

Abstract No: communityradioIndia07/ABS/122

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Abstract:

The time for community radio has arrived, the time for community radio has come." These are the historic often repeated words of our Prime Minister, Dr. Manmohan Singh, who announced the fact first on the 16th November 2006 when the cabinet passed a Bill allowing three year old Ngos and Trusts to own, run and manage community radio stations in India. This significant ruling marks the democratization of the airwaves. India is the last in a long list of countries who have community radio stations running but better late then never.

As there is nothing new under the sun - that is what the Bible says - CR is not new on the planet. In the last seventy five years, it was none other than Marconi who designed the radio and the Vatican state used it to communicate with the people of that time. Today the Vatican state radio celebrates 75 years of existence broadcasting to a number of people in a plethora of languages and dialects.

If we run along with history we come across a number of radio stations being born first as rebel and clandestine radio transmissions before they got accommodated into the mainstream channel of communication against hostile governments and insecure leadership.

All radio stations began with the initiative of a pioneers, a few or a core group that influenced the country to adopt and accept community radio as a legitimate form of advocacy towards a people-centric and issue based medium. When other governments saw that the impact on peoples lives was phenomenal they laid aside the legislations that prevented the airwaves from being used earlier.

All radio stations began with one common issue. They all began with no funding and no money but the power of radio was so overpowering that this obstacle was easily overcome with determination and creativity on the part of those who desired radio to reach the masses.

India has an advantage though as it is one of the few countries that had its infrastructure set so tactfully these last fifty years with AIR, that no one realized that some thing was lacking. Thus we come to the three and the half tier stratification of radio, first AIR; then private commercial radio stations and then the half - campus radio, and now the third and climax, the plum on the pudding, rural community radio, We may call it ngo- radio when we begin, but we can expect that it will bring about a revolution at the level of information to the masses as neighbourhood radio stations or community owned radio.

The government has an ambitious goal for community radio expecting between 4,000 to 5,000 radio stations to mushroom across the length and breadth, the height and depth of the Indian grassroots. The Karnataka government has already set up its mechanism for funding their own state projects in community radio, which is an indication that the other states must follow their example and targets, if CR is to flourish before the end of this decade.

The right to Information Bill, the Millennium goals, the rights of the Child & girl-child and the United Nation's Declaration on Human Rights must reach from dusty documents in office shelves into the daily lives and praxis of the people of India and that is why community radio is relevant. Better information means a better quality of life for the voiceless of India. Community radio well run can bring about a difference in the lives of the people in our villages and countryside. This is possible - a new world is possible with community well run, managed and organized by the people, for the people, with the people and also about the people themselves. Community radio is thus the extension of a well-greased democracy. We need to hide our faces in shame that we have been so slow in releasing this, the great democracy that we boast of being in South East Asia.

Kotmale in Sri Lanka, Sagamatha in Kathmandu, Tambuli in the Phillipines are our close neighbours but they have walked far ahead of us in the community radio ethos and movement and we have a long and arduous road and journey ahead of us. We need all our resources to begin this journey where others have reached but the task is not impossible known the type of people we are the type of citizen we espouse ourselves to be. So let us put our shoulder to the plough and our wills to the wheel and begin community radio in our country and for our people, the time for community radio has arrived and the time for community radio is come. CR is here. CR is now. Come us join our fragmented country with one seamless blanket or the airwaves and let us be first Indians and be patriotic on air. May community radio unite all of us once more as Indians, as travellers and as neighbors who are friends.