

Role of Community Radio in Rural Development: A Study of Jnan Taranga, the community radio service of KKHSOU

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1. Introduction:

Economic growth is often contrasted with economic development. However, whereas economic growth refers to a rise in a country's GDP or GNP, in percentage terms, economic development refers to the increase in economic welfare of a country. Economic growth is an essential but not the only condition for economic development. In course of time, development has come to be accepted as a 'widely participatory process of social change in a society, intended to bring about social and material advancement for the majority of people through their gaining control over their environment' (Rogers, 1976). In a similar line, Okunna's (2002) perception of development is based on the belief that only with rural development, development in the real sense takes place.

India was a colony of the British till it became independent on 15 August 1947. Through various programmes undertaken by the Government of India immediately after independence, India has achieved success in many fields. However, much needs to be done in order to make development meaningful for all sections of the society and make India a developed country. At present, even after planned efforts of development, around 60 percent of Indian population depends on agriculture, per capita income(nominal) stands at Rs 7593 in 2013 (ranked 112 out of 164 countries) , literacy rate is 74 percent(2011 Census), 22 percentage of population below poverty line, etc. This shows that there are still a number of problems facing national development.

The media can be an important agent of development which can be used to ensure social, cultural and political development in a society. The developmental policies and actions can be conveyed to the masses with the help of media; and the people in turn can use the media to convey their developmental needs as well as feedback to the government. The post modernism school of thought argue that national development should involve a participatory process, which implies, development

should be bi-directional and there should be mutual sharing of ideas and information among the people towards achieving development in the country. The post-modernists also put emphasis on the fact that national development is the totality of all the communication activities, whose main aim is to move the entire population upwards on the social ladder.

The role of local media to enhance community development at the grass root level is immense. Wilson (1991) analysed the influence of mass media as “The mass media of communication are so pervasive in their socio-cultural and political influence that there is hardly any field of human endeavor where they do not have a specific role to play. They act as eye and ear of society (i.e., as watchdogs) and as mobilisers, informers, educators, entertainers and channels for disseminating information, propagating culture, educating, entertaining, mobilizing, correlating the environment and promoting the general economic well-being of the society and their owners.

Amongst the various existing genres of local community media, community radio is the most effective as it can easily cover a wide range of area and audience. One of the most important reasons for having community radio is that it enables the community members to speak to themselves and also to those outside their community about the issues that matter to them.

2. Community Radio:

Community radio brings small communities together, focuses on common man’s problems and helps in realizing local aspirations. It does 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 (Wadia, 2007). Community radio has three major characteristics- non-profit making; community ownership and control; and community participation. It is not about doing something for the community but about the community doing something for itself, which means the community owns and controls its own means of communication (Carole, 2002). Community radio has the following advantages:

- i. Community radio can mobilize people to solve common problems and/or address common issues affecting the community.
- ii. Community radio can bring development of the community by disseminating information about health and disease control.

- iii. Community radio can make community members aware of the resources it owns.
- iv. Community radio can bring about cultural development. Local artists get a chance to perform and in this way, community radio helps in preserving the cultural heritage of the community.
- v. Community radio is a source of relaxation, entertainment, advice and information. It increases the understanding of rural people and enriches their knowledge on different issues.

3. Statement of the Problem:

Since its independence, India has taken up numerous programmes for the development of the masses, especially rural development. However, development in the real sense is yet to reach the desired target group. So, it has become necessary that the issue of community/ rural development should be articulated and communicated in order to enlighten the people concerned about developmental activities of the Government.

The relationship between community radio and community/ rural development is immense. From the development media theory perspective and the social responsibility theory perspective, community radio is a development catalyst. Community radio can help to reduce, to a large extent, the various challenges faced by the rural people such as health challenges, illiteracy, agriculture development, etc. The aspect also cannot be overlooked that community radio can be used to foster harmony and improve communication among rural communities.

4. Community Radio in India:

In India, community radio was legitimized in the mid 1990s, after the Supreme Court of India ruled in its judgment of February 1995 that 'airwaves are public property'. Initially only educational radio stations were allowed. Anna FM is India's first community radio launched on 1 February, 2004. At present, some of the successful examples of Community Radio in India are Sarang 107.8 FM, Chala Ho Gaon Mein, Mandakini Ki Awaz. Jnan Taranga, the community radio of Krishna Kanta Handiqui State Open University (KKHSOU), was established on November 20, 2010, to bring the deprived and marginal sections of the society into the development process. Community based programmes on health , career, agriculture, environment based programmes, educational programmes, youth oriented programmes, Manor Khabor,

Mohila Sora, Seuji Dharani Zuba Tirtha, Sahitya Sara, Sanskriti, Gyan Saphura etc., are broadcast every day which includes programmes for all sections of the society.

5. Objectives of the Study:

1. To ascertain whether Jnan Taranga has been successful in catering to the needs of all sections of the society.
2. To see whether Jnan Taranga has been able to cater to the university's motto of 'education beyond barriers'.
3. To study whether Jnan Taranga can be a source of empowerment for the common people.

6. Methodology:

The present study investigates community radio of KKHSOU as a tool of development drawing on case studies. Making an indepth analysis of the programmes of Jnan Taranga, the study will see whether these programmes are influenced by the agendas of development agencies, i.e., it examines the extent to which communication for development in Jnan Taranga takes the form of participatory communication. Using the case study method, the study specifically examines whether community radio can encourage development through enhancing capabilities and participation; how radio listening itself can expand people's capabilities. The case study method takes a situation as given and tries to find out what it particularly means to the participants. Usually case studies are associated with qualitative research; but at times they can incorporate quantitative data and show quantitative findings. In the case study method, one, two or possibly three particular cases in-depth and historically. This is a practical and interesting research method that uses many different research techniques simultaneously.

7. Analysis:

As mentioned earlier, Jnan Taranga, the community radio of Krishna Kanta Handiqui State Open University (KKHSOU), was established on November 20, 2010. Programmes in Jnan Taranga started on November 20, 2010 with a two hours live programme and two hours of repeat telecast. Out of two hours of live programme, half an hour was devoted to educational programme and the rest of the time was devoted to issues on agriculture, animal husbandry, horticulture, etc. This time schedule

continued for around six months. This was followed by an increase in the timing of the programmes from two hours to four hours of live programme. This phase continued for one and a half years. From 2015, till present times, Jnan Taranga is broadcast from 9am to 8 pm everyday. From 9 am to 2 pm, its live broadcast; from 2 pm to 5 pm, it is weekly programmes and from 5 pm to 8 pm, it is repeat telecast of the previous slot (2 pm -5pm).

The programmes broadcast covers almost all aspects of daily life ranging from birthday wishes, health tips, satire, beauty tips, children programme, education, career, environment, folk music, agriculture, animal husbandry, horticulture, etc. A brief break up of the programme broadcast in Jnan Taranga is given below.

Table 1: Programmes of Jnan Taranga

| Timing | Name of the programmes | Issues covered |
|------------------|-------------------------------|---|
| 9.00 – 9.30 am | Puwar Kiran | Mostly devotional and folk music along with a good morning message and quotes of great people |
| 9.30 – 10.00 am | Seuji Dharani | Environmental issues, conservation of water bodies/ forests, pollution control, disaster management |
| 10.00 – 12.00 pm | Zuba Tirthat | Birthday wishes, information about festivals falling on that day, career oriented news/ views, discussion on topics of science, new inventions, quiz, sports, problems faced by adolescents |
| 12.00 – 12.30 pm | Sahitya Sara | Information on story, drama, poetry, novels, discussion with prominent writers |
| 12.30 – 1.00 pm | Sanskriti | News about Assam’s culture/ tradition, festivals, folk music, traditional instruments/ ornaments |

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|---|---|---|
| 1.00 – 2.00 pm | Gyan Saphura | Information on the lives of great people, information on the use of traditional local herbs/ medicinal plants, tips on cooking nutritious receipes |
| 2.00 – 5.00 pm (these are weekly programmes) | Bhupendra Sangeet Lokogeet Jyoti Sangeet Bishnu Rabha Geet Angana Upanash Path Mohanogorit Mor Jibon Saat Sur Ki Dunia Mohila Sora Samajik Diabodhota Sisu Tirtha Amar Kobologia Esar Zatra Eklavya Sansoi-Biniyug Dibyabanga Sakalor Anusthan Career Religious Programmes Etc. | Songs of Bhupen Hazarika Folk songs of Assam Songs by Jyoti Prasad Agarwalla Songs by Bishnu Rabha Interview with women who have excelled Novel narration How to tackle city life problems Musical Programme Women Issues Social Issues Children Programme Interaction with community members Travels Educational Programme Investment News Programme for Differently Abled Student Programme Discussion on different Religious Issues |
| 5.00 – 8.00 pm | REPEAT TELECAST | |

Source: Jnan Taranga, KKHSOU, 2017

The above table reveals that Jnan Taranga broadcasts programmes which cater to the needs of all sections of the society. In addition to the broadcasts on different issues, the live phone-in programme “Monor Khobor” is a popular programme which addresses different social issues of the community. Here the listeners make calls to the station and give their suggestions, feedback and views on the programmes. “Eklavya” is another purely educational programme which caters to the needs of the student community. The University’s motto is to disseminate education transcending all barriers. ‘Eklavya’ and ‘Zuba Tirtha’ are educational

programmes where all people, even from the disadvantaged and marginalized sections of the society (usually deprived from formal education) has access to. The programme “Amar Kobologiya Ekasar” is a weekly broadcast for half an hour every Monday where radio reporters go to meet community members and interact with them directly and share their experiences and issues related to their day-to-day lives. There is a weekly programme “Mohila Sora” on Saturday which deals with issues affecting women. “Zatra” is another weekly programme broadcast every Tuesday which speaks on places of tourist interest and the easiest way to reach these places. One important programme “Sansoi-Biniyug” gives ideas on investment. There is a special programme ‘Dibyabanga Sakalor Anusthan’ which deals with the special issues/ challenges related to the differently abled section of the society. There are special programmes on women issues - ‘Angana’ and ‘Mohila Sora’. ‘Angana’ is a programme on those women who have talent but have not been able to succeed because of some difficulties. It is actually an appreciation of the lives of these women in different areas – literature, music, dance, cooking, business, etc. Here interviews with these women are taken and they are allowed to express their struggles, problems, hopes and success. Different knowledge based programmes also give tips on how to minimize fuel use, how to avoid adulterated food, the best food to be taken during illness, how to cure common diseases, etc. In keeping with the policies of the Government of India, a programme on Skill India was done for a year starting in 2014. An UNICEF Project based on Adolescents has been going on since the last two years where their problems are discussed. This programme also contains discussion shows, drama, poetry, quiz, etc.

The following table shows the number of phone calls received in the programme ‘Monor Khobor’ over a period of time.

Table 2: No of phone calls received in ‘Manor Khobor’

| Sl No | Period | No of phone call received |
|-------|----------------|---------------------------|
| 1 | July 2015 | 167 |
| 2 | September 2015 | 179 |
| 3 | July 2016 | 164 |
| 4 | September 2016 | 181 |
| 5 | July 2017 | 183 |
| 6 | September 2017 | 185 |

Source: Jnan Taranga, KKHSOU, 2017

The data given in table 2 shows that the popular phone-in programme 'Monor Khobor' has retained its popularity over the years. In just an hour, the programme has been able to receive on an average about 175 calls which are attended by radio jockeys and answers/ suggestions given accordingly.

The above analysis proves our objectives that Jnan Taranga has been successful in (a) catering to the needs of all sections of the society and (b) to the university's motto of 'education beyond barriers'.

The third objective is fulfilled with three case studies which show that Jnan Taranga has been successful in empowering common people.

Case 1

Santo Kalita hails from Nalbari but migrated to Guwahati for work in 2011 and is settled here. Listening to radio is his hobby. Initially he used to listen to the radio programme 'Akashbani'. One day by chance he listened to the phone-in programme of Jnan Tarang. He too made a call and since his call was answered and queries attended to, he became interested in the programme. After that, he started interacting in the phone-in programme everyday. On March 12, 2013 i.e., on Radio Day, he was felicitated by KKHSOU and a mobile phone was given to him as a gift. Mr Kalita is an ardent fan of Jnan Taranga and has publicized it amongst his friends. He now anchors programmes on Borgeet/ Lokageet / Bhaktir geet (i.e., folk songs and devotional songs) in Jnan Taranga. This is a case of a common man being empowered by community radio.

Case 2

Chinmoy Kalita is the son of Santo Kalita. At present he anchors different children programmes related to the environment, literature, science, recitation, general knowledge etc. He is a frequent visitor to the studios of Jnan Taranga and has even learnt to handle the equipments there. Chinmoy has till now conducted about 70 different programmes in schools in greater Guwahati. These are children programmes which range from half an hour to one and a half hour duration and recitation competition, quiz, storytelling, etc are covered in this time. Chinmoy wanted to be a journalist but as he has become popular among his peers by conducting different programmes in Jnan Taranga, he now wants to grow up to be an anchor. This is another case of Jnan Taranga empowering people by taking radio to the community.

Case 3

Ms Reetu Gogoi initially came to KKHSOU because she wanted to pursue PhD. She was already associated with Doordorshan- Guwahati as an anchor, scriptwriter, programme and news producer. Her association with the electronic media made her interested in Jnan Taranga. She started her journey in Jnan Taranga as an anchor in two programmes – ‘Swatha Sarsa’ (a live programme where interviews were taken with specialists from different fields) and ‘Angana’ (a women oriented programme where women with talents in different fields were interviewed and asked to share their experiences) in 2014. From there on, there was no looking back. Reetu was awarded ‘The Laadli Media and Advertising World Award’ in 2015 by the international organization ‘Population First’, London. She was the only one from North East India to win the award in electronic media for gender sensitivity. This is another case of empowerment brought about by Jnan Taranga where Reetu has been able to pursue her dreams of working in the electronic media in addition to earning a decent livelihood. Reetu now anchors a number of other programmes also, especially knowledge based programmes and Awareness Programmes on special days.

8. Conclusion:

Community Radio Forum states that community radio programming ‘should be relevant to the educational, developmental, social and cultural needs of the community’ (Venniyoor, 2007). Community radio broadcasting has changed radio listening, especially in the remote areas. Jnan Taranga has been successful in achieving its desired objectives of bringing development to the community through their own participation; i.e., Jnan Taranga has been successful in fulfilling its objective of social responsibility by providing the community with news bulletins, current affairs, sports, culture, health programmes, children programmes etc. The programmes are such that people can easily identify themselves with; the rural audience likes to hear themselves and their neighbours/ friends. The problems, challenges, hopes of the community are discussed and solutions of their problems are given. In future also, Jnan Taranga will continue to achieve its objective of bringing development to the communities. There is a high degree of listener participation in the programmes of Jnan Taranga. Community members are further happy with the fact that their suggestions/recommendations have been heeded to by the staff of the station. In addition, as shown by case

studies, community members participate in the programmes by making announcements and advertisements.

9. Recommendations:

Regular feedback from the listening public of Jnan Taranga will help to identify the listeners' preferences. The taste of the different categories of listeners – children, youth, aged, men, women, etc., should be taken into consideration. The need of the present times is environmental protection, especially in Assam. Inclusion of more programmes on land degradation, indiscriminate tree felling, waste management, soil erosion and climate change and its effects on peoples' livelihood will increase the popularity of the station. And for Jnan Taranga to retain its role in community development, it should be kept out of politics and religion. Community radio possesses great potential. So it should be given enough chance and condition to succeed in the face of competition from other media.

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