THE COMMUNITY RADIO IN KASHMIR: A WAY FORWARD

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ABSTRACT

In India, the campaign to legitimise community radio began in mid-1990s, soon after the Supreme Court of India ruled in its judgment of February 1995 that "airwaves are public property. Though the approval for setting up of Community radio stations in India was granted in 2002, it is yet to develop in the valley of Kashmir. Till now, the valley has not established any community radio station, but the first effort to use radio for the development of the community was made in 2009 when Panos South Asia, in collaboration with the Islamic University of Science and Technology (IUST), a rural University in Awantipora (Kashmir) started a community radio program in the Awantipora community. The program named "Pesh Kadam" meaning "Step Forward" started in 2009 and completed 350 episodes in 2018.

This paper is aimed to study the reasons for absence of community radio stations in Kashmir. It also documents the efforts made to bring this medium to Kashmir and understand the evolution and challenges of first ever community radio program in Kashmir, study its content, analyse its popularity and efficacy. Both qualitative and quantitative research techniques are deployed in this study.

KEYWORDS: Community Radio, Awantipora, Kashmir & Pesh Kadam

Original Article

INTRODUCTION

The state of Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) is a fascinating geographic region including unique blend of natural and cultural characteristics. The state comprised of three regions - the Jammu division, the Vale of Kashmir and Ladakh. Though by area Kashmir is the smallest province (15.73%) but in terms of population, it is the largest (54.93%). Hindus and Sikhs are prevalent in Jammu region with Muslims as a minority, on the other hand, Muslims are predominant in Kashmir valley with Hindus & Sikhs as a minority and Buddhists in Ladakh-Baltistan region.

At the time of transfer of power from British to India, there were 562 princely states in India and every prince was given three options; join Indian Union, join the Dominion of Pakistan or remain independent. Most of the states had signed the Instrument of Accession before 15 August, 1947 and joined the Indian Union lead by Congress, except Hyderabad which was ruled by a Muslim Nawab, Junagadh in Western India, a Hindu majority state ruled by a Muslim ruler who wished to join Pakistan dominion, and Jammu and Kashmir a Muslim Majority state ruled by a Hindu king. In the end, Junagadh was added to Indian union when New Delhi held a plebiscite in the state, which Pakistan never accepted, Hyderabad was brought under control by India using armed forces, and Jammu and Kashmir became victim of a military dispute politically and diplomatically which still continues(Lamb, 1991).

Kashmir has been an acknowledged conflict area reeling under continuous violence for the past three decades. It is more in focus regarding militancy, civil unrest, human rights violations that make an alluring subject

for researchers. Though the turmoil in Kashmir had begun in 1940s but from 1989, the struggle for the independence of the state intensified and armed struggle began. As per a media report published in 2008, the death toll from nearly two decades of insurgency in Kashmir is more than 47,000 people and this figure does not include people who disappeared as a result of the conflict(Reuters, 2008). As per the 156-page report 'Everyone Lives in Fear' published by the International Human Rights Watch in 2006, since 1989 (to 2006), over 50,000 people are claimed to have died during the conflict. (Human Rights Watch, 2006) After this period, there were mass uprisings in the years 2008, 2010 and most recent 2016 wherein hundreds of people got killed and thousands injured. Official figures reveal around 110 people lost their lives in the 2010 Kashmir uprising(Ishfaq-ul-Hassan, 2011) and Human Rights Review's 2016 annual report puts the total number of killings in 2016 at 383 (including 145 civilians)(Yasir, 2017).

This conflict has a devastating and catastrophic effect with the widespread social disorder, disorganization, educational backwardness, physical and mental health deterioration, mass psychological depression and extreme helplessness. Most alarming aspect of the conflict is that prominent victims of violence during the last three decades are the youth. No aspect of their young lives has been left untouched by the conflict that has broken down traditional community structures, weakened authority figures, disintegrated cultural norms and coping mechanisms and destroyed community networks that used to provide support in times of crisis (Hassan, 2011).

Media is believed to have a critical role in any conflict. The role of the mass media in conflict situations has attracted enormous scholarly attention. Media function as a platform where the causes and impacts of conflict are discussed and solutions for peace are generated. Though the media is sometimes blamed to escalate conflict, but it has a tremendous potential to contribute in conflict resolution and peace building. The media can either report negatively on political opponents, or raise the legitimacy of those supporting peaceful negotiations (Wolfsfeld, 2004).

Role of Community Media in Conflict Resolution

In Kashmir, media penetration has grown enormously as in any other part of the world. However the outreach is not uniformly distributed as this base is more urban based and large swathes of rural and remote segments across the state still have no adequate access to any form of media(Bali, 2015). Though, no community media exist in Kashmir but the experiences worldwide have shown that community media play a role in any conflict.

Frances Fortune, SFCG's Africa director who runs radio projects in eight countries emerging from conflict, including Angola, Burundi, Sierra Leone and Liberia believes that the role of community media in supporting peace is immense. "Governments are not very good at communicating to their people, yet often there is so much going on during and after conflict that people need to know and understand. You can change the way a government engages. Even prevention of conflict is possible if you provide people with alternative ideas early enough"(Kimani, 2007).

Conscious that in today's radically changed media landscape; community media can play an important role, notably by promoting social cohesion, intercultural dialogue and tolerance, as well as by fostering community engagement and democratic participation at the local and regional level(Council of Europe, 2009). Community radio, through its openness to participation to all sectors and all people in a community/ies, creates a diversity of voices and opinions on the air(C. Fraser, 2001).

TerYat, a talk show run on a community based radio station in Gulu, northern Uganda was set up to promote dialogue and better public understanding in order to defuse tensions. (Momanyi, 2015). Ministers, members of parliament,

religious leaders, politicians and rebels talk in the studio or by phone and give their views on the ways to foster peace and development and answer questions through phone-ins (UNDP, 2006).

In northern Uganda, an area that was worse affected by the conflict, a radio station Mega FM set up by the United Nations, donor agencies, church organizations and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) help communities to deal with the challenges of re-establishing peace after the war(Momanyi, 2015).

A research conducted to study the role of community media in peace building in post-conflict Rwanda has revealed that community radio has contributed to peace by defining community in terms of region and not defining the concept along the same ethnic lines that have proven to be problematic in the past(Mutasa, 2015).

Radio Okapi created by the United Nations Mission in Congo has been credited by regional analysts with easing tensions, counteracting propaganda, and helping people in eastern Congo rebuild their lives after the war(Kimani, 2007)

Community Radio in Kashmir

When peace and security is a priority, the means of development usually take a second place. Conflict affects the level of development in several ways. The delay in the introduction of a development medium in Kashmir in the form of community radio is one such consequence.

It was December 2002 when the Government of India approved the policy for the grant of licenses for setting up of community radio stations in India. By November 2008, there were 38 operational community radio stations in the country. By 25 April 2013, the number of applications received by the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting had reached 1200, 428 Letters of Intent (LOI) were issued and 191 Grant of Permission of Agreement (GOPA) signed and 148 community radio stations were on air (Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, 2013). As per the Ministry's report, the number of operational community radio stations in India as on 25 May 2018 is 217 and 306 organizations has been provided the GOPA (MIB, 2018).

While this medium was adopted in other states of the country much earlier, it took a long time to enter the valley of Kashmir. The first effort to use radio for the development of the community was made in 2009 when Panos South Asia, running similar programmes elsewhere, in collaboration with the Islamic University of Science and Technology (IUST), Awantipora, started a community radio program in the Awantipora community. Though it was planned to establish a community radio station in the campus of IUST but it could not become possible due to the reasons discussed in the paper. However, a successful and effective community program *Pesh Kadam*[1] meaning "A Step Forward" was started in 2009 that has completed 350 episodes by March 2018.

AIM AND METHODS

This study is aimed to study the reasons as to why document the evolution and challenges of first-of-its-kind community radio program in Kashmir *Pesh Kadam*, study its content, analyse its popularity and efficacy among the local audience of Awantipora where the CR program is based. Both qualitative and quantitative research techniques were deployed inthis study. The method of content analysis was adopted to study the aim, focus and content of the program. Content analysis is the method used predominantly in mass communication research. It is based on the concepts originally developed in other social sciences. Content analysis is a methodology in the social sciences for studying the content of

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[1]Pesh Kadam is an Urdu word meaning 'a step forward'.

communication. Earl Babbie defines it as "the study of recorded human communications, such as books, websites, paintings and laws"(Babble, 2009).

One (first) episode of *Pesh Kadam* from each month was selected for a period of three years (2014-2016) of *Pesh Kadam* to understand the issues highlighted by the program. This is a form of systematic sampling, wherein every k^{th} item is selected to produce a sample of size *n* from a population size of *N* (Bajpai, 2010). Since the program was not produced for 10 weeks in 2014 and 24 weeks in the year of 2016[2], the number of months for which the program was run during these three years was 28, so was the number of the selected episodes. In the year 2014, the valley was hit by devastating floods that affected all the districts of the valley and in the year 2016, there was a mass uprising after the killing of a young militant Burhan Wani. Due to this uprising, curfews were imposed in 9 districts of Kashmir for more than five months (PTI, 2018).

The quantitative procedure of the survey was used to study the listenership patterns of its audience, employing a well-structured questionnaire. S. M. Harrison defined survey as a process by which quantitative facts are collected about the social aspects of the community composition and activities(Harrison, 1930). Eighty respondents in the age group of 16-35 years were covered under the survey. This group was selected for the survey as this is the age-group which was identified as the target audience of the program during the baseline survey. The respondents were equally divided on the basis of gender (male: 40, female: 40). Discussions with coordinators of the community radio program were also held.

Community Radio Program in Kashmir

The thought of introducing community radio for Awantipora emerged during a fellowship program initiated by Panos South Asia to expose and train journalists and academicians from two parts of Kashmir[3]. Panos South Asia is an NGOs with an objective to work in partnership with both local and regional partners, to stimulate and inform public and policy debate and to provide information on key environment and development issues that is accessible to multiple target groups(Panos South Asia, 2010). In one such program conducted in 2008, a staffer from Islamic University of Science and Technology was trained at Nepal regarding the community media. Nepal has a wide and efficient network of community radio stations that has emerged as an efficient model of community radio across the globe. Nepal, with a small fraction of India's population, has 260 community radio stations(Jain, 2015).

In 2009, the university decided to establish its own community radio station as a community development initiative and apply for the licence of the same. Though the university did not receive any written response to the application, but upon enquiring the status of the university application for a community radio licence, it was revealed that the approval could not be granted as there is an army airbase near the campus (approximately 3 kms away) and it was apprehended that the transmission of the program may interfere with the wireless communication of the army.[4]

Universities, Deemed Universities and other educational institutions shall be permitted to locate their transmitters and antennae only within their main campuses (Government of India, 2006).

This clause of the policy guidelines makes it difficult for the institution to establish its transmitter at any other place.

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[2]Conversation with Shazia Yousuf, Coordinator, *Pesh Kadam* (2017).
[3]Two parts of Kashmir separated by Line of Control (LoC) between Indian and Pakistan.
[4]Conversation with Deputy Registrar (Academics), IUST, Jan. 2017

The other main reason as to why the varsity failed to obtain the licence is the belief of the government of India that community radio in Kashmir could be used as a medium of communication against the state. Government of India has a policy that they cannot give transmitters to the general public in border and sensitive areas (Rasool, 2017).

So the university decided to start with a community based radio program under the title *Pesh Kadam*as a joint initiative of the Islamic University of Science and Technology (IUST), Awantipora, and Panos South Asia [5] a non-profit organisation aiming to put critical issues in the public sphere through the media. IUST is a rural university situated in Awantipora with the majority of its students from rural areas. Out of around 3000 students of the varsity, about 60 per cent belong to rural areas. Among the rural districts of the valley, the students mostly belong to South Kashmir (Pulwama, Anantnag & Shopian). The capacity of Department of Journalism of IUST and experience of Panos South Asia in working on radio were brought together in this endeavour for a community based initiative using radio as a tool. The Memorandum of Agreement (MoA) between Panos South Asia and IUST ran for 3 years starting 1 November 2009 supported by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. Since 2013, the university has been supporting the program from its own resources.

The target community for the program is Awantipora, a town located in the South Kashmir in Pulwama District. The town is almost equidistant from the other districts of Srinagar and Anantnag. Besides, lying on the National Highway the town assumes importance because of it being a historically rich place. The town has served as the capital city of King Awanti Verman in 10thcentury AD. Administratively it is a tehsil of District Pulwama. It has been categorized as a Notified Area Committee under the Census of India 2011, with 1083houses and a population of 12,647, of which 8,982 are males while 3,665 are females (Sex Ratio: 408). The literacy rate of the town has increased to 81.75% as against 47.76 % in 2001. However, the female literacy rate (55.5% is much less than the male literacy rate (91%) in the area. As can be seen there is a huge disparity in literacy among males and females in the town(National Population Census, 2011). As a political unit, the town is part of the Pampore assembly constituency. It is one of the areas of the South Kashmir where the conflict has affected almost every life (Hassan, 2011). The uprising of 2016 emerged from South Kashmir and the maximum protests and causalities were reported from this area. Despite this, the community members associated with the *Pesh Kadam* continued to use this medium as a medium of development rather than the issues of the conflict.

Pesh Kadam aims to give a voice to the young Kashmiris masses from Awantipora. The first episode of *Pesh Kadam* was broadcasted on 20 December 2010 and so far about 320 episodes of the program have been broadcast. The program is broadcast on Sunday evening every week. However, the program was not on air during the following breaks-

- Two weeks in June 2010 due to unrest when more than 100 people got killed and strict curfew was imposed in all major districts of the valley.

- Two weeks in March 2013 when the program was not broadcast due to some technical problems at Radio Kashmir, Srinagar.[6]

- 10 weeks during Kashmir floods (September – November 2014) as the transmission system of Radio Kashmir, Srinagar was badly damaged.

- Six months in 2016 due to the Kashmir unrest that mostly affected the South Kashmir.

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[5]PNOS South Asia is a part of the family of Panos Institute.
[6]Email with Janisar Qureshi (Coordinator, *PeshKadam*) on 3 March 2014.

As per the program coordinator, "The program is aimed at serving three primary purposes. The first, and the most crucial, is to create a space for development of youth in the area. Years of conflict in the valley have resulted in a shrunken space for development of the youth. The program intends to create a space where the youth finds a constructive and gainful creative space. At the same time it can provide them with media skills in the form of professional training. The second is to use radio as a tool for communication in voicing issues relevant to the community of Awantipora. This is also an effort towards setting up a community radio (CR) station in the town. CR is emerging as a powerful tool for grassroots level communication and the location of IUST in Awantipora provides an apt opportunity for a radio station where it is not only a space for the youth, but also a tool to voice issues important to the people of Awantipora and the Kashmir in general. With an institution such as IUST facilitating such a space, the idea is to create a sustainable link between the communication needs of the community and structures and facilities of the institution. The third is to provide a real time technical training for the journalism students of IUST and youth in Awantipora. With a full-fledged studio and equipment, the programme also acts as a part of a complete and rigorous technical training regime of the university as far as broadcast journalism is concerned.[7]

Pesh Kadam developed its own module for engaging the community members from Awantipora and the students of the Islamic University of Science and Technology (60% of whom belong to rural areas). A baseline survey was conducted in Awantipora to gather relevant information regarding the local people that ultimately helped in deciding the content of the proposed program (Imran S. , 2009). In the first phase of the program production, some 70 youth from IUST and Awantipora were involved with the program who conceptualised, wrote, recorded, edited and managed all the production related work under the supervision of teachers in the university and trainers provided by Panos South Asia. Four radio clubs were constituted with members from Awantipora and IUST. During the first two years of the production, the radio club members were trained by the experts from Nalanda Way Foundation, a Chennai based non-profit organisation working on several issues through theatre, visual arts, music, dance, radio and films. Nomad India, an organization involved in the manufacture and setting up of community radio stations helped in setting up the necessary infrastructure in the university.

In the last eight years, more than 200 youth (in the age-group of 9-30 years) have been trained in the *Pesh Kadam* studio. The initial trainings were conducted by professionals and people from academia focussing on the production of community-oriented participatory programs. The later trainings are conducted by the community members and the IUST students and teachers.[8]

Content on Peshkadam

So far more than 350 episodes of *Pesh Kadam* have been aired on FM 102.6 MHz of Radio Kashmir, Srinagar on every Sunday at 2100 hours. *Pesh Kadam* covers a range of issues from public health and civic amenities to the traditions and culture of Kashmir. Some of the issues that have been covered so far are – casual labour, poppy cultivation and other agricultural issues, child rights, water scarcity, the environment and climate change, illiteracy, history, various career options etc. Segments related to different aspects of the community or issues related to youth in general are covered (Showkat, 2011).

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[7] Email with Ms. Sana Beg (Coordinator, *Pesh Kadam*), 2012.
[8] Conversation with Coordinator, *Pesh Kadam* on March 2017.

The programs were mostly based on the issues that were highlighted by the community members during the baseline survey. It included segments based on agriculture, education, child labour, health, child immunization and other social issues. As per a study carried out on thirteen episodes of *Pesh Kadam* in 2013, the program had 94 segments on 11 broad categories, viz "Cover Story"; "Talent"; "KhelKe Rang (Colors of Sports)"; "Health"; "Pesh Kadam Genius"; "Career Counselling"; "Meri Kahaani (My Story)"; "Sungmeel (Milestones)"; "Kisan Sanchar Seva (Farmer's Communication Service)"; "Nehake Nuskay (Prescriptions by Neha)" and "Vox Pop (Voice of People)" (Noor, 2013). Besides, segments named Kath pend (A platform for discussion), Innovations, placement bulletins, radio drama, quiz, radio documentaries, programs on environment, history, culture and traditions of Kashmir have also been part of the program. Though the program started with 6basic formats of a radio program in 2009 but it used to give space to different creative segments also. Most of the segments were named by the members of the radio club.

The varsity has developed all the necessary equipment within a studio where the community members and IUST students work together for the production on each segment of the program. It acts as a part of a complete and rigorous technical training regime of the IUST as far as broadcast journalism is concerned. The radio-club members who comprise of students and young community members conceptualise each segment of the program regarding which they collect the relevant broadcast material. For that, they are being acquainted with various techniques, like how to motivate a person for sound bites, how to arrange these voice clips in order and so on. Besides, they are guided about the various stages of the programme production. Though members of the radio clubs are not the regular contributors of the program as the frequency of their contributions has declined to a large extend in last two years but there are community members as young as 13 years old who often visit the studio for sharing their recorded material with the production team.

The community members (those who are radio club members) are provided a Radio Club Identity Card by the Department of Journalism and Mass Communication of the Islamic University of Science and Technology as that is essential in a conflict-ridden place like Kashmir where a person is supposed to reveal his/her identify at several occasions. Though the department issues audio recorders to the community members but some also use their personal mobile phones for recording.

Survey Findings

Table 1

Respondents who Listen to	Number	Percentage
Radio	64	80
Radio Kashmir (Srinagar)	50	62
FM Radio	55	69
Pesh Kadam	53	66
Pesh Kadam regularly	17	21
Participate in any segment	14	18

The survey conducted among the Awantipora youth revealed interesting facts and also helped to understand the gaps and challenges of the program. All the respondents consider radio as a medium of entertainment and information and have access to radio though it is second popular medium after television, but more popular than print media (newspapers & magazines). Eighty percent of the people listen to the radio, out of which sixty-two percent listen to Radio Kashmir (Srinagar) for 1-2 hours daily. Sixty-nine percent of them tune to FM stations of the valley. Pertinent to mention here, that there are only two FM channels (equally popular) in Srinagar, accessible in Kashmir that include 102.6 FM Radio Kashmir of All India Radio and 92.7 Big FM of Reliance Broadcast Network.

Sixty six percent of the respondents listen to *PeshKadam* with about twenty-one percent who listen to the program regularly. Eighteen percent of the respondents have participated in at least one segment of *PeshKadam*. The participation ranges from giving bytes in the program segments up to the recording of a whole program (mostly *Vox Pop* and *Kath Pend).*

Table 2

Respondent Satisfaction	Number	Percentage of PeshKadam audience
Format of program	47	88% (59 % of total audience)
Time of program	34	64% (42% of *total* audience)

Table 3

Popular Segments	Number	Percentage of PeshKadam audience
Cover Story	30	56 (37 % of total audience)
Health	26	49 (32% of total audience)
MeriKahani	24	45 (30% of total audience)

Fifty-nine percent of the total respondents (that comprise 88 percent of *PeshKadam* audience*)* are contended with the format of the program, though all the respondents want an increase in the duration of the community program. All the respondents who listen to the program expressed their pleasure that Awantipora is the only community in the valley that has a program focused on their issues. The cover story is the most popular segment of the program among 41 percent of the total respondents (56 percent of the *PeshKadam* audience). It is followed by the Health and *MeriKahani (My story)* segments popular among 49 percent and 45 percent of the *PeshKadam* audience respectively.

Fifty-six percent of the *PeshKadam* respondents suggested that there is a needfor change in the content of the program and 64 percent of them suggested an increase in the duration of the program. The timing of the program was considered appropriate by 64 percent of them.

CONCLUSIONS

The attempt of the university needs to be appreciated as it has taken a major and critical step in creating a media for the people of Awantipora where their issues could be highlighted and discussed. In conflict and disaster hit community like Kashmir, the medium of community radio can play a great role in sensitization for development and peace-building. The lessons from the community radio in Nepal and African countries needs to be remembered where the role of community radio in conflict resolution has been very crucial.

Kashmir has faced media gag several times (International Federation of Journalists (IFJ), 2017), and running a community radio in such a scenario is a challenge in itself. Though several efforts have been made to utilize this community space in the best possible manner, but a lot still needs to be done. *PeshKadam*is a small step in bringing the concept of community radio to the people of Kashmir valley. The success of this program points towards the possibility of having a community based media in Kashmir as well. Some of the challenges that the program experience include-

- At some instances, some of the content of the program has been edited by editors at Radio Kashmir, Srinagar citing the policy of the AIR as its reason.

- The turmoil in the state has disrupted the production and transmission of the program at several occasions.

- There is a decline in the participation of the community members in the production of the program that needs to be addressed.

- The program is run by the university as a community support initiative and the community members do not participate in the management of the program.

- The community based program of IUST has been able to earn a space. Comparing the content of *PeshKadam* with that of the content broadcasted on *VidyaWani*(Community Radio station, Pune University), *PeshKadam* have worked on the issues other than education. While Pune University's station is focussed to develop a connect among the students, teachers and administration of the varsity(The Indian Express, 2017)(Sakal Times , 2017), *PeshKadam* has highlighted the issues that goes beyond the university's internal issues. Also, the program has reached more audience that the Community Radio Station run by Jamia Millia University, New Delhi. Nine per cent of the target audience listen to the Jamia Community Radio (Fatma M Khan, 2016).

More than 350 episodes of the program have been run successfully by the university while actively engaging the community members. Most of these problems could be solved if the varsity will be given a license for the establishment of a community radio station in the campus. The university again applied for the license in 2017 with the hope that the requisite permission will be granted. Besides, the participation of the community members in the management and administration of the program is crucial, so a community body for the station/program needs to be constituted.

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