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Radio in the age of ICTs: Revisiting the literature on socio-cultural changes with special reference to health communication in rural areas of Arunachal Pradesh

Ms. Champa Devi

Research Scholar, Department of Mass Communication, Rajiv Gandhi University, Arunachal Pradesh, India

Dr. M. Nawaz Khan

Associate Professor, Department of Mass Communication, Rajiv Gandhi University, Arunachal Pradesh, India

Mr. Kombong Darang

Research Scholar, Department of Mass Communication, Rajiv Gandhi University, Arunachal Pradesh, India

Abstract--In the age of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), the traditional mass media like radio, television and newspaper are still capable of influencing socio-cultural changes specially health and hygiene related behavior even in indigenous communities. Over the years, communication scholars have attempted to examine every facet of mass media in terms of their roles in bringing out social development. A systematic review of literature of their research findings show that mass media in general and radio broadcasting in particular continue to play an important role in spreading information about health, education, and politics as well as raising awareness about various global and local social concerns. The All India Radio (AIR) has been playing a significant role in the empowerment of indigenous population of Arunachal Pradesh in northeast India as majority of radio programmes are produced in indigenous languages or dialects in order to cater to the information and communication needs of indigenous communities particularly those living in the villages. While mass media can provide a platform for all public health communications, the role of radio in disseminating health information is significant as evidenced from its contribution to the COVID-19 infodemics. However, there is a paucity of research work on the role of radio in socio-cultural changes particularly in

health communication that have been taking place in the state particularly in rural areas. Through a comprehensive study of relevant literature this paper attempts to identify the linkages between radio broadcasting and socio-cultural changes in rural areas with special reference to health communication in the age of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) thereby evolving further research paths for determining the relationship between radio and the socio-cultural changes occurring in rural tribal society in Arunachal Pradesh.

Keywords--health communication, radio, ICTs, social change, Arunachal Pradesh.

Introduction

Different forms of mass media including radio, television, newspaper, billboard etc. are capable of influencing socio-cultural changes even in indigenous communities. Radio being the least expensive mode of communication has the ability to reach all corners of the globe. Research findings have established the strength of radio as the most effective medium for enhancing public education and crystalizing development particularly in rural and remote regions. With its ability to influence individuals from all walks of life, radio informs, updates, entertains and educates them while making them aware of societal concerns and challenges. While mass media can provide a platform for all public health communications, the role of radio in disseminating health information is significant as evidenced from its contribution to the COVID-19 infodemics. In today's contemporary media culture, when everyone has access to ICTs, villagers even in the indigenous tribal communities of Arunachal Pradesh in northeast India continue to depend on radio broadcast for self-updates and information. Since its start in Pasighat on March 6th, 1966, the All India Radio Pasighat has played a significant role in the empowerment of indigenous population in Arunachal Pradesh. Subsequently, four other radio stations were established in Itanagar, Ziro, Tezu, and Tawang, each broadcasting a range of programmes in local languages or dialects in addition to Hindi and English. Radio is still significant in villages of Arunachal Pradesh since it satisfies the rural populace's communication demands on a daily basis. However, there is a paucity of research work on the role of radio in socio-cultural changes particularly through health communication in terms of raising awareness about health, cleanliness and other social issues in the state particularly in rural areas. Through a comprehensive study of relevant literature this paper attempts to identify the linkages between radio broadcasting and socio-cultural changes in rural areas with special reference to health communication in the age of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) thereby evolving further research paths for determining the relationship between radio and the socio-cultural changes occurring in rural tribal society in Arunachal Pradesh.

ICTs and Socio-Cultural Change in Rural Areas

Mass media has the ability to influence people's thoughts on social problems and also address societal difficulties. It has the potential to influence an individual's view on various social issues. Information and communication technologies (ICTs) have transformed life by revolutionizing access to information, education, and entertainment, as well as by facilitating access to services and social interactions. It has a profound effect on culture when it becomes the primary mode of communication. ICTs have also altered people's thought processes in many spheres of life, elevating civilization to new heights. Wardynski (2019) explores the connection between technology and social transformation, demonstrating how they are inextricably linked. He believes that technology and social development are linked to some extent. He defines social change as "the change that happens in human interactions and relationships and has an effect on cultural and social institutions," using current civil rights, women's rights, and LGBTQ rights as examples. He asserts that technology has a profound effect on social transformation through enhancing education, alleviating humanitarian needs, and preventing corruption. According to him, all cultures, whether it is primitive or advanced has to undergo social changes with the passage of time. It is a global phenomenon, which indicates that social change happens everywhere, though the rate and depth of change may vary by civilization. The author attributes society's evolution to modernization and a technologically oriented culture, stating that when a society undergoes a shift in its identity, social change would necessarily follow. According to Sablonnière (2017), social transformation is universal and worldwide, including neither the developing nor the developed countries. She asserts that tremendous societal change is the new normal, as shown by current events ranging from political and economic turmoil to desperate mass migration, natural or human calamities, and technological advancements.

Servaes (2011) in his study identifies the roadmap for the future of communication which leads to development and social change. He says that communication for social change is the exchange of information with the goal of achieving a consensus for action that takes the interests, needs, and capabilities of all parties into consideration. Citing societal change as a social process, he argues that communication technologies are critical instruments for facilitating this process. While money, productivity, and gross national product (GNP) continue to be critical components of human growth, the author asserts that communication is important for social transformation and development. Similarly, Mutekwe (2012) asserts that technology alters society since it serves as the organising force for social life and when it alters, the resulting changes may be substantial. He says that the development of the computer is altering how people practice medicine, study, work, and even think. Mutekwe says that society is a complicated network of interactions in which each member plays a unique function, elucidating William Ogburn's theory of social change, that says that technology is basic source for any kind of social change. At the same time, people are confronted with such new circumstances to which they react. These circumstances represent a variety of elements, including the introduction of new technology, new modes of production, changes in residency, and new technologies, ideas, and societal ideals. For him, societal transformation includes alterations to the way individuals work, raise their families, educate and manage

their children, and seek ultimate purpose in life. He notes that the world's fast social transformation is the consequence of basic forces put into action thousands of years ago, starting with domestication, agriculture, industrialization, and, finally, information.

According to Khanna (2012), technological improvements have had a significant influence on society across time. She notes that while many people advocated for the use of cutting-edge cloud, M2M, and mobile technologies, the existing system had not yet implemented even basic computing technologies in a few societies, with many health care programmes still relying on manually filled paper forms for data entry and tracking. Khanna believes that technology is still restricted to a few segments of society and that further work is required to widen its reach. According to him, new technologies continue to astound people with their vision and potential, and there is a need to employ current technology to aid in and facilitate societal change. As per Gibson and Murray (2012), the emergence of electronic media proved to be one of the significant technical milestones in evolution of communication technology since it shifted people away from oral and tribal cultures and toward a literate mindset. According to the authors, Marshall McLuhan's coining of the term "global village" describe the way in which electronic communication technologies make people connected. As McLuhan put it, as the wheel is an extension of foot and the book is an extension of eye, the electronic technologies are the extensions of human physical and mental capacities, while electric circuitry is an extension of the human central nervous system. While describing the negative consequences of the transition to global communication, they say with the invention of technologies the connection between the people with one another is slowly declining. As such, one of the pressing challenges in the global village, which is an interconnected world of communication, is to understand the potential positive and negative effects of life.

Declaring that change is a natural element of our life as we go through the phases of infancy, adolescence, maturity, and old age, Akujobi and Jackson (2017) demonstrate that no human civilization can remain static for an extended period of time due to the inevitability of social change. For them, societal transformation occurs as a consequence of the convenience required to address certain social issues. They assert that social change occurs in tandem with societal issues that need a more robust solution for human civilization, and that social change is as ancient as human society itself, which has evolved through time. They state that social change is considered natural, unavoidable, and ongoing, and that it progresses in a certain direction. Greenwood and Guner (2008) define social change as a movement in the percentage of the population that adheres to a specific attitude or pattern of conduct. According to them, social change is mostly a response to technical advancements in a society's technological environment. Since society's production capabilities has been increasing as a result of technological advancement, it becomes in certain people's self-interest to alter their behavior to take advantage of the new conditions. As individuals progressively alter their behaviour in response to growing possibilities, custom gradually changes as well. According to the authors, a significant portion of societal change is a response to economic and technological growth.

While Greenwood and Guner (2008) address the subject of why there is so much social change in modern civilization compared to ancient times, they identify the explanations as intensive research, mechanical innovation, and scientific discovery. They assert that there can be no question that beneficial discoveries and research result in societal transformation. Badawood (2016) believes that a variety of factors may contribute to societal transformation, including cultural, technical, and economic considerations. According to him, some historians think that societal change or evolution occurs primarily as a result of four essential processes- innovations, accumulation, diffusion, and adaptation. He explains that inventions change lifestyles and that their proliferation results in accumulations that result in further change and innovations that are more closely associated with daily life, particularly when they spread rapidly and on a large scale, necessitating that society gradually adapt to them. He asserts that new breakthroughs compel society to adapt to new technology, despite widespread opposition and a refusal to use it. According to Badawood (2016), social transition is unavoidable, and all advancements occurring around us must be embraced by everybody. He says that we should all work together to foster change in order to grow as people and as a community, within the framework of our faith and ideals. According to Hampesh (2013), the change in mass media technology has ushered in a mega media period. He believes that good communication is necessary for meaningful social development and that the mass media raise public awareness and encourage the formation of suitable attitudes among individuals. He says that although the mass media serve as a conduit for information, they also operate as agents of social change and disseminate new ideas. He believes that the mass media, particularly radio, has done an excellent job of motivating people by emphasizing rural development processes through various rural programs.

Kuppuswamy (1993) uses a variety of terminology to characterize societal changes, including evolution, process, boom, progress, development, and revolution. According to him, social change is defined as a major shift in social behaviour or in social structure. A social transformation occurs when there are changes in the structure of connections and the pattern of social behaviour within that framework. He asserts that the advancement of knowledge and technology has been a primary driver of societal transformation. He further emphasized the importance of knowledge as well as information expansion as a force which can bring societal transformation. Rao (1992), in his book, *Television for Rural Development*, says that mass media is a gift of the technological revolution from which people benefit from greater accessibility and wider reach. He quotes agricultural scientist and the father of India's green revolution, M.S. Swaminathan as saying, "ICTs were found to have great potential in taking knowledge and information to the rural population. Proper use of ICTs would help bridge the urban-rural divide in India while providing better links between researchers and rural people." Srinivas (2017) studies the process of Sanskritization and Westernization to understand cultural, religious, and social change in modern society. He analyses how the concept of a single pan-India hierarchy of varnas obscures the dynamic understanding of pre-British India. He explains "Sanskritization" as the process in which lower castes or tribal groups adopt the ways of life of higher caste in terms of customs and rituals. Sanskritization may bring positional change rather than total structural

changewhile“westernization”isadoption of certain western influences on social status and caste.

Weichold and Bonnie (2009) describe any social changes in society are associated with transformations in different aspects of human life. They explain that many countries have undergone tremendous changes over recent decades in societal value systems, media technology, and educational systems. They observe that such changes make its influence in the lives of children, adolescents, and adults in various aspects. Their study focuses on the effects of social change on human development in various aspects. While Kapur (2018) in her study focuses upon the lifestyle of the tribal people and the effect of globalisation and technological advancements on the tribes. She defines tribal people as the isolated dwellers of forests and hilly areas with lowlevels of educationand doing various kinds of jobs while some migrate to other regions for work. She says the tribal communities residing in India are simple in their living. The author states that the effect of globalisation is strong on the tribal groups and that the construction of various developmental projects, including big dams, pipelines, mines, roads, energy developments, and military invasions, have resulted in the extinction of the tribal communities. Kumar and Bansal (2013) say the development level of a society is measured by the level of efficiently harnessing government policies and programmes by the beneficiaries. For them, tribal people in India have been deprived of many of the best opportunities, and lack of infrastructure. They are of the view that information technology can play a key role in bringing progress and changes in their livelihoods, especially in tribal areas. They say ICTs may be utilized to strengthen or facilitate the information systems of development plans especially for the tribal population. ICTscan be used effectivelyin bettering livelihood opportunities thereby enhancingpeople’s access to information related to healthcare, economy,etc.

Mantu and Dipannita (2019) says with the introduction of information technology, human life has become increasingly dynamic. Though the use of information technology is crucial for development and modernization, these technologies have less influence on poor people who livein rural areas. While explaining the impact of information technology on tribal communities of Jhargram district in West Bengal, they argued that the backwardness of tribal community is mainly attributed to economic problemsbesideslow level of education thanks to lack of encouragement for childeducation.Explaining the significant role of Development Communication in development process, Choudhury (2011)statestwo primary roles of development communication –a transforming role meaning social change in hygiene taste and a socializing role meaning maintenance of established values of society. She says mass media has the potential to play an important role in development communication through knowledge dissemination, providing forum for issues discussion and also impart ideas and skills for a better life. She writes new technologies have also been playing an important role for development communication. She writes that new interactive communication technologieslike mobile phone, website and internet having persuasion capability with instant feedback bring in common peoplein the process of development. Choudhury (2011) observes that mass media and communication technology should be used for development purpose extensively but tactfully as it is a weapon in the hands of the government for positive development.

Radio and Socio-Cultural Change in Rural Areas

Radio as a mass medium is very effective in reaching out to a large and heterogeneous audience as it is very influential and popular. In today's digital society, the existence of radio is still significant as most of the people especially in rural areas are using radio for information and entertainment. All India Radio has 420 stations across the country and they broadcast different kinds of programmes in 23 languages and 146 dialects. They disseminate information through specialists and experts to the community people and make them interact also. Reporting the findings of his study, Sakda (1984) writes that different programmes broadcast in radio help villagers directly with recommendation and special educational programmes to take up new strategies in their agricultural process. In his study he also found that the villagers on whom he conducted study were interested in listening radio which made them remain well-informed about radio programmes and other government policies. However, he noted that though people in traditional and remote villages would listen to radio, they found it difficult to make complete use of the new ideas because of various bottlenecks. Similarly, Khan (2011) pointed out that radio played a key role in meeting the information needs of the villagers, but radio alone was not responsible for any socio-cultural change because other existing mass media also influenced socio-cultural change in rural areas. Pandey (2013) reported that rural people would mostly rely on radio for information while they would also expose to other mass media like television, newspapers, books, folklore, folksongs etc. He stated that besides watching other national TV news channels, the villagers also prefer to listen local radio programmes for more credible information and updates.

Yerkimbay Brown *et al.* (2017) pointed out that radio is an important medium for the preservation of ethnic identity and language. They said many groups who belonged to the minority groups can benefit from radio programmes that broadcast in their own languages and their own voices too. Likewise, Schulma (2016) writes that radio is still as strong as ever for disseminating information. Pati (2004) in his study identified the important role of mass media in tribal development with special reference to Jharkhand. He highlighted the views of tribal people towards different programmes broadcast on radio as an educational information entertainment sub-system. While analyzing media behaviour among tribal groups, he underscores the importance of broadcasting medium especially radio and says it has the potentials to influence people. Anwar, Malik, Raees *et al.* (2020) stated that it is only with the help of mass media that people across the country get information about the novel Coronavirus. They believed that like previous pandemic such as SARS (2003), H1N1 (2009), and MERS (2012), this time also the mass media including radio played a significant role and contributed to the COVID-19 infodemics. Their study revealed that for the tracking and updates of Coronavirus, media played a worldwide role. Citing that mass media has an imperative role in today's society, they write media could provide a unified platform for all public health communications. They further suggest that the need for public health communications and the role of media in disseminating health information should be well understood and explored as it could be an essential tool for combating pandemics like COVID-19 or future outbreaks.

Khalid, Ahmed, et al. (2015) described development as a long and complex evolutionary process. Rather than merely generation and accumulation of material resources, it is also a process of social change. Information dissemination is crucial for bringing in social change and in the third world countries the positive role of development has been recognized. They write that the real influence of media in national development depends on the media themselves and societies in which they operate and the audience they reach. However, not all these factors are the same everywhere, at all times, or all conditions. They are of the view that acting as the gatekeeper of public issues the media would set public agenda. Stating that change is inevitable, they say any study of social change hardly possible without studying mass media. They write media boosted the process of socio-cultural change and modernization and technology brought about many changes. Pati (1992) writes radio was regarded as a vehicle of development and it has got a high standard of government support. Explaining the history of radio broadcasting, he says after the outbreak of Second World War, radio journalism started in an organized way in India just to counter the war propaganda and the first news bulletin was broadcast by All India Radio from Delhi in 1936. The author says presently, the AIR broadcasts 276 news bulletins every day in its different services including home, external and regional. Terming the Pati (1992) writes that the News Services Division of the All India Radio is a big news organization which broadcasts regular news bulletins, besides current affairs, news reels, news reviews etc.

Explaining the important role of All India Radio in society, Jafri (2015) writes radio broadcasting has reached a newer height that has a potential more than what is imagined. It could be used in the best possible way for any kind of development and change in a society. Citing that radio still is considered as an effective medium of communication, he says with the recent roll out of FM channels in India, the broadcasting is growing substantially. He explains that from advertising to economy, social change to consumerism, education to business development, radio broadcasting can effectively graduate the behavioral pattern of India's consumer market. Praveena (2019) writes that the tribal people have their own languages, dialects, culture and effective systematic knowledge besides their own management system. Studying the role of modernization in social change of Adi tribe of Arunachal Pradesh, she writes that modernity allows the backward classes to get acquainted to the outside world through education and cultural transformation. She says the concept of modernity basically based on social structure mainly characterized by urbanization, growing literacy rate and creating new ideas among people through new media technologies, radio, television and books.

Community Radio in Rural Areas: A Paradigm Shift

The research results indicate that radio continues to play a vital role in society, particularly in rural regions, despite the fact that the value of conventional media such as radio seems to be diminishing daily as new media technologies arise. The village people mostly rely on radio because it is portable and does not require electricity. Hence, for villagers, radio is a more convenient medium of communication to listen even while working on fields. Besides the All India Radio services, the contribution of Community Radio is also pivotal for the growth of

rural areas. Rashmi and Nagaraja (2016) conducted a study on understanding how the radio programmes are designed and their impact on the community of Tumkur taluk of Tumkur district in Karnataka. Stating the potential of community radio in creating impact on society, they observe that as people in rural areas in India would depend on radio for both information and entertainment, community radio stations can cater to their such needs effectively. Similarly, Sharma (2012) in her study explains various roles that community radio can play for the development of rural society. She says that the community radio will be an effective tool in protecting and promoting local culture. This medium is the best way to meet the needs of communication at local level because community radio helps to create a place where various people in the community including youths, seniors, children, students, religious leaders meet.

While stating that any developmental needs of the people revolves round the basic requirement including clean drinking water, medical facilities, educational facilities, electricity, roads, etc., Khan (2014) says the task of the community radio is to build capacities among its audience and raise their concern to the authorities in achieving all these requirements. He writes community radio is a powerful medium to raise one's voice. As community is the owner of the community radio, the author says community radio has the potential to address grievances and basic issues. He says community radio could play an important role in facilitating sustainable development through empowerment and social change. The author further explains that there is a relationship between community radio and social change provided it should involve its audience at all stages to facilitate development.

Though the Information and Communication Technologies have their influence even in villager's living standard, they still prefer radio as their main source of information. Reporting the findings of a study on radio listening habits and their effects in the economic, cultural and political spheres in Northern Thailand, Sakda (1984) says that radio has its impact in every aspects of life as it prepares listeners for reception of innovations. According to him, radio helps villagers directly with recommendation and special educational programmes to undertake new strategies at agricultural methods. He explains that the villagers were interested in listening radio which made them remain well-informed about radio programmes and other government policies. In the study of rural communities in Manipur, Khan (2011) points out that mass media like radio disseminated facts on development policies and programmes of the government and helped in bringing out socio-cultural change in nearly all aspects of life. According to his findings in Andro and Moijing villages of Manipur, radio plays a key role in meeting the information needs of the villagers, but radio alone was not responsible for any socio-cultural change because other existing mass media also influenced socio-cultural change in rural areas. While Pandey (2013) writes villagers listen to radio for a few hours in comparison to their exposure to different mass media. He says that the people in villages located near cities were more exposed to various mass media. According to him, rural people mostly rely on radio for information which was followed by other mass media like television, newspapers, books, folklore/songs etc. He says besides watching other national news channels, the villagers also prefer to listen local radio programmes for more credible information and updates.

Future Research Path for Radio and Socio-Cultural Change in Arunachal Pradesh

Being one the youngest state in the country, Arunachal Pradesh is located in the North Eastern part of India. It is the largest state in area wise in the north-eastern region and shares national boundaries with Assam and Nagaland and international boundaries with Bhutan, China and Myanmar. Gogoi (2019) writes from 1914 to 1954 the state of Arunachal Pradesh was known as North East Frontier Tract. From 1954 to 1972 it was known as North East Frontier Agencies. Earlier, it was the part of Assam and further it gained the Union Territory status on January 20, 1972 and renamed as Arunachal Pradesh which means "Land of the Rising Sun." Arunachal Pradesh became a full-fledged state on February 20, 1987 and include as the 28th state of India. The media landscape of the state comprises of radio, newspapers, television, film, magazines and other periodicals besides the recent emergence of digital media and blogs. All such mass media provide a platform to connect people within the state and to the rest of the world to share information. Newspapers in the state entered lately and it was only after attaining its statehood in 1987 that the number of newspapers began to increase. The first newspaper from the state *Echo of Arunachal* an English tabloid was launched on 20th February 1988 at Itanagar while the first All India Radio station was established in Pasighat on 6th March 1966.

In Arunachal Pradesh, radio broadcasting has reached the remotest areas with its variety of national and local programmes. At present, the state has altogether five radio stations located at Pasighat, Itanagar, Ziro, Tezu and Tawang. These radio stations have been rendering their services by producing a variety of programmes in local languages and dialects besides Hindi and English. Several studies on social, political, economic, and cultural changes in society have been conducted by various academicians and scholars in the state, including T. Mibang's *Social Change in Arunachal Pradesh* and Rinchin Megejee's *Stratification and Social Change Among Tribals: An Anthropological Study Among the Sherdukpens of Arunachal Pradesh*, Amrendra Kumar Thakur's *Social Transition in Pre-Colonial Arunachal Pradesh: Servitude as a Primary Driver* and Tame Ramya and Tame Ramjuk's *Changing Cultural Practices among the Nyishis of Arunachal Pradesh: A Contextual Study*. However, no serious attempts have been made to understand the potential of radio broadcasting in rural areas for indigenous community growth in Arunachal Pradesh which makes it difficult to get related literature from Arunachal Pradesh on the topic.

But the review of related literature from across the country points out that radio still is a vital medium of communication in villages to fulfill their communication needs and also to educate masses on various issues of society. Being an inexpensive and portable medium of communication, radio is liked by villagers more than other medium like newspapers, television, and Internet etc. because even an illiterate person can gain knowledge from radio through its local programmes which are broadcast in their own language or dialect. As radio broadcasting has reached a newer height in today's society, so it can be used in the best possible way for development and change. Radio still is considered as an effective medium of communication as the News Services Division of AIR is considered as one of the largest radio news organizations which also provide quick

updates from across the globe. In today's digital world where everyone has access to different mass media for information and communication, radio has been considered as a blessed gift for the villagers for knowledge and information. It can be utilized for any kind of development in rural areas by disseminating various programmes and policies of the government.

Conclusion

From the above discussion, it can be concluded that the mass media are vital for any kind of development to take place in a society while radio is considered the heart and soul of the rural populace to bring development in villages. As the watchdog of a society, media has the potential and power to set public agenda and act as the gatekeeper of its issues. In today's society, where ICTs have their influence in all walks of life, radio also plays an equally important role in bringing transformation from traditional to modern society, especially in health communication in rural areas. If utilized properly, it can change people's perceptions towards health and social issues and bring positive development. Moreover, the significant role of radio cannot be ignored in the world of ICTs in modern society, as people from both urban and rural areas still opt radio for news bulletins and other health-related information. Hence, radio is still the most credible source of information in today's ICT pervasive digital society even in indigenous communities in Arunachal Pradesh.

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