



## Community Radio for ODL in KKHSOU, Assam State, India

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### ABSTRACT :

Community Radio is an emerging arena in building a democratic society wherein every individual finds a space for himself and his community. The Radio gives a platform for many unheard voices and enables participatory development. Though the technology boom focuses on internet, broadband, mobile connectivity and coverage, we are looking deep into the well of reality where Radio as a technology can make an impact on the lives of the people. The transitional aspect of Distance Education has been due to its assimilation with new technologies. Radio as a broadcast media has been used for a long time in educational purposes. However, the emergence of Community Radio in Distance Learning is a recent phenomenon. Community Radio in Distance Learning has challenging prospects, as it brings benefits not only to the learners but also to the society members. The present paper aims to understand the growing phenomena of Community Radio in Distance Education with an emphasis on Assam. It aims to look into the role of Community Radio (Jnan Taranga) used in the State Open University in Assam. The paper tries to highlight the empowering potential of Community Radio leading to the development of the community in a rural society like Assam that is troubled by internal strives and struggles.

### 1. INTRODUCTION :

Broadcasting in India first began with the establishment of the Indian Broadcasting Company in 1927, and the first radio service was launched. Though it began as a private venture, yet in the later phase, it came to be controlled by the Government. 'Rural Radio Forum' was the first step to use radio in education, initiated right after independence (Agrawal, 2007).

It was after 1956 that radio as a public service was let open for mass participation. The first FM service started from Madras in 1977(Pavarala and Manik, 2007).

Community Radio is a non-profit service provided for the community by its members. The community can be geographically bound, or bound by ties of ethnicity, religion, and so on. According to AMARC,

the World Association of Community Broadcasters, CR is "When radio fosters the participation of citizens and defends their interests; when it reflects the tastes of the majority and makes good humour and hope its main purpose; when it truly informs; when it helps resolve the thousand and one problems of daily life ; when all ideas are debated in its programs and all opinions are respected; when cultural diversity is stimulated over commercial homogeneity; when women are main players in communication and not simply a pretty voice or a publicity gimmick; when no type of dictatorship is tolerated, or even the musical dictatorship of the big recording studios; when everyone's words fly without discrimination or censorship, that is community radio."

It is often referred to as being "alternative

media”. The difference between mainstream and alternative media is given below in Table 1 (from Pavarala & Malik, 2007). Community Radio (CR) in India started after the grant by the Government to setting it up in 2002. The Government allowed for CR stations in educational institutions.

Table 1 : CR as Alternative Media

Mainstream Media	Alternative Media CR
Not committed to a particular community	Committed to the community
Influenced by market	Not related to market ups and downs
Strictly professionals are at the steering command	Provides democratic access and participation
State owned or corporate ownership	Community owned

However, conceptualizing Community is very hard, as its meaning spans many disciplines like political science, sociology etc. The idea of “community” forges the idea of ‘collective identity’ (Pavarala & Malik, 200), which, as said earlier may emerge due to physical or non-physical elements. This identity emerges due to the sharing of some common interests.

Open Distance Learning has emerged in recent times as the most “viable, reliable and sustainable” form of education. The development of DE over the years is worth recognition all over the globe.

The “knowledge economic boom” has facilitated the growth of DE, besides the innovative developments of technology. Other reasons attributed to it are (learner specific):

- *Time management as a factor:* In the world of competition people like to be way ahead than the other. Hence, many people opt for courses through distance mode so as to keep themselves upgraded with new information, while carrying on their own

work, job or interest. There are also students who are eager to manage their time with distance courses while undergoing a regular course.

- *Affordability:* Distance Education is more affordable than the regular mode of education and with the recognition granted, there has been no turning back. The DE mode of education allows access to higher education to people of all walks of life.

- *High Aspirations:* This mode of education is also very popular because, people aspire to walk high in the ranks of the society. They want upward mobility and hence, are always on the lookout for opportunities that can enable them to move straight up.

As AMARC (1998b) has pointed out that “the historical philosophy of the community radio is to use this medium as the voice of the voiceless, the mouthpiece of the oppressed people and as a tool for development” (Pavarala & Malik, 2007). The Community Radio can augment the mission of the Open University Learning system to make higher education accessible to all. The radio being the cheapest mode of technology, it can enable a healthy growth of citizens.

Assam is a land of mystic beauty and grandeur. It is a land with prospects for higher development, a land inhabited by laborious people, a land of opportunities but also on the other side a land going through tough times- internal struggles, natural hazards, political instability, and so on. The following details will give a short highlight of the state-

Geographical Area	78,438 km <sup>2</sup>	
Population Density	396.8/km <sup>2</sup> (2011 census)	
Total Population	31,169,272 (2011 census)	1. Male:15,954,927 2. Female: 15,214,345
Literacy Rate	73.18%(2011 census)	1. Male: 78.81% 2. Female: 67.27%

Assam Government <http://www.assam.gov.in>

The first State Open University in the entire North East Region was proudly named after the great Sanskrit scholar and Orientalist of Assam. The university was established by the Krishna Kanta Handiqui

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State Open University Act 2005, which was enacted by the state legislature of Assam.

The University is authorised to award degrees, diplomas, certificates, conduct examinations and prepare curriculum for the learners. The motto of the University states: “*Education beyond Barriers*”. The mission of the University is to reach the mass of population who have not been able to access higher education due to unavoidable reasons.

The University motto has been also the inspiration behind different experiments so as to make education reach the people without any barriers.

The establishment of the state open university is the manifestation of the demand of higher education, and more specifically higher education through distance.

The University aims to reach out to the people living in the remote areas, those who had no access to higher forms of learning, individuals engaged in services or jobs, marginalized groups, communities, disabled people, prisoners, etc. The University today has more than 170 study centers spread around the state. The study centers serves as an outlet to the distant learners desirous of taking a step ahead in their life. The main office of the University is located at the heart of the capital, Guwahati (Dispur). The University will soon have its permanent campus; however, the present infra-structural facilities provided are modern and up to date. The enrolment trend of the University is a sign of growth and positivity. The trends show marked increase in the learners:

Programmes	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11
BPP	3,434	7,657	9,234	10,360
BMC		305	317	263
BA		4,250	8,080	13,671
B.Com		210	381	497
BBA		281	252	189
BCA		470	465	441
Total	3,434	13,173	18,729	25421

Horizon 2011, KKHSOU

The University started offering its programmes since 2008. Currently, the University offers PhD, PG, Under Graduate, PG Diploma, Certificate courses, and BPP

(Bachelor Preparatory Programme) learners who could not pursue higher education due to their inability to pass the HS or Pre-University exam.

The programmes on offer have been a huge success in the state. The programmes are given in Table 2 below.

The University has grown over a very small time and till date, KKHSOU tops the list of highest student enrolment in the Region. The University strives hard to reach the masses by blending technology with the needs of the learners, depending on its availability, man power, and so on.

The state is basically an agricultural economy and hence majority of population resides in the villages and small towns. In order to reach these populations, an effective media should be chosen. Radio is one of them. Besides the Community Radio, the University offers special educational programme “Ekalavya” through Akashbani Guwahati and Dibrugarh. It was launched in 2011 and since then, has been aired regularly every Saturday and Sunday from 8.00 – 8.30 p.m. The programme is meant to be utilized both by the learners as well as the general listeners. The topics included within the programme aired are educational programmes of the University - course related, socially relevant issues, discussions of learned scholars invited, and so on (Horizon, 2011).

The University launched its Community radio service “Jnan Taranga” for the general audience in 2010. The radio is broadcast on air at 90.4. MHz within a space of 15 km aerial distance. The name Jnan Taranga means “knowledge” (Jnan) “waves” (Taranga). The main purpose of the radio is to disseminate knowledge as well as to provide a platform for further learner-teacher interaction, discussion on important issues and development in the field of education and society or community. The service area of the Radio covers the entire Guwahati Municipal area and it encompasses the study center within this geographical limit.

The programmes aired on Jnan Taranga are discussed below.

Table 2 : Programmes offered by KKHSOU

UG prog.	Diploma	PG prog.	PG Dip. Prog.	Cert. prog.	
BA	Journalism & Mass Communication	MA	Mass Communication	Electr. & Instru.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Mobile Phone Repairing</li> <li>2. Maintenance And Repairing of Audio-video Equipment</li> <li>3. Maintenance And Repairing of Electronic Domestic Appliances</li> <li>4. Computer Hardware</li> <li>5. Computer Networking</li> </ol>
B.Com	Sanskrit Learning	MSW	Broadcast Journalism	Computer Application	
BBA	Library and Information Science	MCA	Tourism and Hospitality Management	Animal Husbandry Related Programmes	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Commercial Goat Rearing</li> <li>2. Scientific Piggery Farming</li> <li>3. Scientific Duck Farming</li> <li>4. Commercial Broiler Farming</li> <li>5. Scientific Layer Farming</li> </ol>
BMC	Computer Hardware & Networking	MBA	Human Resource Management	Repair and Maintenance of Refrigeration and Air Conditioner	
BCA	Creative writing in English	MNC	Business Management	Scientific Broiler Farming	
	Hotel Management		Computer Application	Electrical House Wiring	
	Tourism Management		Television Production(Regular full time courses)	Two/Three Wheeler Repairing and Maintenance	
			Radio Production(Regular full time course)	Welding and Cutting	

### Educational Programmes

Mostly educational programmes are broadcast on Jnan Taranga. These educational programmes are related to the courses provided by the University and meant to enrich the learners, besides the printed SLMs (Self Learning Materials). The programmes are prepared in subjects offered by the University and delivered by the University faculties. The other education programme is “Kunhipaat” related to the Sarba Sikhsha Abhiyan scheme of the Government.

### Youth Related Programmes (Yuva-Taranga)

The Community Radio of KKHSOU also

caters to the needs of the youths with the programme “Yuva Taranga”. The programmes in this category include career opportunities, counseling, tips to face job interviews, etc. The youth’s programmes are made with an attempt to prepare the youths for every challenges and opportunities that come their way like interviews of counselors, entrepreneurs, and so on. The young listeners along with the learners of the University can listen to the learners of the University can listen to the programme on language learning.

### Programmes For Women (Angana)

“Angana” is a programme that is aired every Monday between 4.05 pm to 4.20 pm.

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This programme is totally dedicated to the issues related to women. In this programme, issues related to health, legal issues, beauty regime, solution for mental problems, interview of successful women in order to encourage the learners as well as the general listeners. The programme tries to, within its limited time, to bring in to focus the problems faced by women.

### *Art And Culture Related Programmes*

Programmes like “*SahityaChora*”, are aired for quenching the thirst of the literary population and discussions are also broadcast giving ample chance for book lovers to hear their favourite authors. Celebrated novels, poems, works of literary giants of Assam are read.

### *Interactive Session and Discussion*

Jnan Taranga provides a platform for interaction through its phone in live programme. Discussion or “*Alusona*” is another programme which is a programme based on discussion in topics ranging from the day to day lives, more specifically social issues. The aim is to search for paths for the development of the society. Besides these programmes, “*Bijnan Barta*” is another programme Broadcast though Jnan Taranga, which is related to science.

## 2. RESULTS :

### 2.1 Prospects and Potentiality of Community Radio

Radio can be considered an agent of change with its applicability in real field. The radio is to be found everywhere and when radio becomes educational and entertaining, it takes the listener to a whole new realm of knowledge.

The CR has the ability to unite the people for a common cause, help people overcome crisis, as seen from the long history of low FM radios all around the globe.

For example WQRZ-LP a radio based in Mississippi played an important role in the post hurricane times. The radio gave out all information about the impending trouble and also helped to rebuild the community after the hurricane was over.

The radio also helps in preserving the local culture and tradition. The CR can be a tool for cultural revival. In Assam, there are many tribal languages, folk lore's that are on the brink of extinction. The CR can help in this matter and bring into light the long forgotten roots.

Another positive point of CR is its non-exclusive nature in rendering services, be it through one way or two way communications. The radio reaches out to the community members without any biasness towards any particular community or tribe.

CR can also play the role of forming a network of like-minded people who desire to bring change in their lives as well as others. CR can provide the base and also the opportunity for nurturing such people with constructive ideas.

Community Radio facilitates access to the marginalized communities to participate and give them the freedom to say what they want to say. F.J. Berrigan has truly remarked in this matter (Pavarala and Malik, 2007): *[Community media} are media to which members of the community have access, for information, education, entertainment, when they want access. They are media in which the community participates, as planners, producers, performers. They are the means of expression of the community, rather than for the community.*

### 2.2 Challenges of Community Radio

Though Jnan Taranga has been functioning well since its launch, yet there are problems that hinders its potentiality in reaching out to the wide mass as well as fostering increased participation. These problems are:

- The Radio functions within 15 km aerial distance only. That covers only the main city area and the places surrounding it. This leaves a wide area unreached. The opportunities offered are therefore limited and available to a few.
- Jnan Taranga as a Community Radio needs more participatory based programmes with emphasis on rural issues.

- More women based programmes should be broadcast. The programmes should be about raising the positivity level amongst them, it should give them the chance to speak their mind, it should help them take decisions for every single issue, and it should be an inclusive one.
- More airtime should be allowed for the programmes.
- The programmes should be such that the listeners to relate to it, and thus bind the community into one whole.

### 3. CONCLUSION :

In a neo-liberal society, where there are a constant struggle between public and private, profit and cost effectiveness, quality and quantity, the choice is always a hard one. At this time of crisis, where media becomes a puppet, the voice of the people cannot be heard.

CR has definitely an important role to play. In an Open and Distance Learning system, CR can be educative and informative at the same time. Jnan Taranga of KKHSOU has been doing that and aims to raise its level to new heights.

CR can play the role in peace building in an ethnic strife hit region as Assam. CR can allow for more involvement of key people such as policy makers, and make the people aware of the developments.

The Open University as an institution of higher learning equally has a substantial role in building a stable society and be a harbinger of change.

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