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## Exploring the Subaltern Voices: A Study of Community Radio Reporters (CRR's) in Rural India

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### Abstract

Despite India's remarkable communication media revolution the rural subalterns remained uninformed, unheard and voiceless, who asks the question: Whose Media, Whose Voice? This created a space for community radio (CR) because it is of, for, and by the community. However, in spite of the alternative, counter-hegemonic, and participatory communication ethos, the contribution of CR's and CRR's lingered unexplored and unacknowledged. To bridge this gap, within the theoretical framework of alternative-media-theory this study has been undertaken. Based on case studies of India's pioneer CR's (Sangam Radio and Radio Bundelkhand) using media ethnography tools a qualitative inquiry was carried out. Findings suggest that CR's can be seen as means of developing capabilities among the subalterns through equitable inclusion not merely as participants but as active producers, partners and managers. The dialectical, dynamic, non-hierarchical and citizen controlled journalism of CRR's reflects antagonisms of reality and high level of community belongingness and responsibility that created fundamental distinctiveness-challenges to mainstream media. Finally, providing platform for expression enlarges the voices of the subalterns which will ultimately facilitate community dialogs and deliberations around local issues and helps to redefine their community identity in their own way and might lead to positive social change.

### Keywords

Rural India, Community Radio, Community Radio Reporters, Alternative Media Theory, Content Creation, Platforms for Expression, Subaltern.

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## **Exploring the Subaltern Voices: A Study of Community Radio Reporters (CRR's) in Rural India**

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*Despite India's remarkable communication media revolution the rural subalterns remained uninformed, unheard and voiceless, who asks the question: Whose Media, Whose Voice? This created a space for community radio (CR) because it is of, for, and by the community. However, in spite of the alternative, counter-hegemonic, and participatory communication ethos, the contribution of CR's and CRR's lingered unexplored and unacknowledged. To bridge this gap, within the theoretical framework of alternative-media-theory this study has been undertaken. Based on case studies of India's pioneer CR's (Sangam Radio and Radio Bundelkhand) using media ethnography tools a qualitative inquiry was carried out. Findings suggest that CR's can be seen as means of developing capabilities among the subalterns through equitable inclusion not merely as participants but as active producers, partners and managers. The dialectical, dynamic, non-hierarchical and citizen controlled journalism of CRR's reflects antagonisms of reality and high level of community belongingness and responsibility that created fundamental distinctiveness-challenges to mainstream media. Finally, providing platform for expression enlarges the voices of the subalterns which will ultimately facilitate community dialogs and deliberations around local issues and helps to redefine their community identity in their own way and might lead to positive social change. Keywords: Rural India, Community Radio, Community Radio Reporters, Alternative Media Theory, Content Creation, Platforms for Expression, Subaltern.*

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### **Introduction**

With the end of 19<sup>th</sup> century and early 20<sup>th</sup> century the media instead of being a means for advancing freedom and democracy started flattering more and more a way of making capital and propaganda for the new and powerful classes. India is not exception for this reality, where we observe an oligopolistic supremacy over the terms of public debate and discourse by a few multi-sector conglomerates and power-wielding entities (Malik, 2012:1). The worst impacts of these changes are commercialization and urbanisation of mass media and the exclusion of the voices of rural subaltern groups. India has arrived at a historic fork towards tackling the regional disparities between urban and rural. In spite of recent economic growth, poverty levels have not been reduced at the same pace. With 33 per cent of the world's poor people, 41.6 per cent of India's population lives on less than US\$1.25 a day. Poor rural people continue to live with inadequate physical and social infrastructure, poor access to services, and a highly stratified and hierarchical social structure, characterized by inequalities in assets, status and power. Agricultural wage earners, marginal farmers and casual workers constitute the bulk of subaltern rural people accounts for nearly 650 million. Majority of them belongs to scheduled caste scheduled tribe and nomadic communities (IFAD, 2011; World Bank, 2011). Although after media liberalization India saw a veritable media explosion but it has very little direct impact on the projection of the issues that has a bearing on the poor and excluded sections of the rural society (see Agrawal, 2006; Sainth,

2012; Satish, 2012). That broaches a question: Are India's rural issues, crises and anxieties getting the media spotlight they deserve? According to the recent study conducted by Mudgal Vipul (2011, pp. 92-97) of Delhi-based Centre for Study of Developing Societies (CSDS), mainstream Indian newspapers devote only two 02% of its space to stories about rural India. The aspiration level of people living in small villages is rising as much as in urban India and going pretty much unreported and undervalued. They are forced to continue only as consumers of media that is produced for them by outsiders. One reason for their lack of interest could be explained by the fact that their consumers, advertisers and journalists, mostly come from urban backgrounds (Choudhury, 2013).

Isolated and marginalized in particularly rural-remote groups face acute constraints with regard to access to information and communication, and thus have limited participation and voice in the public sphere and in decision-making process affecting their lives and thus risk further marginalization, politically, socially and economically (Balit, 2004; Miller, 1992; Melkote, 2001). In this context, the ability of "common" people even from the remote rural part to create and distribute their "own" content has amplified exponentially mainly through the emergence of community media channels such as community radio, video and newspaper. Earlier the means and sources of media content production and distribution were not in the hands of poor masses (see Atton, 2002; Carpentier et al., 2003; Fraser and Estrada, 2001). It has been observed that community radio stations are more popular in Indian context than the other community media channels. The rationale for community radio in India is strong on legal-constitutional, social, cultural and development grounds. India is multi-linguistic, multi-cultural, and multi-religious with more than 4000 castes, tribes and nomadic communities. If one considers village as a community then there more than 0. 5 million villages and hence communities (Patil, 2010, p. 1).

The history of community radio in India is the account of struggle by human right activists, grass roots level community based organizations and communication media scholars with the help of few international development agencies like UNESCO, World Bank and AMARC. The community radio movement in India was ushered in with high hopes and expectations in the mid 90s', soon after the Supreme Court of India ruled in its judgment of February 1995 that "airwaves are public property" (see Ambekar, 2004; Kumar, 2003; Pavarala & Kumar, 2007; Sen, 2003). One of the most central features of community media is community radio reporters who come from outside mainstream media organizations they are the grassroots media producers typically have little or no training or professional qualifications as journalists; they write and report from their position as common citizens, as members of communities or as activists, as supporters of their community. However, in spite of such a humanistic contribution they have been undervalued, undocumented and under-researched (see Rodriguez, 2001; Atton & Hamilton, 2008; Forde et al., 2003; Gillmor, 2006; Harcup, 2003). Thus, against this background this paper attempts to explore the following research questions:

- a) Does the selected CR's accommodate representation of all sections of the community as CRR's?
- b) If yes, what is the status of marginalized sections particularly rural women and *Dalits* (formerly known as untouchables)?
- c) What (if any) are the distinctive features and values of the journalism of CRR's that made them distinctive than the mainstream-non community radio reporters (henceforth NCRR's)?
- d) How their initiatives helped in amplifying the voices of rural masses and served as a platform for expression of alternative development actions?

These are questions about media environment that need an understanding of its practitioners: their values, motivations, attitudes, ideologies, history, education, and relationships. They require what, in Bourdieusian terms, is an examination of practice that takes into account the relationship between habitus and field.

After this introductory section, the section following discusses brief review of relevant literature, author context and setting of the study. Following this background the impending section provides an in-depth outline of methodologies' adopted for this study. The sections after that offer core components of the study which consist: results, discussion and conclusion.

## **Literature Review**

In the body of available literature, since MacBride Report (1980) alternative community media in general and community radio in particular recognised as one of the vital mediums for the democratization of information (FAO, 2001). The term community media tends to refer "to non-profit media outlets which, generally, encourage the participation of their community (whether that be a geographic or community of interest) in developing content" (Carpentier & Servaes, 2003, p. 53; AMARC - [www.amarc.org](http://www.amarc.org)).

Community radio is one of the popular and pioneering forms of community media all over the world. Scholars like (Atton, 2002, 2008, Dowing, 2000; Jankowski, 2003; Law, 1986) used different terminologies such as Amateur media, Citizens media, Independent media, Critical media, Radical media which is produced by those outside mainstream media organizations.

Since 1980's with the expansion of community radio especially in Latin America, South Africa, Austria, and parts of South Asia, studies have also been conducted with different perspectives. The literature survey shows that international development organizations such as AMARC, World Bank and UNESCO have conducted cross country social impact studies on community radio.

A mega study conducted by The World Association of Community Radio Broadcaster's (AMARC) in 2007 found that, "since voicelessness is a key dimension of exclusion and poverty, access to voice, information and knowledge (which are facilitated by CRs) are vital factors for reduction of poverty and sustainable human development" (AMARC, 2007, p. 10).

On similar lines, based on an intercontinental study conducted by World Bank (2007) found that community radio stations are playing three vital roles:

- i. *an advocacy role*- which defends the interests of the common citizens
- ii. *public forum*- covers issues related to monitoring and accountability of issues related to public governance
- iii. *partner of government*- community participation in government public programs.

There is a mounting worldwide movement in which marginal communities, mainly indigenous people are making and operating their own media programs and projecting their vices across cultural, political and geographical boundaries (Alia & Bull, 2005). One of the best examples is South Africa where community radio movement has replaced the monopoly of the state-run South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) and emerging as a mouthpiece of the oppressed (Balit, 2004). Likewise, in South Asia particularly countries like Nepal, Srilanka, India and Afghanistan where worlds majority of poor and ethnic marginalized communities exist the movement of community radio has created a new hope

for these communities to have their “voice” represented through the peoples medium “radio”(Deuze, 2006; Gillmor, 2006; Kumar, 2003).

However, as far as Indian context is concerned there has been a very little rigorous research done around community radio stations, which are mostly available in the form of presentations, popular papers, and newspaper and magazine articles (Dhal & Aram, 2013; Patil, 2010). The study conducted by Pavarala and Malik (2007) seems one of the early in-depth studies with qualitative design. This study has been conducted before the revised CR policy opened up for NGO’s and CBO’s by Ministry of Information and Broadcasting (MIB) in 2008. Therefore, studies on Indian CR’s after this policy becomes more important. One of the vital gaps in the literature reviewed reveals that the contributions of Community Radio Reporters (CRR’s) that are considered as a plinth and pillar of community radio stations have been under-represented and marginalized. In this context, this study proposes to discover the unexplored contributions of CRR’s in term of their philosophy and inclination with the respective CR’s and providing platform for participatory community communication and action.

### **Context**

Being a media academician cum activist I have been involved in the process of communication for the marginalized communities for last ten years. During my PhD on India’s one of the first ICT based rural projects sponsored by Prime Minister’s Office (PMO) Government of India, on the role of ICT’s for the development of sugarcane cultivator peasant communities in western India (Warana Wired Village Project) persuaded me to involve deeply towards the perspectives related to communication for development of rural communities.

Meanwhile, the grass roots movement for starting community radio stations in India diverted my attention from modern ICT’s to traditional but popular means of community communication. Most importantly I was heartily interested to start a small community radio station for the nomadic communities in my region. That provoked me to visit India’s pioneering CR’s (Sangam Radio and Radio Bundelkhand). Where I observed these highly dedicated groups of CRR’s working unconditionally for the empowerment of their “own” community.

It has been with this ideological terrain in mind that since 2008, I have been engaged with an active support from Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR) in researching on the contributions of CR and its associated organs like CRR’s in the process of making the subaltern rural masses as dynamic participants and producers of their own discourses as well as to discover and discuss their dreams and re-shape their lost identities. Thus, it is hoped that this study will full fill gap in the Indian media institution through exploring the ecology of alternative community media where thrust, community accountability and counter-hegemonic practices becomes the centre of media formation.

### **Setting of the Study**

I selected case studies of one of the two Community Based Organization (CBO) run pioneering community radio stations located in the most backward regions of India purposively.

- a) Deccan Development Society (henceforth DDS) run Sangham Community Radio, in Medak district of Andhra Pradesh and;

- b) Development Alternatives (henceforth DA) run Radio Bundelkhand, in Orchha district of Madhya Pradesh.

However, before going to deal with the corresponding sections, let us first have an overview of the account of the CBO's and their development philosophy in the region where their community radio initiatives are functioning.

### **Sangham Radio (SR), Telangana region, Andhra Pradesh, India**

It is on 15 October, 2008 (World Rural Women's Day) when *Sangham* (voluntary village level associations of the poor) Radio, India's first rural community radio station and also the first all woman community radio station in Asia was inaugurated at Machnoor Village in Medak District by former Justice of Supreme Court Justice P B Sawant. The radio is completely owned, managed and operated by women from marginalized rural communities. The radio broadcast to a radius of 25 kms covering about 100 villages and a population close to 50,000. As soon as Justice Sawant switched on the 90.4 F.M; 50 watt transmitter at 1100 hours, the voice of the DDS women went out on air when they sang:

*Akka Chellenlu Podaame mana sanghamku maatlada podaamey... (Come sisters let us go to our Sangham to talk) reflecting the aspirations of thousands or the members of DDS women's Sanghams.*

The Sangham Radio goes on air every day from 7 pm - 9 pm. In 1995 the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action affirmed the importance of media for women's empowerment. In 1997, women from 75 villages in and around Pastapur decided they needed their own media to express themselves, facilitate dialogue across rural communities, document and analyze local events and issues and convey information and ideas to the outside world. Based on these felt needs and UNESCO's interest in women's development and democratization of communication media, DDS was identified as a suitable partner for UNESCO's "Women Speak to Women" project. As part of this, DDS has initiated necessary steps for establishing a radio station in 1998. But initially they have not received license from Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, hence they used to rely on narrowcasting. This three-decade old grassroots organization (DDS) working in about 75 villages with women's *Sanghams* in telengana region one of the most backward deprived regions of Indian states. The term *Sangham* derives from the Buddhist conception of an egalitarian and cooperative political community that was formed by the Buddhist movement in the fifth century BCE. The 5000 women members of the society represent the poorest of the poor in their village communities. Most of them are *dalits*, the lowest group in the Indian social hierarchy.

### **Methods**

Researching on issues related to alternative media like community radio is not merely a head count; it goes beyond and explores micro realities at the grass roots level (Kidd, 1999). Studies of alternative media tend to employ qualitative approaches. This is especially appropriate given the perspectives of these studies. Qualitative methods emphasize the experience of media producers; an internal approach to understanding the culture of participants; and a search for the meaningfulness of production as a process (Jensen, 1991). Within the alternative media theory (Atton, 2002; Fuchs, 2010; Gumucio, 2001) framework

the research is based on the study of community radio stations as “case study organizations” (Berg, 1989).

One of the most important reasons to select case study strategy is to deeply involve and explore the unexplored contributions of the CRR's of India's first two rural CR's in amplifying the voices of the rural subalterns. A case study is an opportunity where the researcher is “an interpreter in the field.....who records objectively what is happening but simultaneously enriches its meaning and redirects observations to refine or substantiate those meanings” (Stake, 1995, pp. 8-9). Another pertinent purpose is that “it also offers a deep, rich, and personal exploration of participants' feelings, opinions, experiences and reflections” (Allen, 2014, p. 3). Thus, case study offered an opportunity for exploring, expanding and in particularly visualizing and analyzing micro social realities of the rural subalterns their voices, expressions and the media ecology and values of CRR's in a more holistic way.

### **Tools of Data Generation**

I used media ethnography tool which is more appropriate for this kind of study that mainly includes in-depth interviews, background studies, focus group discussions (FGD's), document analysis with an ethnographic fascination in the research context (Dick, 2006; Lindlof & Shatzer, 1998; Machin, 2002). I also applied observation method as focal tool to gauge the inner impressions throughout the research. Observation is more relevant tool because in which the researcher becomes part of the process and tries to capture the experiences through own “experiential understandings” (Stake, 1995, p. 43; McLeod, 2001). The application of media ethnographic tools enlarged the very meaning of media use and technology in the form of culture and places the researcher into the “lifeworld” (Habermas, 1987) of the study participants.

In this context (Angrosino, 2005) also suggest that observation has an unique features in which researcher through direct contact watches the behavior and documents the micro insights of the object, which is a primary method of data collection in both sociological community studies and anthropological field studies. I used this method during entire study to observe the lifeworld of both CRR's and their community with the help of diary writing.

### **Participants**

Selection of participants in a typical qualitative study always differs from that of quantitative research. The question of “whom to interview becomes more important than the representative sample of the larger population as it requested for survey interviews” (Warren, 2002, p. 87). In this context (Mays & Pope, 1995, p. 110) also emphasizes that, in qualitative research “the purpose is not to establish a random or representative sample drawn from a population but to identify specific groups of people who either possess characteristics or live in a circumstances relevant to the social phenomenon being studied.”

Against this background, the strategy of theoretical sampling is used in this study (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The participants of this study broadly divided into following three categories: First category includes the key participants that are community radio reporters (CRR's) and managers of both CR's (SR and RB). Second category comprises members of board of governances (BoG's) of both CR's. Third category incorporates community radio listeners (CRL's) and local change agents such as (local teachers, social workers and administrators) care is taken to include representative from marginalized groups. Other than first two categories the selection of the remaining participants were made on the basis of their involvement, ideological base and relationship with the respective CR's. However, all the respondents were selected purposively as suggested by (Barbour, 2001; Devers & Frankel,



2000). They recommend that purposive sampling strategy provides a “degree of control” in research to avoid subjectivity and bias as well as it refines researchers understanding through “information rich” cases, that may be individuals, groups, or behaviors which further offers vital perspective into the research question. The rationale of selecting purposive method for this study is to draw a concrete sampling frame for selecting appropriate study units and the subjects who are capable for answering the specific research questions of the present study.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Ethical matters in qualitative research are frequently become more pertinent than issues in survey or experimental research. Qualitative case studies often typically include long-standing and close individual association, interviewing and participant observation. Therefore, the interests of participants must be of prime objective in the production of qualitative data. Furthermore, “to maintaining the privacy of participants, researchers need to proceed with sensitivity and concern for their needs and desires” (Polkinghorne, 2005, p. 144). As far as the present study is concerned I followed the customary procedures to retain ethical concerns in the sphere of participants consent and confidentiality as well as approval from the concerned agency.

### **Data Collection**

The article discusses the prominent issues of India’s voiceless subaltern rural masses who have lost their space in the mainstream media. However, the emergence of community radio stations (CR’s) as an alternative media to provide a platform for expression to these masses becomes more important. Both the studied CR’s typically located at India’s most deprived rural regions and pioneering in serving for the empowerment of India’s most excluded and marginalized communities which is also one of the important criteria’s for the selection of these two CR’s as study units. Therefore, studying such CR’s more relevant from both media accountability and social responsibility perspective.

Thus, considering the vitality of this study a total of 27 in-depth interviews were conducted at both Sangam Radio and radio Bundelkhand. These interviews were conducted taking into consideration of the preferential categories of participants such as CRR’s and community radio managers of both CR’s. Likewise, 05 Focus Group Discussions (FGD’s) were also conducted including those with second and third category of participants.

### **Data Analysis**

The data collected from different tools such as interview, observation, background study, FGD and my personal field diary analyzed into the subsequent three manual steps by following the research method of grounded theory with a primary intention to do not overlook the framework and background as well as the broader socio-cultural ecology where the study is mainly conducted (Charmaz, 2006; Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

To more incline and familiarize with the data in the first stage all the collected data is broadly classified according to the tentative analytical structure of the study. In the second stage, unnecessary data is removed and then the fine data is coded by using key words based on the thrust of the study. These codes are primarily included words and phrases which have direct and indirect causal relationship with the study. Around 27 secondary and 18 primary key words developed. In the final stage these key words are again broadly classified into four specific thematic categories mainly based on the research questions viz:

- i. Community representation in CR
- ii. Status of marginalized groups' in CR
- iii. Values, philosophies and peculiarities' of CRR's and NCRR's
- iv. Amplifying and providing platform for the subalterns.

The categorization of data helped to produce concrete analytical sections. Thus, finally manual co-relation exercise carried out to develop thematic arguments and hypothesis for the purpose of enlarging knowledge about the study problem.

## Conceptual Framework

This study employed theoretical underpinnings of Alternative Media Theory (henceforth AMT). The focal framework that guided the study is its principle of counter-hegemonic discourses produced by non-mainstream organizations and producers termed as “native reporting” and the lenses through which the problem of the present study has been analyzed (Atton, 2002, 2008, 2009; Deuze 2006; Sandoval & Fuchs, 2010). AMT tends to refer to non-profit media outlets which, generally, encourage the participation of their community (whether that be a geographic or community of interest) in developing content (Carpentier et al., 2003; also AMARC, [www.amarc.org](http://www.amarc.org)). This suggests that the conceptualization is entirely relevant to definitions of alternative, independent and radical media as well as community media outlets – indeed, these terms very frequently overlap. The literature suggests that, in contrast to mainstream sourcing routines, the alternative media theory privilege “ordinary,” non-elite sources for their news and, through what has been termed native reporting (Atton, 2003), offer such sources a platform to speak directly to audiences.

Likewise, Pierre Bourdieu (1991) argues that symbolic power is the power to construct reality. Alternative media construct a reality that appears to oppose the conventions and representations of the mainstream media. Participatory, amateur media production contests the concentration of institutional and professional media power and challenges the media monopoly on producing symbolic forms. The use of alternative media like CR by ordinary-voiceless subaltern masses as producers-contributors in rural India can be seen as an inclusive medium of liberating and reconstructing their “own” voices-stories and concerns which are excluded or subordinated by the mainstream society and its media.

## Results

### I. Representation of Community

The representation of community in the CR (mainly reporters- managers) is one of the important indicators of sustainability of CR. This implies providing representation to those groups (gender, ethnicity, age, and religion) not usually represented in the mainstream media as well as providing the audience with access to marginalized information.

**Table 1.** Profile of representation of community in Staff, SR-RB

Sr.no	Variables	Sangham Radio	Bundelkhand Radio
1	Age	Middle and elder age	Young, middle age
2	Gender	Female concentration	Combination of both male & female
3	Social category	Downtrodden, Backward caste (Dalit), <i>Buddhist</i> .	Scheduled Caste( <i>Dalit</i> ) and Other Backward Castes
4	Class	Lower Bellow Poverty Line(LBPL)	Lower Bellow Poverty Line(LBPL)

5	Region/community	Same region, community	Same region, community
6	Education	Illiterate, neo-literate	Semi literate and higher secondary educated
7	Professional journalism training or experience	No	No

**Source:** Patil, 2012

In this context the station manager of RB, Anuja Shukla explained the stations philosophy regarding the representativeness of local community:

The station deems that the community radio must be staffed by the community. Natural talent, aptitude, mastery of local languages, knowledge of community and the willingness to work for its development are criteria for selecting volunteers and reporters. Radio Bundelkhand is aware of its community function as a CRS. She further emphasizes that the stations programming aims at reflecting the interests, beliefs and traditions of its listeners. The station makes an effort to be representative of its community. Its staff covers a strong representativeness of age as well as gender, religion, social groups and region origin.

If we see the variables selected in Table 1 clearly demonstrates that how a grassroots alternative media provides equity and inclusiveness in representation of the subaltern groups who have historically been excluded from both media and other social institutions in Indian society. It is interesting to note that none of them have any kind of journalistic education or experience. This shows the strength of alternative journalism where “ordinary people” can also participate in production and distribution process of media content.

## II. Representation of Women and Dalit

In the Indian social system women and *dalits* were customarily the most excluded groups from various social institutions including media. A 2006 study by Centre for the Study of Developing Societies (CSDS) Delhi, found that Indian media (mainstream-dominant media) lacks representation of *dalits*, who comprise some 20% of India’s population and live on the margins (see Biswas, 2012). Likewise, the participation and reflection of the concerns particularly rural women in Indian media is much more dismal this accounts for a serious lack of diversity and equality in Indian media (see Joseph, 2004). However, after the initiation of grass roots community media movement in India a silent revolution has begun where the marginalized group’s especially rural woman have taking charge as a media producer and manager. “General” Narsamma and Algole Narsamma of Pastapur village in Medak District of Andhra Pradesh and Prachi, Nitu, Anuradha of Bundelkhand in Tikmgarh District of Madhya Pradesh are young, rural women, matriculate, and belong to poor daily-wage earner *dalit* families.

Over the years they have joined Sangham Radio and Radio Bundelkhand and have been trained in radio production as part of the community radio initiatives by these groups. Shy and hesitant once upon a time, today they proficiently manage audio studios in their villages along with a few other women and volunteers and produce programmes in the local dialect that they feel would “benefit their community.” Their own practical day to day experiences have enhanced the abilities of these rural women who had negligible exposure to media production prior to their involvement in these projects. “General” and Mangala of SR carry out programme planning, and recording, and doing voiceovers, mixing, editing and production of programmes. The opportunities created by CR’s to the rural women create a

new way of self-awareness and confidence for self-empowerment and community development. Each week now, (Ms. Prachi, CR reporter, RB) spends four days interviewing local women on health and family matters and get people to share information on income-generating activities. The community now holds her in high regard. The following inner voices of Prachi of RB explains her journey with RB and how she has been involved in this entirely new, dynamic and male dominated field.

**“Speaking for ‘our’ community was truly an exciting experience”**

I live in Sitapur village. Before I had become involved with Radio Bundelkhand, I used to spend my days in studies and domestic chores. Whenever I would listen to the radio, I would surprise who were the people that spoke on the radio, what kind of lives they led, and so on. At times I too wanted to speak through this medium. Soon after I realized that there is no gender based constraints to get involved in it. Afterward, a meeting was held in my village, which I too decided to attend. Then Ekta Madam (Manager of RB) told us that when you work for the radio, you have to speak. It is a must and for me speaking for “our” community was truly an exciting experience. A few days later, I heard that I was one of the chosen few. Since that day, I have been working as a reporter and Radio Jockey for Radio Bundelkhand and so far I realized that RB is truly a platform for the empowerment of rural woman.

Likewise, the station manager of SR General Narsima itself a story of struggle, probably her case will be a unique example in the movement of communication for marginalized. Alcole Narsimma is one of the pioneering members of Sangham radio (SR).

**“My life has changed a lot thanks to the SR”**

Alcole Narsamma lives in Agole village with her family and she is a happy lady today. She beams with joy and states proudly, “My life has changed a lot thanks to the radio. My friends who worked with me earlier as daily wage labourers are still the same but I have completed my education and I am financially independent today. This radio means a lot to me and I can never think of leaving it”. She wishes to make a change in the lives of many more women and use her services to do so. Community radio is like our own baby. Before this we didn’t have any medium for our local news and our local problem.” “Many people discouraged me when we were not getting a license for SR but today those same people value my work and respect me in the village”

With this approach SR has been working for and by the community for more than ten years. DDS Director PV Satheesh (2012) capitalized on the strong oral tradition in the community.

"For me the possibility of providing video and audio technologies as a means of expression for disadvantaged rural women was an exciting idea," he is quoted as saying on the DDS website.

It is appealing to note that the managers of both the CR’s are women. Thus, the above notions indicates that in the context of globalisation and resurgence of grassroots movements, conventional development strategies are giving way to more participatory and inclusive approaches that are recognizing the involvement of those who have suffered systematic inequalities and deprivations as “equal partners” in developmental process. This paradigmatic shift from dominant-hegemonic to alternative -proletariat counter approach offer prospects of giving everyone who has a stake a voice and a chance.

### III. Distinctive features and values of the journalism of CRR's

This subsection draws some of the most fundamental features and philosophies of CRR and dynamics of CMR and NCMR importantly it also shows the ways in which people work with alternative media like community radio and how do they learn to become reporters and their compassion and social responsibility towards their community?

**Table 2:** Fundamental dynamics between CMR and NCMR

Sr. no	Indicator	Community Media Reporter(CMR)	Non-Community Media Reporter(NCMR)
1	Media Production	Community-Citizen journalism	Elite-Dominant journalism
2	Organizational Media Structures	Grassroots-participatory	Top-Down-Hierarchical
3	Distribution Structures	Alternative-Horizontal	Professional-Vertical marketing
4	Reception Practices	Critical-Counter -hegemonic reception	Manipulative-hegemonic reception
5	Motive	Change, empowerment, Voice to the Voiceless	Based on Organizational motive(Profit)
6	Ownership of content	Community ownership	Private ownership
7	Nature of story/news/information	Community need-demand based; use of local language and ethos and based on marginal issues-voices	Organizational need-supply based; lacks use of local language and ethos and based on dominant issues-voices
8	Influencing factors	Non-material(Community belongingness and representativeness, accountability, responsibility; social respect and satisfaction)	Lacks Non-material factors. Mostly based on material aspects
9	Relationship with story/news	Intimate and organic relationship	Distinct and mechanical relationship
10	Freedom	Full freedom (content creation and distribution)	Controlled freedom (content creation and distribution)
11	Sources	Internal-fully community centric and based on ordinary sources; CMR itself a key source	External-less community centric and based on secondary-elite source
12	Object	Common –ordinary-excluded masses	Specific-dominant classes
14	Control and ownership	Exclusively by community	By economic and political elites

**Source:** Patil, 2012

Alternative media are true “mass” media that challenges the dominant capitalist forms of media production, media structures, content, distribution, and reception. In both the media the primary aspects are reporters and their recipients and practices (actor-oriented), media product structures, media organizational structures, and media distribution structures (structure-oriented). In dominant media journalism, one finds reporters as a professional wage-labour class that is confronted with corporate and political pressures, journalistic production conditioned by power processes, and the accumulation of journalistic status capital. The model of community journalism, in which one finds the independence of writers from corporate and political influences and pressures, challenges this production model where anybody can be content producer without specific training or expertise. Ordinary citizens can become journalists, so journalism is citizen-controlled. Individuals or groups that are affected by certain problems become journalists where consumers become producers the audience becomes active (Fuchs, 2010, p. 178). In other words it may be called as “hybrid

reporter” where source and writer become one. This notion is also termed as “native reporter” (see Atton & Wickenden, 2005).

In this context if we observe the anatomy of the reporters such as Prachi, Dalchand, Ajendra, Manisha and Jagroop of Radio Bundelkhand, Orchha (Madhya Pradesh), General Narsamma and Algotle Narsamma of Sangham Radio, Pastapur (Andhra Pradesh), have one thing in common which clearly signifies the perspective of alternative media. They are all, much-admired community radio (CR) reporters and presenters, who produce amazing programmes, which go on air at the CR stations set up in their region. All of these CR reporters have a number of other things in common too, which have, in no way, restrained them from carrying out their tasks skillfully. They belong to rural areas or the most remote; none of them have gone to journalism schools or professional experience; many have scarcely completed their primary education; they had negligible exposure to media production before getting involved with radio; and they are members of a disadvantaged groups (be it on basis of caste, class or gender) even within their own community. If we can understand what motivates these community reporters, it provides important indicators to what they might actually be doing, or aiming to do, in this field. The study found that they aimed to produce a truly people oriented media tied with public journalism to empower common people to understand issues and to actually do something about them. As one of my respondents Jagrup CRR of RB said: *“I always wanted my voice to be used for ‘my people’* selected along with Jagrup is Anuradha, due to traditional orthodox ethos she had to struggle a lot of odds to become a community reporter in her village.

Initially there were a lot of anxieties and negative responses to provide permission in my family, but once they recognized how valuable the work was, they gave me consent, she still faces upsetting remarks from few traditional minded people when she leaves for the radio station and while coming back. I feel it’s a small price to pay, compared to the human service I am doing for the community and the deprived women who need to be empowered in my region.

Indeed, majority of the CRR’s reported that they accepted their duties as social responsibility for the higher ideals of independence, the ability to help people, and editorial freedom rather than the superficial concerns articulated by mainstream journalists such as the pay, fringe benefits, the chance to “get ahead” and job security. Furthermore, they are more committed to the active public and “citizens” for “motivating the public” and “giving a voice to the voiceless” as their prime journalistic objectives. Independent and alternative media channels practice a journalism that is based on strong notions of social responsibility (Atton, 2003, p. 267) as well as reveal stronger commitment to the idealistic and “professional” norms of journalism than their mainstream counterparts (Forde, 1997). Because they believe that their culture is marginalized and misinterpreted by mainstream media. Another important dynamics of CRR’s are they often have a zealous hold of their field and can be powerful and smart in the presentation of their arguments and demands. The driving force behind their enthusiasm is an abiding faith that their “own” radio will give them and their community a “voice” that matters most in the struggle for a better life. These splendidly motivated CR reporters also aspire to deploy what Jean Burgess (2006) calls their “vernacular creativity” to mobilize and empower the communities they belong to.

## The Vibrancy of Young Reporters of RB

One has to experience the infectious enthusiasm and high motivation levels of these young reporters in person. They are mostly in the late teens to early twenties age group. They are a friendly, confident and talented bunch of people with full of community conscious. Belonging to the villages near Orchha, they are able to tie with the local population and draw them out naturally. Writing scripts in local language for their own programmes is well within their comfort zone, and so is working on the computer to create audio content. They are quite proficient in using Audacity for their editing needs, even they can operate the latest GRINS (*Gramin Radio Inter-Networking System*) software system. Nevertheless, they are interested and motivated to learn new things, they face some barriers in knowledge acquisition. They have the inquisitiveness to explore concerns and follow things up on their own for the betterment of their “own” people.

As we mentioned previously, people have very different start and end points when it comes to producing people centered content. In the case of Community Reporters though, we have said that the motivation and start point is generally neither news nor a resource. So what keeps our Community Reporters motivated and engaged? The answer is a sense of community belonging. In this background General Narsima, Station Manager of SR an ideal role model for thousands of rural deprived women puts on:

I come from a poor *dalit* family. It almost one decade has been completed in working with my own “people” and “radio.” This is a kind of self learning experience with full of problems, complexities and joyfulness. I get the most satisfaction when people recognize me that I am the radio person, they give me that respect and I am known. Without being in the radio I would have never got that respect.

The bottom line of the above statement is an essence in terms of analyzing these processes through the lens of alternative media framework. Likewise, Prachi CRR of RB also shares her consciousness towards RB in a following way:

My happiest day with Radio Bundelkhand was when our radio was to be inaugurated. I was so happy; I could barely contain my joy. That was the day I heard my voice broadcast through the air. Now I am learning to work on the computer as well. I have learnt many things that I had no idea of earlier. I have to continue with the same zeal and create better and more improved programmes, reach out to more and more people from “my community.” That is my dream.

Undeniably, community media reporters are, in essence, working from the bottom up approach. Furthermore, for community radio reporters, the first stimulus for involvement is often not so much about a cause or an issue but more the desire to learn new skills, to feel more connected to their local community or to give something return. Thus, on the basis of this study I define Community Reporting, is a radical process born out of community demand to “fill in the spaces” left by dominant media outlets, and to give ordinary people a participatory, inclusive and counter-alternative medium for dialogs they need in order to make their political, cultural and developmental decisions, and to participate fully in public sphere.

## IV. Amplifying the Voices of Voiceless

The founding principles of community media and the socio-communicative dialectics at the community allows community radio reporters to address the basic value and principles of community-alternative journalism in light of democratization, social change, and community empowerment initiatives. This leads them to emphasize the significance of encouraging contributions from as many concerned publics as possible, in order to emphasize the “multiple realities” of everyday social life (oppression, exploitation, socio-political and economic conditions). The initiatives of these community media projects in spatial terms concern their capability to facilitate collectivities, peoples who are excluded from the conventional public sphere to open a space for themselves, for common people.

The value of this project is that we, some of us joining for the first time, and it is not only for us; everyone who wants to intervene in the things and had not a way to do it before has the chance now, either as volunteer, providing the local information, or, even by taking part in the process of managing it as well (Local teacher, Sangham Radio).

Even though the starting point of the different community groups can be different but the need and rational is relatively the same.

(Radio Bundelkhand) is a medium to express and make known my concerns and views ... freely; there is also a feedback (phone-in program, drop-box in villages and letters) that opens a space people who had not have the chance to be participants in this medium (Local tourist guide, Radio Bundelkhand).

As described earlier, Sangham Radio recognizes every member of the community it addresses as an expert in many areas. Hence, the voices it brings to the broadcast are the voices that have never been heard or recognized before. They are all excluded voices. This is the primary strength of this community radio. Besides, when new and unheard people come on air, they bring with them dozens of new perspectives that are stimulating. Thereby; it refuses to consign its listeners to become consumers of media. One of the important reasons for the reflection of community needs and concerns is the engagement of local people (male-female) as reporter, managers and volunteers their involvement and knowledge about the region, culture and political economy helped to build up alternative development strategies. The following proclamation of the community radio reporter of RB Mr. Jagrup Singh evidently reflects the significance of the native reporters in terms of equity of inclusion of ordinary voices.

If I am doing an interview ...I will almost not at all go to a politician for an opinion, I'd rather talk to the common people who are directly affected, whose voices are often not heard.

Therefore Michael Law (1986, p. 32) also observes, community radio is the domain of “ordinary” people, who have used their radio stations to transform their societies or radically reorient them. Rather than considering community broadcasting as a corrective, or as a competitor to, mainstream media, its function and purpose have been conceived as enabling “a community, and its many sub-communities, to talk with itself, to get to know itself, and to empower itself.” The following facts also demonstrate this process in a more concrete manner.



## **Evolving a platform for alternative development actions: Evidences from SR-RB**

Agricultural sustainability is one of the important aspects of SR, during few years farmers of this region were facing severe problem regarding the use of BT Cotton seeds and genetically modified crop in their fields. To create awareness reporters made extensive reporting and grass roots level research to record the dismal experiences and opinions of farmers and made an excellent program, “Why are Warangal Farmers Angry with BT Cotton?” which has generated a favorable environment to the farmer to go with alternative measures such as organic seeds and practices that further creates a sense of belongingness irrespective of CR listeners or non-listeners or agriculturalist or non- agriculturalist. Since majority of the people are illiterate and poor they do not able to learn these issues through written material but the programs made by SR in their own language with supporting local level evidences and experts creates mammoth impact on these marginalized sections.

“We cannot follow written material, but we can listen to the programmes and learn more about things that affect our lives” says an illiterate farmer.

SR’s efforts durably help the poor people for making sustainable agriculture. A preliminary content analysis reveals that near about 99% of the programs have been made by local people on local concerns importantly in which more than 80% of the participants are women and dalits. Substantial contributions come from the elderly who are seen by the station as repositories of very valuable knowledge otherwise are exclusively treated as most uncreative and neglected by mainstream media.

“We have programmes on agriculture, gender, children not attending school, bonded labour, health, tips in cropping, weeding, organic manure and other subjects. We interview people with traditional knowledge and skills, record discussions on current issues and have over 300 hours of recordings,” she says, not without some pride. Narsamma (Manager, SR)

"If we are talking on our radio about our group's experiences, we will speak about where we bought goats, how we took care of them, what our problems were, how we solved them and how we made profits from this," said Siddamma. SR

For the first time, it seems that many of these community members feel an ownership of the radio and its content and also an understanding of the power of expression and access to the public sphere to create social change and action. Sangham Radio has created various tangible changes among the communities one of the vital changes are it has provided right to voice to the common people through which they can now able to ask questions to even the public servants much more efficiently than the earlier.

“Now we discuss matters in our sanghams, make radio programmes and even talk to any superior public official, including the patwari, (village accountant) to whom earlier we even can’t speak” (Member, Sangham)

“When we go to conduct interviews with government officials, because they see recorders in our hands, they take us a bit seriously. You can see that they have “prepared” themselves for this interaction as they have all their relevant

documents and files in place to show you. That is the first step towards transparency and accountability for us” says General, manager, SR.

Furthermore, it has the potential to be extremely powerful - symbolically and in everyday practice. It allows for everyday issues of ordinary people to be voiced in ways that is extraordinary in the opportunity it provides.

“After working in this field for more than ten years, I've really come to appreciate that there is something special, a kind of magic ability to empower and mobilise that comes from sharing the ability to have your voice heard in the media with communities that for too long might have been excluded from decision making in their societies. It seems so simple, but I've seen over and over again, in so many contexts, that this is the key to positive social change in many communities,” says General Narsima, who was one of the pioneers of SR since 1997.

### **SR's initiatives on Climate change**

In order to create a Community Charter on Climate Crisis, Sangham Radio was used for a series of participatory exercises to consult local communities. The consultation revealed living and dynamic capacities of the indigenous and local communities to combat the climate crisis through their traditional farming, fishing, pastoral and other such life affirming practices and their resounding confidence in their ability to find solutions to the climate crisis. If this awareness does not follow this route and depends upon those very scientists and scientific institutions which through their agricultural and energy policies brought about the climate crisis in the first place, it would be a travesty of justice and an incompetent use of the media, Says P. V. Satheesh, Director, Deccan Development Society, Hyderabad.

### **Rural Women: Inclusion of most excluded voices**

One of the most excluded groups in rural communication structure is women. However, it has been observed that through the various initiatives of both the CR's the traditional power structure of information is liberating and the marginalized sections mainly rural women are getting a new space. Sangham Radio (SR) is the only community radio in India owned, run and managed completely by women and dalits. The major thrust of the programming is to establish community leadership for women and to end media exclusion of the marginalized. When I was in Zahirabad *mandal* (an administrative division of rural system), was struck by the way some poor women that I met talked about the importance of community radio, they opined that:

Though SR do not provides us money but it has given us our voice of being able to speak our name in public, and for people in positions of relative power to hear our names. It has created an identity and that is more than money for us.

In the villages of Telengana where SR reaches, the community radio programmes, “*yarandla muchatlu*” (village-ladies gossip) permits discussions on issues of significance to the women of the community through transmission to thousands of community radio listeners. The programme delves into issues related to cultural, health, educational and human rights (Unwomen, 2013).

Equipped with microphones and recorders, the women reporter goes out in the villages to conduct interviews. There are many dying traditional folk songs sung by women, some relate to their crops, others to the mind-boggling cropping diversity in the region, and these have been faithfully recorded by Narsamma, nicknamed “General” (SR, manager) for some reason, and her two colleagues, all rural women.

Likewise, in Bundelkhand, during the participatory research we worked with the women to find out how they understand and use the information that they get through television, and radio (Public-Private). We found that these women were frustrated at being mere passive receivers of information. They had serious concerns and were seeking a platform to voice their needs. However, in the context of increasing participation of women in both the CR’s the following expressions are very significant:

It’s great that women in some of our most backward regions are taking such courageous steps in voicing their opinions. It’s a gigantic step towards a true democracy, as only an informed society can choose better leaders. Women are particularly welcome, as their children will follow in their footsteps. Most problems in rural India are caused by a lack of information or suppression of the truth (Manisha, radio reporter, RB).

This process confirms, women in rural India are as smart as their urban counterparts. These women are truly inspirational. Their stories are stories of female empowerment; it should motivate thousands if we can provide encouragement, a big change can be brought about here, one that can truly transform society (Aogale Narsimma, radio manager, SR).

Thus, this is a curative effort to make undermined communities to reinvent themselves and engage in the larger role of development media; democratizing a community. In the light of the long tradition of being neglected and ignored by the state and central governments, the community members of both the regions (Telangana and Bundelkhand) had no option to instigate developmental initiatives at the local level. In this context CR’s have been emerging as an instrument to create a favorable atmosphere for conscientization and competitive spirit among the community members to take necessary action at both individual and community level. During the focus group discussion at RB we have received encouraging feedback from the direct listeners.

We expect CR should be different than the AIR (All India Radio) or Private FM radio channels, because they never come to us and ask about our needs and problems. It is the RB where we have hopes and really we observed that it reflects our day to day common needs and problems. It is only possible with frequent community interaction and involvement (Puspesh, a College Student, R.B.).

Keshv Panth (RB): “When we hear on the radio that the problems of neighboring villages have been solved, we will also put together an effort to take actions to do something about our own situation.”

### **Stories of alternative actions: Radio Bundelkhand**

The channel's popular chunk *Apne Aas-paas* (Our surrounding) is an open forum programme. In this programme, many of local problems highlighted and some of those solved. The participatory communication initiatives of RB resulted in the following outcomes.

- 1) Sitapur village (8 kilometres away from Radio Bundelkhand Station) had piling waste near school premises inviting many diseases on the health of students. Due to collaborative efforts of reporter and village youth, public attention to get rid of this danger was drawn.
- 2) Community members raised issues of Pratappura water hoarding problem, Jijora village water scarcity problem, Ajadpura's unavailability of wheel on well. This resulted in action by authorities. In fact NREGS (National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme) is a big success story; of impact of radio in the area some listeners also purchased radio to get aware the information. In Maharajpura workers got back their job cards after learning about (NREGS) through radio programmes.
- 3) *Khet khalihan* (Farming-threshing) is another successful programme. The channel has collected a number of case studies and success stories where the community applied suggestions and solutions, broadcast from radio. Letters of impact of its programmes and folk songs were sent in by listeners, where issue based folk songs and programmes were composed, inspiring and motivating the community to take action.
- 4) At the time of village level election campaign of "*Hamara sarpanch kaisa ho*", (How Should be our Village Chief), channel received remarkable reaction from listeners that include not only youth who just turn 18 year old but women in veil also willing to share via phone calls their opinion on the ideal face of *Sarpanch* (Village Chief). To engage women and identify the issues of women in the area radio started a biography based programmes "*stri...ek kahani meri bhi*" (Women: A story of self).
- 5) Spreading awareness on climate change as part of the *Shubh Kal* (Tomorrow Morning) radio campaign in Bundelkhand is also encouraging which works on the principle that the local and global effects of climate change, can in some measure, be dealt with in rural communities adopt the means to derive enhanced economic benefits with lower carbon emissions and work to regenerate the environment.

Furthermore, Radio Bundelkhand has also initiated two unique initiatives such as "Bundeli Idol and Narrowcasting" which are worth mentioning initiatives not only in India but also in south Asian region.

### **Bundeli idol: A Way towards sustaining local culture**

The oral traditions are very strong in this region. *Radio Bundelkhand*, one of the early community radio stations in India, started live musical programme which is meant for preserving the local music and promoting local talent through the participation of local, amateur artists in a show called *Bundeli idol*, a version of the popular reality television show, American/Indian Idol.

Prakash Narayan, one of the community reporters of RB, says it is our natural responsibility to give a voice to the marginalized. The programme (*Bundeli Idol*), he adds, is also aimed at giving opportunities for oppressed/suppressed artistic talent (*“Kuchle/dabe hue kalakar”*) in the villages.

The programme Bundeli idol gave us tremendous confidence and encouragement to express our unexplored talent, the most important factor is it has given us a different identity as a Singer among the community members,” says Kamalnath a local artisan and upcoming singer from village Orchha.

Till date, Radio Bundelkhand has collected 1,025 songs and around 400 artists from the communities have performed for the radio and won the prestigious Commonwealth Educational Media Centre Asia Award in 2011. It has enabled the people to broadcast in their own *Bundeli* (a local dialect of Hindi) language, tell their own story and sing their own songs.

### **Narrowcasting: recognizing the pulse of the community**

One of the vital strengths of RB is narrowcasting that created massive impact not only on the participation of listeners but also the active involvement in the stations ownership and provided a platform for expression of real life issues of most remote neglected members where no other media or media person reaches. Radio Bundelkhand has an exclusive team of reporters for narrowcasting. The team organizes special group listening sessions that allow them to interact directly with the community to elicit feedback and further ideas for programming. This group listening activity organized twice a week is also converted into a popular radio programme called *“Aaya Radio Aapke Gaon,”* *“Radio arrives to Your Village.”*

When we organize our team, the staff we chose came from within the community itself where narrowcasting of the programme would be done. Most CR reporters had not seen a mike or a console or even heard what a recording was. But today by sheer hard work and dedication they have made the radio programmes so popular that it is the most heard in this region. Since they belong to the same region the affection towards their own soil and that translate in to meaningful stories.....Adds Anuja Shukla who manages the CR station.

This activity is critical for the station to keep in touch with what is the pulse of the community. It also is a useful tool for gathering concrete real time live feedback, not only depending on feedback from phone or letters etc. It also is a good way for reporters to discuss matters of importance to the community in depth. Narrowcasting is the opposite of broadcasting. It means selecting a focused group of community members, pre-selecting an audio program and playing it to them in their village at a pre-selected location chosen and preferred by them. Once a reporter facilitates this playback, then he or she will get feedback on this program. Not only technical feedback like quality of voice, language and volume etc., but also whether they found the program useful, relevant and whether they were able to understand what is being conveyed. The narrowcast can also be used to ask community members what they would like to hear in the future, and also be used as an opportunity to record some feedback about the radio station in general or about specific programs. The most vital advantage of this initiative is the direct involvement most excluded members in content creation process.

These initiatives showed how a small radio station can also contribute to create a discursive space equally for their remote members as well as care to preserve and nurture amateur local talent in a sustainable way.

What unique in the project is the direct participation and action, and the horizontal way of involving in things. It is people themselves who create, discuss ... the aspect of each one is appreciated ... this gives you the sense of being equal participant, and this process frees a lot of community power.  
(Local social worker, RB)

However, many people during group discussions confirmed significant recall of the key issues such as alcoholism, dowry problem, literacy, child labour, and unemployment on which the program had been made by both the CR's. The motivating fact that many came up with an inventory of further issues, on which radio programs should be made shows that people have remarkable amount of trust in the medium to solve their community problems. Thus, it seems that the initiatives made by CR stations at the rural level are revitalizing the communicative environment, which may be used as a potent instrument for democratic deliberations and negotiations.

### **Discussion**

This qualitative study on India's first two community radio stations (CR's) found that merely establishing CR's is not a sufficient condition to succeed as a "true" community radio. Therefore, the question of the equitable representation and participation of community members in the functioning of CR's becomes more pertinent. Participation does not mean homogeneity like in mainstream media it should always be reflected through community diversity in terms of caste, age, religion and notably gender (Sen, 2003; Unwomen, 2013). The findings confirms that despite of short span of their existence as well as poverty, traditional cultural ethos and remoteness both the CR's have relatively better representation of their respective community members in this process (see Table 1).

One of the most encouraging findings is that the proportion of women's representation and involvement in both CR's is at high level. Particularly, both CR's have been managed by women managers since their inception. In contrary the mainstream Indian media generally lacks this dynamics (Biswas, 2012; Joseph, 2004). Gender is one of the most significant dimensions of community media (CM) in fact CM is incomplete without their participation. In a typical patriarchal Indian rural society women have historically been unacknowledged and remained silent socially, economically and politically (Abbott, 1997; Pavarala et al., 2005). Thus, the findings substantiates that, CR's are becoming instrumental in recognizing the involvement of their communities who have suffered systematic inequalities as "actors" in the development process. Therefore, Wanyeki (2000, p. 30) rightly said "community media is the means of expression of the community rather than for the community".

Furthermore, what makes the CR's distinctive than the mainstream media is the existence and unique ethos of the journalism of community radio reporters (CRR's). Findings of this study explore several inimitable features of CRR's which are entirely peculiar than the mainstream reporters (see Table 2). They are collective, anti-hierarchical, ordinary, non-professional and an inclusive form of community members who are also popularly conceptualized as "native reporters" by Atton (2002, p. 111). These and other associated values of CRR's not only make a distinction between the mainstream reporters and CRR's but also facilitate to uphold the social sustainability of CR's which is considered as a

prerequisite for the subsistence of any community radio stations. Moreover, the study also confirms the fact that although CRR's do not have professional journalism experience and degree but trying to build a novel type of creative and critical journalism. They socialize in an independent and non-formal environment which is out from custodial kind of education that helps to create "laboratories of local innovations" through which they illustrate how the news and stories are ethnically packaged and delivered by the community and for the community.

Finally, the following intricacies have been found more pertinent to explore the answer of how the highly community conscious journalism of CRR's facilitated the process of amplifying rural unheard voices and providing a platform for their expression. A policy has been applied where instead of making their community member sheer listeners thrust is given to build two-way dialog which is an important dimension of *conscientization* (Freire, 1970). Besides regular radio programs special programs are designed with targeted interventions that helped in getting participation of specific community groups. Participatory content creation approach has been used that enables subaltern communities to have a "voice" in their programs (Tacchi, 2006; Tacchi et al., 2009). Furthermore, to get community feedback and provide platform CRR's have undertaken narrowcasting in the remote villages, phone-in programs, CR drop-box at every villages, weekly *Sangam* meetings, and encouragement to write letters to the stations. All these initiatives are fundamentally counter hegemonic and applied with participatory communication approach that has established a significant association to involve ordinary rural masses in their "own" station. In this process the contribution of CRR's becomes central.

### **Limitations and Generalizability**

This study is mostly relies on the interviews of CRR's, CR managers and members of CR governing body however, limited responses have been taken from community radio listeners (CRL's). That may be one of the limitations of this study. Furthermore, both the selected CR's presents rural context which also lacks perspectives from urban social setting. These interviews may over-represent the situation because of the high level of ethnocentrism and initial affection towards their respective community radio stations. Future research should encompass the perspectives from both CRR's and CRL's along with selection of rural and urban community radio stations for cross sectional analysis.

As far as generalizability is concerned it is not my intent to suggest that the findings are generalizable in airy context. Instead, as made popular by Geertz (1973), I have provided readers with a deep account so that readers have adequate knowledge concerning the study and context to discern for themselves the transferability to their own context. Second, as mentioned by Stake and Trumbull (1982, as cited in Stake, 2005, p. 120) "the readers of a case study may obtain naturalistic generalizations from personal or vicarious experience. In other words, people can share and understand others' social experience." Although this study is limited in researching two particular community radio stations and their communities in one of the most underdeveloped regions of rural India, its influence to challenge the hegemony and provide voice to the voiceless cannot be denied.

### **Conclusion**

The alternative media experiments in India like Sangham radio and Radio Bundelkhand originated from "below" and inclined by the notion of counter-hegemonic ethos. They are the part of civil society and emerged as an alternative voice between state and dominant private media as well as facilitating as non-formal educational centres for the deprived rural masses. The most vital features of such experiments are inclusion of ordinary,



non-professional, local subaltern masses as CRR's in the process of media-content production that helps them in developing their skills which further added benefits of allowing them to voice their concerns to acquire and share locally relevant knowledge for creating a community platform for democratic deliberations.

Furthermore, it becomes more pertinent to conclude that in a highly unequal and patriarchal Indian society, both Sangam Radio and Radio Bundelkhand not only creating avenues for rural marginalized women but most importantly transformed them as key players that are extremely significant and offer realistic emancipatory potential. It is further concluded that community reporting is the future of community media in general and community radio in particular however, they together are the means for transforming communities addressing the need for social interaction and public engagement that provides necessary assimilation to promote community identity and development, and increase human capital through the extended social climate for social interaction and empowerment, common people find the necessary resources to take control of their daily lives, give shape to their future, and that eventually reflecting to transform their communities.

In addition to sustain the ethos of alternative media practices I suggest that CRR's should always observe community's power structure on content creation and accommodates the need and issues of subaltern voices.

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