



# Role of Rural Women in Community Radio with special reference to APNA RADIO and GURGAON KI AWAAZ

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**Abstract.** In rural areas, there is a greater need for resources to empower women compared to urban areas. As we all know, the government has launched many schemes for rural development as well as for women's development. Despite this, encouraging and empowering women in rural areas remains a significant challenge. When someone says we are living in the 21st century, the first question that comes to mind is, "Are we really living in the 21st century?" Women in rural areas are still primarily occupied with household chores.

However, many community radios have become a boon in rural areas, bringing about significant changes in the lives of many women. Despite not being highly educated, rural women are successfully running community radio stations. Most importantly, these women have taken leadership positions in these radio stations. Are these women truly empowering others in their communities?

Nowadays, the media plays a crucial role in creating awareness among women through television programs, radio shows, newspapers, and magazines. Since rural women are often not highly educated, radio serves as a particularly effective medium. Community radios are actively working towards the development of these communities.

**Keywords.** Rural women, Rural area status, Community radio, Women's condition, Working-Women, Digital-Divide

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## PUBLISHED BY

Dev Sanskriti Vishwavidyalaya, Gayatrikunj-Shantikunj, Haridwar, India

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## Introduction

The first two experiments in CR broadcasting in the world date back a little over 50 years in Latin America. Poverty and social injustice were the main factors driving such projects. In 1947, Bolivia witnessed the establishment of Radio de los Mineros (Miners Radio Station), and Colombia saw the emergence of Radio Sutatenza. The primary goal of the former was to unite the mining community in the struggle for better and fairer working conditions for rural women. Today, in this era of advancement, people are migrating to urban areas, and rural areas and women are being neglected. In the 21st century, a term emerged called the "Digital Divide." This digital divide has become a barrier for rural women. To address this issue, it is essential to establish community radios in rural areas, ideally operated by rural women. These women can play a vital role in bridging the digital divide. To tackle this challenge, many community radios have been launched, particularly in rural areas, where women are being trained to operate these stations. Through these efforts, community radios are supporting rural areas by addressing social issues, raising awareness, and helping women learn new skills and embrace the technological era [1].

We all know that radio programs can create awareness about various important issues, but when it comes to women, radio plays a significant role in their lives. Nutrition and education are key components. The role of community radio in empowering women in India is crucial [2].

## Need of the Study

### *Empowering the Women*

In rural areas, there is a greater need for resources to empower women compared to urban areas. As we all know, the government has launched many schemes for rural and women's development. However, empowering women in rural areas remains a huge challenge [3]. When someone says we are living in the 21st century, the first question that comes to mind is, "Are we really living in the 21st century?" Women in rural areas are still busy with household chores.

Community radios have become a boon in rural areas, bringing significant changes to many women's lives. Although rural women are often not highly educated, they are running community radios. The most important thing is that these women have taken leadership positions in the radio stations, which is a notable achievement compared to other radio stations [4]. Are these women truly empowering other women in their area?

### *Awareness in that Area in Women*

In the 21st century, numerous resources are available for creating awareness among women. Media plays a huge role in raising awareness among women through television programs, radio programs, newspapers, and magazines [5]. When we talk about rural women, many are not highly educated, so radio plays an essential role. As we already know, community radios are working toward the development of these communities. But are they truly making a difference on the ground for real development? [6]

## Review of Literature

UNESCO (2018) [7] highlighted that women are twice as likely as men to be illiterate, with rural women being especially at risk. Globally, only 39% of rural girls attend secondary school, and they often face lower levels of civic integration and access to information, as well as exclusion from decision-making circles.

Bhatia, Chetna (2016) [8] suggests that the concept of development has shifted from top to bottom in the last two decades. Radio Mewat has played a crucial role in bringing social change and improving the lives of community members. The government needs to revamp its policy and attitude towards community media, taking into account the diverse needs, cultures, and aspirations of the rural population.

Kini, Tanya (2016) [9] critiques a research article, noting that while there are 195 licensed community radio stations in India as of March 2016, the author focuses on specific stations like Radio Sangam, Radio Mewat, Kutch, and Radio Active, which appear to reflect a particular ideology or vested interest in community radio.

Rikzana, A. Afreen and Neelamalar, M (2015) [10] emphasize that radio can play a vital role in spreading awareness about women's rights, including property rights and intellectual property. Radio programs can educate women about their constitutional and legal rights, special provisions for their welfare, and measures taken by the government and other agencies. These programs also aim to raise awareness about violence against women, maternity rights, and other legal aspects.

Vyas, Bhanu Priya (2015) [11] discusses the operational impact of 179 community radio stations in India, focusing on their role in reaching remote areas. These stations help local women farmers recognize their inherent abilities and build their confidence, highlighting the role of small media in transforming rural India.

Nandakumar, S. & Sridharraj, G. (2015) [12] point out that social development, empowerment of women at the grassroots level, and capacity building are major concerns. Community radio has the potential to become a tool for rural women's development. This research analyzes how community radio stations design unique programs for self-help groups (SHGs) and engage these groups in creating programs for their local communities.

Nirmala, Yalala (2015) [13] concludes that media, especially radio, is playing an important role in women's empowerment. Community radio, whether through All India Radio (AIR) or other stations, has become a key tool for advancing women's welfare.

Women Web (2014) [14] highlights the barriers faced by women in accessing media, particularly in rural areas. However, community radio has emerged as a powerful tool for empowering rural women, both as broadcasters and listeners. Women are able to overcome various barriers to deprivation and use their voices to express concerns through the community radio platform.

Balkan, K.C. Siva and Norman, Salving Jebaraj (2012) [15] argue that media, especially radio, is a popular tool for women's development. Radio transcends literacy barriers and serves as an effective platform for promoting women's participation in decision-making and governance.

Malik, Kanchan K. and Bandell, Daniela (2012) [16] examine community radio initiatives in rural areas aimed at deploying communication technologies for social change and empowering women. This research explores the opportunities and challenges for women participating in community radio, providing insights into how radio can reshape the gendered public sphere.

## Significance and Objectives

The study focuses on exploring the involvement of rural women in community radio, analyzing their roles, initiatives, and the potential for their development within this medium. It also seeks to highlight community radio's impact on rural women's empowerment and its significance as a tool for social change.

The significance of this study lies in its academic, professional, and social implications. Academically, it highlights the dynamics of rural women's participation in community radio, with a special focus on the NCR region, particularly the community radio stations Apna Radio and Alfaz-e-Mewat. Professionally, the study underscores the role of community radio in rural development, offering insights that may guide other community radio stations in addressing challenges and implementing solutions. Socially, the research generates gender-related data and could serve as a source of inspiration for other rural women to engage with community radio and lead developmental initiatives.

The objectives of this study are to examine the current condition of rural women in community radio, review their roles, and identify possibilities for their development through this medium. Additionally, the study aims to analyze the initiatives undertaken by rural women in community radio to further explore their contributions and potential.

## Methodology

This study is theoretical in nature and adopts a qualitative research approach to achieve its objectives. The research focuses on analyzing case studies and content related to community radio stations to understand the involvement of rural

women. Specific tools and techniques used for data collection and analysis are detailed below:

### Sampling

Purposive sampling was used to select community radio stations that highlight rural women's roles and initiatives.

### Approach

The study employs a qualitative research approach to explore the experiences and contributions of rural women in community radio.

### Data Analysis

Content analysis was conducted to evaluate the programs, initiatives, and narratives from the selected radio channels.

### Sample Size

The research focuses on two community radio channels: 1. Gurgaon Ki Awaaz 2. Alfaz-e-Mewat

### Data Collection Tool

Case studies of the selected radio channels were utilized as the primary data collection tool.

## Findings

### Case Study of Gurgaon Ki Awaaz

A non-profit radio broadcasts 22 hours a day, 365 days a year to over 5,00,000 listeners in Gurugram. It serves as a critical information and communication bridge in the community using participatory radio. In 2013, under a partnership with the Commonwealth of Learning Program, the result was "Chahat Chowk- Crossroads of Desire". This series of "Chahat Chowk" was made for and by rural women. It is a weekly program focused on the sexual and reproductive health of couples. Produced along with stakeholders such as Civil Hospital-Gurugram, St. Stephens Hospital-Gurugram, community men and women, and partner NGOs, the program features a doctor in the studio to answer questions from listeners—rural women—in a live program format.

### *Chahat Chowk: Breaking the silence around sexual health*

Gurgaon Ki Awaaz community radio has been broadcasting "Chahat Chowk", a half-hour weekly program focusing on rural women's reproductive health since July 2013. The program has been designed with the active participation of the NRHM RCH center in Mullaheda village, migrant women's groups in Mullaheda, Mahila Mandal groups of the NGO Mera Parivaar, rural Haryanvi women's groups in Mullaheda, ASHA workers, ANMs, and the IVR service provider Awaaz De. The issues of reproductive health plaguing women in Mullaheda are brought to light, along with a range of media platforms to ensure the message reaches the last mile—the women inside their homes [17].

Issues include responsible sexual behavior, safe pregnancy, the role of family members in ensuring safe pregnancy and birth, anemia, lack of privacy, poor nutrition among women, menstrual health and hygiene, understanding the changes in adolescence, and common myths and misconceptions about women's health in rural women. Chahat Chowk program had a significant impact on rural women, as the work of narrowcasting was also done by Sharmila. This program not only changed the lives of rural women but also impacted the lives of their children. Chahat Chowk is the best example for all community radio stations; it is completely created with the help of Sharmila—the Rural Employee—and for rural women.

### *Apna Nazariya Apna Kaam*

Entrepreneurship first—inside information on small businesses to encourage rural women to become entrepreneurs. It focuses on entrepreneurship through in-depth discussions with rural women who want to do something. They can start a snack shop, make mattresses at home, start a part-time business, etc. A program called "Rasoi Se" was also started by Sharmila, in which she records programs with the help of rural women. While going for narrowcasting of the "Chahat Chowk" program, Sharmila also records the "Rasoi Se" program. Through this, the voices of rural women are aired, encouraging

them to pursue more programs like this.

### Case Study of Alfaz-e-Mewat

Alfaz-e-Mewat FM 107.8 (Rural Voices of Mewat) is a community radio station established in 2012 by the S.M. Sehgal Foundation with seed funding from the Ministry of Agriculture, Government of India, under its Agricultural Technology Management Agency scheme. Its purpose is to provide a voice to rural communities on development issues and promote local culture [18]. As a “minority-concerned backward district” with problems in basic areas such as water availability, agricultural production, health, literacy, and a lack of awareness about government entitlements and services, Alfaz-e-Mewat serves as a tool for the empowerment of rural women and girls.

Village women hear about and discuss best practices in water management and conservation, health and sanitation, education, agriculture, environmental awareness, and rural governance. Awareness campaigns and programs discuss social issues that affect rural women. Oral folklore, poetry, music, and storytelling programs showcase cultural heritage and the history of rural women [19].

Razia, a reporter of Alfaz-e-Mewat, invites rural women to take part in conversations about local issues. Educational programs that cater to children as well as rural women include “Galli-Galli Sim Sim” (the Indian adaptation of Sesame Street) and Radio School tutoring in science, math, and English. In this community, agriculture is the main livelihood, and women also perform much of the agricultural work in the fields, but their work on the family farm is uncompensated. Since women’s major contributions to the local economy are not recognized, they are financially dependent and vulnerable to domestic isolation and violence [20]. Empowering such a district will not only lead to the emergence of women leaders but will also accelerate the development of the entire community. Research has shown that after broadcasting programs, rural women move into leadership positions, which helps the community [21].

The most effective program is “Kanoon ki

Baat”, in which Razia and her team made the program successful. With the help of the Administration and the Chief Judicial Officer, the program helped end the fear of rural women. These women were unaware of their equal rights as Indian citizens or ways in which they could become involved in their village-level institutions. By receiving excellent feedback, a new program called “Police Aapke Dwaar” was started, aimed at further developing the rural Mewat women. These programs changed the lives of women, made a great impact on this community, and set an example for others.

### Community Radio & Rural Women

Community radio is a radio service that caters to the development of a specific community within the geographical limits of that area. It is a non-profit organization, and the radio programs are created by volunteers from the community. The important role of community radio lies in informing, providing psychological support, building solidarity, and reshaping the knowledge and behavior of rural women in the community. It is a third type of radio broadcasting, distinct from public and commercial or private radio broadcasters [22]. The philosophy of community radio is to use this medium as the voice of the voiceless and the mouthpiece of oppressed women, serving as a tool for development.

Community radio stations often reflect the gender stereotyping of mainstream radio stations in staff and volunteer roles, despite having aims and charters that support equal opportunities. However, community radio attracts women as volunteers [23]. Radio has been discussed as a female medium, both in terms of the intimate relationship women have with it as listeners and the program content that has been devised by/for them. Radio is a medium that is women-friendly, pertinent, and accessible in terms of learning production skills and techniques, as well as working together to shape program schedules.

### Conclusion

When we talk about change at the ground level, community radio stations play an impor-

tant role. There are many issues in rural areas that affect both men and women. Community radio has enhanced the participation of rural women in program production and created awareness among female listeners about health, sanitation, education, food habits, and family systems, leading to significant changes in their daily lives. An important aspect is that community radio has developed leadership qualities and behaviors among rural women listeners. It has increased their general knowledge, enabled them to showcase their talents, and motivated them on various issues.

In terms of economic empowerment, community radio programs have also helped women learn job skills, which in turn has increased their income. “Community radio has given a voice to the women of the community.” The programs have helped boost women’s self-confidence, raised awareness about pollution, health, hygiene, and aspects of personality development.

Rural women—like Razia and Sharmila—who are both producers and listeners, have started to reflect on their abilities and aspirations, as well as the lives of other women. Hence, radio can be a source of empowerment for women. Radio has changed the lives of these community women by giving them a voice, empowering them to fight for their rights, and raising awareness about various issues—from women’s rights to health, maternity, violence, and nutrition. Therefore, community radio can do wonders if it is used properly for the development, upliftment, or empowerment of women.

**Compliance with ethical standards:**

Not required.

**Conflict of interest:**

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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