

# COMMUNITY RADIO AND TRIBAL EMPOWERMENT: EVALUATING THE ROLE OF VANYA RADIO IN PARTICIPATORY DEVELOPMENT IN MADHYA PRADESH

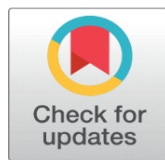
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## ABSTRACT

Owned and managed by communities, community radio stations are considered forums for participatory community dialogue that are essential to development and social change initiatives (Fraser & Restrepo-Estrada, 2002). Through these dialogues, the communities are able to identify their problems and seek solutions through collaborations in line with their local needs. With these theoretical departure points, this study seeks to investigate the role of Vanya Radio – community radio stations set up by the Tribal Welfare Department of the Government of Madhya Pradesh - in the developmental processes at the grassroots level. Presently, these radio stations are operational in eight tribal-dominated areas of the state with a view to facilitating dialogues and deliberations among the communities around the local issues that affect their lives and hence collectively work towards addressing them. This study tries to identify the impact of Vanya Radio in their communities, to how they deploy the overall communication among the target audience. This study also identifies the current status and measures the reach and accessibility of the Vanya Community Radio Stations through the survey, FGD and interview; this paper is only based on the pilot study on Vanya Community Radio Station in Chicholi, Betul, MP.

**Keywords:** Impact Assessment, Vanya Radio, Community Radio, Tribal

## 1. INTRODUCTION

India is home to various tribal communities, each possessing its own art forms, values, culture, customs, folk communication practices, festivals, and historical traditions. The standard of living among these tribes also differs according to geographical conditions and distinct cultural beliefs. These tribal communities mainly reside in isolated regions of the country; however, development and urbanisation have also influenced them. They have their own traditional methods of communication and awareness generation, but over time, most tribal societies in the country have

remained marginalised from the democratic mainstream. Problems such as poverty, illiteracy, malnutrition, and superstition continue to exist within these communities, creating obstacles to their development.

In this context, mass communication has also influenced tribal communities. For any kind of development and social transformation, democratic and decentralised media systems within participatory communication processes can play a significant role in empowering communities living on the margins of society (Pavarala & Malik, 2007). In India and many other developing countries, community radio stations are gaining recognition as communication platforms that embody the characteristics of democratic and participatory media (Patil, 2019). Evidence from across the country demonstrates the potential of radio to promote community participation (Sen, 2003).

Community radio stations can play a crucial role in addressing the issues of the poor and giving a voice to the voiceless (Pavarala, 2015). Tacchi (2009) described community radio as a platform that gives people a voice in decision-making processes that affect their daily lives. Similarly, Noronha (2000) emphasised that community radio helps the “information poor” understand issues that are important to their lives and encourages them to engage with their surrounding realities.

Owned and managed by the community, community radio stations are considered platforms for participatory community dialogue, which are essential for initiatives related to development and social change (Fraser & Restrepo-Estrada, 2002). Through these dialogues, communities can identify their own problems and collectively seek solutions according to local needs.

With these theoretical foundations, the present study attempts to examine the role of Vanya Radio, established by the Tribal Welfare Department of the Government of Madhya Pradesh, in development processes. At present, these radio stations are functioning in ten tribal-dominated regions of the state with the objective of facilitating dialogue and discussion among communities on local issues affecting their lives, and thereby collectively working toward their solutions

For a participatory communication process aimed at any development and social change, democratised and decentralised media systems can play a key role in empowering the communities living on the margins of society (Pavarala & Malik, 2007). In many developing countries, including India, community radio stations are gaining acceptance as communication mediums possessing the traits of such democratised and participatory media platforms (Patil, 2019). There are evidences available in many pockets of the country that indicates the potential of radio as a medium that can foster community participation (Sen, 2003).

Pavarala (2015) feels that community radio stations can play a vital role in addressing the issue of ‘voice poverty’, which Tacchi (2009) describes as a situation in which people do not have a say in the decision-making processes around the issues that affect their everyday lives. In a similar take, Noronha (2000) emphasises the essentiality of community radio to allow the ‘information poor’ to understand the issues that are critical to their lives and work around them.

Owned and managed by the communities, community radio stations are considered forums for participatory community dialogues that are essential for development and social change-related initiatives (Fraser & Restrepo-Estrada, 2002). Through these dialogues, the communities are able to identify their problems and seek solutions through collaborations in line with their local needs. With these theoretical departure points, this study seeks to investigate the role of Vanya Radio—community radio stations set up by the Tribal Welfare Department of Government of Madhya Pradesh - in the developmental processes at the grassroots level. These radio stations are operational in eight tribal-dominated areas of the state, intending to facilitate dialogues and deliberations among the communities around the local issues that affect their lives and, hence, collectively working towards addressing them.

## **2. ABOUT VANYA AND VANYA RADIO**

Vanya is an organisation established on March 25, 1980, by the Tribal Welfare Department of Government of Madhya Pradesh for the promotion and conservation of tribal culture and traditions and also to disseminate the welfare schemes of the state government to the tribal communities residing in the remote areas. Since its establishment, Vanya has regularly organised events for tribal communities to showcase the arts, crafts, and other cultural heritage of tribal artists from various parts of the state, including traditional dance forms, paintings, artefacts, natural medicines, and food items. Of late, with a view to ensuring the sustainability of tribal arts and culture, the organisation has started online classes in which tribal artists can teach their various forms of art to the outside world.

As part of this Government of Madhya Pradesh endeavour, Vanya Radio was assigned the responsibility of setting up and running community radio stations in the state's tribal areas, during which eight radio stations have so far been established in different districts. These radio stations are:

- 1) Vanya Community Radio, Bhabra, Alirajpur
- 2) Vanya Community Radio, Khalwa, Khandwa
- 3) Vanya Community Radio, Nalchha, Dhar
- 4) Vanya Community Radio, Chanda, Dindori
- 5) Vanya Community Radio, Sesaipura, Sheopur
- 6) Vanya Community Radio, Chicholi, Betul
- 7) Vanya Community Radio, Bijori, Chhindwara
- 8) Vanya Community Radio, Meghnagar, Jhabua

Later, two more radios were launched with the same objectives as the previous community radio.

### 3. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Dhanraj Patil (2019) discussed participatory communication for rural development through community radio stations in rural India in the *Asia-Pacific Journal of Rural Development* (July 2019). After conducting case studies of Sangam Radio and Radio Bundelkhand, the study highlighted that this is an era in which alternative communication media, such as community radio, have been accepted as tools for a participatory approach to rural development in developing countries like India.

Mohammed Faisal Amadu and Amin Alhassan (2018) examined Radio Gakii in the Saboba District as part of their study on community radio and rural development in Northeastern Ghana. The study focused on the relationship between community radio broadcasting and community development. It particularly analysed the style and format of Radio Gakii's programs to understand the unique role of radio in development activities.

B. Natarajan (2013), in the article titled *Community Radio: Possibilities and Challenges*, studied the role of community radio and stated that it plays an important role in generating social awareness within its service area.

Ravindran Ritu and N. Muhammad Ali (2023) conducted a study titled *Tribal Participation in Content Development for Community Radio: A Case Study of Radio Mattoli*. The study arrived at the following findings:

Community participation is ensured at all stages of radio production, including pre-production, production, and post-production.

Special attention is given to engaging target audiences, including farmers, women, children, and tribal communities.

Tribal programs provide marginalised communities with a platform to present their perspectives on issues affecting them.

Radio Mattoli plays a significant role in preserving and promoting tribal language and culture.

The preservation of local dialects becomes possible through the active participation of the respective tribal communities.

### 4. BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

As a part of the pilot study for our research project titled *Impact Assessment of Vanya Radio: A Tribal Community Radio Initiative of the Government of Madhya Pradesh*, we first visited the Vanya Publication - a wing of the Tribal Affairs Department of the state situated at Shyamala Hills, Bhopal, to meet the authorities and officials engaged with the work of Vanya Radio stations. Based on the discussion with them, we figured out the potential locations for us to carry out our pilot studies to assess the feasibility of the study and envision future courses of action. It was found that the three Vanya Radio stations set up at Jhabua, Alirajpur and Betul were better options for the purpose of the pilot study. Later, looking at the logistical and travel-related feasibility, Vanya Community Radio, Chicholi, Betul, was selected for the pilot study. The other two community radio stations at Jhabua and Alirajpur were dropped due to some logistical issues.

**Table 1**

| <b>Table 1 List of Vanya Community Radio Stations in Madhya Pradesh</b> |  |             |              |                           |   |
|---|--|-------------|--------------|---------------------------|---|
| <b>S. No.</b>   | <b>Vanya Community Radio Station</b>             | <b>Year</b> | <b>Tribe</b> | <b>Language</b>           | <b>Management</b>                             |
| 1   | Bhabra, Alirajpur                                | 2011        | Bhil         | Hindi and Bhili           | Government Excellence Higher Secondary School |
| 2   | Vanya Community Radio, Khalwa, Khandwa           | 2011        | Korku        | Hindi and Korku           | Government Excellence Higher Secondary School |
| 3   | Vanya Community Radio, Nalcha, Dhar              | 2013        | Bhil         | Hindi and Bhili           | Government Excellence Higher Secondary School |
| 4   | Vanya Community Radio, Chand, Dindori            | 2013        | Baiga        | Hindi, Baigani, and Baiga | Diksha Welfare and Cultural Society           |
| 5   | Vanya Community Radio, Sesaipur, Sheopur         | 2012        | Sahariya     | Hindi and Sahariya        | Government Excellence Higher Secondary School |
| 6   | Vanya Community Radio, Chicholi, Betul           | 2012        | Gond         | Hindi and Gondi           | Government Excellence Higher Secondary School |
| 7   | Vanya Community Radio, Bijori, Chhindwara        | 2012        | Bharia       | Hindi and Bharia          | Government Excellence Higher Secondary School |
| 8   | Vanya Community Radio, Meghnagar, Jhabua         | 2013        | Bhil         | Hindi and Bhili           | Adivasi Chetna Shiksha Seva Samiti            |
| 9   | Vanya Community Radio, Baihar, Balaghat District | 2013        | Baiga        | Hindi, Baigani, and Baiga | Government Excellence Higher Secondary School |
| 10  | Tantya Bhil, Jhabua                              | 2022        | Bhil         | Hindi and Bhili           | Government Excellence Higher Secondary School |

The study will employ a mixed method approach, adopting qualitative and quantitative data collection methods to gather and analyse relevant data. Such methods would include:

- Field visits and observation of the functioning of the radio stations
- In-depth interviews of the people working with the radio stations using interview guides
- Focus group discussions (FGDs) with the community members working with the radio stations and the departmental officials taking care of the radio stations using FGD guides and FGDs among listeners
- The survey method has been applied among the communities using questionnaires.
- This study used Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) formula to determine sample size selection.

#### **The Objectives of the study:**

- To find out the status of the Vanya Community Radio Stations
- To measure the reach and accessibility of the Vanya Community Radio
- To examine the level of participation of the communities in content production/operations.
- To study the types of content being produced at these radio stations.

## **5. DATA COLLECTION**

During the data collection involved conducting interviews with the staff members of the radio station, organising a focus group discussion with community members in one village, engaging in informal face-to-face conversations with some community members in two villages, and administering a small survey.

## **6. ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF THE COLLECTED DATA**

As discussed above, the data were gathered through interviews with the coordinator and assistant of Vanya Community Radio and through discussions (both formal and informal) with community members from nearby villages regarding overall functioning, programming, content production, listenership, etc. The Gond tribe dominates the Chicholi

area of the Betul district of Madhya Pradesh. It is due to this dominance of the tribal population in the area that the community radio station was set up. This area has a tremendous tribal culture, and it is an area beside the national highway. Discussion with Ajay Dhurve, community radio coordinator, and Neelam Gohiya, assistant of the community radio, gives an accurate insight into the overall scenario of the Chicholi community radio.

The discussion has revealed community radio programs, infrastructure, and the economic aspects of community radio-related issues. A total of 10 programs are broadcast from early morning, 6 am to 11 am, and that same program is repeated (repeat broadcast) in the evening from 05 pm to 10 pm. These programs are equally distributed in Hindi and Gondi dialects. Community radio is a government initiative; they have some working model; it's a community-based program and works without profit.

This community radio station covers an approximately 15 KM radius area, and it covers 70 villages; they don't have any recordist for the outdoor program. One of the recordists was working with this community radio, but he left the job after two years due to some economic issues. There is no mechanism for feedback from the community radio. Most of the staff of community radio struggle with the financial crisis. They get a remuneration of 10,000 to 11,000 per month (MP government collectorate rate), which is not enough for the expenditure of a family.

As per the discussion, it has been found that there are some programmes which are popular amongst the villagers. These programmes are Lok Ranjini, Sukhi Jivan, Kisan Vani and Sthaniya Varta.

**Table 2**

| Table 2 Analysis of Data of Vanya Community Radio Stations |  |   |
|--|--|---|
| S. No.   | Question   | Response  |
| 1.   | Language distribution of the program.                      | The Gondi dialect is broadcast in 50% of the shows, and in 50% of the shows, Hindi is broadcast.  |
| 2.   | Advertisement broadcasting                                 | Only government advertisements are broadcast.   |
| 3.   | Range of the community radio                               | 15 KM, approximately 70 villages.   |
| 4.   | Outdoor recording  | Field recordist (field recordist has not been working since 2018).  |
| 5.   | Process of feedback  | With the assistance of the field recordist (who is not available).  |
| 6.   | Duration of broadcast                                      | Five hours in the morning and five hours in the evening.  |
| 7.   | Remuneration for field recording                           | average 200 Rs per program, which also depends upon the duration of the program.  |
| 8.   | Remuneration (scale)                                       | Collectorate rate.  |
| 9.   | The most popular program in Vanya Community Radio Chicholi | 1. Lok Ranjini – Gondi<br>2. SukhiJivan – Gondi and Hindi<br>3. Kisan Vani – Gondi and Hindi<br>4. Katha Kahani – Gondi and Hindi<br>5. SthaniyaVarta – Gondi and Hindi |
| 10.  | Pre-recorded program                                       | The Bhopal head office decides it.  |

The study covered four villages Singraikhapa, Birpur, Nasirabad and Sitadongri. Approximately 89 people participated in the survey from these villages. Most villagers said they hardly listen to the radio and do not listen to this Vanya or any other radio station accessible in the area. Some of the reasons for such a lack of interest towards radio are:

- They have a lot of content for entertainment and information available on their smartphones at their fingertips.
- The content broadcasted on the Community Radio is not entertaining.
- Most women like to watch television.
- Most of the villagers were connected to the radio during the initial days when radio was set up in the Chicholi, but after 3 to 4 months, their interest slightly declined. The main reason they mention is the availability of the technology and program content.
- Some of the respondents also cited that they were listening to the radio, but after the availability of the mobile, they have many options for the variety of the content.
- Few of them who participated in the survey mentioned that once in a while, they tune in to the radio to listen to the Gondi songs but barely listen to the other programmes.

- Some of the villagers revealed that they are not connected to community radio due to the lack of communication between the community radio stations and the villagers. Further, they said that we hardly listen to the community radio program due to the need for more information on the schedule of the community radio program and technical issues.
- One of the respondents cited that there is no benefit from community radio because there is only one-way communication; this mechanism is only for the government to promote their image, but there is no provision through community radio for the villagers to ventilate their problems.
- Further, he underlined that there is no social or economic profit for the Gond tribes through the Gond folk song.
- After the villagers' claim, the community radio coordinator explained the community radio's working style, and they agreed that community radio provides information to the villagers. Still, there is no way of taking their concerns to the government and administration through the radio.
- Some of the community members felt that there needed to be more creativity in the radio content and that the same programmes have been run for years, sometimes making it less interesting or enjoyable for the listeners. There is a need for some innovation and novelty in the programme and content production.
- One of the respondents highlighted that the community radio has, to some extent, helped them understand the Hindi language, while earlier, they only used their local Gondi dialect.

## 7. CONCLUSION

Based on the preliminary investigation, Vanya radio stations are not popular with the community. This indifference toward radio programming was attributed to various factors. Notably, the prevalence of smartphone access providing abundant entertainment and information emerged as a primary reason. Moreover, a considerable portion of the female population preferred television for audio-visual content, gradually diminishing their radio interest over three to four months. Participants highlighted the need for more communication between the radio stations and the locals, leading to a disconnect and minimal engagement. They perceived community radio as a unilateral tool without provisions for their concerns, emphasising the absence of tangible benefits for the Gond tribes. Despite the coordinator's acknowledgement of the radio's informative role, the absence of a mechanism for the community's voices to reach the authorities was recognized. Calls for increased creativity in content production and a shift from repetitive programming echoed the need for fresh, engaging content. One positive aspect noted was the radio's role in aiding language comprehension, mainly Hindi, for those primarily reliant on the local Gondi dialect. These insights underscore the multifaceted challenges community radio faces in engaging and serving the diverse needs of the local population, emphasising the necessity for innovative programming and inclusive communication strategies to bridge the gap and foster meaningful community engagement.

## CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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