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# **LISTENER PERCEPTION OF SARATHI JHALAK COMMUNITY RADIO**

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**Abstract:** Community Radio has been one of the most democratic platforms of communication ensuring participation at the grassroots level. It serves as the Voice of the voiceless and mouthpiece of the marginalised. Community Radio initiative intend to bring about empowerment of communities through its bottom up approach. It is seen as a catalyst of development. In India,198 Community Radio stations in myriad dialects reflecting the cultural diversity of the country calls for appreciation. However, considering the landmine of opportunities that community Radio offers towards contributing to the process of development of the country, we may reflect whether CR has been underutilised. In this background, it is important for us to understand the stories behind each of the Community Radio initiatives – stories of their struggle for survival, success and failures, challenges, achievements, aspirations and motivation. This can provide some valuable insights towards strengthening CR initiatives. It is significant to comprehend the role of community radio in empowering societies thereby contributing to development. This research aims at studying the listener perception of Sarathi Jhalak Community Radio aired on 90.4 FM from Anugondanahalli, Hoskote Taluk, Bangalore Rural district. **The objective of the Study is to** understand the perceptions of members of the community towards the role of community radio in empowering them. The Study adopts quantitative methodology.

**Keywords:** Empowerment Marginalized, Participation, Perceptions.

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**Introduction:** Community Radio offers a third model of radio broadcasting beyond commercial and public service. Community stations can serve geographic communities and communities of interest. They broadcast content that is popular and relevant to a local/specific audience. “A community radio station is one that is operated in the community, for the community, about the community and by the community.” A community radio station is characterized by its ownership and programming and the community it is authorized 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- UNESCO

Community radio stations are operated, owned, and driven by the communities they serve.

Community radio is non- profit and provides a mechanism for facilitating individuals, groups, and communities to tell their own diverse stories, to share experiences, to become active contributors of media. It serves a recognizable community and encourages participatory democracy. It offers the opportunity to any member of the community to initiate communication and participate in program making, management and ownership of the station. It uses technology appropriate to the economic capability of the people, not that which leads to dependence on external sources. It is motivated by community wellbeing, not commercial considerations. It promotes and improves problem solving

Community radio, as distinct from public service broadcasting, serves to bring small communities together, focuses on the common man’s day to day concerns and help in realizing local aspirations. In this sense, it aims to contribute to the lives of the local community by creation of content by the people and for the people of that community.

In India, the Supreme Court of India passed a judgment in 1995 that "**airwaves are public property**". This triggered community radio efforts in India. To begin with, only educational (campus) radio stations were allowed, under stringent conditions. Anna FM is India's first campus 'community' radio, launched in 2004 at Anna University. In 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. Individuals, Political Parties, Organizations operating with a motive to earn profit and organisations expressly banned by the Union and State Governments are not eligible to run a CRS.

As of 2016, about 196 Community Radio Stations are operational as per the compendium released by the Government during the 6<sup>th</sup> National Sammelan of CR Stations. The government, as part of the 12th Plan scheme of "Supporting Community Radio Movement in India", has allocated Rs 100 crore to strengthen community radio in India.

**Sarathi-Jhalak:** FM 90.4 MHz, Community Radio Station went on air on August 23<sup>rd</sup> 2012 with a 50 m high transmission tower in Anugondana Halli Hobli, Hoskote. It is on the eastern periphery of Bangalore. It is an initiative of Sarathi; a Bangalore based non profit organization. The NGO claims to be working towards the betterment of under privileged people, through media. The official website of Sarathi Jhalak claims to be a 'knowledge based organization' which 'strongly believes in information and knowledge as tool for change in society.'

Sarathi Jhalak is transmitting to 100 and odd villages in Malur and Anekal taluks, Sarjapura, ITPL, White Field, Marathhalli, Kundala Halli Gate areas . The coverage area has a significant population of educated, semi-urbanized, and predominantly young people. The station has tried to capture the young listeners. The geographic proximity to Bangalore city Since it has geographical proximity to Bangalore city, but is still untouched by rapid urbanization, we see this area as offering an excellent opportunity for environmental development, education of young and old alike and counselling and participation to induct right values, to effectively integrate the residents with city life. Programmes on Sarathi Jhalak - The radio programs focus on development issues and matters of public health, agriculture, folklore, legal matters and social.

**Objective of the study is** to understand the perceptions of members of the community towards the role of community radio in empowering them.

**Review of Literature:** There have been studies conducted to evaluate the success of community radio in the development process of communities. A study conducted by Rashmi Kumari A Nagaraja S on 'Impact of Radio Siddhartha Community Radio Station on the Integrated Development of Tumkur Taluk - A Sociological Study' indicates that Community Radio is playing a very important role in development of Tumkur taluk. Radio Siddhartha is well received by the local community of Tumkur taluk. They respond positively for all the programmes broadcast by Radio Siddhartha. Majority of the respondents of Tumkur taluk liked variety of Community Radio programmes and benefited by them. Further, this kind of research reveals the challenges of Community Radio stations in its survival and in reaching the masses. It suggests how radio listening culture is still alive and how the Community Radio is needed for the integrated development of society by considering an individual as a role player in socio-cultural development.

Keeping in mind the multifaceted role a woman has to play within the realms of a family and ultimately in the extended society, a research 'Community Radio (CR) – Participatory Communication Tool for Rural Women Development - A Study' was conducted by K.C. Siva Balan and SelvinJebaraj Norman on Pudukkottai Community Radio of Pondicherry University. The important conclusions drawn from the study were to empower women is to increase their control over the decisions that affect their lives both within and outside the household. Women should be assisted in conflict situations and their participation in peace processes. Thus radio media has a number of attributes that makes it an effective tool in promoting women's participation in decision-making processes and governance structures.

**ManndeshiTarang**, Maharashtra, was established on 16 December 2008 by Mann VikasSamajikSanstha, an NGO working for the empowerment of rural and marginalized women. *ManndeshiTarang* is providing relevant programming aimed at enriching civic and cultural life. The CR is operated under the guidance of the Mann Deshi Foundation but is owned by the Mhaswad village community and surrounding coverage areas. *ManndeshiTarang* has proved to be useful to them (women) in their life. It increased their knowledge, and enabled them to showcase their talent and also motivating them in various aspects.

**Research Methodology:** This Study adopts quantitative methods. A structured questionnaire was administered to community listeners to understand their perception towards community radio.

This study has been conducted in the district of Bangalore Rural and Kolar. Threetalukas where the signals of Sarathi Jhalak reach –Bangalore East, Hoskote taluk of Bangalore Rural district and Malurtalukasof Kolar district have been covered. Structured interviews with the listeners were conducted in 16 villeges– Medimallaandra, Muthkur, Gangalur, Channasandra, Belkere, Valepura, Kadumuthsandra,Obalapura, Valagerepura, Lakkur, Marasandra, Medahatti, Malur, Rampura, Bhodanahosahalli, Doddadunnasandra.

The Hoskotetaluka has population of 56,980 , Malur – 10,050 and Bangalore East - **102,607**. **A sample of 400 respondents were chosen for the study. A structured questionnaire was administered to the respondents.** For the survey method, Non probability sampling method was adopted. Since the study intends to gather data from the listeners of Sarathi Jhalak, Purposive Sampling method has been adopted.

The independent variables used for the study are Age, Gender, Education, Occupation and Family size. The dependent variables used are – Frequency, level of satisfaction and level of participation

**Theoretical Framework** Participatory communication is the by-product of participatory processes and participatory communities. Many development communication practitioners and researchers believe that they have found in participatory communication the most appropriate concept to guide their work in the developing world. There are four different ways of participation which can be observed in most development projects claiming to be participatory in nature. They are: Participation in implementation, Participation in evaluation, Participation in benefit and Participation in decision-making. Community Radio as a manifestation of the Participatory development project employs participatory approach to decision making processes and enable marginalized people to define their own development path through the identification and implementation of projects that are initiated by them. Participatory communication gives the local community a right to freely share or exchange information and to reach a consensus on what they want to do or to be done and how to do it.

#### **Findings and Discussions:**

- The analysis reveal the media accessibility of the respondents. All most all the respondents have access to mobile phones. This is has definitely furthered in their accessing to radio on their mobile phones. Though the study indicates that majority of the respondents have access to television and radio, we may note that their interest in newspapers is not very promising. This shows that majority of respondents rely on television and radio for information. However, mobile phone has been one of the significant platform for receiving both television and radio content.

We may note the digital and technical soundness of the respondents. This indicates that the community which the study analysis is abreast with the digital technology. Newspapers are considered one of the most reliable and credible sources of information. Minimum accessibility to newspapers is a clear indication of excessive dependence on alternative communication platforms for news and information. Which means there is plenty of scope of community radio intervention for development communication.

- Frequency of Listening to radio stations –  
It has been found that among the three models of radio broadcasting, the private FM broadcasting emerges as clear winner among the respondents in terms of respondents listening habits. We may

note how only 20% respondents listen to Sarathi Jhalak everyday as against 39% of them listening to private FM stations. But if we look at the overall frequency of listenership, about 56% of them listen to Sarathi Jhalak frequently as against 64% of them listening to private FM stations.

This is a clear indication of the listener preference. Private FM stations are entertainment centric. The commercial nature of these outlets is not to be ignored. Further, these stations are not community centric. Their content is most of the times not even relevant to the community. In spite of these factors it is interesting to note how though an alternative is available, private FM stations are a clear favourite in terms of audience listenership.

We may observe how the respondents spend about an average of 22 minutes per day on a weekday and a bit more on a week day/holiday. It is very evident from the analysis that a majority (30%) respondents listen to music and entertainment programmes. Interestingly, about 11% respondents have stated that they also listen to children's programme. This gives us an interesting perspective. Most of the children's programmes are done by children from the community. This could have contributed to the respondents' listening to the same. Further, the respondents reply on programmes pertaining to education which is directly related to community development is dismal. This could either be that the listeners' are disinterested or the station has failed to capture listener's interest in these programmes or we should also examine if there is dearth of such programmes.

- Audience recall of programme / RJ -We may notice how very few respondents could actually recall educational programmes like Arogyakanaja (health based), KaanoonuBelaku (issues related to law) and yashassinaguttu (motivational programmes). This clearly reflects the extent to which the station's programmes have created an impact on the audience.
- Favourite RJ – The analysis indicates the audience recall of names of the RJs from the station. RJ Sunil, who is the only full time RJ and programme producer at the station is preferred by only about 15% respondents. RJ Ishwar and RJ Ramsha are the most preferred RJs by the respondents. When the field investigators probed for qualitative responses on this, most of the respondents reacted that they get to listen to RJ Sunil in most of the programmes and this tends to get monotonous. This could be one of the reasons why respondents have chosen RJs who are not over exposed. Surprisingly some of the respondents have chosen RJ Kala though she no longer works with the station. This instance of recalling an RJ who was working earlier indicates that these listeners have not updated themselves about this. Or the other reason could be the impact and popularity of RJ Kala which continues to linger on in the minds of listeners even in her absence from the station.
- Audience satisfaction and expectation of programmes from Sarathi Jhalak - The study has revealed that only 37% are satisfied with the programmes. About 20% of them have specified that they are not satisfied with the programmes. Interestingly, a majority of respondents have stated that they are not sure if they are satisfied. This trend of uncertainty could be linked to the nature of programmes preferred by the listeners. Since most of them have admitted to prefer entertainment programmes, there is no much of a differentiation factor between sarathi Jhalak and other private FM stations. The respondents would not have found anything unique to express their satisfaction level clearly.

We may note that majority of the respondents – over 60% expect entertainment programmes from the station. Further, in terms of education based content, health, environment and women related programmes are the next most expected programmes with 27% and 30% respondents choosing this. We may also note that career, job related programmes which ideally will be community specific is expected from a small percentage of respondents.

This expectation can be analysed in relation to what the respondents listen to on the station. Community Radio is a model towards participatory development communication. The working of the station and the expectations from the community members indicate that there is a difference in the way they perceive the station. This could be either because of the apathy from the listeners towards content related to development or the failure to produce interesting educational content by the station. This forms vital discussion point for us in understanding the ground reality of community radio model.

- Community contribution to programme/content for Sarathi Jahalak -The study suggests that a whopping majority (85%) of the respondents to be passive listeners only. The very essence of community radio is in its community participation. This study clearly indicates that the station is challenged with minimum community participation. The reasons also have been very indicative of

lack of structured approach. Most of them lacked the awareness about the possibility or availability of opportunity to contribute to the programmes. Also some of them were very clear about their lack of interest towards the same. This indicates non involvement of listeners and the lack of sense of belongingness about the station. Some of the responses revealed that the listener perceived their illiteracy as a barrier. This response defeats the purpose of community radio. The initiative is intended to overcome all barriers, bring them out of their inhibitions and empower people to voice their opinion. If listeners felt that there is a barrier, this implies that though there is willingness to participate, there is still some kind of effort required to clear and make way for them into the station. Some of the responses indicated helplessness of the listeners when they said that they did not know how to contribute. This reflects poorly on the efforts of the station to reach out to people or encourage them to participate. There is a lot of effort required in this direction. The focus first should tap the interested listeners by providing an orientation on the station's purpose and help them understand the opportunities available and motivate them to be active contributors. We may also note that some of the listeners feel that though they are willing to contribute, they are bound by work pressure. This leaves us with an interesting observation that some of the respondents are yet to realize the significance of the station being part of their work in the community. This issue can be addressed by coming up with programmes which addresses issues related to work atmosphere.

- Willingness to participate – The silver lining is that the respondents have expressed their willingness to participate in the discussion if opportunities are provided. A good majority of 49% respondents have expressed their willingness to participate. However, about 24% respondents feel they may rarely go which means they might still be influenced to go. These respondents also give us some hope. A clear 14% respondents have been very clear that they do not wish to participate. Also another 14% respondents are not sure where they would go. This uncertainty again could be because of the respondents' conviction about how their participation would add value or how it even matters to the station. It is these respondents who are not clear of their role as a community listener.
- Any successful media content or programme measures its success based on the impact of the programme. Whether the content has triggered a thought process leading to discussion is extremely important. In the earlier instance, we realised that the analysis shows poor satisfaction level of the programmes on Sarathi Jhalak. This is further reiterated in this response analysis which indicates that the programmes have not triggered adequate discussions among the community members. In terms of audience perception, the audience have probably not attached too much importance to the station for them to discuss or deliberate on anything. This is a not so promising trend for the wellness of the station.

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**Conclusion:** We may note through the audience perspective, we now there is a casual take on the entire process. Quantitative observations in the study have iterated this aspect.

The station has instances of producing programmes which are aimed at empowering community members. However, again, this lacks endorsement by the audience which means that the efforts have either gone unnoticed or there the quality of the output is questionable. The study indicates that development communication purpose of the community radio concept is clearly not realised through this particular station.

It has been observed that though there are development oriented programmes which are relevant to the community on Sarathi Jhalak, it has gone unnoticed or has failed to create impact. The community listeners are followers of both private FM stations and AIR along with community radio station. There is a certain expectation from the audience in terms of quality of programmes. Though the audience are aware that it is community effort, they expect some standardisation in the programmes. Also here the community members are mostly passive listeners. There is lack of active involvement from the

community to contribute to the programmes. This is again attributed to lack of information about their role as a community member. The programme producers can go to villages and have discussions on field with community members. This will ensure participation of the community members.

Community participation, development oriented content, sustainability, empowerment, grass root communication, bottom up communication in theory is a fool proof concept. However, there can be community specific challenges that a community radio station faces. Sustainability and staying relevant to the community is a constant struggle.

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