Community radio - obscurity to prosperity: A case study of HAMARA MSPICM 90.4, a community radio of Solan, Himachal Pradesh

Dr. M. Rabindranath

Central University of Himachal Pradesh, Dharamshala, Himachal Pradesh

Abstract

Community radio is a radio service which is offering a third model of radio broadcasting in addition to commercial and public broadcasting. Many of us have grown up with All India Radio and its Medium Wave Channels. The paper defines and focuses on the fundaments of CR and how community radio movement has started in India. The case study shows the light on the Community Radio Hamara MSPICM 90.4, pioneer in the field being the first Institution in Himachal Pradesh to get a license, by M.S. Panwar Institute of Communication & Management (MSPICM).

Key words: social benefit, social objectives and social gain

Introduction

Community stations serve geographic communities and communities of interest. A key feature of a community radio station is that it is Local in every way-in its geographic reach, its language, the content of its programming and its management and ownership. They broadcast content that is popular and relevant to a local, specific audience but is often overlooked by commercial or mass-media broadcasters. Community radio stations are operated, owned, and influenced by the communities they serve. They provide a mechanism for enabling individuals, groups, and communities to tell their own stories, to share experiences and, in a media-rich world, to become creators and contributors of media. Much of the legislation has included phrases such as "social benefit", "social objectives" and "social gain" as part of the definition. Community radio has developed differently in different countries, and the term has somewhat different meanings in the United Kingdom, Ireland, the United States, Canada, and Australia.

The historical philosophy of community radio is to use this medium as the voice of the voiceless, the mouthpiece of oppressed people (be it on racial, gender, or class grounds) and generally as a tool for development. Community radio is defined as

Dr. M Rabindranath (mrabindra2002@yahoo.co.in) is Associate Professor & Dean, School of Journalism, Mass Communication and New Media, Central University of Himachal Pradesh, Dharamshala, Himachal Pradesh.

having three aspects: non-profit making, community ownership and control ownership and control, community participation. It should be made clear that community radio is not about doing some-thing for the community but about the community doing something for itself, i.e owning and controlling its own means of communication, (AMARC 1998).

Definition of CR

Tabing (2002:9) defines a community radio station as 'one that is operated in the community, for the community, about the community and by the community.' According to Tabing, '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.' Thus community radio may be owned and managed by one group or by combined groups. It could also be controlled and run by people such as women, children, farmers, fisher folk, ethnic groups, or senior citizens. Tabing points out that a high degree of people's participation, both in management and programme production aspects distinguishes community radio from the other media. Also, the principle sources of support for community radio operations are individual community members and local institutions.

The Seventh World Congress of AMARC held in Milan, Italy, 23-29 August 1998 emphasised on the just and equitable access to and participation in communications media for strengthening the rights of indigenous peoples, minorities, migrants and refugees. There was also focus on education and training to enable people to develop their own media and communication skills.

Modern community radio stations serve their listeners by offering a variety of content that is not necessarily provided by the larger commercial radio stations. Community radio outlets may carry news and information programming geared toward the local area (particularly immigrant or minority groups who are poorly served by major media outlets). Specialized musical shows are also often a feature of many community radio stations. Community radio stations typically avoid content found on commercial outlets and they will operate with like community radio should be 10 percent radio and 90 percent community. There is also a distinction drawn in contrast to mainstream stations, which are viewed as pandering to commercial concerns or the personalities of presenters. Community radio has been built around the ideals of access and participation. Stations have been run by locals, typically to serve a local audience.

Fundamental principles of CR

The two fundamental principles that guide community radio are Public Access and Participation. Public access means that all members of the community must have access to the broadcast services provided by the station i.e the content is produced for and reaches all the inhabitants of the local community. Access here also inherently means access to the language of programming. Additionally access would mean access to the station's content production and broadcast centre itself. This means that the community radio station is making itself available to the community

in all possible ways. If the station is fully accessible it opens the doors for participation. Participation implies that the local community participates in the day-to-day content creation and operation of the community radio station and is included in the discussion and decision making process of the station's activities. The community is involved in defining the goals and objectives and thus the vision and mission of the Community Radio Station. The community also participates in electing issues on which content is to be produced, as well as the programme scheduling for various target audience and the programme duration. In order to incorporate these core principles, the community radio station needs to establish appropriate systems and mechanism that enable community access, ownership and participation.

Two philosophical approaches to community radio exist, although the models are not mutually exclusive. One emphasizes service and community-mindedness, focusing on what the station can do for the community. The other stresses involvement and participation by the listener.

In the service model locality is valued; community radio, as a third tier, can provide content focused on a more local or particular community than a larger operation. Sometimes, though, providing syndicated content not already available within the station's service area is viewed as public service. In the access (or participatory) model, the participation of community members in producing content is viewed as a good in itself. While this model does not necessarily exclude a service approach, there is some

disagreement between the two.

The community radio movement in India

While Indian radio is shifting from a government monopoly to a highly-commercialized broadcasting network, citizens' groups are also demanding that the media be democratized.

Imagine a country which has 18 officially-recognized languages and a total of 1652 mother tongues in a country nearly a billion strong and spread over an area of 3.2 million square kilometres. Given its diversity and expanse, one could well understand the problems that tribal, under-privileged, or minority cultures face in getting their voices heard.

As far as the radio is concerned, long years of official domination by the government, outdated, but existing British regulations, and the rampant commercialization of the airwaves have complicated the problem. Citizens groups and non-profit organizations in India are pushing for a wider representation on the centralized and hierarchical Indian radio network -- with some success. Court rulings have recently favoured the establishment of new, local stations and campaigners from across India are underlining the importance of radio in shaping the destiny of Indian society For decades, India's radio stations have been centralized, unable to cater to the regional diversity of India, and lacking editorial independence. Now, citizens' groups are pressuring the government for a community radio model.

Call it by any name - community radio, rural radio, cooperative radio, or

development radio - its proponents feel that radio holds the key that will unite India's linguistic and ethnic diversity and improve the economic disparity and the huge rural-urban divide. "Imagine having your own radio station where you can walk in any time to ask for your favorite music, share some important local event or chat with your neighbor who's now become a celebrity," says media advocacy campaigner Ms. Sucharita S. Eashwar from Bangalore.

The right for communities to own the airwaves came after a long struggle. A struggle by people who believed that voice was power and that in order to truly empower communities and citizens the media needs to be community owned and managed. The community radio movement in India was born from the invigorating and rights based 1995 judgement of the Supreme Court declaring airwaves to be public property. 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". The judgment inspired several free speech advocates, academics and community members across the country to being a concerted campaign to legitimize community radio in India.

In 1996, a Bangalore based media advocacy group called VOICES 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. A suggestion that AIR's local stations should allocate regular airtime for community broadcasting was put forward. Requests were also made for grant of licences to NGOs and other non-profit making groups for running community radio stations. Subsequently, UNESCO made available a portable production and transmission "briefcase radio station" kit to VOICES to do experimental broadcasts of programmes for a hands-on learning experience towards the objective of setting up an independently-run community radio station.

A UNESCO sponsored workshop, hosted by an Andhra Pradesh NGO, Deccan Development Society (DDS) from July 17-20, 2000 in Hyderabad issued the 'Pastapur Initiative' on community radio that urged the government to take its intentions of freeing broadcasting from state monopoly to its logical conclusion, by making media space available not only to private players but also to communities. This landmark document urged the government to create a three-tier structure of broadcasting in India by adding non-profit community radio to the already existing state-owned public radio and private commercial radio.

Simultaneously, several initiatives had already started working on community radio in terms of production and dissemination of participatory programming. In South India, Deccan Development Society worked with Dalit women's collectives to start Sangam Radio, the programmes for which were made by the community, but were 'narrowcast', i.e. played back to the community over cassette players at group meetings. Another landmark initiative was jointly set up by VOICES and MYRADA - called Namma Dhwani (Our Voices), where programmes were produced by communities in and around the village of

Budikote (about 100 kilometers from Bangalore), and were distributed over the nearest All India Radio station and subsequently over the local cable network. In the west, Kutch Mahila Vikas Sanghatan, a civil society group in Gujarat worked with the women in Kutch District to produce programmes on local developmental and cultural issues, and started broadcasting on the nearest All India Radio Station. In the northern part, Alternative for India Development made programmes with community members in Garhwa block of Jharkhand, and broadcast programmes over the Daltonganj All India Radio Station. Community Groups in Chamba, and Rudraprayag, both in Uttarakhand started producing participatory programmes and broadcast over the World Space Satellite Radio network.

By early 2003, the government of India released the first set of community radio guidelines, but unfortunately, restricted eligibility to educational institutions only. Marginalized and voiceless communities continued to remain outside the ambit of the then released community radio policy guidelines. 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. Practitioners and community radio advocates continued to push the government towards expanding the mandate of the community radio sector to include communities living in rural, remote and hilly areas of the country.

On 16 November 2006, the government of India implemented new Community Radio Guidelines, which permit NGOs, educational institutions and agricultural institutions to own and operate community radio stations. By 30 November 2008, there were 38 operational community radio stations in the country. Of these, two are run by NGOs and the rest by educational institutions.

The first community-based radio station licensed to an NGO (as distinct from campus-based radio) was launched on 15 October 2008, when Sangham Radio, licensed to Deccan Development Society, in Pastapur village, Medak district, Andhra Pradesh state went on the air at 11:00 am. Sangham Radio, which broadcasts on 90.4 MHz, is licensed to the Deccan Development Society (DDS) (an NGO which works with women's groups in approximately 75 villages in Andhra Pradesh). The community radio station is managed by "General" Narsamma and Algole Narsamma.

The government recently clarified that certain categories of news are permitted on radio, including sports news and commentaries, information on traffic and weather conditions, coverage of cultural events and festivals, information on academic events, public announcements pertaining to utilities such as electricity and the water supply, disaster warnings and health alerts. Five minutes of advertising per hour is allowed on community radio. Sponsored programs are not allowed, except when the program is sponsored by the government at the local or state level. The Community Radio Forum, India, was registered as a Society and Trust on 26 February 2008. Members from the Community Radio Forum participate in screening committee meetings to screen

potential applicants, and the organization is also recognized as a national level self-regulatory body in the Draft Broadcast Bill as published by the Government of India.

By 1 July 2010, the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting announced that 715 applications for CR licenses had been received, including 104 under the old campus-radio guidelines. By 1 February 2012, the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting had received a total of 991 community radio licence applications. Grant of Permission Agreements had been signed with 161 applicants and 126 community radio stations were on air.

From April 1, 2012, the Ministry of Communications and IT has hiked the spectrum fees to Rs. 91,000-a fivefold increase from the previous annual fee of Rs. 19,700. This move provoked widespread protest from functional community radio stations, advocacy bodies like Community Radio Forum and Community Radio Association of India, and even the Secretary, Ministry of Information and Broadcast has gone on record to say that his Ministry's views were not sought before the decision was taken. Several community radio stations also observed a 'Day of Silence' on 9 May, where the spectrum fee hike was announced, protest songs were broadcast, community views were invited, and subsequently transmission was switched off for the rest of the day. After pressure from various stakeholders, the Ministry for Information and Communication Technology (MoCIT) announced that the spectrum fee and royalty charges would be rolled back to annual fee of Rs. 19,700. Currently, the spectrum fee is Rs. 19,700 annually, till September 2013, at which time the Ministry will re-examine the matter.

According to the Ministry of Information & Broadcasting, Government of India, the current status (as on 25 April 2013) of Community Radio in India as there are 148 CR stations are operational.

In India, radio is shifting from being a government monopoly to a highly-commercialized broadcasting service. Media advocacy groups say the media needs to be "democratized" simultaneously as it moves away from official control. Privatization and total deregulation is not enough if the media becomes irrelevant to the vast majority of Indians. Now, while the policies are being developed, is the time for non-profit groups, educational and research institutions, cooperatives, women's groups, and development organizations to seize the available opportunities created by liberalizing the electronic media. Radio has already proven its relevance to Indians. Recent government studies suggest that radio in India could potentially reach up to 98.5% of the population. There are homes that have radio-nearly double the number of homes that have TV.

Information can make or break you. Information can enable or disable you. You can have information and feel empowered or you can be deprived of information and opportunities, rights and freedom. In the disaster in Uttarakhand, information was the biggest casualty. How? Although stories of devastation and horror are flowing out of Uttarakhand, we have almost no real information on the exact situation in the upper reaches of the Himalayas. The massive floods that struck

Uttarakhand is a wake-up call to the government as well as citizens. The tragedy is also an institutional disaster. Before the cloudburst and flash floods wreaked havoc, the Indian Meteorological Department had warned of heavy rainfall in Rudraprayag, yet disaster management agencies made little effort to prepare. The lack of coordination in states prone to natural calamities makes quick response in such a situation nearly impossible. India's most hi-tech communication lab, Defence Electronics Application Laboratory (DEAL), is in Dehradun, but even after two weeks of the tragedy, the government failed to take assistance of DEAL to establish communications.

Community radio will be very helpful to disseminate the new during crisis situations. During natural disasters, and for some time afterwards, people affected will ask many questions and are desperate for information. When this disaster took place, unlike in the past, we are living in the era of real-time information and media and the sources are many and diverse-radio, television, Internet, SMS, mobile phones, and so on. Yet, we could not find many of those real-time media playing any decisive role in finding solutions. It is often noted that the real effective solution to many disasters, where government action is always inadequate, like we have in India, local communities remain the first responders. Their role, especially youth, in saving lives during the first few hours after a disaster, is critical. The role of community radio is tremendous in natural calamities. A public radio station with a reach of 15-20km becomes highly powerful with the integration of mobile telephony in real time. The region, brutalized by floods, has only three community radios running-Kumaon Vani (Mukteshwar), Henvalvani (Chamba Valley) and Mandakini Ki Awaz (Rudraprayag). These radio stations have been broadcasting live programmes that inform and sensitize communities and tried to reach all flood-affected families.

A case study

Setting up of a Community Radio 90.4 by M.S. Panwar Institute of Communication & Management (MSPICM), Solan - a media and management Institute, in a small hill town of Solan with a population of 50,000 was a historical moment for Himachal Pradesh. It is a pioneer in the field of Community Radio being the first Institution in Himachal Pradesh to get a license for FM Community Radio. They have Journalism and Mass Communication Courses, students will get hands on experience in broadcast Journalism.

HAMARA MSPICM 90.4 is the first community radio station not only in the state of Himachal Pradesh but also in other hill states of India. It was the 41st CRS of India and was inaugurated on 13th March 2009 by Ms.Aasha Swaroop, Chief Secretary of Himachal Pradesh coinciding with the 7th Consultation on Awareness on Community Radio for the North West Region organized by MSPICM, Solan and CEMCA in Association with Ministry of Information & Broadcasting, Government of India in which representatives from about100 NGOs and educational institutions participated.

Initially, from March 13, 2009 onwards, test broadcast was started for the period of two hours regularly from 8 A.M. to 9 A.M.

in the morning and 6 P.M. to 7 P.M. in the evening. After one month of CRS operation, one hour was added in the afternoon from 1 P.M. to 2 P.M. From July, 2009 onwards Radio was on air for six hours every day from 7 A.M. to 9 A.M. in the morning, 12 P.M. to 2 P.M. in the afternoon and from 6 P.M. to 8 P.M. in the evening. From 15th August, 2009 onwards, radio is on air for 12 hours every day from 7 AM to 12 PM in the morning and 3 PM to 10 PM in the evening. Some morning programmes were repeated in the evening. Since May, 2010, the radio is on air for 14 hours every day. In June, 2010, a team from University of Hyderabad conducted a study on two NGO-run community radios and two Campus –run radios.

HAMARA MSPICM 90.4 FM Community Radio Station and the Community Radio of University of Mumbai were the two campus radios selected for the study. The visiting team visited the coverage areas of Community Radio and interacted with the listeners. They got a positive feedback from the listeners and we were surprised to learn that we have such a wide and dedicated listenership in four districts- Solan, Shimla, Sirmour and Bilaspur.

It would also help in grooming professionals in broadcast journalism. The students of the institute would get hands-on experience in scriptwriting, reporting and editing for radio. They would thus be exposed to the real experience of working in radio studios/stations." The institute's Director, Dr BS Panwar adds, "The content revolves around developmental issues of health, agriculture, employment, government opportunities, literacy

programmes and life coping skills etc. The plan is to increase such content to about 60-70%."

Programmes on different issues are voiced on HAMARA MSPICM 90.4 CRS. Issues covered include Health, Nutrition, Problems of Community, Sports, local talent, women and child oriented programmes etc. Programmes related to creating awareness on issues like female foeticide, career, counselling, tips to rural youth etc. At this stage, students of the institute, members of the community like volunteers from Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), Self Help Groups (SHGs) and local students from other institutions are the main participants in the radio in terms of content generation and taking care of the operational activities of the radio. We are making all out efforts to rope in members of the community through Department of Information & Public Relations, Nehru Yuvak Kendra, Department of Youth Affairs & Sports, Department of Rural Development & Panchayat Raj etc. Many volunteers both male and female from the nearby communities have come forward to join the radio as performers and presenters and many programmes are made in the local language Phadi. We have formed media clubs in the local schools of Solan and Shishu Panchayats in the schools of rural areas and are providing them training in making radio programmes.

MSPICM seeks to serve the community residing in a radius of 15 km from the institute. Perhaps Initially broadcasting for two hours, the number of hours increased with the MoU that the institute entered into with IGNOU to become a training centre for radio jockeying. Today, Hamara

broadcasts mostly in Hindi and Bhagati (local dialect) for 12 hours. The RJ training programme has also ensured a steady stream of human resources to the station.

Dr. Panwar, (Ph.D. in Communication) from University of Hyderabad also realises that music occupies a significant space on the fixed point chart. Phone-in requests are a regular feature as are birthday greetings. Ghazals are another important feature on *Hamara*. "Radio is quite a popular medium in the ranges and *Hamara* considers the young audiences as a special sort of sub-community. However, we are not competing with the other commercial FM channels. We are on a different trip altogether," says Dr. Panwar. People walk into the studio to sing folk songs. Talented children from the local schools and colleges actively participate in *Baccho Ki Paathshaala.*

Limitations of Hamara 90.4 CRS, MSPICM Solan, H.P.

1. Low signal - Because of no signal in many areas, HAMARA 90.4 CRS is covering limited areas. The reach is restricted due to hilly terrain. We request that our CRS should be taken as a special case and we may be allowed to install high power transmitter as per provision in the guidelines of CRS.

2. Limited resources - There are limited resources to keep radio going. The Government should take effective steps to provide advertisements through DAVP and other government departments on the lines of advertisement provided to print and electronic media. This step would go a long way to generate resources for the sustenance and development of CRS.

Policy decisions should be taken by the Government to address this problem which is common to almost all community radios.

MSPICM is collaborating with DRISTI, a media advocacy and training NGO, and Mountain Forum Himalayas through which six radio producers from MFH and four reporters from Solan will be trained over a period of one year at the Panwar Institute. Drishti will locate a trainer at the Institute. "This can be seen as a step towards our deeper commitment towards community-based programming," says Dr. Panwar.

Conclusion

Since community radio has proved to be an excellent empowering media tool on the ground, kudos to the government for making it possible that NGOs can have permits to run such operations. In a country like India, where 70% of the people live in rural areas, where governance is a casualty, information is a miss and media is non-existent, community radio is a must. It is perhaps time once again for people to come on the street to demand their permits and the exemption of licence fees as has been promised by the ministry. The Government of India-Ministry of Information and Broadcasting must speed up the process in giving the license without much cumbersome process and must encourage those who are interested in launching the community radio broadcasting systems. Community radios should be financially sustainable and especially the corporate sector in that particular society must come forward by giving them advertisement campaign so that the community radios will be financially stable. A truly community owned community radio

station can change the way development.

Hamara MSPICM community radio 90.4, echoes loud and clear in the hills of Solan of Himachal Pradesh. *Hamara* is worthwhile since the main focus of the programmes is to create awareness amongst the local community on employment avenues, hygiene, agriculture, environment, health and women related issues. Health issues it mainly focussing is like health tips for senior citizens, tips for reducing maternal mortality rate, nutrition for women during pregnancy, discussion on different health related problems and their remedies etc. Women related programmes like home management, cooking, beauty tips, women's health tips, new born baby tips, government schemes for women and children etc. Despite the presence of commercial FM stations in Solan, *Hamara* still stands tall both literally and figuratively. Perched on a hillside in the picturesque Shivalik ranges of Solan, Himachal Pradesh, the facade of the M.S. Panwar Institute of Communication and Management (MSPICM) is deceptive. Today, *Hamara* broadcasts mostly in Hindi and Bhagati (local dialect) for 12 hours. The RJ training programme has also ensured a steady stream of human resources to the station.

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Transparency and accountability in administration: A study of Right to Information Act

Jhansi Rani Kannepamula

Arts and Science College for Women, Hyderabad

Abstract

The Right to Information Act 2005 was passed by the UPA (United Progressive Alliance) Government with a sense of establishing truth based society. It is a milestone in India's democratic system. It is seven years since the RTI was passed; the performance on the implementation front is far from perfect. Hence the present study will analyse the impact on the attitude, mindset and behaviour patterns of the public authorities to reveal RTI to the people. Most of the people are still not aware of their newly acquired power. It will analyse and focus on major portion of ethics, transparency and accountability in building up the moral society through good governance. It will also look at the way the Government, NGOs and other enlightened and empowered citizens can supplement the benefits of this Act manifold. The study will stress on how RTI will not only help in mitigating corruption in public life but also in alleviating poverty- the two monstrous maladies of India.

Key Words: *Transparency, Accountability, Public administration, anti-Corruption movement, South Asia*

Introduction

India now is witnessing not mere corruption but national plunder (Brahma Challeny, 2010). There are still millions in India who dream of transparency and accountability/answerability in public administration for corruption free society; although, it is considered as fourth largest economy in the world with the land of natural resources. Moreover, India is a country with multiple identities and incomparable & prosperous cultural heritage. However, the rich resources of the nation have been facing perpetual problems like poverty, illiteracy and corruption in its own land by its own politicians and bureaucrats and still being considered as a developing country. The expansion of constitutionalism and democratic system has given rise to the notion of administrative accountability (Shamsul,1970). Mass democratic state of present times is not realistic without a huge army of permanently employed state officials, generally characterized as the

Jhansi Rani Kannepamula (mahimaesther@yahoo.com) is Head of the Department cum Sr. Lecturer, Department of Public Administration, Arts and Science College for Women (Autonomous) Andhra Mahila Sabha, Osmania University Campus, Hyderabad, Andhra Pradesh, India.