The arguments put forth in Chapters 3 and 4 work to establish the vital relationship between memory, biodiversity, and gender. This chapter inserts into this complex interlay the role of DDS media initiatives and the role they play within this social movement. Specifically, this chapter looks at how media technologies work to amplify the sense of nostalgia and utopia that permeate the programmes of DDS, furthering the movement underway in the region. To put it another way, following Mookerjea (2010:126), this chapter examines the role that the community media projects play in the invention of different kinds of utopian cultural production by DDS.

One of the autonomies, as mentioned in the introduction, that DDS and its sangams strive towards is the one over media. Being one of most marginalised sections in Indian society, they have been repeatedly rendered invisible in terms of expression, both by various state apparatus and mainstream media. DDS sees the need for community based media for two reasons- the first is to make heard the voices of people with no proper access to mainstream media. This in their view takes them from being mere consumers of elitist media, to producers of their own media that deals with issues relevant to their own lives. Secondly, community media initiative becomes a way to overcome issue of literacy. P.V. Satheesh (1999: 9) elaborates this point:

"Literacy has become a Holy Grail in the world of development. Development groups working in rural areas suffer from a feeling of inadequacy if they are not pursuing literacy programmes. They [might] be doing excellent work [by] harnessing people's knowledge in the fields of forestry, fisheries, natural farming, land development, natural resource management whatever. But literacy programmes haunt them. The irony is that in most of these activities, literacy has very little to offer...Time has come to question this exaggerated importance given to literacy in development. I would not like to be misunderstood as an anti-literacy person. I value literacy very much. What I am pointing to is [that] in valuing literacy we should not devalue other capabilities and skills present in non-literate people.

In DDS’s own critique of mainstream media, literacy, and some of the Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) methods they have used to build their programmes, Participatory Video (PV) and Community Radio (CR) emerged as answers to all these questions. The PV unit was started in 1998 with about thirteen people who underwent training. They would train for about four days a month and practise the film making skills for the rest of the month. This was done in little less than a year (Interview with Jaya, November 2011). The CR initiative was also started in 1998, through a UNESCO supported programme called ‘Women Speak to Women’ (Pavarala and Malik 2007: 139-141). The DDS
community also inaugurated a Community Media Center on the 15th October 2001. The centre included editing suits, dubbing booths, a storage space, a room for rehearsal/discussion and one computer room. On this day, the PV and CR teams were merged into unified Community Media Trust, with a transfer of the ownership of the media facilities to the Trust (Ibid: 143). Both PV and CR teams of DDS, as will be demonstrated through this chapter, produce media that is by them, focused on their lives, and is consumed by them.

**Participatory Video at DDS**

The PV team was started in 1998 as mentioned before, with a team of about thirteen women. They underwent training with the director of DDS and another young man who has just finished learning a little bit of video editing at the time (Filed Notes, November 2011). When I spoke to one of the PV team members about how the PV team came about and why they felt the need for it, she explained:

> We had an important meeting that needed be to be recorded on video at the time. But the people who were supposed to come and shoot did not turn up that day. Then the DDS karyakartas (members/advocates) and senior staff opined that if our own people could shoot, they would not have to face a situation like this again. So they decided that they would hand-pick a team to train. This is more advantageous as it is our own people and within our reach and we are not dependent on others (Interview with Jaya1, November 2011).

The community felt that this could be a means to make the outside world aware of their issues. The PV team in the film *Sangam Shot* (1999) elaborates on the need for its own video. Reiterating how literacy is an obstacle for them, one member says that they cannot send anything to newspapers because they are not literate. However, video can help them express what they want to, without having to know how to write. Another member says that outsiders may not be able build close rapport with locals when they shoot. A lot of people, especially women may be hesitant or shy in opening up to strangers. A film team made of locals would allow for such community members to speak freely (Ibid). Also, emphasising the advantages of an insider’s perspective, one women says that outsiders may not have enough time to truly understand the local context, or may lose out on nuances of local life due to processes of language translations. She asserts that a video of their own would then help provide a more ‘authentic’ portrayal of their lives. Images, the team argues, become a way to validate the spoken accounts of problems they face in life. This also adds to the ‘authenticity’ of their portrayal when viewed by the outside world (Ibid).

A sangam member views the films the team make as a way to increase solidarity, provide awareness of sangam programmes as well as increase sangam membership. She states that in seeing how DDS sangams are potential support systems for them in the face of hardship, could help encourage others to join. It could help carry this promise of support to non-members who are facing similar difficulties in life (Ibid). The films the team make, could serve as an archive. It would help preserve traditional

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1 Name has been changed here to maintain anonymity.
knowledge and cultural artefacts. It would also help maintain a record of agricultural crops and practices of one season, to be used as a reference in another season. A team trained in making film/videos could also record festivals, weddings, meetings etc. in the communities and take photos of the same. Also, it is a way to document for record, the visits and speeches made to the community by government officials and other visitors (Sangam Shot 1999).

**Learning to wield the camera.** The director of the DDS administration conducted these training workshops in 1998, along with two other members. The women who were part of this team were taught how to handle the camcorder and its various parts, the tripod, framing a shot and simple picture composition, camera angles, positions and movements, basic techniques of sound recording and basics of executing an edit on a VHS (Video Home System) (DDS-An Alternative to Literacy 2015). Further, the basic grammar of film making was taught using methods and language familiar to them. The team, for example, developed a technical vocabulary for different camera shots, using their own dialect and drawing from their personal experiences (DDS-An Alternative to Literacy 2015). For instance, the shot where the camera sits on the tripod to focus on something below eye level, resembles to the film maker, a Patel (or landlord) sitting on his seat, looking down upon his labourer. This kind of a shot then is called a Patel shot. Similarly, when the camera is placed below eye level to record something looking up, it is similar to a labourer sitting on the ground looking up at the landlord. This shot is called a Gaidolla shot or Slave shot. As a team member explains, in a sangam we are all equal, hence a camera shot which is at eye level, is called a Sangam shot (Sangam Shot, 1999).

The language or grammar used here to describe the various camera angles is strongly related to deep rooted caste relations in the area. It is also reflective in many ways, of the people’s struggle against the feudal oppression of the late 1940s and early 1950s. Such a grammar of film then, influences the way a shot is framed, in turn swaying a viewer’s ‘perspective’ so to say. Hence, within a frame of a given film wherein the viewer’s eye or attention is drawn from the ground level looking upwards, it quite literally provides the viewer a sense of where a Dalit labourer might have sat, providing them her perspective. And similarly a shot, drawing the viewer’s attention to one’s eye level could work to infuse a sense of equality or justice. To reiterate from Chapter 1, note how the idea of a sangam as a collective striving for equality recurs in the film as it does in many other places at DDS. This in turn resonates with the two historical connotations mentioned earlier- that is, of the Communist party villages units in the 1946-51 uprising, as well as the Buddhist connotation of a political collective.

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2 I use the term perspective in quotation, to bring across two specific meanings of the word. I use it firstly, in the most common manner – i.e. to signify a person’s opinion or viewpoint. I also use the term here, as it is used within the field of Art, Painting, and Graphic Design. That is, the representation of any image on a flat surface (such as a paper or canvas) as it is seen by the eye. In varying the distance of an object on paper from the eye, one could either place the object in the background or foreground, hence swaying our attention or focus in particular directions.
Mastering a new and unfamiliar technology was a challenge. On being asked how she felt on seeing
the film recorded for the first time, Jaya remarks:

We had never seen a camera before in our village. The first time I saw it was here, when I joined this DDS
team. It is rare for us because we are people who work in the field, who do manual labour. We also never had
cameras then. It was difficult getting even our photographs at that time. There used to be one person who
would go around taking photos in those days. People would go to him to get their photos taken. As kids we
would follow him around the village (Interview with Jaya, November 2011).

She also recollects her first experience of shooting with the camera:

It was around the time of the MBF that year. We had just finished our training and Sir asked us whether we
wanted to make a film on it. We all got into an argument with each other over who would shoot first- because
it was all so new and all so exciting. So we made a film on the Biodiversity festival. It came out really well in
the end and we felt really happy. This is a hard task for people who are educated itself, so for us who aren’t
very highly educated, it was an achievement, and we were so happy about it (Interview with Jaya, November
2011)

Today they have reached a stage where, the PV team members travel to various countries to share
their film-making experiences, as well as train other teams in the skill. Many of their films have also
played at various international film festivals and won awards. Jaya sums up this experience:

We’ve gone to many countries like South Africa, Indonesia, Australia, Denmark, Sri Lanka, Peru, London etc.
Bali, Indonesia- their condition is bad. It was sad to see that. London is a great nation, better than ours. Peru is
similar to us. They practise hill-side agriculture. They still do things by hand, like planting rice etc. The
markets there are nice. In Peru we trained thirteen people in film making with the help of a PR person. We did
the training by screening and using our film ‘Sangam Shot’ for reference. It was a nice. They made a short
film in turn and sent it to us (Interview with Jaya, November 2011).

The Participatory Video team has also sown inspiration in their young ones. Mayuri, who was about
11 years old when she started to make short films on various issues, is exemplary in this regard. The
niece of one of the CMT members, she has learned to use both the still camera and camcorder. Her
films have been screened and received appreciation from around the world (Field Notes, September
2012, NDTV News, 2012). Her films continue to travel the film festival circuit for screening to this
day.

**From the Community and back to the Community.** The subject matters for Participatory
Video films stem from their own life experience and issues they face. This as we shall see in the next
section, is true of the Community Radio programmes as well:

We basically focus on the farmers of our region. We keep track of what farmers are doing each season, what
are the challenges they are facing. These come from stories in our own villages and some stories in the
newspapers. Out team sits down, discusses and decides what issues we want to make into a film. For example
we’ve made a film on how BT cotton has had adverse effects on farmers. This way we’ve made films on
various issues. We recently finished a film comparing the crops grown in our villages by sangam members
and non-sangam member (Interview with Jaya, November 2011).

The PV team has made over a hundred films since they first began to operate. This is apart from the
coverage of their annual biodiversity festivals and other local events.
Fig 5.1: A CMT member recording the Mobile Biodiversity Festival 2012 (Photo by Author, January 2012).
While *Sangam Shot* (1999) remains one of their most celebrated and well known films, some of the other films they have made are mentioned here. While this description is not an exhaustive list, it is to provide one an idea of the kind of issue the PV team covers in its films. For instance, *A Disaster in Search of Success* (2005) and *BT Cotton in Andhra Pradesh: A Three Year Fraud* (2005), both look at the devastating loss and degradation brought about by genetically engineered crops and BT cotton respectively. *Community Conquers Hunger* (2011) looks at how the rural poor Dalit in Medak have reduced hunger and increased food security in their villages by forming sangam and practising traditional subsistence agriculture.

*Naa Chenu Naa Chaduvu* (2010) (My Farm, My Studies) and *Dhanwarlo O’Avva* (2010) (A Grandmother in Dhanwar) are both films by the 11 year old Mayuri as mentioned earlier. *Naa Chenu Naa Chaduvu* film follows Mayuri as she learns about various agricultural practices and crops on visits to her grandparents’ farm. Knowledge she would not have gained from mainstream school education. In the second film (*Dhanwarlo O’Avva*), the filmmaker follows an energetic woman in her eighties who, using traditional crops and farming practices grows enough to feed her and her family. She doesn’t really depend on the market for any of her food needs. The filmmaker concludes that if everyone were to be able to do this, it would be beneficial for all, hence carrying the message of food security and sovereignty across. *People’s Agenda for Biodiversity* (2005) covers the DDS Mobile Biodiversity Festival, describing how the festivals came to be, chronicling their growth over the decade or so, since its beginnings. The PV team has also tied up with Doordarshan and another private Telugu language T.V. channel, to periodically broadcast some of the films they’ve made. This way, they have been able to carry their message and show their films to a larger audience.

The PV team functions autonomously in terms of day-to-day tasks. They do however consult the director and one other male member Jeevan, for some decisions. I also came to learn that Jeevan is involved in the editing processes of films the team produces. I met Jeevan by way of a brief introduction in the 2012 Mobile Biodiversity Festival. While mingling with people in the festival, he introduced himself as an editor on the video team. While we didn’t get a chance to make any lengthy conversation at that point, I connect him with a mention Jaya makes of him in a previous conversation:

> We shoot and record on a DV recorder. However, there is person called Jeevan who helps us edit, because he is a little more trained and educated. He is from one of our villages itself. But we still decide on how and what to shoot; which part to put where etc. We consult the director for some editing and other issues if needed (Interview with Jaya, November 2011).

The role played by the male members in the process of participatory video is important to note here. Jeevan is connected closely with the phase of editing of the films, one of the most political charged

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3 Name changed to maintain anonymity.
aspects of film making. Thus, the role of a male facilitator can become a bit messy in terms of gender dynamics within the team coming to bear on crucial decisions related to narrative and editing.

Sangam Radio, the community radio initiative of DDS has seen a similar journey to the PV team. It was also started in 1998, but it would take a long, arduous struggle to broadcast their first radio programmes. The struggle DDS faced is closely tied to the larger movement for a third tier of radio (i.e. community radio) in India. Community radio, argue Pavarala and Malik (2007: 18), gives people from marginalised communities the chance to express themselves socially, culturally and politically. The struggle for community radio can be seen as a part of a broader struggle “…for access to communication media and as a mechanism for social groups to reproduce their cultural identity, to voice their social and economic demands and to create new social relations” (Ibid: 18).

This same reasoning is reflected in the wish expressed by the members of the DDS sangams. Sangam Radio was funded by a UNESCO’s ‘Women speak to Women’ programme. In speaking with UNESCO officials, they assert that a radio of their own would be an “effective medium for articulating locally relevant issues, in their own language and in their own time” (Ibid: 141). Sighting more reasons, similar to the ones of the PV team, they say that mainstream media is elitist, and is not interested in covering the minute details of their lives. These details and issues are however relevant to them. This radio would help them carry the message of their efforts to other people in their community, reducing the burden on individual leaders (Satheesh 2003). After being given the funding for the radio station by UNESCO and setting up the facilities for it, DDS at this time, applied to the then government for a broadcasting licence. Satheesh (Ibid) notes the development of events around the refusal of licence as such:

After sixteen months, in January 2002, came a bland six line reply from the Government of India which said starkly [that] at present the [government] does not have a policy of granting licences to NGOs or charitable institutions [to set] up and [operate] Radio Stations. Licences have been issued only to Indian registered [Private] Companies for operating FM channels for entertainment, Music & Information.

Pavarala and Malik, in their important work Other Voices (2007), document the larger movement started by NGOs, civil society organisations, media advocacy groups, and activists for a community radio policy in India. I provide a summary of some of their main arguments and findings to understand the transition of Sangam Radio over the years. Sangam Radio was a one of the case-studies included in Other Voices along with other community radio projects such as VOICES/MYRADA (Karnataka), the Kutch Mahila Vikas Sanghatan (KMVS, Gujrat) and Alternative for India Development (AID, Jharkhand) to make a case for community radio in India. These organisations were also important participants in the struggle.
Community Radio in India

Pavarala and Malik argue that radio as a medium has been monopolised by the Government of India and private companies. There has been a general hesitation on the part of the government almost since the start to decentralise the operation and bring in a variety in programmes that truly engage with its audience. According to the authors (2007:86), All India Radio “… set out after independence to ‘benefit’ the masses by giving them not what they sought to hear but what they ought to hear”. They cite finding from the Chanda committee report which found that AIR programmes were dull and drab, low on variety, and did not engage with contentious political matters or even those of civic consequence (Ibid: 91). Such a situation has been further hampered by the uneven and improper setting up of infrastructure across the country. Further the Chanda committee report (as cited in Pavarala and Malik 2007: 90):

…castigated AIR’s programme policy in the two decades of its functioning after Independence on the grounds that the government was overlooking development imperatives and that a technical infrastructure built with public resources was being misused for propaganda of public policy and as a vehicle for setting political agendas.

Providing this historical account of Radio and Broadcasting policy in India, Pavarala and Malik (Ibid:27) argue that the Government of India still retains this tendency, refusing to free the air waves to allow more public participation in the setting up of stations and broadcasting of programmes. Instead, it has “shifted from being a government monopoly to a highly commercialised broadcasting after the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting (MIB) announced the Phase I of auctioning of licences to set up 140 private FM stations in 40 cities in November 1999” (Ibid: 27). The many marginalised sections of the country, including the rural, urban poor and tribal communities amongst many others were and are rendered voiceless because of this. “No one seemed to have an ear for the voices from the rural areas that were seeking a ‘radio of our own’ for using it as a tool to participate in and further their own development” (Ibid: 27). What the government has extended instead, they state, is a mere token that has been labelled ‘Community Radio’. Although, the airwaves have been declared public property through a Supreme Court ruling on the 9th February 1995, the government continues to be “…cautious in unshackling broadcasting, but to allow its use only for entertainment” (Ibid: 27).

Further, it has not permitted private FM (Frequency Modulation) stations to broadcast news or programmes related to current affairs4. Instead the “demands for a third tier of independent, not-for-profit broadcasting in the country yielded a confined ‘campus’ avatar of community radio in the form

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4 At the time of writing this thesis, this stance has seen some relaxation by the current Ministry for Information and Broadcasting which allows Private FM Radio stations to broadcast news from the AIR news bulletins. See Times of India (2014), The Hindu (2014), and Business Standard (2014) for initial reports on the issue. This stance however, only continues to reflect the aforementioned attitude of the state towards completely freeing airwaves as argued by Pavarala and Malik (2007).
of ‘Guidelines’ issued in the first quarter of 2003 that allow ‘well-established’ educational institutions to set up FM transmitters and run radio stations on their campuses” (*Ibid*: 27). The authors argue that while this move, somewhat dilutes the stronghold of the government, it only continues to serve the well-educated, urban elite that already have access to media (*Ibid*: 27). Pavarala (2003: 2166) states elsewhere:

Mistakenly labelled ‘community radio’, the norms laid down for licences include content regulations that suggest that these campus radio stations air programmes on agriculture, environment, health, and other development-related information. Apart from the fact that university campuses are privileged ‘communities’ with more than adequate access to media resources, it is unrealistic to expect campus radio stations managed by young students to eschew fun and entertainment. There is no apparent fit between form and content in this new policy, even as marginalised rural communities continue to be denied the right to produce, own, and operate real community radio.

Given the above background to Community Radio in India, a lot of non-profits/NGOs, activists and civil society organisations have been demanding a policy that genuinely fosters autonomy and self-reliance with which communities can set up radio projects, especially for marginalised groups.

At the time that Pavarala and Malik brought out this work, Sangam Radio had already started a form of narrowcasting of its programmes to its growing network of sangams. By the time I came to undertake my study however, many developments had come to pass in the community radio movement. The government brought in a policy for community radio and started to give out licences to NGOs and non-profits. Thus, when I started my interactions with Sangam Radio in 2011, it had already been about three years since the station had received its licence, and was broadcasting to the seventy five villages in its community. The next section looks briefly at this transition from narrowcasting to broadcasting, in turn also detailing how and what kind of programmes are produced by the station. The reason I keep the section on narrowcasting brief is so as to avoid a repetition of the work established by Pavarala and Malik (2007), seeking instead to build on their study by focusing on the broadcasting.

**Narrowcasting to Broadcasting: Sangam Radio at DDS**

Sangam Radio is located in a village that is roughly a thirty to forty five minute auto-rickshaw ride away from the DDS office. A round red brick building, it effortlessly merges into its surroundings. Like the other DDS buildings, this one too is made of materials local to the area. It consists of a reception area, a small meeting room, and a recording studio attached to the control room. There are not many lights surrounding the building so it goes quite dark in the evening, around the time of the broadcasts. There is a neatly maintained garden just outside the building. Within the control room is a computer, mixer, microphones, and recorders. Present in the control room are shelves filled with tapes of past shows; an archive (Field Notes, November 2011). The content that is digitally recorded now is
stored on a backup hard drive. There is a folder here for each show and content produced for each show are filed into their respective folders for retrieval.

The recording studio is adjacent to the control room and has microphones where people sit down and record programmes. It allows for small groups of people to record at one go. After having moved to editing on a computer and starting broadcasting, Sangam Radio uses software called Wavelab for recording and editing content and a software programme called Green for broadcasting (Field Notes, November 2011). It has two FM transmitters and a hundred-metre tall transmission tower, which has a capacity to broadcast to a radius of thirty kilometres, roughly covering the four mandals in which DDS works. With this installation and the nominal amounts paid to community members for the time they spend recording in the studio, Pavarala and Malik (2007:141) estimated that an hour’s worth of programming would cost Rs. 500 and would cost approximately Rs.1000-1,500 per hour once the station went on air.

Between 1998 to about 2009, Sangam Radio members, along with a team of sangam supervisors and other sangam programme coordinators would make decisions on the kind of content to be produced, depending on the season and other DDS or local events. The station in this time period would record and edit show content on audio tapes. The shows were similar to what is now being broadcast, including songs, stories, recipes, discussions on seasonal crops etc. Without a means to transmit to a large audience the team would take the tapes to sangam meetings and play it back to the members. This way they took their radio programmes out to their community via a type of ‘analogue network’. After playing the content in each meeting, the team would take feedback, ideas, and suggestions from its listeners to improve future episodes of shows (Interview with Geetha, November 2011). Sangam Radio during its days of narrowcasting would have fallen under what Ravi Sundaram (2007: 50) calls a “non-legal” domain. This is especially given the strong resistance to the establishment of community radio by the India state. Pavarala and Malik’s comments in this regard are particularly telling:

…the Government of India stubbornly refused to yield to the demands for opening up this sector, under misplaced apprehensions that secessionists, militants or subversive elements would misuse the medium…this is just a bogey raised by a government uneasy about the consequences of allowing autonomous broadcasting spaces to communities and the social sector (Pavarala and Malik 2007:28).

On one of my visits in 2012, the DDS community had gathered together to sign a petition being submitted to the government in power at the time. This was a petition opposing the increased prices for community radio licenses, making it unaffordable for communities like DDS.

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5 Pavarala and Malik, provide a detailed account of this process in *Other Voices* (2007) Particularly in Chapter 5 of this book.
Fig 5.2: The Sangam Radio station (Photo by author, November 2011).
It is obvious therefore, that this sense of unease on behalf of the state continues to exist as does the somewhat tense relationship it shares with actors like DDS. As I argue in a later section, it is these very boundaries that entities like Sangam Radio push.

Pavarala and Malik (*Ibid*: 180), at the time of their study had noted that Sangam Radio has canned more than four hundred hours of programming on various issues. They also noted that playing back the cassettes in meetings, helped women reconnect with traditional crops and farming methods. They found in their study across different community radio projects and especially DDS that the gender dimension was “…not limited to the gender of the participant or simply including women-related issues in communicative interaction. The women also influence the nature of message production” (*Ibid*: 239-240). They note that the radio programme, along with participation in various other sangam activities have helped them build a solidarity and assert themselves, where they once stood alone and silent. Like the PV team, the programmes made by Sangam Radio are closely connected to their everyday lives. This is probably more defined in the case of the radio team. The next section looks at the different ways in which content for the radio shows are produced as well as some details of these shows itself.

**From the Community and Back to the Community.**

At the time of my visits, Sangam Radio’s broadcasts were produced by three women⁶. Geetha and Sunitha are the two station managers and radio jockeys. There is also Asha, a young woman who helped set-up recordings, editing and the general maintenance of the studio. Sangam Radio broadcasts seven days a week, from 7:00-9:00 pm each day. The slot between 7:00-8:30 pm consists of pre-recorded programmes. Between 8:30 and 9:00 pm the station takes in requests from its listeners. These usually consist of songs, but also include a replay of stories or parts of previous episodes. *Table 1* provides an overview of the programmes broadcasted through the week

Note from *Table 1*, how closely linked the programmes and its contents are to the lives of its producers and listeners (similar to the Participatory Video initiative). The songs and stories also come from the folklore of the community. To reiterate what was said in the introduction, it emerges from their lives and goes back to them. Thus, each piece of content is based on the crop, agricultural methods, cultural practices, and festivals of that season. Locals identified as having extensive knowledge of these various aspects are brought in to record debates, interviews, or discussions on their respective topics.

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⁶ The names of all three team members have been changed to maintain anonymity.
### Table 1

**Shows produced and broadcasted by Sangam Radio**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl. No.</th>
<th>Name of Programme</th>
<th>Description of Programme</th>
<th>Days of Broadcast in a week.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Mana Oori Pantalu (The crops of our villages)</td>
<td>Discussions and information on the crops of each season, with tips and suggestions on agricultural practices and methods.</td>
<td>Monday- Sunday</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Mana Bhasha (Our Language)</td>
<td>Stories of various kinds, native to the region. Three types of stories are generally used: Hun Ante Katha, Bicchappola Katha, and Burrakatha.</td>
<td>Monday-Sunday</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Arogyam (Health/Well-Being)</td>
<td>Programme focusing on health, nutrition, and general well-being.</td>
<td>Monday, Wednesday, Friday</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Aadolla Sanghalu (Women’s sangams)</td>
<td>Here, members from different sangams share the activities conducted by their sangams, including problems faced, challenges overcome, and their achievements.</td>
<td>Monday</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Paatalu (Songs)</td>
<td>These are folksongs indigenous to the region of Zaheerabad/Telangana. These songs are used as fillers between each programme. Also, the last twenty to thirty minutes of each day’s broadcast, between 8:30-9:00 pm is slotted for requests from audiences which include these songs.</td>
<td>Monday-Sunday</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Mee Letters (Letters from You)</td>
<td>A reading of letters from listeners, usually consisting of feedback and requests to play/re-play songs, parts of shows, stories etc.</td>
<td>Monday-Sunday</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Oori Varthalu (Local News)</td>
<td>A round up of the local news from all the villages affiliated to DDS.</td>
<td>Monday-Sunday</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Yarralla Muchatlu (Light hearted talk or gossip between co-sisters)</td>
<td>This programme is structured as a light-hearted conversation between two co-sisters or sisters-in-law in the family. However, through their conversation they discuss and advice each other (and the audience) on various topics of interest. Be it health, agricultural practices, and other cultural practices.</td>
<td>Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday, Sunday</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Chaduvu</td>
<td>Educational stories and songs</td>
<td>Tuesday</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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7 The word *Sanghalu* in the Telugu language stands for the plural of the term Sangam.
As one of the team members recounts:

Now it is a season for sowing. We look at what crops are generally sown around this time. For instance, now is the season to sow senegalau (chickpeas), vomam (bishop’s weed) and aavalu (mustard). So for the next fifteen odd days, our diet consists of food cooked with the crops of this season… We know that some villages yield a high Rabi season harvest, and some others yield a higher Poonasa\(^8\) season harvest. For instance, Village C has a higher Poonasa crop, so at the moment they find it difficult to get a supply of crops like vomam, senegalau etc. On the other hand if you go to say Village P, R, or Z, their Rabi crop is better. So we focus our shows on these villages and what they are doing to get a good yield, how are they cooking these crops, what new recipes are possible etc. Over say the next ten to fifteen days, our shows concentrate on broadcasting this content. If we don’t do so while it is the season, there is no use for it later for anybody. So everything is based on season. Whether it is the kind of fodder for our cattle, the food for us humans, and the kinds of manure that strengthens the earth or what we face while going about our work. All of these are based on what season it is. We make the programmes at that particular time and broadcast it (Interview with Geetha, November 2011).

The second means of creating radio show content is centred around people known to be local experts on various subject matters. The following example highlights this. During my visits to Sangam Radio, a member pulled out a file recording for one of the shows. This consisted of a local farmer talking about the importance of birds for agriculture, and how different birds shared a symbiotic existence with the various crops in the two major agricultural seasons. The farmer had also talked about how the number of birds in that ecology are depleting and this has an adverse effect on the crops they sow.

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\(^8\) Rabi and Poonasa are the two major agricultural seasons in Zaheerabad. Rabi is the winter crop and Poonasa is approximately the spring to summer crop.
Therefore, this farmer, identified as a local expert, was brought in to explain this delicate balance between native birds and crops. Such local people become invaluable resources to create content for the radio programmes. Another major way in which content is created is through the participation of the sangam members and other residents of the affiliate villages:

Sangam members and other people [also] do come. While anyone is welcome to come and record with us, sangam members in any given village are usually more familiar with approaching the radio station than non-members. Hence, they tend to bring other people and non-members from their village to record a show...once a month, people from each affiliated village record an hour’s worth of content for different programmes and go. It could be anything- songs, stories, debates, etc. So, different parties come on different days, whenever they are free, record content and go (Interview with Geetha, November 2011).

Apart from studio recordings, there are members of the sangam, usually sangam supervisors, and the radio jockeys who do field recordings. So instead of community members coming to the studio, the jockeys or supervisors go into villages and record either group debates, songs, stories, news, interviews, and other items. For instance, Saritha demonstrated for me, how a field recording happens with the help of another member. She recorded an interview with the member on the problems she was facing with her crops that season. Also, the lady sang a song eulogising a former chief minister of the state, who had recently passed away. While this was a small glimpse of what a field recording would involve, it highlights the participation of the community in content creation. Saritha explained later that interviews recorded in this manner would go into their files for use in one of the upcoming broadcasts.

There is also a Planning Committee that sits down and helps decide the content for shows, especially around special occasions and festivals. This is similar to the committee that existed during the narrowcasting period, constituted of sangam supervisors, CMT members, and sangam programme coordinators. I had a chance to observe a Planning Committee meeting as they discussed the content for a special show for the Peerla Panduga or Muharram (Field Notes, September 2012). While there didn’t seem to be a specific way in which these members were chosen or replaced, the committee was carved out of existing DDS staff and those who left were replaced. The committee also had a few male staff as a part of it, which makes it one of the more unique committees in DDS. The meeting mostly revolved around what songs, shows stories should be broadcasted on the day of the festival.

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9 Peerla Panduga is a unique way of observing Muharram in the Telangana region of India. It is observed across Sufi shrines in the area, involving the participation of Muslims and Hindus. The highlight of the festival is procession of a sacred relic called the Alam. It has been seen as a festival, particularly in recent decades, that promotes communal harmony between the Hindus and Muslims. In fact, in some areas and shrines such as Bibi Ka Alwa, in Hyderabad city, Hindus are the standard bearers or Alambar daar, as they are parochially known. The Hindus of the region believe that worshiping the relic Alam will bring them solace and peace of mind. They also go on to take part in the conventional Muharram processions taken out in memory of Martyrs by the Muslims (Telangana Tourism, 2014).
Inspiration for radio shows also comes from daily life. One of the radio jockeys once chanced upon a discussion between some men in her village. They were talking about how a scheme of ‘chits’\textsuperscript{10} (or ‘chitty’ in the Telugu language) as well as getting jobs allow women to gain everything today. They are financially secure and even independent. This inspired her to include the issue one of the radio shows as a discussion. Apart from this, two of the major ways in which the community, as an audience participates is through letters they write in, requesting for particular content to be played back. The second way is, as mentioned above, through the request programme aired live, every night. The requests in this slot mostly consist of folk songs and stories of the region or the replay of a certain show they heard previously. Specific requests for songs or stories related to special occasions would be made around the times of festivals or days of commemoration (e.g. an Ambedkar Paata on Ambedkar Jayanti).

The sangam members from different villages and the radio team manage the daily working of the radio station. However, the administration of DDS often weighs in on some matters- usually the field officers and the director. It is in such interactions that some hierarchies within DDS often get expressed. For instance, there has been some difference in opinion in how to approach sponsored advertisements or public service announcements. A few members at Sangam Radio feel like the station could earn good revenue by airing such announcements and have suggested it to the concerned administrative staff. This idea has been suggested a few times to the administration, but the concerned team members feel like their views have not been taken seriously enough\textsuperscript{11} (Field notes, September 2012).

\textbf{Transition from Tapes to Computers.} Around the same time that Sangam Radio received its broadcasting licence, they had also moved from using audio tapes to computers (such as the one shown in Figure 5.3) for producing and transmitting content. It has taken months of practice to edit with the ease that they do. In my conversations with the three team members, they reminisce about the early days of training\textsuperscript{12}:

\begin{quote}
It used to be difficult, no matter how hard we tried. A cassette would instantaneously play as soon as you hit a button. With a computer, cutting it at the right time is easier, it’s neater. Things like a ‘fade out’ and ‘fade in’ are quite tough on an audio tape. With a computer, fade out, fade in, volume control etc. are much easier (Interview with Geetha, November 2011).
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{10} Chits here refer to a kitty of money pooled in by a group of people (in this case it is women). It is another way to refer to micro-finance schemes or self-help groups. The money pooled in by members is lent to a member of the group as a loan to be used for personal and/or professional purposes (like a wedding, or setting up a small business etc.) and repaid as soon as possible. Then this kitty is lent to another member. It is similar to microfinance schemes, but may not always be formally organised. See Chapter 3 of this dissertation for a brief discussion on microfinance schemes.

\textsuperscript{11} The specific details of this event have been altered slightly to maintain anonymity of the people concerned. The issues of importance however have been brought forth as is.

\textsuperscript{12} Pavarala and Malik (2007) elaborate on experiences of training the Sangam Radio Team had with technical equipment during the period of narrowcasting. The women recount similar experiences. See pages 195-202.
Fig 5.3: Recording equipment at Sangam Radio (Photo by author, September 2012).
Sunitha adds to this experience in another conversation:

On the computer it is much easier to edit. And it’s easier to note and observe the time of the recording, and duration of the recording. It is also easier to go from one part of the recording to another. One a tape, you don’t know which corner of the tape has the content you need. A lot of time has gone by before you find it (Interview with Sunitha, September 2012).

Asha and Sunitha relate anecdotes about the time they first operated a computer. They look back at the mistakes today with amusement, but at that time it seemed like a herculean task. Sunitha relates this anecdote:

When using a computer, if you want two hours’ worth of programmes, you need to record about two and a half hours’ of content and edit it down. So it was quite tedious and challenging at the start. We also had to make announcements between each show. I was always afraid I would make mistakes while announcing. We used to record these announcements and paste it in line with the programmes.

I remember one of our field officers was there on one of the first days and tried helping us out. We sat down recorded and saved the files. When we went back later to retrieve them, we couldn’t find the files. And this happened just when we sat down to do the broadcast for the day. God knows where they went! (Laughs) I just don’t know where they went. I worked on it all morning and even skipped lunch. I started at 9:00 am and I was in this bad state at 7:00 pm in the night. I kept wondering what happened. I went home very upset (Interview with Sunitha, September, 2012).

Sunitha says that she took to making announcements between programmes live, after her husband gave her the idea that day. She would make the announcements live into the microphone and then play the rest of the show from the tapes or computer. So she had to just line them up in order from then on. Asha recollects an incident when, she was alone at the station one day. This was in her early days of joining. A group of women came in to do a recording. She set up the studio, computer, mixer etc. and completed the recording. When she went back to retrieve it to show the radio jockeys, she found that she captured only one minute of the entire recording. They had to call the group back to record that episode again. The team expressed that through the course of learning computer related skills, they felt joy, fear, and excitement. One of the fears they expressed they had was making mistakes with keyboard short cuts and pressing buttons. Especially when it came to cut, copy, paste and save commands:

I didn’t know what would happen when I pressed what button. So I was scared the first few days. But as I worked with it I got better. I learned to do what was needed and left it at that and not do anything extra. That way it was safe. Nothing would happen (Interview with Sunitha, September, 2012).

The above conversation does not just highlight the challenges one faces in mastering certain skills. It also highlights issues related to knowing languages (especially English) and the access such knowledge facilitates to other resources or privileges. I noticed in the time spent with them that they would use a computer keyboard based on the English alphabet to spell out Telugu words. Asha knows a minimal amount of English making it a little easier for her as opposed to Sunitha or Geetha. On asking her how she gets around this she says:
I pick out the English alphabets based on the Telugu ones I need. I am a little familiar with English alphabets and how they sound. And with that I relate it back to the Telugu ones. So for e.g. if I need to write Katha (story), I use Ka and tha from the English keyboard (Interview with Asha, July 2012).

The same is a little more challenging for Sunitha:

I don’t know English. In the beginning I tried observing and taught myself using the sounds of the alphabets. E.g. Paata (song) has ‘Paa’. I spell it out in my own way and I know how I have spelt a particular word. There are probably many mistakes, but I understand how I spelt it so I can recognise it on the computer. It is okay (Interview with Sunitha, September, 2012).

This practice of spelling Telugu words using the English alphabet is in one sense, a creative way to negotiate the barriers posed by language and literacy. The familiarity with the cut, copy and paste functions to save computer files or those of editing audio content would come with practice. On the other hand this English language keyboard is an indicator of certain biases that technologies continue to carry. Thus, while it has become easy to hand over the technologies, make them ubiquitous in a community, and train people to use them, it is seemingly small issues like this that continue to reproduce hegemonies. This is both in terms of hardware and software. Gee (2005) for instance, makes a case for an increase in availability of software applications like word processors, in various Afrikaans dialects to make accesses to (digital) technologies better. Access to media technologies here then cannot be understood only in terms of varying degrees of ownership or availability for use. It needs to also be understood as ease of comprehension and learning the skills to operate them. The observations of Jo Tacchi et.al (2009:580) in relation to a participatory content creation project in Sri Lanka seems apt to this context:

The social and political contexts in which the technological and human intermediaries operate shape the processes that emerge…Local power relations and inequalities can simply serve to reinforce existing power dynamics, or shift them in ways that benefit neither the wider community, nor the most marginalised. This emphasises the need to pay close attention to local contexts and power dynamics and recognise that any introduction of new technologies and media will happen in richly layered social and political contexts, with or without intermediaries.

Adapting Folk culture to Radio. A special mention needs to be made about the variety of folk songs and stories and how some of these are adapted to radio. There are three or four major categories of songs used on air. These have a long history in the region of Telengana, even playing a major role in the Telengana struggle. A sangam supervisor Saritha (Conversation with Saritha, September 2012) talked about some of these songs. There is the Chaitrika paatalu, usually songs on the relationships between men and women. Bhootalli Mata Paatalu or songs dedicated to Mother Earth and are sung during festivals. Men in the village usually drive bullocks attached to ploughs around a tree while singing these songs praising Mother Earth and urging her to yield a plentiful harvest. There are also songs praising political heroes such as Ambedkar. So much so that there is a small collection of songs on his life and work called Ambedkar Paatalu. There is also the Uyalla paatalu. Sung by women, usually while rocking their children to sleep in cradles, they speak of the deeds of the gods and
goddesses. They end with the word *Uyalla* or *uyallo* meaning cradle at the end of each line. For example, one uyalla paaata goes as such: ‘*Nadilla Baludu Uyallo, nagale gatinde uyallo, okka suttu thrigenu uyallo*, rendu suttle thrigenu uyallo’\(^{13}\) (Sample from Sangam Radio, 2012). These songs are characterised by the rhythmic occurrence of the word ‘uyallo’ in their lyrics. Another popular type of song is the *Peeralu Paata* sung by Muslim mendicants. These are especially broadcast around the Islamic festivals of *Muharram* and *Eid*.

The stories used are of three major kinds: Bicchapolla Katha, Burrakatha, and Hun Ante Katha. These three types of stories, like the songs, are indigenous to the Telengana region. The Bicchapolla katha (Stories of the mendicants) are usually stories that are sung- a format similar to ballads. These storytellers hail from a particular caste called *Bicchoppallas* that is similar to mendicants. They have for generations, sung these songs at events in upper caste homes in exchange for alms. The Burrakatha is a very popular form of folktales, again similar in format to a ballad. It proceeds as a conversation between three singers (See Figure 5.4 below). While it also began as stories narrating myths of gods and goddesses, new Burrakathas have been written to spread different messages. Many famous ones such as ‘*Moscow Polimeralona*’ and ‘*Telangana Veerayodhulu*’ were written during the Telengana struggle of 1946-51 (Dhanaraju 2012: 3-4).

The third type of story is the Hun Ante Katha. In this is form of story- telling, especially popular in Telengana, proceeding from one point in the narrative to the next only upon a signal through the sound ‘*Hun*’ from the audience. Radio adapts these myriad forms of folksongs, stories, and ballads in innovative ways for broadcasting. Take for illustration the Hun Ante Katha. As mentioned above, this is a form that involves the storyteller and the audience, with the story proceeding from one point to another only when the audience says ‘hun’. Hun is a sound or word similar to the English ‘Hmmm’. Depending on the context it denotes agreement or a signal for the narrator to continue. It goes something like this:

Storyteller: Once there was a king in a faraway land. He was a fair and just king who had two sons.
Audience: Hun.
Story teller: The king brought the sons up with great love and care. He provided for a good education in various subjects.
Audience: Hun.

Adapting this to radio can be tricky. So while the story teller at Sangam Radio sits in a studio recording a Hun Ante Katha, another person sits in front of the narrator nodding or saying ‘hun’ to help the story teller proceed. While the ‘hun’ response is not always recorded or heard on the radio, tiny pauses are often heard at relevant points when the recording is aired (Field notes and Sample recording from Sangam Radio, 2012).

\(^{13}\) The song roughly translates to the following: ‘There is a young boy (uyallo). He is adorned with many jewels (uyallo). He goes around once (uyallo). He goes around twice (uyallo)…’ and so on.
Fig 5.4: Folk artists performing a Burrakatha at the Mobile Biodiversity Festival 2012
(Photo by Author, January 2012).
A lot of these songs and stories are such that the basic format remains the same, but very often the lyrics are spontaneously made up on the spot, to describe a situation and express a range of emotions ranging from happiness, anger, sadness, determination etc. It can encompass encouragement, motivation, a call to arms and satire amongst others. For instance, at DDS some Uyalla Paatalu have been modified to sing of the importance of a girl child in the family and to urge people to treat women with more respect. There is even a song describing the formation and activities of the sangams through DDS called Akkachellelu koodi poddamu14 (Sisters let us go to the sangam to meet) that is often sung on important occasions. It also describes which crops and herbs can be used as medications for different ailments (Sample song ‘Akkachellelu koodi poddamu’, Sangam Radio 2012). This type of adaptation played an important role in the Telangana Uprising of 1946-51. Many of these folk songs and stories, which have a mythological or historical basis, were tweaked instead, to describe the problems of the people’s lives and carry across the message of the revolution (Dhanaraju 2012:3-4, See also Sundarayya 1973b: 38).

These songs and stories then constantly open up capacities for a new kind of expression (e.g. Ambedkar paatalu) or reconfigure old ones (e.g. Uyalla Paatalu on the importance of the girl child). Similarly, recall the lady who sang a eulogy about a late chief minister of the state at a field recording. Such songs are created to expresses deep seated sentiments, afforded to its singer by the form of the song itself. And the capacities for myriad expressions are further opened up, as I argue in detail over the next few sections, when such songs are transmitted via radio or video.

**Participatory Video and Community Radio as Communal Archives**

Recall how a PV team member explained that video would help them create programmes on one agricultural season to be viewed in another. They also mentioned how it could help them record meetings they had with various government officials. Similarly, as illustrated in Figure 5.5 and Figure 5.6, the Sangam Radio programmes which are recorded on tapes and also stored away on a hard drive, all collectively form an archive(a point also noted by Pavarala and Malik 2007: 181). This is not only of their songs and stories, but also of their struggles and everyday lives. Saritha, a sangam supervisor says to us in our conversation:

Compared to the elders, the youth prefer film songs. But with Sangam Radio, these songs are preserved and both the young and the old like listening to them. They would have been forgotten if they were not preserved via radio (Conversation with Saritha, September, 2012).

14 An excerpt from this song is used as the epigraph to Chapter 3.
Fig 5.5: A collection of Video and Radio tapes at the Community Media Trust centre (Photo by author, November 2011).

Fig 5.6: A collection of Radio programme tapes at Sangam Radio (Photo by author, September 2012).
As a resource, these archives are also much coveted ones. A major television channel in erstwhile Andhra Pradesh, tried many a times to get Sangam Radio to share folksongs from their archives - a move vehemently opposed by the community. The content was to be used in a popular T.V show that showcased folk songs and artists. The community refused to let private companies co-opt what they had spent years collecting and building, asserting their ownership over their inheritance (Interview with Sunitha, September 2012). On the other hand, in the interest of spreading awareness for their cause, their Participatory Video team, in the past (as mentioned in the earlier section) has collaborated with state sponsored and private, commercial television channels to telecast a few documentaries made by them (Field Notes, November 2011). The DDS community is constantly struggling with the commodification of their cultural artefacts, while sharing an uneasy work relationship with the more formally organised media industry. This tension and uneasy work relationship that Sangam radio shares with commercial media, as well as the state (given the historical context of the development of community radio in India), could be typified as what Ravi Sundaram (2007) calls “cultures of insubordination”. Ito (2007: 105) describes it as those practices that:

…produce alternative cultural forms that are disseminated through everyday peer-to-peer exchanges below the radar of commodity capitalism; they are a mode of cultural production that does not overthrow capitalism, but operates in its shadow…that both rely on and disrupt the dominant mode.

These “cultures of insubordination” (Ito 2007, Sundaram 2007) then constitute practices that slowly chew away at the peripheries of commercial or organised industries such as media, and agriculture. They entail working in grey areas and the margins to preserve an alternative to the dominant and hegemonic systems. I elaborate further on this argument in what follows.

Brian Larkin (2007) makes an observation in relation to pirate media and “pirate archives” (Ibid: 78-79) in Nigeria that seem relevant here. He argues that new infrastructural forms create and recreate conditions for everyday urban life. Piracy in turn also “creates new kinds of archives inconceivable outside of this mode of media reproduction” (Ibid: 78). While, the media at work here is very different from pirate media and archives, what is relevant from Larkin (Ibid: 78) is how new technologies “organise sensory perception, provide new relationships between people and things, and give rise to different forms of affectivity, sociability, and leisure”. Not only are these cultural artefacts recorded and archived, but are constantly played and replayed to the community through the radio shows and audience feedback. In this way, the radio station, in a sense, also serves a mnemonic function within the larger biodiversity movement underway at DDS. It constantly engages with the community’s collective memory, as well as mobilises it for political action directed at achieving future goals (A pattern also observed with the Mobile Biodiversity Festival in Chapter 4). Thus, Sangam Radio works to “amplify”- as James Ash puts it (2012:18) - certain affects. He argues in relation to videogame technologies that “these systems transport the potential for the reactivation of memories regarding an
affective encounter or the potential production of new affects…” (Ibid: 18) which could be extended to this case.

Nostalgia for the old or traditional then is what is often circulated within the various programmes of DDS, as is the case with say the Community Gene Bank, the Mobile Biodiversity Festivals, or the shows/films of Community Media Trust. They, as Ash (2012: 18) puts it above, constantly create spaces and “transport the potential for the reactivation” of the collective memories of the region. Not only this, they reconfigure it so as to be able to create new forms of expressions, as in the case of the Uyalla Paata on the importance of girl child, or the telling of a Hun Ante Katha adapted to radio.

To elaborate, take a Uyalla Paata on a girl child. A group of sangam members, who were present for a recording session in July 2012, obliged me with one such song after their recording. They sang a song ‘Ninati Monati Uyallo’ (Group interview, July 2012), which describes the family dynamics, considered as typical within a household in the region. It talks of a family of brothers, who after much struggle where able to sow their land with jonna (Sorghum). However, they weren’t always available to keep the birds from pecking on the young crop. The daughters-in-law of the house suggest their sister-in-law, a young girl take charge of this. She spent much time tending to the crops, in the harsh sun. However, the daughters-in-law would not feed her well, and expected her to eat whatever she was given. The song goes on then to explain how she was not treated well by the daughters-in-law; a dynamic often seen as common between sisters-in-law. Using this they point to how it is important to treat the girl of the house well and count her labour as equal.

Dhanaraju (2012:5) points out that traditionally Uyalla Paatalu were based on the Hindu Goddesses of Lakshmi and Gowri. They were sung by girls who would hang cradles from a tree branch. A form of song such as this however, has been modified in this regard to address gender inequality in above instance. Interestingly, Dhanaraju (Ibid: 5) notes in his paper, that Uyalla Paatalu were often used to mobilise women during the Telangana Struggle of 1946-1951 by modifying the lyrics at the time, to reflect the oppressive conditions of the period.

Fraying the Edges of the Media and Culture Industry

Joe Karaganis (2007), in a volume that inquiries into the ‘structures of participation’ in digital cultures, points out that digital cultures, like a lot of cultural activities allow for the embracing of new capacities for making and sharing cultural work. Further, they provide “new ways of scaling up cultural agency from interpersonal and local relations toward the larger dispersed forms of associations characteristic of modern society” (Ibid: 225). What makes digital technologies particularly different is that they “create the conditions for a shift in the organisation of culture, away from the exclusive reliance on culture industries to manage these transitions of scale” (Ibid: 225). He makes one further point important to this discussion. He says that digital technologies have done more
than “…encroach on the productive roles once reserved for a large-scale enterprises…” but have in fact “…broken open the carefully disciplined networks of distribution and promotion that makes cultural goods available and visible in crowded media environments” (Ibid: 225).

If one were to keep with Karaganis’ arguments, the next question that comes to mind is if this is relevant to non-digital or the ‘older’ formats of media like video and radio which have been, as in the case of DDS’s community media projects, reconfigured so as to blur the lines between the traditionally assigned roles of producer and consumer? Would his argument hold true for such ‘structures of participation’? I would argue that large parts of it would. A structure of participation where a woman from the one of the most marginalised sections of society is able to produce her own radio show and carry it across to others in her community, have an important say in creative and managerial decisions in the production processes; such a structure of participation would have the potential to upset the “carefully disciplined networks of distribution and promotion” that Karaganis (Ibid: 225) alludes to. This tension is probably most obvious in the incident discussed earlier of the private television channel pressurising Sangam Radio to share their archive of folk music. The argument made above is closely related to the final argument I make in the next section, which is, that such media assemblages, are also collective assemblages of enunciations. I make this argument specifically in relation to Sangam Radio however, more than participatory video, by drawing parallels to Guattari’s notion of a Free Radio and Post Media.

Guattari’s Free Radio and Collective Assemblages of Enunciation

Livesey (2005), in his reading of Deleuze and Guattari’s work, talks of an assemblage15 as “the processes of arranging, organising, or fitting together” (Ibid: 18). Further, assemblages have a horizontal and a vertical axis associated with them. The vertical axis consists of territorialised sides or reterritorialised sides which help stabilise it, as well as the forces of deterritorialisation that carry it away (Ibid: 18). Of interest to us here is the horizontal axis that deals with two things. One is a machinic assemblage of bodies, actions, and passions and secondly, collective assemblages of enunciations that consist of “acts and statements, of incorporeal transformations of bodies” (Ibid: 18). Guattari (see Goddard 2013, Genosko 2013) spoke of Italy’s 1970s radio project -Radio Alice as one of these collective assemblages of enunciations. Further, it is projects like that of Radio Alice that would lead into a post-mediatic era.

In the mid to late 1970s, the then government in Italy had a monopoly over radio airwaves with high levels of regulations of what could and couldn’t be broadcast. There started in the face of this chocking strong hold, a number of unauthorised or pirate radio stations that challenged this monopoly

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15 To reiterate, Livesey (2005:18) understands assemblages as “complex constellations of objects, bodies, expressions, qualities, and territories that come together for varying periods of time to ideally create new ways of functioning”.
of the government. Radio Alice was one of this, short-lived, but prominent and catalytic pirate or free (as they referred to themselves) radio stations. The then government saw them as an “intolerable threat” (Padovani 2011: 207). Its founders, one of whom was Franco Berardi- a close associate of Guattari, are described as “hackers, pirates of technology and language, true innovators of the counterculture scene of the 1977 movement” (Ibid: 206). Their programming is described as a mix of poetry, far left politics, performance art, innovative music, and call-ins (Downing 2004: 2150). The call-ins to the radio station particularly, were described as a powerful source of information. Callers would phone in to report events as they occurred, which allowed people to join marches and protests as they happened on the streets. It is event touted to have played a catalytic role in the riots of 1977 in Bologna (Padovani 2011: 206).

It was these forms of participation and media production that Guattari was inspired by, hailing such efforts as heralding the post media era. Michael Goddard’s (2013: 48) observations about Italy’s 1970s free radio experiment, seems apt here:

[Radio] … had not only the technical advantage of lightweight replaceable technology, but more importantly was able to be used to create a self-referential feedback loop of political communication between producers and receivers, tending towards breaking down the distinctions between them.

Keeping in mind the above points, I argue that DDS’s Sangam Radio could be seen as a potential form of post media, with interesting parallels between the free radio described above and Sangam Radio. As demonstrated in the processes of media production at Sangam Radio (and to an extent with Participatory Video), the lines between the producer and consumer of their programmes is blurred. Karaganis (2007), as noted in the previous section, makes a similar point, noting that such structures of participation make the definitions of users and consumers of media very porous. The members who come in to make programmes are the ones consuming it too. Note Guttari’s (as quoted in Goddard 2013: 48) remarks in this regard:

…the totality of technical and human means available must permit the establishment of a veritable feedback loop between the auditors and the broadcast team: whether through direct intervention by phone, through opening studio doors, through interviews or programmes based on listener made cassettes.

The travelling of villagers up to Machanoor to record shows, radio jockeys and sangam supervisors going in to various villages to capture content, the planning of shows for special occasions, everyday conversations inspiring debates, audiences punctuating daily broadcasts with feedback and requests via letters and phone calls while on air –all add to this breaking down of distinctions. Rising from and going back to the community, establishing that “veritable feedback loop” (Ibid: 48). Goddard’s strict reading of Guattari’s Free Radio doesn’t lend itself to community radio station such as the one discussed here, for he see them as working to represent their particular interests. However, I am more inclined to agree with Genosko’s (2013) understanding of the same. He sees free radio as, “a node in a
complex media ecology that is sustained by micropolitics built upon experimentation that perfuses a social assemblage” (Ibid: 21).

Keeping aside the matter of definitions for a moment, what I would like to draw our attention to is why such media assemblages are important. Whether it was Radio Alice in the 1970s Italy or Sangam Radio in today’s India, Goddard (2013: 50) sees such collective assemblages of enunciation, as a cause for the panic on part of the order of social forces because it begins to mobilise a massive and unpredictable political affectivity and subjectivity that is “autonomous, self-referential, and self-reinforcing”. Taking this argument in tandem with Ash’s (2012) idea of such systems transporting the potential for the reactivation of memories of an affective encounter (as well as the potential production of new ones), such mobilisations of “unpredictable political affectivity and subjectivity” (Goddard 2013: 50) in a sense become a contagion. A much needed one perhaps to break existing hegemonies along the lines of gender, caste, and class.

As we have seen in Chapter 3 and 4, many of the DDS programmes, like the Community Media discussed here, also work the same way. In keeping with this last point the following chapter seeks to summarise arguments and draw some conclusions. I also argue in this chapter, why movements such as the one at DDS become important in a neoliberal context. As Wendy Brown (2015) points out, it has serious implications for democracy itself. I tie up all of these arguments together in the next chapter.