Community Radio: History, Growth, Challenges and Current Status of It With Special Reference to India

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Community radio is a type of radio service that caters to the interests of a certain area, broadcasting content that is popular to a local audience but which may often be overlooked by commercial or mass-media broadcasters. Modern-day community radio stations often serve their listeners by offering a variety of content that is not necessarily provided by the larger commercial radio stations. Community radio outlets may carry news and information programming geared toward the local area, particularly immigrant or minority groups that are poorly served by other major media outlets.

Philosophically two distinct approaches to community radio can be discerned, though the models are not necessarily mutually exclusive. One stresses service or community-mindedness, a focus on what the station can do for the community. The other stresses involvement and participation by the listener.

Community radio stations are sometimes specialist music stations, or they might strongly represent local music and arts. Others might broadcast talks and current affairs programs representing alternative, Indigenous Australian, environmental, feminist or gay and lesbian interests, filling perceived gaps in commercial or government radio content.

In India, the campaign to legitimise community radio began in the mid 1990s, soon after the Supreme Court of India ruled in its judgment of February 1995 that "airwaves are public property". This came as an inspiration to groups across the country, but to begin with, only educational (campus) radio stations were allowed, under somewhat stringent conditions.

According to the Ministry of Information & Broadcasting, 47 community radio stations were operational in India by 1 November 2009, including 45 campus-based stations and two CRS run by NGOs. By 4 December 2009, the Ministry of Information & Broadcasting had issued 'Grant of Permission Agreements' (GOPA) for 62 community radio stations.

The potential of community radio to bring about social change is not a matter of mere observation but, as Population Media Center President William Ryerson demonstrated, an empirically proven fact based on quantifiable and statistically analyzed results.