Role of Community Radio in Rural Development

Dr. Jitendra J. Radadiya
Asst. Professor
Department of Journalism
Saurashtra University, Rajkot

Community radio is a type of radio service that caters to the interests of a certain area, broadcasting content that is popular to a local audience but which may often be overlooked by commercial or mass-media broadcasters. The term has somewhat different meanings in the United Kingdom, the United States, Canada, and Australia. In the UK, the idea of community-based services can be traced back at least as far as the original concept for BBC local radio in the early 1960s. Thereafter various land-based unlicensed pirate radio stations (Such as East London Radio, and Radio AMY (Alternative Media for You)) developed the idea further. As pirate stations proliferated during the late 1970s and early 1980s these stations were joined by those broadcasting specifically to minority immigrant communities (Afro-Caribbean and Asian etc.), particularly in cities such as London, Birmingham, Bristol, and Manchester. Although, "community radio" remains synonymous with "pirate radio" for some people in the UK, most minority immigrant stations focused purely on specific musical genres and were operated (theoretically at least) on a not- for-profit basis. Community radio services in the UK are operated on a not-for-profit basis with community ownership and control built in to their structures. Following an experiment started in 2001 by the former UK broadcast regulator The Radio Authority, since 2005 some 200 such stations have been licensed by the UK broadcasting regulator (Of com). Most such stations broadcast on FM (typically at a radiated power level of approximately 25 Watts (per-plane)) although there are a few that operate on AM (medium wave), particularly in more rural areas.

In the U.S., community radio stations are non-profit, community based operations licensed by the Federal Communications Commission for broadcasting in the noncommercial, public portion of the FM band. These stations differ from other public radio outlets in the U.S. by allowing community volunteers to actively participate as broadcasters.[2] Pirate radio is virtually unknown in Australia because of the strictly controlled allocation of broadcasting frequencies, and the likely application of severe, legislated penalties including jail, for offenders.

Concept of Community:-

Communities are complex entities and so what constitutes "community" in Community radio is often a contentious and tricky debate and will vary from country to country. Community may also often be replaced by a range of tenns like "alternative", "radical", or "citizen" radio. Traditionally in sociology, a "community" has been defined as a group of interacting people living in a common location. Community radio is often built around concepts of access and participation and so the term community may be thought of as often referring to geographical communities based around the possible reach of the radio's signal, i.e.. the people who can receive the message, and their potential to participate in the creation of such messages. This is of course problematized by the fact that many radio stations now broadcast over the internet as well, thereby reaching potentially global audiences and committees.

Community radio in India:-

In India, the campaign to legitimize 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".[3] This came as an inspiration to groups across the country, but to begin with, only educational (campus) radio stations were allowed, under somewhat stringent conditions.

Anna FM is India's first campus 'community' radio, launched on 1 February 2004, which is run by Education and Multimedia Research Centre (EM2RC), and all programmes are produced by the students of Media Sciences at Anna University.

On 16 November 2006, the government of India notified new Community Radio Guidelines which permit NGOS and other civil society organizations to own and operate community radio stations.

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' in Pastapur village, Medak district, Andhra Pradesh state, was switched on at 11.00 am. Sangham Radio, which broadcasts on 90.4 MHz, is licensed to Deccan Development Society (DDS), an NGO that works with women's groups in about 75 villages of Andhra Pradesh. The community radio station is managed by 'General' Narsamma and Algole Narsamma. The second NGO-led community radio station in India was launched on 23 October 2008 at 'T ARAgram' in Orchha, Madhya Pradesh state. Named 'Radio Bundelkhand' after the Bundelkhand region of central India where it is located, the radio station is licensed to the Society for Development Alternatives (DA), a Delhi-based NGO. Radio Bundelkhand also broadcasts on 90.4 MHz for four hours a day, including two hours of repeat broadcast.

Under the new community radio policy, any not-for-profit 'legal entity' - except individuals, political parties and their affiliates, criminal and banned organizations - can apply for a CR license. Central funding is not available for such stations, and there are stringent restrictions on fundraising from other sources. Only organisations that are registered for a minimum of three years old and with a 'proven' track record of local community service can apply. License conditions implicitly favour well-funded stations as against inexpensive low power operations, several of which (e.g. Mana Radio in Andhra Pradesh and Raghav FM in Bihar) ran successfully on shoe-string budgets before the imposition of any community radio policy.

The license entitles them to operate a 100 watt (ERP) radio station, with a coverage area of approximately 12 kilometers radius. A maximum antenna height of 30 meters is allowed. Community radio stations are expected to produce at least 50% of their programmes locally, as far as possible in the local language or dialect. The stress is on developmental programming, though there is no explicit ban on entertainment. News programmes are banned on community radio in India, as also on commercial FM radio. However, 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 like electricity and 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 Centre or State. Activists and community workers from across the country have banded together under the aegis of the 'Community Radio Forum' in order to coordinate training and support for community radio stations, as well as to continue to petition for a more proactive community radio policy. The Community Radio Forum, India, was registered as a 'Society' and 'Trust' on 26 February 2008. In the meantime, mobile telephone operators have begun to offer commercial broadcast services over GSM, evading completely government restrictions built around traditional concepts of broadcasting technology.

Successful Examples of Community Radio in India:-

(1) **SARANG 107.8 FM: -** SARANG 107.8 is run by St Aloysius College (Autonomous), Mangalore, a coastal town in the southern part of Kamataka. SARANG 107.8 FM means 'all colours' of Mangalore signifying various social, religious, linguistic communities and their harmonious existence - which is a requirement now after disturbance in the context of attack on churches (post 14 September 2008) by radical saffronists, and later assault on women ma pub in the name of moral policing by similar groups. The local Communities of farmers, fisher folk, medical! legal experts, students, workers contribute regularly to this radio. The radio also spreads messages of peace and harmony among people through programmes based on the need for the same. Health and hygiene, agricultural messages, fisher folk issues, road safety, water conservation, rain water harvesting, folk culture and life, original entertainment by locals and students are the hall mark of this radio. Currently (as on the last day of July 2009), SARANG 107.8 broadcasts in Konkani, Kannada, Tulu, and English languages regularly, besides occasionally broadcasting in Malayalam and Beary languages.[4]

(2) **KUNJAL PANCHHI KUTCH 11:-** This community radio station is administered by Kach Women Development Corporation and is immensely popular among the rural womenfolk. This corporation is working in this area since last two decades. This radio station mostly focuses on the issues relating to women and tries to find a solution to all the problems being discussed here. The topic for discussion mostly consists of issues like female foeticide, dowry and female education.[5]

(3) **CHALA HO GAON MEIN: -** The importance of this community radio lies in the fact that the programs broadcasted here is prepared by the people belonging to rural background. The program basically covers issues like dowry, violence against women, corruption, social evils etc. Needless to say that 'Chalo Ho Gao Me' has really proved to be a landmark in providing common platform to the residents of Palamu district of Jharkhand from where they can communicate their thoughts without any restriction.

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(4) MANDAKINI KI AWAAZ: - 'Mandakini ki Awaaz' Community Radio is located in Mandakini river valley at Pauri in Garhwal, supported by a group of people from a tiny village called Bhanaj. Located at a 5 hour drive from the nearest town Centre of Rudraprayag, this group of people aims at creating an open and transparent administrative and governance information system. The radio group mediates between the people and the governing bodies (panchayats) of these villages, in order to create an open platform where policies, schemes and financial budgets can be made available for public discussion and scrutiny. It was established with required technical support and training from Ideosync Media Combine and Equal Access, the two NGOS working in the field of development communication and long standing partners of community radio.[6]

Conclusion :-

In the real sense, community radio plays a pivotal role in making the masses aware about their basic rights and duties. Not only limited to solving problems which a common man faces in his day-to-day life, community radio provides him a strong platform from where he can freely disseminate his ideas among his community members in the best possible manner. Thus, community radio becomes one of the important instrument in strengthening our "Right to Freedom of Speech and Expression'. Besides solving social problems as well as entertaining local people, community radio also acts as an intermediary between the Government and the local masses. This is the place from where local people can air their grievances to the Government as well as get the solutions to their problems too. Needless to say, community radio has played a major role in bridging the communication gap between the Government and the local people. As, the community radio is still evolving it might be possible that in the near future, we will witness its various new forms which will be technologically more superior as well as user friendly. Well whatever the case may be, community radio has proved to be one of the best medium of communication at the grass-root level.

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