10-14-2013

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Recommended APA Citation

Dahal, S., & Aram, I. A. (2013). Empowering Indigenous Community through Community Radio: A Case Study from Nepal. *The Qualitative Report*, 18(41), 1-26. <https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2013.1456>

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Abstract

The recently won People's Democracy (Loktantra) in Nepal has transpired a contested yet ever demanding platform furthering rights and identity movements. The availability of alternative voices through community radios is a space to emancipate the identity movement towards indigenous empowerment and asserting their respectful and equitable entry in to " New Nepal ." Within the theoretical framework of identity and democracy this research is based on the study of community radios as " case study organizations ." We have used media ethnography and media text analysis including the observation to both corroborate and contradict with the participants' understandings and expressions in the research. We find that indigenous communities can reflect their agenda of identity re - establishment towards empowerment through the active participation in the production of media contents. Active participation of indigenous communities in local radio production not only mandates acknowledgement of ethnic identity in the new nation building but also give an opportunity of lesson learning on the potentiality of using community radios as one of the tools for empowerment. In this context, reestablishment of identity through community radio deserves appreciation because it facilitates the creation of discursive space which will ultimately help to establish pluralist democracy by creating different public spheres.

Keywords

Identity, Empowerment, Indigenous Communities, Community Radio, Nepal.

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Empowering Indigenous Community through Community Radio: A Case Study from Nepal

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The recently won People's Democracy (Loktantra) in Nepal has transpired a contested yet ever demanding platform furthering rights and identity movements. The availability of alternative voices through community radios is a space to emancipate the identity movement towards indigenous empowerment and asserting their respectful and equitable entry in to "New Nepal." Within the theoretical framework of identity and democracy this research is based on the study of community radios as "case study organizations." We have used media ethnography and media text analysis including the observation to both corroborate and contradict with the participants' understandings and expressions in the research. We find that indigenous communities can reflect their agenda of identity re-establishment towards empowerment through the active participation in the production of media contents. Active participation of indigenous communities in local radio production not only mandates acknowledgement of ethnic identity in the new nation building but also give an opportunity of lesson learning on the potentiality of using community radios as one of the tools for empowerment. In this context, reestablishment of identity through community radio deserves appreciation because it facilitates the creation of discursive space which will ultimately help to establish pluralist democracy by creating different public spheres. Keywords: Identity, Empowerment, Indigenous Communities, Community Radio, Nepal.

Introduction

Wittgenstein says "at the end of reasons comes persuasion" (as quoted in Mouffe, 2000, p. 70). The critics say that some of the greatest abuses of democracy in this century have been systems that are inclusive only in the plebiscitary sense where everyone has a choice to represent their voice through voting, but the voice can only say yes or no to the leader. While very few dare to openly challenge the liberal-democratic model, nevertheless "there have been some signs that the affection with present institutions are waning and becoming widespread" (Mouffe, 2000, p. 80), peculiarly where the larger polity has taken citizenry for granted.

A free expression of ideas can expose the falseness of claims by the would-be authorities and make possible the "delegitimation" of fraudulent appeals to basic human aspirations. As such, "freedom of expression becomes key ingredient in democracy by adding contribution to dynamism of knowledge." (Hoover, James, & Parris, 1997, p. 76). The participative processes need to incorporate means of communication that facilitate exchanges whereby differing visions can be expressed of the integrative principles that tie communities together. The encouragement of a development of civil society activities by forming associations and solidarity, interacting with both the private and the public spaces will provide the emergence of a truly pluralistic democracy, instead of a purely one with the majority representation.

The recent critiques of liberal democracy solely based on plebiscite draw on the recognition of conflict and plurality of ideas. Here Chantal Mouffe (2000) comments "no

final resolution or equilibrium between those two conflicting logics [of liberalism and democracy] is ever possible, and there can be only temporary, pragmatic unstable and precarious negotiations of the tension between them” (p. 45). For her, although liberal-democratic politics consists of constant process of negotiation and renegotiation but they are all hegemonic articulations, which are nothing but paradoxes within the liberal democracy (Mouffe, 2000).

Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe (2001) discuss new theory of democracy as “radical” but quickly clarify that its radicalism discards any kind of “hegemony” and assert that it is based on the notion of “plurality.” The theory proposed in their seminal publication *Hegemony and Social Strategy* (2001[1985]) highlights a platform, where we could not only revisit the current flaws in representative liberal democracy but also chart a consensual map to establish “plurality” of existence. This would be a case of true representation. Mouffe in her later publications (Mouffe, 2000, 2005) outlines a process whereby from a “procedures of deliberation” we could reach into forms of agreement that would satisfy both “rationality (understood as defense of liberal rights) and democratic legitimacy (as represented by popular sovereignty)” (Mouffe, 2000, p. 83). She points out “democratic theory should renounce those forms of escapism and face the challenge that the recognition of the pluralism of values entails.” (Mouffe, 2000, p. 93).

The extant forms of democracy exercised in South Asia is either drawn from or targeted towards a notion of “stabilization of conflict.” The existential intricacies of the region, which is highly exhibitory through diversity in its languages and culture, were made tractive with a heavy pull of the tension between equality and liberty. Democracy could never have reconciled within traction between the two. This very idea blocks any possible discussions on the alternative to the existing configuration of democracy, which was all too powerful not to expand beyond its limited elite-space. It also makes the possibility where legitimate expression for the resistances against the dominant power relations disappears (Mouffe, 2000). Thus, the democratic struggle is always left to render illegal and against the state, which is the establishment.

The question is, whether liberalism and popular sovereignty could go hand in hand? Jan Aart Scholte (2002) proposes one probable answer by saying “effective governance is regulation that achieves not only efficiency and order, but also participation and accountability” (p. 3). In this context, Laclau and Mouffe (2001) propose a solution of “agonism,” which is a different mode of manifestation of antagonism because it promotes a relation not between the enemies but between the “adversaries.” Here the adversaries are being defined in a paradoxical way as “friendly enemies” that is, “persons who are friends because they share a common symbolic space but also enemies because they want to organize this common symbolic space in a different way.” (Mouffe, 2000, p. 13).

The proposal of “agonistic pluralist democratic model” (Mouffe, 2000) reminds us the lack in liberal democracy that has ignored the existence of minority and established hegemony of majority and towards consensus-centered democracy. Inclusion of the intricacies of the minorities is important to sustain multi-cultural societies. She critiqued these approaches for ignoring the presence of conflict as a structuring societal force and for not recognizing its crucial role in the shaping of the much-esteemed societal consensus (Mouffe, 2005).

The idea of agonistic democratic model that assumes conflict within the democratic political as dynamic has been “inspirational for many researchers working within the field of media, journalism and democracy” (Mouffe as quoted in Carpentier & Cammaerts, 2006, p. 966). The argument in the critique of democracy that not allowing conflict would ultimately lead to an authoritarian order is substantiated as “any form of order is a hegemonic order, but of course there are some forms of order that are more democratic than others” (Mouffe as

quoted in Carpentier & Cammaerts, 2006, p. 967) . It is obvious that the naive concept of equating democracy and voting is insufficient as it leaves behind a larger part of minority population from being represented in the democracy. This has been the lived experience of democracy so far in the South Asia, including that in Nepal.

South Asia has more than 2,000 ethnic entities with populations ranging from hundreds of millions to small tribal groups of less than 100 people (Dahal & Aram, 2010). Nepal has pioneered in establishing community radio stations in South Asia. With the establishment of Radio Sagarmatha in 1997 the radio broadcasting came into the hands of the public from decades of government's control. Community radio is a well-acknowledged tool that supports participation and representation for the underserved and other similar communities to have their "voices" represented through the medium of radio.

Nepal is moving into a path of new nation building, known as "New Nepal" after the recently won *Loktantra* (Peoples' Democracy) from the success of *Jana Aandolan II* (Peoples' Movement II). The immediate task in the nation building is to guarantee the achievements of *Loktantra* in the form of inclusive and participatory democracy. This is being done through writing a new constitution, which will permanently transform the country from semi-feudal monarchy into that of an inclusive republican democracy.

In this context, study of indigenous empowerment through community radio not only mandates acknowledgement of ethnic minorities in the new nation building but it would also give an opportunity of lesson learning for the whole of South Asia to explore the potentiality of using community radio as one of the tools for greater democratic exercise. Community radio as at once is a response to the encroachment of the global upon the local as well as an assertion of local cultural identities and socio-political autonomy in light of these global forces (Howley, 2002).

This article explores the opportunities provided by the virtual space of community radio for the indigenous community to establish identity, which is vital for asserting their rights and recognition in "New Nepal." The article investigates and compares two indigenous communities along the two community radio stations at different geographic locations in Nepal. In realm of indigenous community radio and empowerment the article posits following question:

As the indigenous communities are in the flux of the movement to establish their identity, what role does the community radio play in their agenda and purpose of doing so?

After this introductory section, the section following discusses the theoretical framework and research methodology employed in the research. After the section on methodology we chart out the course the identity movement has taken in Nepal and discuss the role of community radio within and outside of this movement. The section after that reports the result of the research, which compares the different aspects of identity establishment using available community radios by the two indigenous communities. In the concluding section we forward the discussion on the results to argue for the commonalities in using community radio for indigenous identity re-establishment towards a broader goal of empowerment.

Methods

Dorothy Kidd (1999) says that community radio research is not mere head count, it demands going beyond to ask people about benefits they derive from the radio programing and "What themes do they want us to cover, what debates and discussions really need more

airing, what is enriching and sustaining their lives?” (Kidd, 1999, p. 118). This article reports the case study of community radio stations by studying the complex socio-cultural contexts of the people, their media preferences and opportunities for socio-political empowerment and inclusions through a participation in a virtual space created by local community radios. The study also tried to understand the causal links and relationships between individual participation and empowerment through community radio.

Framework and Design

Within the theoretical framework of identity and democracy (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001; Mouffe, 2000, 2005) the research is based on the study of community radio stations as “case study organizations” (Berg, 1989). We used media ethnography tools such as Focus Group Discussions (FGD), in-depth interviews, background study, and media text analysis with an ethnographic immersion in the research situation (Dick, 2006). We also used observation method in this study to both corroborate and contradict with the research subjects’ understandings and expressions during the research.

The use of qualitative research method helps in providing an understanding of local social, political and cultural contexts in which the community radio stations are operating. The use of media ethnographic tools has broadened the definitions of media use and technology in the context of culture and put the researcher into the “lifeworld” (Habermas, 1987) of the research participants.

In qualitative research, sample selection differs from that of quantitative research. Qualitative research does not try to generalize findings to a larger population. Interviews, therefore, do not need to constitute a representative sample of the larger population, as is required of survey interviews. Instead, “the question of “whom to interview” may be answered by pre-establishing a research design or by seeking specific respondents” (Warren, 2002, p. 87).

“Rather than aspiring to statistical generalizability or representativeness, qualitative research usually aims to reflect the diversity within a given population” (Barbour, 2001, p. 1115). At the same place Barbour also reminds us that in using purposive and theoretical sampling to have a “degree of control” in research to avoid bias, details of sampling are often dealt with in the methods section of papers and are disregarded in the analysis section. She explicates, “samples may have been selected purposively, but they are not being used purposefully to interrogate the data collected” (Barbour, 2001, p. 1116).

“The qualitative researcher has to make research design more concrete by developing a sampling frame which is the criteria for selecting sites and/or subjects capable of answering the research questions” (Devers & Frankel, 2000, p. 264). In this research, the research question were framed after broadly discussing research concerns and explicating each research concern with relevant research implication in determining sample sites and subjects.

An appropriate sample size for a qualitative study is the one that adequately answers the research question. Marshall (1996, p. 253) asserts that “for simple questions or very detailed studies, this might be in single figures; for complex questions large samples and a variety of sampling techniques might be necessary.” In qualitative research design “the purpose is not to establish a random or representative sample drawn from a population but rather to identify specific groups of people who either possess characteristics or live in circumstances relevant to the social phenomenon being studied” (Mays & Pope, 1995, p. 110).

Some suggest the use of multiple participants in the qualitative research to have a proper representation. But it should be reminded that “the very purpose of multiple participants, who serve as a kind of triangulation on the experience but does not serve to

verify a particular account” (Polkinghorne, 2005, p. 140). In such situations, triangulation of method is also proposed, for example, a suggestion to use observation as another method (Polkinghorne, 2005).

Potter (1996) says “Observation is the technique of gathering data through direct contact with an object – usually another human being. The researcher watches the behavior and documents the properties of the object” (as quoted in Polkinghorne, 2005, p. 143). “Observations are the primary data source in sociological community studies and anthropological field studies” (Angrosino, 2005, p. 739). The researchers used observation in this study to both corroborate and contradict with the research subjects’ understanding and expressions during the research.

Participants

The strategy chosen in this study is based on theoretical sampling (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), which is used in selecting community radio station managers for the expert interview. Their testimony and the richness in data they can contribute are key to the study of empowering role of community radios in Nepal. Other expert respondents were selected depending on their professional or ideological positions, they include local community leaders, members of the radio management board, news and current affairs program producers, indigenous or marginalized program producers, women and Dalit indigenous community producers, representatives of local civil society working with radio. All the respondents were purposefully selected as suggested by Kelly J. Devers and Richard M. Frankel (2000). They suggest that “purposive sampling strategies are designed to enhance understandings of selected individuals or groups’ experience(s)...by selecting “information rich” cases, that is individuals, groups, organizations, or behaviors that provide the greatest insight into the research question” (Devers & Frankel, 2000, p. 265).

The integrity of the data depends on the honest judgment that it is always the perspectives of the research participants, which needs to be open to the reviewers and other researchers’ use (Polkinghorne, 2005). “Foremost, the welfare of the participants must be of primary concern in the production of qualitative data. In addition to maintaining the confidentiality of participants, researchers need to proceed with sensitivity and concern for their needs and desires” (Polkinghorne, 2005, p. 144). We followed the established procedures in maintaining research ethics within the realm of participants’ consent and confidentiality.

Data Collection

This article discusses empowerment of minority indigenous communities; Athpahariya in Dhankuta and Danuwar in Kavrepalanchowk districts through the local community radio station Radio Makalu and Radio Namobuddha. The studied radio stations were chosen based on the criteria developed by the researchers according to the number of considerations such as, locations based on the country’s political and physical geography; number of years of establishment of community radio stations; general or specialized nature of the radio station’s identity; number and characteristics of served broadcast population and first author’s 10-years’ experience working in the field of development communication in general and the community radio in particular. The profiled community radio stations in this article are the specialized community radio stations serving to the needs of indigenous communities in Eastern and Northern Nepal.

A total of 30 in-depth interviews were conducted with both Athpahariya and Danuwar community members; radio producers and management staffs; community radio activists and supporters including teachers, journalists and indigenous movement activists. The in-depth interviews generated 45 hours of audio data and an average time of each interview was 90 minutes. Similarly, 16 Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were conducted including those with radio listeners groups, program producers, radio management staff, both Athpahariya and Danuwar community members. The FGDs culminated in producing 32 hours of audio data with average time for single session lasting for 120 minutes. Thus the total audio data was of 77 hours.

Data Analysis

All of the audio data were recorded with the use of a digital recorder and transcribed with the help of “f4” computer software, which is available free of charge from the website (<http://www.audiotranskription.de/english>). The data was analyzed using ATLAS.ti, a Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS), which is theoretically based on the idea of grounded theory analysis (Muhr, 2004).

The purpose of choosing this audio data transcription software was due to its near native support by ATLAS.ti. It allows importing of “f4” transcript text not only retaining the timeframes but also synchronizing the texts with the native audio file. This feature of combination software grounds the research in the data, which means the researcher is always connected to the contexts and surrounding, while analyzing the data.

Use of ATLAS.ti helped in reducing “cut and paste” timing of traditional method of qualitative data analysis and in the management of data processing time so that the researchers could delve deeper into the data. It has allowed for grounding the analysis in the data and keeping it within the research context. We took a serious note during the data analysis process to avoid quick conclusion and sloppy analysis. Use of ATLAS.ti thus helped in extracting much informed and varied knowledge on the research subject from the existing data.

The analysis was carried out following the research method of grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006; Corbin & Strauss, 1990; Strauss, 1987) with the strategy of “grounding analysis in data” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 13). This means to keep the analysis firmly established in the data so as not to lose the context and background of research subjects as well as the larger socio-cultural environment on which the research is primarily based.

A total of 666 primary codes were generated by comparing and contrasting (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) the quotations representing the codes and generation of new codes was based on the theoretical sampling. In the second stage of analysis, the researchers used the method of “constant comparison” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) to merge the repetitive and similar codes and discard the isolated codes not supported by the empirical evidence (grounded in the data). Thus total primary codes were reduced to 430.

The 430 primary codes thus generated produced higher level codes through abstract, selective and axial coding (Corbin & Strauss, 1990; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The analysis of these abstracts codes through “sort, sift and select” generated 55 preliminary categories related to the Athpahariya and Danuwar identity establishment and the role of local community radio for empowerment. These 55 categories culminated into generating 11 themes on the role of community radio for empowerment; five themes related to Athpahariya identity assertion and five themes related to Danuwar identity reclamation in a progression towards their empowerment. The themes along with the higher codes were depicted into network maps generated by ATLAS.ti for semantic analysis of the data. The semantic analysis was done on the different relations between the data objects such as codes-codes relationships, code-quotations relationships, codes-themes relationships, codes-memos

relationships and network-network relationships. The relations are established with the semantic nodes between the data objects. The semantic nodes used were symmetric, asymmetric and transitive depending on their relationships with each other.

Analysis of the themes resulted in the production of 11 different semantic maps showing relationships between the empowering role of radio and intricacies of indigenous identity formation. The main map showing intricacies of Danuwar identity and community radio is produced in Figure 1. These 11 semantic maps based on the generated themes helped to produce the analytical sections along with the help from review of relevant literature.

The use of numbers and figures here is not to satiate the research result as “quantification of qualitative data” but to show the processes of higher level of data analysis, which is attained not by a computational shortcut alone but with the persistent human endeavor in understanding and reflecting in data.

Context

We describe how the community radio stations become instrumental in identity re-establishment of indigenous communities who are in the flux of social and political transitioning. The first author is involved as a professional and a researcher in the field of community communication and community empowerment in Nepal and India from past more than 15 years. He became interested in the field of community radio research after working in a UNDP supported project called Digital Broadcast Initiative in South Asia. As Nepal pioneers in community radio establishment in South Asia, he was particularly aware of the lax in serious research on the role of community radio and community empowerment originating in Nepal. The media ethnography study that provides the data for this paper was collected by the first author for his PhD thesis, which is an attempt not only to fill the research gap but also to document the causal links between rural community radio and empowerment in Nepal.

The second author has headed the Educational Multimedia Research Centre, Anna University, which houses India’s first community radio, Anna Community Radio. During his tenure, the radio station has got the all-India award for the best community radio practices for its programming on health and hygiene for women in slums around the campus. Now he heads the Department of Media Sciences, Anna University, where many of its students are involved as content providers and researchers for community radio. He has been a journalist with *The Hindu* newspaper for 17 years before taking up full-time teaching in 2006. He has been an active campaigner for opening up the airwaves for community radio in India. He was the Supervisor of the first author’s PhD thesis on community radio in Nepal. Besides this study, he had been involved in community radio research in India for a little over a decade, particularly in the context of college/university campuses setting up radio stations for the benefit of the community around. His first paper on community radio in South Asia was presented in an IAMCR conference in Barcelona in 2002.

The first author spent two spaced years between 2009-11 in the field studying the various intricacies within community radios and indigenous identity movements in Nepal during the most difficult time in the country’s political history. As Nepal is going through political and social change to establish “New Nepal” through new constitution writing, the politics of identity movement at many times were fervent, highly charged and violent. The fallout of identity movement was direct in the field visit and the extension of study time. The *bandh* (total closure), road blocks and physical and psychological terror was always the part of contingency planning during the field visits. As the research sites were sparsely located within the mountainous geography of Nepal, the point to point travel between the case study

community radio stations were always fraught with uncertainty.

Figure 1: Danuwar identity reclamation through Radio Makalu

Identity Movement in Nepal

Identity is driven by the interplay of powerful social forces. “Empirical research suggests that a strong sense of self-esteem can overcome negative stereotyping of one’s ethnic identity” (Hoover et al., 1997, p. 37). As individual choices are not made in isolation they are cued, shaped, and constrained by powerful influences emanating from greater or smaller social forces. “Independent of economic advantage or disadvantage, considerations of identity has the potential both to tear communities apart and bring them together” (Hoover et al., 1997, p. 61). Culture never can be neutral and is an active component of every identity. Identity is always constructed and shaped by prevailing social norms and values, which cannot be abstract. The more representative form of democracy is practiced with a method for making social decisions that could be changed in view of new conditions, knowledge, and perceptions (Hoover et al., 1997). Such system of democracy would be facilitating the transformation of indigenous identity formation, which was otherwise defined according to pejorative of the majority. According to Mouffe (2000), there are prevalent hegemonic articulations behind every meaning:

Meaning is always constructed and the aspect of social which fixes it thus defines within a hegemonic articulation making it political. Carl Schmitt

indicates that even in modern democratic States, where a universal human equality has been established, there is a category of people who are excluded as foreigners or aliens. (p. 41)

As this conflict is part of any culture or society the best way for the representation of many (if not all) would be to recognize the existence of other and making system open for amendments, which Mouffe (2000) calls as “agonistic.”

The theory of agonistic pluralist democracy helps us to understand the identity politics within the social movements. Identity construction is related with power within a society. Mouffe (2000) calls an approach to conceptualize power not as “an extended relation taking place between two pre-constituted identities, but rather as constituting the identities themselves” (p. 21).

The novelty of modern democracy and what makes it properly “modern,” is that, with the advent of the “democratic revolution,” the old democratic principle that “power should be exercised by the people emerges again, but this time within a symbolic framework informed by the liberal discourse, with its strong emphasis on the value of individual liberty and on human rights” (Mouffe, 2000, p. 2). This opens up the discussion of people’s representation in democracy, which was always taken for granted in the exercise of the Western modeled democracies in Nepal.

Nepal is moving in a direction of sustainable peace albeit in a fragile path of greater political understanding and people’s higher expectations. The idea of more representative democracy called as *Loktantra* (Peoples’ Democracy) was emancipated after the April 2006 political mass movement known as *Jana-Aandolan II* (Peoples’ Movement II). The fervent outcome of the movement not only compelled King Gyanendra to abdicate but ultimately resulted in the ouster of the more than two century old monarchy in 2008.

Signing of comprehensive peace agreement between the government and Nepal Communist Party (Maoist) on 21 November 2006 to end 11 years old armed conflict in Nepal opened the way to formulate an interim constitution. On 15 January 2007 “Interim Constitution 2007” was pronounced by the reinstated parliament declaring Nepal as a secular state; recognized the right of traditionally marginalized groups; provided the right to non-discrimination and the right not to be subjected to victimization as fundamental rights.

On 10 April 2008, Nepal, for the very first time in its history, held a successful election for the Constituent Assembly as mandated by the interim constitution to write a new constitution to consolidate the achievements of *Loktantra*. However, the Constituent Assembly was self-dissolved on 27 May 2012, following two extended terms and before giving the country a new constitution. In a recent political vacuum, the process of new constitution making in Nepal has entered into a further state of uncertainty and chaos. The new election has been announced for 19 November 2013, but the certainty of election on the date is doubted more than ever.

In a highly charged political environment of new constitution making every groups and communities are taking their socio-political agenda of discrimination and representation into the open. Some are coming to the negotiating table with the government but majority of them, who are political, are taking it into the streets. It is witnessing in a series of parallel social movements for identity re-establishment and securing space in making of “New Nepal,” which is on-going.

The biggest two of the social movements in the recent political history of Nepal are the *Madhesh* movement of the peoples from the geographical plain of the country known as *Madhesh* and that of the Indigenous Peoples (IP), who call themselves *Adivasi/Janjati* (indigenous nationalities) (NFDIN, 2003). The latter is a social movement of identity re-

establishment, where the main agenda is to highlight the marginalization of the *Janajatis* by the Nepali state on political and socio-economic issues.

Nepal is undergoing transitions at multiple levels; from monarchy to republic; from authoritarianism to democracy and human rights; from a hegemonic to a participatory system of governance; from a state wholly pervaded by one religion to secularism; and from a highly centralized unitary system to one characterized by decentralization and autonomy. The *Janajati* movement takes up the agenda which is seen affecting in the three realms of life spheres during the process of nation-building and of state restructuring in Nepal. First, on the political realm, the *Janajati* movement wants to overcome poor representation and subjugation in governance to establish proportional representation and ethnic autonomy. Second, on the socio-economic front the movement seeks to mitigate low literacy and unemployment through targeted education program and affirmative action. Similarly, the third is the cultural realm of the sphere, where *Janajatis* want to address religious and linguistic discrimination through the formation of secular state and subscribing official status to their languages.

The detail analysis of this unique socio-political mix forms a subject of another research but it mandates a cursory acknowledgement here to establish the link between identity movement and the community radio in Nepal. The People's Democracy muddled into becoming a contested yet ever demanding platform furthering rights and identity movements. The latter movement has two sides, one political and violent exaction, and the other a softer, in identity creation and rights assertion. This softer side is contributory as well as a convener to the recent explosion of community radio sector in Nepal.

Community Radio for Empowerment: Establishing Indigenous Identity

There is a growing "international movement in which minority peoples, particularly indigenous peoples are creating and running their own media programming and projecting their voices across cultural, political and geographical boundaries" (Alia & Bull, 2005). The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples 2008 includes rights: affirming the practice and revitalising of cultural traditions and customs (Art. 12); affirming the maintenance and development of distinct identities (Art. 8); and recognition and full ownership, control and protection of cultural and intellectual property (Art. 29) (United Nations, 2008).

Community media interventions contribute importantly to the transformation of cultures rooted in distinct communities. In this case, the politics we are discussing is not confined to governments; it includes any situation where differences of power, status, knowledge, or any other distinction compel people to engage in strategies of influence and persuasion that are the stuff of political behaviour. Politics, in this broad view, encompasses the workplace and even the community.

The meaning of freedom of expression is a critical ingredient of democracy. The function of government in relation to human development is primarily to create choices rather than to compel conformity. The means of communication that facilitate exchanges whereby differing visions can be expressed of the integrative principles that tie communities together is the community communication. Such communication becomes reality through the participation of the community in the qualitative dimension. The forms of participation that foster mutuality and the inculcation of a shared sense of responsibility are essential aspects of democracy. Hence, participation of indigenous communities for their identity reestablishment and rights assertion is a democratic exercise fostering community empowerment.

Clemencia Rodriguez (2001) has proposed the idea of "citizens' media" to represent the myriad of practices taken for the empowerment of communities using available media.

Her proposal of “citizens’ media” draws from the theory of radical democracy proposed by Lacalu and Mouffe (2001), who suggest that attempts by non-mainstream groups to contest legitimate discourses and to redefine their identity in their own terms should be interpreted as political action (Bosch, 2005).

Many media democrats advocate a “right to communicate” broader than free speech, one which also includes the rights to inform, to be informed, to privacy, and to participate in public communication (McChesney, 1993). Building autonomous or alternative media independent of state and corporate control not only add diversity to the media system but they also give voice to the marginalized hitherto not represented in any media form. Such media also conveys “counter- hegemonic information, and/or offer models of organization and communication more democratic than the dominant commercial media” (Hackett, 2000, p. 70).

“The concepts of ‘alternative media’ and ‘counter-public’ emphasize the plurality of the media and publics in any modern society. In particular, they have been used to refer to historical phenomena neglected by Habermas (1989) in his early book on the transformation of the public sphere” (Thorn, 2007, p. 897). In any given historical context, as the public sphere relates to dominant media, counter-public spheres are created by alternative media like community radios. Taking the case of the anti-apartheid movement in South Africa, Hakan Thorn (2007) asserts that the development of alternative media particularly through the use of radio by African National Congress and the emergence of a diversity of alternative public spheres therein support “Habermas’s famous theory on the fragmentation of public sphere” (Thorn, 2007, p. 913). In place of a single public sphere there are many public spheres created by many different alternative media.

Community radio in the proximity would be one aspect to look into participation and empowerment. Like a rhizome (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987), community stations are a network of connections across which things flow and disperse. If the connectedness is properly established including the proximity qualifier, a community radio as a technology hub still fits into the life and doings of the various communities it takes up to serve.

Results

The growing social movement media like community radio is crucial because they are pivotal vehicles within which “civil society can collectively chew on solutions, float and discard them, track their trajectories, and evaluate them, from the most local and immediate to the international and long term” (Downing, 2010, p. xxvi).

Community media contents are often regarded as counter-hegemonic textual products in which elements of re-establishing identity are present because they are constituted through performance, materiality, practice, social relations and signification (Dunbar-Hester, 2008).

As one of the definitional characteristics of indigenous is its uniqueness, each indigenous community would have their own way of life. Although we cannot generalize the actions of one community into the other, however, there is some aspect of media use by the indigenous communities that merits a common understanding. For example, indigenous communities would “do as they have so often done: provide their own specific cultural answer” (Rodriguez & El Gazi, 2007, p. 460). As Rodriguez and El Gazi (2007) report the indigenous community radio movement in Colombia, “in many other parts of the world, the democratization of the airwaves in the form of more legitimate citizens’ radio has emerged at the intersection of social movements and policy reform” (p. 461).

It was the availability of alternative voices through community radios, which has significantly contributed in the emergence of specialist community radio stations in recent times in Nepal; for example women specific, Dalit specific, indigenous community specific

and faith based community radio stations. Moreover, the Interim Constitution 2007 left behind the idea of “nation” as a monolithic entity founded in one language, one religion, one identity and one culture with the monarchy as overall unifying force, and espoused an idea of “nation” as a dialogue among diverse ethnic and cultural identities.

The indigenous communities can reflect their agenda of identity re-establishment towards empowerment through the active participation in the production of media contents. We report the findings from case study of two indigenous radios in Nepal below in the subsequent sub-sections.

Athpahariya and Radio: Re-establishing the Identity

Athpahariya is listed as one of the eight potentially endangered languages of Nepal. According to Yogendra P. Yadava (2004) potentially endangered language is the one sustaining pressure from a large language and is beginning to lose its child speakers. Hence it would be limited within the surviving old speakers, who could further push it in to endangerment to memory loss because of ageing. Potentially endangered languages with small size of speakers lack “intergenerational language transmission and the use of language in education despite having positive attitudes towards their languages” (Regmi, 2011, p. 49). Athpahariyas are the communities speaking Athpahariya language and they are found only in Dhankuta district in eastern Nepal. Their settlement areas are Dadagaun, Chharagaun, Sipting, Pangsing, Tekunala, Santang, Karmitar, Thoka of Dhankuta Municipality and neighboring Belahara and Bhirgaun villages. A total of 1442 households of this indigenous community inhabits in these localities at Dhankuta.

An Athpahariya activist Chandra Rai says:

Athpahariya means the person, who dedicates himself to work for eight prahars [Ath = eight], one prahar is equal to three hours. Hence Athpahariya is one who works for 24 hours. We were given this title by King Prithivi Narayan Shah. We are from Rai community but we are also different.

Chandra is also a publisher of a small booklet on Athpahariyas. The booklet notes that people belonging to a particular section of Rai community, who were deputed as the king’s bodyguards were entitled Athpahariyas (Rai, 2008). Chandra adds, “The fact that we are the descendants of the security force who were deployed to protect ancient *Margahang* kingdom is also found mentioned in our *Mundhum*.” *Mundhum* is their sacred writing almost equal to the Vedas for Hindus.

Gajendra Bahadur Rai works in Saudi Arabia as a migrant laborer. He was simply overwhelmed by listening to a song in his language while returning home in 2010. Immediately after reaching home he inquired about the radio that was airing the song. Gajendra was doubly surprised to discover that now his village not only has a community radio station but it also airs many programs in the Athpahariya language, his mother tongue. Gajendra shares his contentment:

Whatever it is but I like the Athpahariya program in Radio Makalu. This is very good initiative to include the Athpahariya language in the radio program. If they could, they should do more of such programs by improving it further. Especially, the news in Athpahariya is very effective and I like it very much. For me, I like Radio Makalu because this is our own radio.

Radio Makalu in Dhankuta district in the eastern region is one of the many community radios in Nepal with aspiration and rigor. The radio aims to serve its broadcast communities by providing needy information in a timely manner. With a 500W transmitter Radio Makalu regularly broadcasts 16h in a day on FM 92.2MHz frequency particularly targeting rural and marginalized population living within its broadcast areas; that includes women, Dalit, and indigenous population of different walks of life.

Radio Makalu has a comparative advantage over the other radio stations available to the people in the area as it broadcast news and other contents in the languages other than Nepali. Broadcasting news and other programs in Rai Bantawa, Limbu, Athpahariya, Yakkhya and Tamang languages broadens its audience base among those varieties of populace living in the area. It has a strong resolution and unfettered commitment in progressive and democratic transformation of the communities it serves. Contributing to new knowledge and social transformation, the radio generates contents on education, health, agriculture, development, environment, human rights, gender equality, democracy, public empowerment and social inclusion. With a vast array of local contents, Radio Makalu also broadcasts shared contents through national networks coming from country's capital Kathmandu.

For the community radio to be a real participatory agent for social change first, it has to reach out to the community and secondly, it should lay a proper foundation, where different communities and particularly marginalized and left-out population can openly participate in the making of community friendly contents. Radio Makalu's staff structure is inclusive as 41% local indigenous peoples are working in the radio. This percentage nears to the demography of the indigenous community inhabiting the area. The radio's role in preserving and promoting indigenous language and culture helps in establishing the relationship between Athpahariya identity and radio program.

With the availability of new media like community radio station in the community, the young Athpahariyas are dedicating their time and resources in protecting, promoting and expanding indigenous values and identity through the language of radio. The Athpahariya youth, who were already active in cultural activities through *Derapang* (an indigenous cultural forum) and some school teachers got themselves involved for the very first time in the uncharted course of radio program production in Radio Makalu. This is a debut Athpahariya presence in electronic media. The Athpahariya enthusiasts began their entry into the radio with a 10 min translated news from Nepali language. Later, it was extended to 20 min news, which became a half hour daily bulletin after few months. Now, the Athpahariya news primarily includes reports on local events and activities supplemented by a compilation of national news reports. Bimala, an Athpahariya news producer in Radio Makalu says:

When Radio Makalu's station manager Sobish *Dai* [brother] invited us to do news in the Athpahariya language it was a completely new venture for us. Although some of us were involved in *Derapang* for organizing cultural events, we never have worked with media or produced anything more than singing songs and dancing *Maruni*. The radio people assured us that there will be some training but we were confused in producing something in the Athpahariya language as the news. So what we finally decided was to produce a ten-minutes bulleting translated directly from Nepali news produced by the radio's news team.

Some Athpahariya community members are finding that the news uses "new words," which is difficult to understand. A young male participant during a FGD in Santhang says:

We have been learning new words from Athpahariya news program and that makes us difficult to understand the news. I even placed a bet with my friends whether the broadcast was in our language or something other.

The news reader Bindu Rai, who was also taking part in the discussion immediately clarified that those were not new but lost words from their language.

Matter of fact, we are recovering those lost words and bringing them back in to daily use with the help from our elders, who knows the meaning and its use. Similarly, before we started the program in Radio Makalu, Athpahariya common language did not use own numbers system and borrowed it from Nepali. Now the radio with the help from our organization and the elders is making people also learn the numbers – Bindu.

After participating in radio program Athpahariyas have also discovered that even the commonly known places have distinct Athpahariya names, which used to be known only in Nepali language. “This is the reason people are finding it new, but it is only the rediscovery,” says Bindu. She was convincing the researchers during the interview that the radio program is thus helping community rediscover their identity, which was lost due to infusion with other larger language communities, mainly the national Nepali language. As a most common form of radio formats news also has a potential to make people learn new words and use it in common parlance.

In between the development of the news, some music talents among them started recording Athpahariya songs in radio’s studio. Radio Makalu in its varieties of other programming on indigenous communities has started including Athpahariya songs. Mansuri Rai tells that she has recorded a total of nine songs with Radio Makalu out of which five are in her own language and the rest four are in Nepali. After participating in radio program production these Athpahariya youths, who were otherwise silent and shy are overcoming their inhibitions. Some FGD participants in Santhang village even sang the songs they have recorded for radio. A non-Athpahariya woman social worker informed during the discussion that the Athpahariya women were categorized as “hard to reach” community by her NGO until last year. She says:

When we visited the villages under some development campaigns these women always shut their doors on us, but now things are changing. Just last week, some of them even asked me if I know about their radio programs. Knowing my ignorance they informed me that one of them has sung on the radio and it gets regularly broadcast.

Another girl Thamsuri Rai has recorded five songs in the Athpahariya language and two in the Nepali language, which are regularly broadcast over Radio Makalu. As she has become a local popular singer her friend Purnima also shed her inhibitions and recorded two songs, one in Athpahariya and another in Nepali. For these young Athpahariya girls, having a space in radio is empowering in a sense that they don’t have to feel shy anymore and if they have talents they also have a forum now.

The Athpahariya populations by and large feel pride in finding their identity being re-established through radio. In a want of taking the space provided by the local community radio a further, they have started using it for the benefits of Athpahariya population in general and the youths in particular. Dilu Rai is a young primary teacher in Dadagaun; she feels that her generation has forgotten what she calls “a typical Athpahariya language and culture.” She

admittedly says “We mix other languages and mostly Nepali while talking and we also are not much aware of our culture.” She also feels that the news is helping them to learn new Athpahariya words and making those words into the daily practical uses. She is particular in mentioning that the radio program is also complementing the Athpahariya language teaching in her school.

Some young Athpahariya activists have initiated awareness building activities to re-establish the indigenous identity through various means. Dilu Rai confirms, “This initiative is to encourage people to overcome their hesitations in using the Athpahariya language and to protect our identity.” The majority of FGD participants in two Athpahariya villages of Santhang and Dadagaun reiterate that only the elder Athpahariyas know their language and culture and their identity is in danger of extinction.

The enthusiast Athpahariyas after producing the news at Radio Makalu ventured to start a “real” Athpahariya program. It was their next step in identity movement. The aim was to re-establish their identity, promote the culture and preserve the language, which has been in the list of potentially endangered languages of Nepal.

These Athpahariya youths with the help from “Athpahariya Kirat Rai Samaj” (Athpahariya Kirat Rai Society), an organization established to promote their language and culture, started producing a program called “*Amiga Mundhum*” in Radio Makalu. This is what they call as the “real” Athpahariya program. *Mundhum* is important cultural heritage of Kirat community including the Athpahariyas. Some also call it the “oral Veda” of Kirati people (Chemjong, 2003). The *Mundhum* is included in Athpahariya radio programming through a dedicated show called “*Amiga Mundhum*.”

Bir Bahadur Rai says:

Mundhum has histories of Kirat kings and stories of their valour. It also includes our belief systems like the good and bad spirits; inspiring spirits; life after death; *Tantrik* features; the spirits of envy and jealousy etc. It is also a book of our origin, identity, culture and mainly our existence.

Bir Bahadur is executive committee member of *Athpahariya Kirat Rai Samaj*, working for the indigenous welfare. As the *Mundhum* represents intricacies of Athpahariya lifestyles, the document itself is a complex one to decipher. One of the program hosts Mausami Rai says:

The language, tone and style used within the *Mundhum* program are very different than the common everyday use of Athpahariya dialect. We are getting help from our organization to understand meaning and interpretations from *Mundhum*, so that a common listener understands it. As there are lots of folk-tales in *Mundhum*, we are also using stories to talk about Athpahariya culture. It is our culture, ritual, language and everything.

By broadcasting stories from their scripture in “*Amiga Mundhum*” Athpahariyas are also teaching their children and young generations about their values and identity. Here, Radio Makalu is directly contributing to preserve and promote indigenous Athpahariya culture and identity, which is at a risk of extinction. Hence, the Athpahariya identity became the cause of starting Athpahariya radio program. The Athpahariya values are part of Athpahariya radio program because whatever the producers of the radio program produce, it will be based on their indigenous values. Another primary school teacher in Santhang village, Menuka Rai asserts that Athpahariya radio programming is enriching not only because it is

preserving culture and language but it also has helped change the behavior of the young generation Athpahariyas.

Our young generations were in a complete state of loss regarding their cultural identity. They were growing in a hybrid culture, which was neither Athpahariya nor the other but a complete mess. Now as we have radio program based on *Mundhum* and it has taught us back who we really are and what we do. Peoples, who use to shy away from revealing their cultural identities are now feeling proud not only talking in their language but also singing their songs in public – Menuka.

The language program in Radio Makalu aims to re-establish Athpahariya identity in the context of their dying language and losing cultural and traditional values. Athpahariya activists complain that they are being made to follow other cultural practices and Nepali language. A senior Athpahariya activist asserts:

We need to discourage it so that we could preserve our language and thus identity. This could be done only if we make our people learn Athpahariya language and follow Athpahariya culture and traditions. Through Radio Makalu we have been able not only to promote our language but preserve it for the use by our future generations. Community radio is our natural choice due to high illiteracy prevalent among us.

Danuwar and Radio: Reclaiming Lost Identity

Danuvars are categorized as highly marginalized indigenous communities by the government as well as non-governmental sectors in Nepal. They are geographically spread into 63 out of 75 districts in the country. Danuvars although have their own language and cultural identity but that was lost amidst their own survival within the hegemony of majority; both from the indigenous as well as non-indigenous populations.

Danuvars are using the community radio as a cultural tool to re-establish their identity and for them it is to reclaim the lost cultural identity through the symbolic space of community radio. The ancestral strongholds of the Danuvars are Banke and Bardia districts but a significant numbers of this indigenous community is found in different places of Kavrepalanchowk, Sindhuli, Makawanpur, Siraha, Udayapur, Sarlahi, Nuwakot and Dhading districts in Nepal. The 2009 Statistical Year Book indicates Danuwar population as 53229 and there are 5715 Danuvars inhabitants in the Kavrepalanchowk district (the study area) alone (CBS, 2009).

They have the own language but its use is exponentially declining. The Indigenous Peoples (IPs) in Nepal identify themselves as Indigenous Nationalities and their representative organization Nepal Federation of Indigenous Nationality (NEFIN) lists several subgroups or sects of Danuvars as Dhoni, Chheku, Kuechariya, Rajan, Kushniya, Jidhariya, Kunuor, Adhikari, Dhami, Rai, Kanchla, Nampurchre, and so on.

Since Danuvars are spread sparsely into many districts of the country, they are influenced by the majority inhabitants of the neighborhood and their culture has been shaped accordingly. Suryamanya Danuwar, who is a member of Danuwar National Network, an organization setup for the welfares of Danuwar community, denies that there are any subgroups within Danuvars. She says:

Danuvars are only one with a single language called *Doné Bhasa* but due to the population spread and for the survival within the majority influences many of us have taken up other communities' identities.

Danuvars in Mahadevsthan village in Kavrepalanchowk write Rai in their surnames. It such happened that in 1975 when a group of government land surveyors visited the area they suggested the Danuvars to change their surnames into Rai as the leading officer in the survey was a Rai. He also assured them that if they do so, no one can take away their land including the government. The illiterate Danuvars complied and the whole of the Danuvars in the village thus got the Rai surname. This is a perfect example of marginalization of the minority indigenous community by a majority indigenous community itself. Some researchers also confirm this fact. Gurung and Bhattachan (2011) report:

Tarai Danuwar lost their culture heritage (tradition, custom, legacy, birth right) and adopted Hinduism. Due to influence of Hindus, now most of the Danuwar follows Hindu religion and celebrate Hindu festivals too. Some of them say Danuwar of inner *Tarai* unable to speak their language but they are excited to learn [if provided with the opportunity] (p. 104)

A Danuwar person was elected in the Constituent Assembly in 2008 from Sindhuli districts but he writes his surname as Adhikari, which belongs to either the high caste Brahmins or the Chhetris. When some Danuwar activists approached MP Bisem Lal Adhikari, he acknowledged his Danuwar identity but told them that despite of his willingness, it seemed difficult for him to change the surname. Others have different views on the changed Danuwar identities. According to Khatry (1995), what Danuvars use as their surnames now are the titles given to their ancestors under indigenous administrative structures. This is also confirmed by a baseline study conducted by NEFIN (Gurung & Bhattachan, 2011).

Danuvars have their own rituals regarding marriage, rite of passage, death rite and festivals. Suryamaya informs that due to high infusion with the Hindu society which she calls as "Hindubadi", they also celebrate Hindu festivals but in a distinctly different ways. She says:

We have been celebrating festivals of *Dashain* and *Tihar* as do other Nepali Hindus. But we are not Hindu and our way of celebrating these festivals are totally different. When it is the seventh day of a ten-day Dashain festival it is the very first day for us. Similarly, we celebrate Bhai Tika but not Laxmi Puja during Tihar festival.

Dashain and *Tihar* are celebrated as national festivals and it is projected not as a religious but as a common Nepali festival calling it "*Nepali Matra Ko Mahan Chad*" (The grand Nepali festival). Danuwar activists like Suryamaya are concerned that in so doing they are losing their culture and identity.

Danuwar Jagaran Samiti was established in 2001 as a national organization to work towards preserving, promoting and protecting Danuwar identity and culture. But along the establishment they witnessed serious divisions within the organization; among those, who were living in the hills and others living in the *Tarai* (plains) – herein after called as *Tarai* Danuvars and Hill Danuvars. The *Tarai* Danuvars asserted that they are high caste as they wear sacred threads and practice Hinduism. These Danuvars have adopted Hindu culture taking influence from the high caste *Tarai* Brahmins. They also have similar surnames and

consider Hill Danuwars, who neither wear sacred thread and nor are pronounced Hindus to be of inferior caste within Danuwar.

Although the *Tarai* Danuwars are less in population than their hills counterparts (CBS, 2002), they are better placed to have education and other facilities including employment opportunities. It has created a serious rift within the Danuwar identity movement, consequently Hill Danuwars created another organization called Danuwar Development Committee to assert their own rights. On the continuum, there are majority of Danuwars, who feel that all Danuwars should come under the purview of one identity and language. They also floated a network among themselves to create another national organization called Danuwar National Network. The Danuwars belonging to the network claim that they would combine the two organizations towards the better focused single Danuwar identity movement.

Suryamaya Danuwar is an executive committee member of the network and she recounts her efforts in bridging this “artificial gap.” She blames it as “artificially created” due to the influence of the high caste communities, who always want their hegemony to prevail. She says:

The network has managed to convince the *Tarai* Danuwars of their real identity and many have now given up wearing sacred threads along with their Hindu identity and also started writing Danuwar as their surnames. But they still have the feelings of superiority. Matter of fact, Danuwars are neither Hindus nor they have any caste divisions. Another factor contributing to the rift within Danuwar identity movement is the divisive party politics.

Danuwars fall under Highly Marginalized Janajati (HMJ) category with 35-50 per cent illiterate population and more than half of whom are living below the poverty line (Subba, Rai, & Thapa, 2008). An authentic Danuwar history throwing a clear light on their origin, migration and social evolution is unavailable. This is also the case with many other indigenous tribes of Nepal (Khatry, 1995).

Realizing the differences in their identity among the hills and *Tarai* people, and for their own growing need to confirm to a single, egalitarian and just identity, some activist among them formed a committee to establish their own media in Kavrepalanchowk in 2003. Their efforts could not materialize at that time because the country was going through an armed conflict and media was vulnerable and misappropriated by both the state and non-state parties to the conflict. When the country finally managed to return back to democracy in 2006 and some youth from other communities initiated a campaign to start a local community radio in the area, the activist like Suryamaya Danuwar could not wait but jumped into the association.

Danuwar youths have already discussed the idea of starting electronic media, particularly a community radio in Kavrepalanchowk and when Phulman Bal, Bhakta Syangtan and his team approached them they not only bought the idea but also shared their homework with them. It was an initiative, which later became a full-fledged reality as Radio Namobuddha, an indigenous community radio in 2007.

Community radios have different purposes and mission than the mainstream media. They have become instrument and forum for the local people bringing hitherto hidden issues to public, educating them on various social, cultural and political issues. Moreover, these radios have worked as motivator, inspirer and purveyor of promoting marginalized identity and culture. Hence, community radio is an agent of social and cultural change. Radio Namobuddha is one of such radios with both strength and weakness. It started with

experimental broadcasting in 21 June 2007 and began regular broadcasting after three months.

With the capacity of a 100W transmitter, it has been regularly broadcasting varieties of contents for thirteen hours a day on FM 106.7MHz in eight ethnic languages including Nepali. Radio Namobuddha has resolute determination and commitment for progressive and democratic transformation of the indigenous communities. It has a stated mission of indigenous generation and proliferation of local knowledge through disseminating information on democracy, public empowerment and social inclusion.

Danuvars, with hibernated language and cultural identity are living in sparse population all over the country. This hibernation is created through the higher diffusion with other communities and it has witnessed in a negative impact. Many Danuvars have lost their cultural identity and were living with the camouflaged identity along the dominant population. Among them very few have managed to keep their traditional language and culture alive. One such community is living in the hills of Kavrepalanchowk district, which is also active in protecting and promoting their identity and culture through other means such as setting up a Danuvar network organization. The activist used to collect a small levy among themselves to raise a fund to visit Danuvar villages in the different districts of Nepal to promote, protect and preserve their language.

Although there is only one Danuvar language, some research studies have documented different names for the dialects spoken by them in different parts of the country. Omkareswor Shrestha et al. (2006) studied Danuvars of Dukuchhap village in Lalitpur district near Kathmandu valley and report that Danuvars have “their own language called Kaini (language, talk, and thing)” (Shrestha, Tamang, Subedi, & Shahu, 2007, p. 14). Later in a journal of the linguistic society of Nepal, Timilsina and Das (2009) confirmed that “Danuvar people introduce themselves as ‘*Doné*’ and their language ‘*Doné Bhasa*’” (Timilsina & Das, 2009, p. 351) [emphasis authors]. It shows a clear mistaken identity of the Danuvar community not only reflected in their lifestyle and culture but also in the academic documentation, which is vital for identity establishment. Hence, the importance of using a single language to reclaim their identity through a media is a noble cause taken up by the young Danuvar activists.

Danuvars, who have one of the lowest literacy rates among the marginalized indigenous groups in Nepal and categorized as Highly Marginalized Group, started a *Doné Bhasa* program from Radio Namobuddha in 2007. Until that time Danuvars did not have any media presence and their language was on the verge of extinction. After some months in to the radio broadcast, the *Doné Bhasa* also got an opportunity to publish as a supplement in Nepal’s oldest national newspaper. A *Doné Bhasa* page started to appear regularly on a monthly basis in *Gorkhapatra* daily, a government owned broadsheet. This was a part of the initiatives taken by the Nepali state towards recognition and acknowledgement of indigenous nationalities through media. Nepal is aiming to become a federalist republic and the government forwarded an inclusive agenda by publishing two pages daily supplement in the official newspaper with each page dedicated to one of the 28 indigenous languages. This is one aspect of becoming a New Nepal.

Along with the daily news, the Danuvars are producing a weekly half an hour program called *Doné Awaz* (*Doné Voice*) in Radio Namobuddha. The program aims to reclaim Danuvar identity in the context of their dying language and losing cultural and traditional values. Danuvar activists complain that notion of “majority-mix” makes them follow Hindu cultural practices and Nepali language, which are detrimental to their identity preservation.

We could preserve our language and thus identity only if we stand together for the recognition of single Doné Bhasa. This could be done by teaching Doné Bhasa and encouraging them to follow Danuwar culture and traditions. More than any other media a community radio could help in this regard due to high illiteracy and prevalent poverty among us – Ram Kumar Danuwar, a Danuwar activist.

Kamala Danuwar, the host of *Doné Awaz* informs that she gets very encouraging feedbacks from Danuwar listeners of her program, including those from the far off area. She shared a feedback received from a caller as far as in Kathmandu:

We used to hesitate disclosing our Danuwar identity and using the language before we started listening to *Doné Awaz*. We are always encouraged by the way you people talk freely on *Doné Bhasa*, particularly when the program urges Danuwars to use their own language. We feel really proud that our language is being broadcast on the radio. It is something I never thought to get in my lifetime – a caller.

Making radio program in the language which is dying and that also to talk about culture and values unaccustomed from so many years has not been easy for Kamala and her team of radio volunteers.

The main component we lack in our program is music and songs. We have managed to collect much information related to our culture and traditions but lack of music makes program a monotonous – a volunteer working as Danuwar program producer.

In the recent past, Danuwar National Network assigned a Danuwar person from Udayapur district a task to collect music and songs. “But the person assigned evaded his duty and we don’t have much music except the few we have managed to record in our radio studio here”, informs Suryamaya, who also oversees the Danuwar program production in Radio Namobuddha. For Suryama, Kamala and her team of radio producers, it gives them satisfaction that radio program *Doné Awaz* has helped Danuwars to overcome their hesitation in using the language.

Radio Namobuddha regularly collects feedback from their broadcast communities by visiting them calling it as “Radio in a Village” program. “Communities never thought that a radio station could physically come to their village and broadcast program from their courtyards,” says Bhakta Syangtan, station manager of Radio Namobuddha, about the mobile radio campaign. Mobile radio is being used to gather information regarding the lives and cultures of those indigenous people, who are not yet ready to producer program by their own community members. One such community is Majhi in Kavrepalanchowk.

Majhi people have just started to show their interest in doing radio program. We lobbied with them for almost one year. Now, two Majhi volunteers are learning radio production in our studio. I hope they will be ready with their first Majhi program very soon – Jagat Lama, an erstwhile station manager of Radio Namobudhha.

Danuwar radio program is not just another radio broadcast but it includes a socio-cultural mix of forming an undivided identity and promoting culture and traditions, which are in the verge of extinction. Danuwar identity and sociology includes intricacies of their lived

experiences. Here, the identity is related with being a Danuwar with a single language, *Doné Bhasa*. Danuwar is highly marginalized group within indigenous nationalities, let alone among the country's total population mix. Danuwar identity also has to deal with internal contradictions. For example, a camouflaged identity as in the case of a Danuwar MP is a stumbling-block in attaining single unified identity, which they long to establish. The identity movements get problematic because of varieties of cultural practices within Danuwar communities. For example, Danuwars living in the neighbouring districts of Kavrepalanchowk and Sindhuli are common indigenous group yet they have different cultural practices including the dialect. Danuwar culture is represented within their lived experiences and practiced in the religious and festive activities. Danuwar population is found to be distinctly divided along the geographical line as demonstrated by the conflict among hills and *Tarai* Danuwars.

Similarly, Danuwar sociology is intricately related with having no caste or sub-division and a matriarchal system of society. Danuwar society's matrilineal practices promote gender equity and division of work but only among those, who live independent or who does not come into the influence of other majority community. Danuwar identity is camouflaged not only by the "Hindubadi" mixture but also by other majority indigenous population, as in the case of Rais in the eastern hills (for details see Kuegler & Rai, 1975). Danuwar radio is a part of Danuwar cultural programming, which is trying to weave Danuwars into a single language and uniform cultural practices, however, it is self-problematic.

The news in Danuwar language and program on Danuwar culture and traditions called *Doné Awaz* is limited only to Radio Namobuddha. It reaches only to the districts covered by the radio broadcast. As you know, Danuwars are spread in 63 out of 75 districts in Nepal our immediate challenge is how to do similar programming for the all the Danuwars in all those 63 districts – Suryamaya.

Conclusion

Ethnic Nepali people in general have become more aware of their ethnic identity from past some years due to the Maoist insurgency that started with the People's War in 1996 (Lawoti, 2008; Onesto, 2005). Whereas, the Maoist forwarded an agenda of quick remedy through violence. The larger mass of ethnic activists did not join the Maoist, except some leaders of the ethnic movements but many openly supported them. The leaders at the forefront of indigenous activism thought that the only option for their emancipation was the Maoist proposed quick remedy. It was largely due to the lack of alternative space to put forth the agenda for indigenous empowerment. However, the mainstream of ethnic movement still "prioritized cultural reform and settled for gradual political change." (Hagen, 2007, p. 38).

At the same time many ethnic activists have been apprehensive about the Maoist agenda as they could easily see their presence within the party was limited to rank and file, whereas the top brass of the party were high caste Hindus (Lawoti, 2003). But some believe that there was "considerable involvement of indigenous nationalities in the insurgency" (Hagen, 2007, 38) and that has made the indigenous movement in Nepal highly political and violent. The later indigenous movements after the establishment of *Loktantra* in 2006 have used forceful and violent means of demonstrations to press for their demands.

When the Indigenous Peoples are provided with the opportunity to create their own media it will not only help them to preserve their language and culture but also allows them to create their own history in their own terms. For example, the Athpahariyas need no introduction among the wider society in Dhankuta but through radio programs in their language they are asserting their space along with the other communities. Through the language programming from community radio, Athpahariyas are making their future

generation learn the language and keep abreast with cultural values and identity. This is where the larger community is becoming interested if not involved in their empowerment process.

For Athpahariyas who have a traditionally strong cultural identity and well developed language, it was a challenge to reestablish it. As Nepal is craving to become a federalist republic the rights of each and every communities needs to be ascertained to weave them into a single Nepali identity. Nepali identity has multiple ethnic diversities and like many others, Athpahariyas also are seeking the ways to reestablish their identity. When Radio Makalu was established as a community radio station with a clear mission to promote, preserve and protect local culture and identity, there would have been no other alternative for minority communities like Athpahariya to be part of it. Hence, Athpahariya radio program is not “fill the space” radio show but a radio program for social and cultural change.

Among many minority indigenous nationalities in Nepal, Danuwars have inconsistency in identifying themselves. Due to the hegemony of majority within the indigenous communities that the minorities prefer to show allegiance as part of the bigger ethnic identities. For example, the Danuwars in Sindhuli write their surnames as Rai, Kachadia or Adhikari. Similarly, the only Danuwar Constituent Assembly member and MP from Sindhuli, Bishem Lal Adhikari's identity is camouflaged with that of the high caste *Brahmin* or *Chhetri*. The majority of minority indigenous nationalities like Danuwars feel safe and secure in identifying within the prevalent hegemonic identity, whether they are Hindubadi or non-Hindubadi. Danuwar activists complain the hegemony as one of the major hindrances in Danuwar identity re-establishment. This becomes particularly problematic as some official documents identify them as “Danuwar-Rai,” which is a mixed identity of being Danuwar within a larger Rai indigenous community. The activists not only refute such identity construction but also level it as a conspiracy to thwart their progress and empowerment. As the indigenous identity movement is growing stronger in Nepal, the changes are being seen in recent times. *Doné Awaz* radio host confirms that the listeners from far and wide call them to express their happiness and gratitude that the radio program has been helping them to re-establish the identity. Some listeners had a very strong feedback when they say, “we were not only hesitant to identify ourselves as Danuwar but at the same time also felt a shame in identifying that way and we were using other surnames.”

The community radios are facilitating varieties of identity movements in their own indigenous way. For Athpahariya, who are a small concentrated indigenous community in the eastern hills of Nepal, they are served by local community radio, Radio Makalu in re-establishing their roots not only among themselves but also as a part of diverse Nepali nation. Athpahariya identity is problematic because the data pertaining to their characteristics are not available in the existing census or other government data source (CBS, 2002). They are not listed among the 59 recognized indigenous nationalities by Nepal Foundation of Indigenous Nationalities (NFDIN). NFDIN is a government established body under National Foundation for Development of Indigenous Nationalities Act-2002 (NFDIN, 2003).

In all of the official documents, Athpahariyas are broadly included within the Rai indigenous nationality, which they reject outright and repudiate any attempt towards such amalgamation of the identity. Rather, they ascertain that Rai, Limbu, Yakkha, Sunuwar, Lepcha and Athpahariya are parts of larger Kirati identity (Rai, 2008). The rest of the Kiratis except Athpahariya are enlisted and the data pertaining to their existence, language and culture are officially available. Hence, Athpahariyas are re-establishing their identities through different form and the Athpahariya radio program in Radio Makalu is one such lines of approach.

Similarly, Danuwars are sparsely distributed indigenous community who have lost their identities within a majority mix. The challenge in Danuwar identity re-establishment is

to forge a common and consensual image. Danuwars have ascertained their language as *Doné Bhasa* (Timilsina & Das, 2009) and broadcasting *Doné Awaz* in their language from Radio Namobuddha is an approach towards the formation of undivided identity. Producing a radio program in own language not only helps in attaining immediate advocacy goal but also advances social and cultural empowerment for indigenous rights.

Although both of the indigenous communities are in distinct fluxes of the movement to re-establish identity for asserting their rights, the agenda and purpose of so doing is not different for the two. In this context, re-establishing identity through community radio deserves acknowledgement not only because it will help a particular indigenous nationality towards their empowerment but also to an extent that it facilitates the creation of discursive space, which will ultimately help to establish what Mouffe (2000) calls a pluralist democracy. With the help of the virtual spaces created by community radios, different indigenous nationalities with the varieties of agendas of identity reestablishment are creating different public spheres where others are equally participating.

After one and a half decades of their establishment, community radios in Nepal are still limitedly discussed either on the anecdotal stories or in some donor supported pragmatic evaluations. There are very few, even less than a handful of serious academic studies originating from the research on the role of community radio in South Asia in general and Nepal in particular.

We believe that documenting community radio experience is important in terms of keeping communities' media activities visible and enabling a more balanced understanding of grassroots contribution to radio. Although this research is limited in studying two specific community radio stations vis-à-vis two different indigenous communities in Nepal, the power of community radio as place of challenging hegemony and promoting empowerment cannot be denied.

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Article Citation

Dahal, S., & Aram, I. A. (2013). Empowering indigenous community through community radio: A case study from Nepal. *The Qualitative Report*, 18(82), 1-26. Retrieved from <http://www.nova.edu/ssss/QR/QR18/dahal82.pdf>