
HARNESSING THE POTENTIALS OF COMMUNITY RADIO IN DEVELOPMENT OF RURAL WOMEN

Manpreet Kaur

*Assistant Professor, Institute of Home Economics (University of Delhi),
F4 Hauz Khas Enclave, New Delhi, India*

Akshima Sharma

*Ph.D. Scholar, Institute of Home Economics (University of Delhi),
F4 Hauz Khas Enclave, New Delhi, India*

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Abstract: Community radio, as a media for communication, can be one of the most motivating ways for the development of women. The paper highlights on the fact that community radio has the potential to empower women and change their lives by providing them with valuable information about various issues concerning their lives such as health, nutrition, violence etc. It can also be an effective way of reaching out to the women regarding the rights, rules and laws initiated by the government for them. This paper is based on secondary data and aims to document various community radio initiatives in India and highlights the issues they focus and how these radio stations are catering the need of the community. Community radio, having its own distinct potentials, can have a powerful impact in providing better and improved livelihood to rural communities and hence help in overall development of women.

Keywords: Community Radio, Women, Rural India, Development.

Introduction: Women have a very important role to play in our society right from the time they take birth till the end of their life. She is the one who gives birth to a new generation, nurtures it and ultimately forms the society. Even though a woman is recognised with such an important role, a woman is less respected in our society. According to Buxi, since many years, women have not been able to be free of shackles and chains, binding her and confining her to a limited space to move and act [1]. According to Pannu & Kaur, the status of women is the yardstick for assessing the standard of culture of any age of any nation. It also encompasses in itself the notions, rights and obligations of superiority and inferiority in terms of power, authority and grading. In the context of women, status implies her position in particular subsystem in society [2]. Her rights, privileges and their determination, her access to power and authority, the state of her position when compared to that of man, manifests her status of in that particular society. The Census of India, 2011 findings provide an overview of the status of Indian women. The Indian women fare poorly on all the demographic, health, literacy related indicators. The overall sex ratio is 940 females per 1000 males, as per the Census 2011. This marked gap between boys and girls, which has nationwide implications, is the result of decisions made at the most local level - the family. Hence, women are given unequal position and status; thus it is necessary to empower them by providing equal opportunities. In India, women comprise of nearly half of its total population. Therefore, it becomes important to empower their lives so that they get aware of the power they have and also gain self-confidence and strength to challenge the various issues of life such as inequality. Mass media are the chief agents of creation, preservation and eradication of different kinds of images and stereotypes of women in the contemporary world [3]. **Community Radio** is one of such agent which is contributing immensely in women empowerment since a long time. Community radio is a radio own and operated by the members of the community; working together to develop programmes, produce and air them. The community and its members use radio as a medium to reflect and enrich their life and provide utility services to the members of the community.

Community Radio As A Tool: Community radio, also known as Rural radios, is a form of local radio which is autonomous in nature - and relies on the community for its survival without any commercial aims or objects. According to UNESCO, a community radio is a medium that gives voice to the voiceless, that serves as the mouthpiece of the marginalised and is at the heart of communication and democratic processes within societies' [4]. The community radio is a powerful tool which can also be impactful for the development of women residing in rural areas. As these radios are owned, managed, run and controlled by a community which give power in the hands of community member and also benefits its members in fulfilling the needs and interests of a community specially women. In community radio, there is voluntary participation by the people where they identify the issue(s) which require detailed discussion and prepare the programme accordingly. These radios can be a very impactful platform in terms of addressing the women issues like poor health status, social stigmas, dowry, domestic violence, illiteracy and also strengthen their skills and promote over-all development and empowerment of women. Hence, Community Radio acts as a medium for rural women to voice their issues and opinions and it gives them an opportunity to express their views and act as a tool in bringing awareness in the lives of women.

This paper intends to document the community radio initiatives and highlighting its role as a powerful instrument in creating awareness among people specially women in rural India.

Methodology: This paper is based on secondary research and systematic data review was done including the case studies of the community radio initiatives for rural women development. The research summaries the secondary data collected from sources like academic journal articles, reports, published papers, research studies, reference books.

Community Radio Initiatives: 'Namma Dhvani' means *Our Voices* in Kannada, is a community radio partnership between the community of Budikote and the NGOs VOICES and MYRADA, with the support of UNESCO started broadcasting in Karnataka in 2003. It began as a quasi-community radio pilot project to assess the possibilities for local participation and programme content. This community radio encouraged village women and men, farmers, rural entrepreneurs, children, and youth to participate in the development of the programmes to be aired on the community radio. The focus area of these programs were women's health, income-generating opportunities for rural management, watershed management, education for girls, and the impact of adult literacy programmes on rural life etc.

Waqt ki Awaz was Launched in 2013, Waqt ki Awaz Community Radio Station is situated in district Kanpur of Uttar Pradesh. This radio station has large coverage and reach as total number of households within coverage area is 46, 472 with a population of 2, 50, 950 and the proportion of listener households has been estimated at 50%. The focus of the station is on local art and culture, social harmony, health education, societal problems and issues, community participation in management of Panchayati Raj Institutions. The formats of the programs are drama, interview, talk show etc., and are aired in Hindi language with total hours of program broadcast being 8 hrs. This community radio addresses the issue of gender equality through one of their program and aims to change the mind set of people. Through their numerous programmes, they have worked towards bringing the positive mindset about girl child education, personality and knowledge development of women.

Alfaz-e-Mewat was launched in 2012, Alfaz-e-Mewat Community Radio Station is situated in Mewat district of Haryana. With their various programs (talk shows, health shows, drama etc), they focus on the issues addressing their community problems like women's empowerment, health and nutrition, gender equality, local governance, and education. The programs are aired in Hindi and Mewati languages. This community radio aims to empower the local rural community specially women. One of the major challenge this radio station faces is lack of local women participation due to illiteracy and socio-cultural norms.

'**Radio Namaskar**' is a community radio which was launched in Orissa on July 11, 2010 by Young India. Ram Namaskar also focuses on women based program which provide information on the rights of the women, issues related to gender and equality and information on women in society.

Another community radio working towards upliftment of women in India is '**Puduvai Vaani**'. This community radio was started by Puducherry University on December 27, 2008 with the support of University Grants Commission. The public broadcasting is done with the aim of entertaining people, creating awareness, educating and informing people about issues concerning their lives. The community radio deals with the issue of women empowerment, youth development, health, agriculture, community empowerment etc. Puduvai Vaani also imparts training programmes for women and children from community for empowering their skills.

Radio Sharda is situated in district Jammu of J&K, was launched in 2010. The focus of the station is on motivating the younger generation for promotion of culture and language through educational programmes. The programs are aired in Kashmiri, Dogri and Punjabi languages with total hours of program broadcast being 15 hrs. the radio station not only aims to revive their culture but also broadcasts programmes on social issues which promote women empowerment and motivate girls towards education. The radio station also sensitizes people towards national integration and give messages of maintaining peace in Jammu and Kashmir.

Chanderi Ki Aawaz is a community radio station launched in 2010 in Chanderi district of MP. It aims the caters the community need by focusing on the thematic issues of their community on health and nutrition, rights of women, conservation of local talent and folk arts, legal awareness, employment, rights and entitlements. The station also organizes regular narrow casting sessions with the community to find out the issues and challenges of the community, and prepares program contents on that basis. It takes feedback of programs through phone calls and through personal contact or meetings. As a result of their programmes and messages, people in the community are more actively participating in the vaccination camps, aware about the health issues of their community and have a positive outlook about their children education which overall impact on improved livelihood of their community specially women.

Another popular community radio working for the development of women in India is '**Mann Deshi Tarang**'. The Mann Deshi Tarang Vahini was established on December 16, 2008, in Maharashtra, aims to target the issue of empowerment of rural women. The community radio also shares the success stories of women entrepreneurs and inspire the women in the community to start their own venture. It also aims to made information on various government schemes and services accessible to women entrepreneurs.

The CRS, **Rudi No Radio** was launched in 2009, in Ahmedabad District of Gujarat. The station is run by NGO with the help of community stakeholders. The thematic focus of the station is on topics like health, education, folk music, traditional food, storytelling, employment and livelihoods, agriculture, traditional medicines and animal husbandry etc. they have a women show which broadcasts the messages on health issue of women, maternal and child health, women education, gender equality and social stigmas.

Sangham Radio is considered to be India's first community radio station started by the Deccan Development Society and UNESCO in 2008. It is also recognised as the first all-woman community radio station in Asia. It is completely owned and run by Dalit women from the Machanoor village, Pastapur, in the Medak district of Andhra Pradesh. This initiative acted as an encouraging platform for these women in voicing their opinions and problems to the other people with a view of getting help in solving those problems. The Dalit women gets a platform to discuss the issues of land regeneration, ecological agriculture, community land ownership and cultivation.

All these Community radio station are examples of how this media can be used as a tool for community development and specially addressing the needs of women in the community. These community radio

stations are aired in their local language and are managed by the community people, hence there is a sense of personal touch to the messages they broadcast. The messages provided by these community radios are altered according to the needs of the people of the community. They provide a regional forum to the people specially women to voice their problems, seek solution and support from their own community and aware other women about the problem.

Salient points of community radio empowering women:

1. Community radio helps to address the sensitive issues related to development of women and overall development of the community.
2. Community radio airs its program in community local language and regional languages which help in better understanding and comprehension of messages.
3. Community radio is a very impactful tool in terms of dissemination of information as it makes information easily accessible to women and provides them a forum to discuss their problems.
4. Community radios are the source of capacity and skill development for women as they are encouraged in creating their programmes, managing the broadcast and motivate other women to do so.
5. Community radios also helps in social development as it is a community radio and the ownership lies with every member of the community providing them a common platform beyond caste, class, culture, sex or income.

The paper discusses the concept of community radio and how this media can be used as a useful tool in empowering people specially women. Community radio, as a media for communication, can be one of the most motivating ways for the development of women. The paper highlights on the fact that community radio has the potential to empower women and change their lives by providing them with valuable information about various issues concerning their lives such as health, nutrition, violence etc. It can also be an effective way of reaching out to the women regarding the rights, rules and laws initiated by the government for them. Community radio can also encourage the women to respect their abilities and capabilities and to have confidence in speaking in the public fight for their rights. The different community radios running in the country provides women with access to information which is a scarce resource in rural areas.

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