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Research Paper Media

Community Radio – A Voice to the Voiceless: A Case-study of Nagapatinam coastal area, Tamil Nadu

S. Janet Mary

Assistant professor, Department of visual communication, Sathyabama University, Jeppiar Nagar, Chennai – 600 119.

ABSTRACT

Radio has been a perfect and the most popular medium for building on the oral tradition in Indian societies for a long time. Because of its reach, their quality as a spoken medium radio is more accessible to most people than other media. They broadcast content that is popular and relevant to a local and specific audience. Being a non-profit sector, this medium provides a mechanism for enabling individuals, groups, and communities to tell their own stories, in a media-rich world, to become creators and contributors to the voice to the voiceless for the fishing community of Nagapatinam. This article discusses the above issues with the object to demonstrate the role and function of community radio with its challenges in the coastal area of Nagapatinam, Tamil Nadu. Participant-observation methodology is followed in this research project, with the help of appropriate scientific questionnaire.

KEYWORDS : Community Radio, fishing community, disaster management

INTRODUCTION

This study explores how community radio plays a role in revitalizing local communities in the coastal areas of Nagapatinam in Tamil Nadu. Since the massive Tsunami in 2004, attention has been paid to the role of community radio for providing local information in preventing and responding to natural disasters. Moreover, the emerging information and communication technology has called for urgent reconstruction of the new systems, motivating fishing community to use community media for constructing better communication system for local autonomy. Some people perceive community radio as a public space; in which local people happen to meet each other, exchange opinions, and express thoughts. In media studies, a general understanding is that community radio plays an important role in developing countries where media is not available for all or the media environment is not developed (Girard, 1992). Assuming this perspective, it is important for media scholars to explore why people still want to have community radio for local community development in India, where more technologically sophisticated media are available for most members of society today. Hence this study attempts to explore, first of all, how community radio has been used for various purposes, such as disaster prevention, relief and revitalization, secondly, how community radio has served as an agent of social change and finally how does community radio function for community communication in the coastal areas of Nagapattinam, Tamil Nadu.

Community Radio

Community radio is located in isolated rural villages and in the heart of the largest cities in the world. Their signals may reach only a kilometer, cover a whole country or be carried via shortwave to other parts of the world.

Some stations are owned by non-profit groups or by cooperatives whose members are the listeners themselves. Others are owned by students, universities, municipalities, churches or trade unions.

Girard provides a definition in *A Passion for Radio,* which focuses on the roles of community radio. "Community radio is a type of radio made to serve people; radio that encourages expression and participation and that values local culture. Its purpose is to give a voice to those without voices, the marginalized groups and to communities far from large urban centers, where the population is too small to attract commercial or large-scale state radio. (Girard, 1992, p.13).

Community Radio in India

Since 1956, there were radio broadcasts which aimed to give the community advice on agriculture inputs, hygiene, health and practical finance, mainly for farmers. All India Radio at first started the famous Pune Radio Farm Forum Project. The project was a field experiment to evaluate the effects of radio farm forums, each consisting of several dozen villagers who gathered weekly to listen to a half-hour radio programme and then discuss the content. [1]

Grameen Nioyojan Kendra in Maharajgunj, Uttar Pradesh routinely produces programmes on Malaria, Japanese Encephalities.[2] UNESCO organized 'Tool to Empower Communities' a programme that took place in Madhya Pradesh, from 3-5 March 2009. In the year 2003, Raghav Mahato, a mechanic took initiative to setup a community radio station by his own efforts in Mansoorpur in the Vaishali district of Bihar. The station was perhaps the cheapest in the world, fitted with an antenna attached to a bamboo pole; costing just over Rs. 50. He began broadcasting Bollywood and Bhojpuri songs along with public interest message on HIV and polio news and announcements. Sadly, he had to close it down due to lake of support.[3] Later, the government of India gave permission to expand its footprint area.

Community Radio in Nagapattinam, Tamil Nadu

After the Tsunami devastation, in December 26, 2004, DHAN Foundation started working in a big way with the affected fishing and farming communities along the coast with a long term development focus. Empowering the community in all aspects, particularly in building capacity of the community for disaster management was felt as an important area of intervention. A Community Radio Station *Kalanjiuam Samuga Vanoli* with a vision of creating a Community Media Centre with mixed media model, combining radio with video and web based technologies. The Station has started to function from October 2005. The station for Kalanjiam Samuga Vanoli has been set up at Vizhunthamavadi village of Keelaiyur Block in Nagapattinam District, Tamil Nadu.

Theoretical Framework

Communication is regarded as a device of the relation between individuals and community (Rutherbuhler, 2001). A number of scholars have studied how media communication would construct relation between the two. For instance, Park (1922) and Janowitz (1952) described the unique contributions of newspapers and newspaper reading to communities.

Stamm's community ties concept is quite useful here (Hollander, 2002). According to Stamm (1985), community ties are specifically those things that connect individuals to each other across a variety of gaps, which may be spatial, social, linguistic, political, information, etc.

This study attempts to understand how community radio plays a role in revitalizing local communities in Nagapattinam. Hence the following questions are made to discuss:

How are members of the community

connected through community radio?

How does community radio help for disaster prevention, relief and revitalization?

How community radio has served as an agent of social change?

How does community radio function for community communication?

Method
This study used in-depth interviews with community radio center at Vizhunthamavadi and other beneficiaries, all who located in the surrounding villages. The research has taken into consideration of the types of programmes provided by the community radio, who is involved in the programmes and what kinds of relationships exist via services.

Analysis
This study attempts to understand how community radio plays a role in revitalizing local communities in Nagapattinam based upon Stamm's community ties concept. The above said five issues will be analyzed here below.

1. Connecting Various People in the community
Community radio helps create a place where various people in the community meet, including farmers, fishermen, factory workers, housewives, mothers with small children, students, and differently skilled people. The broadcast content is designated through several programmes focused on a number of locally relevant topics. This information and learning focus is combined with valuable information to the community, and giving a voice to the community's talent. Furthermore programmes on Disaster Risk Reduction, employment opportunities, herbal/home remedies, HIV awareness, SMS/postcard jokes, cooking tips, information bits, and live interaction with experts.

2. The Role of Community Radio in Disaster Management
During the research 73% of the respondents have highlighted health issue as a serious development issue and other issues they raised were disaster, infrastructure such as road, electricity and drinking water.

The Kalanjiam Community Radio Station jointly with district disaster preparedness training unit organized a training programme with 40 Community members from five villages of the Keelaiyur block. They were also taught on steps to be taken in distress situation. People need information as much as water, food, medicine or shelter. Information can save lives, livelihoods and resources.[4]

3. Community Radio as an Agent of Social Change/Control
At a time when stress-related suicides are increasing among the student community and farmers, fishing community, testimony from a fishing community of Kalanjiam presented here comes as a breath of fresh air: "*I am Ponnusamy, before Tsunami we all thought sea is God and it provides everything. However, after Tsunami the community radio programmes have empowered us to see the reality in good perspective. It is time now that we send our children for other studies to empower them so that we do not depend on fishing alone. Secondly, we started to build our houses far away from the sea coast so that we can be saved from any natural calamity. Thirdly, the school in our area achieved 100 per cent pass in the public examinations and it is a landmark even for a rural Government School like ours. I would definitely say that the Kalanjiam community radio has its share of contribution in this success.*"

4. Discovering Resources in the Community and Promoting Cultural Identity
Kalanjiam Community Radio helps people discover local resources, including people, culture, nature, history, institutions, activities, and commodities.

It was observed that the community members were able to act as reporters as a member of a voluntary group. When becoming a reporter, people tend to be more interested in the community including people, events, facilities, building, nature, and history. Naturally, these civic reporters want to tell what they find in the community.

5. Capacity Building and a Voice to the Voiceless
Kalanjiam aims to build capacity of the community through its programme. Launched in 2005 in five villages has 2000 minutes of audio programme produced and disseminated. It is disseminated through Karaikal FM on weekly basis for 15 minutes. The Narrow casting reaches 500 households in five villages. 1800 Self-Help-Group members are inducted in the cassette player every fortnight. Kalanjiam offers an integrated training package in journalistic skills such as on-air-presentation, radio interviews, technical training in editing, sound engineering, use of equipment; management training, audience research and programming, enhancing community involvement, as well as technical and logistical support.

Discussion
This study observed that most activities that Stamm (1985) mentioned in his discussion of community ties were operational through community radio in Nagapattinam coastal area. As Girard (1992) explains, many community radio stations encourage people without voices to have a voice through community radio. More importantly, both people with voices and without voices establish contact with each other. Through community communication activities, participants are tied to each other. **Challenges ahead**

- Community Participation Verses Ownership
- Investing Women in the core business of media management, within the male dominated local communities is the challenge
- Funding arrangement and Sustainability:
- Community Radio would be especially important in the education and warning roles.

Conclusion
Communication is about the human factor in development – it gives people a voice, makes them 'visible' and helps them to learn and take action. Communication is most useful when it starts listening to what people already know, what they aspire to become, what they perceive is possible and what they can productively sustain. In our analysis and discussion we have pointed out how the Kalanjiam Radio has helped people to get connected through community radio, what kinds of activities as community communication are taken by members of the community through community radio. It is also highlighted how this medium attempts to build up a local community with cultural empowerment and economic development. Children and elders are the potential resources for content generation that needs to be tapped. The responses from these groups were overwhelming for programme production.

Table 1 : Areas of Programme Production

SN	Type of Programme	Duration (seconds)	Minutes
1	Thirukural	4445	74:05
2	Local Information	3029	50:29
3	Agriculture	12051	20151
4	Fishing	5616	94:36
5	Livelihoods Best Practices	5997	108:57
6	Women and Self-help groups	13002	217:42
7	Education, Environment	25217	421:77
8	Traditional Health Practices	10854	181:54
9	Local Leadership	6733	112:13
10	Development issues	16419	273:39
11	Local Culture and Songs	10818	181:18

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amurthi@gmail.com |