

Tribal Language and Community Radio: A Case Study on “Radio Mattoli” Wayanad, Kerala, India

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Abstract

Wayanad is located in the Western Ghats as a north-east district of Kerala. The Wayanadan culture is mainly carved out from the different tribal communities. They do not have any basic infrastructure and the literacy level is very low. Most tribes do not have very much interaction with the outside world and hence the governments are helpless in upgrading their living standard. *Radio Mattoli* is a community radio started in the year 2009 with the aim of developing the socio economic and the cultural status of the marginalized society at Wayanad. In this study, the researcher could get a positive result on the reach as well as the impact of the community radio. Development of alternative medium for indigenous group not only helps in communicating local news and information, but it also helps in improving quality of life of the people.

Keywords: *Community Radio, Tribal community, Tribal language broadcasting, Personal Interviews.*

Introduction

Wayanad is located in the Western Ghats as a north-east district of Kerala, India, with an altitude ranging from 700-1200meter. It is the only district in the state to have the border with both Tamil Nadu and Karnataka (Therakam, 2014). Wayanad is famous for its scenic beauty and rich traditions. The Wayanadan culture is mainly curved out from the different tribal communities. The total population of Wayanad could be divided as Tribes and Non Tribes where the tribes consist of different indigenous minority groups with their own cultural and ethnic identity (Fedina, 2000). Even though Wayanad has got large plantations like Tea, Coffee, Rubber, Pepper and Paddy; Wayanad is considered as one of the backward district in Kerala.

Most of the tribal communities here are depending upon forest and agriculture for their living. They do not have any basic infrastructure and the literacy level is very low. Each of these communities lives in their particular colonies and has got their own languages, culture, believes and norms. Few tribes even do interact with the outside world, and this is the reason even governments became helpless in upgrading their living standard by preserving their cultural context.

Radio Mattoli is a community radio started in the year 2009 with an aim of socio economic and the cultural development of marginalized with the credible source of information within its transmission zone. It is transmitted in the frequency 90.4 FM with coverage of 85% of Wayanad District. The radio has got daily broadcasting of 17 hours from 6am to 11pm. It provides farmers, tribes, dalits, women and children with an opportunity to speak out, and be heard. *Radio Mattoli* serves as a catalyst for the integral development of individuals and societies, and operates as an avenue for the free flow of beneficial information aimed at bringing socio economic changes in the society.

Tribal Programmes in Radio Mattoli

Since Wayanad is having large tribal population, Radio Mattoli has put special effort in producing programs in tribal languages and dialects. Most of these programs are produced by tribal people themselves. Such programs includes information for the tribal listeners on topics such as government schemes/aids/special packages for indigenous people etc which are often neglected by mainstream media such as Television and newspaper to which tribal community has limited or no access.

Unarvu

Unarvu is weekly programs in tribal language which discuss about Government projects and found that are allotted towards tribal communities. Unarvu also talks about rights of tribal people, tricks and tips in framing etc along with other tribal programs for awareness such as drama or skit in tribal languages itself.

Thudichetham

Thudichetham is a daily program in tribal languages which deals with health, education and other issues which are faced by the tribal community. It not only provides information in their own languages but also helps in conservation of their traditional art and culture through awareness programs. Tribals from various communities present programs such as folk songs and stories in their own languages in Thudichetham.

Related Studies

Community radio is a medium by and for the communities perceived as a pro-people medium. (Dahal, 2013). There have been several studies done on different aspects of community radio in the past two decades. The major areas of social science research on community radio includes the content, its influence and impact on the targeted audience, participation of people within the community and so on. Studies clearly supported that community radio can play a major role in developing and encouraging participation, sharing their opinion, developing their knowledge and skills, and its programming shows the involvement of the community and in catering to health and cultural needs of the rural communities, especially in the underdeveloped countries (Girard, 1992; Jankowski and Prehn, 2002; Kumar, 2003; Tacchi, 2003; Pavarala and Malik, 2007; Hallett and Hintz, 2010; and Patil 2010).

Community Radio for Disaster Management

The role of community radio in disaster management is very important and has proved that it could help people at the time of natural calamities. Lintas Merapi Community Radio started in the year 2001, in an area where people live under the threat of active volcano in Indonesia. Merapi Community Radio is an efficient tool for giving warnings and cautions to the people around the village when volcano goes active and thus it could save lives of many people. (Mario Antonius Birowo, 2010)

Role of Community Radio in education

The community radio stations design their program with factors such as educational and economical status of the audience, their age, gender and the place where they are living. Many of the people living in Caribbean Island are poor and who could not possess a radio, but there have been studies that poor and less educated people listen to radio more than a rich highly educated person. Community radios are used for educating people within a community and the main aim of this educational community broadcast is to give people a better understanding about themselves and the world they are living. (HUOH P. MORRISON)

Community Radio for Community Development and Democracy

Citizen radio or alternative radio's are one of the few mediums which open up demarcation of the society. Studies have been done not only in the rural villages to understand the effectiveness of community radios for reducing the marginalisation in the society, but also among poor urban dwellers in the cities of Latin America. These studies bring out the role of radio in the formation of public spheres in poor urban communities. (Navarro, 2009)

Some people perceive community radio acts as public space where people meet, exchange and share the thoughts. On the other hand it acts as a useful tool for promoting local culture and business (Kanayama, 2007, 2011).

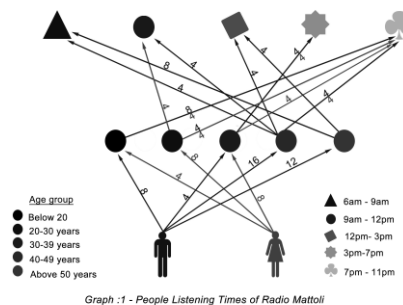
The participation of the Indigenous Community in the production of Radio programs are helping in re-establishing their ethnic identity. Active participation in the radio programs also make them think as a part of the nation and need of participation democratic procedures in NEW democratic Nepal (Dahal and Aram, 2013). Community radio created grassroots-level participation and horizontal circulation of ideas among rural communities (Aaditeshwar, 2009).

One of the major functions of Community Radio would apart from educating and entertaining people is circular communication or connecting the communities and bounding it together. (Satheesh, 2010)

Language is found to be an important factor considering the listenership of the programmes in Radio Mattoli especially among tribal listeners (Deepthi, 2011). Thus programmes such as Thudichetham is having high popularity among tribal communities. The study also states that programmes on Radio Mattoli promote sustainable development of tribal community without compromising their culture and life style.

Radio Mattoli is the only electronic media in Kerala airing programs daily in indigenous dialects. It has given greater visibility, recognition and respect to tribal dialects, culture and identity. This study, aims to find out the reach and the impact of these programs on tribal community. Also, the researcher tries to understand how these programs are helping Tribal's for their development activities.

Analysis



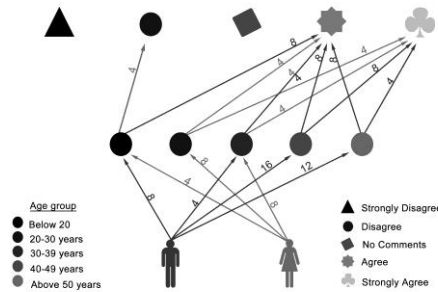
Graph :1 - People Listening Times of Radio Mattoli

The researcher collected 60 samples from the tribal settlement of Kurumakkadu colony, Mananthavady, Wayanad out of which twenty are female and forty are male. Out of these sixty samples, twelve people (4 male and 8 female) are students and below 20 years of age. As they are students, they don't listen to radio in early morning as most of them need to start early from tribal settlement to reach their school/college. They don't listen during the evening time also due to their academic related activities. So they listen to radio during the time slot of 7pm – 11pm.

The next section of samples is from the age group of 20-30 in which eight are female. The researcher couldn't get any male samples during the time of his survey, as most of them have gone for work. Among the eight female members, four listen to radio during 9am-12pm and another four listen from 7pm-11pm. Most of these female members are housewives and they will be busy with sending their husband and children to work in the mornings. So they will be listening to radio at 9am-12 slots where ladies' programs like "Vanitha Matoli" are broadcast and night slots from 7pm-11pm, when most of their works are over.

From the age group 31-40, there are eight people in which four are male and four female members. Among these, all listen to radio in the evening and late evening slots as most of them would be engaged with work like farming or going to forest for collecting products like timber, during day time. Four of them listen during the time slot 3pm-7pm and another four from 7pm-11pm. It is surprising to notice that people belonging to the age group of 40-49 (12 male members) do not listen to radio in the late evening slot.

Those who are above the age of 50 are twelve in number and eight among them listen to radio in the morning slot of 6am-9am. Rest of them listens to radio in the 12-3pm slot. Since most of them are aged they listen to radio either during early morning or afternoon.

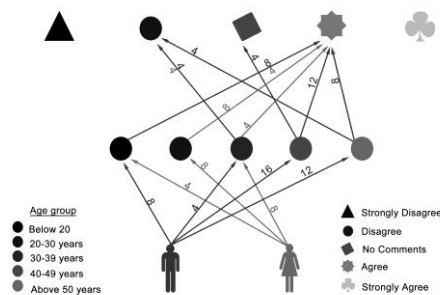


Graph 2: Regular Listener of Thudichetham.

With the help of the graph the researcher observed that, out of twelve people who belong to the age group of below 20, none of the female members listen to Thudichetham regularly whereas all male members agree that they are listening to the program regularly.

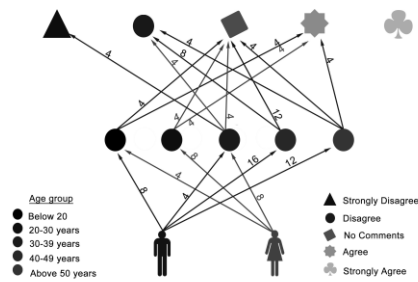
It is evident from the graph that, female members belonging to the age group 20-30 and 30-40 are listening to the radio regularly. Four males who are above 50 years of age are also regular listeners of Thudichetham.

With this graph the researcher is able to conclude that those aged below 20 are not regular listeners while the others are regularly listening to the program.



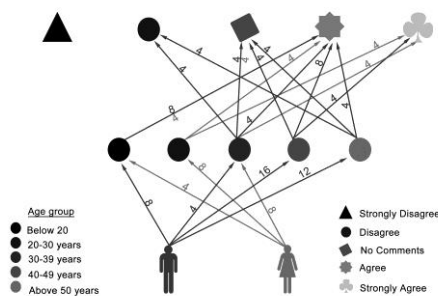
Graph 3: Regular Listeners of Unarvu

People who are less than 20 years of age are regular listeners of Unarvu. Few listeners who are between 30-40 are listening to the program in a regular manner. During the weekends the male members of 30 and above age, spend their time in alcohol consumption and hardly listen to radio programmes. Most of the male members who are aged 50 and above are regular listeners of Unarvu. On the other end all female members are listening Unarvu regularly.



Graph:4 - Likes Unarvu more than Thudichetham

Out of the sixty samples taken, only twelve people (8 male and 12 female) agree that they like Unarvu more than Thudichetham. Four male members from 31-40 strongly disagree the statement. At the same time eight male members agree that they like Unarvu more than Thudichetham. On the other hand, among the elderly people aged 50 and above, four people agreed and another four disagreed and yet another four took a neutral stand. This gives a clear understanding to the researcher that 40% of the people like both the programs and 33% of the people like Thudichetham more than Unarvu and other 27% like Unarvu more than Thudichetham.



Graph:5 - I listen Thudichetham/Unarvu with my family.

This diagram gives an idea that most people listen radio with their families. However, male members who belong to the age group of 31-40 are not listening to these programs with their family because they spend their time with their friends during that particular time. Out of the twelve people, who are above 50 years, four of them do not listen to radio with their family members. On the other hand, mostly, all female members are listening radio programs with their family.

Eighty seven percent responded that they listen to Radio Mattoli daily whereas another thirteen percent do not listen to radio so often. Out of sixty, thirty two people listen to radio for 1 or 2 hours, while twenty four others listen to radio for 2 to 5 hours. Four people listen to radio for more than 5 hours from 11 hours of their broadcasting time. Ninety three percent of the People listen to radio program using radio sets whereas only seven present depend on other modes like radio in public library etc. It is noted that no one listens to radio using mobile phones.

Out of sixty, twenty four people agree that they like listening to radio when they are in job and another twelve people strongly agree to this statement. But there are other twenty people who do not like listening to radio while working.

Majority of people disagree to the statement that they listen to Unarvu when they are at work. As per the survey conducted, twenty eight people do not listen to Unarvu when they are at work and twenty people took a neutral stand. Another twenty people listen to Unarvu even when they are busy with work and are mostly ladies, who work at home as the program is broadcast only at 8pm during weekends.

From the survey it was very clear that Tribals like listening to their folk songs through radio. Eight people strongly disagree and forty people disagree to the statement that they like film songs more than folk songs. Another eight do not have any comment on this whereas there were 4 people who like film songs more than their folk song who were mainly youngsters.

Forty four people out of sixty agreed that they understood the importance of health care after listening to the programs in their own language. Eight people took a neutral stand and there were eight people who disagreed with this statement.

Even though people were having a general opinion to all other queries, to the question on their influence of radio in casting votes generated a mixed bunch of responses. Here four people strongly disagreed, four disagreed and twenty didn't comment on it. But there were about twenty eight people who agreed to this statement and four who strongly believed that, radio programs in their own language, have influenced their voting behavior.

Most people responded that they will feel bad if these tribal programs are stopped for a month. A few suggested that they will even make enquiries to the radio station after discussing with their friends in the tribal colony.

From the given four options in the survey most people have opinioned that radio is helping them. Forty people quoted it as a helping tool in understanding government policies while another 44 people mentioned about its serviceability in getting news around Wayanad. Twenty eight people expressed their understandability in government projects and special allowances allocated for them while another twenty four said that radio made them aware about other local information.

As most of these people depend on agriculture, forty four out of sixty say that radio has helped them in agricultural related matters. In this part of the survey, people were allowed to choose multiple options and most of them have opted more than one choice among the given four. Thirty two people agreed that radio has helped them in health related issues and thirty six people say that it helped them to understand the importance of education. Twenty eight quoted its help in cultural and women empowerment while twenty four others mentioned that radio is helping to understand the importance of democratic participation.

Forty people agree that they sing along, when their tribal folk songs are broadcast through radio programmes. Among them, four said they will sing along with the broadcasted



programme if they have consumed alcohol while another four said they sing and dance along with the folk songs when they are with friends. Twenty people told that they not sing along with the radio once folk song is played.

The majority of people are of the view that the most influential episodes of Thudichetham program was on anti-drug campaign and other educational related episodes. Forty people like anti-drug campaign and thirty six people like educational related programs. In this part of the survey also, subjects could choose more than one option out of the given four. Twenty four people like programs on herbal medicines and 16 like programs on importance of preserving their traditional cultures. Twenty four people like awareness programs and announcements on development activities.

All the tribal listeners agreed to the statement that tribal programs in radio Mattoli are useful to them and most of them quoted that it is helping them in uplifting their living conditions.

Majority of the people (44 tribal people) are of the view that programs in radio Mattoli are helping in their personality development. But another twelve do not have any comments on this and four think that it is not helping in personality development at all.

Forty eight people think that radio Mattoli is helping them in farming and agricultural related works whereas there also another twelve do not have any comments on this. So far, only four have participated in radio Mattoli programs from these colonies and they all are school children who got chance to present their program through Mattoli school club. Among those fifty six who have not participated yet, few are ready to present a program if they get a chance.

All sixty tribal people who have participated in the survey have unique opinion that these programs are helping them to get information about the developmental activities carried out and all suggest that there should be more programs on tribal languages.

Majority of the tribal people do not give feedback after listening to the programs. However, there are twenty four people who try to inform feedback after both these programs Thudichetham and Unarvu. Few wrote letters and other few informed their feedbacks to the presenters directly. There are people who are so moved by the programs that even though they are illiterate, they ask their children to write a feedback letter to the radio station after listening to these programs.

The researcher identified that the reach of Thudichetham was very high among tribals as well as non-tribals. Ninety percent of total population of Wayanad listens to radio Mattoli and about seventy eight percent of the population thinks that Mattoli is helping in tribal development.

Many public places like hotels or public library plays radio Mattoli and Thudichetham is one of the most popular programs which got major listeners in all these plays. The tea stall near government hospital Mananthavady gets crowded at 8pm when Thudichetham goes on air. In most tribal settlements, people used to sing aloud and dance, when their folk songs are

presented in Thudichetham. Most tribal men return to a point where they can access to radio by 8pm even if they are at work or engaged in some other activities.

Radio is their only communication medium for old and physically challenged people in Adivasi colonies. They often listen to Thudichetham as well as Unarvu so keenly and give feedbacks to the presenters. Tribal youth are fond of folk songs or film songs played in the program rather than awareness programs. They find it easy listening radio Mattoli as F.M radios are available in basic models of mobile phones.

There are many areas where Thudichetham has made some significant changes in the life of tribal community. It not only broadcasts the need of documents like election identity card and ration card for the tribal people but these presenters along with other volunteers have even taken initiative for accruing these documents to them.

Active participation of tribal people in discussions held in Thudichetham made them speak aloud against the exploitations done by others. Government could take essential steps in procures like fund allocation more accurately as Thudichetham collects opinion from the people and bring it directly in front of concerned authorities.

Besides these there have been rapid increases in the number of people consulting hospitals, casting vote once Thudichetham start going on air. Tribals feel proud and happy when they listen to their language or dialect being broadcast. Thudichetham and Unarvu tell them the need of preserving their culture and passing it to next generations.

Conclusion

In the survey the researcher has conducted, he used similar questions on same topics in order to validate the responses of the people, but it's interesting to note that they have strong opinion on their views which was not changing even with twisted questions. They support radio Mattoli and love listening to their own language in community radio.

Form the words of tribal presenters; we could conclude that these programs have a high impact in the tribal community. In the survey also the researcher could get a positive result on the reach as well as the impact of the community radio. Development of alternative medium for indigenous group not only helps in communicating local news and information, but it also helps in improving quality of life of the people. Thus it is proved that the community Radio Mattoli has a wide reach and great impact on the tribal community. It is also proven that most tribal people think that radio is helping them in their development activities.

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