

# Who Is the Community in Community Radio?

SAVITA BAILUR

Despite the enthusiasm for community-owned radio, a movement which has been steadily gaining pace since the implementation of new legislation of 2006, we are yet to find an understanding of who the community is in community radio. Through an extended case study, this analysis shows how “community participation” is constantly shifting. It presents three arguments: “community” is not a discrete entity; communities are dynamic; and communities are cognitive constructs.

Following the decision of the Supreme Court in 1996 that the “airwaves are public property”, and the implementation of new guidelines for non-governmental organisation (NGO)-owned community radio in November 2006, the movement for community radio has been rapidly gaining momentum in India. In 2011, it was estimated that 82 community radios were operational in India, with a further 121 having signed the “grant of permission agreement” with the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting.<sup>1</sup> It is frequently stated that community radio is the most relevant form of media for socially excluded groups, due to its lower technological cost (both of the station and receiver sets), low literacy levels required, and therefore, relatively low barriers to entry and participation (Girard 1992; Gumucio Dagron 2001; Noronha 2003; Pavarala 2003a; Gumucio Dagron and Tufte 2006).

For these reasons, community radio is considered a critical medium for development and social change (Melkote and Steeves 2001; Noronha 2003; Tacchi 2005; Gumucio Dagron and Tufte 2006; Pavarala and Malik 2007). The unfailing emphasis is that for community radio to be relevant, contextual and sustainable, it must be owned by the “community” (Pavarala and Malik 2007). Undoubtedly, one of the key challenges to this is that completely community-owned radio is still non-existent in India, as a Letter of Intent to the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting has to be issued by educational institutions or NGOs. A second challenge is one that we argue here is little discussed in community radio literature in India. Namely, who constitutes the community in community radio and how exactly does community participation occur? Based on eight consecutive months of fieldwork in 2006, and return visits in the ensuing three years, this paper deconstructs how community is formed and unformed, and participation is equally fluid in a donor-established community radio station, which we will anonymise here as “Avaaz”. It is argued that more acknowledgement needs to be made that community is not a discrete entity, that communities, and therefore, participation are dynamic, and finally, that communities are cognitive and performed. First, a brief overview is given of how community is seen in community radio. This is posited against the broader discussion and deconstruction of community both in sociology and development. Our three theoretical arguments are then presented. The case of Avaaz and the methodology used to research it are introduced next. Finally, we provide examples to substantiate our theoretical stance on community, and provide relevant conclusions and recommendations.

Savita Bailur ([s.bailur@lse.ac.uk](mailto:s.bailur@lse.ac.uk)) is a research associate at the London School of Economics, London.

## 1 An Overview

### 1.1 The 'Community' in Community Radio

Numerous authors write that only community participation and ownership will lead to relevant programming, sustainability of community radio and empowerment of the local community (Girard 1992; Gumucio Dagron 2001; Tacchi 2003; Tacchi 2005; Lewis and Jones 2006; Fuller 2007; Pavarala and Malik 2007). AMARC (the French acronym for the World Association of Community Radio) defines community radio itself as "a non-profit station, currently broadcasting, which offers a service to the community in which it is located, or to which it broadcasts, while promoting the participation of this community in the radio".<sup>2</sup> Fuller (2007) states that ownership and control of community media is rooted in and responsible to the communities they serve. Rodrigues states that "empowerment, conscientisation and fragmentation of power result when the men, women and youth gain access to and reclaim their own media" (cited by Tacchi 2005). According to Pavarala and Malik (2007) "community radio helps to put the community members in charge of their own affairs" (ibid: 18). Gumucio Dagron states that community radio "has to think locally first in order to consolidate cultural identity and reflect needs" (2007: 206).

Pavarala (2003b) is one of the few to provide a detailed case study on a community radio in India (*Chala Ho Gaon Mein*), but concludes

...conscious efforts should be made by all the community reporters to involve as many villagers as possible in programme production as it has been observed that those villages which have contributed to programme content also tend to be more committed audiences (p 2197).

There is an emphasis on preservation of local language, culture and identity (Gumucio Dagron 2007). Volunteers with dedication (Dunaway 2002) and collective community ownership (Salazar 2007) are called for. Pasha states that "a local radio station must be flexible and spontaneous to enable itself to function as the mouthpiece of the local community" (1997: 12). There is a particular emphasis for marginalised groups such as women and tribal groups to use community radio to give them a voice (Pavarala and Malik 2007; Aleaz 2010). Yet, within such statements lie several challenges: what (or who) is the community in community radio? Pavarala (2003a) defines community as "a territorially bound group with some commonality of interest" (p 2166). What is local language, culture and identity, as called for by Gumucio Dagron? Is collective community ownership ever possible? What are the processes by which a local radio station comes to function as the mouthpiece of the local community? In other words, what are power struggles in the community in enacting community participation? As Hocheimer (1993:473-86) asks, "who serves whom? Who speaks for which community interest? Who decides what are the legitimate voices to be heard?" (ibid: 480).

### 1.2 Debates on Community and Community Participation

Participation in community radio is specifically seen as "activities related to involving people directly in station programming, administration and policy activities" (Prehn 1991: 259). In

theory, community radio listeners are the producers, managers, directors and even owners of stations (Girard 1992: 2). As seen above, there is a tendency to view community media as owned by a holistic community. However, in the fields of sociology and development, it is argued that community is a symbolic construction rather than a given (Cohen 1985; Cleaver 2001; Cooke and Kothari 2001). Some state that the homogenisation is a form of government surveillance and control from colonial times when community was a constructed "other" to be governed (Dar and Cooke 2008). It is argued that this holistic entity conceals discrete interest groups and power dynamics such as race, religion, class, caste and gender (Gujit and Shah 1998; Botchway 2001; Cleaver 2001; Mosse 2001). Authors caution that emphasis on community participation, local empowerment and building social capital underplays local inequalities and power relations. It is also stated that in light of caste and class hierarchies in south Asian cultures, community is a particularly complicated, and perhaps unachievable, entity (Tharoor 2000; Jodhka 2001).

Sociological debates also critique the notion of a holistic culture or identity. It is argued that one's affinity to culture is relational (Featherstone 1995), while Tajfel and Turner (1979) have spoken of social identity theory, where culture is iteratively and dynamically performed against shifting reference points, including ethnicity and religion. Therefore, it is accepted that a constructivist notion of community and local culture may provide a useful shorthand, but is reductionist and static (Sihlongonyane 2009), particularly in today's globalised, dynamic "scapes" (Appadurai 1990). One may speak of the "Muslim community of Bangalore", but within this created, holistic "Muslim community", there will be further networks dependent on neighbourhoods resided in, friendships made, schools and universities attended, and so on. In short, a geographically bounded community may exist but comprises other multifarious networks.

Admittedly, there is some acknowledgement of these fractures and frictions within community, and therefore, "community participation" in community media literature. Pavarala and Malik (2007) note that there needs to be further understanding of what this term means. It has been argued that because of the connotations of a holistic community in community radio, other terms should be used such as "alternative radio" or "citizens' radio" (Lewis 1993; Tacchi 2003; Fuller 2007). Challenges in community participation in community radio have been documented, for example, attempts at appropriation by pentecostal and evangelical churches on community radio in Guatemala and Bolivia (Gumucio Dagron 2007) or between different groups of women in a female community radio in the United Kingdom, as opposed to treating "women" as a holistic group which need to be empowered (Mitchell 2002), or local politicians trying to use a UNESCO-supported community radio in Benin as their propaganda machine, having donated to it (Dlamini 2004). Instead of community media reflecting a holistic, specific, local culture then, it is more likely to fit in with Appadurai's (1990) conceptualisation of a dynamic, global "mediascape" (Jayaprakash and Shoemsmith 2007).

Similarly, it is not a given that community media should only discuss local issues – in their research, Jayaprakash and Shoemith (*ibid*) find that listeners and producers of Ooty Radio Station are not interested in representing “local culture”, for example, programmes of local methods of agricultural production because “if it is local, it is not new” (p 49).

Therefore, we put forward three theoretical elements here: first, community is not a discrete, holistic entity which will uniformly “participate” in community radio; second, communities are dynamic, and finally, communities are cognitive and performed entities. These arguments may seem self-evident, but it is believed that they are insufficiently discussed in discussion groups or policies in India, or even in community radio literature (including in past papers in this journal) where community radio is largely seen as a panacea for communities deprived of “voice”, in a battle against the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting or mass media. In the following sections, we first deconstruct these three theoretical elements, before applying the case of Avaaz.

### 1.3 Community Is Not a Discrete Entity

It has been argued that although an attractive proposition, community is not a discrete entity (Cohen 1985; Cleaver 2001; Cooke and Kothari 2001; Sihlongonyane 2009). Instead, it is more useful to turn towards how social relationships are formed within and through networks (Wellman 1983; Wellman and Berkowitz 1988; Kilduff and Tsai 2003; Marin and Wellman 2010). Actors in networks are bound together through homophily, that is the interaction with others who share similar goals and values to themselves, which itself is a subjectively interpreted criteria (Louch 2000; McPherson et al 2001). Therefore, we seek to belong to networks where we feel our interests will be served. We may even adhere to long defunct values in the desire to belong to networks (Emirbayer and Goodwin 1994) and avoid ostracisation. However, because different networks bring us different benefits, we also belong to multiple networks, and this multiple network belonging may result in conflict when the goals of different networks clash, and one goal is more important than another (Human and Provan 2000). We may belong to a community then, but multiple spider webs of relations exist within this overall grouping.

### 1.4 Communities are Dynamic

As we belong to multiple networks, the argument follows that this network belonging is always dynamic. Menjívar illustrates how networks of immigrants from El Salvador in the United States are welcoming to new immigrants, but shrink during times of financial crisis (Menjívar 2000). Kapferer (1972) analyses how at times of strike action in an Indian owned textile factory in Zambia, network allegiances shift, according to who the workers think is more important. Zachary documented goal conflict in a karate club, where the club president and club instructor disagreed over the price and type of karate offered, subsequently dividing the club (Zachary 1977). Similarly, Chatterjee (1998) shows how what appears to be a cohesive community in a Kolkata

slum is constructed of multiple networks based on actors’ self concerns and awareness of repercussions on themselves. The consequence of belonging to multiple networks then is that we are always assessing which networks bring us more value. Therefore, in terms of participation, this will also always be dynamic as actors reassess which networks they belong to, which bring value to them and whether it is worth participating or not.

### 1.5 Communities are Cognitive

Finally, we argue that communities are not static, objective entities because they, like all relationships, are mental constructs. This is illustrated by an example given by Cialdini of the financier Baron De Rothschild when petitioned for a loan by an acquaintance, who replied to the latter: “I won’t give you a loan myself... I will walk arm in arm with you across the floor of the stock exchange and you will soon have willing lenders to spare” (1989: 45). Simply the association of being with Rothschild is considered enough to make others think that the potential borrower is trustworthy. A network is temporary and ephemeral because according to Strathern, it is no more than “the tracery of heterogenous elements...or string of circumstances, held by social interactions...in short a hybrid imagined in a socially extended state” (1996: 521). A network is temporary because events may occur which weaken or strengthen it, as illustrated by Kapferer (1972). It is also temporary because it is subjective, as network construction is the result of individual cognitive maps (Weick and Bougon 1986). Network membership may not only be constructed on the basis of which networks, individuals feel they belong to, but also which they feel they do not belong to. A famous example of this is given by Gino and Ayal (2009) in a controlled experiment where students cheated more when they saw those from their own university cheating, but not when they saw those from a rival university cheating (because they felt they were above the rival university and did not follow these values). This is linked to ideas of how we perform in different social contexts, as discussed by the American sociologist Erving Goffman (1959). The next section introduces the case of Avaaz before analysing it through these three constructs: communities as networks, communities as dynamic entities, and communities as cognitive and performed constructs.

## 2 The Case of Avaaz

The case of Avaaz has been anonymised here in order to protect those who were working there at the time, although it is understood that first, it may still be recognisable from the few details given, and second, a weakness of the anonymisation is that much detail has been lost. This raises larger questions of research ethics (protecting research subjects) (Dodson and Sterling 2010) versus reliability (Hammersley 1992). These are complex issues which deserve further discussion on living research subjects such as contemporary community media (Sterling and Rangaswamy 2010), but are beyond the scope of this paper.

Avaaz is a community radio which was already narrowcasting through NGOs in 2001, when it was given support from a

donor agency in 2002. This support included a new studio, as well as four computers for IT teaching, a printer, photocopier and scanner. There was also in theory an internet connection for radio browsing, a technique previously employed in Kothmale Community Radio in Sri Lanka, where the DJ could look up information online and broadcast it over the radio (Noronha 2003), but it is unclear whether this ever worked at Avaaz. Two NGOs were involved in assisting the operationalisation of Avaaz, made anonymous here as Jaan (a development NGO) and Maatu (a media NGO). The main aim of Avaaz was to combine new and traditional technologies to produce relevant local content, in local languages to improve the quality of life for people in rural communities, especially in poorer households. In order to be sustainable, Avaaz solicited support from already existing local self-help groups (SHGs) as well as the local panchayat, and it was located in an accessible area next to the village bus stop. The management committee comprised representatives from the SHGs, and staff and volunteers were recruited from the local catchment. All the latter were intended to participate in programme design, content, production, management and evaluation of Avaaz.

## 2.1 Research Methodology

An overall extended case study approach (Burawoy 2009) was pursued while researching Avaaz. This involved a pilot visit in 2004, eight consecutive months at Avaaz in 2006, and subsequent brief research trips in 2007, 2008 and 2009. Interpreters were used in this period, because while I had a basic understanding of the local language, I was not fluent in it. Interviews recounted here are with Guru (the centre manager, employed by Jaan), Shivani (the ex-project manager, employed by Maatu and the donor), Ramesh (the subsequent project manager, employed by Maatu), and past and present staff and volunteers.

One specific analytical method was that of narrative analysis. This refrains from treating interviews as hard data, and instead sees the storytelling itself as revealing in how interviewees see themselves and others (Riessman 1993; Czarniawska-Joerges 1998). In narrative analysis, what is critical is the construction of the plot (defined as an original state of affairs, an action/event, and a consequent state of affairs or resolution) (Riessman 1993; Boje 2001). Who includes what and who omits what (a process Riessman calls selectivity). How does the passage of time influence the story (Ricoeur 1988; Levine 1997; Cunliffe et al 2004)? What is a storyteller's "cognitive resolution" (Chafe 1990) as to why something happened, and what their role was in the story? Therefore, in what way does the story result in the storyteller's self making (Bruner 2003)? For these reasons, narrative analysis complements the perspective of performance and cognitive constructs of community, as we see how interviewees use the relevant "social dialect" (Casey 1993) depending on how they see themselves, the circumstances in which they narrate their story (where the interview takes place, who else is present, how soon after the event it takes place as time itself is a subjective entity and cognitive resolution may have occurred in that intervening time, the relationship between

interviewer, interpreter and interviewee, etc) and how they wish to be perceived.

## 2.2 Networks of Participation in Avaaz

As mentioned above, Avaaz illustrated community participation by not only recruiting studio managers and volunteer staff from the village in which it was based, but also by establishing a management committee drawing from the 12 SHGs in the village. In network terminology, it could be said that this network was "goal directed" (Kilduff and Tsai 2003) with a common goal of creating a community radio constituting local content represented by local people. Shivani, an early project manager, emphasised the "access to all" mantra which made Avaaz "a casteless, genderless place". However, this goal directed network on establishing Avaaz overlaid existing networks of religion, caste and family feuds. Shivani illustrated this with an example of religion: "I did play devil's advocate and said if you want to play a prayer song, does it have to be a Hindu song every day? What about the Muslim community? And they said no, the Muslim community can come in and sing their song every Friday... this was the time of the whole Babri masjid event, there was a lot of tension". It is seen therefore how the opening prayer song is heavily influenced by religious allegiances, and there is no one holistic community, but rather a division into the Hindu and Muslim community (and the "spokeswomen" for the "Hindu community" create a holistic "the Muslim community" as it serves to justify their decision, a point which we will return to in discussing how communities are cognitive). Similarly, when Bhavana, one of the volunteers, was asked of her time at the station, and if there were any issues of caste, gender or religion, she replied "nothing like that, even the backward castes used to come, they used to mingle with us". Narratively, her inclusion of "*even* [italics added] the backward castes" implies an extension to these castes which is not usual. The distinction "*they* used to mingle with *us* [italics added]" illustrates an underlying delineation of "them" and "us".

The argument that a "goal directed" network of Avaaz overlaid existing networks was also illustrated by the example of Sheila, another Avaaz staff member in 2006. In early interviews, Sheila had stated that "giving awareness is important. Information is important. It is good to help others". Yet, later in fieldwork, still in 2006, she came subdued to work one day. Her elder sister had been suffering a difficult pregnancy and on birth, it was discovered that the baby's oesophagus and trachea were fused. She said "we talk about information on health, we are the ones who keep telling other people to listen. But none of this is worth anything if you don't have money". Sheila's comments and cognitive resolution showed how her very real family challenges affected on how much she believed the value of her work.

Finally, the idea that participation in Avaaz (particularly on programmes raising awareness about corruption or local middlemen) was influenced by actors' membership of other networks was made by Guru, the centre manager: "poorer people do not want to get involved. Because supposing they

complain about the richer people, and later the richer people offer work, they will not support them if they have complained before". Even though, according to Ramesh, the Maatu project manager, attempts were made to preserve anonymity such as polls and vox pops, people were reluctant to participate in such programmes for fear of repercussions (Emirbayer and Goodwin 1994; Chatterjee 1998), unless it was already clear they did not belong to these.

### 2.3 Dynamic Networks in Avaaz

It is, of course, understandable that between 2001, when the centre is said to have started, and 2006 (the start of our research), participation in Avaaz had morphed continuously. As illustrated by Kapferer (1972), Menjivar (2000) and Zachary (1977), network membership changes because of seminal moments. This was also the case in Avaaz. One event recounted by Shivani was that of a volunteers strike as a result of one of the SHG members storming into the centre to demand the broadcast of her as yet unedited programme. The volunteers found the episode disturbing, and went on strike until their respect and security was assured. However, in an illustration of the influence of time over narrative (Levine 1997), Ricoeur's fiction effect (Ricoeur 1988) and Riessman's selectivity (1993), it is notable that none of the volunteers mentioned this when interviewed.

A second seminal event in Avaaz was the theft of a digital camera by one of the volunteers. According to Shivani and Guru, the event was not considered particularly relevant, but the panchayat was insistent on punishment and the two boys implicated were held overnight in a cell. The camera was recovered in bushes nearby. Again, the actual circumstances surrounding this were never clear as varying narratives were told. According to Shivani, "next day, a group of 20 or so volunteers came to the centre. They said we will never volunteer for you again, and we will make sure nobody in this village ever volunteers for you again". Again, selectivity emerged when interviewed in 2006, most of the volunteers who were there at the time did not mention this. Only one, Anand, stated that "there had been some problem with Nikhil and Kamal and after that, people began leaving... when people left no one else went and the centre became quiet" (although note, the explicit mention of the theft was omitted).

However, one strong account came from Arun, a volunteer and subsequent studio manager at the time of the theft. According to him "after the camera was found, the person who stole it was reappointed. I was disappointed .... [H]e had robbed, and if he served in [Avaaz], others will learn to rob. As long as he is there, I will not go back there. We kept asking the management committee not to employ him, but they did". Arun's narrative thus illustrates a moving away from the goal directed network of Avaaz workers. He added "all the good people left at this time, first Suresh, then Divya, then Rajendra, then me... we kept asking the management committee not to employ Nikhil, but they did". The composition of the narrative illustrates his self-making (Bruner 2003): by distancing himself from the person who committed this theft, and including

himself as one of "all the good people", he shows himself as someone who no longer wished to belong to the network of Avaaz. Instead, his focus on the camera theft as a primary experience (Riessman 1993), illustrates how he uses it to place himself along with Suresh, Divya and Rajendra in the smaller network, bound by more honourable ties and stronger values against theft, against the larger network of the management committee and Nikhil.

The third seminal event, the departure of Divya, again illustrates the fracturing and changing networks of participation in community radio. Once again, the actual circumstances are not clear, due to conflicting accounts. According to Shivani, Divya wanted to leave for a higher paid job, but unable to do so, she decided to withdraw her resignation. When this was not approved, Shivani remembers that Divya began "mobilising opinions against the radio station... it came to the point where the mc [management committee] were seeing it as Guru and Shivani versus her, and they were on her side". Once more, this suggests that networks were fracturing, cliques forming, and where once an overall network working on Avaaz was constructed, now the radio station was being seen as Guru and Shivani versus Divya and the management committee. If the representatives of the mc were meant to be from the community, if they saw the radio station as "being seen as Guru and Shivani", then this would illustrate a lack of community participation (although it should be remembered that this was Shivani's own narrative: once more, the mc members interviewed were silent on this matter, except that "Guru is not from here" and therefore did not understand the village).

The fourth seminal event which again appeared to divide networks and therefore participation was the live recording of the village gram sabha which was played on the radio. At the start of the establishment of Avaaz, Ramesh from Maatu stated that "it was one of the villages where the panchayat willingly said, okay, you can take the building, you don't have to pay rent, and the people were very excited". According to him, one of the early ideas was "like fertilisers are being given for free, or a special fertiliser is being given, we broadcast that information. Something government is giving out, something that these guys don't know about and we are the link". The use of the phrase "we are the link" is particularly inoffensive, and so the idea of working together rather than against (i.e., belonging to the same network). However, in 2002, when the annual gram sabha meeting was recorded live, "the panchayat had a big fight" (Guru). Further events caused further fractures: an annual Jamma Bundi which again the radio station raised awareness about, but the panchayat "changed the date and they did not tell us" (Guru), and the 2005 live broadcast of local elections. According to Guru "we go from Avaaz and they openly say, every Prime Minister is corrupt, every chief minister is corrupt, why do you want to talk about us only?". Therefore, although initially Ramesh perceived homophily (Louch 2000; McPherson et al 2001), it is clear this is no longer the case (according to Guru and the panchayat), and in fact, the latter feels victimised as they are only part of a larger corrupt system.

Other critical events occurred during fieldwork in 2006. Through August and September 2006, the only live Avaaz broadcasts were to the outlying Ambedkar colonies, where loudspeakers had been placed. One evening in late September, a young boy mentioned that “somebody had the cables”. One of the loudspeakers was also missing. Later that evening, celebrations for the Ganesh Chaturthi festival began in the village. A pick-up truck with a loudspeaker system paraded through the local area, accompanied by much festivity. Rumours began circulating that it was the same loudspeaker which had been stolen. When asked if this was the case, one of the revellers jokingly replied “it is ours only” playing on the concept of ownership and therefore, their right to do whatever they wished with the equipment. In contrast, when Guru brought up this issue many months later, he complained “it is not their property to do that”: a marked deviation from the original rhetoric of community participation and ownership.

One final event involved Rani, one of the Avaaz staff, who was being harassed by a young boy calling her daily at the station during fieldwork. After one call, she decided to go home for the day. Her father visited in the afternoon, stating that it was no place for young women, and that Rani would be leaving. Although Rani had until now somewhat successfully negotiated multiple network belonging, two of which were the family network and work network, the goals of these two clash (Human and Provan 2000; Kilduff and Tsai 2003) and it is no longer beneficial for her to be part of the work network. Thus, even though Ramesh had stated that one of the attempts to make the centre “community owned” was its location next to the bus stop and therefore “very, very accessible”, despite the fact that we encountered Rani several times at the bus stop next to the centre, she did not re-enter the premises. This, and the above examples of the volunteers strike, camera theft, departure of Divya, division from the panchayat and loudspeaker theft lead us to the argument that community inclusion and exclusion is also a matter of perception, i.e., cognitive.

#### 2.4 Cognitive Communities in Avaaz

In the above perspectives, it has been argued that communities comprise multiple networks, and are therefore, dynamic as an individual’s aims might begin to differ from the aims of the network. However, changing network membership is not simply an action. In most cases, as argued above (Weick and Bougon 1986; Cialdini 1989; Strathern 1996; Gino and Ayal 2009), this network membership is cognitive and therefore, performed (Goffman 1959). Initially for example, most of the Avaaz workers saw themselves as distinct from the larger uneducated community. According to Guru “we are supporting the community... everything the community does”. Sheila saw herself as “giving awareness” to “others”. In 2004, Divya mentioned “the large difference between rural and urban people” and how “we are helping change that”. “Giving awareness is important. Information is important... we tell others boil water nicely, keep your house clean”. Yet, through the course of research, all three individuals showed their concerns about this goal-focused network of Avaaz. The baby’s death illustrated

this in the case of Sheila. For Divya, the turning point appeared to be when she attempted to leave. In 2004, she had placed herself in a benevolent, somewhat hierarchical position of helping others and educating the rural people to the level of the urban. However, in 2006, instead of standing apart from “the community” as she had done in 2004, she stated the reason she had been asked to leave was because she did not make “innovative programmes”. She asked “what is innovative? I live in the village – how innovative can I be? I am a simple village girl”. Thus, we can see how Divya cognitively changes positions, from outside the community, to inside it, and constructing herself as “a simple village girl” when it is helpful for her.

It is also interesting how community membership was frequently invoked to justify whether programme content was relevant or not. We saw it above when the Hindu community decides what a constructed “Muslim community” should do, even though crosscutting networks existed between these two “communities”, e.g., the SHG members were also neighbours, had children who went to the same school, were babysitters for each other, etc. Similarly, Jagadish, the first IT teacher, complained that the original content was “blade, blade, blade [boring]... am also boring here are only. So I know how the community people like, I know”. Even though Jagadish now lived in the state capital, he considered himself as belonging from there. In contrast, although Guru had lived and worked in the area for 11 years, it was often pointed out that “he was not from here” and therefore, did not understand the village, and therefore, political processes which affected participation (even though, as seen above, he had illustrated an understanding of why people were reluctant to speak out). Similarly, the acting panchayat president stated that “they only want to complain about us... nobody from that centre understands our village”, even though all the volunteers and staff (including Guru, who lived behind the centre) lived in that village or outlying ones. Thus, even though in this case the panchayat and Avaaz staff geographically constituted the same community, the first half of the definition of community used by Pavarala (2003) (“a territorially bound group”), they did not, as seen in the research, represent a community in the second half of his definition (“with some commonality of interest”), as they did not perceive themselves as having the same goals. Yet again, in an illustration of how dynamic networks, and therefore communities, are, it was observed that in the preparations for a Republic Day parade in 2007, the panchayat and the centre worked together putting differences aside, because once more this was a common goal.

Perhaps the individual who illustrated the greatest cognitive construction in and out of different networks was Guru. As seen above, he frequently distanced himself from the community, which he was merely supporting. Returning to discuss the retaining of Nikhil, he stated: “even Nikhil, I did not want to take back. Till this day, I oppose his inclusion, but community decided”. This multiple network membership, however, was not without discomfort for him. His uncertainty and attempts at cognitive resolution emerged in his narrative with statements such as “we, that is they, Jaan”, showing him

unclear as to whether he belonged to Jaan or not. However, a visit by a Reliance mobile phone salesman (to use the centre as a sales point) also illustrated Guru's attempts to benefit from this multiple network membership, shown in the following conversation:

- Reliance salesman: "What can we do for you, so that we can make this happen?" [For the centre to be an outlet for Reliance mobile phones.]
- Guru: "Give me some money, we are so happy".
- Reliance salesman: "That is there".
- Guru: "Some incentive, anything, like 50 phones we sell, we get a motorbike."  
[Guru and salesman laugh]
- Guru: "I am thinking, I am helping, getting information, ICTs to the people. So 50 phones, one bike. 100 phones, one car."
- Reliance salesman: "This will be a costly thing for us".
- Guru: "We want people to get a connection, to get ICTs".
- Reliance salesman: "So, it is not only upliftment of the community, it is also upliftment for you".  
[Guru and salesman laugh]
- Guru: "I am also community, no? I'm joking."

As seen, Guru first constructs himself as helping "the people" but when his "upliftment of the community" is gently mocked, he constructs themselves as part of the community, as it is more beneficial for him. This and the examples of the changing perceptions of Sheila, Divya, the panchayat, and how Arun chooses not to see himself as part of the Avaz

network after he believes it condones the camera theft (although note how Guru himself attributes this to the "community"), all illustrate how communities are dynamic because they are cognitive creations.

### 3 Discussion and Conclusions

It could justifiably be asked what the benefits are of such a somewhat theoretical discussion on what constitutes community in community radio. However, the main point of this paper is that there is an insufficient deconstruction of the complexities of community in community radio literature and discussion in India. Too often we see a binary distinction in community radio between an oppressive government or mass media and wholesome community radio (Pasha 1997; Mitchell and Baxter 2006). Instead, it should be understood that the processes of community participation in community radio are no different to any other participatory and democratic processes, in illustrating the cleavages, power struggles and temporary alliances which come together, but also disintegrate. For this reason, we can only emphasise the need for more detailed case studies on community radio in India, which are all too rare (see for a few examples, Aleaz (2010), Pavarala and Malik (2007) and Slater and Tacchi (2003)). An extended case method and narrative analysis were understandably a luxury of doctoral research, but if at all possible more thought needs to be given to qualitative and ethnographic style research in community media, where we listen to what people say, and therefore, their understandings of community and "participation".



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## Environment, Technology and Development: Critical and Subversive Essays

*Essays from the Economic and Political Weekly*

Edited By **ROHAN D'SOUZA**

Many political battles, policy initiatives, academic debates and our understanding of the world in general have been shaped by the ideas that have developed around the concepts of environment, technology and development. How do these concepts influence each other? How have they subverted established ideas and dogmas? How have they developed over time and what are its varied meaning? This volume brings together writings across disciplines, perspectives and ideologies that answer these questions, map the main conceptual lines and identify the points where they converge and diverge. The articles have appeared over the past four decades in the *Economic and Political Weekly*. The introduction provides a brief chronological overview of the theoretical underpinnings that led to the emergence of the current notion of environmental development. The chapters are selected and arranged in a non-linear manner that allows the reader to get a sense of the wide-ranging debates. The essays see the progress of technology in its political context and in relation to the social and environmental consequences it engenders. They show how technology is meshed with politics as is environment with development, and how agriculture is woven with ecology. The transfer of resources from the marginalised to the empowered groups and the crucial issue of spatial politics where space is constituted, assembled and forged by the economically powerful are also discussed. This volume will provoke, educate, stimulate and inform the lay reader and specialist alike.

**Authors include**  
T R Thankappan Achari • Manshi Asher • P A Azeez • Jayanta Bandyopadhyay • Charul Bharwada • Philippe Cullet • Mahasveta Devi • Sumita Gupta Gangopadhyay • Hiren Gohain • Rahul Gupta • Barbara Harriss-White • L C Jain • Annu Jalais • Ashwin Kumar • John Kurien • Vinay Mahajan • Arjun Makhijani • Dinesh Mohan • Dipti Mukherji • Chandrika Parmar • K Krishna Prasad • P P Nikhil Raj • M V Ramana • C H Hanumantha Rao • Amulya Kumar N Reddy • Sunali Rohra • Vandana Shiva • Nigel Singh • Sudha Srivastava • Geetam Tiwari • G Vijay • Gregor Meerganz von Medeazza • Shiv Visvanathan • Arundhati Roy Choudhury.

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## NOTES

- 1 Community Radio India (2011). "Community Radio India: Sharing Capacity, Empowering Communities" retrieved on 5 February 2012, from <http://communityradioindia.org/>.
- 2 AMARC (2011). "World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters", retrieved on 4 March 2011, from <http://www.amarc.org>.

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