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## RESEARCH ARTICLE

# SOCIAL EMPOWERMENT DONE BY RAJARATA REGIONAL RADIO STATION IN SRI LANKA AND THE PERCEPTION OF ITS LISTENERS

**\*Boyagoda, E.W.M.S.**

Senior Lecturer, Department of Languages and Communication Studies, Trincomalee Campus

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**\*Corresponding author:**  
**Boyagoda, E.W.M.S.**

### ABSTRACT

The study sets out to find the contribution rendered by the Rajarata Regional Radio Station and the perception of its listeners in Anuradhapura District, Sri Lanka. In order to carry out the objectives, survey method, interviews and observations were conducted. The study concluded that Rajarata radio which was in forefront in the beginning has been collapsed and unpopular at present. Most of the programmes which broadcasted by the station were given entertainment value and education value as well and it had maintained its identity and offered a unique service to the region at the beginning. In order to bring it to right track to contribute the region again, there is a dire need to improve the quality of the programmes and technological facilities, and to avoid political influences and to build up and improve the close relationship with the community producing locally-made programmes on various regional issues such as agricultural, educational, social, religious, health and all aspects of lives. The listeners of Rajarata Radio strongly believe that the channel should be continued with the improvements in future in order to serve and empower the community in the region and proposed some of the suggestions too.

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## INTRODUCTION

Radio is the audio medium which is most popular and ideal for the illiterate societies being a voice for marginalized people in the rural areas of the Third World. Dagron (2001) states that radio is the most impressive communication tool for development, especially in the rural context. In the history, radio had become the most appealing tool for the social development, change and empowering the people in different ways. It creates a platform that provides local communities to engage in developmental issues and initiates the positive actions. As Karpf states, 'Radio is a medium that can be taken neat: as a source of education, information and entertainment rather than as a creator of a distinct ideology' (1980). Radio is considered as a medium of development communication since its widespread accessibility and at relatively less cost. Dagron (2001) adds that it is not only an important mechanism for the diffusion of development information in local languages and over widespread and remote geographical areas; it is also a great tool for reinforcing and strengthening cultural expressions and identities.

Regional radio and Community radio are significant for empowering the society giving the voice for voiceless to actively participate in the society. As a result, people would be empowered economically, socially, politically and in different ways. Adams (2008) points out that 'Empowerment is the capacity of individuals, groups and/or communities to take control of their circumstances, exercise power and achieve their own goals, and the process by which, individually and collectively, they are able to help themselves and others to maximize the quality of their lives.' Radio provides an appropriate amount of programmes, including local material and locally-made programmes on various issues agricultural, educational, health, social etc, and provides instructions as to how these requirements should be met. Furthermore, radio creates "a unique intimacy with its listeners who can interact with it through their imagination" (Fleming, 2002). The radio still survives in the world and compete magnificently with proliferation of mass media and new media and with challenges. At present in Sri Lanka also, more than 60 radio channels both private and state owned are available for the listeners. Among them, Rajarata Regional Radio Station which is an Anuradhapura District is significant as contributed for the community for 41 years as the first state owned regional radio

channel in Sri Lanka. Therefore, this research is sought to find the role and social empowerment done by Rajarata Radio Station and the perceptions of the listeners in Anuradhapura District on it. Sri Lanka Broadcasting Cooperation (in short, SLBC) was the first ever radio station in Asia. SLBC started in 16<sup>th</sup> of December 1924 officially naming 'Colombo Radio' and became popular more and more while fulfilling British colonial needs. In 1949, it was called 'Radio Ceylon'. Subsequently in 1967, the Department of Broadcasting was transformed into its present statutory form of a state corporation by the Ceylon broadcasting corporation Act. No 37 of 1966 of the parliament of Ceylon. Since 1972, it was called 'Sri Lanka Broadcasting Corporation'.

It was the first radio station in Sri Lanka which broadcasted using three languages; Sinhalese, Tamil and English in order to make available the service for every people in the country being committed public service broadcasting service. To extend the service further to the community and to keep the identity of the country, Rajarata Regional Radio Station was started on 12<sup>th</sup> of April, 1979 in Anuradhapura District in Sri Lanka as a 'Regional Radio' and was in the forefront as a medium of development. Further, the regional artists were given the opportunities. Its' vision was "Fulfilling the pioneering Public Service Broadcasting obligations in the Sri Lankan media field" while mission was to "carry out radio broadcasting in such a manner as to improve the quality of life of the listeners by way of developing their skills, knowledge and attitudes relating to various fields such as economic, social, cultural, ethical, educational and entertainment" (SLBC Website).

Considering the effectiveness of Rajarata Regional Radio Station, other regional services such as Ruhunu and Kandy radio station started. Rajarata Radio Station covers mainly several districts such as Anuradhapuraya, Pollonnaruwa, Kurunagala, Matale and Trinomalee in Sri Lanka and some areas of Kagolle, Vauniya, Mullathiu, Kandy and Gampaha and provides the service coverage from '*Karagathenna*'. First director was Mr. Siril Rajapaksha. Pramakrithi De Alwis, Swarna Sri Bandara, Wijayananda Jayaweera, Somasiri Chandrasena, Sena Gunasekara, M.G, Nanayakkara, Kulasekara Fonseka were some of significant journalists of the station. In the past decades, this regional radio station acquainted with its local communities and was in the forefront.

Most of the programmes broadcasted at the beginning of this radio focused agriculture based on folkculture and values and its listeners. Still people remember well some of the productive programmes such as *Rajarata Kakulu*, *Sanhinda*, *Miyurusara*, *Guwanvidhuli Rangamadala*, *Sakaskada*, *Kokila Asapuwa*, *Rasakalapana*. Since this regional service is new and powerful experience, it was popular among people and considered it as their own radio station.

## OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- ) To find the contribution of Rajarata Regional Radio Station in empowering the society.
- ) To find out the perceptions of listeners/receivers of Rajarata Regional Radio Station.
- ) To investigate the effectiveness of Rajarata Regional Radio Station.

## METHODOLOGY

Since the survey method was used to collect primary data for the study, the participants (85) were selected randomly from Mihinthale village, Anuradhapuraya District, Sri Lanka and visited each and every house of participants to get the perceptions on RajarataRegional Radio and find out its contribution towards the society. In addition to that, interviews were conducted with the personal of the station and observation made on program formats which are broadcasted presently.

## FINDINGS

Most of the elder respondents stated that still they do listen to RajarataRegional Radio and satisfy with the quality of sound on average. But at the present its' listenership is lower than 6%. Most of the people do not listen due to its unpopularity. According to the data, Rajarata regional radio won heart of the listeners and its listenership was 80% at the beginning. At the same time, it is found that 100% of respondents emphasized that the radio station must continue for the betterment of the lives and the region. People who listened regular basis revealed that most of the programmes which broadcasted by the station were given entertainment value and education value as well and it has maintained its identity and offered a unique service to the region at beginning of the radio station. Most of the respondents revealed that agricultural programmes discussed their matters and issues and people had been able to solve their problems. News programme of the RajarataRegional Radio was retained in the mind of the respondents due to information value. Most significantly, people revealed that they listened to the station more than 15 years regularly. The purposes of listening to radio were getting information, entertainment and education and being empowered.

It is revealed that those who listen to the radio more than 15 years on regular basis believe that Rajarata Regional Radio affected their social relationships with the neighbors significantly and to make collective decisions as a community. But majority of participants did not have any ideas that Rajarata Regional Radio contributed the community on working collectively. Further, most of the people believe that radio station have a high ability to solve problems in the region giving priority for regional issues like agricultural and social. The radio programmes had a high ability to develop and improve the skills of the community. But at the same time, listeners think that private radio channels available in Sri Lanka give more support in solving their problems than government channels. Therefore it is concluded that most of the listeners of the radio are somewhat confused on contribution of Rajarata Radio Station. According to the observation done and responses of the participants, the station face following difficulties and challenges;

- ) Unavailability of permanent staff and technical staff to produce the programmes.
- ) Unavailability of permanent music band.
- ) No transportation facilities.
- ) Since there is no adequate capacity of the transmitter, only limited listeners of the region are benefited.
- ) Inadequacy time allocation.
- ) Administrative problems due to political influences.

- ) Sponsors also are not willing to sponsor because of its unpopularity among listeners.
- ) Unavailability of facilities to do the promotions.
- ) Problems in giving incentives to the staff.

Most of the personal of station emphasized that political intervention in this radio station is a main challenge to achieve the its' objectives. Even though the station is capable to broadcast plenty of religious programmes on historic temples, at present they produce only less number of programmes due to lack of sponsors. At present, private channels have taken the opportunity to broadcast the programmes; pirith chanting and other major events of historic temples. Most of the respondents stated that the journalists who achieved the success from "Rajarataseveya", they gave-up it and settled in Colombo. Most of the employees are having a mental stereotype as the "Punishment Place". At present, since there is lack of human resource; 22 permanent staff and 11 other staff, the station is not capable to move smoothly producing necessary locally-made programmes to cover all regional issues. They are supposed broadcast programmes from 5.25 a.m to midnight, but at present time allocation is limited in order to deduct the expenditure. But this has been a reason to decrease the listeners and their attraction. According to the observation done on programme formats, it is obvious that the Rajarata radio has introduced several new programmes such as *Janamandalee*, *Kadawarayamaya*, *Disanathiya*, *Kelinpara*, *Sathdith meth*, *Isiwaraasapuwa*, *Prabhasarasamodhini*, *Liyamadala* and has won several state awards also.

Most of the respondents emphasized that Rajarata radio station must continue with the improvements in future to serve and empower the community in the region and proposed some of the following suggestions;

- ) Changes in programme formats and quality to get the attraction of the listeners.
- ) Should develop a mechanism to get the sponsors back to the station and connect the listeners via online too.
- ) Technological facilities should be developed to produce programmes focusing major temples and schools in the district.
- ) Should give priority for the regional problems and issues to have a close relationship with the listeners.
- ) Transportation facilities should be developed.
- ) Should preserve the cassettes available at the station.
- ) Should compete with other commercialized radio channels.
- ) Specific promotional programmes should be developed focusing schools and readings on the station should be developed.

An advisory committee should be appointed without any political influences. In 2021, the Rajarata Regional Radio Station passed nearly 41 years under the control by Sri Lanka Broadcasting Channel (SLBC).

By observing the Administration, Financial and Format of Radio Station, it is found that the station is in problematic situation and has entered in to the non-profitable sector in government. The different program format of Raja rata regional radio station follows the traditional way combined with ethical cultural framework. It is concluded that the esteemed identity of the Rararata Radio still is in the mind of the listeners and but its credibility has gone down. If the station could use above proposed mechanism, the station would sustain for years and years empowering the society accordingly with its unique identity.

## CONCLUSION

It is obvious that Rajarata radio which was in forefront in the beginning has been unpopular at the present among listeners. But the listeners of Rajarata Radio strongly believed that the channel should be continued in future to serve and empower the community. Letting the voices be heard empowers the people and finally will be a key to positive change in the society. When people empowered socially, People would be able to work collectively with all, take decisions collective as a community, maintain healthy social relationship with other communities and solve problems which they face. Therefore, there is a dire need to improve the statues of the Rajarata Radio Station and let it improve the close relationship with the community producing locally-made programmes on various regional issues such as agricultural, educational, social, religious, health and all aspects of lives.

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