.org/tsunami/PDF_Files/Kalanjiam_Community_Radio_Experience.pdf

17. https://www.mib.gov.in/broadcasting/community-radio-stations-0