

# mass media

## 65

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# Diversifying voices, Strengthening Community Through Radio

Harsh Dobhal & Mukesh Devrari\*

## Abstract

Though having tremendous potential in negotiating and democratizing access to communication rights and media to wide segment of society, community radio remains at the bottom of the capitalist-driven media landscape. It is in this context that this paper deals with three interrelated themes. First, building on the assumption that media can be effective only if they are accessible in a participatory way to a broad section of communities, the paper discusses the linkages between and the role of media in deepening democracy. Second, it deals with the increasing attempts of the State to curb freedom of expression and the urgent need to democratize media. Third segment deals with the potential role of community radio as an effective instrument towards strengthening grassroots democracy by providing access to media to large section of population and ensuring representation and diversifying voice of citizens.

An attempt is made to construct argument in favor of expansion of public sphere through community radio in India in the backdrop of successive governments perceiving community radio as a 'threat' instead of treating it as a

powerful tool towards furthering a vibrant participatory democratic process.

## Media and Democracy

Democracy is a structure where individual's dignity is fully respected and maintained; at the same time collective interests of community are also protected. The greatest part of modern democracy is the creation of acceptable structure where though the ruling elite have the legitimacy to govern the masses, it provides a platform, although in a limited sense, to every citizen to argue for and attempt to realize her/his interests. It allows individuals to shape the nation state in unique ways.

India as a nation state may have the most modern model of political governance, but the idea of a full-blown democratic society can't be realized without respect for concepts like equality, liberty and social justice. There are several reasons why the equality provisions in the Indian Constitution appear stronger and more extensive than in American.<sup>1</sup> However, as eminent political scientist Achin Vanaik argues, India has an overdeveloped State in an underdeveloped civil society and historically the country faced a unique problem of implanting a