1. Introduction

In May 2011, Google Chrome launched a television advertisement campaign called ‘Dear Sophie’\(^1\). The advertisement which lasts about ninety seconds follows a dad as he documents his daughter’s life in a digital scrapbook, from the day she is born. He uses an email account with the address ‘dear.sophie.lee@gmail.com’ to write emails to his daughter. To this address, the father emails her files of her activities using photos on Picasa, videos on YouTube, Google Maps etc., building an archive of sorts. The advertisement ends with a close up of an email he is writing wherein he says—“I’ve been writing to you since you were born…I can’t wait to share these with you someday” (Google Chrome 2011). The father here is doing what many generations of parents have done in various ways to preserve childhood memories. The methods used by parents to save these memories however, are changing. The advertisement reflects this changing relationship between media practices and memories.

To further elaborate on this change, consider a personal anecdote by way of example. It was the wee hours of a warm New Zealand summer day in December 2013. While, I sat writing, I was briefly distracted by my Facebook feed. I sat in shock as I read a schoolmate’s post. She was paying tribute to a senior schoolmate who passed away quite suddenly that week in a road accident. I noticed that throughout that week, many of my schoolmates visited the senior’s page to write her messages in mourning and prayer; in grief and condolence. They continued ‘talking’ to her on her Facebook profile for days. A year later, they continue to visit her profile and write posts recounting school memories. Amanda Williams and Michael Merten, in a 2009 study, looked at how adolescents used online social networking sites as a means to cope with the sudden death of peers. Amongst other things, their study highlights one particular point which is of interest. They observed that adolescents continued to post on the deceased peer’s online page and ‘talk’ to them (Williams and Merten 2009: 82). This is very much like events related in personal anecdote above.

The Google advertisement, personal anecdote, and the academic study, all point to a significant relationship in our daily lives- the one between memory (both personal and collective) and media technologies. Further, studies like the one by Williams and Merten (2009) cited above, opens up the space for discussions on the everyday (embodied, socio-cultural) practices as they shape and are shaped by media technologies. It is these very questions that I hope to explore in this study.

Academic interest in the study of memory has a long history, especially within Sociology, Social Psychology, and Cultural Studies. Scholars have studied memory from various perspectives. For

\(^1\) See the short articles on the advertising campaign by the Miller (2011) and the Houston (2011) for more details.
instance, some have looked at it from theoretical perspectives focusing on the nature of memory and its socio-cultural functions (For example, Bergson 1896, Halbwachs 1992, Schwartz 1982, Assaman & Czaplicka 1995, Ricoeur 2004), as a resource in nation building exercises and other social movements (Example Hobsbawn 1983, Ranger 1983, Barker 1985), the relationship between trauma, memory and forgetting, memory and identity and many more.

Interest in memory and the reconstruction of the past has seen a waxing and waning over the years especially since the 1980s (Olick and Robbins 1998). We currently find ourselves amidst a renewed phase of interest in the face of the ‘digital explosion’, putting a spotlight on the memory-media technology relationship. The archive for instance has come under much scrutiny. This includes questions connected to the ‘politics of the archive’ and its role in the processes of knowledge creation (See for example-Derrida & Prenowitz 1995, Ernst 1999, Lynch 1999, Joyce 1999). Particular questions on the changing nature and form of the archive have also gained circulation in the last ten to fifteen years. They have argued for and against how democratic and accessible archives have become, as well as the breakdown in some of their linear structures of narrative. Similar questions have been raised in relation to digitisation of libraries (example Dalbello 2004) and museums (see for example Reading 2003) and other artefacts/objects of public commemoration (e.g. Cohen and Willis 2004). Some scholars have also looked at the internet itself as a mnemonic system (for example Caygill 1999); and other internet objects and spaces like YouTube as new archival forms (for instance Gehl 2009).

Detailing more specific processes of online archiving and mnemonic practices, Palmer (2010) analyses how users create an ‘emotional archive’ through online photo-sharing software. Similarly, using a phenomenological approach van Dijck (2004, 2005, and 2007) explores how personal and cultural memories are increasingly “mediated” (van Dijck 2004, 2007) through myriad digital technologies and hence have deep connections with processes of identity building and identity performance. On the contrary, voices like those of Wendy Chun (2008) have brought in the importance of hardware, and warn us of the dangers of conflating storage with (digital) memory. She argues that many things digital are not necessarily permanent but are “enduring ephemerals” (Ibid: 148). Some of the studies mentioned above focus on the internet, the digital, and its relationship to memory. There are a few others however, who look at media like television, live televised programmes and memory (Hoskins 2001). In a similar vein, Lurry (1998) and Koepnick (2004) look at photographs and memory. Zelizer (2008) and Zandberg (2010) have argued about the role of journalism/journalists as agents of collective memory.

See Olick and Robbins (1998) for a comprehensive, historical account on the various trends within Memory Studies.

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2 See Olick and Robbins (1998) for a comprehensive, historical account on the various trends within Memory Studies.
Another area of research into memory relevant here, draws from fields such as Ethnoecology and the Anthropology of Food. Scholars have pointed to the close linkages between collective memory, traditional environmental knowledge (TEK), myriad foodways, and biodiversity movements (see for example Holtzman 2006, Nazarea 2006, Hunn 1999, and Dove 1999). Such traditional knowledge is grounded in daily life and, “…is sustained by its relevance to the exigencies of making a living off the land” (Hunn 1999: 27). Similarly the smells, textures, and sights of different native crops, seeds, food and, farming methods can evoke memories of the old. For Hunn (Ibid: 26), such in situ conservation efforts can present radical alternatives to the, “globalising of a market mentality” (Ibid: 26) and modernised agriculture. Such traditional knowledge and collective memory are important as counter memory, or as an opposition to the dominant or official narrative.

The discussion thus far points to the longstanding preoccupation academics have had with the study of memory. The relationship between memory, media technologies and, biodiversity continue to be relevant today as it has serious implications for history, knowledge, political mobilisation, and processes of identity. In the Indian context, there has been an explosion in the past 20-25 years, of ‘e-solutions’ to ‘solve’ issues related to health, education, and poverty in India. Various Government organisations, Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), and collaborative efforts between the state and civil society organisations or business corporations, have introduced various Information and Communication Technology (ICTs) projects, especially in rural areas and amongst the urban poor to induce ‘development’. In a rather alarming echo of a Lerner-esque (1958) notion of progress, a ‘trickling down of technology’ continues to be hailed as an answer. Its enthusiastic cheer-leaders continue to state that it is only a matter of making it more accessible to empower users. The Satellite Instructional Television Experiment (SITE), introduced in 1975, was probably one of the earliest projects of this kind that was conceived and implemented in India. This collaborative project between NASA and the India government aimed to use a satellite to help broadcast and disseminate informational programmes designed around education, health, modernising agriculture, and science and technology. It was felt that dissemination of such information via television would help bring in social change and development (Pal et.al 1975, Chander & Karnik 1976). However, past experiences such as these have also taught us that while access to technology can enable its users, it always occurs in contexts layered with relations of power. It follows that an introduction of media technologies tends to reconfigure these relations of power- some in subtle ways and others in more overt ways.

In consideration of the above arguments and examples, it might be useful to understand how the concept of ‘access’ might have translated on the ground. How are the capacities of the community interacting with these different media-technologies “amplified” (Ash 2012) or dampened? Further, we need to explore how they might have complicated existing relations of powers (e.g. those of gender, caste, and class relations) or introduced new ones. This study, as I elaborate here, engages with such debates around the relationship between media technology, political mobilisation, and collective
memory. Specifically, the following are some of the lines of inquiry pursued here. Firstly, what kinds of capacities are opened up in our interactions with media-technologies, particularly in terms of memory? Further, there is an attempt to understand the links between collective memory and media technology. Specifically, it focuses on how this link between a community’s collective memory and its community media amplify or dampen its capacities, and feed into the political mobilisation of this community within a given social movement.

Many studies, such as a few discussed above, approach these questions with either the subject, or object as the focus. Particularly, the object often is posited as a signifier, a symbol, or a text/narrative that has implications for our subjectivities and how we make sense of the world around us. This tends to place privilege on the (human) subject and her/his consciousness. Simply put, some of these studies tend to have an anthropocentric bias. However, to understand how interactions with media technologies capacitate us in different ways, I argue that we need a reorientation in our approach. Firstly, to map how the introduction of any media actually reconfigures power relations in a community’s life, we need to take a look at everyday practices, routines, rituals, and habits. For instance, the Participatory Video team of the Deccan Development Society (DDS), the research site for this study, have developed terminology based on local language and expression to learn various camera angles. They call a top-down shot for example, a Patel Shot. This comes from the idea that a Patel or landlord sits above everyone else looking down upon them. Secondly, because the attempt is to understand how different media capacitate us, we need to study practices surrounding the production and consumption of media and not just its content. Thirdly, I argue that such an analysis requires a non-anthropocentric approach—where things matter as much as people.

An interest in how our interactions with things shape our capacities and influence our practices or habits brings to the fore two things. One is the relationship or the relational and the Spinozian notion of the “power to affect and be affected” (Massumi and McKim 2009:1). Thus, it allows one to move away from an anthropocentric bias, and bring back things and the embodied. These embodied habits, practices, and rituals then become the (data) pegs for the various arguments in this study. Keeping in line with this, I choose tools from affect theory and material media ecology practice, substantiated with ethnographic data. These arguments are further described in Chapter 2.

The nature of this study requires a site that sees the intersection of collective memory, media-technology and issues of empowerment (and hence, also political mobilisation). After a pilot study conducted in 2011, DDS presented itself as an ideal site for this study, and data collection. DDS is an alternative developmental organisation located in the Medak district of Telangana, India. It works at the grass-root level with women’s self-help groups or a network of Sangams who together are engaged in a social movement for the conservation of agrobiodiversity. The following section provides a brief introduction to DDS and its various programmes.
Deccan Development Society

The Deccan Development Society, as mentioned above is a grass-root level organisation that works with women’s self-help groups or Sangams as they are locally known. It was founded in 1983, by a group of professionals from various fields. Together they took over a rural development project initiated and later abandoned by an industrial house (DDS - DDS Team 2015). They work predominantly with (albeit not restricted to) Dalit women in the Zaheerabad Medak district (See Figure 1.1 below). This is spread across seventy-five village and four mandals of Zaheerabad. Zaheerabad is indicated in Figure 1.2 within the map of Medak district.

DDS could also be seen as one of many organisations that emerged in the 1980s and 1990s in response to a growing, world-wide call to resolve biodiversity and environmental degradation (another example is the Slow Food Movement that started in Italy and subsequently spread across the world). This is especially so after the signing of the Convention of Biological Diversity at the 1992 Rio Earth Summit. Nazarea (2006: 319-320) notes that, “Since the first call to arms in the 1980s, biological and social scientists have been analysing causes and trends and fashioning solutions”.

Starting out to increase food security in the region, DDS have over the years, developed community oriented programmes through which they aim to achieve various autonomies. These include autonomy over food production, seeds, natural resources, market, and media (DDS - About Us 2015). As they state, DDS, and its sangams have:

…a vision of consolidating these village groups into vibrant organs of primary local governance and federate them into a strong pressure lobby for women, the poor and Dalits. A host of continuing dialogues, debates, educational and other activities with the people, facilitated by the Society, try to translate this vision into a reality (DDS - About Us 2012).

DDS has a strong stand against genetically modified crops, chemical based agriculture, and monocropping. It has also been critical of the Green Revolution in India, arguing that it has “caused untold deprivation to small and marginal farmers” (DDS- Food Security: Four Major Steps 2015).

More specifically they state:

The Green Revolution model of agriculture, which started in India in the 1960s with a focus on varieties of seeds that respond to high external inputs, resulted in widespread monocrops and the chemicalisation of agriculture, destroying in its wake much of the agricultural biodiversity of the irrigated tracts. Nevertheless, large pockets of the Green Revolution model have continued to sustain not only their biodiversity, but also the farmers’ knowledge associated with this biodiversity (Ibid).

DDS’s efforts are aimed towards the promotion of millet and other food systems indigenous to the area, as well as what are popularly termed ‘organic’ farming techniques. Most importantly, it works to reverse the degradation of biodiversity and the ecosystem of the region.

3 Maps displayed in Figures 1.1 and 1.2 are only indicative and not to scale. They have been sourced from the website mapsofindia.com.
Fig 1.1: Map of the state of Telangana, India (Source: Maps of India 2015)

Fig 1.2: A map of Medak district (Source: Maps of India2012).
They have three guiding principles as the basic foundation for all their programmes. These are gender justice, environmental soundness, and people’s knowledge (DDS- DDS Team 2015). With these principles, the various DDS programmes, as stated above, have gone on to address more than just the issue of food security and agricultural biodiversity. They work towards a vision of reviving indigenous knowledge and practices to be able to build a better, more equitable world. There is a constant and strong sense of connection with the past and the old - with their collective memory which reverberates through all their schemes and programmes. Thus, it matters to them not just what crops you grow, but how you grow them. With a revival of traditional seeds, is a revival of traditional agricultural and cultural practices. Thus, the festivals, folk stories and folksongs and their preservation are as important to them as their seeds.

The initiative that started as a group of professionals working with village residents has grown into a structure constituted of an administrative body that includes the DDS board, and the network of village self-help groups or sangams. DDS has over the years included sangam members as board members and has assumed a more advisory role, helping with funding or sponsorship for its various programmes. Starting with micro-finance initiative, DDS has expanded to introduce a Community Grain Fund, a Community Gene Bank, a Farmer’s Science Center or Krishi Vigyan Kendra (KVK), Balwadis (early child-care centres) and a Pachasaale (Green School), Village Medicinal Commons, Mobile Biodiversity Festivals and Community Media initiatives (Participatory Video and Community Radio). I provide a brief description of these programmes here and continue to discuss it at length in Chapters 3, 4 and 5.

Each village sangam is essentially a unit built around a micro-finance scheme, where members pool in a certain amount. This lump sum is lent out to one member who pays it back within a decided duration. However, rather than functioning simply as a micro-finance scheme, each sangam also works towards the implementation of other DDS programmes in their respective villages. Each sangam is split into various committees and sub-committees, thus decentralising the day-to-day functioning. As one such example, consider a sangam’s Bhoomi (Earth or Land) committee. This committee reaches out to non-members, creating awareness about biodiversity degradation in their area. They also function as liaisons for anyone who might want to start practising more environmentally friendly or traditional agriculture. Another such committee is the Balwadi committee, who are in charge of running the early child care centres in their villages, including its management and daily tasks. This is directly related to the implementation of the Balwadi programme under DDS. This way, each programme has a corresponding committee within a given sangam. DDS runs a school for children who have dropped out of school called Pachasaale or ‘The Green School’. This school aims to provide an all rounded education by including in their syllabi resources from indigenous knowledge systems, and not just mainstream education.
The Community Gene Banks, simply called Seed Banks in each village, work as storehouses for seeds native to the region. Many villagers approach the sangam seed banks to borrow seeds from them. It has become an ‘archive’ of sorts for native landraces and seeds. The Community Grain Fund serves as an alternative to the state run public distribution system. It helps integrate millets as part of the distribution system, provides grains to the neediest families via a public audit, as well as aims to establish a level of food security for that village. The Krishi Vigyana Kendra, or the Farmers’ Science Center, works to record, preserve, and encourage the use of local and traditional agricultural systems and farming practices, as opposed to what they call market driven farming practices. KVKs run by the government are organised such that the scientist disseminates useful information and technology to the farmer. The DDS-KVK on the other hand is centred on the farmer, with them playing a more proactive role in research and experiments.

DDS and the sangams host an annual Mobile Biodiversity Festival that sees the entire community come together, to celebrate their traditional crops and farming methods. This usually coincides with the Hindu, winter harvest festival of Sankranti, and is a month long affair. The festival consists of a caravan of bullock carts, which travels to all seventy five affiliate villages over the month. With the visit of the bullock cart in each village, the members hold food and film festivals, as well as village level meetings to discuss their concerns/grievances relating to their farming futures. These also include discussions and debates on agricultural and biodiversity policies. The Inaugural and Closing ceremonies are colourful gatherings, consisting of folk songs, stories, and dance performances, native to the region. They also hold children’s quiz contests and present awards to villages and individuals for their contributions/achievements. Apart from all this, DDS also has started a small café called Café Ethnic in the nearby town of Zaheerabad, which serves up millet based cuisine, helping it connect with the urban consumers. They also have Mobile markets and have produced a Millet Cookbook.

As stressed earlier, the overall emphasis of DDS’s goals is to work with the community to enhance local practices, resources, and knowledge systems, as opposed to those driven by commercial enterprises, some government schemes, or other third parties. To realise all these efforts, DDS also started a Community Media Team (CMT) that works pre-dominantly with Community Radio and Participatory Video. This is an effort to democratise media and it aims to give voice to people who have been silenced. The members of the CMT are mostly drawn from the women’s sangams, and they play important roles in the creation and dissemination of its media content. The most unique thing about their Community Radio is the content of its broadcasts and how closely tied they are to the daily lives of the people of Medak. The seasons, rain, crop, actions, interactions, festivities, celebrations, fights, health, stories, and songs all shape the content of any given show. It emerges from the locales and the people that inhabit it, and goes back to them.
Most DDS programmes are strongly focused around the revival and (re)application of traditional practices, knowledge systems, and skills. It is also an attempt to connect with collective memories which are forgotten under the imposition of the dominant versions of the past. A brief sketch of the region’s history might be useful in building a background to this study. Thus, brief historical notes of the Telangana region are provided in the next section. This is particularly vital, given that the states of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana have seen a recent bifurcation.

**Telangana: A Brief History**

Telangana lies on the Deccan Plateau of South India. Predominantly an arid to semi-arid region, the agriculture here has been rain-fed. Evidence has shown that along with dry land agriculture, the region developed a pastoral lifestyle since prehistoric times (Talbot 2001: 23). Through the Medieval period, this region, along with the now reorganised state of Andhra Pradesh, was ruled by the Satavahana dynasty (200 B.C.- 300 A.D), the Eastern and Western Chalukyas (624 A.D. to mid-8th century), and the Kakatiya dynasty (1175 A.D- 1324 A.D.). From the 14th century A.D till around the mid-1950s the region came under the reign of the Bahamani and Vijayanagar kingdoms, the Qutubsahi dynasty and Asif Jahi Nizams or the Nizams of Hyderabad respectively (Thapar 1966).

It was under the last of the Nizams that the region saw one of the most important uprisings in Telangana history. This was from 1946-1951, and to this day continues to influence politics in the region. The people of Telangana were extremely oppressed at the hands of feudal landlords under the Nizams. It was first through the Andhra Mahasabha (AMS) and later the Communist Party in the 1940s that people were rallied and organised to fight against this exploitation, take back lands and redistribute them. To quell the uprising, the Nizam organised their own militia called the Razakars who added to the oppression through torture, killing and rape. The Indian National Congress and Indian Union (since 1947) did not intervene till 1948. This intervention through the army ultimately played a part in the annexure of the state to the India Union (Sundarayya 1973a, 1973b). Parallel to this set of events, was the carving out of the Andhra state from the state of Madras in 1953. It was in 1956, amidst much controversy and opposition that the state of Hyderabad and Andhra were merged into one with a Gentleman’s agreement, which included provisions for people from the Telangana region, to help especially with the improvement of employment and education (Forrester 1970: 11-12). The region saw an uprising in 1969 because the people of Telangana felt like this Gentlemen’s Agreement was not adhered to. The uprising was quelled through an intervention by the then Congress government through promises of more provisions (Ibid: 12).

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5 The state of Andhra as referred to in this instance is different from the state of Hyderabad. Andhra state was carved out by merging Telugu speaking districts with the state of Madras and had Karnool for its capital. Hyderabad state was the princely state under the Nizams and approximates the present day state of Telangana.
In 2001, Kalvakuntla Chandrashekar Rao (KCR) started the Telangana Rastra Samiti (TRS) with the agenda of creating a separate state of Telangana (Jafri: 2001). The struggle for this separation intensified from 2009 and ended with the bifurcation of Andhra Pradesh into Telangana and Andhra Pradesh in February 2014. KCR took over as the Chief Minister in June 2014 and the city of Hyderabad is to remain a shared capital for the next ten years (The Andhra Pradesh Reorganisation Act 2014). Given this background, it makes the location of DDS in Medak unique economically, politically and socio-culturally, especially given that Indira Gandhi (former Prime Minister of India), and KCR have won their Lok Sabha seats from the constituency of Medak.

Telangana People’s Armed Struggle of (1946-1951). While a large part of this regional history continues to influence the politics of Telangana to date, it is the Armed Struggle of 1946-1951 that is of relevance to this study. It is the spirit of these times, so to say, that is constantly invoked in various contexts. Of special significance is the relationship between the Communist Party active at the time, and the common people. Referred to as Sangan6 by the common folk, it had become the central point of this people’s movement. Starting with an overview of the Telangana people’s uprising, I go on to draw out the importance of Sangam to this context. I use the accounts of Sundarayya (1973a, 1973b, 1973c and 1973d), himself a comrade of the days and a slightly later account of events by Thirumali (1996) for the same.

During the reign of the Nizams, its people, especially the landless peasants were brutally oppressed by its rulers and the feudal lords7. Sundarayya writes, “The basic feature that dominated the socio-economic life of the people of Hyderabad and especially Telangana, was the unbridled feudal exploitation that persisted till the beginning of the Telangana armed peasant struggle” (Sundarayya 1973a: 8). He (Ibid: 8) also states that peasants were “… nothing but bond-slaves (sic), or total serfs, under the Nizams”. This period was characterised by forced labour, illegal exactions, extremely high tax and grain levy, forced occupation and usurpation of land (Ibid: 18). He adds, “Some of these jagirs, paigas and samsthanams, especially the bigger ones, had their own separate police, revenue, civil and criminal systems; they must be considered subfeudatory states under the Nizam’s Hyderabad state, itself a stooge native State under the British autocracy in India” (Ibid: 8).

A system in place at the time, which was vehemently opposed in the struggle, was the Vetti system. Sundarayya (Ibid: 10) talks of vetti as being all-pervasive, affecting all classes of people in varying degrees. This was a system where one member from each household had to provide services, and carry out set tasks for the landlord’s homes. For instance, the toddy tappers in a given village had to

6 To clarify, the Sangam referred to here is different to the DDS sangams mentioned in earlier sections. In this connotation, Sangam is the name people gave to the Communist Party unit of their village.

7 Sundarayya (1973a: 8) records many different types of feudal ranks or “oppressors”, each varying in title and role based on the land ownership and revenue systems they belonged to in the region. Some of these included the paigas, samsthanams, jagirdars, ijardars, banjardars, maktedars, inamdars, or agraharams.
set apart five to ten trees for exclusive free supply to the landlords’ families (Ibid: 10). This way, people from various castes/occupations had to either set aside commodities or provide services for free. Any refusal to do so resulted in harsh punishments or torture. Various forms of forced labour were extracted not only by landlords but also by officers of all ranks, some of whom lived in the villages and others who visited them (Ibid: 11). Sundarayya (Ibid: 11) records that one of the worst forms of exploitation was the practice of, “…keeping girls as ‘slaves’ in the houses of landlords. When landlords gave their daughters in marriage, they presented slave girls and sent them along with their married daughters, to serve them in their new homes. These slave girls were used by the landlords as concubines.

Sundarayya (Ibid: 12-13) also comments that the condition of factory workers and middle class employees was not better. They were paid miserably, barely making ends meet. Such exploitation he notes, was across both Hindu and Muslim communities. The Nizam did try and organise the Muslim community, trying to establish that they were ‘rulers’ (Ibid: 13) and encouraged the formation of religious fundamentalist groups such as Majlis Ittehad-ul-Muslimeen. The group constantly tried bringing in a communal divide in the movement, which Sundarayya states, was averted to an extent due to the efforts of the Communist Party. They were able to rally a “large number of the Muslim peasantry and rural artisans and the rural poor were rallied behind the fighting Telangana peasantry” (Ibid: 7).

**The Andhra Mahasabha (AMS).** The Nizam under his reign restricted the formation of popular village bodies or associations, including literary or cultural associations. One consequence attributed to this, is a delayed growth of literature in the region. A number of intellectuals inspired by the larger national movement in the country, “…finally succeeded in organising themselves into the Andhra Mahasabha in the Telangana region…” (Ibid: 14). It was first organised in 1928 under the leadership of Madapati Hanumantha Rao and others (Ibid: 14). It held many conferences, where demands were made for:

…certain reforms in the administrative structure, for more schools, for certain concessions for the landed gentry and for certain civil liberties. It did not try to mobilise the people and launch struggles against the oppressors or against the Nizam’s Government. But in these wretched and tremendously oppressive conditions in Hyderabad State, it became a forum, a focal point for the rising democratic aspirations of the people (Ibid: 14).

It was from the late 1930s, that the communist influences began to reach the AMS via the Andhra unit of the Communist Party in India. They started by reaching out to the progressive and militant cadres within the AMS (Ibid: 15). By 1940 the AMS had transformed from a “liberal organisation into an anti-Nizam united mass-militant organisation…” (Ibid: 14) and had gone beyond “the tradition of merely passing resolutions and went ahead to rouse and rally the people around these resolutions” (Ibid: 15). Growing communist influences began to cause a rift in the leadership of the AMS, with one
section wanting a moderate approach and the other preferring more militant means. Thirumali (1996:168) remarks that, “The communists who started practising their ‘revolutionary politics’ had to face innumerable problems. They had to adjust themselves with moderate nationalist (AMS) leadership on the one hand and the autocratic Nizam’s state on the other”. By 1946, the party began to train people in guerrilla warfare techniques to fight off attacks from landlords, their henchmen, and the Nizam’s policemen:

The people’s demands resulted in the clashes with the landlords and the state. The village branches of AMS formed into armed sangams to confront the landlords. In these clashes, the people often used lathis to confront the landlord’s goondas. Though initially hesitant over the consequences of armed clashes, the party was compelled to go along with the people and the local party units to use sticks. The party units and local armed sangams withstood the landlords/police repression with mass support. The actual distinction between the party/AMS functionary and the village militant blurred (Ibid: 178).

**Resisting the Razakars.** These armed squads using sticks, chili powder, and later guns went on to attack any landlords, henchmen or police who attempted to illegally take land, demand vetti services, levied taxes or tried evicting people from their lands. They also did the same to resist arrests and protect sangam leaders and members from getting arrested. Such resistance was organised on large scales with villages coming together to fight oppression. They also took control of large tracts of lands under zamindars, as well as stocks of grains from the granary and would redistribute land and grain amongst the people. It was on 4th July 1946, with the assassination of a major Communist or Sangam leader that the six years long rebellion started (Sundarayya 1973b: 20) and continued on after India was declared independent in 1947. In an attempt to subdue this uprising, the Nizams created their own militia called the Razakars:

The Nizam’s rule was shaking to its foundations. He had resorted to large-scale terror. He organised the Razakars under the leadership of Kasim Razvi, of the Majlis Ittehad-ul-Muslimeen. He let them loose, with the full backing of the army, on the villagers; looting, arson, torture, murder and rape stalked the land. (Ibid: 28-29).

To fight off this violent suppression at the hands of the Razakars, the peasants were organised into guerrilla squads at the district, zonal and village level (Ibid: 31-32). These guerrilla squads, “…with their country weapons became the nuclei of the people’s armed forces that enabled the people to destroy the governmental authority in village after village and establish people’s rule in about three thousand villages” (Ibid:32). Till this point, the Congress party in India, refused to intervene into any issues within the various princely states, including Hyderabad. This changed in 1947 when the Nehru government took over from the British. Under Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, the Government sought to reign in and annex the princely states into the Indian union. Specifically in the Hyderabad state, the

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8 Goonda refers to a vernacular term for henchmen.

9 The account provided here of such events is brief, given the limits of this study. However, like any movement this resistance also saw periods in which the struggles intensified and weakened due to various factors. For cases and illustrations outlining these varying intensities within the movement, see Sundarayya’s four part article on the Telangana People’s Armed Struggle of 1946-1951, (1973a, 1973b, 1973c, and 1973d). This is an interesting account as Sundarayya himself was deeply involved in the struggle.
Congress Government intervened to achieve one other goal- to end the Communist movement in Telangana. Hence, what people thought was an intervention to end the Nizam’s autocracy, turned into a quashing of the movement itself. From 1947 onwards, at the peak of the Telangana struggle, Sundarayya (Ibid: 42) records:

…the Congress Government launched a ferocious attack to liquidate it; the first attack in the first half of 1947 and the second attack beginning from January 1948 and lasting till the middle of 1951; and from the beginning of October 1949, the physical annihilation and the calculated murder of 300 Communist leaders and cadre after arresting them.

With the intervention of the Indian Army in 1947-1948, there was a divide amongst the movement, and Party leaders. One section wanted to end an armed struggle against the Indian army and pursue more legal means of struggle. The other section disagreed with this view, seeing the move as a loss of all that had already been achieved by the movement (Sundarayya, 1973b). In the meantime, the Nizam surrendered to the Indian Army within days of their attack on Hyderabad, on the 18th of September, 1948. Around 1950, the Nizam was appointed the main administrator or Raj Pramukh of Hyderabad under the Indian Union, which further enraged the people of the region. After much persistence, and facing the Indian army for about three years, the Telangana movement was called off in October 1951 (Ibid: 45).

**Significance of the term Sangam**

I would like to draw attention at this juncture to the term Sangam. If one recalls, the self-help groups of DDS as well as their radio station are named Sangam. The name also recurs elsewhere within the DDS community. For instance, the Participatory Video team has a film named *Sangam Shot* (1999). The Participatory Video team learnt various camera angles by giving them names from their local linguistic context. So, for instance, a low angle shot, where the camera is placed on a tripod and shoots angles higher than eye-level is called a Gaidolla shot or Slave shot. This is because the angle and camera placement resembles a labourer sitting on the ground looking up at the Patel or landlord in servitude. Another instance is the term Sangam Shot, which is the name for a camera angle placed at eye-level and hence signifies equality (*Sangam Shot* 1999).

This term has some important historic significance in the Telangana region. In the Telangana People’s Struggle of 1946-51, as mentioned above, the Communist Party had a major role to play in rallying people to the cause. They had village level units which were referred to by the people as Sangam. For example Thirumali (1996:169) recounts that “the cultivators of Betavolu makta lands, the peasants from Munagala Zamindari and the Suryapet AMS workers came to the session singing songs and

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10 AMS stands for the Andhra Mahasabha. Initially the Community Party made inroads into the region through the AMS. Gradually one faction within the AMS, sometime during the 1940s aligned itself completely with the Communist Party later leading to a split. See Thirumali’s *The Political Pragmatism of the Communists in Telangana, 1938-48* (1996) for an extensive account of the AMS’s contact with the Communist Party and the
shouting slogans ‘Join the Sangam’, ‘Witness Andhra Sabha’” (emphasis added). Take for another illustration, Sundarayya (1973a:18-19), talking of the heroic acts of the Lambadi community during the uprising, where he writes, “under the leadership of the AMS or the Sangham (sic) as it was known to the people, took up sticks and slings, planted red flags in their fields and, marching up and down, protected their fields, drove away the goondas and tilled their lands” (emphasis added). The sangams became the nuclei of the Telangana Uprising (1946-1951) in every village. It was the place where people came to seek justice, right wrongs, and attempted to abolish exploitative practices like the vetti at a systemic level. The role sangam leaders and entire village sangams played are often the premise for many a song and stories of the period.

While the above is one connotation of the term Sangam, the term also has a connection to Buddhism in India. Sourayan Mookerjea (2010: 111), in this regard writes, “The term Sangham (sic) derives from the Buddhist conception of an egalitarian and cooperative political community that was formed by the Buddhist movement in the fifth century BCE”. In his study of DDS, he argues that Sangam in this particular context “can be understood in light of the revival of Buddhism by Dalit mass conversions in the twentieth century” (Ibid: 111).

Keeping in mind these two strains of history behind the word sangam, I find that it might be hard to pinpoint which particular legacy might be a force circulating within the DDS community. It could be either one or a combination of both. What I do want to take as a common from both however, is the idea of Sangam11 being synonymous with a collective, cooperative or meeting. It is this meaning and spirit that is often reflected in the many programmes of DDS. Thus, I would like to set the idea of a ‘sangam as a collective’ as a sort of background score in all the following chapters, tying them all up together.

The rest of this dissertation is spread over five more chapters. **Chapter 2** outlines in detail the conceptual and methodological approach to this study. It argues for a move away from social constructivism and critical realism and an adoption of a non-representational and non-anthropocentric approach. To do so, it uses a toolbox drawn from memory studies, material media ecology practice, feminist studies, and ethnoecology. It also outlines some important and relevant debates within Memory Studies. The chapter ends with some notes on data collection and specific methods made use of in this case. **Chapter 3** takes a detailed look at the various programmes and activities of DDS, keeping the women’s self-help groups or sangams as the focal points. Drawing largely from concepts in Ethnoecology, the chapter looks at the connections between biodiversity conservation, collective memory, and indigenous knowledge. It also attempts to understand the power dynamics along gender, subsequent split in the AMS leadership. The role of specific leaders, members and the roles they played in the armed struggle outlined in detail is particularly useful.

11 It is interesting to note that a similar term Sangamam in the Telugu language is also used to describe the confluence of two or more rivers.
class and caste in the DDS context and how they negotiate these relations. Finally, the programmes of DDS are linked to arguments on the micro-finance movement, collective-counter memory, and ecofeminism.

**Chapter 4** delves into the colourful Mobile Biodiversity Festival of DDS and connects this to debates on mnemonic practices and collective memory. This confluence becomes a means to mobilise people, readying them for political action. It is argued here that the collective memory of this region becomes a resource for the larger environmental and anti-globalisation movement underway. Secondly, it looks at collective memory as a site of struggle and resistance against the oppression faced by this community. **Chapter 5** looks at the Community Media Trust of DDS with a focus on some films by the Participatory Video team and the Sangam Radio programmes. In turn it takes a critical look at the gender relations at work in the daily running and creation of content. The flows of collective memory, for instance, the songs and stories of the community, are a vital feature in Community Media content (particularly Sangam Radio). This is tied back to some of the arguments on collective memory posited in the earlier chapter. An attempt has also been made to capture the way the Sangam Radio team interacts with the radio equipment and technology at hand. All these above aspects tied together are an attempt then, to map material media practices within the Community Media Trust. In conclusion, I propose that the CMT and Sangam Radio can be understood in the light of Guattari’s concept of Free Radio and Post Media. **Chapter 6** brings in a summary of arguments along some broad, interconnected themes. Included here are some reflections on the data collection process, and some lines of inquiry for further exploration. Finally I argue for why non-anthropocentric approaches as well as movements such as the ones at DDS become important in the face of neoliberalism.