



# Evolution of Community Radio: A Theoretical Purview

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## Abstract

Radio is the most effective medium in all communication media. Soon after its invention it got immense popularity and brought a revolution in the communication media. Listeners around the world enjoyed the programmes without any barriers. Radio is called the medium of the masses as it is the most effective and economical medium that everyone can afford. Community radio falls under the community broadcasting category. Broadcasting can be categorised as public service, commercial or private, and community broadcasting. Public service broadcasting is supported and controlled by the state authority. Commercial or private broadcasting is controlled by private persons or enterprises. Community broadcasting is a service that is owned and controlled by the community. A rapid expansion can be noticed in the number and popularity of community radio stations in the last two decades. The reason for this growth is the relaxing of the broadcasting monopolies by the governments by analysing its needs, dissatisfaction towards commercial and public service broadcasting, and the democratisation process in various countries. Community radio originated with the Miners' radio in Bolivia and Peasants' Radio Sutatenza in 1947. Realizing the worth of community radio, other countries too joined the movement. Most countries have realised the importance of community radio stations in the development process and started giving full support for these broadcasting. The Indian government also allowed educational institutions *Krishivigyan Kendras*, NGOs, and other civil societies to operate the community radio stations in the policy released in 2002 and revised in 2006. Community radio is still evolving, and the governments that have not allowed community broadcasting are realising its worth and gradually shedding its control.

**Keywords:** Community Radio, Public Service Broadcasting, Commercial Broadcasting, Community Broadcasting, Developmental Process

### **Introduction:**

Broadcasting may be divided into public service, commercial or private, and community broadcasting. Public service broadcasting is often state-supported, fully controlled by the state authority, and can also be called the mouthpiece of the authority. Commercial or private broadcasting is fully controlled by private persons or enterprises. The main purpose of this broadcasting is profit-making and therefore the programmes are designed accordingly. Community broadcasting is a service that is owned and controlled by the community through institutions, trusts, organizations, etc. The main objective of this broadcasting is to serve the community. Furthermore, it depends upon the community resources for existence. Community broadcasting or media can be in the form of print electronic and social media and mixed types of media.

Radio is considered the most effective medium in all media as radio has brought a revolution in the communication media as very soon it got immense popularity and listeners around the world enjoyed the programmes without any barriers. It is the most effective and economical medium as everyone can afford it. Due to these features of it, radio is rightly called the medium of the masses.

### **Origin of Radio:**

The idea of radio originated in 1865 with the scientist James Maxwell. Though Maxwell and other scientists gave the mathematical theory related to electromagnetic waves but could not prove the theory. In 1887 German scientist Heinrich Hertz proved in an experiment that energy in the form of electromagnetic waves can pass from one device to another through the air. Therefore, radio waves are known as Hertzian waves. Guglielmo Marconi, an Italian Physicist made some improvements in the Hertzian waves' device in 1897 and transmitted the sound across miles. He established a wireless telegraph company in 1897, opening the world's first radio company in 1898 in Chelmsford, England.

The world's first broadcast on the radio was transmitted on 2 November 1920 from Pittsburgh Pennsylvania on KDKA radio station and the result of the presidential election was announced on the radio (Sreedhar & Murada, 2019). The radio brought a revolution in the communication media and soon it gained immense popularity and listeners around the world enjoyed the news and other musical programmes on the radio. Among the other means of communication, radio is considered the most effective, economical, and accessible medium.

**Radio in India:**

Radio broadcasting in India started in July 1923 by the Bombay Presidency Radio Club. A private company named Indian Broadcasting Company limited started two radio stations in India through an agreement. The first station began on 23 July 1927 in Bombay and the second in Calcutta on 26 July 1927. In 1930 the private company dissolved and shut down and the government took over the charge and started two years project under the name Indian State Broadcasting Service. In 1936 the Indian State Broadcasting Service was renamed All India Radio. Department of Information and Broadcasting took the charge of AIR in 1946. At the time of independence in 1947, India had only six radio stations out of which Delhi, Bombay, Calcutta, Madras, Lucknow, and Tiruchirappalli were in India, and Peshawar, Lahore, and Karachi went to Pakistan. During the year of independence, a total of 275,000 radio sets were available in the whole country.

**Community Radio:**

Community radio has been defined by many scholars and institutions in their own ways. Tabing (2002) defines community radio as “one that is operated in the community, for the community, about the community, and by the community” (p.11).

The main purpose of community radio is to benefit the community and work for its welfare by involving its members in the functioning of the station and thus provide them the useful information to highlight their issues, which mainstream media often tends to ignore. There is a difference between the functioning of community radio and the mainstream media. According to Lewis and Booth (1989), “The main difference between the two is that for community radio the listeners are subjects and participants whereas public service and commercial radio consider them as objects to be taken by advertisers and to be informed”

Fraser and Estrada (2001) have described community radio in a complete sense. According to them: “A community radio station is characterized by its ownership and programming and the community it is authorised to serve. It is owned and controlled by a non-profit organization whose structure provides for membership, management, operation, and programming primarily by members of the community at large. Its programming should be

based on community access and participation and should reflect the special interests and needs of the listenership it is licensed to serve” (p 4). The programmes of the community media are based on local issues and the presenters

or announcers are also from the community. In most of the community radio stations, programmes are being broadcast in local dialects for better understanding of the listeners.

### **Evolution of Community Radio**

The origin of community radio can be traced to Latin America in the mid-40s when the dissemination of information to the masses was initiated. Miners' radio in Bolivia in 1947 followed by the Peasants' radio of Colombia in 1952 can be considered the predecessors of present community radio in the world. The main forces behind starting of these radio stations were poverty and social injustice in these areas. The miners' radio stations were started by the trade union to highlight the pathetic conditions of workers in the mines. These radio stations were helpful in uniting the miners against the atrocities and thus provided them the useful information which helped them counter the negative propaganda by the mainstream media against their interests. By 1970, as many as 23 community radio stations in various mining areas of the country were set up. These community radio stations were collectively named as the Miners' Radios. Radio Sutatenza in Colombia on the other hand was initiated with the purpose of helping the peasants' community. Though the community radio was not owned or directly managed by them. There was regular feedback from peasants. The radio used to receive about 50,000 feedback letters from the listeners which showed their trust in the radio programming. Though it was not like today's community radio which is owned and controlled by the community (Fraser & Estrada, 2001).

National Public Radio (NPR) is a membership-based non-profit organization that presents an alternative model of broadcasting in the USA. It is an alliance of around one thousand radio stations. During recent years, community radio movement has been increasing at a rapid pace in popularity as well as numbers.

In South Africa, with the fall of the Apartheid regime, the community radio movement started gaining popularity. Many African countries have started realizing the importance of the role of community radio stations in the developmental process. In this continent, the financial support geared up the growth of community radio as the number of community radio stations increased faster than commercial radio throughout Africa.

In third-world countries, community broadcasting grew at a relatively slower pace. Countries like Singapore, Korea, Taiwan, and China are not supportive of community broadcasting. Similar is the case in the countries like Laos, Vietnam, Burma, and Malaysia.

In Nepal, however, Radio Sagarmatha started the revolution of community broadcasting. It started functioning in 1997 and became the first community radio in South Asia. Radio Sagarmatha paved the way for

community broadcasting in Nepal as presently 22 community radio stations are operational and cover about 70 percent population. These community radio stations are playing important role in sustaining democratic values.

India released a community radio policy in 2002 and paved the way for bringing its population under the coverage of community radio stations. Bangladesh and Afghanistan are also willing to establish community radio stations even though at a slower pace. Pakistan has not allowed community broadcasting thus far.

In Southeast Asia, Thailand leads the Southeast region with about 5,000 community-owned radio stations even though most of them have been functioning without licenses. In Indonesia too, the number of community radio stations has been increasing rapidly. Colombia, Bolivia, Mexico, and Argentina have adopted supportive community broadcasting policies. Latin America has 10000 community radio stations which is the highest number of operational community radio stations followed by Peru, Ecuador Bolivia, and Brazil. (Sreedhar & Murada, 2019).

### **Community Radio in India**

In India, civil societies began lobbying for the legitimisation of the community radio broadcasting CR in the mid-1990s. The movement got boosted by the Supreme Court judgment which declared airwaves a public property. The series of events regarding community radio set an agenda and thus prepared a framework which resulted in the formation of community radio policy in India in 2002. The policy permitted educational institutions to operate community radio stations.

Anna FM became the first campus radio in India which was managed by Anna university Chennai. On 16 November 2006, the Indian Government released the revised policy allowing *Krishivigyan Kendras*, NGOs, and other civil societies to operate the community radio stations. Sangam Radio in Pastapur Village of Andhra Pradesh was the first community-based radio station in India. The community radio station went on air on October 15, 2008, and was managed by an NGO called Deccan Development Society. Radio Bundelkhand was the second community-based radio station situated at Orchha, Madhya Pradesh on October 23, 2008. Community radio broadcasting has been spreading its root all over India for empowering the community by accessing information and communication. As per the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting Govt of India, the total number of operational community radio stations is 385.

## Community Radio Projects in India

Some of the community-based organizations in India initiated community broadcasting projects in India via using the available space for broadcasting their content whereas others reached the community through narrowcasting such as playing programs on the tape recorder or making use of television cable to reach the masses.

*Chala Ho Gaon Mein* is a community radio broadcasting project initiated by an NGO namely Alternative for India Development in 2001 in Jharkhand. The programmes herein were based on local issues in the local dialect by involving people from the local community.

The programmes thus were broadcast from Daltongunj, which is a backward area in the Palamau district of Jharkhand. The people enjoyed the programmes which promoted their culture and folk music as prior to this project the people of that region were nowhere visible in the media. The mainstream media was out of their reach as most of the population was illiterate and therefore newspapers were of no use to them and likewise without electricity electronic media was also out of their reach.

The Kutch Mahila Vikas Sangathan (KMVS) is an NGO working for the empowerment of the rural women in Gujrat. The NGO started a project on Ujjas Radio in which a series of programmes were made concerning women's issues and development activities in the locality. They started a sponsored programme of 30 minutes in the local dialect and was broadcast from AIR Bhuj. The Ujjas Radio produced 350 episodes in 10 series in local dialects by involving local women only.

Another community radio project in India is run by the NGO called Deccan Development Society (DDS) with support from UNESCO in 1998. A radio station was set up in a small village in Sangareddy district of Telangana. Two Dalit women from the area managed the radio stations and produced programmes on folk songs and culture, agriculture, health and hygiene, and other social issues narrowcasting the tape of village *Sangams* signifying autonomous groups of women.

A Bangalore-based development communication group, VOICES, and an NGO called Mysore Resettlement and Development Agency (MYRADA) which is a non-governmental organization, started community broadcasting *Namma Dhvani* (implying our voice). *Namma Dhawani* was an audio production centre at Budhikote, Karnataka where programmes were made by three trained persons and other volunteers from the community on local issues and were cablecast through a television cable link (Pavarala & Malik, 2007).

## Conclusions:

To sum up, it can be averred that community radio has been gaining popularity and importance all over the world during the last few years. Undoubtedly, the concept of community radio is still the process of maturing as its actual purpose is still not very clear in the sense of being focussed and change-centred. Nevertheless, it is getting streamlined on gradual basis. Miners' radio in Bolivia and Peasants' Radio Sutatenza in 1947 pioneered the community radio movement in the world. The importance of community broadcasting was realised by other countries as well who joined the movement later. Most African countries have realised the importance of community radio stations in the developmental process and started giving full support to community radio broadcasting. Surprisingly, the increase in community radio stations is more than the commercial radio throughout Africa. In third-world countries where community broadcasting is much needed, it has been growing at a relatively slower pace. Countries like Singapore, Korea, Taiwan, and China are not supportive of community broadcasting. Similar is the case in the countries like Laos, Vietnam, Burma, and Malaysia.

Indian Government permitted community radio broadcasting in 2003 by announcing the community radio policy 2002 and revised it on 16 November 2006. The vision was to start more than 4000 community radio stations by 2008 across India but the total number of operational community radio stations is 385 as on March 2023. It is worth mentioning that the number of community radio stations in the country is less than the actual need, considering the rural population of the country which needs to be increased. Community radio has proved its worth in countries that have allowed/lent support to the community broadcasting. Even though phenomenon of community radio is still evolving, there is the possibility of it becoming one of the best mediums of communication triggering concrete changes at the grass-root level.

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