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Community Radio and Collective Memory: A mapping of material media practices at a Community Radio Station in Telangana

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Abstract

This paper is based on Ph.D. work currently being done by the author. An attempt is made here to move away from an anthropocentric understanding of media technology. Here, I extending ideas from material media ecology practice, affect studies and Cybercultures to a case of a community radio in Telangana, India. This radio station is embedded within a larger biodiversity movement underway in the region, run with the help of a Non-Governmental Organisation. In doing so I argue that the station serves important archival and mnemonic function within the larger movement. Secondly, I also argue that the specific media practices that have emerged in this context tend to fray the processes of "cultural production" within what Joe Karaganis (2007) calls the "industrial organization of culture" or the "culture industry". Finally, I also draw parallels between this case of community radio and Guattari's idea of Free Radio.

Keywords: community radio, telangana, collective memory, free radio, affect, non-representation, biodiversity

"…it is less the question of the subversive use of a technical media form than the generation of a media, or rather post-media, ecology that is a self-referential network for an unforeseen processual production of subjectivity amplifying itself via technical means"

-Michael Goddard: *Felix and Alice in Wonderland*

Amanda Williams and Michael Merten, in a 2009 study, looked at how adolescents used online social networking sites as a means to cope with the sudden death of peer. This study came into circulation at an interesting time. It was just a few years after social networking site Facebook had moved out of limited college campus usage to the larger public domain, and sites like Orkut and Myspace had seen increase in popularity. The study was one of the many (in the preceding two decades) that was preoccupied with what, *new* [1]media, and technology were "*doing to us*". While, other aspects of this study are not of importance here, their study highlights one point which is of interest here. They observed that adolescents continued to post on the deceased peer's online page and "talk" to them (Williams & Merten 2009: 82). The authors see this as a coping mechanism in the process of bereavement; however, this phenomenon opens up a host of other questions regarding our relationship with technology. The number of times we comment on the complex relationships we share with media technology is innumerable. But what does this really mean? The idea that people still "talk" to people who have passed on would, I argue, calls for a reconfiguration in our understanding of identity, rituals of grieving, and, more relevant to this study, of memory and cultural practice in relation to media technology. Further, one could ask does this apply only to new media or is there a need to rework how we approach the study of "old" or analogue media technology?

As a starting point for such a reconfiguration, there are a number of scholars who have stressed the need to move away from an emphasis on media content and a social constructivist approach and adopt a more non-linear and non-representational way of studying media technologies. This has especially gained strength in the wake of the "digital revolution". An assertion by Andy Clarke (2003) on cyborgs is appropriate in this regard. He states that that the emergence of cyborgs is not a phenomenon of today. We have always been cyborgs, in so far as we understand them as human beings' capacities being extended by the technology they interact with. Humans, therefore, have always been inserted in a social, biotechnological matrix, whether it is with our watches, phones, or pencils.

[1] The term "new" media has often had some scholars hail this category enthusiastically and others who have questioned the "newness" of new media. For one account that complicates these debates see Wendy Chun (2006) "Introduction: Did Somebody Say New Media?" in Wendy Chun and Thomas Keenan (eds) *New Media, Old Media: A History and Theory Reader* (For a complete citation, see Bibliography).

This paper is an attempt to contribute to this line of thinking and joins in the assertion that there is a need to move away from an anthropocentric understanding of media technologies. The emphasis on a non-anthropocentric approach to media technologies and practices is also intertwined with similar debates within the areas of Ethnoecology and biodiversity conservation. Here, I extend ideas from material media ecology practice, Affect Studies, Cybercultures, and Ethnoecology to a case of a community radio[2] station in Telangana, India. This radio station is embedded within a larger biodiversity movement underway in the region, run with the help of a Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) called the Deccan Development Society (DDS). In extending this line of thinking to this particular case, I argue that the station serves important archival and mnemonic functions within the larger movement. Secondly, I argue that the specific media practices that have emerged in this context tend to fray the processes of "cultural production" within what Joe Karaganis (2007) calls the "industrial organization of culture" or the "culture industry". This fraying, in turn, also ties back to the challenge that DDS poses to what it sees as the homogenising tendencies of globalisation and neoliberalism. Finally, I argue that a non-anthropocentric approach, such as the one outlined in this paper, helps highlight and value concrete embodied practices that preserve diversity and multiplicities. Some of these practices tend to emerge, like DDS, within the margins or the grey areas and as alternatives to the dominant, hegemonic practices. Such efforts need urgent recognition and even celebration to counter the aforementioned homogenising forces.

The rest of the paper is divided roughly into six sections. The next section provides an introduction to the Deccan Development Society and its various programmes and how they are geared towards conserving agricultural biodiversity. Also included here are brief notes on the history of the Telangana region, where DDS is located. In the third section I develop arguments for the use of a non-anthropocentric or a non-representational approach as mentioned earlier. I start with a critique of social constructivism and critical realism and move on to expand on two concepts- affect and assemblages and their relevance to this study. Section four provides a detailed analysis of Sangam Radio at DDS. I start by locating the initial phase of narrowcasting adopted by Sangam Radio within the larger context of the Community Radio movement in

[2] For the purpose of this paper, I take two definitions of Community Radio. The first is AMARC, the World Association for Community Radio Broadcasting criteria which states that community radio "has three aspects: non-profit making, community ownership, and control and community participation" (as quoted in Pavarala and Malik, 2007: 16). The second definition by Tabing states that a community radio station is "one that is operated in the community, for the community, about the community and by the community" (as quoted in Pavarala and Malik, 2007:17). See Bibliography for full citations.

India. I then describe the media practices of the Radio station in its current phase of broadcasting. The last two sections draw out the two main arguments of this paper. The first one argues that Sangam Radio serves important archival and mnemonic functions within the biodiversity movement of the DDS community. Secondly I argue that the media practices of Sangam Radio, tied in with the general practices of biodiversity conservation at DDS ; serve to resist the dominant systems of media and agriculture. I close the paper with some concluding comments, highlighting why there is need for practices such as those of DDS.

The Deccan Development Society (DDS)

The Deccan Development Society, as mentioned above is a grass-root level organisation that works with women's self-help groups or *Sangams* as they are locally known. It was founded in 1983, by a group of professionals from various fields. They got together to take over a rural development project initiated and later abandoned by an industrial house (DDS -DDS Team 2015.). Today they work predominantly with (albeit not restricted to) Dalit women in the Zaheerabad, Medak district of Telangana. They work across seventy-five villages across four mandals of Zaheerabad, about a 100 kilometres outside Hyderabad city.

DDS could be cast as one of many organisations that emerged in the 1980s and 1990s in response to a growing, world-wide call to resolve biodiversity and environmental degradation (for example the Slow Food Movement in Italy and subsequently spreading across the world). This is especially so after the signing of the Convention of Biological Diversity at the 1992 Rio Earth Summit. Nazarea notes in this regard that, "Since the first call to arms in the 1980s, biological and social scientists have been analysing causes and trends and fashioning solutions" (2006: 319-320). Starting out to increase food security in the region, they have over the years developed community oriented programmes through which they aim to achieve various autonomies. These include autonomy over food production, seeds, natural resources, market, and media (DDS- About Us 2015). As they state, DDS, and its sangams have:

> *…a vision of consolidating these village groups into vibrant organs of primary local governance and federate them into a strong pressure lobby for women, the poor and Dalits. A host of continuing dialogues, debates, educational and other activities with the people, facilitated by the Society, try to translate this vision into a reality* (DDS- About Us 2015).

DDS has a strong stand against genetically modified crops, chemical based agriculture, and monocropping. It has also been critical of the Green Revolution in India, arguing that it has

"caused untold deprivation to small and marginal farmers (DDS-Food Security: Four Major Steps 2015). The Green Revolution has led to the introduction of such things as genetically modified or high yielding variety crops, high input based farming and monocropping into the Indian agricultural system. More specifically they state:

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

Its main efforts are aimed towards the promotion of millet and other food systems indigenous to the area, as well as what is today popularly termed as 'organic' farming techniques. Most importantly, it works to reverse the degradation of biodiversity and the ecosystem of the region. They have three guiding principles as the basic foundation for all their programmes. These are gender justice, environmental soundness and people's knowledge (DDS - DDS Team 2015). With these principles, the various DDS programmes have gone on to address more than just the issue of food security and agricultural biodiversity. They work towards a vision of reviving indigenous knowledge and practices to be able to build a better, more equitable world. There is a strong connection with the past and the old- with their collective memory which reverberates through all their schemes and programmes. Thus, it matters to them not only what crops are grown, but also how they are grown. With a revival of traditional seeds, is a revival of traditional agricultural and cultural practices. The festivals, folk stories and folksongs and their preservation then, are as important to them as the seeds. To put it in brief, DDS's biodiversity conservation efforts are what Ethnoecologists call *in vivo* or conservation as a *way of life* (see for example, Hunn 1999 and Nazarea 2005).

The network of DDS *Sangams* works towards the implementation of their programmes in each affiliated village. Each of these *Sangams* is split into various committees and sub-committees that correspond with the larger DDS programmes. These committees work to achieve the goals of each of the programmes in their respective villages, thus decentralising the day-to-day functioning of DDS. The DDS board and its members has over the years assumed more of an advisory role, and helps with raising funds or sponsorship for its programmes. Starting with a micro-finance initiative, DDS has expanded to introduce a Community Grain Fund, a Community Gene Bank, a Farmer's Science Center *or Krishi Vigyan Kendra* (KVK), Balwadies and

a *Paccha Shaale* (Green School), Village Medicinal Commons, Mobile Biodiversity Festivals and Community Media initiatives (Participatory Video and Community Radio) (Field Notes, November 2011). A brief description of these follows.

Each village has a day care centres or *balwadies* across villages to help care for children whose parents go to work. The schools, called *Paccha Shaale* or 'green schools' aim to provide not just mainstream education but an all-round education by including in their syllabus resources from indigenous knowledge systems. The Community Gene Banks, simply called Seed Banks established in each village work as storehouses for native seeds and landraces of the region. Many villagers approach the *Sangam* seed banks to borrow seeds from them. This is coupled with a Community Grain Fund or the Alternative Public Distribution System (APDS) that works on the localised procurement and distribution of food. The APDS has proven to be a powerful alternative to the state run Public Distribution Systems, by increasing food security in the region with many villages achieving complete security. It has also worked to include millets within the APDS, reducing the dominance of and dependence on wheat and rice. This has further helped the cause, bringing back traditional millets into the diets of the people (Field Notes, September 2012).

The *Krishi Vigyana Kendra* (KVK), or the Farmers' Science Centre works to record, preserve, and encourage the use of local and traditional agricultural systems and farming practices, as opposed to what they call market driven farming practices. It is a place that connects the activists and scientists with the farmers, often to produce collaborative projects. Unlike other KVKs in India, DDS's KVK is centred on traditional practices and farmer's knowledge or research. Instead of just imparting the technology or knowledge that is state approved, the KVK works to preserve and legitimise the farmer's experience and practices as equally important as those of an agricultural scientist (DDS-Activities-Krishi Vigyan Kendra 2015).

DDS and the *Sangams* also host an annual Mobile Biodiversity Festival that sees the entire community come together to celebrate their traditional crops and farming methods. This usually coincides with the Hindu winter harvest festival of *Sankranti,* and is a month long affair. The festival consists of a caravan of bullock carts, which travels to all seventy five affiliate villages over the month. With the visit of the bullock cart in each village, the members hold food and film festivals, as well as village level meetings to discuss their concerns/grievances with regard to their farming futures. These also include discussions and debates on agricultural and biodiversity policies. The Inaugural and Closing ceremonies are colourful gatherings, consisting of folk songs,

stories and dance performances native to the region, with children's quiz contests and awards presented to villages and individuals for their contributions/achievements. Apart from all this, DDS has also started a small café called Café Ethnic in the nearby town of Zaheerabad, which serves up millet based cuisine. They also have Mobile markets and have produced a Millet Cookbook (Field Notes, January 2012).

As mentioned earlier the overall emphasis of DDS's goals is to work with the community to enhance local practices, resources, and knowledge systems, as opposed to those driven by commercial enterprises, some government schemes, or other third parties. In trying to realize these efforts DDS also started a Community Media Team (CMT) that works pre-dominantly with Community Radio and Participatory Video. This is seen as an effort to democratise media and give a voice to people that have been silenced. The members of the CMT are predominantly drawn from the women's *Sangams* and play important roles in the creation and dissemination of its media content. The most unique aspect of the Community Radio is the content of its broadcasts and how closely tied they are to the daily lives of the people of Medak. The seasons, rain, crop, actions, interactions, festivities, celebrations, fights, health, stories, and songs all shape the content of any given show. It emerges from the locales and the people that inhabit it and goes back to them.

In sum, what pervades all of DDS's programmes is a sense of nostalgia as well as an effort to overcome what Virginia Nazarea (2005: x) calls "organised forgetting" induced by commercial agriculture, especially encouraged by the Green Revolution. Over the next two sub sections, I develop two separate but connected points- one on the history of the Telangana region, and the significance of the term *Sangam*, to help lay a more detailed background to DDS and the region it works in.

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

It was under the last of the Nizams that the region saw the one of the most important uprising in Telangana history. This was from 1946-1951, and events of the period continue to influence politics here to date. The people of Telangana had seen extreme oppression at the hands of feudal landlords under the Nizams. It was first through the Andhra Mahasabha (AMS) and later the Communist Party in the 1940s that people were rallied and organised to fight off this exploitation, take back lands and redistribute them To quell the uprising the Nizam organised their own militia called the Razakars who added to the oppression through torture, killing and rape. The Indian National Congress and Indian Union (since 1947) did not intervene till 1948. It was this intervention through the army that ultimately also played a part in the annexure of the state to the India Union (Sundarayya 1973a, Sundarayya 1973b). Parallel to this set of events, was the carving out of the Andhra[3] State from the state of Madras in 1953. It was in 1956, amongst much controversy and opposition that the state of Hyderabad and Andhra were merged into one with a Gentleman's agreement that included provisions for people from Telangana regions to help especially with the improvement of employment and education (Forrester 1970:11-12).The region saw an uprising in 1969, because the people of Telangana felt like this Gentlemen's Agreement was not adhered to; but it was quelled through an intervention by the then Congress government through promises of more provisions (*Ibid*: 12).

In 2001, Kalvakuntla Chandrashekar Rao (KCR) started the Telangana Rastra Samiti (TRS) with the sole agenda of creation of a separate Telangana state (Jafri: 2001). The struggle for this separate state intensified from 2009 and ended with the bifurcation of Andhra Pradesh into Telangana and Andhra Pradesh in February 2014. KCR took over as the Chief Minister in June 2014 and the city of Hyderabad is to remain a shared capital for the next ten years (The Andhra Pradesh Reorganisation Act 2014). Given this background, it makes the location of DDS in Medak unique economically, politically and socio-culturally, especially given that Indira Gandhi, former Prime Minister of India, and KCR have won their Lok Sabha seat from the constituency of Medak.

Significance of the term *Sangam*. Continuing with the discussion in the previous sections, I turn to outline the significance of the term *Sangam*. One connotation of this term has connections with some history of the Telangana discussed above. To recall, the self-help groups

[3] The state of Andhra during this period is different from the state of Hyderabad as well as present day state of Andhra Pradesh. What is referenced as the Andhra state here was carved out by merging Telugu speaking districts with the state of Madras and had Karnool for its capital. The Hyderabad state was the princely state under the Nizams and approximates the present day state of Telangana.

of DDS as well as their radio station are named *Sangam*. The name also recurs elsewhere within the DDS community. For instance, the Participatory Video team has a film named *Sangam Shot*[4]. This term has some historic significance in the Telangana region. In the Telangana People's Struggle of 1946-1951 the Communist Party had a major role to play in rallying people to the cause. They had village level units which were referred to by the people as *Sangam*. For instance Thirumali recounts that "the cultivators of *Betavolu makta* lands, the peasants from Munagala Zamindari and the Suryapet AMS[5] workers came to the session singing songs and shouting slogans '*Join the Sangam'*, 'Witness Andhra Sabha"' (1996:169) (emphasis added). Take as another instance, Sundarayya[6], talking of the heroic acts of the *Lambadi* community during the uprising, where he writes, "under the leadership of the AMS or the *Sangham* (sic) as it was known to the people, took up sticks and slings, planted red flags in their fields and, marching up and down, protected their fields, drove away the goondas and tilled their lands" (1973a:18-19) (emphasis added).The *Sangams* became the nuclei of the movement in every village. It was the place where people came to seek justice, right wrongs and managed to abolish exploitative practices like the *Vetti* at a systemic level. The role *Sangam* leaders and entire village *Sangams* played are often the premise for many a song and stories of the period.

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

[4] In fact, the Participatory Video team learnt various camera angles by giving them names from their local linguistic context. So for instance, a high angle shot, where the camera is placed on a tripod and shoots angles lower than eye-level is called a Patel shot. This is because the angle and camera placement resembles a landlord or Patel sitting on a high bench in village meetings. Another instance is the term Sangam Shot, which is the name for a camera angle placed at eye-level and hence signifies equality.

[5] AMS stands for the Andhra Mahasabha. Initially the Community Party made inroads into the region through the AMS. Gradually one faction within the AMS, sometime during the 1940s aligned itself completely with the Communist Party later leading to a split. See Thirumali' s 'The Political Pragmatism of the Communists in Telangana, 1938-48' (1996) for an extensive account of the AMS's contact with the Communist Party and the subsequent split in the AMS leadership. The role of specific leaders, members and the roles they played in the armed struggle outlined in detail is particularly useful.

[6] Sundarayya (1973a, 1973b, 1973c, 1973d) provides a detailed, four part account of the Telangana Struggle of 1946-51 from the Communist Party's perspective. This is an interesting account as Sundarayya himself was deeply involved in the struggle. See Bibliography for full citations.

Buddhism by Dalit mass conversions in the twentieth century" (*Ibid*: 111). Keeping in mind these two strains of history behind the word *Sangam*, I find that it might be hard to pinpoint which particular legacy might be a force circulating within the DDS community. It could be either one or a combination of both. However, what I do take as a common from both is the idea of *Sangam*[7] being synonymous with a collective, cooperative or meeting. It is this meaning and this spirit that is often reflected in the many programs of DDS. Thus, I would like to set the idea of a *Sangam* as a collective as a sort of background score to the entire paper. In the next section, I will elaborate on the non-anthropocentric approach mentioned in the introduction and discuss how I adopt the approach to this study.

A Non-Representational Approach

DDS's biodiversity conservation can be classified as what Nazarea (2005: 17) refers to as "*in vivo"* or "*conservation as a way of life"* as opposed to conservation by design. Hence, it is not just plant genetic resources or seeds that need preservation. Such an approach to conservation of diversity requires the unearthing of knowledge and of practices, rituals, and skills – cultural and agricultural – that are connected to these seeds/crops. These practices, rituals, and skills are embedded in the complex realities of everyday life. They are not only symbolic gestures or utterance; they are also embodied utterances and gestures. A similar proposition was made in the introduction vis-à-vis our relationship with technology. To recount, Andy Clarke (2003) suggests that we are constantly inserted in a social biotechnological matrix. To provide an illustration of this take how Connerton (1989: 76-77) analyses the act of writing as constituted of both the muscular action of inscribing letters on a surface as well as the symbolic component of alphabets- i.e. acts of incorporation and inscription respectively. To quote Connerton:

> *For it is certainly the case that many practices of inscription contain an element of incorporation, and it may be indeed be that no type of inscription is at all conceivable without such an irreducible incorporating aspect….Each of these acts, none the less, is accompanied by a corresponding muscular action. The way in which we generally adhere to the same method of forming the same character in handwriting demonstrates that writing entails a minimal muscular skill; and if we begin to write in an unfamiliar way, as when printing our letters instead of writing them longhand, we will be alerted to the fact that every character we form entails a bodily action* (*Ibid*: 76-77).

[7] It is interesting to note that a similar term *Sangamam* in the Telugu language is also used to describe the confluence of two or more rivers.

There is, therefore, a need in this study to look at the everyday as well as the embodied practices, habits and rituals of the people and objects involved. There is a need to go beyond the symbol, the textual, or the representational. Attention also needs to be drawn to various objects and entities that we come into contact with and the relationship we build with them in our daily lives. So the seeds, radios, phones, soil, farm animals etc. each extend our capacities in infinitely different ways. It is these relationships which also lie at the heart of conservation as a way of life in this particular case. Hence, the move away from an anthropocentric understanding of our world helps highlight these relations. In short, we need a methodological approach that helps map embodied actions as well the relational aspect of interactions. In the following section, I take a critical look at some theoretical approaches that are classified as representational approaches and how they may be slightly limited in achieving the above.

Representational Approaches: A Critique. Different philosophical approaches have either emphasized the Individual over the Society or vice-versa. Some theories emphasise the System or Society as independent of the individual, subsuming the individual, and shaping her/his behaviour. And on the other hand, philosophical approaches like phenomenology and symbolic interactionism, among others, state that society is continuously constituted through and by interacting subjects; reversing the emphasis back on to the individual's actions and interpretations of things around them. Massumi (2002) in his comparison finds the later set of positions to be "foundationalist". They "…conjure away society with the fiction of an atomistic flock of individuals who forge a relation with one another on the basis of a normative recognition of shared needs and common goods" (Masumi 2002: 68). Masumi is critical of such approaches, as they appeal, "more or less explicitly to the myth of origins" (*Ibid*: 68). He also argues that theoretical positions emphasising society/system are no less foundationalist. Such positions privilege notions such as structures and semiotic systems, leading one to posit society as an *a priori*.

Hence, these theories swing from a time axis to a spatial or position axis respectively. He stresses that individuals and societies are strictly simultaneous and consubstantial:

> *It is an absurdity even to speak of them (individuals and societies) using notions of mediations, as if they were discrete entities that enter into extrinsic relation to one another, let alone to wonder which term takes precedence over the other in determining stasis and change* (*Ibid*: 71).

Nick Srnicek (2007) makes similar arguments as above, on issues related to the Philosophy of Science and Political Science. He points to the same inadequacies within Social Constructivism as well as in Critical Realism. Srnicek (2007: 9) builds a critique of social constructivist ontology as such:

> *…For the social constructivists, the object of study is never fully present; in studying the social world, the other's subjective meaning is never available to us in-itself. Instead, we always have to undertake an interpretive process in order to understand it; meaning therefore becomes a problem insofar as the 'objective' meaning of a sign cannot be considered as identical to the 'subjective' meaning that was intended. In a social constructivist's ontology, it is argued that there are ultimately no pure objects, but only signs that refer to the intention they represent. As a result of all these factors, the social constructivist argues that there must necessarily be a focus upon the ontological givens of language (and semiotics as the general science of signs) and the construction of meanings.*

Srnicek rightly points out that such ontology has risen out of a criticism of Positivism and lays stress on the "actors who constitute the social world and the interpretations and meanings they ascribe to their actions" (*Ibid*: 9). He however, argues in favour of the mind-independent world that Critical Realist ontology offers, but says it is limited by their essentialism and dynamic ontology. For him this is resolved by folding into the mix ideas of Deleuze (*Ibid*: 9). He argues that both paths are limited in terms of the ontological stance they can offer; often stressing epistemology over ontology. While his interest lies in applying this to the field of Political Science, it can be extended to this project. For both theoretical traditions, "…their primary mistake is to tie their ontology too closely to subjective experience" (*Ibid*: 9). In his view, most importantly "both commit the fallacy of projecting *anthropocentric images* onto the nature of being" (*Ibid*: 23) (emphasis added).

This is an important point, for a move away from an anthropocentric bias allows us to look at questions of social change differently, especially in relation to nature, things, and technologies. Like Srnicek, de Landa (2010: 31) warns us of essentialism in the asserting a mind-independent world:

> *When one asserts the mind-independence of the material world a crucial task is to explain the more or less stable identity of the entities that inhabit that world. If this identity is explained by the possession of an atemporal essence then all one has done is to reintroduce idealism through the back door. Thus,*

> *a coherent materialism must have as its main tool a concept of objective synthesis, that is, of a historical process that produces and maintains those stable identities..*

The call made here by these scholars is to start from the middle, the in-between. And, while we are in this in-between, they ask us to shift our focus from the system and the individual to the *event*. Immerse ourselves in the processes and flows that crystalize and fuel these systems and individuals; for these systems, structures and persons arise from and feed back into these processes. And this rising and feeding back is not done in some staid, mundane cycle but in a space of infinite possibilities forever at the brink of actualization. It is a call for a new kind of a materialist ontology; a non-representational approach.

Affect and Assemblages. The idea of a non-representational approach I choose to adapt here is probably best elaborated in the many works of Nigel Thrift (e.g. 2000, 2008); within the field of Human Geography. He states that this is a *style of thinking* rather than a new theoretical approach. As he writes:

> *Note that I use the world 'style' deliberately: this is* not *a new theoretical edifice that is being constructed, but a means of* valuing *and* working with *everyday practical* activities *as they occur. It follows that this style of working is both anti-cognitivist and, by extension anti-elitist since it is trying to counter the still-prevalent tendency to consider life from the point of view of individual agents who generate action by instead weaving a poetic of the common* practices *and* skills *which produce people, selves, and worlds* (2000: 216) (emphasis original).

Not only does Thrift press upon us the importance of common practices and skills, but also that it is such actions and relationships that *produce both* people and things. The stress on relationality here stems from the idea that when one interacts, comes in contact with, or builds a relationship with an "other", this other produces a change in our capacities and potential, as much as we produce such changes in this other. de Landa (2010) explains this with the illustration of a simple tool like a knife. The knife along with certain properties such as weight, length or sharpness, also has capacities. But what these capacities might be is difficult to ascertain till one know what or who else the knife interacts with. To quote de Landa (2010: 70-71):

> *A sharp knife… also has capacities, like its capacity to cut. Unlike sharpness, the capacity to cut need not be actual, if the knife is not presently cutting something, and may never become actual if the knife is never used. And when a capacity does become actual it is never as an enduring state but as a*

> *more or less instantaneous event. Moreover, this event is always double,* to cut-to be cut*, (emphasis original) because a capacity to affect must always be coupled to a capacity to be affected: a particular knife may be able to cut through bread, cheese, paper, or even wood, but not through a solid block of titanium. This implies that while properties are finite and may be put into a closed list, capacities to affect may not be fully enumerated because they depend on a potentially infinite number of capacities to be affected. Thus, a knife may not only have a capacity to cut but also a capacity to kill, if it happens to interact with a large enough organism with differentiated organs, that is,* with an entity having the capacity to be killed (emphasis added).

This is in effect, the basic Spinozan notion (and also a Deleuzian notion) of the power or ability "*to affect and be affected*" (As cited in Massumi and McKim 2009:1). To clarify, affect is "an outcome of an encounter between two or more bodies (which can be human or non-human, organic or inorganic), which either increases or decreases a body's capacity for action" (Ash 2010:657). It serves to say that all entities in a given relationship affect and are affected simultaneously. Affect also has another dimension, one that Simpson (2009: 2558) calls "*the not-already-qualified registers of experience* present within everyday practices" (emphasis added) or what is described as a "prepersonal intensity corresponding to the passage from one experiential state of the body to another and implying an augmentation or diminution in that body's capacity to act" (Massumi quoted in Dewsbury 2012: 78). Thus, it refers to aspects of us and our encounter with others (things and people) that is not registered (and cannot always be registered) in our conscious minds. It is these dimensions of affect that help pin down to some extent the embodied aspect of practices, rituals, skills, and habits or bodily automatisms.

There is a need to bridge one more gap in this argument- that is the one of the individual and system. Further, how can one use the above notion- the *ability to affect and be affected* to understand entities of a larger scale (such as communities or associations) and interaction between them? How do the individual and system (or parts and wholes) feature within a non-representational approach? For this I turn to Manuel de Landa (2010) and his rendering of the Deleuzian concept of *assemblages*. While many scholars have written about this, I use the works of Manuel de Landa because of how he breaks down Deleuze's rich philosophy into lucid, easily digestible pieces and adds to this his own innovative insights. To begin with, de Landa conceives of *wholes* as having properties that are not present in their parts. Rather, they *emerge* when *parts* interact with each other. Such a model de Landa argues, removes that possibility of micro-reductionism, but is still open to macro-reductionism. To block this, the parts need to share relations of exteriority

between them. Here the parts then subsist/exist independently of their wholes and 'being part of a whole' is not the only defining characteristic of the part (de Landa 2010: 3). This way we "conceive of emergent wholes in which the parts retain a relative autonomy, so that they can be detached from one whole and plugged into another one entering into new interactions" (*Ibid*: 3-4) .

In other words, we can compare the composition of entities to playing with Lego blocks. Each block has a different shape, size, colour, and possible ways of fitting into the other blocks. And each of these blocks can be plugged and unplugged into each other in infinite combinations to form countless number of structures, from robots and castles to pyramids and planes. What then makes an individual different from say an association is the scale at which they are organised. This in particular also helps us deal with a criticism levelled against realist and/or materialist ontology- i.e. "essences acting as formal causes" (de Landa 2010: 84) for the existence of objects. An assemblage then:

> *…is a multiplicity which is made up of heterogeneous terms and which establishes liaisons, relations between them, across ages, sexes and reigns-different natures. Thus the assemblage's only unity is that of a co-functioning: it is symbiosis, a 'sympathy'. It is never filiations which are important, but alliances, alloys: these are not successions, lines of descent, but contagions, epidemics, the wind* (Deleuze and Parnet as quoted in de Landa, 2010:10).

How can we in turn, use the above to reconfigure our understanding of the relationship between media technology and memory? We find some clues when we return to Andy Clarke's (2003) idea of a cyborg. He suggests that we are constantly in an encounter with many things in our lives both human and non-human. These in turn, lead to either amplification -as James Ash (2012a) calls it, or dampening of capacities, and opens up the potential for new ones. As he states elsewhere, "Technologies[8] are worked into the practices of bodies and directly reorganize the perceptual capacities of these bodies" (2012b: 188) (See also Larkin 2007). If we were to accept this assertion and apply it to this particular study, then the question that arises is; what transpires in this community's encounter with a media set up like a community radio station?. What capacities are amplified and dampened, and what new potentials are unlocked? Further, how

[8] Ash (2012a: 10) elaborates on the concept of Technology, following Stiegler in his article titled 'Attention, Videogames, and the Retentional Economies of Affective Amplification' (For full references see Bibliography). He states that technology "can be understood as inorganic organized being, which is a form of being that is irreducible to either biological bodies or inert passive matter".

does this shift dynamics of power within and without this entity especially in relation to the biodiversity movement at DDS? An attempt at such an analysis forms the rest of this paper.

There has been an effort with this study, to apply this approach to understanding the connection between community media, memory, and the biodiversity movement. Specifically tools of ethnography- such as observation (participatory and non-participatory), interviews with key informants and more informal conservations became ways to map and gain insight into these relationships, interactions and, daily practices, skills and rituals. A more detailed description of how this data was collected is described below.

A Note on Data. This paper and data used for it are based on ongoing Ph.D. work. Data was collected between November 2011 and November 2012. It was done over 3-6 day visits across each month. Ethnographic methods were used for data collection, hence, conversations[9], with the various members of DDS whether as formal interviews[10] or more informal ones shared over an evening tea, all provided rich insight. These have occurred with individuals as well as in groups. Some of these individuals I have met only once and others I had the luxury of meeting every day through the course of their work schedule. These conversations are supplemented by field notes and observations recorded during my stay. The Sangam Radio team at DDS have been generous in sharing some of their recorded content and archived material with me. These are an invaluable resource to this project. These include songs, shows, and stories that have been part of the daily broadcasts. The team also kindly accommodated me into their everyday work schedules during my visits and I have often spent full days at the radio station, becoming a part of the coming and going within the station. It is in time that I gained some understanding about how the team operates radio equipment, records shows, plans content, and maintain a schedule of shows and recordings. I was privy on some occasion to the creative and administrative/managerial aspects of running Sangam Radio. The DDS office shared with me,

[9] Familiarity with the local language was something that worked to my advantage. I am somewhat fluent with a dialect of Telugu language spoken in the Seem Andhra region, which helped establish rapports straight away. However, it took me sometime to understand the distinct Telangana dialect of Telugu spoken around the Zaheerabad region. Thus, some help with meanings of local words and phrases from the DDS members went a long way.

[10] Through the period of data collection there were some select conversations that could be classified as formal, recorded interviews. However, I found people opened up better once the Dictaphone was switched off. Hence, many of these formal interviews were supplemented with interview notes and field observations. As mentioned, many of the "informal" interviews occurred more as casual conversations through the course of visits. I found that people grew more comfortable going about their usual routine and interactions around me towards my later visits. This could be attributed to the increased level of familiarity with me over time.

copies of some documentary films produced by their participatory video team. An analysis of these is a part of the data. Over and above this, the DDS websites and the literature published by them have also been included in this study. This literature includes annual reports on events as well as research papers published by the DDS members.

The aim at each point of my field visits was to immerse myself into the environment of DDS as much as circumstances would permit. I have tried paying attention to the relationships people share and build with non-human and human entities- be it their *Sangams*, seeds, or their radios and phones. The focus, in keeping with the non-representational approach discussed above; has been to understand and record the everyday- practices, habits, skills, and rituals, for it is through these, as mentioned earlier, that we can comprehend how our capacities are transformed through multitudes of interactions, including technology[11].I have let the different themes and content emerging from this data become the basis on which to consolidate and analyse it. These have in turn been woven back in with the various ideas mentioned at the beginning of this paper.

To summarise this section of arguments I go back to stressing on the need to study the everyday and common practices. Mizuko Ito's comments on the topic in her study of media mix games and the subculture of *Yu-Gi-Oh* in Japan are apt here. This everyday life, she states:

> *…needs to be theorized as a site of generative cultural creativity and productivity. This is a structure of participation (emphasis original) in cultural life that, since the modern era of mechanical cultural reproduction…has been overshadowed but never eliminated by centralized, professionalized, and capitalized form of media production* (2007:90).

The above also resonates with arguments some Ethnoecologists make in relation to *in vivo* biodiversity conservation and preservation of Traditional Environmental Knowledge (TEK) (e.g. Nazarea 2005, Nazarea 2006, and Hunn 1999). For instance, Nazarea argues that, "local knowledge is experiential and embodied in *everyday practice* (emphasis added). It is not logically formulated apart from what makes sense from living day to day in one's environment; nor is it inscribed as a set of processes or rules"(2006:323). She also notes that indigenous knowledge that

[11] James Ash makes a compelling point about studying micro-analysis, especially with regard habits and skills. In relation to his study of video game players, he states, "The importance of this micro-analysis is emphasized by the fact that there are now whole companies that can be hired to quantify the biological basis of user experience of videogames through testing, including measuring processed such as tracking eye movement of players in real time to analyse how they perceive and interpret visual information on screen" (2012: 5) (See Bibliography for full citation).

is contained in these everyday practice provide a powerful counter in marginal fields and, "for most part this counter is lodged not in rhetoric and text but in the senses and the flesh- in the dance pungency and grittiness of everyday life" (*Ibid*: 320).

Keeping in mind how much embodied practices are integral to media practices, biodiversity conservation, and TEK, the non-representational approach outlined above helps map such practices. Over the next few sections I look at the Community Radio initiative of DDS and its role within the biodiversity movement in Zaheerabad. Sangam Radio is one of two Community Media initiatives at DDS, the other being a Participatory Video (PV) unit. In the next section, I start by looking at some developments within the community radio movement in India, and DDS's role in the same. This is followed by a description of the daily functioning and media practices of the Sangam Radio station. I then connect some of the observations made here to the larger theoretical arguments of the paper.

Community Radio at DDS

Sangam Radio, along with the Participatory team was started in 1998, but it would take a long, arduous struggle to officially make their first broadcast. This struggle DDS faced is closely tied to the larger movement for a third tier of radio (or community radio) in India. Community radio, argue Pavarala and Malik (2007: 18), gives people from marginalised communities the chance to expresses 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 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 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 (DDS- An entitlement refused 2015). After receiving funding for the radio station from UNESCO and setting up the facilities for it, DDS then

applied to the government of the time, for a broadcasting licence. P.V. Satheesh 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* (DDS- An entitlement refused 2015).

Pavarala and Malik, in their important work *Other Voices* (2007), document the 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 different transitions of Sangam Radio over the years. Sangam Radio of DDS was a one of the case-studies included in *Other Voices* along with others 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 from the start to decentralise the operation and bring in a variety in programs that truly engage with its audience. "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" (2007: 86). Pavarala and Malik cite finding from the Chanda committee report which found that "… AIR programmes were dull and drab and low on variety. They did not engage with contentious political matters or even those of civic consequence" (*Ibid*: 91). This situation has been hampered further by the uneven and improper setting up of infrastructure across the country. Further the report:

> *…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* (*Ibid*: 90).

Providing this historical account of Radio and Broadcasting policy in India, Pavarala and Malik 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). Various marginalised sections across 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 stations to broadcast news or programs related to current affairs[12]. 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 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 who already have access to media. 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.*

[12] At the time of writing this paper, 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 The Times of India (2014) and The Hindu (2014) for 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.

Given this background to Community Radio in India, a number 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 this 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, it had already been about three years since the station had received its licence and broadcasting underway, reaching its seventy five villages. 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, seeking instead to build on their study by focusing on the broadcasting aspects.

Narrowcasting to Broadcasting at Sangam Radio. Sangam Radio is located in a village that is roughly a 30-45 minute auto- rickshaw ride away from the DDS office. A round red brick building, it effortlessly merges into its surroundings. Made of materials local to the area, the building consists of a reception area, a small meeting room, and a recording studio attached to the control room. There are not many lights around the building so it goes quite dark in the evening, around the time of the broadcasts. There is a neatly maintained garden surrounding 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. The content that is digitally recorded these days is stored on a backup 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 programs. It allows for small groups of people to record at one go. After having moved to broadcasting, and adding a computerised set up; Sangam Radio employs a software called Wavelab for recording and editing content and a software program called Green for the actual broadcasting (Field Notes, November 2011). It has two FM transmitters and a 100-metre tall transmission tower, which has a capacity to broadcast to a radius of 30 km, roughly the coverage area of DDS. With this installation and the nominal amounts paid to community

members who are compensated for the time they spend in the studio, Pavarala and Malik 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 (2007: 141).

Fig 5.2: The Sangam Radio station. (Photo taken by author, November 2011)

Between 1998 to 2009, Sangam Radio members, along with a team of *Sangam* supervisors and other *Sangam* programme coordinators would make decisions on what kind of content was to be produced, depending on the season and other DDS initiatives. The station in this time period would record and edit show content on audio tapes[13]. 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* or self-help group 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 programme in each meeting, the team would take feedback, ideas, and suggestions from its listeners to improve their programs (Interview with Geetha, 3rd November 2011). Sangam Radio during its days of Narrowcasting would have fallen under what Ravi Sundaram calls a "non-legal" domain (2007:

[13] Pavarala and Malik, provide a detailed account of this process in *Other Voices* (2007) Particularly in Chapter 5 of this book.

50). 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 petition opposing the increased prices for community radio licenses, making it unaffordable for communities like DDS. 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 later in a later section, it is these very boundaries that entities like Sangam Radio push.

Pavarala and Malik, at the time of their study had noted that Sangam radio has canned more than 400 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 (*Ibid*: 180). 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 and other programmes at DDS, the content produced by Sangam Radio is 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 programmes are produced as well as some details of the programmes itself.

From the Community and Back to the Community. At the time of my visits, Sangam Radio's broadcasts were produced by three women.[14] Geetha and Sunitha, the two station managers and radio jockeys and Asha a young women who would help with setting up recordings, edits and the general maintenance of the studio. Sangam Radio broadcasts seven days a week, and from 7:00-9:00 pm each day. The slot between 7:00-8:30 pm consists of pre-recorded programs. Between

[14] The names of all three women have been changed to maintain anonymity.

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 from other programmes. *Table 1* provides an overview of the programs broadcasted through the week.

Note from *Table 1*, how closely linked the programmes and their contents are to the lives of their producers and listeners. 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. As one of the team members elaborates:

> *Now it is a season for sowing. We look at what are the crops 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 15 odd days, our diet consists of food cooked with these crops of the season… We know that some villages yield a high Rabi season harvest, and some others yield a higher* Poonasa[15] *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, senegalu *etc. On the other hand if you go to say Village P, R or Z, their* Rabi *crop is better. So we focus our programs on how 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 10-15 days our programs concentrate on broadcasting this content. If we don't do so while it is the season, then it won't be useful for anybody later. 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 programs at that particular time and broadcast it* (Interview with Geetha, 3rd November 2011).

[15] *Poonasa* and *Rabi* are the two major agricultural harvest seasons in Zaheerabad. Rabi is the winter crop harvest and *Poonasa* is approximately the spring to summer crop harvest.

Table 1

Programmes produced and broadcasted by Sangam Radio

Sl. No.	*Name of Programme*	*Description of Programme*	*Days of Broadcast in a week.*
1	Mana Oori Pantalu (The crops of our villages)	Discussions and information on the crops of each season, with tips and suggestions on agricultural practices and methods.	Monday-Sunday
2	Mana Bhasha (Our Language)	Stories of various kinds, native to the region. Three of these kinds are generally used: *Hun Ante Katha, Bicchapolla Katha, and Burrakatha.*	Monday-Sunday
3	Arogyam (Health/Well-Being)	Programme focusing on health, nutrition, and general well-being.	Monday, Wednesday, Friday.
4	Aadolla Sanghalu (Women's *Sangams*)	Here, members from different village *Sangams* share the activities conducted by their *Sangams*, including problems faced, challenges overcome and their achievements.	Monday
5	Patalu (Songs)	These are folksongs indigenous to the region of Zahirabad. These songs are used as fillers between each programme. Also, the last 20-30 minutes of each day's broadcast, between 8:30-9:00 pm is slotted for playing requests from audiences which includes these songs.	Monday-Sunday
6	Mee Letters (Letters from You)	A reading of letters from listeners, usually consisting of feedback and requests to play/re-play songs, parts of shows, stories etc.	Monday-Sunday

7	Oori Varthalu (Local News)	A round up of the local news from all the villages affiliated to DDS.	Monday-Sunday
8	Yarralla Muchatlu (Light hearted talk or gossip between co-sisters)	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 advise each other (and the audience) on various topics of interest. Be it health, agricultural practices, and other cultural practices.	Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday, Sunday.
9	Chaduvu (Studies/Education)	Educational stories and songs focused on children's interest	Tuesday
10	Savidi Katta (Village Gathering)	The Legal Committee of different *Sangams* present cases they have handled and how they have been resolved. The format for this discussion is set to emulate a village gathering to announce or debate important issue.	Tuesday, Thursday, Saturday.
11	Mana Ruchulu (Our cuisine/ Our Tastes)	A show focusing on recipes with crops of the season, particularly millets and vegetables indigenous to the region. These are interspersed with home-remedies and nutritional information.	Thursday, Saturday, Sunday.
12	Balanandanamu (For our children's delight)	An entertainment programme of humorous, light stories and songs from the region for children.	Sunday
13	Pariyavaranam (The Environment)	A show consisting of discussion, debates and information focused on the environmental and biodiversity conservation and issues.	Sunday
14	Voche Varam Prasaralu (Programs for the coming week)	An announcement of the shows and topics that will be discussed in the coming week.	Saturday.

Another example can be cited to highlight this process of creating content. 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.

One of the major ways in which content is created is through the participation of the *Sangam* members particularly as well as 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 program...once a month, people from each affiliated village record an hour's worth of content for different programs 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, 3rd November 2011).

Apart from studio recordings, there are members of the *Sangams*, 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 on issues of interest, songs, stories news and other interviews and items. For instance, during one of my visits Saritha[16], a *Sangam* supervisor, demonstrated how a field recording is done with the help of another member. She recorded an interviewed with the member on the problems she was facing with her crops that season. This member also 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

[16] Name of person changed to maintain anonymity.

discussed the content for a special show, i.e. Peerla Panduga[17] 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 few committees in DDS teams or *Sangams* to do so. The meeting mostly revolved around what songs, shows stories should be broadcasted on the day of the festival.

Inspiration also comes from routines in daily life. One of the radio jockeys once chanced upon a discussion between some men in her village on her everyday commute. The men were talking about how a scheme of 'chits', [18] (or 'chitty' in the Telugu language) as well as getting jobs, let women get everything today. They are financially secure and even independent. This inspired her to include it in one of the radio shows as a group debate or 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. Some members of at Sangam Radio

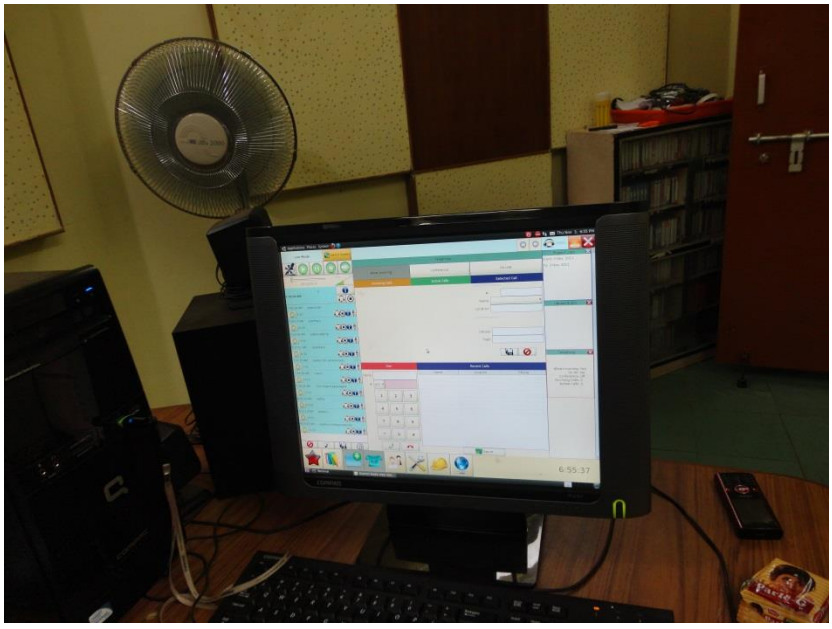
[17] Peerla Panduga is a unique way of observing Muharram in the Telangana region of India. It is observed across Sufi shrines in the area, involving the participation of Muslims and Hindus. The highlight of the festival is procession of a sacred relic called the *Alam*. It has been hailed as a festival, 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 *Alambardaar*, as they are parochially known. The Hindus of the region believe that worshipping 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).

[18] Chits here refer to a kitty of money pooled in by a group of people (in this case it is women). This kitty is then 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 is not always formally organised. See Chapter 3 of this dissertation for a brief discussion on microfinance schemes.

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[19] (Field notes, September 2012). Along with balancing intra-community relationships and power dynamics such as the aforementioned ones, the Radio team has had to undergo training so as to operate various recording and editing equipment. This included acquiring some computer literacy when they moved from narrowcasting to broadcasting.

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 the Sangam Radio team months of practice to edit with the ease that they do. In my conversations with the three of the members they reminisce about the early days of training:[20]

> *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, 3rd November 2011).



[19] 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.

[20] 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

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, duration of the recording. It is also easier to go from one part of the recording to another. On a tape, you don't know which corner of the tape has the content you need. A lot time has gone by before you find it* (Interview with Sunitha, 25th September 2012).

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

> *When using a computer, if you want two hours' worth of programs, 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 programme. I was always afraid I would make mistakes while announcing. We used to record these announcements and paste it in line with the programs. 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, 25th September, 2012).

Sunitha says that she took to making announcements between programs live, after her husband gave her the idea that day. She would make the announcements live into the microphone and then play the program 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 at the station. 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 the program again. The team expressed that through the course of learning computer related skills, felt joy, fear, and excitement. One of the fears they expressed was making mistakes with keyboard short cuts and pressing buttons. Especially when it came to *cut, copy, paste* and *save command.*

> *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 leave it at that and not do anything extra. That way it was safe. Nothing would happen* (Interview with Sunitha, 25th September, 2012).

The issue that comes to fore from the experiences related in our conversations though, is not just one of challenges in mastering certain skills. It is an issue of language and access. 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 than say for 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 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, 21st 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.* Pata *(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 make out. It is okay* (Interview with Sunitha, 25th 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 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 participatory content creation project in Sri Lanka seems apt in 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.*

While computer and recording equipment posed one sort of challenge, adapting their numerous songs and stories to a recorded, oral format was another challenge. This is elaborated in the following section.

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 Uprising of 1946-1951. *Sangam* supervisor, Saritha,[21] spoke to me about some of these songs, providing a rough classification of them. There is the *Chaitrika patalu*[22], usually songs on the relationships between men and women. *Bhootalli Mata Patalu* are songs dedicated to Mother Earth. *Bhootalli Patalu* 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. Further, there are 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 Patalu*. There is also the *Uyalla patalu*, sung by women and girls, usually while playing on swings or cradles, which speak of the deeds of the gods and goddesses. They end with the word *Uyalla* meaning cradle at the end of each line. For example, one *Uyalla Paata* goes : '*Nadilla Baludu Uyallo, nagale gatinde uyallo, okka suttu thirigenu uyallo, rendu suttle thirigenu uyallo'* (Sample from Sangam Radio, 2012). Another popular type of song is the *Peerala Pata* 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, like the songs are indigenous to the Telengana region. The *Bicchapolla* katha (Stories

[21] Name changed to maintain anonymity.

[22] It is to be noted here that the term *patalu* is the plural form of the term *paata* in the Telugu language, with both terms meaning "song".

of the mendicants) are usually stories that are sung- a format similar to ballads. These storytellers hail from a particular caste called *Bicchapollas* who are 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. This though proceeds as a conversation between three singers as demonstrated in 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).

Fig 5.4 : Folk artists performing a Burrakatha at the Mobile Biodiversity Festival 2012

(Photo by Author, January 2012)

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 bought 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).

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 to describe a situation and express a range of emotions from happiness, anger to sadness, and determination amongst others. It can encompass encouragement, motivation, a call to arms and satire. For instance, *Uyalla Patalu* are often 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 poddamu* (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 patalu*) or reconfigure old ones (e.g. *Uyalla Patalu on the importance of the girl child*). Similarly, recall the lady who sang a eulogy about a late chief minister of the state. 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.

Community Radio as Communal Archives

In one of the interviews conducted, a Participatory Video 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. This is similar to how Sangam Radio bases their programmes on agricultural seasons, local news, and events. Similarly, as illustrated in Figure 5.5 and Figure 5.6, the Sangam Radio programmes recorded on tapes, and computer hard drives 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. *Sangam* supervisor Saritha discusses this archival role 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 *Sangam* Supervisor, September, 2012).

Fig 5.5: A collection of Video and Radio tapes at the Community Media Trust centre

Fig 5.6: A collection of Radio programme tapes at Sangam Radio

Brian Larkin makes an observation in relation to Pirate media and "pirate archives" in Nigeria that seem relevant here. He argues that new infrastructural forms create and recreates conditions for everyday urban life. Piracy in turn also "creates new kinds of archives inconceivable outside of this mode of media reproduction" (2007:78). While, the media at work here is very different from pirate media and archives, what is relevant from Larkin 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" (*Ibid*: 78). Not only are these cultural artefacts recorded and archived, but are constantly played and replayed to the community through the radio programmes and audience feedback. 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. Thus, Sangam Radio works to "amplify"- as James Ash puts it (2012a: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 is could be extended to this case.

Extending the above ideas from Ash and Larkin, nostalgia for the *old* or *traditional* is what is often circulated within the various programmes DDS, especially Sangam Radio. As Ash puts it above, this system constantly create spaces and "transport the potential for the reactivation" of the collective memories of the region. Not only this, they reconfigure us 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 Pata* 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* (From a 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* or *Jowar* (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 Patalu* 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 notes in his paper (*Ibid*: 5), that Uyalla Patalu 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.

The Community Radio's recordings as a communal archive have now also become a much coveted resource. 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. program 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, 25th September 2012). On the other hand, in the interest of spreading awareness for their cause, their Participatory Video team, in the past has collaborated with state sponsored and private commercial television channel to telecast a few documentaries made by them (Field Notes, November 2011). Sangam Radio, at the time of my visits had agreed to play Public Service Announcements on consumer rights introduced by the government. 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 with commercial media that Sangam radio shares as well as with the

state; given the historical context of the development of community radio in India, could be typified as a 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" 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.

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" (Karaganis 2007: 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 another point that is important to this discussion. That is, 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 radio which have been; as in the case of DDS's Sangam Radio, reconfigured 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 alludes to. This tension is probably most obviously in the incident discussed earlier of the private television channel pressuring 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 in relation to Sangam Radio by drawing parallels to Guattari's notion of a *Free Rad*io and *Post Media*.

Guattari's Free Radio and Collective Assemblages of Enunciation. Livesey, in his reading of Deleuze and Guattari's work, talks of an assemblage[23] as "the processes of arranging, organising, or fitting together" (2010: 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 the second, *collective assemblages of enunciations* that consist of "acts and statements, of incorporeal transformations of bodies" (*Ibid*: 18). Guattari 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*. Why such post-media are important, is a point I elaborate in the concluding comments of this paper.

To continue, 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 broadcasted. There started in the face of this chocking stronghold, a number of unauthorised or pirate radio stations to challenge this monopoly. Radio Alice was one of these, short-lived, but prominent and catalytic, pirate or *free* (as they referred to themselves) radio stations that the government saw 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 an event touted to have

[23] To reiterate, Livesey 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" (2005:18).

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. What Michael Goddard says 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* (2013: 48).

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, the lines between the producer and consumer of their programmes is blurred. The members who come in to make programmes are the ones consuming it as well. Goddard also says of Free Radio that:

> *…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* (Guattari, Felix, as quoted in Goddard 2013: 48).

The travelling of villagers up to Machanoor to record shows, Jockeys and *Sangam* supervisors going into various villages to record/produce 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". While Goddard's strict reading of Guattari's Free Radio doesn't lend itself to community radio stations such as the one discussed here, which work to represent their particular interests, I am more inclined to agree with Genosko's 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" (2013: 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 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" (2013: 50). Taking this argument in tandem with Ash's 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. I move into the next section to provide some concluding comments.

Conclusion

In January 2015, the social networking site Facebook, introduced a new feature to ring in the New Year. Shah (2015:1) describes it as the use of a predictive algorithm to remind us of what the year past looked like. He also records that when this feature was first brought in, one could choose as to whether or not one wanted to avail it. But a little later, he writes, "Facebook transformed from a helpful friend to a nagging aunt and decided to put this summary on the top of our pages, urging us to look at the recap of the year whether we wanted to or not" (*Ibid*: 2). Shah's observation go on to confirm the complicated relations between media technologies and memory. In a time when memory is often conflated with storage (following Chun 2008), and as Shah points out, big data and predictive algorithms curate and decide what is important (2015:1), it can be argued that this battle is a two-pronged one. For on one hand we try hard to forget some things in the face of sapient technologies constantly recording and regurgitating our every move. On another, there are projects such as Sangam Radio and DDS's Participatory Video, that do the very opposite. They constantly work to help communities recollect and hold on to their affirmative ways of life against neoliberal forces that threaten to obliterate them.

This paper was an attempt at understanding this complex relationship between media technologies, memory, and biodiversity. Above all it joins in the argument made by some scholars who impress upon us the need to understand both media and biodiversity conservation (especially by indigenous communities) from a non-linear and non-anthropocentric approach. One reason for this is because both media today, especially digital/new media and convergent forms of media (like the smart television or internet radio); as well as the area of biodiversity conservation are both rooted in the non-linear and the embodied. Therefore, they require, "less monolithic frameworks and formulaic approaches" (Nazarea 2005: 20). It can be akin to Rossiter's application of *dirt research* to the study of cybernetics which, "diagrams the relations of force and transformation operative within ecologies of noise populated by unruly subjects,

persistent objects and algorithmic cultures" (2012: 48). In this particular study, they have allowed me to draw patterns between embodied, everyday practices, skills, habits, and rituals and the other entities we interact with. In turn, it helps understand how such interactions transform capacities (amplify or diminish) and how these reconfigure relationships of power in our daily lives.

To summarise the major observations and arguments, I point out that in this particular case, Sangam Radio station serves important archival and mnemonic functions. It helps the community engage with its collective memory and cultural artefacts on a daily basis. Such an engagement with memory, mostly in the form of nostalgia serves to counter the dominant practices and systems. This collective memory then is also a counter memory that provides us with an alternative narrative of events within a movement for agro biodiversity conservation. As argued earlier in the paper, collective memory and indigenous knowledge are intrinsic to and inseparable from biodiversity conservation that is a way of life. In this particular case, a non-representational approach helps highlight and value that which frays at the neat, uniform edges. It draws our attention to the periphery- to all that is grey and even disruptive. In this study it has helped understand how DDS and its network of *Sangams* challenge dominant systems of knowledge, agricultural biodiversity and media systems. It goes on to confirm the ideas of Ethnoecologists that it is in the margins that we find alternatives. These, as Hunn argues, serve as "…independent alternatives to the globalization of a market mentality that at present comes close to overwhelming all competitions for the hearts and minds of humanity" (1999: 26). As mentioned earlier, they tend towards a Deleuzian notion of a post-media.

These arguments would then require us to change our understanding of social movements. As demonstrated in this study, this social movement is embedded in the silent practices of the everyday. These silent forms of resistance and counter memory, Nazarea argues can provide a release from "…the hegemony of blahs that most of us tolerate most of the time" (2005:43). These in her view are as capable of inspiring social movements as any other force. She writes that, "…while social movements can be precipitated by a build-up of a sense of injustice and moral outrage, I believe that they are just as frequently and strongly stimulated by a release from reified boundaries and naturalised latitudes of choice" (*Ibid*: 43).To make a final point here, I would like to make an argument as to why we need such post-media, biodiversity conservation efforts *in vivo* and many more such social movements. Why do we need this opposition to the dominant systems; a resistance to what encompasses globalisation and/or a neoliberal offensive?

Wendy Brown argues for the urgency in seeing neoliberalism as not just an economic doctrine but as a "governing rationality" (2015). To elaborate, while neoliberalism as an economic policy

> *…generates and legitimates extreme inequalities of wealth and life conditions; that it leads to increasingly precarious and disposable populations; that it produces an unprecedented intimacy between capital (especially finance capital) and states, and thus permits domination of political life by capital; that it generates crass and even unethical commercialization of things rightly protected from markets, for example, babies, human organs, or endangered species or wilderness; that it privatizes public goods and thus eliminates shared and egalitarian access to them…* (Brown and Shenk 2015:1)

However it is not just these economic repercussion that result from neoliberalism. Brown argues that it has deeper implications for democracy, where the meaning of democratic value changes from a political to an economic register (*Ibid*). This would in turn completely vanquish the political man or *homo politicus* because this governing rationality would have us preoccupied with "…enhancing present and future value through self-investments…" (*Ibid*). Democracy on the other hand she states requires us to have at least a modest orientation towards self-rule and an understanding that our freedom rests in such self-rule. When this political dimension in us is extinguished she argues that it "…takes with it the necessary energies, practices and culture of democracy, as well as its intelligibility" (*Ibid*). Are not these very processes, rather consequences of neoliberalism at play this very moment? The degradation of lands and ways of life in the Zaheerabad region are an illustration of this. But as Wiedemann and Zehle (2012:5) ask, what happens when, like the DDS community, "subjects and objects join in a refusal of roles in the great game of reification"? Most of all how to we refuse to play this game? The answer lies for me, in life affirming practices like that of the DDS community. For while these are not perfect and need to reach the ideals they have set for themselves they provide for us spaces to nurture diversity and creativity.

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