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Constructions of Community in Communication Research

A Study of Radio Broadcasting in India

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Introduction

The term 'Community' haunts us so much in our day to day life that it becomes a marker for our existence. No matter how big the shape and size of our association, we always aspire and recreate the symbols of community life for our existence. We all want to belong to communities, be it communities of choice, symbolic communities, imaginary communities, virtual communities and even, the places where we have lived turn out, in the modern world, to be places from which we have to expel other people who are also living there.

Sociological contributions have immensely contributed to understand the origin, growth, dynamics and complexity of the term(Tonnies,1957; Bell and Newby, 1972; Redfield,1947). Furthermore, Sociologists like Nisbet(1966: 47) opines it as 'most fundamental and far-reaching' concept of sociology'. However, Sociologists have not arrived at a consensus of the exact meaning of the term. Brint(2001) comments that even though community remains a potent symbol and aspiration in political and intellectual life, however it has passed out of Sociological analysis. As Hillery (1955) collected 94 distinct definitions of the concept, these definitions sometimes complement and contradict at other. This state of uncertainty can be best captured in Abercombie et.al's (1994;75) contributions, highlight it as 'one of the most elusive and vague in sociology and without any specific meaning'. Inspite of these contributions, the most compelling has been the possibility of regenerating community through mediated forms of communication and in the literature of communication studies(Park, 1922,1929; Merton,1949; Janowitz,1952; Stamm,1985). Specially, with the emergence of Press, the balance between the communities constructed through experience of the face to face , the continuities of an immobile society and the sharing of physical space and material culture, and those constructed through what might call the imaginary, has been shifting. As Anderson(1983)points out that with the introduction of press, there was a creation of invisible public and the emergence of an abstract and abstracted community. The news paper intensified the process and created a sense of reading public and community in the realm of symbolic. Thus, communities are both materialistic as well as symbolic in their composition. This has helped in constructing community in the public texts and

symbols of everyday life, in the mediated meanings of broadcast and electronic culture(Silverstone, Roger,1999).

Although, the term community has caught the collective imagination and interest among communication scholars as much as it was during the earlier years of sociology, the main difference seems to be the redirection of emphasis from geographic place to a feeling or sense of collectivity in the realm of symbolic.

My paper attempts to capture the construction of 'Community' in Indian Communication research. This paper attempts to trace the genealogy, interrogates its usage in Indian communication studies and situates its contemporaneity in the present context. The paper has four sections: In the first section, attempt has been made to locate various discourses pertaining to 'community' during the introduction of Radio Broadcasting in India. This section captures the interpretative ability of community. Also, it reflects the communitarian character of community. In the second section, the paper examines marginalisation of community and identity at the cost of 'nation' and 'state'. Communities are to be improvised to suit the requirements of nation state. Community becomes disaggregated sets of variables so that planned development and innovation can be introduced inside the communities. The third section attempts to bring both the conflicting strands together for a creative conversation and develops a typology for understanding community. Finally, the concluding section summarises the arguments and examines the implications of the interface between community and media.

I

Community interpreted

'Community' received significant attention but developed amidst two conflicting discourses during the introduction of Radio Broadcasting in India. One, that denied the premise that there was a national audience, a national culture, or a national politics and neither the role of radio was to create them. Hence the need to cater to the subcontinent's fractured landscape, which resulted in village broadcasting or community listening to reach the so called 'primitive India'. The other discourse did not subscribe to the earlier views, neither had access to the Radio Broadcasting, however, looked at community as a larger part of nation and indeed, agreed that there was a

national audience, national culture and national polity that resided in village India.

Village Broadcasting or community listening was promoted not by colonial state machinery, whose chief members had little interest in building costly infrastructure for the natives but by romantic champions of India tradition. These were the aging British civilians and Army officers and their wives who settled back in England. For them India always remained as a nostalgia with sweet memories of the rustic countryside. Some of these proponents included dignitaries from the principalities and those appointed to the offices of the Colonial government. The most active among them was Frank Lugard .Brayne, a civil servant who spent his career not in the Delhi secretariat but in the mofussil(Mason,1954).

Although village broadcasting was but one feature of a broader development project which sought material improvement within the traditional confines of village life, reflecting a paradigm shared by the Colonialists and the Gandhians alike. Yet, after considering the possibility of sponsoring community listening scheme at the time, the Indian Broadcasting company was chartered, the central government departments decided such schemes were impractical and too costly experiments. Delhi officials were hardly enthused about the prospect of independent systems dotting the countryside, especially with the IBC(Indian Broadcasting Company) in such a tenuous position. Since the rural systems fell under the rubric of education, a subject transferred to the quasi representative provincial ministries under the government of India Act of 1919. The central government could not legally disallow them.

Village broadcasting or community listening was intended to bolster and sustain what its proponents conceived as the authentically, primitive India. The new mass medium- the great boon of modern science as one enthusiast put it-“ was to be employed to keep the Indian peasant content in his natural habitat. Instead of families gathering hearth-side around radios in the privacy of their own homes - the rural listeners would congregate in the village square or headman's court-yard to hear official uplift programming in the local vernacular blaring from a community receiver that carried no other frequencies. Instead of flooding the rural airwaves with metropolitan influences, the radio was to offer a utopian image of the village brought to its potential with clean water, fat cattle, sturdy crops and vaccinated children. If only Delhi Fort could be set up as a broadcasting station, the district officer Frank Lugard Brayne fantasized in 1929, there could be immediate contact with every village for one hundred miles. Instructions, announcements, warnings of pests and epidemics, all sorts of news, informations and advice, and

all the hundred and one things one wants to tell the villagers……would be possible"(Brayne,1929). With the help of romanticist's effort, a handful of experimental community listening systems were established in the early thirties on the rural outskirts of the Northern cities of Lahore, Delhi and Peshawar, in southern Madras, in the Midnapore district of Bengal and in the Princely state of Hyderabad.

The other discourse viewed village India as the epicenter of politics as well as mobilization center for the freedom struggle movement. Populist nationalism virtually monopolized on the subcontinental scale by Gandhi and the Indian national congress, claimed to represent the rural majority as the arbiter of political legitimacy. Mobilisation at the village level was the core of Gandhi's political and social life for a national reformation. " Our cities are not India" he declared. " India lives in her seven and half lacs of villages and the cities live upon the villages." (Hingorani,1966). Though he could hardly disinherit his urban political colleagues in his programme for constructive work, Gandhi enjoined them to return to the villages both to teach and learn from their rural counterparts.(Gandhi,1929). Gandhi's romanticism of the village and village communities is well known, as is his view that cities were places of evil and corruption. On the contrary, Nehru thought of the village as a place of backwardness and ignorance. In a letter to Gandhi in 1945, Nehru wrote "I do not understand why a village should embody truth and non-violence. A village, normally speaking, is backward intellectually and culturally and no progress can be made from a backward environment"(Parel et.al 1997). Not only was the village a place of backwardness and ignorance, but British rule had also robbed it of its organicity and vitality; it had become "progressively a derelict area, just a collection of mud huts and odd individuals".(Nehru,1946). Nehru added, the village held something of value, "But still the village holds together by some invisible link and old memories revive". Indeed, despite his distaste for the village and for the hierarchical social structure it represented, Nehru's The Discovery of India also contains a powerful sense that the countryside was an authentic symbol of India. Thus, recalling the effect of Gandhi on the Congress and nationalist mobilisation, he wrote, "He (Gandhi) sent us to the villages, and the countryside hummed with the activity of innumerable messengers of the new gospel of action. The peasant was shaken up and he began to emerge from his quiescent shell. The effect on us was different but equally far-reaching, for we saw, for the first time as it were, the villager in the intimacy of his mud-hut… We learnt our Indian economics more from these visits than from books and discourses. The emotional

experience we had already undergone was emphasised and confirmed(Nehru, 1985,p.361-362). Gandhi's conception of the village community as the 'real India'. It is clear from the appendix of Hind Swaraj, which mentions, among other 'authorities', Henry Maine's text on village communities, that Gandhi drew on European writings in formulating his notion that India resided in its villages. This, in itself, is not significant. But it assumed importance when considered in conjunction with his conception of the village. In 1945, Gandhi outlined his vision of the village in a letter to Nehru, "While I admire modern science, I find that it is the old looked at in the true light of modern science which should be reclothed and refashioned aright. You must not imagine that I am envisaging our village life as it is today. The village of my dreams is still in my mind. After all every man lives in the world of his dreams. My ideal village will contain intelligent human beings. They will not live in dirt and darkness as animals. Men and women will be free to hold their own against any one in the world. There will be neither plague, nor cholera nor smallpox; no one will be idle, no one will wallow in luxury... It is possible to envisage railways, post and telegraph offices etc. For me it is material to obtain the real article and the rest will fit into the picture afterwards.(Gandhi, 1945,p. 150-51).

Thus, the evocation of Real India validated the claims to trusteeship of both the colonial and anti-colonial lobbies that employed them. On this spectrum the rural broadcasting enthusiasts were among the least reformed in their adherence to impartial trusteeship, scorning nationalism but also tending to dismiss the government of India's constitutional reforms as irrelevant to the villages.(Darling, 1934). However, the colonialists hailed the peasants as the backbone of India and the chief creator of its wealth, who deserved to be saved from a drab and hard life.(Hardinge,1934) The Colonialists regarded the lure of the towns as political threat as well as a force leading to community disintegration, and worried that already younger villagers, especially the literate young men, find the village so dull a spot that they resort in increasing numbers to the towns for their amusements. Radio programming for the localities would replicate the idioms of village speech; these particularities, then demanded a multiplicity of discrete and locally operated stations.(Srinivasan,1935). As C.F. Strickland(1934), who made his career guiding the official village Co-operative movement, warned that combining a broadcasting service for town and country would lead to an irresistible urbanization of the rural programme.

Community broadcasting was but one feature of a broader development project which sought

material improvement within the traditional confines of village life, reflecting a paradigm shared by the guardians and Gandhians alike(Fox,1989). But the most influential pioneer of British sponsored rural development and community broadcasting was frank Brayne, who as district Commissioner of Gurgaon district in Punjab in the 1920s single handedly masterminded the official model of village uplift. Brayne's uplift project was a progenitor both of a post-war colonial development scheme and India's green Revolution of the 1960s and the 70s. Yet Brayne's reforming energies were just as powerfully directed at the social ills of rural life, particularly what he saw as the undervalued role of women and the effects of poor hygiene. Brayne insisted that traditional governing organizations be conserved. Lawmaking and decisions for the collective good were to remain in the panchayats, local administrative councils manned by village leaders. The village must be approached with respect and humility(Brayne,1937). In many ways Brayne's village reform project resembled Gandhi's own. But while Gandhi emphasized self sufficiency and moral regeneration, represented philosophically as well as materially by hand -spinning and khadi production, Brayne stressed a healthy measure of peasant gratitude to government. The two personalities were well aware of their competing yet common visions. But Gandhi did not approve Brayne's blue print of village reform simply because it could not be successful or legitimate when conducted under the auspices of the imperial government.

While broadcasting languished in the Delhi departments , the romanticists pushed on with their ambitions to implant the radio in village soil. Lending the campaign influence and financial assistance in London was the Indian village welfare association, whose prominent membership included Lady Irwin , wife of the ex-viceroy amongst other dignitaries.

From the start the design and implementation of the village loudspeakers, rather than the programming radiating from them, was deemed the critical determinant of the experiment's success or failure. While problems of keeping batteries charged and dust from settling were real and chronic, the preoccupation with the broadcasting apparatus had ideological as well as pragmatic dimensions. The rural broadcasting was heard out in the open as the necessary correlate of having but a single receiver with a belief about the primacy of public space in rural India. On the contrary, private listening was promoted in England as a domesticating check against the mob mentality.

The selection of custodians for the village radio equipment demonstrated how

broadcasting was channelised through established imperial constructs of peasant India. With limited government field staff to protect the equipment and lend broadcasting an official air, the matter of custodians was considered a crucial one. Authorities in Delhi had suggested early on that the supervisory role should go to the most obvious representatives of the state, the police, but by the 30s this affiliation was clearly prudent. Traditional village leadership was sought as the custodian for the community set. The list was very comprehensive which identified the school teachers, shopkeepers, zamindars, lambardars and the well- to- do khans for the job.

The Colonialist's healthy respect for peasant audiences and their venerated elders made broadcasting appear to be an unproblematic exercise of paternalistic good will. But by nature broadcasting was a unidirectional mode of communication; what the villager heard was a determined from a distant, unseen location, the transmitting station. Advocates of rural broadcasting conceived of this matter as benign, their role as programmers being straightforwardly in the best interest of their audience and their knowledge of what peasants needed and wanted complete.

Belying this warm intimacy, the design of the receiver indicated how little control villagers had over their relationship with broadcasting that they were to be a passive and perhaps not even an assenting audience. As one of the designers, Hardinge boasted of its impenetrability, of the locking of the set at the time of its installation so that all working parts are entirely inaccessible. Outwardly the set was supremely simple, only a key whole and a switch marring its exterior. Internally, it was a masterpiece of construction, with controls to fix the volume and the wavelength reception, the latter a clear recognition that other broadcasts - distant Russian programs for instance- were potentially available to Indian listeners. The machine was intended to contribute to a healthy mystification of broadcasting suited to the hamlet mentality, or as Hardinge put it, the village was simply provided with a box which speaks when the headmen turns a key. In essence, the report on broadcasting admitted, broadcasting was forced upon the villager.

It did not follow that villagers were entirely compliant. Hardinge's account of the Peshawar experiment gave evidence of the skepticism with which even presumably loyalist communities greeted the new medium. At least some villagers associated the new technology with the surveillance operations of the state. At some places considerable suspicion was shown as to our intentions. Hardinge admitted people wondered whether we proposed installing the village

receivers in order that we could listen to what the villagers were saying, or whether the intention was to enable us to communicate with our aeroplanes. Broadcasting was perceived to be yet another means by which the government would milk the rural cultivator. It had been anticipated that villagers would eagerly subscribe to the service through contributions toward the costs of the set and renewable license, but Punjabi peasants, burdened by the expense of rural uplift, expressed relief that at least they were not required to purchase community loudspeakers.

When broadcasting had become more common place in India, some still feared broadcasting as a scheme to raise taxes. Nor were the moral sensitivities of the broadcasting agents fully trusted. ' when we wanted to climb roofs in order to erect an aerial, we were suspected of wishing to peer into the houses of neighbours and so violate the purdah of their womenfolk, Hardinge recalled.'

" In the inaugural broadcast from the Peshawar service, the governor Sir Ralph Griffith spoke 'in fluent pusthu' on the value of programs on education, sanitation, health, farming and other rural topics. Ironically, considering the general unease with which the colonialists greeted any politicised vision for broadcasting, the existent model of community listening came from an unlikely source, the Soviet Union. The Soviet planners had inaugurated a scheme to broadcast state ideology and instructions via public receivers to peasants and urban workers undergoing the transition to collectivist organisation. In functional terms the analogy was not inept. As in India, the Russian landscape was dominated by illiterate villages supported by primitive technologies . Like India's colonial regime, the soviet counterpart was faced with the challenge of disseminating messages of state to populations previously outside the elite range of their reception. More remarkable was the fact that sponsors of Indian rural broadcasting enthusiastically held up the soviet example without any apparent discomfort about the propaganda project it embodied.

The post war reconstruction project emphasized the following requirements:

1. to provide two different broadcast services, one to the urban population and another to the rural population, on the different sets of transmitters.
2. For urban programmes, 19 different languages had to be covered. This implied that at least as many programme centre (equipped with studios, etc) would be required . For rural programmes, the corresponding no. was about 125.

3. A rural service was necessary for the whole of India. The urban service should be distributed according to the distribution of cities and towns which was far from being as even as the distribution of villages.
4. Both the services should be capable of being picked up satisfactorily and with comparatively inexpensive equipment. This implies a certain minimum of transmitter power. It also implied a stronger service in urban areas where electrical interferences was higher than in rural areas.
5. Both urban and rural populations were distributed over a wide area. A large no. of transmitters would therefore be required for providing the two services, and they would have to be linked up by telephone lines for relay and for interchange of programmes.
6. In locating programme centre and transmitters, priority , as a rule, would have to be given to densely populated areas in each class, if the aim was to cover as much of the population as was possible at each stage of development. Any weightage to be given because of the relatively advanced or backward nature of an area would have to be considered separately.

As independent system village Radio Broadcasting was short lived, subsumed under the expanding government of India controlled All India radio network by 1937. (GOI,1939) With their demise went the colonial commitment to village broadcasting; regional AIR station thereafter confined their coverage to a half hour daily programme for farmers, and there were in 1939 a mere one hundred community listening sets in all of British India.(P.C. Chatteji,1987).

From the following discussion, we can decipher that the views expressed by both the romanticists as well as the gandhians are alike in their treatment of community in India. Rarely the community was viewed in its own right and merit. The suggestions clearly marked two categories in terms of 'rural' and 'urban' and seeking for audience as listeners for Radio Broadcasting. Since audience requires homogeneity and common cultural taste, radio clearly made a distinction between urban and rural listeners. Besides, it attempted to forge community as audience, as if there is no internal dissent and individual opinion and taste. Radio propagated a communitarian ideal in the community. While the fate of the 'better village' was discarded as amateur and unworkable in the transition to national broadcasting, a more emancipatory possibility for radio died along with the romanticist's system. Although the model might have evolved into an outlet for grassroot community radio, however the rural audience were returned

to the purview of post –independence media planning but the possibility of autonomy from the nation statist broadcasting idiom was not.

II

Community improvised

> The nation needs the power of the state, the state needs the community of the nation.
> (Cronin,1980:3)

Community in the post-independent scenario can only be understood by examining the socio-political environment in which the role of Radio Broadcasting was conceived. Since the formation of Indian identity through Radio had not been uniformly accepted by the nationalist and other vanguards of freedom struggle, besides, radio was completely under the control of the colonial state, the colonialists were dismayed at the failure to secure and consolidate the unitary nation state. The influence of cultural nationalism was such that it was broadly accepted that as Indian nation had always existed, it was only the political state that remained to be forged. This perception of the antecedent nation would help share the cultural policy of the new state, specifically with regard to broadcasting. The role of the state was to be one of protecting the nation so that the indigenous cultural energies of the nation would be provided with channels through which they could freely flow. It was the state that required immediate attention.

The prominence of official nationalism in post independent India was at the expense of various conflicting traditions which had been responsible for the creation of the state itself. In part, this process was legitimised by its connecting with the Indian cultural tradition that had also influenced the various separatist movements. A state regulated system of broadcasting was in place by the 1950's whose organisation and programme policies were in turn influenced by the nation state assumptions , as well as the realisation of the of the economic limitations of the Indian economy. The economy of the Indian state prior to 1947 was completely ravaged by the war and partition followed by the structural weakness of Indian economy. When allied with the post colonial dependent nature of economic development in India, it became evident that these above mentioned factors played a key role in determining the nature of the broadcasting structure that evolved.

At an ideological level, the institution of Radio Broadcasting was envisaged as a central instrument in both fostering the agenda of the champions of the freedom struggle movement as

well as acting as antidote to the harmful characteristics of the alien culture. The term 'fostering ' is crucial in understanding the role allocated to radio within the cultural domain of the state. The state derived its legitimacy from the existence of an antecedent nation, and thus the function of broadcasting was not to establish but to revitalise this nation, realising the cultural energies which, it was believed had accumulated over centuries.

Radio's cultural role was shaped by the continual need of the state to assert its political independence and acquire a legitimate power base. Radio programmes became an important area in the development of national activities that the state seemingly presided over. The task was quite daunting because of broadcasting to an audience characterized by diversities in language, cultural practices, religion and living standards. The legitimacy of Indian state's monopoly was predicated on its use to promote socio-economic development, which reflected in its programming to create a national identity. Since nationalist sentiments during the freedom struggle fostered the notion that cultural nationalism could serve as a potent force for nation building as a tool for resisting cultural neo-imperialism, Indian state took responsibility for the implementation of a complex set of policy goals that ultimately proved unachievable. Initially, nationalist objectives legitimated centralized control over radio; over time, however, the unfulfilled promise of these goals brought these legitimacy into question, and by extension raised questions about the motives and credibility of successive governments perpetuating and consolidating a hierarchical centralization that was quite different from other media.

A number of unintended consequences arose from justifying the construction of India's radio network on the basic potential for promoting development. Development was defined broadly, in a way that included two very different types of goals. One was basic economic development , improving the living standard of India's poor. This I refer 'material' development , as opposed to more culturally based 'national' development. The second type of development implicit in media policy was the creation of a national identity. However, the unintended consequences of linking radio and national integration proved to be significantly more damaging to the fibre of Indian democracy. In attempting to inculcate a national identity through media depictions, the center entered in to a game that simply could not be won. There were many different views of India. No conception of its national identity, however overarching, would ever be uncontested , and no conception, however pluralist, would ever be uncontested, would ever be deemed fair by everyone. In a culturally plural, multilingual and multireligious country, no state sponsored

depiction of the ideal national personality, character and ethos could possibly be without controversy, and these controversies both reflected and promulgated schims inherent in the inexact fit between state and nation. In Independent India, the most damaging aspect of media policy proved to be the impossibility of any state sponsored depiction of the nation to be fully devoid of religious and communal overtones.

The specific characteristics of Radio Broadcasting, its immediacy and actuality, when allied with the nature of live programmes, proved to be a popular substitute with listeners unable to attend the live event. The citing of the receiver within the domestic environment also connected the family and home with the nation state. The fostering of national cohesion was not however, the sole prerogative of the radio. The development in school education, agricultural programmes, etc. were all crucial in the process.

Community listening was included as part of the five year plan after 1950. The central thrust of the plan document was to locate Radio for planned social change in India. Most of the studies on the community development programme(Roy,P et.al, 1969; Dube, S.C 1976) examined the effectiveness of the various attributes both dependent as well as independent associated with the community for planned social change. Most of these studies highlighted the role of mass media and more particularly, radio as agent of change. Indeed, the role of radio was realized for introducing innovations for desired behavioral change in the community. New Units were created in All India radio called 'Audience Research Units' to undertake research on popularity of programmes and listeners' behaviour to planned development such as Family Planning (Patankar, P& De Lillian,1973) , Community Development(Dube, S.C 1976) , Rural Development(Ray,Samirendra,1995), Agricultural Development, Nation Building, Political Behavior, Voting Behaviour etc. A host of studies(Gupta, S,K, 1985) were undertaken all over the nation to realize the role and importance of developmental ventures and identified the ills within communities for acceptance of such programmes. Attitudinal and attributional dimensions were highlighted within communities as hindrance for any developmental effort. Through out these efforts, a 'blaming the victim' concern emerged. Thus, the outcome of various studies was to squarely blame the community for modern innovation and planned development. These studies never critically questioned nor challenged the modernization paradigm nor took into account the intricacies within the communities. An alien concept of 'community' and development was imposed so that communities could be improvised to suit the requirements of

the nation state. It failed to grasp the tensions and oppressions within the communities. What it underscored was the lack of recognition of communities within the community. Most of these community like expressions were articulated and practiced in their everyday forms of life.

III

Community embedded

In the first section we witnessed that Community has been important but the way it was conceived by both romanticists as well as Gandhians fell short in our understanding of the term. The distinction revealed two fold typologies of community based on communal relations and interest based associations. Both these assertions were based on romanticizing and debunking portraits of community which had failed to yield scientific generalizations. Similarly, the second section revealed that community was important but not at the cost of nation so that communities could be improvised for planned development and innovation. It treated community as variable properties of human interaction. But these properties were not uniform in all the communities. Hence, the need to focus on the properties themselves, rather than the contexts in which they were more or less frequently found, made good analytical sense. Although Communication research produced a great many conscientious portraits of villages, small towns and suburban life, however, developed few interesting generalizations. It is true that such research have been able to point out how rhythms of collective life and participation in collective activities, reinforced by collective symbols, help to create a strong sense of identity with place in smaller communities of place.

The present section attempts to treat community as a generic concept and the term can be defined as aggregates of people who share common activities and/or beliefs and who are bound together principally by relations of affect, loyalty, common values and/or personal concerns. Motives for interaction are thus centrally important in this definition.

While our older conception of community is tied to the notion of localities, there have always been communities which are much wider than that. One shares things with people with

whom one doesn't live face to face. One shares varieties of taste with people on the other side of the world - and increasingly because of the media, these communities of choice, communities of taste, communities of interest have been growing. These can be referred as symbolic communities, growing alongside the communities of space and residence. Another element of community, does have to do with the degree of the knowledge base or information base. Community can provide information and can create information which can help in empowering of communities. Hence we can say that communities have been locked into their own histories, their own economies, their own cultures and can only reach out because when they have access to alternative models of communication which the community radio can facilitate( ). It builds both local and global consciousness. Here both 'local' and 'global' do not mean that there are no differences between these different communities that are speaking, but it does connect across communities that have been previously very much confined by space, a kind of transcending of space.

As new meanings of community are rising, we are bound to move more towards belonging to multiple communities, symbolic communities, communities of choice, and further away from belonging to communities of traditional location. However, the politics of place still matter, our language comes out of it and the idiom of our speech. We can not do without them just simply because we have the exciting possibility of belonging to a lot of other communities of choice or symbolic communities. There is a need to tilt the balance from the one to the other - many fewer traditional communities existing of the kind that we've had before, much less closure, much less homogenous identification. Our identities overlap; Our identity as a parent, as a worker, in our leisure time, in our personal life, in our professional interests, are all found in the same community, and we'll belong to a variety of communities and learn to manipulate ourselves, reflexively, very differently, the different parts of ourselves for these different conversations. Thus, we are able to live in and inhabit the multiplicity of identity and the weakening of homogenous identities.

While situating it within communication studies, we witness that historically the study of radio audience has been largely the study of the broadcast audience, substantially without reference to other media. The visibility as well as negligence of this medium in the last twenty years may explain the larger developments in the field as well as choice, selection and

preference for any specific medium may explain some aspects of this, but it can not possibly explain all of them. Yet without doubt, radio is no longer simply a broadcast medium and households are no longer condemned to a single act of communication. Radio is one among many communication technologies providing information and entertainment. The convergence of video, computer and telephone based services; the digitalization of communication and information delivery, the increasing possibilities of interactivity, the sheer amount of choice on offer are radically transforming the social and cultural environment in which radio is likely to be received and appropriated. Further, audiences are not simply listeners of radio, they are also members of families, households, communities and nation. They are gendered, aged, and members of social classes. They are skilled and unskilled, educated and uneducated, and they listen radio while doing other things and in competition with other things. They also listen radio at times and places, alone and with others, in ways that mark their activity as powerfully mediated by the social , economic political and technological systems and structures of everyday life. The search for the audience therefore is not a search for a unitary psychological or social object. It is a search for more or less consistent or inconsistent, motivated or unmotivated, set of practices that has its defining conditions in the domestic sphere and in the relations between the domestic and public sphere. Thus, the audience consists in, and is the product of, an infinity of more or less fragile and ephemeral interactions with an increasing variety of media and mediated texts, interactions that take place and become meaningful only within the private/public worlds of households, neighborhoods or working environments.

Community Radio has been the focus of studies across Western societies (e.g. Halloran, 1977; Jankowski, 1988; Widlok, 1992) as well as in India(Pavarala,Vinod 2003a, 2003b; Norohna,Fredrick 2003). These studies reflect how groups utilize such small-scale broadcast media for political and cultural purposes (Downing, 1984; 2000; Girard, 1992; Jallov, 1997). As Jankowski comments " we are ... taken by the dreams of developing or rebuilding a sense of community within new housing estates and aging neighborhoods, and applying these new media to that task. Sometimes these new community oriented media are meant to simply inform their audiences of events. Sometimes they went a step further and attempt to mobilize citizens in efforts to bring about change and improvement. Sometimes emancipatory objectives are embedded in station programming(Jankowski,1992: 1). In an assessment of these goals, Prehn

(1992) points out that the initiators of community media frequently overestimated the need of people to express themselves via the media. This miscalculation often increased the difficulty of maintaining the necessary level of programming production for an established broadcasting schedule. And this problem led to the formation of a professional organizational structure antithetical to the original community oriented objectives.

The legacy of this wave of activity relating community and media is mixed. Certainly the aspirations have remained intact, but the results of the multitude of initiatives to achieve alternative voices reaching intended audiences are unclear. In an overall assessment of a national experiment with community electronic media in the Netherlands, the researchers suggest that the contribution of community media to community-building processes worked best in those situations where a sense of community is already well established (Hollander, 1982; Stappers et al., 1992). In residential areas short on social capital, it seems as if community media can do little to 'make things better' (Jankowski et al., 2001).

People in virtual communities use words on screens to exchange pleasantries and argue, engage in intellectual discourse, conduct commerce, exchange knowledge, share emotional support, make plans, brainstorm, gossip, feud, fall in love, find friends and lose them, play games, flirt, create a little high art and a lot of idle talk. People in virtual communities do just about everything people do in real life, but we leave our bodies behind. Jones(1995; 1998) discusses and problematizes the possibility of community that is based on forms of computer mediated communication, and critiques the often unquestioned position taken by community sociologists who automatically associate community with locality, with geographic place. Jones contends such identification robs the concept of community of its essence and mistakenly gives priority to organizational ease. Jones also draws from the conceptualization of communication as a form of ritual that draws persons together in fellowship and commonality (Carey, 1989)

One of the striking and problematic features of virtual communities, according to Fernback and Thompson (1995), is the fluidity of association individuals may have with such communities. Individuals can become active and prominent quickly, and just as quickly disappear altogether: 'Leaving a virtual community might be as easy as changing the channel on a television set.' Such fluidity may have consequences, they point out, for the stability of virtual communities to a greater degree than is the case for 'real-life' or online communities. For this reason they are pessimistic about the potential of online communities to contribute to 'the already fragmented

landscape of the public sphere'. In a subsequent work, Fernback compares characteristics of virtual communities and American culture. The principles of free speech, individualism, equality and open access are associated with virtual communities, she claims, and are 'the same symbolic interests that define the character of American democracy' (Fernback, 1997: 39). It remains to be demonstrated that the above characteristics attributed to virtual communities are universal, but even should that be the case it remains particularly ethnocentric to identify them with American cultural icons. Such parochialism seems out of place in a discussion of a form of community that, by definition, is not constrained by the geographical boundaries or the cultural manifestations of a particular nation-state.

Van Dijk (1998) takes a different approach to the topic of virtual communities from both Jones and Fernback. He sets, first of all, the task of determining whether such social constructions can compensate for the general sense of loss of community prevailing in society. He then provides a working definition of virtual communities similar to other formulations, noting that they 'are communities which are not tied to a particular place or time, but which still serve common interests in social, cultural and mental reality ranging from general to special interests or activities' (1998: 40). On the basis of a review of some of the available literature on communities, van Dijk distils four characteristics he says are common to all communities: having members, a social organization, language and patterns of interaction, and a culture and common identity. These characteristics are then used to compare virtual communities with real-life or what he prefers to call 'organic' communities. This exercise leads to a typology of ideal types wherein virtual communities are described as those with relatively loose relations, which are unconcerned with considerations of time and place, which contain a well developed paralanguage, and which are pluralistic and heterogeneous in composition. As is the case with most efforts to construct ideal types, this profile of virtual communities falls short of adequately describing actual cases. Many virtual communities can be characterized by the strong ties among their members, are grounded in time and place, and reflect a homogeneous membership.

Conclusion

In the concluding section we would like to recapitulate some of our earlier discussions and reflect on its implications for understanding community. Community has been important but the way it has been conceived by both romanticists as well as Gandhians, fell short in our understanding of the term. The distinction revealed two fold typologies of community based on communal relations and interest based associations. Both these assertions were based on romanticizing and debunking portraits of community which had failed to yield scientific generalizations. Similarly, the second section revealed that community was important but not at the cost of nation so that communities could be improvised for planned development and innovation. Media research considerably followed these lines. It treated community as variable properties of human interaction. But these properties were not uniform in all the communities. Hence, the need to focus on the properties themselves.

The third section treats Community as a generic concept and the term could be defined as aggregates of people who shared common activities and/or beliefs and who were bound together principally by relations of affect, loyalty, common values and/or personal concerns. Motives for interaction were thus centrally important in this definition. While our older conception of community is tied to the notion of localities, there have always been communities which are much wider than that. One shares things with people with whom one doesn't live face to face. One shares varieties of taste with people on the other side of the world - and increasingly because of the media, these communities of choice, communities of taste, communities of interest have been growing. These can be referred as symbolic communities, growing alongside the communities of space and residence. Another element of community, does have to do with the degree of the knowledge base or information base. Community can provide information and can create information which can help in empowering of communities. Hence we can say that communities have been locked into their own histories, their own economies, their own cultures and can only reach out because when they have access to alternative models of communication which the community radio can facilitate.

As new meanings of community are rising, we are bound to move more towards belonging to multiple communities, symbolic communities, communities of choice, and further away from belonging to communities of traditional location. However, the politics of place still matter, our language comes out of it and the idiom of our speech. We can not do without them just simply because we have the exciting possibility of belonging to a lot of other communities of choice or symbolic communities. However, these meanings of community are not free from tensions. Although the contributions of media offer both an alternative vision of media's role in the community as well as alternative vision of community, however they are not free from providing a plural, discrete and an arguably inward looking conception of community which would be a major area of concern in the future years. For instance, the future research would be engaged in resolving the dilemma between traditionally mediated sociability and electronic sociability and finally, between online community and off line community.

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