

Role of community radio in maintaining cultural diversity in Assam (with special reference to Jnan Taranga and Radio Luit)

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Abstract

Community radio belongs to the third tier of broadcasting which is different from public and private broadcasting. It is characterised by the active participation of the community in the process of creating content, research, production and broadcast of programs with an emphasis on local issues and concerns. Being a not-for-profit initiative, the programs broadcast by the station aims for overall development and raising awareness on various socially relevant topics.

India is a land of diverse cultures. The cultures vary significantly different from north to east and the east to west. The North Eastern region consisting of 7 states, for instance, is home to more than one hundred fifty ethnic groups and every group has their own unique culture.

After the historic Supreme Court judgment in 1995 which ruled that “airwaves are public property”, there are 200 operational community radio stations in India till date. In the north eastern region of India, presently, only three community radio stations are there. Since its inception, these three community radio stations always provided a platform to all the communities of the region to promote their own culture by participating in various programs and activities.

The basic objective of the study is to understand the how community radio can play a very important role in retaining the cultural diversity of a region.

The researchers have implied qualitative method for the research.

The study is anticipated to be a pioneering activity in exploring the community radio as a tool for maintaining cultural diversity of a particular region.

Keywords: *community radio, Jnan Taranga, Radio Luit, Radio Brahmaputra, cultural diversity.*

Introduction:

Community radio is a type of radio service that offers a model of radio broadcasting beyond commercial and public service. Community radio broadcasting serves geographic communities and communities' interest. The content of broadcasting is largely popular and relevant to c audience but which may often be overlooked by a local/speci commercial or mass-media broadcasters (Tilak, 2020)

.Community radio belongs to the third tier of broadcasting which is different from public and private broadcasting. A community radio station serves a defined geographical area of a village or groups of villages and is owned and managed by organization serving a given community. It is characterized by the active participation of the community in the process of creating content, research, production and broadcast of programs with an emphasis on local issues and concerns. Being a not-for-profit enterprise, the programs broadcast by the station aims for overall development and raising awareness on various socially relevant topics. The community can take part in different activities of the station like its management, designing programs, generating content etc. Though it has limited reach and access but its characteristics like decentralized and participatory medium of communication makes it a very unique and affordable to the people.

In India the concept of community radio is quite of a recent origin. The Community Radio in India became a legitimate reality after the historic Supreme Court judgment in 1995 which ruled that “airwaves are public property”. That was a eminence incident like green revolution in agriculture. Anna University, Chennai owned the first community radio station in India which was launched on february1st 2004. The station was run by the educational multimedia research centre and the progrmmes were produced by the students of Media science department of the university. According to the data of Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, there are 200 operational community radio stations in India till date. The first community radio policy allowed only the well established educational institution to set up community radio station but after a few years the government allowed the non profit organizations like civil society and voluntary organisation can also set up community radio station.

In the north eastern region of India, the concept of community radio is still at its budding stage. Krishna Kanta Handiqui State Open University took the first initiatives to lunch the first ever community radio station of entire North East. The regular broadcasting of this station was started from 20th November 2010. After that Radio Luit(2011) and Radio Brahmaputra(2015) started their functioning. Since from its inception, these three community radio stations always provided platform to all the communities of their region to maintain their own culture by doing various programs and activities.

Known for the most ethically and linguistically diverse regions in Asia, including seven sisters state, north eastern part of India is the land of unique cultural diversity. Cultural diversity means a mixture of variety of cultures within a society. In a country like India there are different cultures in different regions. The culture is completely different from north to east and the east to west. Apart from the

rest of India the North Eastern region is the native land of more than three hundred fifty ethnic groups and every group has their own unique culture. Therefore, within a small geographic area there are many different languages and cultures in North East. A place renowned for its magical beauty and bewildering diversity, North East India is the home for more than 166 separate tribes speaking a wide range of languages. Some groups have migrated over the centuries from places as far as South East Asia; they retain their cultural traditions and values but are beginning to adapt to contemporary lifestyles. Mainstream media do not provide much opportunities to maintain this unique cultural diversity of that region and also, it is not possible for a public service radio like All India Radio to reflect the desires of all the ethnic groups in a region of such diversity Therefore to retaining the rich culture of the each and every community of this area community radio can play a very important role. Through this radio stations the communities not only retain their own culture but also they passed it to their successors. Community radio can also provide a platform to these communities to showcase their diverse culture to the world.

Through this research paper the researcher will try find out how community radio can play an important role in maintaining cultural diversity in the north east India.

Objectives of the study: The basic objectives of the study are:

- a) To study the variety of cultural programs broadcast through community radio.
- b) To identify how community radio can play in maintaining cultural diversity.

Research Methodology: The researcher has implied qualitative method. Therefore the researcher took interview of the experts and the staffs like twenty five radio anchors and reporters, one production co-coordinator, one program coordinator, three technical staffs of the radio Jnan Taranga and for Radio Luit the researcher took interview with the program coordinator and some anchors. Apart from these interviews the researcher also had done her own observation. The researcher referred books and internet for secondary sources. Focus group discussion was also held among the staff members of Jnan Taranga and Radio Luit.

Data Collected: For this research paper data has been collected from primary and secondary sources. For primary data has been collected through the discussion with the experts and staffs of Jnan Taranga and Radio Luit, own observation and for secondary data they used books, journals and internet.

Background:

In India, the campaign to legitimize began in mid 1990s, soon after the Supreme Court of India ruled in its judgment of February 1995 that 'airwaves are public property'. But in the Northeastern region this operation was started in the year of 2010. Jnan Tarnaga started the journey of community radio in Assam after that radio Luit and Radio brahmaputra started their operation.

Jnan Taranga:-

The Community Radio Service of the Krishna Kanta Handiqui State Open University, named as 'Jnan Taranga' has been rendering regular broadcasting service since 20th November, 2010. The importance of radio as a broadcasting medium has remained undiminished and shall remain so in the foreseeable future. The university therefore, perceives this as a tool to serve the community. In the year 2008 the entire process of establishing a Community Radio Station at the university was initiated with the submission of application form to set up a Community Radio Station to the Ministry of Information & Broadcasting. After completion of all other formalities, such as frequency allocation, SACFA Clearance etc, the Grant of Permission Agreement (GOPA) was signed on 18th August, 2010 between the Under Secretary to the Govt. of India and the Registrar, KKHSOU. The Wireless Operating License (WOL) was issued to the university on 9th November, 2010.

The first Community Radio service of the North East, 'Jnan Taranga', is the result of the support given by the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting Government of India and Commonwealth Educational Media Centre for Asia (CEMCA), New Delhi. The University is indebted to them for their valuable help and support in setting up 'Jnan Taranga'.

The Ministry of Information and Broadcasting Government of India in association with Commonwealth Educational Media Centre for Asia (CEMCA), New Delhi organised the 6th Regional Consultation for community radio awareness at Guwahati with Krishna Kanta Handiqui State Open University as the local partner on 28th and 29th January, 2009. In connection with this occasion, the university received a temporary license of community radio for an experimental broadcast.

More than half of the programs broadcast by this community radio are based on community issues. Educational programs too cater to the educational needs of a community. Water tight compartmentalization of the educational and community based programs is not possible. So, the

programs by Jnan Taranga are a mixture of both educational and community based issues interspersed with tasteful entertainment programs.

The University aims to provide education beyond barriers to reach the unreached of the society, has launched the first community radio of the north east on 28th of January, 2009 at 90.4 MHz with an experimental broadcasting from Assam Administrative Staff College, Guwahati. The regular broadcasting of the radio was formally started on 20th of November, 2010. At present, Jnan Taranga has been broadcasting for 24 hours of which 9 hours are live and the remaining hours are repeat broadcast.

Coverage area:

Jnan Taranga is a community radio service having its coverage to 10-15 kms from the location of the station. The community radio service is entertained by the local community people. Jnan Taranga is heard and utilized by different age groups as it contains both educational and community based issues interspersed with entertainment programs. The community radio station is at present located at Housefed Complex, Dispur, Guwahati-6. The communities served are communities based in Dispur, Hatigaon, Kahilipara, Lokhra, Khanapara etc. which comprises Assamese, Minority, Nepali, Karbi, Rabha and Hindi speaking communities. The number of users of the community radio service is 8000 approx. With the availability of Jnan Taranga on internet, it can be accessed globally.

The broadcast schedule of Jnan Taranga comprises of mostly community based programs. There are programs on wide ranging subjects like health, sports, career, science, woman's issues, children, agriculture, horticulture, folk culture, entrepreneurship etc. It has broadcast various TB features which include information about the disease as well as interviews with some noted physicians to spread TB awareness among the local communities of the state. It started from 28th August 2011 on every Sunday for four consecutive months comprising of sixteen episodes under the program '*Sarir Charcha*'.

The community radio service has always attempted to promote scientific temperament of the local people. It has a regular program on science named '*BigyanBarta*'. News and current affairs are included in the program '*Sampratiki*'. A serial on Gandhiji's *My Experiments with Truth* as well as biography and autobiography of eminent persons like Birendra Kumar Bhattacharyya's '*Yiaruingam*', Lakhminath Bezboroa's '*Mur Jivan Suwaran*' have been aired under the program titled '*Jibonor Alie Padulie*' while radio transcription on some acclaimed works of eminent writers are broadcast in

the program 'Nirabadhi'. Educational programs on different subjects of the university's curriculum are broadcast regularly. Keeping in view about the different sections of the society, youth oriented program 'Yuva Taranga', 'Angana' for women and 'Sishu Tirtha' for children are broadcast. It can be mentioned here that Sishu Tirtha program which is a children program is planned, recorded and produced by two children of 10 yrs and 12 yrs respectively. 'Amar Kobologia Akashar' is a program on environment. This program is mostly Live from the field where the radio reporter visits the community and makes interaction with the people. They talk about different environmental issues and also measures to control them. 'Janajiwani' is a program on tribal people and ethnic groups of the North East. This is also a community based program. Where people share their customs, food habits, rituals and social practices. 'Parampora' is a program on folk art and culture of the state. This program is designed to revive the folk culture of the state. 'Hengul Baran' is another program on senior citizens. The reporter visits age old homes and elderly people from the community and interacts with them. There is a program on education named as 'Gyanjyoti'. This is done for the development of the community. Different kinds of vocational courses, their benefits, Right to Education etc. are discussed in this program. A program on marginalized people and lower classes of the society like rickshaw pullers, cobblers, street vendors etc. is been broadcast under the title 'Topal Topal'. There is also a program on health named as 'Sashthya Charcha' where the radio reporter interacts with a specialist doctor and discuss about a particular health hazard and the remedies. There is program to boost the tourist spots, monuments and religious places of the state. All these have been clubbed under the titled program *Chinaki Baatere Aponar Jatra*. 'Rangoni' is another program which cover the stories of NGO's and Self help group.

Manar Khabar is a regular Live Phone-in program. Listeners are provided socially relevant topics and they make calls and send SMS to the radio station to discuss and share their views and opinions about the topic. Radio drama and documentary on some serious and social issues like AIDS, female feticide, sexual assault on woman etc. have been placed in the schedule of the radio station.

Jnan Taranga has a number of innovative programs in its broadcast schedule. They include *Amar Kobologia Ekashar* which involves autorickshawalas, rickshawalas, vendors, cobblers, daily wage earners etc. *Hengul Baran* is another community program where senior citizens participate and share their experiences. *Mahanagarit Mur Jeevan* is a community program where people living in urban areas share their problems, issues and experiences. *Bhinnosuriya Anusthan* comprises people living in rural areas. They are provided a common platform to speak about their grievances; *Lecheri Butoli* is a recently concluded program on voices of the street singers, beggars and similar deprived sections of the society. *Parampora* is about festivals; it covers different ethnic and cultural occasions

of the state. There is a program for the tribes of North East named as *Janajivan*. All these community programs are broadcast regularly and most of them are covered live from the field.

Jnan Taranga has always been providing platform to uphold the folk culture of the state. It has visited various local areas of Assam and recorded traditional folk music. It has also recorded and broadcast folk songs sung by children in JNB Music School, Emon Kalyan Music School, Aarohan, SwarajJatiyaVidyalaya and other primary schools. These folk songs consist traditional Jyotisangeet, Rabhasangeet, Bhupendrasangeet etc. The community radio service has attempted to present a glimpse of such recordings in the program named Rohon. Rohon is a community based program which also includes discussion on tradition and folk culture of the state by the community people. The recordings include traditional Mohoho song of Assam, Goalparialokageet, Ghosha, HariNaam etc. which consists traditional Jyotisangeet, Rabhasangeet, Bhupendrasangeet, Goalparialokageet, Hari Naam etc. Apart from the music many talk shows as well as discussions and live phone in program were held on the culture. Where not only community people take active part but also share their knowledge, through these way they just pass their cultural heritage to their successors. Jnan Taranga provides a platform to its communities to uphold their culture. Traditional Assamese recipes, songs, short stories, traditional medical system etc were broadcast through its programs.

Community participation is very important factor in a community radio station. The motto of a CRS is to promote a community and provide them opportunities to speak about their common problems and issues. The community members should be encouraged to participate in various programs of the radio station especially in the folk music, discussions, views and opinions etc. The community members can take part in all the processes of radio programming that is from pre production to final feedback.

Broadcast timing- Jnan Taranga is broadcasting for 24 hours daily. It broadcasts for almost Live 9 hours regularly from 9 AM in the morning till 1.45 PM. The next Live transmission starts from 2 PM to 6 PM which includes popular program ‘Monor Khabor’- a Live Phone-In program on different social issues of the community people. The listeners make calls to the station and give their suggestion and valuable feedback on the programs of the station in this program. The rest of the hours is repeat transmission

Radio Luit:-

Radio Luit is the second community radio station of Assam. Renowned Gauhati University started this community radio service which was formally launched on 1st March 2011. This community

Radio station has been setup and stationed at the institute of Distance and open learning(IDOI) of Gauhati University. The station operates at 90.8 MHz. Main policy of Radio Luit is anyone and everyone from the community can participate.

More than half of the programs broadcast by this community radio are based on community issues. Educational programs too cater to the educational needs of a community. Water tight compartmentalization of the educational and community based programs is not possible. So, the programs by Jnan Taranga is a mixture of both educational and community based issues interspersed with tasteful entertainment programs.

Coverage area:

Radio Luit, is a community radio service having its coverage to 10-15 kms from the location of the station. The community radio service is entertained by the local community people. Jnan Taranga is heard and utilized by different age groups as it contains both educational and community based issues interspersed with entertainment programs. The community radio station is at present located at Gopinath Bordoloi Nagar, Gauhati University, Jalukbari. The communities served are communities based in Jalukbari, Mirza, Lokhra, etc. which comprises Assamese, Nepali, Bodo, Rabha and Hindi speaking communities.

In Radio Luit, the students, faculty members and staffs of Gauhati university take active participation. Radio Luit is broadcasting for 12 hours daily. It broadcasts daily from 8 Am to 8 PM. The broadcast schedule of Radio Luit comprises of mostly community based programs. There are programs on wide ranging subjects like health, sports, career, science, woman's issues, children, agriculture, horticulture, folk culture, entrepreneurship etc. Under the program "*Baandhabi*" the station tries to create scientific awareness about woman's health. It is a platform of the women of all the ages where they can take actively participated. "*Malini*" is the another program on women and it is prepared by women. The community radio service has always attempted to promote legal literacy of the local people. It has a regular program on legal issues named '*Bidhan Samidhan*'. There is also a program on health named as '*Shriram Adyam*' where various health issues and their remedies are discussed.

To provide updated information about new careers there is a program named as '*sangsthapan*'. News and current affairs are included in the program '*Luit Sambad*'. Anatar pathdan is a program on education. This is done for the development of the community. Different kinds of subjects, vocational courses, their benefits, Right to Education etc. are discussed in this program.

'Prajannma' is a youth oriented program. To benefit the different sections of the society 'Shirnga' for women and 'Kakoli' for children is broadcast. 'Mukoli sara' is a live phone in program where community people can share their emotions, queirs and their problems.

Radio Luit has tries to provide a platform to the communities and tribes to uphold the folk culture of the state. Like Jnan Tarnga, it has visited various local areas of Assam and recorded traditional folk music. Folk songs consist traditional Jyotisangeet, Rabhasangeet, Bhupendrasangeet , Mohoho song of Assam, Goalparialokageet, Ghosha, HariNaam, Bodo, Tiwa,Mishing, Nepal songs etc are broadcast through this Radio. Apart from the music many talk shows as well as discussions and live phone in program were held on the culture of various tribes.

Critical evaluation:

The culture of North East is completely different from rest of India. It is the land of more than three hundred ethnic tribes and communities. But there is no such platform for these communities to uphold their cultures and their issues. Community radio which is meant for the people, by the people and of the people, is somehow able to provide a platform for the communities to uphold and retain their culture and also it would also help them to share their culture with the rest of the world. In North East there are only three community radio stations. And all the three community radio station are in Assam. Due to time limitations, the researcher was not able take interviews of the staffs of the third community radio station - Radio Brahmaputra. So Radio Luit and Jnan Taranga have been considered in this research paper.

Jnan Taranga and Radio Luit – both of these two radio stations of Assam broadcast several programs. Among this various types of programs , the station gives a special space for cultural programs of the communities. One of the major program of these radio stations is the traditional folksong or traditional songs. Mostly these two radio stations covers musical programs and literary work. Jnan Taranga broadcasts one program for the tribes of North East named as *Janajiwani*. This is a regular program and most of the series of this program are covered live from the field. Through this program, the radio stations try to cover almost every aspect of a particular community, which includes their food habit, customs, music etc. *Bibhinna* is a similar program which is broadcast through Radio Luit. Through this, it also tries to cover the songs and other details of a tribe. But apart from these 2 programs, not much coverage has been done to promote the cultural diversity of North East. These two radio stations give more emphasis on music and songs.

Community radio can create a platform for the communities of Assam by introducing live phone in programs where they can share their customs, rituals, food habits with the other

communities. Through this media they can spread awareness of their unique culture. Also through this medium ,various tribes can preserve their customs and social practices and pass it on to their next generation. Community Radio station should also broadcast programs on the proverbs and medical treatment of the various tribes which are gradually becoming extinct.

In Assam,where other main stream media are not able to highlight the most of the issues of the various groups, these CR stations provide platform to showcase their various problems and also to solve issues like witch hunting, black magic etc. This is a platform where the various community can also express their views and opinion.

Conclusion:- Community radio which is only meant for a community can do many things for their own upliftment. These types of radio stations can help retaining the cultural diversity of a society and can also solve the problems of the society. Today Jnan Taranga, Radio Luit and Radio Brahmaputra are providing a unique platform to the communities to maintain their culture, by providing them various programs and a stage where they can share their unique customs, music, dramas and many more. As North East is a land of thousands of ethnic groups, these type of radio stations can go a long way in improving social conditions of the communities. Endangered communities can hope to preserve their rich social practices by the use of the community radio stations. It is essential that apart from music, songs and literature, community radio should also broadcast the programs like dramas, short stories, food culture and other interactive programs based on the social practices of the different tribes or social groups. As mainstream media has not been successful in reaching out to all communities, the community radio stations have a very important role to play in maintaining cultural diversity of the North East.

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